HE London
Demonstrator Workshop
Workshop Summary
At the kick-off meeting to discuss the role of Higher Education in London’s transition to a circular city, attendees from 11 London universities, the London Waste and Recycling Board, the Leadership Network and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, came together to discuss how the Higher Education sector can support the transition to a circular economy in London. This note captures the outputs of the table discussions.

The attendees were given the following prompts for discussion although conversations were wide ranging:

- Do the 5 key drivers (teaching, research, student-led activities, campus management, local leadership) resonate with participants?
- Is there anything they would add in?
- What are their thoughts on what they have heard in terms of the scale of activity across London?
- What are they currently doing?
- Who are we missing? Who else do we want to invite? Do you want to stay involved?
1. CIRCULAR ECONOMY
TEACHING AND
RESEARCH NEEDS TO BE
MULTIDISCIPLINARY

There was general agreement that circular economy has to be multidisciplinary and cross departmental. The attendees recognised that the structure of universities made this particularly challenging but also that having different tools and approaches to circular economy from different disciplines is a real advantage.

Universities are made up of a vast and diverse group of staff members, but often it is individuals at HE institutions who act as the catalysts for change/new projects.

Ravensbourne shared that due to being a small university, all in one building, change can happen quickly. Ravensbourne also has one week every year where classes are suspended and all students work on cross-disciplinary projects which could be on the circular economy.

CHALLENGE:
How can you create opportunities to collaborate between departments, ensure circular economy is a strategic focus for the university and resource this? How can you infuse circular economy throughout your institution? How do you engage the strategic leadership of your university in the circular economy conversation?
2. UNIVERSITIES ARE AGENTS FOR CHANGE

There was broad agreement that universities are uniquely placed to be agents of change. This change could be both local and international as universities are internationally connected. It was recognised that universities are able to link into and have links into a range of other networks and advisory groups and this could be leveraged. There was discussion about the need to connect in with overarching groups such as EAUC, which the Ellen MacArthur Foundation will put effort into doing.

Universities are hubs bringing together local councils, schools, businesses and the wider community. This gives them the ability to act as a convening force to share knowledge and raise awareness. Harnessing this is the basic idea behind a HE-led city demonstrator project.

The group discussed using stories as vehicles for change. Inspiring case studies showcasing what other institutions have done and achieved in the circular economy space would be useful to inspire further action.

Chancellors are key influencers. There was agreement that engaging university Chancellors / Vice-Chancellors will be key to embedding circular economy across universities. There was a suggestion that the Ellen MacArthur Foundation invites senior university staff to key strategic events. Attendees agreed to be conduits to help make that happen.

Three universities present were all situated in one London Borough and agreed to meet up to discuss how best to leverage those relationships and contacts.

CHALLENGE:
How can we create downloadable resources to support HE staff implementing change at their organisation?

What relationship do you have with your local borough — how is this being leveraged to build circular economy capacity locally?
There was broad agreement that students need to be invited to future meetings of this group and be part of the conversation. It was commented that students are becoming more active and vocal in relation to social responsibility, sustainability.

Student movement/student-led initiatives (e.g. student unions) could be encouraged to initiate projects and changes for a circular economy. Student-led initiatives and unions can increase the visibility of students for topics and issues.

There was a discussion on using students to undertake some research / baseline mapping of circular economy activity across universities and London. Following the presentation by Olio, Kingston University asked if student research into uptake of the app in student halls of residence would be useful. Likely there are many circular economy projects / start-ups that could do with student support. Could this provide good work experience for students?

Roehampton shared an excellent example of a student-led initiative: Roehampton Students Union – Grow Hampton – invited local people to come and join an initiative turning an old shipping container into a restaurant.

**CHALLENGE:**

How can your students support research projects in a way that is beneficial to both their studies and the wider mission to understand the scale of circular economy activity in London, whilst supporting circular economy business growth?
4. APPLIED RESEARCH

Research projects often involve business/innovation actors, but there is a need to bring in civic institutions. Also, when funding ends, the enthusiasm goes out. How can we get around the seasonality of student activity (i.e. not much over the summer) to better work with businesses in research?

There was discussion about the need to apply research back into universities’ organisational practises, deploying the ideas within the institutions themselves.

CHALLENGE:
How can you use your institution / campus to apply circular economy research?

FURTHER THOUGHTS / COMMENTS

- There is still a need to build the story from scratch. (What is the circular economy? Universities can direct all students to the Learning Hub at no cost.
- There is a need to change the ‘ivory tower’ perception communities have of universities.
- As much as its useful to know what everyone is doing, it’s also important to know how they work together. Could this be a mapping exercise of the network?
- Incredible Edible — a global movement understanding food and local communities — is an initiative that universities could sign up to in London.
- Could university canteens and student halls of residence make use of the Olio platform? Could this be cross-university? e.g. Could students who study in Imperial but live near Roehampton, pick up food from Roehampton?
- (For info, the Too Good to Go app is used in all Leeds University canteens).

IDEAS OF WHO WE MAY BE MISSING:

- Local councils
- Student unions
- Local partners of universities
- Estate partners
- Core professional staff areas: catering, waste management etc.
- Vice chancellors and chancellors — to attend Annual Summit?
- Governors on the boards — university management
- Friends from lots of different partnerships
- Key businesses