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HEA Teaching and Learning Conference December 2025

Leading Change Together: Building the Future of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Mapping and building capacity in education for sustainable development in Trinity College Dublin

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Institution(s) and Partner Organisations Involved

Trinity College Dublin. This project was led by the Centre for Academic Practice in Trinity College Dublin.

Contributor(s)

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What level(s) of your institution does this work affect?

- Institutional level

Date and Timeframe

Ongoing

Alignment and Focus

Focus

- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Frameworks, Policies, or Strategies Aligned

- At an institutional level this project supports Trinity's strategy (Thrive) as well as Trinity's sustainability strategy. At a national level this work supports the Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD to 2030) as well as several National Teaching and Learning Forum's priority areas (ESD, the Professional Development of All Those Who Teach, Student Success, Teaching and Learning Enhancement Within and Across Disciplines). At an international level, our work aligns with the UNESCO ESD for 2030, UNECE Strategy for ESD, the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), and the European Union Learning for the green transition Council Recommendation.

Discipline

- Teaching and Learning

Impact, Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Impact and Evidence of Success

Three student interns have completed a report on their "deep dive" i.e. the extent of ESD embeddedness in their own courses. As part of these reports they highlighted areas where improvement can be made as well as examples where ESD leads toeffective learning and have shared these findings with their discipline through the academic dyad partners.

The co-designed TCD wide student survey on ESD embeddedness has been completed by 220 students and is ongoing.

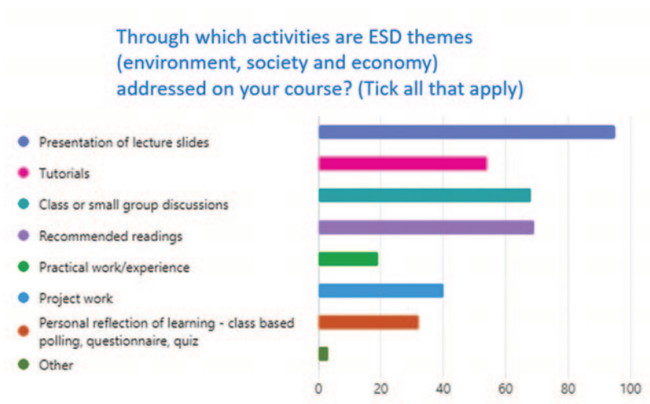
A comparison of deep dive with survey results revealed overall agreement. Generally, students have high confidence in their competence related to ESD, which is encouraging. Most ESD material is embedded in their early years of study and is generally achieved using presentations.

Future Plans and Sustainability

It is our intention to interview student-academic dyads to learn more about the effectiveness of our methods. Preliminary results would suggest that the use of student academic dyads is an effective method of mapping and progressing ESD which also raises awareness of same and fosters engagement with curricular and sustainability issues.
Upon comparison of all three data collection methods, where AI results are valid and align well with both survey and "deep dive" results the AI model alone may be used in subsequent years without the requirement for onerous corroboration of all courses using other methods thereby helping to ensure the continued feasibility and sustainability of ESD mapping at TCD despite a large number of modules.

Top Tips

- The use of student-academic dyads at mapping ESD is an effective way to engage key stakeholders collaboratively in this space
- Courses in which modules are taken from many different core areas are difficult to use with the student–academic dyad model; in such cases, more than one academic partner may be needed
- While survey results of student perspectives offer a superficial outlook on ESD embeddedness, they do align with deeper analysis of the same course



Initiative Description

Aims and Objectives

- Aim: Examine a methodology to map education for sustainable development (ESD) in TCD through two interconnected pillars.
- Pilar 1 aim: To co-develop with students a survey to elicit student perspectives on where ESD is currently embedded in TCD curricula.
- Pillar 2 aim: To examine the use of student-academic dyads as a method to deeply analyse where ESD is embedded in select TCD programmes.

