# Learning for Sustainability in colleges

A guide to support practice, development and understanding



In partnership with

Learning for Sustainability Scotland
Ag Ionnsachadh airson Seasmhachd Alba

RCE

Qualifications Scotland
Teisteanasan Alba

cdn
College Development Network



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# About this guidance

## Who this guidance is for

This guidance has a **strong focus on learning and teaching practice**. It was co-designed by and for:

- Colleagues working in **teaching, learning and assessment** or **supporting learning** (e.g. lecturers, tutors, technicians, teaching assistants)
- Colleagues with responsibility for **curriculum development** (e.g. curriculum managers, programme leaders)

But Learning for Sustainability (LfS) doesn't only happen in the classroom. Truly meaningful education happens when learners and staff in various roles, across and beyond institutions, work together. That's why this guidance will also be relevant to:

- **Senior leaders**, such as principals, directors, heads of department
- **Professional services staff**, such as organisational development, marketing, quality assurance, estates managers, procurement
- Community partners and employers
- Policy makers and sector bodies

We also invite students to use this guidance – for example to evaluate how their learning experience has included LfS and the five principles, or to start a conversation about LfS with their educators.

**Towards a whole systems approach**

Although this guide is focused on college practitioners, we must remember that the contexts and systems we operate in also shape our practice, and therefore our learners. Truly embedding LfS into college education is not just down to educators – it's also about ensuring that wider stakeholders understand why LfS matters and what quality LfS looks like.

**Scotland and beyond**

While the guide was developed in a Scottish context, much of it will be applicable across the UK and beyond. The principles of LfS laid out in this guide will have strong links to other educational concepts, supporting anyone interested in creating learning for a better future for all.

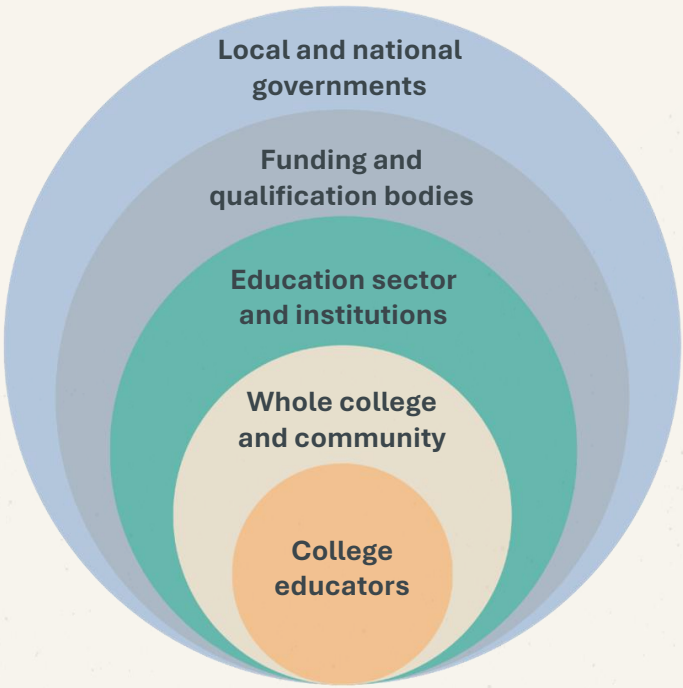



**Figure 1:** contexts and systems of LfS in colleges

## How to use this guide

You don't have to read this guide cover to cover. The guide was designed for you to dip in and out as needed – even if you just have a few minutes.

**Myth busters**
A great starting point: quickly unpack some common misconceptions

**What is Learning for Sustainability?**
Get to grips with the core terminology through our plain language definitions

**The five principles of Learning for Sustainability**
Gain an overview of the five principles at the core of practicing LfS

**The RISE framework**
Understand the four stages of professional development for each LfS principle

**Real world examples: LfS in action**
See stories from colleges meeting the five LfS principles

**Learning pathway**
Find the right resources for your practice at the right time

**Drivers of Learning for Sustainability**
Explore how policies, standards and employers drive LfS

**Actions by role**
Everyone has a role to play in embedding LfS – find yours.

**Stronger together**
Find your community and get involved

**Next steps – and how to shape them**
Contribute to further development of LfS in colleges

**Looking for a way to start? Only have 20 minutes?** Use our reflection and action tool, designed for use by curriculum teams, as well as individual reflection. You can download this tool on the resource webpage.

# Why we need guidance on Learning for Sustainability in colleges

**Why focus on colleges?**
Colleges are a critical part of the UK's post-school education system. Further education learners make up the largest number of tertiary education students (UK Government, 2025). Colleges deliver many types of courses and qualifications (including both further and higher education) which reach an exceptionally diverse range of people. This scale and diversity, as well as strong community links, puts colleges at the heart of many social, economic and environmental challenges and opportunities of today and the future. Supporting colleges to embed LfS means supporting diverse communities to be part of a fairer, more sustainable future.

**Why do colleges need guidance on LfS?**
While there is a growing body of guidance for schools (e.g. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's registrant resources on LfS) and universities (e.g. QAA's ESD guidance), there is much less clear, tailored support for colleges on how to put LfS into practice. This is reflected in research, which finds that college staff often feel that they lack knowledge, confidence and support to embed LfS meaningfully (ETF, 2021; EAUC, 2024).

**Why are we publishing this guidance now?**
Employers, students, staff and educational standards and requirements are increasingly calling for the integration of sustainability-related competencies into education, as we summarise in drivers of Learning for Sustainability. With this growing momentum over the last few years, it's clear that we now need support for college staff to embed LfS meaningfully and intentionally – and this guidance aims to do just that.

**How was this guidance developed?**
For any kind of guidance to be meaningful and helpful, it needs to be aligned with the needs and realities of what happens in practice. That's why this guidance has been shaped throughout by a focus group of college practitioners, results of a needs analysis, a group of college and university sector reviewers, and collaboration with key sector bodies. It also draws and builds on what has already worked for universities and schools. Learn more in our blog on how we developed this guide.

# Myth busters

## Unpacking common misconceptions about sustainability and LfS

The word "sustainability" means many things to many people, as we all connect to the subject in different ways. Nonetheless, some misconceptions and myths can stand in the way of engaging with sustainability. Here, we'll bust some common myths and signpost to where in this guide you can find out more.

✗ **"Sustainability is only about the environment"**

✓ True or "strong" sustainability includes **environmental protection and regeneration, as well as social wellbeing and economic vitality**. These three dimensions are connected and interdependent. Read more in the understanding sustainability section.

✗ **"LfS is all about curriculum content"**

✓ There is an important difference between learning *about* sustainability and learning *for* sustainability. Developing knowledge about sustainability issues and their impacts without providing avenues for action can lead to disengagement, confusion, and anxiety. There is also a well-researched knowledge-action gap. LfS is about much more than simply teaching sustainability knowledge. Read more about other important aspects of embedding LfS in the RISE framework.

✗ **"Sustainability is only relevant to STEM subjects"**

✓ Every subject area is linked to sustainability – from childhood practice to healthcare to business to social sciences (sustainability in different subject areas overview, Education and Training Foundation). While many Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects have an obvious connection to sustainability through "green" technology, you can develop knowledge, values, skills and agency that support a better world through any course or programme (see principle 2 of the five principles of LfS).

✗ **"LfS means addressing a few Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)"**

✓ There is more to LfS than the SGDs.

1. **Focusing on just a few SDGs ignores the essence of sustainability**
   The SDGs are a helpful starting point. However, sustainability is a broad and interconnected topic (see understanding sustainability). If we focus only on a small number of SDGs, we run the risk that our actions will have unintended negative impacts.

2. **The SDGs aren't the only framework for sustainability**
Sustainability underpins the SDGs, not the other way around. LfS is about truly engaging with sustainability issues that matter locally and globally, whether these are covered by the SDGs or not. See the critical thinking section in the learning pathway.

3. **It's not just about curriculum content**
Often, when the focus is on the SDGs, the focus also is on knowledge and learning *about* sustainability, when LfS is about much more than that.

**"College students don't care about sustainability"**

Evidence consistently shows that students do care about sustainability. Longitudinal research by SOS-UK of around 10,000 students annually has found that 86% agree that their place of study should teach skills and understanding that positively impact society and the environment. 77% agree that sustainable development is something that all courses should actively incorporate and promote.

It is true that some students, particularly from low-income backgrounds, might struggle to connect to the environmental dimension of sustainability. But when sustainability is positioned as something relevant to everyone that anyone can act on, students often do engage (EAUC, 2024). Principle 5 and the RISE framework show how we can collaborate to achieve this.

