



This is a pre-print (draft) version of the following published document:

**Ryan, Alex ORCID: 0000-0003-4316-311X and Tilbury, Daniella (2015) Learning for Sustainable Futures: ESD professional development at University of Gloucestershire. In: Leading Practice Publication: Professional development of university educators on Education for Sustainable Development in European countries. UE4SD, Prague, Prague, Czech Republic, pp. 82-87. ISBN 9788087076224**

Official URL: <http://www.ue4sd.eu/images/2015/UE4SD-Leading-Practice-PublicationBG.pdf>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/7686>

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# 7/ Learning for Sustainable Futures: ESD professional development at University of Gloucestershire, UK

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## 1 OVERVIEW

The *Learning for Sustainable Futures* (LSF) scheme at University of Gloucestershire provides professional development in ESD for both teaching staff and staff who support student learning. It enables staff to develop the curriculum and to improve teaching practices as well as students' professional skills in ESD. Staff from any academic faculty or professional department can propose project concepts through an annual competitive process. The successful proposers receive £2500 to lead and develop their projects, as well as mentoring support, tailored ESD guidance, resources, training and networking opportunities.

LSF is supported by the University's senior management as part of the implementation of the *Learning and Teaching Strategy* and commitment to ESD in the *Strategic Plan 2012–17*. It is part of the institutional strategy for embedding ESD across the curriculum, student experience, quality enhancement and corporate practices. The scheme is co-led by the Sustainability Team and Academic Development Unit and has received £50,000 of central University funds. This investment has been provided over a 3 year period and has supported 20 projects in total, with the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle starting in 2015–16. The LSF Scheme also won Highly Commended at the UK 2013 *Green Gown Awards* for its strategic approach to ESD professional development.

## 2 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

### Why we use this process:

LSF develops the understanding and capabilities of staff in ESD, so they can improve student learning experiences. Projects use pedagogical inquiry and are action-focused; they are not about researching ESD, but bringing ESD into the thinking and practice of teaching teams and professional departments. LSF helps to build the skills of staff to be catalysts for change and show leadership for ESD in their own faculties and departments.

### How the process works:

Project leaders work to an agreed project plan for one academic year, with one-to-one (1-1) mentoring meetings each semester, fo-

cused on action learning and change outcomes (Figure 4.8). Visiting scholars and interaction with colleagues working on ESD at other universities are built into the process, to extend opportunities for professional exchange, reflection and dialogue. Staff are also supported through the expanding network of LSF project leaders across faculties and campuses, which encourages interdisciplinary dialogue and helps to ground ESD practice more deeply across the institution.

### What is asked of participants:

Project leaders engage with the professional development process by: developing their project plans in agreement with their head of department and involving relevant colleagues in the process; participating in 1-1 mentoring meetings and engaging with relevant ESD literature; preparing a brief final report and sharing their experiences and outcomes at the annual LSF conference. Some project leaders have written up their project results and professional reflections as case studies, as part of their postgraduate training to gain nationally recognized teaching qualifications for higher education.

## 3 ESD FRAMING

The LSF scheme uses the University's existing ESD guidance framework to guide their projects, which is based on ESD approaches adopted for the UN Decade of ESD (2005–14). The framework focuses on five pedagogical principles that are easily adaptable for different areas: *futures thinking*; *critical and creative thinking*; *participation and participatory learning*; *systemic thinking*; and *partnerships*.

LSF specifically avoids supporting the design of special modules or courses; instead it promotes 'programme-wide' approaches to ESD that aim to reframe the whole curriculum, or projects that pilot an approach and then extend it more widely. It also supports projects that bring ESD thinking and practices into the core work of education and learning support services. This ensures that student learning experiences in ESD are better connected at all levels of study and with their future professional capabilities and roles.

LSF recognizes that for effective changes towards ESD, educators need professional de-

velopment opportunities to help them rethink both teaching approaches and curriculum design. This requires that they engage with ESD pedagogy and best practice; translate it into their own subject areas; and learn change and leadership skills to embed ESD into teaching programmes and departmental practices.

#### 4 KEY QUESTIONS

The issues and challenges that LSF addresses are:

*Q: How can we scale up ESD practice institutionally with only modest investment of resources?*

*Q: What kind of professional support in ESD will work well for both academic and professional staff?*

*Q: How can we support ESD innovation in subjects or departments with no prior background in ESD?*

