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 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) 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' 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. 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 of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**.
- Developing cross-cutting professional competencies to address sustainability will be vital for **future employment** in most sectors and most **students expect sustainability to be covered** in their programmes.

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 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 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, 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 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***; ***AdvanceHE/QAA ESD Guidance***; ***DMU ESD 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 **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).
- Several online resources support educators to translate the SDGs or sustainability competencies into learning outcomes: ***A Rounder Sense of Purpose***; ***UNESCO ESD Learning Objectives***; ***AdvanceHE/QAA ESD Guidance***

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.
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.
    - If not, as a starting point consider engaging with the 10 Ingredients toolkit, and getting feedback from Andrew Reeves or Ian Coleman on programme design.