**"LfS is hard to do"**

College practitioners often feel that they don't know enough about sustainability to embed LfS. But when we look at sustainability holistically – focusing on learning *for,* not just about, sustainability – people almost always find they are already doing something that is, at the very least, a good starting point for LfS.

Effective LfS starts by recognising what we already do, then building on it with support from others. It's OK to start small and not have all the answers – no one does. We can begin where we are. Next step: explore our goals and potential and grow together. To support you in doing this, the RISE framework helps you explore different stages of professional development, and the learning pathway signposts you to the most helpful resources at any point of your journey.

# What is Learning for Sustainability?

To understand Learning for Sustainability, we first need to understand what we mean by sustainability. This section breaks both down so they're easy to understand and relate to.

## Understanding sustainability

There are many perspectives on what sustainability is and what this means for practice. Exploring different perspectives is a good starting point. Such discussions may include the various terms that overlap with sustainability – for example, sustainable development (which in this guide we use interchangeably with sustainability[1]), ethics, responsibility, resilience, regeneration and justice.

**A common definition** from the United Nations Brundtland Commission defines sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". To meet those needs, many contemporary definitions of sustainability look at three dimensions, seeing them as influenced by and dependent on each other:

- **People** (social wellbeing)
- **Planet** (environmental protection and regeneration)
- **Prosperity** (economic vitality)

These are sometimes referred to as the three Ps.

**So, what issues does sustainability include?**
The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) illustrate some of the issues that sustainability encompasses across the three dimensions, or three Ps.

While the SDGs are a good "way in" to understand the breadth of sustainability, it's important to remember that no sustainability issue or opportunity exists in isolation. These issues and the three dimensions are **interconnected and interdependent**. Decisions on one issue affect others. For example, economic growth that harms the environment can undermine people's wellbeing, while caring for ecosystems can support strong, resilient communities. The "wedding cake" model of the SDGs visualises this interconnectivity. Prosperity is dependent on people – and people are dependent on the planet. At the same time, actions for people and prosperity influence our planet, and so on.

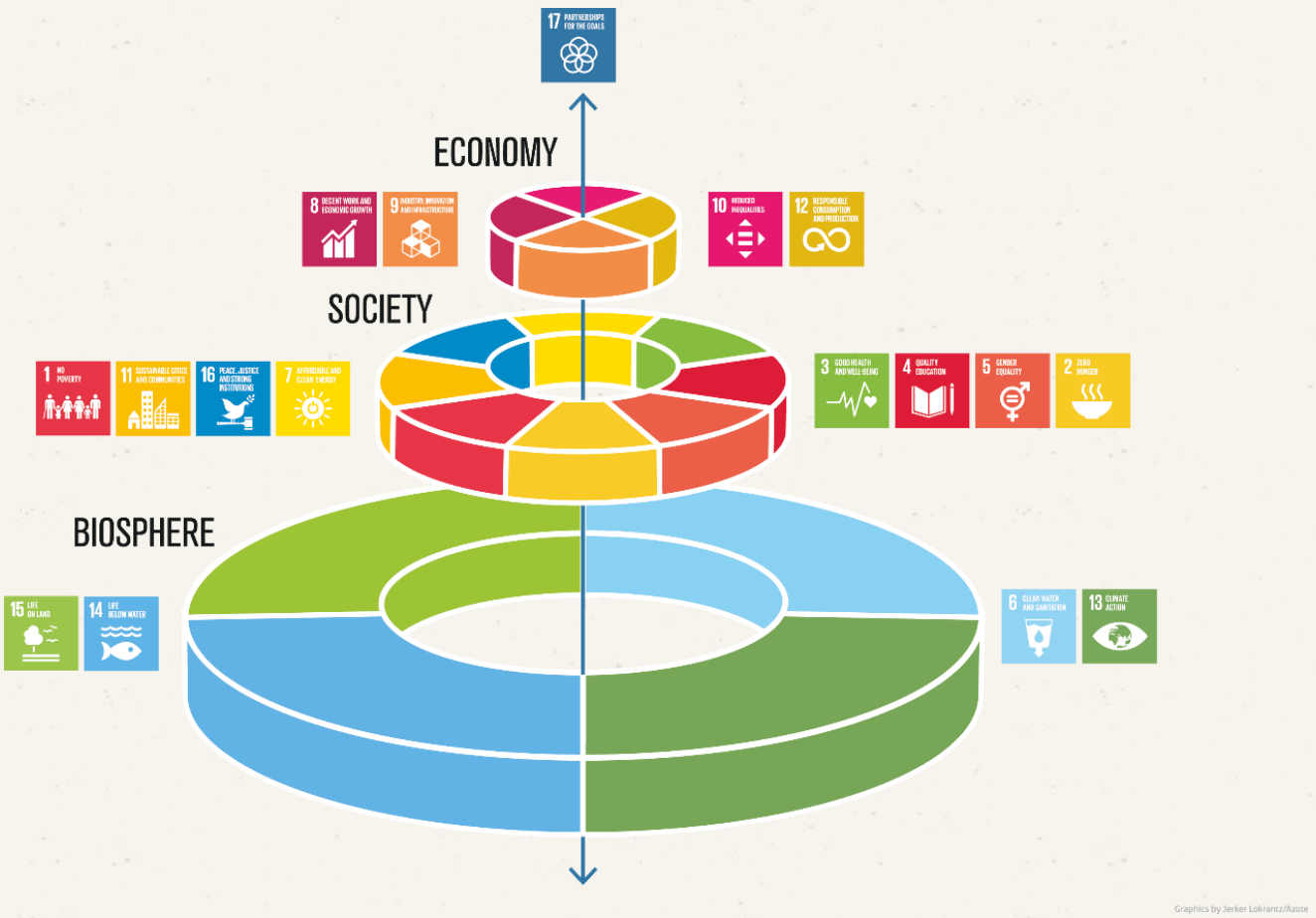
**Sustainability is about acting and living in ways that support both people and the natural world, now and in the future, while enabling communities and economies to thrive.**

[1] This decision was made to ensure the guide is as simple and accessible as possible, based on community feedback that too many terms can be confusing. However, we acknowledge there are important differences between sustainability and sustainable development (see Sustainability and sustainable development: A review of principles and definitions). We invite you to read more in our learning pathway.

**Figure 2: the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**




**Figure 3: the "wedding cake" model of the SDGs**. Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University CC BY-ND 3.0.



## Understanding Learning for Sustainability (LfS)

Learning for Sustainability is defined as "a cross-curricular approach which enables learners, educators, learning settings and their wider community to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society; and as an effective whole-setting approach which weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development and outdoor learning to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences" (Scottish Government, 2023).

**What is the goal of LfS?**

It comes down to one core aim: supporting our learners to develop ways of thinking and acting that are good for their own wellbeing and the long-term wellbeing of other people and the planet. It's about making sure they are, or can become, people who make decisions that create a fairer, more sustainable future for all – especially when faced with the complex challenges of our rapidly-changing world.

**What does effective LfS look like?**

LfS can take many forms. At its centre sits the creation of transformational learning experiences that support learning *for*, not just about, sustainability. Later in this guide, we highlight five key principles to help achieve this and share a variety of examples of how it's already being implemented in colleges.

**Why we're using language focused on Education for Sustainable Development**

Various concepts are used in education contexts to support learning for a better future. While LfS is widely used in Scottish schools, the phrase "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD) is common internationally and in universities. In Scottish colleges, both terms can be found. People often use the terms LfS and ESD interchangeably, although, by definition, LfS combines ESD with global citizenship education and outdoor learning.

In the spirit of LfS, rather than treating these three elements as distinct, we see them as working towards the same shared goal. We focus on that goal through an ESD lens – both for the sake of simplicity and due to its established momentum in post-16 education. This guidance therefore builds on research and guidance and uses language from the field of ESD, while recognising its connection to global citizenship education and outdoor learning.




**Figure 4:** Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is comprised of sustainable development, global citizenship and outdoor learning.

## Defining knowledge, skills, values and agency for sustainability

LfS and ESD emphasise the role of not just knowledge, but also skills, values and agency. This is sometimes referred to as the "heads, hand, heart" approach. Below, we define what we mean by these concepts in this guide.

**Knowledge for sustainability** is about understanding the dimensions and interconnectedness of sustainability. Knowledge alone is not enough, but it is an important prerequisite for critical thinking and reflection.

