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Learning for Sustainability

A professional guide for teachers

In partnership with



What is this guide for?

We live in a turbulent, interdependent and rapidly changing world, with a complex range of social, cultural, political, ecological and economic challenges shaping our future – locally, nationally and globally. Learning for Sustainability is about knowing and understanding the world as it is, and equipping educators and learners with the confidence, values, knowledge, attitudes, capabilities and skills that will enable us to contribute effectively to making a better world.

In Scotland, Learning for Sustainability is an entitlement of all learners and the responsibility of all teachers as part of a whole learning community approach. What, then, does this mean for your professional values and practice?

The purpose of this professional guide is to provide support for teachers to reflect on their practice in the context of the Professional Standards for Teachers, and to consider aspects that may need further advice or professional learning. This guide is intended to complement your employer's policies.

The guide aims to help you understand your responsibility to embed Learning for Sustainability in your practice, inspiring and motivating learners to address the challenges of learning to live within the environmental limits of our planet and to build a just, equitable and peaceful society. It is part of a series of professional guides produced by GTC Scotland.



What is expected of teachers and school leaders?

The interdependent themes: values; Learning for Sustainability; and leadership underpin the Professional Standards for Teachers. Making a professional commitment to learning that is compatible with achieving a sustainable and equitable world embodies what it is to be a teacher and school leader in Scotland.

- All teachers have a role in ensuring that the entitlement of learners in their classes or care in relation to Learning for Sustainability is being met.
- Demonstrating a commitment to the professional values of social justice and sustainability is expected of all teachers, embedding them in professional practice and acting as inspiring, positive role models for learners.
- Learning for Sustainability themes and approaches, using local and global

real-world and outdoor contexts, are expected to be embedded in the design of all curriculum areas and subjects, ensuring progression for learners.

- Reflecting the ethos of Learning for Sustainability throughout every aspect of the life of your school or early years setting, throughout its curriculum, campus and community relationships, is expected. It is not a timetabled subject – rather it is an approach to learning to be woven across all four contexts of Curriculum for Excellence.
- Making progress towards a robust approach to Learning for Sustainability as a learning community requires leadership and commitment at all levels, involving school leaders, staff, learners, parents and members of the community.



How to engage with Learning for Sustainability

Professional values, skills and knowledge are inextricably bound and are all central to Learning for Sustainability. Scottish 19th century visionary Sir Patrick Geddes spoke about the merit in engaging 'heart, hand and head', to achieve truly transformational learning, and this holistic approach encapsulates the kind of ethos that underpins Learning for Sustainability:

Heart: professional values and commitment

Learning for Sustainability is about creating a strong common purpose based on values and working together to address real life, complex and often controversial, issues. Sustainability issues raise fundamental questions about what we value, what we think is important and the way we live our lives.

In demonstrating professional commitment to Learning for Sustainability, there is an opportunity to explore the values we hold as individuals and educators, to question where they come from and identify values that may be important for an optimal life and world for ourselves, and others. Considering your own professional values can help you to explore how to tackle values in the classroom and to understand the skills that learners need to understand a range of perspectives on issues.

Demonstrating a strong personal commitment and a values-based approach to Learning for Sustainability, contributes

to a shared vision and culture of Learning for Sustainability in your setting, and a collective ambition to make this a reality.

Hand: professional skills and actions

John Muir, the Scottish born conservationist, once said: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." All curriculum areas and subjects contribute individually and collectively to Learning for Sustainability and research indicates that engagement with Learning for Sustainability themes and approaches can provide motivation and inspiration for teachers and learners alike.

Sustainability themes – such as poverty, education, gender equality, human rights and climate change – span disciplines and are ideally suited to interdisciplinary learning approaches that explore the connections between subject areas. Framing learning from an issue-based approach rather than starting from single subject areas can help to cohere and link subjects and disciplines; naturally revealing relationships and connections between curriculum areas.

One of the challenges of Learning for Sustainability is that often the subject matter is difficult to present to learners in a way that is not overwhelming or complex because the issues themselves can be both of these things. Approaches that enable learners to face these types of challenges and provide them with the

capacities to tackle them are likely to be interactive and participative and to involve collaboration and group work, high order thinking skills, asking questions and making connections, such as:

- Why are things the way they are?
- Can we live a more harmonious life – with the planet, with each other?
- How can I act to make things better?

