

**Date:** 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021  
**Time:** 1pm-3pm  
**Venue:** Virtual via Zoom  
**Resources:** [www.sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk/esd\\_guidance\\_2021](http://www.sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk/esd_guidance_2021)



# MINUTES:

## Interpreting and Implementing the new Guidance on Education for Sustainable Development

**Attendees:**

Helen Adamson	Lecturer	Newcastle University
Kristina Auxtova	Lecturer in Marketing	University of Dundee
Andrew Bacon	CEO	Enactus
Rod Bain	Teaching Associate in Sustainable Development	University of Strathclyde
Victoria Blake	Environment Advisor	The University of Northampton
Charlotte Bonner	National Head of Education for Sustainable Development	Education and Training Foundation
Christine Calder	Academic Development Lead	Dundee and Angus College
Alina Congreve	Independent researcher	Independent
Thom Cooper	Sustainability Manager	University of Leeds
Cathy d'Abreu	Lecturer	Oxford Brookes University
Catrin Darsley	PhD researcher	University of Cambridge
Ankit Duggal	Student President	Edinburgh Napier University
Kelly Forster	PA and Project Assistant to the Director of Sustainability	University of Leeds
Manveer Gill	Student / Climate Commission HE Student Commissioner	University of Warwick
Karen Hicks	Lecturer in Public Health	Queen Margaret University
John Hirst	Assistant Professor	Durham University
Mark Huxham	Researcher	Edinburgh Napier University
Simon Kemp	Professorial Fellow in Education for Sustainable Development	University of Southampton
John Keenan	Sustainability Manager	Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board
Betsy King	Development Manager	Learning for Sustainability Scotland
Matthew Lawson	Programme Manager	The University of Edinburgh
Romas Malevicius	Lecturer in Sustainability and Ethics	University of Salford
Michel Mason	Tutor	University of Essex
Severine Monvoisin	Community Garden Coordinator	Edinburgh College
Deborah Phelpstead	Environmental Manager	Birmingham City University
Rebecca Petford	Scotland Programme Manager	EAUC-Scotland
Katie Ridley	Sustainability Manager	Northumbria University
Nicki Schantz	Teaching	University of Bath
Eleanor Snare	Lecturer	Leeds Arts University

Scott Strachan	Teaching Fellow	University of Strathclyde
Scott Thomson	Networks and Communications Coordinator	EAUC-Scotland
Alexander Velinov	Campus Services Administrator	Queen Margaret University
Alison Watson	Health Improvement Practitioner	NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde
Rehema White	Academic	University of St Andrews
Eleanor Wills	Sustainability Support Officer	Bournemouth University
Bethan Wood	Senior Lecturer	University of Glasgow
Matt Woodthorpe	Scotland Programme Manager	EAUC-Scotland

**Apologies:**

Miriam Adcock	Project Manager	Zero Waste Scotland
Beth Brownlee	Head of Quality, Student Support and Learning Resources	West Lothian College
Karen Cripps	Lecturer	The University of Winchester
Rachel Howell	Lecturer in Sociology / Sustainable Development	University of Edinburgh
Eilidh MacPhail	Lecturer in Sustainable Rural Development	Lewis Castle College UHI
Suzanne Marshall	Curriculum and Teaching Lead	College Development Network
Mike Pretious	Senior Lecturer in Management	Queen Margaret University
Helen Puntha	Head of Green Academy	Nottingham Trent University
Yumino Simpson	Environmental Management Officer	York St John University

	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS	ACTIONS
1	<p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b>  <i>Dr Rehema White, Education for Sustainable Development TSN Co-Convenor</i></p> <p>Everyone was welcomed to the session, with the wide range of institutions represented commented upon.</p> <p>This event is one of many we have planned by the EAUC Education for Sustainable Development Topic Support Network and Learning for Sustainability Scotland Further and Higher Education Task Group over the next year. The four following events will be focused on COP26 and ensuring a positive legacy from that, starting with how do we engage students with COP26 then how to get started with Education for Sustainable Development, good examples from the sector of taking a whole institution approach, and finally how to monitor and evaluate it. All events will be online and open to all, and advertised through the SHED and EAUC-Scotland lists and Learning for Sustainability Scotland network.</p> <p>Today's event is focused on the recently launched QAA / Advance HE <a href="#">Education for Sustainable Development Guidance</a>. Our previous meeting was focused on developing feedback for the consultation on the draft of the guidance, and it is great to now have it published and have so much interest in hearing more about the guidance itself and plans for implementing it in different institutions.</p> <p>Everyone was invited to introduce themselves within breakout rooms.</p>	