**Skills for sustainability** include both subject specific skills, and transferable skills. Sustainability can be supported by subject specific skills. But employing these skills without awareness of sustainability can cause harm – for example, very technically skilled hairdressing students may unintentionally use products that harm people and nature. Transferable skills (e.g. critical thinking, reflection, problem solving) can help avoid pitfalls and are key to developing knowledge and values in meaningful ways. Many educational frameworks highlight these skills – from meta skills in Scotland to ESD competencies internationally.

**Values[2] for sustainability** refer to the inner compass that guides our actions. This includes two categories: personal and professional values.

- **Personal values** are defined as "broad desirable goals that motivate people's action and serve as guiding principles in their lives" (Sagiv et al, 2017). Examples include community, trust, ambition, fun, safety, and many more – often summarized in value maps.
- **Professional values** are essentially a subset of personal values that guide our work (Values Institute, 2023). Many professional values – such as ethics, responsibility, integrity – can be seen through an LfS lens. And some professional standards explicitly include sustainability – ranging from professional values for educators to engineers.

It's important to note that LfS is not about forcing values on anyone, but about supporting learners to reflect on and explore their values. What does a better world mean to them and others – and what does this mean for their actions?

**Agency for sustainability** is about the capacity for taking action. Agency can be defined as the capacity to intend, plan and adapt an action, as well as the ability to reflect on the reasons behind and outcomes of the action (Bandura, 2006). Feeling and being able to act can be an important antidote to anxiety and hopelessness in the face of the many crises facing us and the world we live in.

**Want to help learners develop knowledge, skills, values and agency for sustainability**? Have a look at our RISE framework and the learning pathway.

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[2] Why the term "values"? The QAA ESD guidance refers to values and attributes, and UNESCO definitions refer to values and attitudes. We focus on values because they can be drivers of both attitudes and attributes, and to reduce the number of concepts. But we encourage you to use the term that aligns most with your context.



# Developing Learning for Sustainability in practice

## Five principles and the RISE framework

# The five principles of Learning for Sustainability

To support practitioners to understand what LfS means for their practice and continue to bust myths, we've developed five principles of LfS. These are informed by college practitioners and literature from various educational contexts, including colleges (Education and Training Foundation Specialist Status in ESD, 2024; EAUC LfS in colleges research report, 2024; UNESCO's guide on ESD and TVET, 2012), schools (Scottish Government Learning Directorate, 2020; General Teaching Council for Scotland LfS Resource Hub; National Framework for LfS in Initial Teacher Education, 2025) and universities (QAA and Advance HE ESD Guidance, 2021; QAA Collaborative Enhancement Projects; Vogel et al for Advance HE, 2023).

**These principles are equal in their importance and support each other.**

We provide more details about the principles within the RISE framework we lay out in the next chapter. This framework also shows how practitioners can develop their practice in four stages.



## Principle 1: Curriculum content

Learners develop their understanding of sustainability as interconnected



## Principle 2: Teaching and learning methods

Learners develop skills, values and agency for sustainability



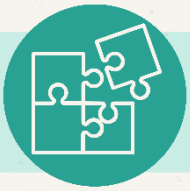
## Principle 3: Contexts for learning and action

Learners are enabled to become change agents in both life and work



## Principle 4: Integration and assessment

Learning for Sustainability is a golden thread throughout the learning experience



## Principle 5: Collaboration across the 4Cs

Curriculum, campus, culture and community support Learning for Sustainability

## Learner voice and inclusion: two overarching principles

There are two elements that cut across all five principles of LfS. They are often already part of college learning and teaching – it's about making sure they shape what LfS looks like in practice.

**The learner voice**
The learner voice is central to all five principles. People learn better when they see the relevance of what they are asked to engage with – and allowing learners to choose topics and activities supports this. Here are five ways, aligned with the five principles, you can ensure the learner voice is a core part of LfS – but there are many more:

- In principle 1, ensure learners co-decide what sustainability issues they focus on, while also nudging them to think beyond issues they already know about.
- For principle 2, use learning methods that centre the learner – including problem-based and project-based learning and meaningful reflective tasks.
- Principle 3 works best when learners have the chance to explore changes they can make in life and work. Make sure they can have a say on where they want to see change.
- Learners should be consulted on their LfS experience and how it could be improved as part of principle 4 – for example, in direct conversations or surveys.
- Learners are a part of every "C" – curriculum, campus, culture and community – and therefore need to be involved in collaborations aligning with principle 5. For example, ask them who they'd like to work with or to involve their friends and family in projects.

**Inclusion**
Inclusion, together with equality and diversity, is central to LfS. Sustainability is about people as much as it is about the environment. When some learners face barriers to participation, this increases inequality and affects both educational and sustainability outcomes. For a truly fairer, greener world, we must bring everyone along. Plus, when learners feel seen, valued and able to make a difference in ways that work for them, LfS becomes more meaningful for all involved.

Inclusive practice starts with getting to know learners, understanding what matters to them, what support they need, and creating opportunities for everyone to contribute. Examples of how this can be done in every principle include:

- Use examples and issues that reflect different people, communities and lived experiences when addressing sustainability in curriculum content (principle 1).
- For principle 2, ensure teaching methods build confidence, value different strengths and provide multiple ways for learners to participate.
- In principle 3, support learners to take action that feels realistic and meaningful to them. Celebrate progress, however small. Listen to reflections on barriers or concerns.
- Ensure sustainability learning and assessment are accessible to a diverse range of learners and needs under principle 4 – for example, by offering different formats of assessment.
- In principle 5, think carefully about representation of guest speakers and partnerships, and how learners can co-shape collaborations to make these work for them.

# The RISE framework of professional development

## Four stages of developing LfS in practice

The RISE framework summarises four stages of professional development – Recognising, Integrating, Strengthening and Elevating – across the five principles of LfS.

### Why did we develop this framework?

College practitioners have told us that LfS can sometimes feel broad and hard to pin down. What does LfS actually mean for everyday practice? What does "good" LfS look like? Colleagues have asked for a balance between structure and clarity on the one hand, and flexibility and context sensitivity on the other hand. In response, the RISE framework was developed with and for practitioners. It aims to support a deeper understanding of LfS, reflect on current practice, and explore where we can build on what we already do.

### How to use the RISE framework

The framework might be particularly useful for:

- **Individual reflection** on your existing strengths and areas for development
- **Group reflection in team meetings**, facilitated by curriculum managers – make use of the 20-minute reflection and action tool, downloadable on our resource webpage
- **Workshops** during professional development weeks
- **Professional development reviews** and identifying how to enhance practice to meet professional standards (see drivers of Learning for Sustainability)
- **Informing design, development and delivery** of units, courses and partnerships across and beyond your college

The framework is designed to provide structure where needed, while also allowing practitioners to use it flexibly in a way that supports them in their context. Importantly, it is not designed to be prescriptive of curriculum content, nor is it a set of fixed instructions or a checklist.

We recommend using the framework in combination with the learning pathway that suggests tailored resources for where practitioners are in their journey.

**Good to know: the RISE framework versus complex realities**

To make the broad and inclusive concept of LfS more manageable, the RISE framework breaks it down – necessarily but somewhat artificially – into five principles and four stages. In reality, the principles overlap and can shape one another, while the stages may not always reflect how people develop as this is rarely linear.

This complexity is inevitable. Education systems, learner needs, and global issues are constantly shifting. What matters is that we engage with different perspectives and accept that there is no

such thing as the perfect or one-size-fits-all solution. What matters is that we keep learning. That's what LfS is all about.

## The four stages

The **RISE** framework highlights the four stages of development for each of the five principles: **Recognising, Integrating, Strengthening and Elevating**. The four stages mainly apply to teaching staff with active teaching responsibilities – but there are many links to professional services staff and communities who can support teaching staff across these stages (see actions by role).

## A Recognising practitioner

Has been practicing elements of LfS without realising; might not have heard of, or connected their practice to, LfS; is just starting to see the relevance to their subject area and teaching practice.

## An Integrating practitioner

Has taken some steps to integrate LfS into their practice; has given LfS some thought and has experimented with approaches; might not yet be aware of the holistic nature of LfS.

## A Strengthening practitioner

Has significant experience of embedding LfS and a strong understanding of what good LfS looks like; embodies and strengthens LfS by consistently integrating it meaningfully in their practice.

