

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Overview guidance and quick reference tool

This document is split in to two sections. Firstly, a brief guide which details the University's approach to sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It contains a rationale, an overview of University strategy and links to the ESD framework and objectives. Secondly, there is a quick reference tool. This is a set of key considerations designed to help reflect on how to embed ESD during programme review. These considerations are collected under each of the four ESD objectives. This is to reinforce consistency of language but also to help colleagues visualise how they are contributing to achieving those objectives.

SUSTAINABILITY AND THE UNIVERSITY STRATEGY

Sustainability is one of four key principles outlined in the [University Strategic Plan 2020-2026](#). These principles overlap and are designed to help us deliver on our purpose; to “act together, using our collective skills and diversity, to deliver a better world through the transformational power of quality education and research”.

The principle of sustainability is implemented using a necessarily wide set of activities. There are six in total presented by [Sustainability Services](#). This includes a number that focus on developing infrastructure, greening the campus and achieving net zero targets. These activities are important yet there is a recognition that any approach must include a creative and committed focus on embedding sustainability in the curriculum. [Education for Sustainable Development](#) (ESD) is mentioned here and is one of the most effective and logical ways that the University of Reading can achieve its sustainability goals. The approach to ESD and curriculum enhancement is outlined in a number of ways. Firstly a set of overarching objectives can be found on [ESD Essentials](#). These objectives form the structure of this guide. The objectives are also accompanied by an [ESD Framework](#) that has formed the basis of our claim for the UK People and Planet University ranking.

RATIONALE

Sustainability is increasingly important to Higher Education Institutions and getting the approach right could be central to its continued success. The [sustainability skills survey](#) is run by Students Organising for Sustainability and funded by Advance HE. The data for [2020-2021](#), on which much of our approach was

based shows that 91% of students think that their place of study should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development, and that 84% would like to see sustainable development actively incorporated and promoted through all subjects. These numbers challenge preconceptions about which subjects hold domain over sustainability, and which student want to learn about it. The same set of surveys found that 93% of respondents feel it is important for students to leave their time in formal education with the knowledge and skills required to address sustainability challenges, while over two thirds (68%) of students identify sustainability as the pre-eminent issue impacting their lives, placing a particular focus being on the empowerment of students as the solution. This is important in terms of student choice and motivation for selecting place and subjects of study. From a student perspective there is much to suggest that we as an institution should be looking to incorporate sustainability and involve them in that process. For information on how this manifests at Reading please see the Reading [University Student Union \(RUSU\) sustainability](#) pages.

There have been a number of metrics that have emerged that attempt to assess the quality of University attempts to embed ESD and develop related skills. The [UK People and Planet league table](#) is designed with the aim of “building an empowered generation of change-makers who are equipped with life-long skills, motivation and networks to be a force for change in achieving a more equitable and sustainable world.” In 2021-22 the University of Reading, supported by the publication of the above resources raised our position to 15, 13 places higher than the previous year. The ESD specific rating was raised to 95% in that category. It’s worth noting that this rating the year before would have seen us place 4th. We have improved, but the field is moving.

The Curriculum Framework

In order to effectively embed ESD we must engage in curriculum enhancement. To look at how the subject curriculum can be used to apply knowledge to resolve real world sustainability challenges. [The Curriculum Framework](#) has been updated to incorporate ESD. It captures the University’s ambition to integrate education for sustainable development appropriate to the discipline. This will be achieved by embedding opportunities and empowering students to engage with environmental, social and economic challenges within their programme and beyond. It does this by encouraging a programme level approach, embedding ESD related skills in to learning outcomes, ensuring these are constructively aligned with appropriate pedagogy and authentic assessment. The CF is also useful in exploring the synergies between ESD and related activities such as employability, student engagement and the inclusivity agenda.

The Curriculum Framework, its approach and its principles underpin curriculum enhancement activities via curriculum review. The Programme Review Project represents the most significant cross University curriculum review and as such provides an ideal opportunity to take a programmes level approach to embedding ESD. The tool below is designed to provide quick reference tips for those considering what ESD is and what it means to them in terms of programme design. Tips are structured under each of the 4 ESD objectives to help you visualise how you might be meeting them. Good design for ESD is good design in general and these tips should be read in conjunction with the [learning design process](#) which highlights the importance of key related terms such as constructive alignment and programme level approach.

ESD- PRP QUICK REFERENCE TOOL

Becoming a world-leading institution for sustainability learning and teaching, informed by research

- Do not ignore the data. Students care about sustainability. They increasingly expect it to be embedded in all subjects and are known to select programmes and universities on this basis.
- Take a programme level approach. Embed ESD across the programme. Engagement does not need to be even but it does need to be planned. Do not be tempted to replace curriculum enhancement activity with bespoke modules or extra-curricular activity.

Embedding education for sustainable development into the subject curriculum, encouraging the application of subject knowledge and practices to develop an explicit understanding of the challenges facing the wider world

- Find the links between your subject and sustainability. It is not a bolt on, it needs to be integrated. Subject knowledge can be applied to understand and resolve key sustainability issues. Make these links part of the T&L experience.
- Select appropriate teaching and assessment methods that are focussed on sustainability issues, but also authentic to the discipline and the activity. Think about what you teach (content), and how you teach it (pedagogy and assessment).
 - Topics of study
 - Case studies
 - Projects
 - Pedagogical strategy: problem-based learning
 - Assessment
 - Reflection

Empowering our students with the knowledge, skills and attributes to contribute solutions to global challenges in an equitable and just way

- Do not separate sustainability/academic skills. This encourages a separation of the subject from the application; one that students find meaningful. We need to see these as complementary so that we can prepare and engage students, but do so in a way that grounds this development within the subject.
- It is not creating extra work. It is the lens through which lots of Curriculum Framework (CF) activities can be aligned. ESD is a vessel for lots of areas of the CF. Do embed ESD and you may be also doing inclusivity, employability, student participation.
- Include skills and capabilities in learning outcomes so that the students are clear on their expectations and can articulate their development.
- Utilise the eight [UNESCO competencies](#) in order to identify embedded skills. There is synergy between employability and ESD. This is seen in the focus on development and authentic learning. The UNESCO competencies set out an example ESD skills framework.

Ensuring that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a focus of all subjects at the University, experienced in a way that is authentic to the discipline

- Do not think that ESD is not for you. It is, and students think it is.
- Align your curriculum with the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UNSDGs). The 17 goals span the breadth of sustainability related issues. The goals reflect issues that speak to all disciplines. The associated challenges require solutions from multiple subject perspectives, and so you should be able to find something that speaks to your disciplinary knowledge or skillsets. [Click here to access UNESCO's guide on embedding the SDGs in to Learning Objectives.](#)