

## ESD & Academic Quality Case Study



### An integrated approach to systematically embed effective ESD: Reflections on UU's six-year journey

Dr Amanda Platt & Colette Murphy  
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Dublin, 12th May 2025



**WE ARE THE UK  
AND IRELAND  
UNIVERSITY  
OF THE YEAR**  
Times Higher Education Awards 2024

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## Outline

- Ulster University Context and Presenters
- UU Six Year ESD & Academic Quality Journey  
Activity: Discussion & Feedback
- Key Milestones for systematic integration  
Activity: Discussion & Feedback
- Reflections: Lessons Learnt and Future Planning  
Activity: Discussion & Feedback

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## University of Ulster: Context & Presenters



Regional Multi campus – Belfast City Centre, Derry/ Londonderry and Coleraine  
30K Students, 2700 Staff, Four Faculties  
Portfolio: Academic Quality & Student Experience



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## What do we mean by Academic Quality?

“The effectiveness of a higher education provider in delivering learning, teaching, and assessment that enables students to achieve their academic and professional potential, within a framework of academic standards that are appropriate, well-maintained, and transparently communicated.” UK QAA Quality Code

### Standards

- Quality Code
- FHEQ
- Subject Benchmark Statement

### Assurance

- Process and Procedures
- Curriculum Validation, Periodic review, modification
- Monitoring and Evaluation

### Enhancement

- Continuous improvement
- Driven by Sector Evidence-based Guidance
- Enhancement Themes

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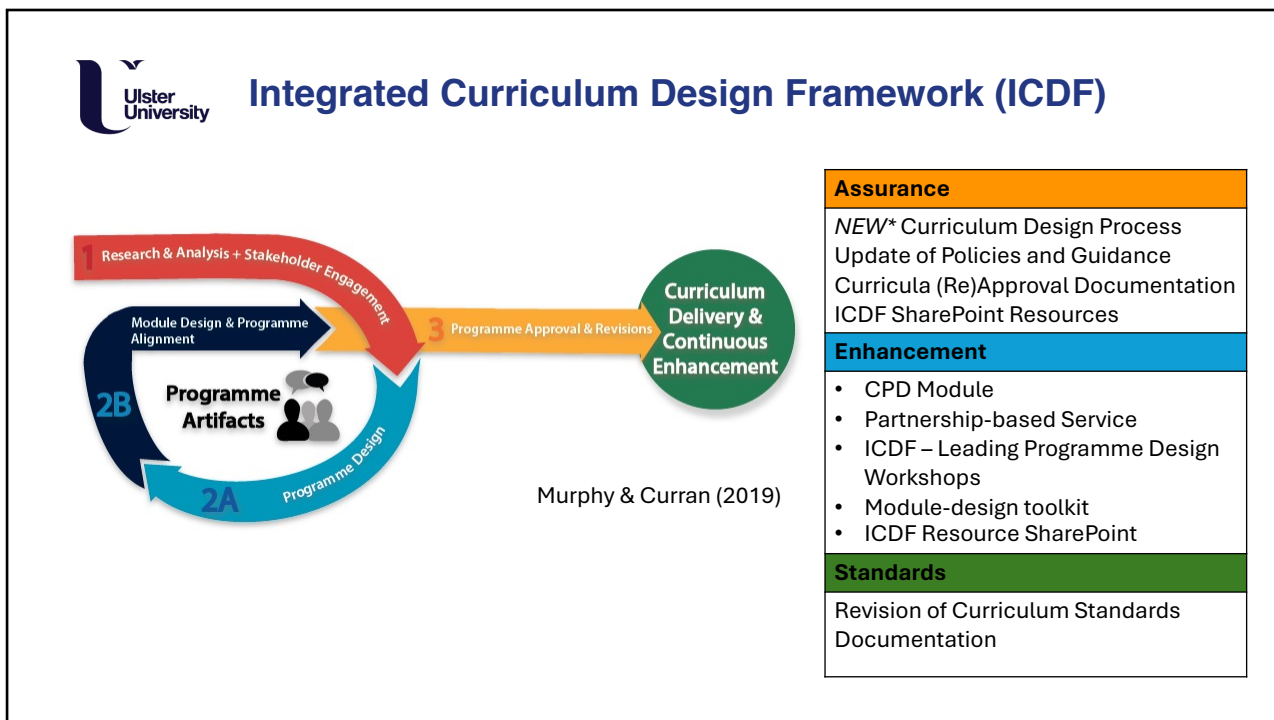
## Activity 1: Institutional approaches to ESD (5 mins)