## An Elevating practitioner

Meets the Strengthening criteria above, and additionally is taking LfS to the next level – for example, by critically evaluating their practice, pioneering new approaches, and supporting the meaningful integration of LfS across curricula teams and/or beyond the college.

| | **Recognising**<br>Starts to recognise the relevance of LfS | **Integrating**<br>Takes steps to consciously integrate LfS | **Strengthening**<br>Embeds and strengthens LfS holistically | **Elevating**<br>A Strengthening practitioner taking LfS to a new level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Principle 1 – Curriculum content:** learners develop an understanding of sustainability as interconnected | Addresses social, environmental or economic issues **implicitly** without realising or exploring their connection to sustainability. | Addresses social, environmental and/or economic issues **explicitly** as a part of sustainability, as **separate issues.** | Addresses social, environmental and economic issues **explicitly and as interconnected sustainability issues.** | Meets "Strengthening" criteria and also **critically engages** with interconnected sustainability issues, going beyond social, environmental, and economic dimensions. |
| **Principle 2 – Teaching and learning methods:** learners develop skills, values and agency for sustainability | Employs teaching methods that support learners to develop **skills without linking to sustainability.** | Employs some transformational teaching methods that support learners to develop **skills by engagement with sustainability.** | Employs a variety of transformational teaching methods that support learners to develop **skills, values and agency for sustainability**. | Meets "Strengthening" criteria and also continuously develops their teaching methods by **evaluating the impact of their practice**. |
| **Principle 3 – Contexts for learning and action:** learners as change agents in life and work | Supports learners to learn and act for sustainability in their **personal OR professional lives**. | Supports learners to learn and act for sustainability in their **personal AND professional** lives. | Supports learners to learn and act for sustainability in their personal and professional lives, and to reflect on **the difference they can make**. | Meets "Strengthening" criteria and also helps learners see what actions they can take **individually and collectively as responsible citizens.** |
| **Principle 4 – Integration and assessment:** LfS as a golden thread | Addresses sustainability in **one-off activities** (e.g. one-time class discussion, field trip, guest speaker). | **Embeds sustainability as a thread** throughout the learning experience, with **limited integration in assessment.** | **Embeds sustainability as a thread** throughout the learning experience, **with clear integration in assessment**. | Meets "Strengthening" criteria and supports **others beyond their subject area and/or college** to integrate LfS. |
| **Principle 5 – Collaboration across the 4Cs:** curriculum, culture, campus and community | Embeds LfS mostly in **their own (teaching) context.** | **Starts to form connections** between their teaching practice and the campus, communities and/or culture of an institution to support LfS. | **Centres collaboration** across subject areas, operational staff and communities to create meaningful LfS experiences for all involved. | Meets "Strengthening" criteria and also engages **beyond the college to create supportive systems for LfS.** |



# Principle 1 – Curriculum content

**Learners develop their understanding of sustainability as interconnected**

This principle is about supporting explicit knowledge on, and a deeper understanding of, sustainability – including the interconnectedness of social, environmental and economic issues, and how our actions shape these.

**The goal**

Learners understand that social, environmental and economic issues are connected and influence each other. They have learned about these issues with explicit reference to sustainability and related terms, allowing them to articulate their learning about sustainability and how it is relevant to their contexts. They understand how our individual and collective actions impact on people, planet and economy, and that solutions to all kinds of challenges, big or small, need to consider this interconnectedness.

**Why it matters:**

- **Knowledge is an important building block**. Having at least basic knowledge about sustainability supports critical thinking and understanding of relevance. Learning *about* sustainability is a part of learning *for* sustainability.
- **Understanding the interconnected nature of sustainability** supports learners to understand its relevance. When learners discover that issues like fairness, income equality, wellbeing and quality of life are part of sustainability, and that these are connected to the environment, this helps them to see why sustainability matters to them and their communities.
- **Making sustainability explicit** is important so that learners can connect to the concept and articulate their learning and views about sustainability in conversations within and beyond the college – all the way from learner surveys to interviews with their future employers. If we address elements of sustainability without creating links to the concept of sustainability, it's likely learners, educators and colleges will miss out on the opportunities that come from being able to connect practice to a widely used term.

**How to learn more**

For this principle, the following stops along the learning pathway might be particularly helpful:

- Developing awareness and early curiosity
- Recognising what you're already doing
- Intentionally integrating sustainability themes

## What if sustainability isn't explicitly a part of the qualification I teach?

When sustainability is not listed explicitly as part of formal qualification content, it is still possible to integrate it effectively without having to rewrite lesson plans or make major changes. Here are some examples of how you can do this for any subject area:

- **Change the context, not the content** by using the original learning outcomes with sustainability-focused examples. Have a look at the examples under the RISE framework for some ideas.
- **Connect to the SDGs**. Map with learners how their course addresses the Goals and where gaps are. Display the SDG "wedding cake" diagram (see figure 3) in the classroom and discuss examples of interdependence. Ask students to relate to the SDGs as part of discussion, assignments, projects, presentations.
- **Adapt internal assessment contexts**. If you can't change the exam, you can often choose scenarios used in formative assessments, assignments and projects. Frame assignments around solving local environmental or community issues or ask learners to link research work to multiple SDGs (one each from social, environmental and economic dimensions).
- **Model sustainability in practice – and make this explicit**. When you act sustainably (reduce and reuse materials, responsibly source products, minimise energy use, etc.), talk to learners about how and why you do this.
- **Link social, environmental and economic issues**, such as how reducing food waste can help combat food poverty; reusing electronics or clothes reduces the need to buy new products made in unfair working conditions; or supporting others' mental health can help them engage with solutions for people and planet.

**Future proofing your practice**

By introducing sustainability into teaching and assessment, you can help to future proof your practice. The NextGen: HN qualifications are the next generation of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas. A core element of these is the introduction of a LfS learning outcome as part of at least one, and often various, of the mandatory course units. Each subject Qualification Design Team has designed this to enable all NextGen: HN learners to exit their studies with:

- A general understanding of sustainability and the SDGs
- A good grounding in subject-specific sustainability
- The confidence to apply the knowledge skills, and values developed through their learning in the next stage of their lives

This is in line with Qualifications Scotland's continuing commitment to embed Learning for Sustainability as outlined in Scotland's national LfS Action Plan (Target 2030: A movement for people, planet, and prosperity).

# Principle 1 – Curriculum content and the RISE stages of professional development

## Recognising

A practitioner who addresses social, environmental or economic issues implicitly, without realising and exploring their connection to each other and to sustainability.

**To rise up**
This lecturer explores with learners how inequality is a sustainability issue – for example, by bringing up the SDGs.

**Example**
A social science lecturer teaches about social justice and inequality without making explicit to students that this is a sustainability issue.

## Integrating

A practitioner who addresses social, environmental and economic issues explicitly as part of sustainability, but as separate issues.

**To rise up**
This lecturer asks learners to explore how poverty can influence green technology uptake, how gender inequality impacts the green skills gap, and what learners can do to be inclusive.

**Example**
An engineering lecturer addresses green technologies, climate change and net zero (environmental) explicitly as sustainability issues. Poverty and gender equality (economic/social) are part of a different unit or lesson but are not connected to learning about green technologies.

## Strengthening

A practitioner who addresses social, environmental and economic issues explicitly and as interconnected.

**To rise up**
This lecturer also integrates discussion on cultural sustainability.

**Example**
A chef lecturer addresses food waste as a sustainability issue, highlighting the climate impacts of food-related emissions (environmental). Students learn how these impacts disproportionately harm low income and marginalised communities, both globally and locally (social). They discuss innovative solutions or business models (economic) that take these issues into account.

## Elevating

A practitioner who meets the strengthening criteria and critically engages with common sustainability frameworks and dimensions (e.g. exploring the cultural dimension of sustainability, questioning dominant narratives, etc).

**Example**
The chef lecturer also encourages students to reflect on cultural norms. For example, the perception of food waste and its relation to sustainability can change depending on income, age or cultural background. Another example is to discuss cultural diversity of food and how recipes from indigenous cultures and countries of the global south minimise food waste by design.

# Principle 2 – Teaching and learning methods

**Learners develop skills, values and agency for sustainability**

This principle highlights the difference between learning *for* and learning *about* sustainability – learners don't only gain knowledge (principle 1) but also ways of thinking, acting and being. For this, we need to think about more than content and include teaching methods.

**The goal**

Learners develop skills, values and agency for sustainability, supported by teaching staff's use of transformational teaching and learning methods. Learners co-shape their learning and have space to meaningfully explore how sustainability relates to their experiences. This supports engagement, employability and learner wellbeing.

**Why it matters:**

- **Meaningful and effective learning** spans cognitive (head), behavioural (hands) and socio-emotional (heart) dimensions, using transformational teaching methods that allow for curiosity, experimentation and reflection.
- **Skills for a better future.** Subject specific skills build confidence and employability. But developing these alongside transferable skills in sustainability contexts is key - this helps learners use their abilities for good and avoid unintended negative consequences.
- **Values guide our actions**. How we use our knowledge and skills is strongly influenced by the "why" behind our actions – and it's important that learners get the chance to reflect on what really matters to them, now and in the future.
- **Agency pulls together knowledge, skills and values** and tests them in action. Giving learners opportunities to take action, however small, on an issue that matters to them, is a powerful way of countering the anxiety many people feel about our present and future.

