



Karen Blincoe is the founder and director of ICIS and former director of Schumacher College in the UK.

Watch the interview with Karen

Karen Blincoe: A lighthouse in the sustainability wilderness

Schumacher College has been at the forefront of the sustainability agenda and has spread the message since 1991. Karen talked about the unique recipe that has made the college a success as well as the ripple effects this small place in the South of England has managed to create.

Sustainability is a complex issue, and the Schumacher College was one of the first lighthouses (established in 1991) in the southern part of England and is placed together with Dartington Trust Hall and the first transition town Totness. Schumacher College was inspired by an Indian philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, who said: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life be in harmony with all existence." The college is also inspired by N. F. S. Grundtvig, the founder of the Danish folk high school movement, who said: "People who are learning to live have a different urgency than those who live to learn." Schumacher College was built on a philosophy of promoting a spirit of freedom, poetry and disciplined creativity, cooperation and discovery in individuals, in science, and in the civil society as a whole. Teachers gave pupils personal guidance in emotional, intellectual and spiritual matters. As the director I felt at home because education in the Schumacher

sense has to do with all aspects of society, and I knew about this way of teaching.

Transformative learning for sustainable living became Schumacher's payoff, and people would come for short or longer courses from all over the world. The college became an experiment where great people with great minds come to share stuff. It is a magical place, it's small and there is no luxury, only simple living. You cook together, eat together, walk together, work in the garden together and so on. It is a holistic experience that transforms people who come there, including me. The college staff and the students are said to be radical, transformative, elitist, unique, special, spiritual, activist, introverted, self-opinionated, universal and pioneering. Facilitators are really important – an intense place needs someone to facilitate.

To sum up the lessons learned: You have to have the right place, an anchor, good teachers, and a content that inspires people if you want to be a lighthouse in the sustainability wilderness. Don't get too arrogant and think that only you have found the holy grail. Don't be an island on an island!

