



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE REPORT

summary of findings

“The STP successfully shifts the educational paradigm from 'learning about the world' to 'learning how to transform it.’”



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University of Cambridge highlights STP's impact

Researchers from the University of Cambridge have been embedded within UWC Atlantic's new curriculum, the Systems Transformation Pathway (STP) since 2023 to evaluate this new approach to learning.

They have released their initial report on the STP, the first IB-recognised curriculum of its kind, which examines how systems thinking and real-world interventions transform learning.

Through rigorous qualitative analysis, the University of Cambridge report endorses the STP as a powerful engine for developing resilient, collaborative and action-oriented future leaders.



How do we teach students to change the world?

The Systems Transformation Pathway (STP) is a pioneering academic programme at UWC Atlantic, developed in partnership with the International Baccalaureate (IB).

It is the first IB-recognised curriculum of its kind, designed to move beyond traditional, siloed subjects and move towards a "whole-systems" approach to global challenges.

Instead of studying subjects in isolation, students focus on five Impact Areas: Biodiversity, Energy, Food, Migration and Water. The goal is to equip young leaders with the practical tools and "systems thinking" required to intervene in complex, interconnected global crises.

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SCAN ME



“The Systems Transformation Pathway represents a significant and timely contribution to global education, equipping young people with the capability to engage meaningfully with complexity and change.”

**Mark Winterbottom,
Professor of Education, Faculty of
Education, University of Cambridge**



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KEY FINDINGS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Students Develop a Transformational Mindset

Key takeaway: The STP successfully shifts students towards systemic, holistic and change-oriented thinking.

- Students described “a lot of transition in our thinking, because at the beginning we came in with no understanding of systems thinking, and now we're designing our own intervention”.
- Students recognised their move away from “surface-level learning”, to “becoming a systems thinker”.
- The pathway gave them a “shift in mindset and perspective...with a holistic approach” and a “deeper understanding of one’s identity”. Students even described becoming “different people” through the pathway.
- Students were no longer looking for simple answers, but instead developed a “more open and complex view of the world”, recognising that “systems are very complex and it's very hard to completely transform” them.

Students Gain Real-World Agency and Confidence

Key takeaway: The STP equips students with the confidence and practical skills to act meaningfully in the real world.

The report shows that the STP functions as a “gateway” to adulthood. Students felt they were no longer just “learning about” the world, but were actually “working in the real world.”

- Students felt empowered. They acquired “tools for empowerment”, realising that “one person can effect change.”
- Students gained the ability and confidence to communicate “with experts and community leaders” and navigate “power dynamics.”
- The pathway was effective in “equipping students to be comfortable with challenges” and “realising possibilities” that felt out of reach.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Collaboration Becomes a Core Competency

Key takeaway: The cohort-based, collaborative design of the STP builds authentic teamwork, empathy and shared purpose.

The report highlighted the collaborative pedagogy of the STP pathway.

- Students learned the value of “collaborating NOT competing” and developed a deep “sense of community.”
- The report identified that “purposeful community building” in the student cohort allowed for “diversity of perspective” where different global views enriched a single issue.
- Students realised the “value of collaboration and teamwork” as a necessity for systems change, noting that they were “building a learning community” themselves.

Learning Becomes Purposeful and Experiential

Key takeaway: The STP re-engages students by making learning meaningful, applied and connected to real-world challenges.

The report celebrates the “purposeful” experiences of the STP with students being motivated by the “possibility of bringing change.”

- Action-Oriented: The findings emphasised “doing/acting rather than theorising” with the curriculum providing an “opportunity to realise dreams.”
- Students felt their education “aligned with personal ideologies and values” and had meaning and purpose.
- Students valued the curriculum being “fun and practical”, with the “practical side of STP” being “motivating.”

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Growth, Resilience and Regenerative Leadership

Key takeaway: The STP develops not just academic competence but resilient, reflective and values-driven leaders.

The report identified how the STP taught students the concept of “Regenerative Leadership” recognising how to “stay in this work for life” without burning out by embracing “realistic optimism.”

- Growth through Failure: Students learnt to see setbacks in their Self-Directed Interventions as learning opportunities, becoming “more realistic” and “bouncing back & adapting.”
- Authenticity: The environment created within STP encouraged students to be their “most authentic self,” which the report links to long-term sustainability in leadership.
- The STP pathway design made students feel they would “take on this work for life in a sustainable way” rather than “burning out in the early years of university.”

In Summary

The research by the University of Cambridge indicates that the Systems Transformation Pathway is:

- Changing how students think
- Building their confidence to act
- Strengthening collaboration and belonging
- Making learning deeply meaningful
- Developing resilient, principled change-makers

OUR STUDENTS SHARE THE IMPACT OF THE STP

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“It feels like working in the real world... it teaches life lessons which are a greater asset than expected.”

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“A different education! It is action-oriented and experiential... learning how to take principled action to bring about transformative change.”

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“Collaborating NOT competing... it's about freeing and encouraging you to be your most authentic self.”

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“You learn to understand and learn from failures... bouncing back and adapting.”

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“The independent and self-directed mode of working is motivating... it's about doing and acting rather than theorising.”



The Systems Transformation Pathway: Leadership for Just Futures

report produced in partnership with



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