**What are transformational teaching methods?**

In transformational teaching, educators do more than share knowledge. While teachers continue to support learners to develop core subject knowledge and skills, they also create opportunities for personal growth, as well as fostering positive attitudes towards learning. They do this by building a shared sense of purpose, encouraging and challenging learners, offering meaningful feedback, creating real-world learning experiences, and making time for reflection. Together, these approaches help learners build confidence, deepen their learning and develop as individuals. Read more in this blog from London School of Economics and Political Science, and find a variety of excellent teaching activities in the Rounder Sense of Purpose Framework.

**How to learn more**

For this principle, the following stops along the learning pathway might be particularly helpful:

- Development of learning and teaching methods for sustainability
- Strengthening the learner voice
- Reflection, critical thinking and further development

# Principle 2 – Teaching and learning methods and the RISE stages of professional development

**To rise up**
These skills are developed through engagement with sustainability issues, e.g. discussing how climate change can affect animal health.

## Recognising
A practitioner who employs teaching methods that support development of transferable skills without linking to sustainability.

**Example**
An animal nursing lecturer supports students to learn transferable (meta) skills like critical thinking and communication.

**To rise up**
Learning activities include prompts for learners to reflect on their values, and to develop agency by exploring solutions to barriers.

## Integrating
A practitioner who employs some transformational teaching methods that support transferable skills through engagement with sustainability.

**Example**
A childhood practice lecturer uses experiential learning, taking learners to an outdoor classroom. Learners present the benefits and barriers to outdoor learning and its connection to sustainability in groups, supporting communication and collaboration skills.

**To rise up**
This lecturer and their learners evaluate impact and map developed competencies to existing frameworks (see Elevating example).

## Strengthening
A practitioner who employs a variety of transformative teaching methods that support students to develop skills, values and agency for sustainability.

**Example**
An ESOL lecturer sets students a brief to research a sustainability issue that they care about (values). The lecturer then supports students to find and explore engaging with an organisation that can help them act on this issue. They present their research and action plans to the class, allowing for debate to support their communication and critical thinking skills.

## Elevating
A practitioner who meets the strengthening criteria and continually evaluates the impact of their practice, e.g. by using sustainability competency frameworks to explore perspectives on skills, values and agency.

**Example**
The same ESOL lecturer collects data and learner feedback on the impact of their practice on learners' skills, values and agency. They explore existing sustainability competency frameworks, such as the UNESCO sustainability competencies, Inner Development Goals or Aim Hi Green Skills to inform their approach, and seek to develop their practice through learner feedback, training, peer mentoring, and/or other forms of CPD.

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## Principle 3 – Contexts for learning and action

**Learners are enabled to become change agents in both life and work**

This principle is about the contexts in which learners develop of sustainability knowledge, skills, values and agency. It overlaps strongly with principles 1 and 2, but focuses more deeply on real-world learning through action in both life and work. It also points to the benefits of highlighting to learners the difference they can make. This includes the power of collective (rather than just individual) action and responsible citizenship.

**The goal**

Learners understand that there are multiple ways in which they can act for sustainability and realise that they can make a difference. They leave their course feeling capable, motivated and enabled to act for sustainability in their personal lives and future careers, individually and collectively.

**Why this matters:**

- **Quality learning** happens when learners can make sense of complex issues and explore what they would do in real life, not just remember information.
- **Making a difference matters**. Creating opportunities for real-world action can reduce the "this is too big" or "this is just theory" feeling that often causes disengagement and anxiety. When we highlight and celebrate the difference learners are making, however small, this is not only good LfS but can also boost wellbeing and engagement. This is particularly true for learners from low-income backgrounds who can feel excluded when action is primarily linked to spending money on "greener" products, rather than reusing, borrowing and reducing materials or restoring nature.
- **Creating a connection to employability** supports learners to explore how sustainability relates to their future careers and what actions they can take to build their experience portfolio. It can also support learners to articulate their "green skills", which can support them in finding employment (see section on employer demand for sustainability).
- **It's not just about personal choices.** Sometimes, sustainability is understood as something we are individually responsible for. While personal choices do matter, the influence we can have through our jobs and civic engagement is just as important and can be more powerful. Recent research highlights young people find the focus on individual action frustrating. This is why it's important to explore collective action to influence and hold accountable corporations, governments and people in power.

**How to learn more**

For this principle, the following stops along the learning pathway might be particularly helpful:

- Supporting real world learning for life and work
- Collaborating across and beyond the college
- Strengthening the learner voice

# Principle 3 – Contexts for learning and action and the RISE stages of professional development

## Recognising

A practitioner who supports learners to learn and act for sustainability in their personal OR professional lives.

**To rise up**
This lecturer also encourages learners to discuss how they can make a difference in their careers (e.g. through sourcing, reuse, partnerships etc).

**Example**
A fashion lecturer addresses the impact of fast fashion on people and the planet. Learners are encouraged to reflect on how they can alter personal shopping behaviours to be more sustainable and ethical.

**To rise up**
This lecturer asks learners to record data on impact. For example, learners pledge an action that they or a business can take (e.g. changing shopping behaviour or switching to green investment). At the end of the unit, they record the action's impact.

## Integrating

A practitioner who supports learners to learn and act for sustainability in their personal AND professional lives.

**Example**
A business lecturer presents various sustainability issues to learners (e.g. via the SDGs). Learners pick an issue, research how it relates to local businesses and then present this to the class, learning from each other through discussion. This activity will prompt learners to reflect on sustainability in their personal lives, as well as in their future careers.

**To rise up**
Learners also explore collective action (see Elevating example).

## Strengthening

A practitioner who supports learners to learn and act for sustainability in their personal and professional lives and helps learners see the difference that they can make

**Example**
A chemistry lecturer has learners investigate energy demand and carbon emissions. They are supported to recognise how behaviours can lower energy consumption. The class collects and analyses data on their energy use (for example, monitoring equipment run-time or comparing different experimental approaches) and saved costs when this is reduced, enabling learners to see the difference they can make when changing behaviours – at work and at home.

## Elevating

A practitioner who meets the strengthening criteria and also enables leaners to act collectively, as well as addressing action within society as responsible citizens.

**Example**
The same chemistry lecturer explores with learners how they can work with future colleagues, managers and suppliers to create wider change. When addressing contaminants of emerging concern (CECs), the lecturer highlights the influence learners have collectively as citizens. For example, the Royal Society for Chemistry is encouraging people to write to their MPs to ask them to support better solutions to pollution issues.



## Principle 4 – Integration and assessment

Learning for Sustainability is a golden thread throughout the learning experience

This principle is all about the importance of an integrated approach: Learning for Sustainability is most effective when it is an integrated part of the learner journey, including assessment, rather than a one-off activity.

**The goal**

Learning for Sustainability is embedded meaningfully and explicitly across the learner journey. Sustainability knowledge, skills, values and agency are clearly integrated in assessment as appropriate (including exams, assignments, portfolios and reflections), highlighting that they are an important part of learning outcomes.

**Why this matters:**

- **Learning about the breadth of sustainability often evokes interest**. Sustainability matters to all learners, not just those with pre-existing knowledge and interest. When learners get the chance to explore a sustainability issue that connects with what is important to them, curiosity and motivation to learn and act often follow (EAUC, 2024). Particularly because sustainability can be understood as relating to a couple of environmental issues only, it's important that all learners have the opportunity to learn that sustainability includes social and economic issues.
- **A matter of inclusivity**. If we make sustainability optional and separate to core learning, many learners who might not immediately see its relevance or can't access this additional learning will miss out (for example, due to caring responsibilities or lack of transport to access extracurricular opportunities, etc.)
- **Signalling importance.** Integrating sustainability into assessment signals that it matters, and helps more learners engage, particularly those who might otherwise overlook or not have access to it.

**How to learn more**

For this principle, the following stops along the learning pathway might be particularly helpful:

- Integrating LfS in assessment
- Intentionally integrating sustainability themes
- Collaborating across and beyond the college

# Principle 4 – Integration and assessment and the RISE stages of professional development

## Recognising

A practitioner who addresses sustainability in one-off activities (e.g. one-time class discussion, field trip, guest speaker).

**To rise up**
This lecturer continues to refer to the SDGs throughout the year, integrating them into various activities, lessons and assignments.