1. Indicate the extent to which your institution had adopted an ESD Academic Quality approach? (Rating slider)

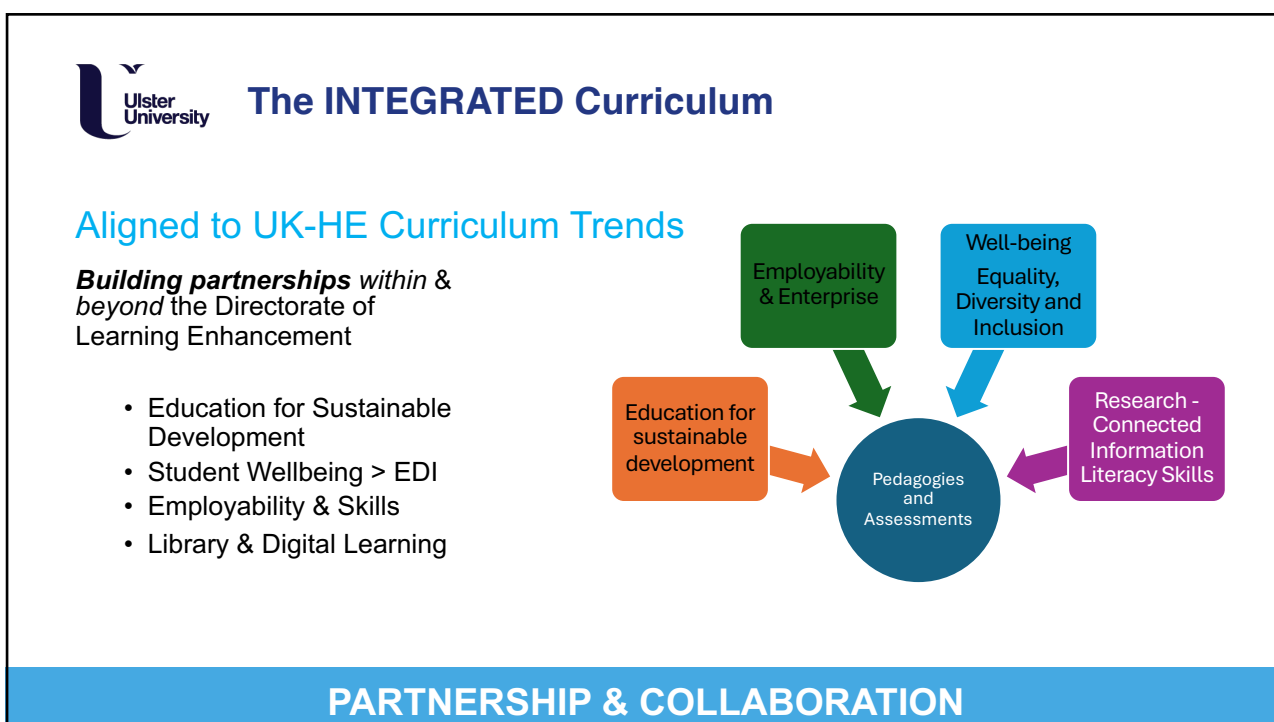
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<b>UU ESD Journey</b>			
	<b>UU ESD Activities</b>	<b>Internal Drivers and Developments</b>	<b>External Drivers &amp; Developments</b>
2019	Horizon Scanning UU ESD Working Group Aim – all discipline curricula	<b>Integrated Curriculum Design Framework (ICDF)/ Revalidation</b>	UCL Connected Curriculum O’Neill, G. (2015) Curriculum: theory to Practice.
2020-	Bespoke ESD Workshops, Resources, Case Studies	ICDF Workshops (19/20-), including ESD	Sandri, 2020
2020-	<b>PgCert Higher Education Practice for UU Educators (AHE Accredited Descriptor 2)</b>	PURE Research Portal SDG mapping L&T Strategy (SLaTE)	<b>QAA/ AHE ESD Guidance (2021)</b>
2022	UU SOS-UK Responsible Futures project	Institutional Strategy, People, Place, Partnership: Sustainable Futures for All	<b>QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (Sustainability section)</b>
2023	<b>UU Graduate Attributes Framework</b>	Dean for Sustainability & CSR	Draft AHE Professional Standards Framework (2022), ESD Dimension
2023	<b>Updated UU Module Handbook Template</b>	<b>UU Research Strategy (23-28)</b>	<b>QAA ESD &amp; Academic Quality Report (2023)</b>
2024	<b>UK National Student Survey (NSS) ESD Questions</b>	UU Sustainability Award (staff)	
2024	Integrating R&T with/ for Sustainability	<b>UU L&amp;T Principles &amp; Qualities</b>	
2024	SOS-UK Sustainability Skills Survey (750 responses)	Faculty Sustainability Committees	
2025	<b>UU SOS-UK Responsible Futures Accreditation</b>	Visiting Professors for Sustainability	

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## Institutional Endorsement (2022) & Sector Alignment



