



# **Academic Quality Framework**

## **Sustainability Education Policy**

**Approved 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025  
By Academic Council**

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## 1. Introduction and policy context

- 1.1 [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity that was agreed by 193 United Nations member countries. It sets 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) that include 169 specific targets and 231 measurable indicators. The UN SDGs aim to improve health and education, reduce inequality, and support economic development – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve biodiversity. UN SDG 4.7 targets that: *“by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.”*

UNESCO supports governments in implementing [Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#) into national policies. At a European level, [the European Green New Deal](#) and [Fit for 55](#) set out challenging targets and objectives which require significant education and training among the population which includes gaining of relevant sustainability competences to successfully achieve these goals.

Informed by [UNESCO’s framework on enhancing sustainability competences](#) (cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural) to achieve UN SDGs through formal and informal learning, [GreenComp](#) is the EU’s sustainability competence framework that provides guidelines to educators and learners to develop sustainability competences in four areas (embodying sustainability values, embracing complexity in sustainability, envisioning sustainable futures and acting for sustainability).

- 1.2 At a national level, legislation sets out clear directions for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: [Climate Action and Low Carbon Development \(Amendment\) Act](#) has set out ambitious targets for climate action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while the [Circular Economy & Miscellaneous Provision Act \(2022\)](#) underpins Ireland's shift from a 'take-make-waste' linear model to a more sustainable pattern of production and consumption. The Government of Ireland uses [The Wellbeing Framework](#) to measure how Ireland is performing economically, environmentally and socially. This shift will require a different set of competences with a focus on sustainable development.

Informed by UNESCO's ESD methodology, the national policy [ESD to 2030: Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development](#) sets out 5 priority action areas:

- Aligning Policy
- Transforming Learning Environments
- Building Capacity of Educators
- Empowering and Mobilising Youth
- Accelerating Local Level Action

- 1.3 In the [TU Dublin Strategic Intent 2030](#), the University sets out the goal of developing responsible global citizens by "*providing education for all learners that instils a sustainability mindset and creates champions to drive the sustainability agenda*". This is informed by the international and national policies shown above and supported by the [TU Dublin Strategic Plan 2024 - 2028](#).

This Sustainability Education Policy sets out how TU Dublin will achieve the goal of developing responsible global citizens which further aligns with [TU Dublin Graduate Attributes](#), in particular with Graduate Attribute 2: Planet that seeks students to become sustainability-focused global citizens who are

socially engaged and responsible graduates leading the sustainability and equity agendas with passion, purpose and resilience.

This policy is also informed by other TU Dublin policies such as the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#).

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1 This policy is intended to set out the philosophy, scope, and principles for the integration of sustainability education at TU Dublin to achieve the university's strategic goal of developing global citizens by providing education for all learners that instils a sustainability mindset and creates champions to drive the sustainability agenda. This will contribute to meeting of the UN SDG 4.7 targets and will address other national and international policy priorities in this area (see 1.1 – 1.3).

Our goal is to equip educators with the competences to integrate ESD principles and practices into teaching, learning, and assessment. Additionally, we aim to apply these principles in managing and governing educational environments and in our partnerships with local communities.

## 3. Scope

- 3.1 This Sustainability Education policy has been developed within the context of TU Dublin's Strategic Intent 2030 and the current TU Dublin Strategic Plan (2024 – 2028). It is primarily focused on academic programmes, rather than requirements for training of professional services staff. It is designed to safeguard both quality assurance and academic standards, encourage quality enhancement, and ensure the provision of appropriate support for staff and students engaged in embedding sustainability into their teaching and learning.

The scope covers all programmes at TU Dublin including apprenticeships, QQI accredited programmes (Level 6 – 10) and other micro-credentials and continuous professional development programmes delivered through varied formats (such as full-time and part-time) and modes (in person on campus, online, mixed mode or HyFlex).

- 3.2 This document sets out the policy. The procedures and responsibilities for implementation of the policy are covered in the Sustainability Education Framework. The Sustainability Education Policy will be implemented via the Programme Review and Programme Validation processes. Resources and supports will be provided by the Sustainability Education team to staff as they integrate sustainability into academic programmes.

## 4. Definition

- 4.1 Sustainability Education at TU Dublin refers to a holistic approach to teaching and learning that emphasises the principles and practices of sustainability within and across various disciplines and contexts. We adopt the UNESCO (2021) definition and use the concepts of sustainability education and education for sustainable development interchangeably: 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD) empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to make informed decisions and take responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. ESD is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education that enhances cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning. It is holistic and transformational and encompasses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself.'