**Example**
A construction lecturer delivers one lesson where learners discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Integrating

A practitioner who supports learners to learn and act for sustainability in their personal AND professional lives.

**To rise up**
In addition to classroom activities, the lecturer includes sustainability issues and/or data.

**Example**
A maths lecturer uses data about sustainability issues (e.g. climate change, poverty and inequality) in multiple examples in class.

## Strengthening

A practitioner who integrates sustainability throughout the learning experience, with clear and substantial integration in assessment. Learner feedback helps to shape this.

**To rise up**
This lecturer shares their work and knowledge with other subject areas and/or people outside of the college.

**Example**
A healthcare lecturer consistently includes the influence of social, economic and environmental factors on health and supports learners to develop knowledge, skills, values and agency, (e.g. by using the Healthcare Decarbonisation Modules). Graded assignments, group work and exams also include knowledge and skills around these issues (e.g. in project briefs, graded presentations, or exam questions).

## Elevating

A practitioner who meets the strengthening criteria and supports others beyond their subject area and/or college to integrate LfS.

**Example**
The same healthcare lecturer also supports colleagues of other subject areas to integrate LfS; for example, by supporting sports or counselling lecturers to take the impact of climate change and pollution into account. They also engage with other colleges or organisations beyond the college to share LfS materials and lessons learned – e.g. through the EAUC ESD network, LfSS bulletin or a CDN event.

## Principle 5 – Collaboration across the 4Cs

**Curriculum, campus, culture and community support Learning for Sustainability**

This principle connects strongly with all other principles: collaborating with learners, colleagues, and the community of the college and beyond is crucial to create the meaningful real-world experiences that are the hallmark of effective LfS. These whole-institution approaches can also help to alleviate pressures on staff by sharing responsibility and care, and by identifying and achieving shared goals together.

**The goal**

Learning for Sustainability is woven throughout a college's curriculum, campus, culture and community, and isn't the responsibility of teaching staff alone. Leadership, teaching staff and learners from different subject areas, professional services staff, and college partners and communities work together to support each other and create meaningful, real world learning experiences.

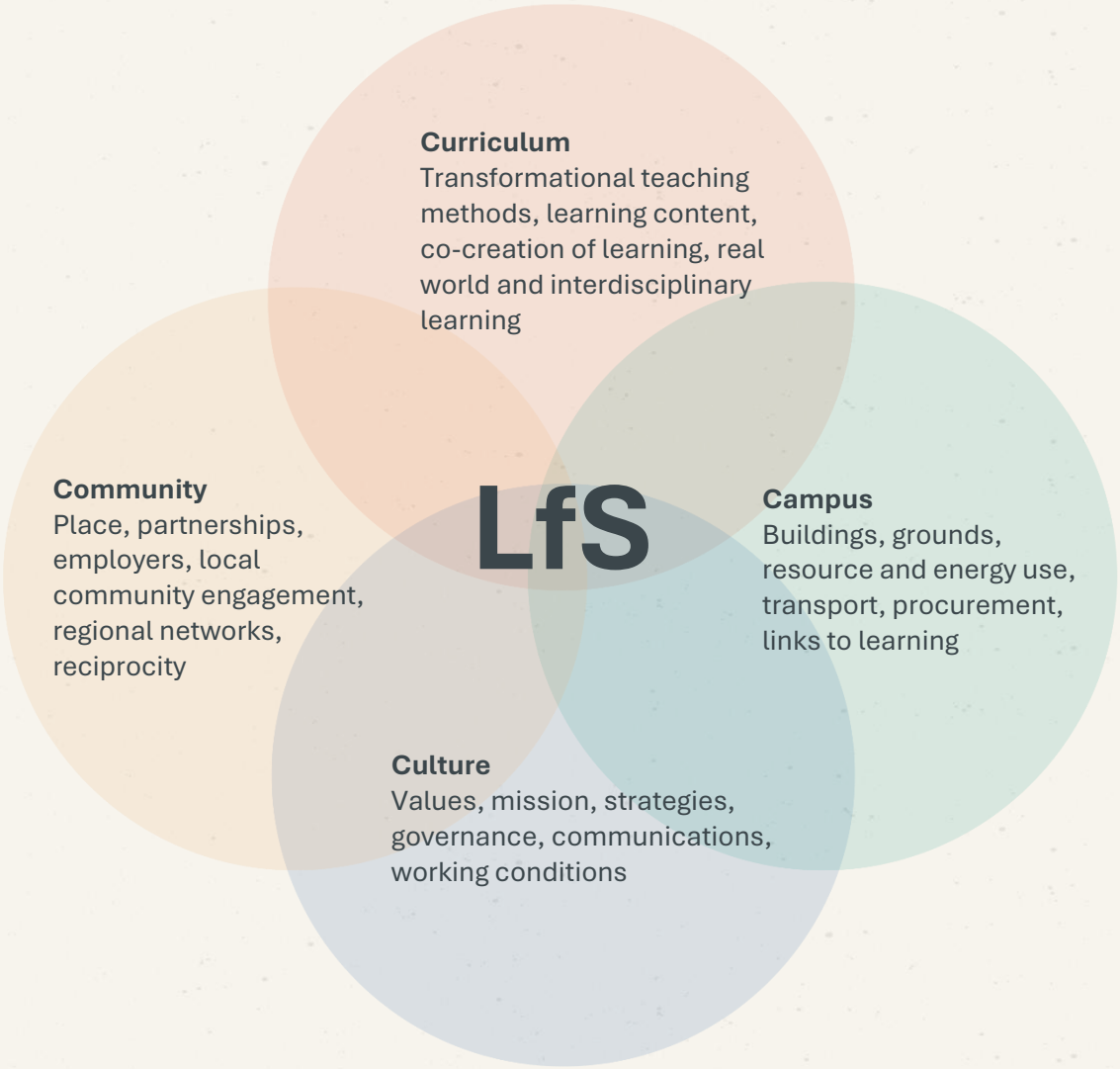



**Figure 5:** The 4Cs of LfS and what they can encompass. Based on Holst, 2023, and the National Framework for LfS in Initial Teacher Education.

**Why this matters:**

- **The spheres of learning.** Learning doesn't only take place in the classroom (curriculum) but is also influenced by how a college is run and its physical and digital spaces (campus), the everyday norms (culture), and the connections within and beyond the college (community).
- **Improving engagement through consistency**. Research shows that when learners and educators experience stronger whole-institution sustainability, they report feeling more motivated and empowered, and are more likely to act on sustainability beyond the institution.
- **Sharing responsibility and mutual benefits.** Delivering quality learning isn't only the responsibility of those who hold teaching roles: teaching staff can seek support from, for example, estates staff and marketing colleagues to support real world learning. Likewise, operational staff can meet their goals through collaboration with teaching staff – for example, by building on student research and recommendations, collecting data for quality reporting or supporting communications campaigns.

**How to learn more**

For this principle, the following stops along the learning pathway might be particularly helpful:

- Collaboration across and beyond the college
- Transformative and systems-oriented practice
- Supporting real world learning for life and work

# Principle 5 – Collaboration across the 4Cs and the RISE stages of professional development

**To rise up**
This lecturer includes connections to campus, culture or community – for example by working with estates staff on a project brief that includes the college's travel emissions.

## Recognising

A practitioner who addresses sustainability mostly in their own teaching context.

**Example**
A tourism lecturer addresses the environmental and social impacts of tourism, integrating this into a group work project brief. Learning mostly takes place in the classroom and within the subject context.

**To rise up**
Learning extends to the colleagues involved -for example, the college or organisation's marketing staff join the class to discuss the findings and recommendations.

## Integrating

A practitioner who is starting to build and embed connections between their teaching practice and the campus, communities or culture of an institution around sustainability.

**Example**
A marketing lecturer sets a project brief in which learners critically analyse the practice and communications of the college or a local organisation against the Sustainable Development Goals, designing recommendations on how to share existing sustainability practice with integrity, avoiding greenwashing, and highlighting future plans.

**To rise up**
This lecturer builds on their work to shape sector-wide systems to support LfS (e.g. qualification updates).

## Strengthening

A practitioner who collaborates across subject areas, operational staff, institutional culture and communities, to create meaningful learning experiences for all involved.

**Example**
A hairdressing lecturer and their learners work with environmental science staff and students to develop prompt cards about climate change that hairdressing students can use in conversations with their clients. Learners work with local salons to test approaches and share their work with staff there. Learners develop their communication skills, get real-world feedback, and learn how to collaborate with other students of other subjects, employers, and the local community. Read the case study.

