

RESPONSIBLE FUTURES INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME PILOT OVERVIEW

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July 2023



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM



Programme Overview

[Responsible Futures](#) is a whole-institution approach to embedding holistic sustainability across the formal and informal curriculum in higher education. It is a supported change programme and accreditation mark that works to put sustainability at the heart of student learning.

The Responsible Futures framework assists in creating an environment for staff and students to work together, in partnership, to embed sustainability throughout teaching and learning. The programme legitimises and mainstreams education for sustainable development (ESD), ultimately helping to ensure students leave education with the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to create a more just and sustainable society.

The framework facilitates a close working partnership between student representatives and their institutions through a set of criteria drawn from good practice across the sector. SOS-UK works with partnerships to tailor their approach to the criteria, ensuring they are challenged against sector good practice but not restricted by a one-size-fits-all approach. This includes developing some of their own criteria to highlight unique examples. Participating institutions join a cohort alongside others where they share resources and learn together as they proceed through the accreditation. When ready, institutions are audited by a team of their own students, trained and supported by SOS-UK, resulting in an externally-verified audit. Accreditations are awarded and remain valid for two years.

Thirty-five partnerships across the UK have joined Responsible Futures since its launch in September 2014. Collectively, they represent over 600,000 students. For more information see [the programme website](#).



“Through the Responsible Futures audit and other processes, [the University of Worcester and Students’ Union] allow students to have a voice in sustainability, which is something we cherish so much.”

**Responsible Futures Student Auditor
at the University of Worcester, June
2022**

Outcomes to date

To date, over 500 actions have been taken by Responsible Futures partnerships through the programme. The outcomes of these actions are summarised in the table below:

Conducting curriculum audits to identify baseline of ESD content	Incorporating ESD into course validation / revalidation processes	Creating interdisciplinary learning experiences for students	Diversifying and decolonising the curriculum	Establishing education professional development on ESD
Establishing living laboratory, applied learning, and community-based learning initiatives	Cohort working and sharing good practice between institutions	Graduate attributes / outcomes include sustainability	Gaining buy-in from trustees, governors, and senior management	Developing a stronger relationship between the institution and student representatives

Reflecting on gaining accreditation, partnerships have said that the value in achieving the *Responsible Futures* accreditation had been:

- Securing credibility - internally and externally
- Securing greater resourcing - both in direct funding and increased staff capacity
- Developing a reputation for excellence
- Enabling access to funding
- Developing new working links within the institution - identifying new supporters and allies
- Creating better partnerships between the institution and student representatives
- Enabling engagement of staff, at multiple levels and roles, in embedding sustainability
- Securing incorporation of ESD into high-level strategy
- Embedding ESD across the formal and informal curricula

On the programme overall, partnerships have reported that *Responsible Futures* has driven new activity; benchmarked progress and facilitated reflection; developed new, strong working relationships across the institution; engaged and empowered staff to take action.

The Framework

The Responsible Futures criteria in the UK framework are drawn from good practice across the sector and were developed in collaboration with the 2014-15 pilot partnerships, representing further and higher education institutions and students' unions across the UK as well as the advisory board comprised of various sector organisations including People and Planet, the Association of Colleges, EAUC, EAUC-Scotland, Learning for Sustainability Scotland, University and College Union, Society for the Environment, Higher Education Academy, Knowledge Transfer Network, a selection of academics, and the NUS Sustainability Direction and Oversight Board.

The actions recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective and therefore are designed to be customisable and flexible to suit different priorities and circumstances. The programme provides a framework and road map for partnerships to assess and benchmark their work, guide and shape their future efforts, and recognise their existing accomplishments.

There are 50 criteria, of which 10 are mandatory, 37 are optional, and 3 are self-defined, giving the partnership the opportunity to highlight and celebrate unique areas of their work. To achieve the accreditation mark, the Partnership must complete the mandatory criteria and meet or exceed the score threshold of 220 points, out of the maximum 355 points, not including the three self-defined criteria.

The criteria cover eight key themes:

- Baselines and benchmarks
- Partnership and planning
- Leadership and strategy
- Policy and commitment
- Interventions
- Impacts and outcomes
- Outreach
- Self-defined criteria

Pilot Proposal

Responsible Futures is now a well-established and highly regarded programme in the UK. SOS-UK's other sustainability programmes, when at a similar stage, have successfully moved into international programmes, including Student Switch Off which runs across six European countries and Green Impact which runs across Europe and Australasia.

Higher education and research for sustainable development (HESD) is one of the key priorities of the International Association of Universities (IAU). IAU is working to advance HESD internationally through projects, publications, and bringing higher education stakeholders together since the IAU adopted the Kyoto Declaration in 1993.

SOS-UK has established a partnership with IAU to pilot Responsible Futures internationally with a view to deliver the programme in partnership over the long term.

The pilot will take place over the following stages, as summarised in the Gantt chart on the next page.

Audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-led audit, facilitated by SOS-UK, includes training of student auditors, focus groups and audit feedback reports
Resource bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to regularly updated Resource bank signposting good practice and case studies
Jiscmail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible Futures email group with over 100 contacts from partnerships
Cost per partnership	€6,778 per partnership (\$7,735 USD)

Note: We recommend that the fee is paid by the university or college, not by the students' union/association/group.

* Partnerships must be re-audited every two years to retain the accreditation.

Not included in the costs:

- Travel for representatives from each institution to attend support day(s) and other associated events throughout the year if in-person;
- Travel for IAU/SOS-UK staff to support audits if in-person;
- Venue, catering, and travel costs for student auditor training;
- Local awards events (if you choose to run one) to give out certificates to student auditors and celebrate local successes;
- And UK VAT.

Institutional commitment

In joining the pilot programme, institutions agree to commit to the following:

- A desire to develop/strengthen a whole-institution approach to ESD;
- A willingness to work in close collaboration with other universities, sharing learning, successes, and challenges;
- A desire to work in partnership with your students;
- The support of one or more senior sponsors from within the institution;
- To send at least one representative to the pilot framework workshop in September 2023;
- Provide a financial contribution of £5,985 (€6,778) to cover the costs of the pilot.

Further information

For any questions or further information, please contact:

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