

RESPONSIBLE FUTURES OVERVIEW

A facilitated change programme and accreditation mark to embed sustainability across formal, informal, and subliminal curricula.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Outcomes.....	2
Criteria	3
Costs of participation 2023/24	4
Prerequisites of participation	5
Sign-up form	5
Any questions?	5

Introduction

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

Responsible Futures provides a framework to assist in creating an environment for staff and students to work together to embed sustainability into teaching and learning. It legitimises and mainstreams [education for sustainable development](#), 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 students' unions and their institutions through a set of criteria drawn from good practice across the sector. SOS-UK works with partnerships to personalise their approach by selecting the criteria that suit them, including developing some of their own criteria. Partnerships take part in a cohort with other participating institutions and students' unions and share resources and learn together as they proceed through the accreditation. When ready, partnerships are audited by a team of students, trained and supported by SOS-UK, resulting in an externally-verified audit. Accreditations are

awarded and remain valid for two years.

The Responsible Futures programme is signposted as a step to climate action in the [FE Climate Action Roadmap](#), the [HE Climate Action Toolkit](#) by the Climate Commission for UK Further and Higher education and the [Advance HE QAA ESD Guidance](#). Additionally, Responsible Futures counts toward [Times Higher Education Impact Rankings](#) and is accepted by the People and Planet University League as a recognised framework for Education for Sustainable Development. Demonstrating active participation in the accreditation programme and change framework provides 25% of the scoring for the University League's [section 9, 2a. Education for Sustainable Development](#).

35 partnerships across the UK have joined Responsible Futures since its launch in September 2014. Collectively, they represent around 600,000 students.

“Through the Responsible Futures audit, [the University of Worcester and Students’ Union] support students to have a voice in sustainability, which is something we cherish so much.”
Student Auditor - Responsible Futures Student Auditor at the University of Worcester and Students’ Union, June 2022



Outcomes

To date, over 1000 actions have been taken by Responsible Futures partnerships through the programme. The outcomes of these actions include:

Conducting curriculum audits to identify baseline of ESD content

Passing SU policy on ESD

Creating interdisciplinary experiences for students

Diversifying the curriculum

Securing greater resourcing for ESD

Establishing living laboratory projects

Cohort working

Graduate attributes include sustainability

Gaining buy-in from trustees, governors, and senior management

Developing a stronger relationship between university / college and SU

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

- Securing credibility - internally and externally
- Developing a reputation for excellence
- Enabling access to funding
- Developing new working links within the university / college
- Creating better partnerships between the institution and students' union
- 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

"Building stronger links with others across the university, and a commitment to joint students' union / university working." - Partnership lead

"Credibility for the work, and an objective basis for saying we are doing this well and therefore should be funded to continue to do so." - Partnership lead

"It showed senior management that what we were doing was well regarded and that gave the VC / DVC / PVC confidence to build sustainability education into the core of the new university strategy." - Partnership lead

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.

For more reflections from participants, please see the quotes in Appendix 1.

We are happy to connect you with individuals involved in the programme so you can ask them about Responsible Futures directly.

Criteria

The Responsible Futures criteria in the framework are drawn from good practice across the sector and were developed in collaboration with the 2014-15 pilot partnerships¹, representing FE and HE 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 our 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

¹ The University of Bristol, Coventry University, the University of Chester, Dumfries and Galloway College, Edinburgh University, Keele University, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Plymouth, Sheffield College, South Lanarkshire College, South Thames College, SRUC (Scotland's Rural College), University of Worcester.

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 9 are mandatory, 41 are optional, including 3 which are self-defined, giving the partnership the opportunity to highlight and celebrate unique areas of their work. To achieve the accreditation mark, partnerships must complete the mandatory criteria and meet or exceed the score threshold of 220 points, out of the maximum 355 points.

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

An overview of the criteria can be found in Appendix 2.