Outline or Description

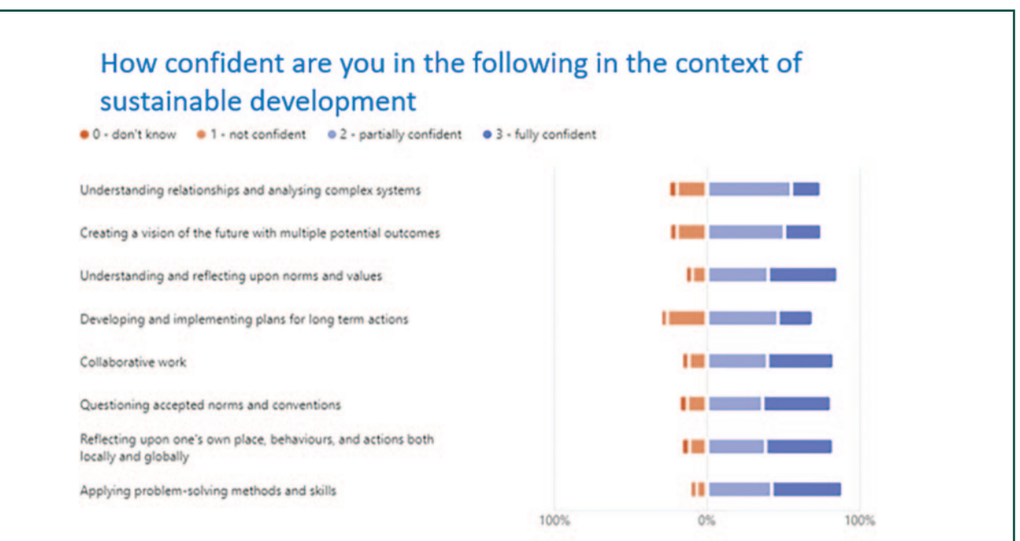
There are many different ways to both define and map ESD in higher level education, each with their own advantages and shortcomings. In Trinity College Dublin, the quantity diversity and breadth of modules renders the above task quite complex. In an effort to ensure rigor, avoid greenwashing, promote the sustainability and replicability of mapping into the future, and incorporate both staff and student voices in this task, the above tasks will be approached through a three-pronged methodology;

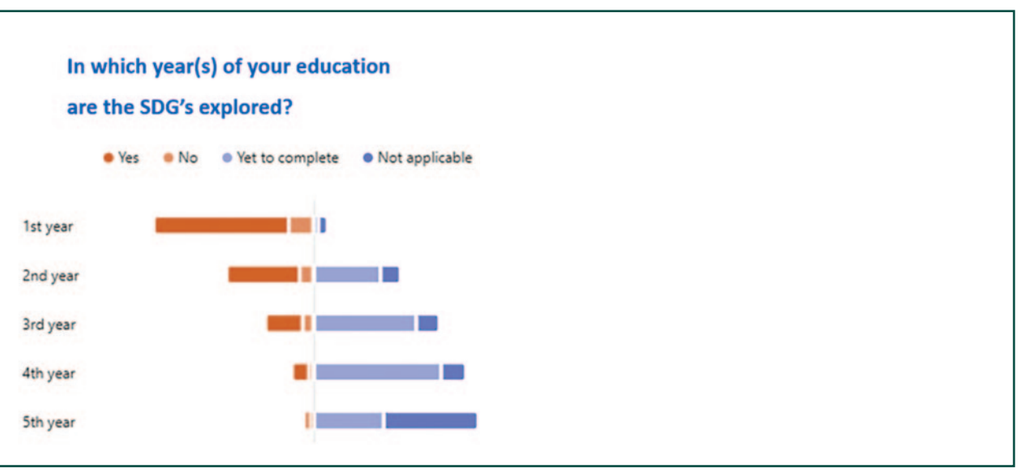
Firstly, student interns were recruited and asked to nominate academic dyads from their courses to contribute to their work on this project. Their task, in collaboration with the ESD fellows was to co-design a survey and disseminate it to all students in TCD with a view to garnering student views on whether ESD is currently embedded in TCD teaching at an UG level.

In addition to the above, module descriptors will be inputted into a bespoke designed closed AI LLM which is being developed as part of a separate but related project. The AI model will deduce whether the module description indicates that SDG themes, UNESCO competencies and specific learning pedagogies are present in each module.

Finally student interns will examine their own courses in collaboration with their academic dyad and conduct a "deep dive" into each of the modules on that course. This examination will have the same aims as that being conducted by the AI module but will be done by humans involved in both the teaching and learning of the courses in question.

Results from each method above will be corroborated with each other to ensure rigour and data triangulation. Furthermore dyad participants will be invited to take part in a qualitative interview investigating their views on the methods used in this work, thus contributing to the body of evidence on how to effectively embed ESD into higher level education.





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