## Elevating

A practitioner who meets the strengthening criteria and also engages in collaborations beyond the college to create supportive systems for LfS.

**Example**
The same hairdressing lecturer engages with initiatives that support more colleges to take similar approaches, e.g. by engaging with relevant professional bodies, supporting qualification development with Qualifications Scotland or by engaging with Learning for Sustainability Scotland's consultation events. To support this, they might also speak to their college leadership and ask how they can use their influence.

# Real world examples: LfS in action

## How practitioners are meeting the five principles

The following stories highlight how college practitioners have been meeting the five principles of LfS. Every example has a focus, but they all address multiple principles.

**Want to see more examples?**
EAUC in partnership with the Education and Training Foundation are developing a new resource that will provide prompts on for embedding in different subject areas. Case studies and real-world examples will illustrate this. The resource will be published in 2026/27 – join our ESD community of practice to hear about it and contribute your own stories and examples.




**Figure 6:** Fife College's Dunfermline City Campus, the first net zero ready tertiary education building in Scotland

### Principle 1 – Curriculum content

**Developing a systemic understanding of sustainability to inform counselling practice: Fife College**

Higher National Certificate and Diploma in Counselling learners explore sustainability by using the social determinants of health and wellbeing as an enquiry framework. Working with case studies, they investigate how factors such as poverty, access to green space, climate change, housing and community support affect people's lives. For example, they research contemporary issues including eco-anxiety, climate grief and the psychological impact of social and environmental inequality, and reflect on how a systemic understanding of sustainability informs person-centred professional practice. Learners are also supported to map these issues against the SDGs, making the connection to global frameworks explicit. This is facilitated by the curriculum team of James Ritchie, Curriculum Manager for social care and counselling.

This is a strong example of how, rather than treating environmental, social and economic issues as separate, learners explore explicitly how they are connected.

**Find out more**: Contact Mark Goodall, Organisational Development Manager and Lead Contact Learning for Sustainability, via markgoodall@fife.ac.uk.



**Figure 7:** A hairdressing student using climate conversation cards with a client

## Principle 2 – Teaching and learning methods

**Interdisciplinary and student-led approaches for climate conversations in salons: UHI Moray**

Hairdressing and Beauty learners at UHI Moray worked with environmental students from the Scottish Association of Marine Science (SAMS) through the Under the Scissors Project to explore how their professional practice could help start conversations about climate change. Through an interdisciplinary, student-led approach, Hairdressing and Beauty learners developed conversation cards with the support of SAMS students. These were used in salons, giving them a real-world opportunity to apply their subject skills while developing communication and relationship-building skills. All participating learners developed an understanding of the importance of communication and how even just one conversation about a topic that's often worrisome can improve wellbeing. This supported reflections on how their everyday professional interactions can contribute to wider community engagement.

This example shows how transformative teaching and learning methods can be employed to develop not just knowledge, but the skills, values and agency learners need to engage others and take action for sustainability. Collaborations across disciplines and with salons allowed for meaningful real-world learning with others.

**Researcher Kerry McInnes said:**

"The Under the Scissors project is unique in that there are currently very few structured opportunities for students to share knowledge, skills and experience across campuses, disciplines and different levels of study. The project also gave students the chance to be involved in a research project who may otherwise not get such an opportunity. The demand for this type of hands-on, interdisciplinary project is clear and Under the Scissors has attracted attention from local authorities, businesses, and colleges throughout Scotland seeking novel and effective strategies for climate engagement. By participating in this project, students have built capacity and confidence and have developed a range of additional employability and citizenship skills, as well as the capacity to continue to serve as active agents for change post-graduation."

**Find out more**: see A Climate Conversation Handbook, Research - Under the Scissors CEF Project or contact Kerry McInnes via kerry.mcinnes.moray@uhi.ac.uk.



**Figure 8:** Maria Zahariea teaches ESOL at Step2Skills.

## Principle 3 – Contexts for learning and action

**Engaging with community initiatives and volunteering while developing language skills: Step2Skills**

At Step2Skills, ESOL learners develop their language skills with sustainability connections to their personal lives and local communities. Through formal and assessed discussions on topics such as green energy, learners build confidence to talk about sustainability in a professional context. Learner-led activities complement this: they consider practical changes they can make themselves and explore opportunities to take part in local sustainability initiatives. Learners develop presentations on their volunteering experiences – for example, on how gardening can support wellbeing and the environment – and discuss how they can engage with local communities and microgrants for environmental projects.

**One learner's presentation reflected on wild places in urban environments:**

"Wild places are not only found in remote areas—they are hidden in our cities. They give life to animals, beauty to neighborhoods, and calm to our busy minds. Next time you walk through the city, take a moment to look for the wild. You might be surprised at what you find."

In combination, these activities help them understand that sustainability is not only about individual choices but also about contributing to collective action and local change. Learners develop civic awareness, while recognising their own capacity to take action and contribute positively to their communities – showing how powerful it can be to explore sustainability meaningfully in personal and professional contexts of learning.

**Find out more:** contact Maria Zahariea, Further Education teacher for English, Maths, Essential Digital Skills & ESOL, via LinkedIn.



**Figure 9:** Apple turnovers made from leftover pastry, prepared by bakery and patisserie students to avoid food waste.

## Principle 4 – Integration and assessment

**A golden thread of sustainability for bakery and patisserie learners: Forth Valley College**

When Forth Valley College developed its new Level 6 Bakery & Patisserie course, sustainability was designed into the learning experience rather than added as a separate topic. Through a Food Waste and Sustainability unit, learners explored the environmental, social, and economic impacts of food waste while developing practical bakery skills – which was also embedded in assessment. Learning is assessed through multiple formats, including mock-designing a carbon-friendly bakery, a zero-waste bake-off, and a sustainability portfolio that draws together evidence from across multiple units, including examples of repurposing leftovers, reducing waste and managing portion sizes.

The impacts of this example highlight the benefits of innovative assessment and of a consistent LfS thread running throughout the course: learners began to apply sustainable approaches in practice, with some independently identifying opportunities to reuse ingredients, and were able document these in their graded portfolios. The course also connected sustainability learning to careers, enterprise and community engagement through guest speakers and industry examples, making sure learners saw the benefits of sustainable approaches to their future careers.

**Find out more**: Contact John Meechan, Bakery Lecturer, via john.meechan@forthvalley.ac.uk.



**Figure 10:** Students learn about renewable energy systems in the remodeled classroom.

## Principle 5 – The 4 Cs

**From disused lab to living classroom: Glasgow Clyde College**

At Glasgow Clyde College, a disused electronics lab was transformed into Scotland's first fully off-grid renewable energy classroom. This was made possible by a close collaboration of operational and campus-focused staff, teaching staff and learners – providing a great example of how the existing campus can help support learning. Rather than just using it when finished, learners helped set up the disused classroom and installed solar panels, wind generation and battery storage. This allowed them and future learners to work directly with live renewable energy systems. Meanwhile, staff, industry partners and college teams collaborated to develop further learning opportunities. The classroom also supports the college's wider sustainability goals by

reducing emissions, strengthening employer partnerships and making sustainability a visible part of everyday college life.

In particular, the collaboration between different staff roles and the involvement of students in the installation of the classroom are great examples of Principle 5 – particularly campus and culture. It's clear that collaboration benefits learners, staff and the college alike.

**Find out more**: contact Barry Faichnie, Curriculum Manager for Electrical and Electronic Engineering, via BFaichnie2@glasgowclyde.ac.uk.



# Supporting Learning for Sustainability practice

## Learning pathway, drivers, communities for LfS and actions by role

# Learning pathway

We asked the EAUC Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) community of practice what steps its members had taken to embed LfS/ESD over time.

Building on what was shared, as well as our own organisational experience, we have developed a learning pathway to help practitioners to find the right resources at the right time, guiding them on their ESD journeys.

The pathway is deliberately only loosely aligned with the RISE framework. Learning journeys are rarely linear, often a little "squiggly" and vary from person to person. It's OK to go back to where we've already been or to jump ahead and try something different. There is not one right way to do this.

For every step on the journey, you'll find an overview of what people typically are looking for, a few quick wins and the top three resources to further develop your practice.