Costs of participation 2023/24

	First year	Subsequent year
Higher Education Institutions	£4, 830 +VAT	£4,140 +VAT
Further Education Institutions	£4,275 +VAT	£3,815 +VAT

Note: We recommend that the fee is paid by the university or college, not by the students' union/association. **Partnerships must be re-audited every two years to retain the accreditation.**

Included in the costs:

- Access to workbook of criteria which provide the partnership with an ambitious, clear, and comprehensive framework to build capacity and enhance learning and teaching;
- Support and guidance at every stage;
- One full-day bespoke support visit per partnership per year, which can be used for delivering training, audit preparations, speaking at events, research and more;
- Being part of an active national cohort, with regular email contact, website updates, and telephone calls - includes cohort catch-up calls every 6 weeks with participating partnerships to promote knowledge exchange and collaborative trouble shooting;
- 2 national support afternoons per year, offered online (Zoom or MS Teams) open to all students and staff from participating partnerships;

- 1 - 2 webinars per year led by Responsible Futures partnerships sharing learning and experience related to enhancing the embedding of ESD in tertiary education open to all students and staff from participating partnerships;
- Access to a regularly updated resource bank of good practice;
- Facilitation of two-day student-led audit, including all student training, interviews, focus groups, and coordination of feedback reports for your partnership;
- Remote support as required.

Not included in the costs:

- Travel for representatives from each institution to attend support day(s) and other associated events throughout the year;
- Venue, catering, and travel costs for student auditor training.

Prerequisites of participation

- A desire to develop a whole-institution approach to embedding sustainability and social responsibility across the curriculum;
- A commitment to allow adequate staff time to lead on Responsible Futures within *both* the students' union and the institution;
- A willingness to work through a close collaborative partnership between the students' union and the institution;
- A commitment to promote and support the monitoring and evaluation of the project;
- A senior champion within both the students' union and the institution;
- A commitment to send at least one representative from each partnership to attend up network events, including cohort catch up calls and support afternoons.
- A willingness to actively engage with and support other members of the cohort.

Sign-up form

Partnerships can sign up to Responsible Futures, as well as all other SOS-UK sustainability programmes, through our [online sign-up form](#).

Any questions?

If you have any questions, please contact: responsiblefutures@sos-uk.org.

Learn more on the website: <https://www.sos-uk.org/project/responsible-futures>.

Appendix 1: Participant Feedback

Benchmarking and reflecting, internally

“Really useful, like holding up a mirror, taking the time to reflect and see where you are at.” **University**

“With any process, it’s a great way of setting a benchmark of good practice and then for us to follow and frame that benchmark, in terms of what you operationally deliver. Gives you an aspiration, which you then try and deliver.” **College**

“It’s reminded us of things that had dropped off the agenda or been put in the ‘too difficult’ box and it’s made us get them out of the ‘too difficult’ box.” **University**

Driving new activity

“Help us see where we can improve. Hadn’t done the student survey before. Will now be doing the student survey every year. Look to make improvements.” **University**

“Focus has broadened out as a result of RF - shifted between looking primarily at environmental and now starting to look at social and economic (procurement) aspects.” **University**

Expanding the scope and context of existing work

“There are projects that would have happened anyway, but the criteria outlined by Responsible Futures enabled us to take our work a step further. It made us think about our work in a different context and highlighted our areas for improvement.” **University**

“[It was an] opportunity to improve...get people involved...provide validity and improve the profile [of the university]” **University**

Engaging and empowering

“It’s given us (the SU) a seat and a legitimacy to sit and talk about the curriculum; not a lot of FE unions have this.” **Students’ Union**

“A major benefit of participating in Responsible Futures has been getting buy in from Senior Management and from the whole University. We’ve seen each other on equal footing through this project.” **Students’ Union**

“We would have had an environmental and sustainability agenda into the future anyway. What it’s done is put that into a bigger external context and corporate context. It’s enabled us to see ways to use it to link across to other aspects within the university.” **University**

Partnership development

“It has been beneficial because it’s made them set up the wider steering group to drive ESD.” **University**

Fun!

It’s been great fun, actually! **University**

Appendix 2: Criteria

The following is a summary of the Responsible Futures criteria. The ten mandatory criteria have their criteria codes underlined. Please note that minor adjustments and updates may be made to criteria in the online toolkit.

Baselines & Benchmarks

BB001) Within the last two years, the Partnership has completed an institution-wide survey of students on their attitudes towards, expectations on, and awareness of social responsibility and sustainability SRS and published the findings.

BB002) The Partnership has completed a follow-up to the survey conducted in BB001 and published the findings.

BB003) Within the last five years, the Partnership has carried out a thorough baseline curriculum review or audit on SRS and published the findings.

BB004) The Partnership has completed a follow-up curriculum review or audit conducted in BB003 on SRS and published the findings.