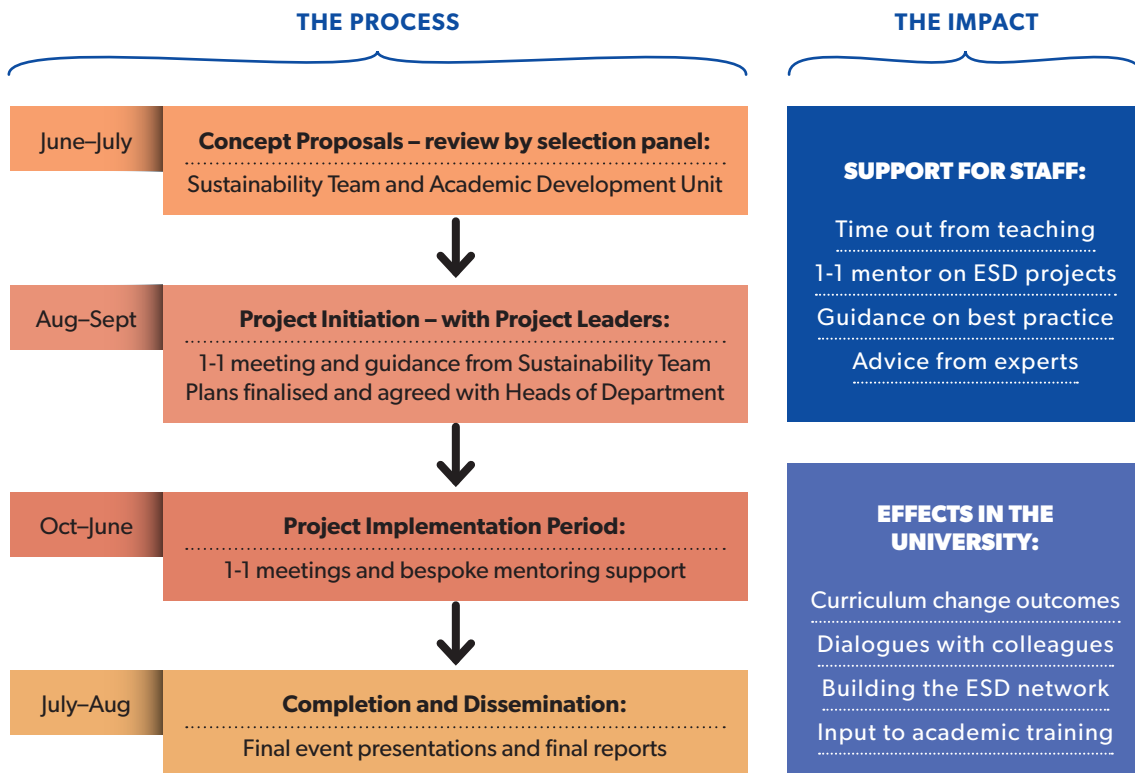
*Q: What approaches will show how ESD can inform both the formal curriculum and co-curriculum?*

#### 5 PRACTICALITY

The key lessons learned from the LSF scheme are:

- ESD professional development works best with regular face-to-face dialogues and interactions that help staff to build their understanding and ownership of how ESD can change education experiences.
- Colleagues working under pressured and changeable conditions need to work to simple, shared plans, with the flexibility to adapt to new opportunities and unexpected developments.
- Following up with personal support for participants at regular stages in the development process helps to keep their interest and confidence alive to ensure stronger outcomes.
- Collaborative approaches that involve the teams that are responsible for professional development will help to embed new ESD practices into institutional education thinking.
- Communicating about the initiative with

#### DIAGRAM



**Figure 4.8** – The process and impact of the *Learning for Sustainable Futures* professional development scheme at University of Gloucestershire, UK.



senior managers and external partners helps to build interest and critical support for ESD at the strategic level.

## 6 REFLECTIONS OF ORGANISERS AND FACILITATORS

Support from senior academic leaders has been key to the success of LSF – and this has developed through positive feedback from staff who have experienced successful professional development journeys. This led to the commitment of further funds for three years after the initial pilot year of LSF.

The approach has been to select projects with best potential for achieving tangible changes and for transfer of insights to other departments, and projects with large course groups that can extend ESD more widely across core undergraduate experiences. It has also been important to support activities that connect with institutional priorities and help to add value and impact in those areas.

*“LSF involves our staff with ESD in new and practical ways, enabling them to forge connections with their subjects, explore ideas with colleagues in other disciplines and engage their teaching teams and heads of department with the aims of ESD. Our institutional investment in providing seed funds, professional mentoring and staff time to support this process should pay dividends, helping to integrate and build capacity for ESD, to realise our Learning and Teaching Strategy, and to motivate and energise staff for research-informed teaching, particularly for junior staff and areas with less history of this kind of curriculum innovation.”*

*Professor Stephen Hill,  
Dean of Teaching and Learning Innovation*

The mentoring support for staff has to both encourage and stretch them, to help them internalize and adapt ESD ideas and approaches. It has to connect with their current priorities or concerns for improving student learning, their own academic expertise and ambitions, and professional or industry contexts.

To achieve these aims, mentoring discussions need to help colleagues to identify the relevant entry points for their specialism and explore different ways to change their pedagogy, to engage students more effectively with ESD learning processes.