- 4.2 Aligned with UNESCO's definition of ESD, **Global Citizenship Education (GCED)** nurtures respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common

humanity and helping learners become responsible and active global citizens. GCED aims to empower learners to assume active roles to face and resolve global challenges and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world. (SDG4.7.1)

- 4.3 Sustainability Literacy is the knowledge and understanding of the concepts, challenges, and practices related to sustainability. This includes awareness of ecological, social, and economic systems and their interconnectedness, as well as the skills and attitudes necessary to make informed decisions that consider both current and future impacts on the planet and society ([AASHE](#)).

In this policy, Global Citizenship Education and Sustainability Literacy are generally seen as integral to the Education for Sustainable Development definition.

- 4.4 **Sustainability focused and sustainability inclusive modules** are defined as follows in the AASHE-STARs technical manual.
- Sustainability-focused courses have a primary and explicit focus on the integrated concept of sustainability and/or the interdependence of ecological and social/cultural/economic systems.
  - Sustainability-inclusive courses are primarily focused on something other than sustainability, but clearly incorporate sustainability content or address one or more sustainability challenges.

## 5. Policy Overview

- 5.1 Sustainability Education at TU Dublin is founded on a set of agreed general principles that are reflective of our university's priorities - these are outlined below. The Sustainability Education Policy is informed by TU Dublin Strategy and policies and national and international policy frameworks as described in Section 1: Introduction and Policy Context.

Specifics regarding: Quality Assurance and Enhancement; Accessibility; Staff and Student Training; Professional Development; and Support are also provided. These headings, and the content therein, are aligned with the Programme Review Process and/or the Programme Validation Process.

- 5.2 This policy document also sets out the governance arrangements for the approval of this policy as well as the approach that will be taken to reviewing and updating the document. Process and procedural aspects of implementing the policy are detailed in the Sustainability Education Framework and the policy is also integrated with the Programme Review and the Programme Validation Processes.

## 6. General Principles

The general principles below, around which this policy centres, are grounded and aligned to TU Dublin's strategic commitment to develop responsible global citizens and to support academic staff in delivering this commitment. This will further contribute to enhancing graduate attributes, in particular GA2: Planet – sustainability-focused, global citizens. The policy is also informed by national and international policies and research on the most effective, transformative and impactful approaches to sustainability education.

### 6.1 UN Sustainable Development Goals and sustainability literacy

Sustainability Education in TU Dublin is based around the 17 UN [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). Students will have the opportunity to develop their sustainability literacy and engage in sustainability literacy awareness self-assessment throughout their studies.

### 6.2 Sustainability competences

Aligned with the EU competency framework GreenComp which is also a base for GA2: Planet – sustainability-focused, global citizens, sustainability education

at TU Dublin supports the development of sustainability competences (cognitive, socio-emotional & behavioural) in four areas: embodying sustainability values, embracing complexity in sustainability, envisioning sustainable futures and acting for sustainability, to address the complex issues related to the UN SDGs.

### 6.3 Integration with academic programme learning outcomes and assessment

As set out in the TU Dublin Strategic Plan, TU Dublin will embed sustainability learning outcomes in all programmes. This will be achieved by integrating sustainability with the core curriculum.

Programmes should scaffold student learning for the progressive development of the sustainability competences within their own discipline and through quality assurance and enhancement processes can extend this to other related, inter/trans-disciplinary contexts.

Programme learning outcomes specify the sustainability competences (cognitive, socio-emotional & behavioural) as related to the UN SDGs that a student is expected to develop by the successful completion of the programme. These are clearly linked to selected module(s) learning outcomes within the programme.

All learners engage with sustainability-related assessment in selected module(s) that demonstrates the development of foundational sustainability competences related to the UN SDGs as specified in programme level learning outcomes.

### 6.4 Incorporating innovative pedagogies supporting sustainability education

Academic staff are supported to incorporate pedagogies that enhance sustainability competences of students. These include transformative teaching and learning approaches such as experiential and challenge-based pedagogies,

service learning and community engaged learning using the TU Dublin campus environment, operations and living labs projects.

### 6.5 **Co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for sustainability action**

The University will continue to provide opportunities to engage in sustainability-focused activities through co-curricular and extra-curricular activities such as Green Campus, sports, societies and volunteering activities.

## 7. **Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

7.1 The University will, through its Quality Framework, assure the quality and academic standards of programmes and modules and contribute towards achieving of TU Dublin Graduate Attributes, specifically GA2: Planet: Responsible Global Citizens. The University will assure the quality and parity of the student experience, in terms of programme delivery and student support.

7.2 The Quality Framework will support the implementation of this policy, its principles and any associated guidelines and checklists. This will include provisions and evidence related to the embedding of sustainability into programmes and sustainability literacy awareness measurement in alignment with the Graduate Attributes during programme validation and review processes as per the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Processes. Student statistics, including performance and progression data, as well as student feedback on their programmes and modules, will be considered as part of the evidence in the context of annual programme assurance, enhancement and programme review.