## 2 Introduction to the Guidance

*Dr Rehema White, Education for Sustainable Development TSN Co-Convenor*

[View the Recording \(7:45-25:00\) and access the slides here](#)

The guidance was developed by the QAA and Advance HE, the organisations which input to quality assurance in our universities, so our colleagues cannot say it is not relevant to them. This is an advantage to us for legitimising this agenda and when it comes to gaining leverage for implementation.

It is no surprise that this guidance has been developed – education for sustainable development has become a lot more mainstream. It is now accepted that education should prepare students to act on the crises which we face, but also that education should be self-fulfilling, prepare students for a vocation, be of good quality and also be potentially transformative.

The guidance launch is timely given the prominence of many interacting agendas relevant to discussing sustainability with students, including Covid-19, COP26, the prominence of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Black Lives Matter movement, decolonizing curriculum agendas etc.

The previous guidance was developed in 2014, and there has been a lot of change since then.

Simon Kemp and Jim Longhurst (both speaking later) chaired and led a group of experts from around the country to discuss what should be included. There was a consultation process on the first draft which led to significant changes, then the guidance was launched. We are trying to now implement the guidance.

It was a challenge to keep this guidance compact (although it is long by QAA / Advance HE standards) – the expert group wanted to include more.

The context is outlined at the start of the guidance – interlinked crises, policy context, green recovery, and student expectations on education for sustainable development.

The guidance is for staff and senior management and quality assurance teams, but can be used for anyone including students. It should be considered alongside the QAA benchmark statements for different subjects. Further resources can also be found on the [Sustainability Exchange](#).

*Section 1: Introducing ESD* describes what ESD is and gives the wider context. ESD is not **about** the environment / sustainable development, but **for** sustainable development – it is grounded in transformative learning and critical pedagogy; and it is about developing competencies, not merely tweaking curricula.

*Section 2: Getting started with ESD* outlines what you should be doing if you are new to this. ESD is best achieved when it is part of institution's strategic priorities, strategies and policies, included in the validation and review of courses, central to staff and student induction and appraisal, within quality assurance and enhancement, and staff training is available. Reinforcing other institution sustainability work by linking to activities in estates or engagement, to employability, or to wider community engagement, is strongly advised.

*Section 3: Teaching, learning and assessment for ESD* draws on the competencies from UNESCO (but there are other associated frameworks which can be used), and explains that students should have these competencies strengthened through their education – systems thinking, anticipatory, critical thinking, strategic, collaboration, integrated problem-solving, self awareness and normative competencies. The guidance focuses less on the topics and more on

	<p>the competencies, and these can be strengthened in any discipline. Effective teaching practices are also outlined – collaborative, enquiry based, playful, storytelling, problem based learning etc.</p> <p><i>Section 4: Annotated References and Resources</i> includes policies and strategies, non-UNESCO resources, UK frameworks</p> <p>So what does this new guidance mean for us?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A useful framing for ESD, including a good introduction for people new to the area</li> <li>• Legitimises the efforts of those doing this already – this presents a requirement to embed ESD (not yet a statutory requirement)</li> <li>• Offers credibility</li> <li>• Provides language for whole institution and sector</li> <li>• Provides resources</li> <li>• Provides inspiration?</li> </ul> <p>Accompanying document to be published including more case studies.</p>	
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Implementation Plans from Different Perspectives</b></p> <p><a href="#">View the Recording (25:15 – 1:17:45) and access the slides here</a></p> <p><b>Students – Perspective 1</b>  <i>Manveer Gill, Climate Commission for Higher and Further Education Student Representative</i></p> <p>Graduated from University of Warwick last July, perspective comes from the discussions he has had with students active in the environmental agenda and student responses to a survey done by the Climate Commission.</p> <p>Students <u>want</u> sustainability within their teaching – sustainability issues are becoming more and more salient by the day, and students are increasingly taking action in this area.</p> <p>Students also <u>need</u> this to be integrated – there will be more jobs in the future which need the understanding of integrated crises, and we risk students leaving FHE institutions without the skills they need if we don't teach for sustainability.</p> <p>Important that this isn't limited to the natural and social sciences – all disciplines will be impacted – and so it's important to consult with pedagogical and subject experts to define what this process could look like.</p> <p>How could this guidance help students?</p> <p>A checklist for students developed from Section 2 on Getting Started could help students to assess how well their institution is doing this, and hold them to account. The points could be split, with one list for student reps, and one for students in general.</p> <p>It would be important for this to be a collaborative discussion rather than a friction between staff and students - collaboration and co-creation of learning is an important part of section 2, and this fits perfectly.</p> <p>The information in Section 3 on integrating the competencies for ESD is within the remit of student-staff committees (where they exist), which is where faculty and class reps could come into play.</p>	

