

ESD and Academic Quality

12th May 2025



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1. Students driving quality -
'anti-greenwash education'

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Learning Energy

2. University strategies for
advancing quality EfS

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1. Anti-Greenwash Education

ACTIVITY 1

Pairs/small groups – agree a ranking for these courses on their ESD/EfS depth and impact

What principles are behind your thinking and decisions? Where were the grey areas?

Anti-greenwash education – hearing and empowering learners

Why we put students at the centre

- To see EfS through student eyes
- To test and develop new EfS quality principles
- To get student course ratings on EfS learning



Student team focus and outputs

- reviewed EfS claims by UK universities
- developed an EfS digital training with 6 short films
- rated courses and gave feedback on criteria & training
- created the anti-greenwash toolkit

Project Need - UK view

EfS aim = change in education systems

- National guidelines
- Increasing diversity of practice
- More EfS lead roles
- Subject benchmarking

Positive developments – BUT:

- Ongoing confusion about what EfS is and how it differs
- Academic language of EfS is obscure for most students
- Gap between entry level and EfS aspiration
- Engagement frameworks allow ‘free for all’
- Treated as silo themes by institutions and agencies

AdvanceHE



Education for Sustainable Development Guidance

March 2021



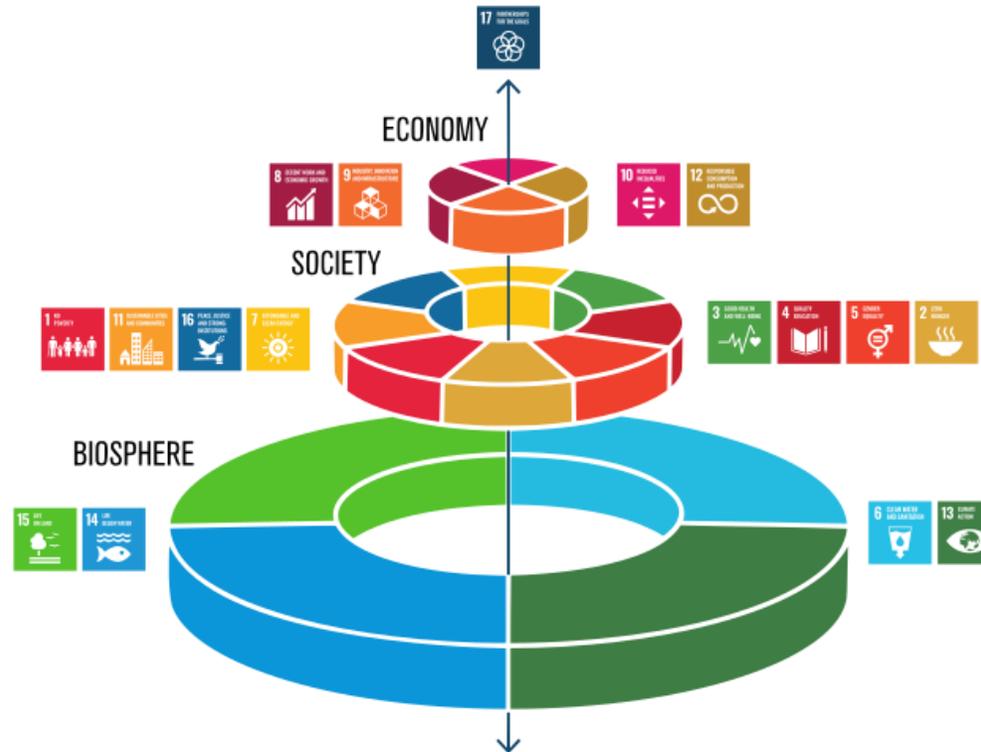
Sector view for learners as customers

35 high profile HEIs

- 29 use SDG issues as 'EfS'
- 16 aim for EfS in all courses

Few focus on core learning

- 3 target compulsory modules
- 4 target all levels of study



19 of 35 have audited portfolio

- 2 looked for EfS
- 4 unclear scope
- 12 looked for single UN SDGs
- 2 looked for skills on UN SDGs

Sector influences reinforcing superficiality and confusion

EfS quality principles & stocktake criteria

4 QUALITY PRINCIPLES

1. Joined up sustainability learning (triple bottom line)

Issues in silo = NO MEDAL

2. Compulsory units

3. In assessment

4. All study levels



BRONZE

JOINED UP sustainability learning in at least one compulsory module



SILVER

As for bronze PLUS EITHER ASSESSED or connected to DECOLONIAL learning



GOLD

As for silver BUT Evidenced at ALL LEVELS of course design

Student feedback on quality framework

Feedback – 132 students, 87 courses, 9 universities

- 51% approval - no improvements
- 23% positive with ideas for better communication
- 25% neutral - no suggestions

Included mainstream views and QAA student board

“This is an effective rating system for sustainability learning - analysing all the corners of a student's education, highlighting the key issues and needs for change”

(student assessor – Uni Glos)





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ACTIVITY 2

Pairs/groups – revisit your ideas for criteria in light of the sector state of play and AGE quality framework

What do you NOW see as most important for quality EfS across the portfolio? Does it change your ranking?

Student road testing

Student team shaped delivery of

- ✓ 6 short films on EfS essentials and the principles for sustainability learning
- ✓ Speed training dashboard with self-practice examples and extra insights
- ✓ Engagement workshops with students at 3 partner settings – F2F and online
- ✓ QAA student advisers guided project – 6 members tested dashboard and rated courses



Course ratings – comparing staff and student views

103 students, 65 courses (40% of portfolio)

- **56% agreement on ratings applied**
- 23% of students more optimistic
- 21% of students less optimistic

21 courses had multiple student raters:

- 8 rated consistently
- 7 spanned 2 nearby levels
- 6 showed divergent views



Impact on student understanding

45% rise in expectations and insight on EfS

“This made me aware of how little sustainability is built into the learning I experienced. For all the talk, it has rarely gone beyond surface-level”

“This has given me a sense of excitement for the steps course teams can take to rectify this and make sustainability a key feature of all courses”

(student assessors – QAA student committee)

www.anti-greenwash-education.com



ACTIVITY 3

Pairs – reflect on student involvement and voice at your institution on EfS

How could students drive quality further – what would be a progressive next step?

Note what your next action is for this

PLENARY

What do our institutions need, for raising EfS quality and mainstreaming across courses?

How could this be supported at sector level through policy and funding frameworks?

2. University Strategies for advancing quality EfS

Ulster University case study

Dr Amanda Platt

Colette Murphy

SPEED COACHING

Triads - ESD leader, Coach, Reflector



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1. What's the critical next step for ESD quality at your institution? (5 mins – just listen)

2. What needs to happen for this to work in practice? (5 mins)

3. What could stop you and how can you get around that? (5 mins)

CLOSE

- REFLECTOR SHARE AN INSIGHT

- LEADER NOTE YOUR KEY LEARNING

**See separate handout for links
to resources and literature**

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LEARNING ENERGY WEBSITE

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