

Title: Universities and fair trade: engaging with tensions and opportunities through the lens of education for sustainability

Panel: Transformative sustainability education for social and ecological justice

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Proposal for presentation in person

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Universities can be an important for raising awareness of fair trade and promoting ethical consumption and trade justice, both as centres of learning and due to the scale of individual institutions. But there are a number of tensions in current models that often focus on specific approaches to fair trade through procurement and curriculum engagement that focuses on content. Indeed, there is concern that despite models like fair trade accreditation, fair trade is failing to interest students and young people, with institutional certification potentially reinforcing passive approaches to fair trade engagement.

Whilst similar risks of box ticking, focus on league tables, metrics and audits exist in the context of education for sustainability, the focus on experiential learning, student voice and collaboration that are at the heart of sustainability pedagogies offer potential to shift perceptions and practices in universities with respect to fair trade.

This paper draws on the experience of academic and professional service colleagues at the University of Leeds who have been involved in embedding sustainability across the curriculum and into institutional practices. This has involved working towards accreditation as a Fairtrade University, which has led to reflection on what we have learned over the past two decades, including how we connect monitoring of fair trade to our wider sustainable procurement practices and underpinning principles, and building more solid links with our sustainable curriculum programme.

We have explored the relationships between fair trade and education for sustainability making a case for more focus on skillsbased, experiential learning.

Our paper also reflects on a dialogue between academics and the campaigns team at the Fairtrade Foundation to help shift the relationship between UK universities and fair trade to one focused on student leadership, cocreation, and meaningful, justicefocused engagement. This builds on broader networks across the education and third sectors offering hope of a new form of ongoing learning partnership.