



Find Out More

HEA Teaching and Learning Conference December 2025

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



Two Years as an ESD Officer: Impact and Challenges



Institution(s) and Partner Organisations Involved

Teaching Enhancement Unit at Dublin City University

Contributor(s)

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

- Across multiple units/schools/faculties
- Institutional level

Date and Timeframe

Academic years 2024 - 2026

Alignment and Focus

Focus

- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Frameworks, Policies, or Strategies Aligned

- DCU Strategy 2023 - 28
- DCU Teaching and Learning Strategy ESD 2030

Discipline

- Teaching and Learning

Impact, Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Impact and Evidence of Success

- Evaluation is broadly informal, with participation and engagement being the key indicators of success. This engagement includes:
- Number of staff participating in Communities of Practice: 40
- Number of staff attending workshops: 50
- Number of staff completed (or currently enrolled in) digital Badge: 47
- Number of students attending ESD specific sessions related to their programme: around 1,000.
- In total, approximately 200 staff and 3,000 students have been impacted.

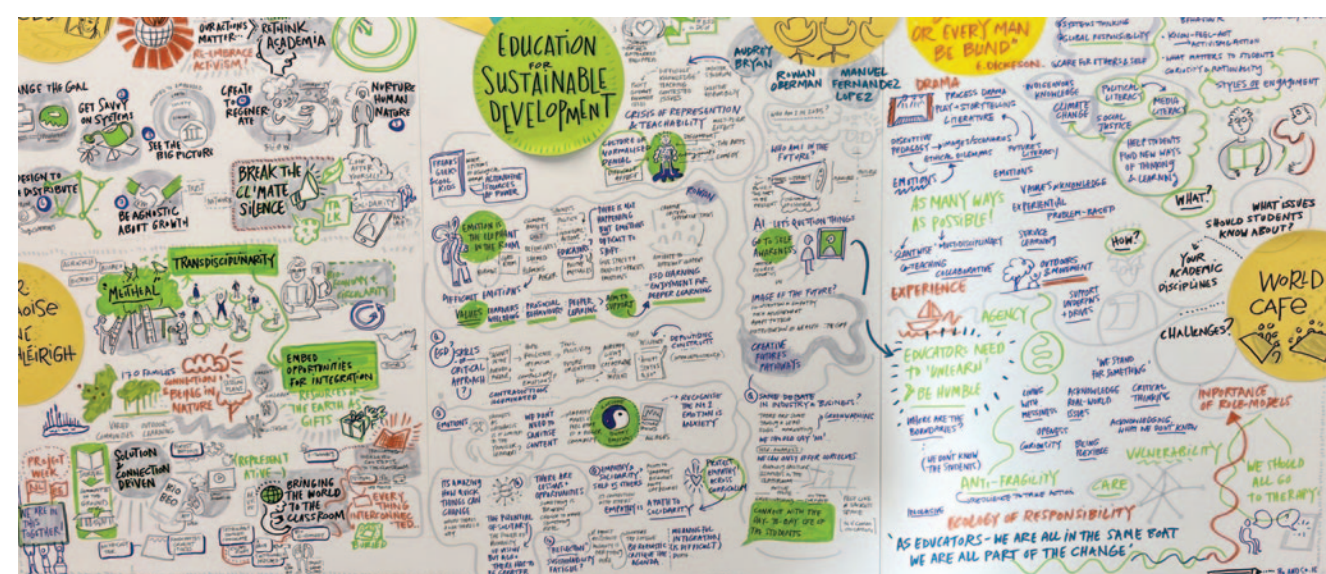
Future Plans and Sustainability

While the initiative has been successful in a qualitative sense, there is scope to increase the numbers impacted. Initiatives will be introduced to scale the project and ensure sustained commitment:

- Engaging in research with a focus on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to identify how academics feel about ESD, where it should sit within their practice and what support they need.
- Working with programme chairs to ensure ESD is integrated into programmes and modules. This would include New Programme Proposal and Periodic Programme Review.
- The creation of an ESD Academy to bring together all of the institution's offerings, to make it as easy as possible for staff to identify supports and select those most beneficial to them.

Top Tips

- Use your social capital. Meet the academics, be nice to them, offer to help them, be available.
- Understand that everyone's busy. If you're asking academics to think about adapting their modules or programmes, there must be something in it for them.
- Good ESD should complement the academic discipline. The students should be able to see how it will benefit them in the future.



Initiative Description

Aims and Objectives

- Building capacity around ESD Increasing commitment towards ESD Developing a culture of ESD

Outline or Description

In January 2024, DCU appointed its first Education for Sustainable Development officer. While the job description highlighted a number of areas, it was decided that the role should, above all, focus on three areas: increasing the capacity of educators in the area of ESD; building commitment towards ESD; and, ultimately, creating a culture of ESD. To achieve this, the ESD officer has worked closely with academic and professional staff, as well as students, in four main areas: programme and module design; teaching and learning; assessment; and specific initiatives involving staff and students.

Examples of programme and module design include:

- Working with the Programme Chair for a new BSc in Physiotherapy to identify sustainability priorities and map these to modules.
- Engaging with staff in DCU's Business School to bolster sustainability content and methodologies in a range of programmes including the award-winning BSc in Digital Business and Innovation.
- Teaching and learning has been supported through several initiatives:
- Development of DCU's ESD hub – a Moodle (loop) course, open to all academic and professional staff.
- Development of a digital badge in Education for Sustainability – an adaptation of the NFTL's Introduction to

Education for Sustainability badge, specifically tailored to meet the needs of staff at DCU.

- A range of workshops - open to whole staff or by faculty / school. This includes an introduction to ESD as well as deeper dives into areas such as ESD and Critical Thinking and ESD and Interdisciplinarity.
- Introducing an Ideas Exchange group.
- Supporting Communities of Practice within faculties.

Assessment was identified as a way that academics could effectively integrate ESD into their practice and remain authentic to their academic discipline. Examples include:

- A new, sustainability focused, Challenge-Based Learning approach in the Business School's Eco-Tech Challenge.
- Debates on ethical dilemmas in the BSc in Interdisciplinary Science. Areas for debate including GM foods, Extractivism and the limits of science in addressing climate change.

Supporting specific initiatives throughout the university such as:

- A 'teaching within planetary boundaries' day in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.
- An ESD symposium for staff in the institute of Education.
- Workshops for all first-year students in the School of Mechanical and manufacturing Engineering.
- A 'Shout out for Sustainable Development' for clubs and societies at DCU to align their interests with themes related to sustainability and social justice.
- The development of an ESD exhibition to showcase good practice and inspire others.

Funding & Acknowledgements Details

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