**You can access the full learning pathway and links to all resources on the EAUC website.**

# LfS learning pathway

## Developing awareness and early curiosity
Resources to support an understanding of how sustainability relates to education

## Intentional integration and alignment
Resources that show how you can embed sustainability explicitly and intentionally

## Recognition in current practice
Resources that help you see what you're already doing, and explore how you can build on this

## Assessment
Resources that demonstrate how assessment can include and strengthen LfS

## Pedagogical development
Resources that support you to develop teaching methods *for* sustainability, alongside content *about* sustainability

## Students as change agents
Resources that help you to explore how students can take action as part of learning

## Transformative and systems-oriented practice
Resources that support you to think beyond your own context and create environments supportive of LfS

## Reflection, critical thinking and further development
Resources that stimulate critical reflection on common approaches and explore different perspectives on LfS

## Making it fun
Resources that help you to bring lightness and playfulness into LfS – avoiding "doom and gloom"

# Drivers of Learning for Sustainability

## Policies, standards and employers

Our world is changing – and so are the ways we teach and learn. Policies, qualifications and requirements reflect this. While change isn't always easy, with the right support, new ways of teaching can open up a whole new range of opportunities for educators to bring learning to life.

So far, this guide has helped you understand what LfS is and how you can put it into practice. Below, we briefly summarise some of the drivers of LfS – because it is no longer just a "nice to have". It has increasingly become a part of what colleges are required to deliver.

You can find a full overview of drivers of LfS on our website.

### LfS in policies and requirements for learning and teaching

In Scotland, LfS is not an optional add-on, rather it is a core expectation of education. LfS is an entitlement for learners that all educators should be demonstrating in their practice across the 3-18 curriculum. This is currently being delivered through the Scottish Government's LfS Action Plan. This means that learners entering colleges from school bring with them informed questions, values and expectations about sustainability-related learning. Colleges play a vital role in deepening and applying this learning in vocational and professional contexts.

National policies and standards for further and higher education make these expectations more explicit. While the education sector is undergoing a lot of changes, the direction of travel for LfS remains clear: LfS and sustainability are included in the Professional Standards for Lecturers in colleges, the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model, the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Quality Code, Qualifications Scotland's Next Gen Higher National Qualifications, and many others.

**What does this mean for you?**
LfS not just good for the world but also helps you to meet sector standards. Talk to your manager about how to further develop your practice, or to your institution's quality team about how you are meeting professional standards and quality requirements around LfS.

### LfS in wider college requirements on environmental sustainability

Sustainability and LfS are about more than just environmental issues (see the myth busters section). But research finds the environmental aspect is often least visible or discussed in colleges' day to day teaching practice (EAUC, 2024). What many practitioners might not know is that the environmental sustainability requirements for college operations include strong links to teaching. In Scotland, colleges are required to report on how they are meeting the public bodies climate change duties (PBCCD) every year. The statutory guidance on the PBCCD highlights that colleges and universities are required to show how they are embedding environmental sustainability into teaching and explicitly refers to LfS and ESD.

**What does this mean for you?**
Try it out – speak to your college's estates or sustainability lead about the "wider influence" aspect of PBCCD reporting. How can student work support campus environmental sustainability projects or objectives while also providing real world contexts for quality learning? See also principle 5 in this guide.

## LfS and employability: employer demand for sustainability

Social and technical skills have long been recognised as essential by employers and the college sector. But the demand for environmental sustainability knowledge and skills is also rising – twice as fast as supply (LinkedIn, 2025). And this is not just the case in environmentally focused roles – all roles are "greening". More than half of "green" hires now have "non-green" job titles, with environmental sustainability increasingly embedded in roles across project management, operations, procurement, technology, finance, media and education (LinkedIn, 2025; Lightcast, 2025).

You can read more about the many forms a green job can take in the EAUC's green career guides – with student facing and staff facing versions.

**What does this mean for you?**
By integrating the environmental dimension of sustainability into learning and teaching, you can help learners develop adaptable, in-demand skills that improve employability. This doesn't mean you have to change your curriculum entirely, but you might want to ensure environmental aspects are included in student-led projects and case studies.

# Actions by role

## Towards a whole college approach

LfS's focus on collaboration across curriculum, campus, culture and community means that everyone has a role to play to help create meaningful learning experiences. While this guide is largely focused on staff directly involved in teaching practice, the below are examples of impactful actions for different roles within a college.

| | |
|---|---|
| Curriculum leads<br>e.g. curriculum manager, or head of sector, etc. | Explore how you could use the RISE framework with your team – where are they at? Where would they like to be? Use our reflection and action tool to celebrate good practice and discuss how your team can develop collaboratively. |
| Organisational and professional development | Embed LfS in professional development reviews and planning tools, e.g. by using the RISE framework, and make it a consistent theme for staff development week, ongoing training sessions and all-staff meetings. |
| Senior leaders | Help create a positive LfS culture by setting goals and targets around LfS across institutional strategies and action plans, while also supporting practice. For example, enable teaching staff to record and celebrate LfS practice (e.g. through award schemes, mentions at all-staff meetings and board presentations). |
| Operational staff and professional services<br>e.g. catering manager, estates director, etc. | Explore opportunities for connecting campus and curriculum. For example, can students analyse the catering offer for environmental and ethical factors, and make suggestions? Can they undertake a research project on nature spaces and their importance for both biodiversity and wellbeing? |
| Roles with formal responsibility for sustainability<br>e.g. sustainability manager | Be a connector – use your knowledge of sustainability needs and ongoing projects at the college to explore how teaching staff and students could engage with these collaboratively; collect success stories and lessons learned, and share this within and beyond the college (e.g. by filling in our LfS stories form) |
| Quality and academic enhancement and assurance staff | Ensure that quality reporting includes the valuable work teaching staff are doing already to embed LfS and the ambitions they have, e.g. through including it in the Self-Evaluation Action Plan (SEAP), connecting it to the QAA Quality Code, addressing progress you've made in the Tertiary Quality Enhancement Review, etc. |
| Student association staff and officers | Support students in extracurricular activities around sustainability; make sure that leadership, teaching staff and people with a responsibility for sustainability are aware of these activities and can explore potential to connect. |
| Students | Tell your lecturers and tutors about your sustainability interests, and discuss how you and your classmates can involve this in course work. Signpost your educators to this guide and ask them to review their practice against the RISE framework. |

# Stronger together

## Find your community

Being an educator at a college is not an easy job. When we're under a lot of pressure, it helps to be part of a community.

Leaning from and with others can help us to overcome barriers and feel less alone. There are many ways to find a community of others working on LfS, and you might be surprised how many people there are: a survey of over 500 college staff in England showed that 94% believe that all UK learners should be taught about sustainability issues (ETF, 2021).

Here are four ways to find a supportive community:

1. **Within your subject area and team**
   At your next team meeting, ask who else is teaching about issues that relate to sustainability. Use the phrasing "people and planet" or share the SDGs if people can't relate to the term "sustainability". You'll often be surprised how many of your colleagues are already doing something. Use the reflection and action tool downloadable on our website to run a 20-minute reflective exercise to evaluate and celebrate your practice.

2. **Within the wider college**
   Speak to someone involved with sustainability – this can be an estates or sustainability manager, someone in the student association, or a manager or leader. They will likely be able to point you towards others working on it, or even to a sustainability group or committee.

3. **Education sector communities**
   Join EAUC's ESD community of practice – we regularly share new resources through our mailing list, and hold online meetings at least twice a year, sharing case studies and opportunities to connect with others. This group is free to join for EAUC members, which includes most Scottish institutions.

4. **Stay up to date and get inspired**
   In addition to the EAUC newsletter focused on further and higher education across the UK (get in touch to join our mailing list), Learning for Sustainability Scotland shares both a monthly bulletin and a quarterly policy and research update. This is full of useful information and stories from all education sectors, from early years through to further and higher education, as well as communities. You can become a member of Learning for Sustainability Scotland for free.

# Next steps – and how to shape them

## How you can get involved

This guide lays out an important theoretical foundation for LfS. It is unique in that it provides clear principles and development stages. But we know that it's also a lot to read – especially for teaching practitioners who already have plenty on their plate.

So, the EAUC, as well as the partners involved in creating this guidance, are keen to help practitioners put LfS into practice and make this as accessible as possible.

We are therefore planning to:

- **Review and improve this guide**
  While we worked closely with practitioners to develop this guide, everyone's perspective is different. We want to honour the diversity of the college sector and people's experiences and therefore will regularly update and improve the guide. Have ideas? Fill in our short feedback form or email us if you'd like to be part of further development.

- **Develop further resources**
  We plan to create a range of practical resources to help colleges embed LfS, including subject-specific prompts, ready-to-use activities and starter kits. We want these resources to be shaped by the people who will use them. Get in touch to share your ideas and experiences, and help us co-create support for colleges in Scotland, the UK and beyond.

- **Deliver events and workshops**
  From lightning presentations at online meetings to workshops at staff development days, we love to bring our guidance to life. Contact us to request a presentation, workshop or other form of engagement.

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