*“When we work with those colleagues who are leading LSF projects, we need to build on their expertise in the*

*specific academic discipline or professional area, but also challenge them to rethink and to innovate in their teaching practices by acting as the ‘critical friend’. This is an important, exciting but complex mentoring process, as we need to be conscious of the multiple challenges they face in trying to absorb ESD ideas, reframe existing schemas, introduce new approaches and become change agents in their area.”*

*Dr Alex Ryan, Associate Director  
of Sustainability (Academic) – LSF Scheme Lead*

## 7 REFLECTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

LSF project leaders highlight the way that the mentoring helps them to engage in reflective dialogue and a process of inquiry and reconstruction of their teaching and learning approach. They explain the value of these dialogues in helping them to adapt ESD principles to suit the focus of their subject area, to refresh the pedagogies they use, and to meet the needs of the particular programme and their institutional context:

*“The LSF project has empowered me to experiment, to reflect and to refine my approach to teaching and learning. The network of experts I have been exposed to has been invaluable; there is always somebody to discuss ideas and issues with. I’ve only recently made the move to HE from a career in professional practice so it’s great to have this wealth of experience at my fingertips and this curriculum development work is now the case study for my MSc dissertation.”*

*Michelle Cook, Lecturer in Accounting  
and Finance – LSF Project Leader*

*“The 1-1 support during module development was invaluable, willingness to act as a sounding board allowed me to work through a number of interesting and thought provoking ESD concepts in a challenging but importantly constructive mentoring relationship.”*

*Ben Moreland, Lecturer in Sport  
and Exercise – LSF Project Leader*

*“Regular mentoring was invaluable in helping me to see how my discipline aligns and connects with ESD in ways I had not previously considered, clearing away the fog and seeing things in a practical, focused manner that eased my way in the movement from abstract and theoretical to real and concrete results.”*

*Dr Roy Jackson Reader in Philosophy  
of Religion – LSF Project Leader*

External participants who have acted as visiting experts and collaborative partners in the LSF scheme have contributed to the professional dialogues at events and have also provided significant inspiration and input to specific LSF projects. These colleagues have also benefited from this process and found LSF valuable for their professional development and their ongoing work at other institutions:

*“I found the meetings and conversations on ESD most engaging. They helped me to reflect critically on my own work. It was interesting to see how they gave each person space to shape/clarify/extend his/her understanding of ESD, remaining open to others’ conceptualizations and starting points and pulling the conversation together so a deeper sense of ESD was reached. I think these conversations are important in enabling staff to engage with ESD – an approach that should be developed and shared.”*

*Dr Lorna Down, Senior Lecturer, University of the West Indies – LSF visiting scholar/mentor 2013*

*“Lots of different ideas/suggestions emerged which prompted me to reflect on our practice and the issues we face. I am increasingly aware that I need to know a lot more about psychology and change management if I am*

*going to be more effective in promoting ESD. I like the conversational and relaxed atmosphere, the inputs were interesting and organization was excellent.”*

*Stephen Scoffham, Principal Lecturer, Canterbury Christ Church University – LSF external partner 2014*

## 8 OUTCOMES

LSF works with a systemic model of change, aiming to connect and influence across the levels of the university. It views project leaders as change agents for ESD in their teaching teams, among student cohorts and with wider professional networks and industry partners. The scheme has been critical to scaling up ESD activity across the University, engaging staff and building executive support for ESD.

The LSF projects have led to the integration of ESD in professional practice and social learning for staff and students in several University departments: *Student Union; Chaplaincy; Placements; Libraries and Information Services; Student Helpzones*. They have also changed the curriculum in: *Accounting and Finance; Business*



*Management; Early Years Education; Education Studies; Fashion Design; Fine Art; Tourism Management; Philosophy and Religion; Product Design; Sports Coaching; Sports Development.* The projects have led to departmental action plans; student workshops and events; learning activities and assessments; curriculum enhancement plans; departmental training workshops; quality assurance documents; and new teaching tools.

The LSF scheme is also changing University academic practice as it features in central academic training programmes and online staff development resource toolkits. The Academic Development Unit offered to sole-fund the scheme during its third year and the quality enhancement team is now using LSF case studies as examples of best practice in HE teaching and learning, which was recognized in the institutional external quality assurance review in 2015. Connections have been made between projects and for institutional development, e.g. to inform curriculum strategy in the restructure of the Business School, and to establish training in ESD provided by the Student Union, for all student course representatives across faculties.

Unexpected outcomes include significant interest and regular collaboration from local tertiary colleges and universities. The University of Worcester has also replicated the LSF model for ESD development at their institution. LFSF events have extended networks and dialogues in ESD by involving participants in the UK and from countries such as Australia and the USA.

## Further information:

Further information about the scheme can be accessed via:

<http://www.glos.ac.uk/sustainability/>



**Case study and additional materials at the UE4SD Online Platform of Resources (access via the UE4SD project website):**

<http://www.ue4sd.eu/>

