# Briefing Sheet: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Taught Courses

## Context: What is ESD?

* ESD is concerned with learners developing **knowledge, skills, attributes and values** to **make a positive difference to sustainable development challenges** such as injustice, environmental impacts and social inequalities.
* **“Sustainable Development”** can be understood as “an aspirational ongoing process of addressing social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world.” (as defined in QAA/AdvanceHE ESD Guidance)
* The key intended outcome of ESD is learners developing [Ways of Thinking, Practising and Being](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development) that influence their actions **professionally and personally** **over the long term** – aiding them to contribute positively to society.
* The 17 [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)](https://sdgs.un.org/goals) for 2030 offer an accessible introduction to sustainable development challenges – the 169 targets beneath these 17 goals clarify specific priority areas.
* ESD is applicable to **every taught course run by DMU** and through **collaborative partners**.
* For any subject area, it influences **what is taught, the pedagogic approaches, assessments, use of materials and resources and links to the wider student experience**.
* It has strong links to the **Decolonising agenda** in terms of pedagogic approaches, empowerment and encouragement towards critical exploration of inequalities within teaching and learning and subject areas.

## Why engage? Drivers for ESD adoption

* A commitment to ESD is a key feature of DMU’s strategic priority of ‘[Sustainability and the SDGs’](https://www.dmu.ac.uk/Empowering-University/index.aspx) as a cross-cutting theme in the **Empowering University strategy**.
* For the sector as a whole, in 2021 AdvanceHE and QAA produced [guidance advocating for ESD adoption across all HEIs](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development). QAA are progressively making this a feature of all subject benchmark statements.
* Globally, ESD adoption by Education institutions is viewed as a “key enabler of sustainable development” – this is reflected in [Target 4.7](https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4) of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**.
* Developing cross-cutting professional competencies to address sustainability will [be vital for **future employment**](https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/defining-the-skills-citizens-will-need-in-the-future-world-of-work) in most sectors and [most **students expect sustainability to be covered** in their programmes](https://www.sos-uk.org/research/sustainability-skills-survey).

## What does ESD look like?

ESD will look different in any given subject area. To give some specific examples:

* In Engineering, students could undertake [a design exercise](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/2019/05/23/case-study-using-engineering-designs-to-solve-sdg-related-issues-in-communities-dr-leticia-ozawa-meida-and-dr-kegong-diao/) to meet a sustainable infrastructure need of a specific community (e.g. access to clean water or renewable energy)
* In Fashion and Textiles, students could learn about the [environmental and social impacts](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/2018/11/01/case-study-textiles-and-the-sdgs-dr-claire-lerpiniere/) of garment manufacture, debate these issues in class and use sustainability criteria in assessed design projects.
* In healthcare disciplines, students could explore how their practice could evolve to minimise environmental impacts through the [NHS’s transition to ‘Net Zero’ carbon emission operations](https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/a-net-zero-nhs/), through guest lectures and project work with colleagues from the local NHS trust.
* In business education, students could critically discuss different frameworks to evaluate [the social value of business](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/2021/05/12/case-study-prme-and-responsible-management-education-in-dmus-faculty-of-business-and-law/) and analyse real-world businesses through this lens.

The points above highlight common issues which can form the basis of considering ESD inclusion:

* How the subject does or could **make a positive contribution to society or the environment**
* **Challenges associated** with the subject to be addressed, such as inequalities or negative environmental impacts
* The **personal and professional ethics and values** linked to the subject area
* How the subject engages with **future trends and challenges** – equipping learners to creatively address them

Further accessible resources to guide staff on the above include: [***DMU 1-page 10 ESD Ingredients Toolkit***](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/planning-toolkits/)***;*** [***AdvanceHE/QAA ESD Guidance***](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development)***;*** [***DMU ESD Case Studies***](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/case-studies/)

## What is ESD as a pedagogic approach? How do students experience ESD?

ESD aims to critique business-as-usual ‘unsustainability’ and engage with real life issues where both **problems and solutions are complex**, contested and have many different stakeholder perceptions to consider.

As an outcome, [ESD aims to develop](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development) **cross-cutting competencies** that are of benefit for addressing these sorts of issues – a long-term view, self-awareness, empathy, a collaborative ethos and problem-solving skills.

Pedagogically, this puts a much greater focus on methods such as:

* **Enquiry-based** or **problem-based** **collaborative** learning approaches,
* **Real-world** and **experiential** learning opportunities (case studies, guest speakers, simulations, visits), to encounter problems or solutions, frequently by working with **external partners** (locally or otherwise)
* **Reflection** on group-based learning activities and personal experiences
* **Play-based or playful** activities, that encourage experimentation, learning from failure and creativity
* **Critical discussion** of ethics and values related to the subject area, linked to specific societal challenges

## How is ESD reflected in learning outcomes and assessments?

* Learning outcomes and associated assessment for ESD should **go beyond learning ‘about’ sustainable development**, but also support learning through real-life experience (ways of practising) and learners’ attributes and values (ways of being, such as via reflection).
* ESD puts a stronger focus on **assessing** **the process** of learning, rather than just the outputs (e.g. via portfolios).
* A common assessment strategy is to **use one of the UN SDGs** (or associated sub-target) to provide a challenge to address which can be tackled via the subject discipline (e.g. journalism, product design, healthcare provision).
* For externally accredited courses, learning outcomes related to sustainable development **are often expressed within professional standards** using appropriate concepts and language for that discipline (e.g. [PRME guidance for management courses](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/2021/05/12/case-study-prme-and-responsible-management-education-in-dmus-faculty-of-business-and-law/)).
* Several online resources support educators to translate the SDGs or sustainability competencies into learning outcomes: [***A Rounder Sense of Purpose***](https://aroundersenseofpurpose.eu/)***;*** [***UNESCO ESD Learning Objectives***](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444)***;*** [***AdvanceHE/QAA ESD Guidance***](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development)

## Key Asks for Programme Teams

DMU’s Programme Handbook Template states:

“DMU is committed to all programmes empowering students to address issues of Sustainable Development, such as social inequalities, health and wellbeing and environmental impacts, through course-specific teaching, learning and assessment approaches.”

Questions to consider in relation to taught courses:

1. **How has Sustainable Development been addressed in this course?**
   * As a minimum, this should be reflected in learning outcomes and assessments of at least one compulsory module. **Going further, engagement with ESD is made explicit to students and is reflected strongly in the ethos, pedagogy and assessment approach of the programme at all levels.**
2. **Has this been articulated in writing for students?** 
   * As a minimum one-two sentences on this feature in programme handbooks. Going further, this could detail how ESD is addressed over the whole programme and linked to assessments.
   * [Examples of statements by programmes/schools are available here.](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/case-studies/)
3. **Have you engaged with the support and resources available?**
   * This could include this document, toolkits or guidance on the <https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk> website, external ESD guidance or input from [colleagues specialising in ESD](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/contact/).
   * If not, as a starting point consider engaging with the [10 Ingredients toolkit](https://esdg.our.dmu.ac.uk/staff/planning-toolkits/), and getting feedback from [Andrew Reeves](mailto:%20areeves@dmu.ac.uk) or [Ian Coleman](mailto:%20ian.coleman@dmu.ac.uk) on programme design.