**PEOPLE,  
PLACE AND  
PARTNERSHIP**

DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE  
FUTURES FOR ALL




*Placing sustainability at the centre of what we do: because we are custodians of the future.*

- Investing with the long term in mind
- Proactively managing our impact with reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

**Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Qualities**

 <b>Relationships</b>	 <b>Wellbeing</b>
 <b>Authenticity</b>	 <b>Research Informed</b>
 <b>Sustainability</b>	 <b>Valuing Voices and Advocacy</b>
 <b>Data and Digitally Enhanced</b>	 <b>Outcomes and Experience</b>

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## UU Module Handbook & Programme Guide Templates

[Module Code] [Module Title]

### 2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Graduate Attributes (GAs) in your module

#### Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The UN SDGs are a comprehensive set of global goals to end poverty, protect our planet, and improve living conditions of the Global Population. You are encouraged to think critically and reflect on SDGs in the context of this module.

The following SDGs are relevant in the context of this module:



[Module Code] [Module Title]

#### Graduate Attributes (GAs)



Ulster University's Graduate Attributes are a high-level set of competencies, developing universal understandings, skills, qualities, and values.

As a result of engaging with this module you will have opportunities to develop and practise the following selected attributes:

Thriving Individual	D	A	Engaged Learner	D	A
Enhancing Potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Subject Specialist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Confidence and Resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Creative Problem Solver	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Well-being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Growth Mindset	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Critical Thinker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaborative Professional	D	A	Active Citizen	D	A
Responsible Team Player	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Citizen with Integrity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effective Communicator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inclusive Citizen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enterprising Innovator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sustainable Citizen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Digital Fluent Professional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Future Thinker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

KEY:  
D = Developed  
A = Assessed

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## PgCert Higher Education Practice Strategic vehicle for Quality Enhancement

### ESD and ICDF embedded in Programme since 2020

- Initial professional Development Ulster Educators (>400 since 2020)
- Explicitly aligned to Strategy, L&T Principles & Qualities
- Advance HE Accredited, Professional Standards Framework (2023)
- Work integrated learning - engage in critical reflection, enhancement and evaluation of practice

**-Learning and Teaching in HE (effective and inclusive learning activities)**

**-Designing a Contemporary Curriculum (ICDF module (re)design)**

**-Enhancing Effectiveness of L&T (enhancement project, implement in practice and evaluate)**

**Fellowship HEA awarded on completion (86% of UU Staff hold Fellowship)**

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## SOS-UK Responsible Futures

Responsible  
Futures

accredited institution

- Whole-institution supported change programme and accreditation mark
- Embed sustainability across ALL aspects of the student experience - formal, informal, subliminal curricula
- Explored 2019, Engaged 2022, Accreditation 2024/25
- RF Working Group members from across UU
- Ulster is the first on island of Ireland to earn Accreditation (January 2025)
- Student-led audit of 50 criteria
- Benchmarking, leadership & strategy, policy & commitment, interventions, and outreach.
- Audit Report – UU student feedback and key recommendations:
  - Monitoring & Evaluation of Impact, increased student involvement, concrete collaboration with UUSU

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## Reconsider to Activity 1

1. Upon reflection, has your opinion changed around the extent to which your institution adopts an ESD & Academic Quality approach? (Rating slider)

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## ESD at UU: Lessons Learnt

- Academic Quality and Curriculum Integration (ICDF) critical to ensure University-wide engagement with ESD
- Some tokenism/ greenwashing is unavoidable
- People, partnerships and networks
- Institutional Strategy to support/ drive agenda
- ESD unique agenda bringing new impetus to curriculum design and practice
- SDGs are a blueprint/ framework for Educators to embed ESD, but it's not ESD (scaffolding)
- Definition of ESD required but needs to be flexible (Responsible Futures criteria)
- **Responsible Futures – 50 criteria, holistic student experience**

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## ESD at UU: Key Future Plans

### ESD

- Integrating Research & Teaching with/for Sustainability (Ireland's HEA Spotlight Webinar February 2025)
- Advanced ESD workshops – ICDF, live projects and interdisciplinary ESD
- Greater involvement of students
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Dissemination
- Mentorship and Collaboration with other institutions

### ICDF Phase 2 / Curriculum Transformation Project

- Planned procurement of a New Curriculum (Technical) Infrastructure
- Quality Standards - explicit mapping of SDG's & Graduate Attributes in the curriculum
- Quality Assurance - Pilot with Business School (2025 - 2027) for Assurance of Learning Pilot for Graduate Attributes
- Quality Enhancement - Re-boot of adopted inclusive Pedagogical models and applied assessments.

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## Activity: Reflections on the UU Case Study

1. What key ideas/ points of learning from UU case study might you apply in own your institutional? (word cloud)

*Additional question if time permits:*

2. *Opportunity to share your Institutional Approaches?*  
(verbal feedback)

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## References

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