<p>There is a lot of good work in this guidance, but it would be good to see a dissemination plan for students too. The developers should consult with student union organisations like Enactus about how to best frame this.</p> <p>It is also important to look at Student Unions and Estates departments and how they interact with teaching.</p> <p>This also needs to come with a call to action, such as a webinar aimed at students and student reps, perhaps in October, which outlines the guidance from their perspective and how they can support its implementation.</p> <p>Top three asks to help students use this guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A checklist for students to assess their institution and hold them to account</li> <li>• Dissemination plans directed at students / Student Unions</li> <li>• Call to action event, such as a webinar aimed at students and student representatives</li> </ul> <p><b>Students – Perspective 2</b>  <i>Lexi Ehresmann, University of Stirling Students Union</i></p> <p>Currently the Vice President Education at University of Stirling Students Union., and will reflect on experience of working with student reps and staff at the university in order to influence teaching.</p> <p>However, getting students to understand the importance of this is vital – many don't see how it affects how it affects their individual career and lives, particularly within non-environmental disciplines.</p> <p>The guidance itself is not something that students are going to engage with. It would be useful to have workshops to engage students in discussion about the guidance and what we can do next to progress things. There are two avenues for this - an external body could provide events for any students, or there could be collaborative work between Student Associations to run these engagement events in individual universities with the student representatives.</p> <p>Then it is important to enable them to use that information in the different levels of influence they are involved in. Student reps need the resources to ask the right questions to convince senior leaders this is important.</p> <p>This could be done by developing a resource that includes the questions students should be asking, how they can evaluate their modules etc. This could be tied into existing structures, such as offering teaching awards for good modules in terms of sustainability. Being supported to ask the right questions and collect the right data will mean the students can be more effective.</p> <p>Good practice sharing is also always really effective – there should be opportunities for students to come together and talk about how students have influenced sustainability in the curriculum at their institution. Make a community to connect students to make them feel like they have a shared voice and support.</p> <p>Top 3 asks to help students use this guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Webinar or workshop(s) to tell them about it</li> <li>• Support them to ask the right questions</li> <li>• Space for sharing good practice space for it between students</li> </ul>	<p>RP and MWv (EAUC-S ESD and Student Network leads) discuss next steps to support students use the guidance effectively</p>
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**Teaching Staff**

*Dr Scott Strachan, University of Strathclyde*

Will discuss our journey at Strathclyde so far at embedding sustainability in the curriculum, where we are now, where we're headed next and how the guidance will help.

First, Strathclyde took an existing programme and framed it around the SDGs. In 2012 Strathclyde were interested in exploring the nexus between research and teaching. They did this by setting up a pilot of their Vertically Integrated Projects module, which involves students from across all 4 faculties and all year groups to make student research groups. In 2015 when the SDGs came online they saw the opportunity to align this with the SDGs – Research Based Education for Sustainable Development rebrand. The programme ticks a lot of the ESD Guidance boxes.

Mainstreaming brings a lot of challenges, but staff and student testimonials were gathered to support the programme, plus external commendations such as the International Green Gown Awards which helped get additional buy in for the programme and ESD more generally.

The programme was so successful that it helped influence Strathclyde's commitment to ESD, where the programme is mentioned explicitly.

More recently, there has been the rise and launch of the Strathclyde Centre for Sustainable Development.