7.3 The Quality Framework encourages and supports pedagogical innovation, while recognising the uniqueness and context of disciplines, programmes and students. Supports in the design of programmes and related modules

addressing sustainability will be provided by the Sustainability Education team through the provision of formal and informal staff capacity building mechanisms and other tools.

## 8. Accessibility

- 8.1 TU Dublin is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning and working environment that ensures all campus resources, technologies and communications are fully accessible to all staff and students, and recognises the alignment between the objectives of sustainability and inclusion.
- 8.2 In cases where sustainability education involves action-orientated or immersive activities, staff should ensure that students with disabilities are not disadvantaged.
- 8.3 Through a focus on SDG 4 Quality Education, and SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, Sustainability Education can provide students with opportunities to explore how education can be used to improve accessibility, inclusion and address the challenge of inequality in society.

## 9. Staff & Student Training, Professional Development, & Support

- 9.1 Staff capabilities and knowledge, and professional development guidance and support, will be recognised as essential for embedding sustainability into teaching, learning and assessment. TU Dublin Sustainability Education in collaboration with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment team, will provide appropriate formal and informal professional development and other capacity building opportunities to academic staff to ensure that they have the relevant knowledge and resources to embed sustainability into their teaching and learning practice. Opportunities for collaboration across disciplines and with other partners will be provided to encourage community engaged learning

using the TU Dublin campus environment, operations and living labs projects.

- 9.2 Opportunities will be provided for students to develop their sustainability competences and GA2 Planet: sustainability-focused, global citizens, so that they can engage with sustainability both through their studies and through co-curricular and extra-curricular activities such as sports, societies and volunteering. All incoming students will engage with a sustainability session and sustainability/climate action focused activities as part of general orientation and extended induction as well as at other specific events (such as those organised by Green Campus).

## 10. Roles & responsibilities

- 10.1 The Sustainability Education Policy will be of relevance to academic managers, staff who teach, students, and the professional services managers and staff who work closely with academic staff and students supporting teaching, learning and assessment activities. Each of these categories of roles has specific responsibilities for the procedures involved in enabling the successful implementation of the Sustainability Education Policy. These roles and responsibilities are outlined in the Sustainability Education Framework.

## 11. Digital Education

- 11.1 Underpinned by the key SDG4 'Quality Education', our strategic objectives include developing and embedding a dynamic new model of education at TU Dublin; providing flexibility in structure, mode, and place of delivery to suit an evolving global landscape; and delivering a digitally enhanced student learning experience that will facilitate the development of our learners to become the most sought after digitally literate graduates.

- 11.2 To ensure this digitally enhanced learning is delivered in an equitable and effective manner, the University has published a [Digital Education Policy](#).

## 12. Approval process

- 12.1 This policy will be reviewed by the University Sustainability Council (USC) and the Academic Affairs Senior Management Team before being tabled for discussion and review at the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (AQAEC) and subsequently Academic Council. Once approved, this policy will be published within the Academic Affairs area of the Policies and Forms section on the TU Dublin website.

## 13. Change process

- 13.1 Academic Affairs is the owner of this document.
- 13.2 This document will be reviewed by USC, AQAEC and Academic Council at least every three years to assess if any change is required.
- 13.3 Minor changes such as document layout changes, change of document owner, document numbering changes etc. will be made to the document by the Head of Sustainability Education in consultation with Academic Affairs.
- 13.4 Where a major change will be required such as changes to the scope, intent or policy details of the document, the Vice-President for Sustainability will reconvene a sub-committee of University Sustainability Council who will follow the processes set out in section 7 of the Procedure for Policy and Procedure Development at TU Dublin.
- 13.5 The updated document will be reapproved following the approval process set out in section 12.1 above.

## 14. Related documents

[TU Dublin Sustainability Education Toolkit](#)

[GreenComp – The European Sustainability Competency Framework](#)

[UNESCO: Education for Sustainable Development Learning Outcomes](#)

[EDIT Inclusive Curriculum Toolkit](#)

## 15. Document management

### 15.1 Version Control

VERSION NUMBER	VERSION DESCRIPTION / CHANGES MADE	AUTHOR	DATE
Draft 1.0	Initial Draft	Brian Gormley	11/4/24. Approved in University Sustainability Council (USC) to go forward to Academic Affairs Senior Management for feedback and consideration.
Draft 2.0	Feedback received from Academic Affairs and Faculty of Sciences and Health	Philip Owende, Linda Moore, Julie Dunne	15/9/24
Draft 3.0	Feedback incorporated	Brian Gormley/Lucia Walsh / Olivia Freeman	10/10/24 Document approved at USC to go forward to AQAEC, subject to minor feedback from Ciaran O'Leary.
Draft 3.1	Minor feedback from COL incorporated.	Ciaran O'Leary	

15.2 Document Approval

VERSION NUMBER	APPROVAL DATE	APPROVED BY (NAME & ROLE)
AA-SEP-01	25/05/2025	Academic Council