Finding sustainability themes that matter to your learners, your school, your learners' communities or wider society is likely to enhance learning experiences and outcomes. Confidence and ownership is built through learner-led research and enquiry; providing opportunities for children and young people to find out things for themselves, to take positive action and make changes on a personal, and everyday level. Such approaches support the establishment of a culture where learners participate meaningfully in decision-making. Authentic engagement that is relevant to their learning, their school and their world as active citizens can be transformational.

Taking learning outdoors has many pedagogical and developmental benefits for learners. Engaging with the natural, cultural and built world within and beyond the school boundary connects your school and learners with the natural environment, as well as the communities it serves.

Exploring the interconnected nature of the world connects us to local and global communities too. This will involve engaging with local and international school and

community partners; inspiring learners through joint activities focusing on sustainability themes. For teachers, such contacts provide valuable opportunities to share experiences and learn new thinking, ideas and practices from colleagues in other places both in Scotland and overseas.

Head: professional knowledge and understanding

There is a growing body of evidence (Scottish Government 2020) that Learning for Sustainability, bringing together sustainable development, global citizenship and outdoor learning, supports improvement across all four contexts of Curriculum for Excellence.

A helpful starting point are the transversal United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. All member states of the UN including Scotland and the rest of the UK, have committed to these 17 ambitious goals, which, if achieved, will make the world's environments, economies and societies significantly better by 2030.

Using real-life contexts for learning and teaching will help your learners make better sense of the world around them. In our uncertain and ever-changing global society, with its relentless and ongoing development of knowledge, we all need to continuously reflect upon how the world's natural, cultural, social, political and economic systems work and on how they are interconnected.

A recognition that 'we are all in this together', recognising that educators and learners are learning together towards a better future, is key.

What you can do

Learning for Sustainability is an entitlement for all learners. In response to the Professional Standards, all teachers, including those in leadership roles, are expected to demonstrate it in their professional practice.

Reflect on Learning for Sustainability in your practice and ask yourself:

- Which aspects of Learning for Sustainability am I already delivering and working on? Which are new for me? In what ways could these be developed and embedded? What support could I seek?
- How do I support learners and myself in engaging with core values and perspectives to make progress on Learning for Sustainability?
- To what extent do my learning and teaching approaches effectively support Learning for Sustainability, using local and global real-world and outdoor contexts?
- How are Learning for Sustainability themes and approaches made explicit in my planning, ensuring progression for learners?
- Am I using relevant findings from research to improve my Learning for Sustainability practice?
- Am I encouraging learners to lead their own learning across a range of Learning for Sustainability contexts?
- How do I evaluate the impact of Learning for Sustainability on learners, and how can I use evidence of impact

to inform my future practice?

- What opportunities do I provide for learners to work with others to contribute effectively to their communities as active citizens?

Across my setting and its community:

- What real-life sustainability issues have relevance for my learners, school and wider school community?
- Which aspects of learning across Learning for Sustainability themes are already taking place in my classroom or school, and where are there gaps?
- How might I collaborate with colleagues and learners to plan interdisciplinary learning around a Learning for Sustainability theme?
- How well do I use the school buildings and grounds and community spaces to support learning and develop leadership and skills of learners?
- How do I involve parents, carers, community and partners in Learning for Sustainability activities?



Additional resources

- [Education Scotland A Summary of Learning for Sustainability Resources](#) ↗
- [Education Scotland Support for Professional Development in Outdoor Learning](#) ↗
- [Education Scotland Learning for Sustainability in action](#) ↗
- [Education Scotland Learner participation in educational settings](#) ↗
- [GTC Scotland Professional Standards for Teachers](#) ↗
- [IDEAS Signposts for Global Citizenship](#) ↗
- [Learning for Sustainability Scotland](#) ↗
- [Outdoor Learning Directory](#) ↗
- [Oxfam \(2019\) The Sustainable Development Goals - a Guide for teachers](#) ↗
- [Scottish Government \(2020\) Impact of Learning for Sustainability in Educational outcomes](#) ↗
- [SQA Learning for Sustainability](#) ↗
- [WWF-UK \(2010\) Learning for sustainability in schools. Effective pedagogy](#) ↗



**General Teaching
Council for Scotland**
Clerwood House
96 Clermiston Road
Edinburgh EH12 6UT

T. 0131 314 6000
E. gtcs@gtcs.org.uk
www.gtcs.org.uk