

# HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A model for curriculum renewal

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# INTRODUCTION

Dr Debra Rowe

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I want to begin this introduction by honouring the good work that educators all over the world are doing for our future quality of life on this planet. I know we want to do more, and we want everybody to do more, but I really want to honour your efforts so far in creating graduates who can play a part in a truly sustainable society.

I also want to thank Interface Flooring. When we started our higher education sustainability consortium ([www.aashe.org/heasc](http://www.aashe.org/heasc)), the former CEO Ray Anderson was our first speaker – the voice of business saying ‘we need your graduates to be literate in the sustainability challenge, in order to be able to engage in the solutions’. He had a lot of impact on mainstream higher education leaders who were only just starting to hear about sustainability, taking the conversation from why education for sustainability should happen to how it can happen. Now examples of policies, processes, learning outcomes and so on are freely available through AASHE and the Disciplinary Associations Network for Sustainability.

A prerequisite for rapid curriculum renewal is a rapid shift in mindset, from critical thinking to action skills for sustainable abundance. We simply cannot afford to graduate one more armchair pontificator! This is why I am so excited to be able to help introduce this book to you. It is a multi-pronged approach packed full of ideas and examples for action towards all students and the community becoming environmentally, socially and economically responsible. Every day we make decisions about what we teach, and in doing so we also decide what we don't teach. These decisions can either create more scarcity and suffering, or a future of greater abundance and higher quality of life. These authors are committed to the latter and have an action plan for educators to get there. I think the message of this book goes far beyond engineering and I look forward to future editions exploring application throughout education institutions.

I would also like to take this opportunity to share about a summit that was held in late 2010 in Washington DC, hosted by the US Department of Education, on the importance of sustainability education. The conversations during this event were committed and rich with plans, clearly demonstrating the power of networks and partnerships to bring about unprecedented action for education for sustainability. To go beyond incremental change we need to share culture change efforts, and share ways all parts of society can collaborate with students working on sustainability to create systemic change. As institutions move from asking ‘why’ to asking ‘how’, we also need to be

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**xxxvi** Introduction by Debra Rowe

giving them manuals like this so that they can get going immediately without wasting time and resources.

I look forward to living the next decade of curriculum renewal within our higher education institutions as we collectively create a shift to sustainable development that ripples through society with our graduates. The leaders of tomorrow who emerge from this transformed education experience will know that our generation of academics made a significant contribution to addressing quality of life on this planet.