Through these successes they have been able to develop an ESD@Strath working group of students and staff and create an action plan to embed ESD in all curricula. The action plan includes:

- Map what you are already doing around ESD
- Raise awareness and build capacity and ownership for ESD amongst both staff and students
- Identify priorities, barriers, opportunities and gaps for ESD
- Integrate, implement and embed ESD (the SDGs) in the curricula
- Monitor and evaluate ESD, including student auditing and accreditation

Important to look for opportunities for ESD to reinforce other institutional objectives. This is mentioned in the guidance but was also done at Strathclyde, where they think about head, heart and hand competencies. ESD is helping develop the competencies in students, and also developing the ability to communicate about them.

Hopefully the guidance will create a blueprint or to do list for everyone based on where you are currently, and help us move from advocacy to action with examples of good practice on how to embed it in our institutions.

**Guidance Chair / Senior Leader**

*Prof. Jim Longhurst, University of the West of England*

Jim gave the perspective of a senior university leader and also as a co-chair of the guidance. He began by saying how good it was to hear of all these different perspectives.

Often it is framed that senior leaders don't get it or aren't interested in ESD because of the range of policy requirements they need to hit. But senior leaders

are bright and committed, and also often academics. They often want to debate why these things matter.

There are different routes in to engaging with senior leaders:

- Executive Route
- Deliberative Route
- Student Route
- Board of Governors

However, in most cases teaching staff have the agency to go ahead with action to embed ESD without senior leadership approval or push. If the validation process is affected then this will be transformative, but there are opportunities for many actions without this.

Executive routes and deliberative routes can bring this work to senior leaders to discuss and debate it on a senior leadership level, but there can be a lot of debate and discussion within committees too which is also useful.

Senior leaders have a responsibility to horizon scan to be aware of what matters to students, so students are also a really powerful voice, and if they are powerful advocates for ESD this can raise the awareness within ESD and change opinions. Every senior management team is going to think a lot about student concerns.

The Board of Governors (or equivalent) is another route – the staff and student representatives on this group could raise the issue higher.

Senior leaders will care about the quality code, and their reputation if they aren't complying with this guidance. This guidance will help them see what the direction of travel is and how they can get involved.

As I look across the sector I see positive changes towards embedding ESD. I hope this guidance will reinforce and initiate progress in different areas. We are moving forward because it is the right thing to do.

Our students will live into the 2080s, and they will need the competencies so they are as prepared as they can be to meet the challenges of this adversely changing world. We need to argue about why this matters to students, to the institution, and why the Senior Leadership Team need to own this agenda and not be a barrier to progress.

#### **Guidance Chair / Senior Academic**

*Prof, Simon Kemp, University of Southampton*

Will share University of Southampton's ESD journey, which has involved periods of calm and periods of frantic activity, but it amounts to lots of activity over many years.

Real activity kicked off with the 2010-11 Green Academy, although they were still not getting as much buy in as they needed at the institutional level.

The Sustainable Development Goals helped widen the discussion about sustainability. They helped people see about why sustainability is relevant to them.

The University of Southampton now have a 5 year sustainability strategy, with a goal on ESD. Simon leads this. ESD needs to be embedded in all programmes and curricular activities, but this is being expanded to also include all extra-curricular activities

	<p>Also looking at developing a single module about sustainability which students could take, but want to make sure it is within all courses too and not just there for those who want it.</p> <p>Baseline audit taking place at the moment, mapping all curricula against the SDGs using 4 students for 3 months, with a computer programme to pull out key words on modules, then doing sense checking, then developing specific materials to go to all heads of departments to produce discipline specific guidance on what has been discovered and where they can find additional support.</p> <p>Having the new guidance document with the QAA and Advance HE badge on it made senior leaders sit up and take note.</p> <p>Induction for all new staff and students will include sustainability too going forward.</p> <p>The most important thing is making sure you are talking to people. The guidance document saves time because it has resources to use and share, so you have more time to talk to people to get them engaged.</p>	
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b>Breakout Discussions: How will you use this Guidance?</b></p> <p>Key discussion points from each room, with follow up discussion points raised within the main session, are noted below.</p> <p>Room 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to ensure there is joined up thinking / coordination. Good examples about how to create more joined up thinking and action would be good to hear about.</li> <li>• The benchmarks in QAA are key for senior managers to be aware of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Priority QAA are giving to inclusion of the ESD guidance in the Subject Benchmark Statements is very positive</li> <li>- Many disciplines develop in parallel with guidance from professional bodies</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Room 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change is messy, iterative, goes backwards, sideways and every which way - which is normal!</li> <li>• Include ESD in the HEA Fellowship application</li> <li>• Everyone's at a different place in their journey ... but we are all on the journey</li> </ul> <p>Room 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do workshops to engage staff with the guidance too, it's not just students who won't read it <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Workshops allow people to debate things, and that is what will allow them to change their opinions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Go to academic quality and leadership team to make sure teaching staff are more formally supported and trained to do this <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It would be good to know what training/support people have provide with educators/teachers/lecturers in their institutions so they're confident, comfortable and competent re: embedding ESD in their subject areas and specialisms.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• We need to think about retraining within our universities and executive training too, universities are not just the 3/4 years at the end of school</li> </ul>	



- Lots of scope for executive education that trains people for competencies, e.g. general systems thinking training for senior leaders, and this should be an important growth area for institutions
- Is there a way institutions can get together to offer free short opportunities for lifelong learning – please contact [Mark Huxham](#) if you are interested in discussing this further.
- Need to engage with employers about what they need more - if employers are demanding more of this then that will drive senior leaders
  - Future Business Council from EAUC has a wide range of businesses involved, and one piece of work was to see what skills they were looking for in graduates and competencies – wanted sustainability values and the ability to translate it into what they did within their organisation.
  - There's been some good stuff from business published recently around student sustainability skills and training requirements. Earlier this year the CBI published 'Skills and Training for the Green Economy' available at [www.cbi.org.uk/articles/skills-and-training-for-the-green-economy/](http://www.cbi.org.uk/articles/skills-and-training-for-the-green-economy/) and last year the Aldersgate Group published a policy briefing 'Upskilling the UK Workforce for the 21st Century' available at [www.aldersgategroup.org.uk/asset/1702](http://www.aldersgategroup.org.uk/asset/1702)

Additional points:

- How do we make sure our institutions are walking the talk? If we spend a lot of time on ESD and the SDGs people will be patting themselves on the back, but what does it mean on the ground in terms of actions such as international travel, meat in refectories etc?
- HEA Fellowship criteria should include ESD (Jim indicated that this conversation is ongoing)
- A lot of institutions are now looking for ESD awareness when recruiting for business school staff

Useful Links:

- UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development group on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9021873/>
- Green Learning Network on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8967113/>
- Sustainable Development Solutions Network Website: <https://www.unsdsn.org/>
- SDSN Youth (a sub network of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network which aims to place young people at the forefront of achieving the SDGs) Website: <https://sdsnyouth.org/>
- SDG Students is an initiative of SDSN Youth (through the SDG Students Program, SDSN Youth aims to engage students in higher education in the global effort to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as empower them with the knowledge, skills, and pathways to action to be effective agents of change today) Website: <https://www.sdgstudent.org/>

<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>Conclusions and Future Plans for the Network</b>  <i>Dr Rehema White, Education for Sustainable Development TSN Co-Convenor</i></p> <p>We need to make sure to ‘catch the wave’ caused by this guidance, think about what the purposes of our Universities are, and thank about the skills and attributes we want our students to develop.</p> <p>Future session ideas (desire for these to be UK-wide):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A specific session on mapping curriculum against the SDGs would be beneficial for both universities and colleges – that is one of the session planned to follow this. Potentially this could be led by the student interns working with Simon at the University of Southampton.</li> <li>• Kate Mori at QAA is going to talk about the subject benchmark statements at a future event, but could also perhaps offer a little more insight into how the guidance can be used to influence institutions</li> <li>• Others could be invited to discuss how the Higher Education Academy schemes could be influenced</li> <li>• Workshop on how to include ESD in teaching training for new teachers and professional development of current teaching staff</li> </ul>	<p>ESD Topic Support Network Convenors and EAUC Staff will discuss future ESD events for the whole of the UK</p>
<p><b>6</b></p>	<p><b>Thanks and Close</b>  <i>Dr Rehema White, Education for Sustainable Development TSN Co-Convenor</i></p> <p>Thank you very much to all speakers and participants. Do <a href="#">get in touch</a> if you have any ideas for future meetings.</p>	

Minutes prepared by Rebecca Petford, EAUC-Scotland Programme Manager

May 2021