BB005) The Partnership routinely asks students about SRS in evaluation surveys.

BB006) Within the last two years, the Partnership has developed an understanding of teaching staff's knowledge and confidence with SRS at the institution and informed their practices with these findings.

BB007) The Partnership has completed a follow-up survey to the survey conducted in BB006 and published the findings.

Partnership & Planning

PPL001) The Partnership has a working or coordinating group that leads on SRS.

PPL002) The Partnership has a SMART action plan progressing actions for issues related to Responsible Futures.

PPL003) Within the current academic year, the Partnership has proactively engaged key stakeholder groups in the issues related to Responsible Futures.

Leadership & Strategy

LS001) The Partnership has gained the support of a high-level champion within both the students' union and institution for their efforts to attain Responsible Futures.

LS002) The Partnership has gained the support of their trustees and/or governors within both the students' union and institution on the issues related to Responsible Futures and their efforts to achieve accreditation.

LS003) The Partnership has developed a statement on SRS through a consultative process that defines what it means to the institution in relation to its educational purpose and values.

LS004) The institution's overall strategic plan and/or the publicly-stated learning outcomes include supportive references to SRS.

LS005) The institution's learning and teaching strategy, academic strategy, or equivalent, includes supportive references to issues related to Responsible Futures, or it will do after the next review.

LS006) The institution and students' union have whole institution/SU holistic sustainability strategies (or equivalent).

LS007) The institution and students' union's marketing and communications teams (or equivalent) are fully engaged with and supportive of the partnerships SRS work.

Policy & Commitment

POC001) The institution has provided professional development and dedicated support for relevant personnel on the issues related to Responsible Futures.

POC002) The students' union has formally passed and publicised a policy commitment to embedding SRS in the formal and informal curriculum.

POC003) One or more named elected student officer has agreed to lead on SRS issues for the students' union this academic year.

POC004) At least one member of staff in the students' union has responsibility for SRS.

POC005) The Partnership has made sufficient staff or student resource available to substantively progress the issues related to Responsible Futures.

POC006) The Partnership has made effective use of the relevant quality framework and/or outcome agreements to progress the issues related to Responsible Futures.

POC007) The Partnership has embedded the issues related to Responsible Futures into their human resource, induction, and training processes for all types of new starters (students, sabbatical officers, staff, governors, etc.).

POC008) The Partnership has worked with the institution's student recruitment and/or widening participation department(s) to incorporate issues relating to SRS into their work.

POC009) The partnership's careers team have committed to promoting careers, internships and placements that incorporate sustainability, and/or supporting students to take sustainability values into any future career or career decisions.

POC010) The partnership's careers team have committed to disengaging with harmful industries (e.g. fossil fuel companies and arms companies), for example through job fairs at the institution.

Interventions

IN001) Within the current academic year, the Partnership has run one or more internal event bringing together staff and students on the issues related to Responsible Futures.

IN002) Within the last five years, the Partnership has taken part in, or is booked onto, an external change programme on the issues related to Responsible Futures.

IN003) Within the current academic year, the institution has made funding, or related resources, available to staff and students so that they can develop their own projects that support the aims of Responsible Futures.

IN004) During the last 12 months, four or more schools or departments have integrated innovative pedagogical approaches to their SRS teaching, learning, and assessment.

IN005) The institution's non-academic and research/academic teams routinely collaborate to create educational and/or research opportunities through their SRS-related work. Some institutions would call this a Living Lab approach.

IN006) Within the current academic year, the Partnership has actively made use of student coursework and/or dissertations.

IN007) There are wide reaching structured interdisciplinary experiences, linked to the issues related to Responsible Futures, through the formal curriculum for students across the institution.

IN008) There are good levels of informal curriculum activity that support the aims of Responsible Futures.

IN009) There is demonstrable positive progress in embedding SRS across the subliminal curriculum.

IN010) Within the last 1-3 years, there have been opportunities for students to co-create teaching, learning and/or assessment approaches or content in the formal curriculum with their educators.

Impacts & Outcomes

IO001) The Partnership has reflected on and identified demonstrable positive progress in embedding SRS across the formal curriculum.

IO002) The Partnership has reflected on and identified demonstrable positive progress in relation to its **institution-wide collaborative approach**.

IO003) The Partnership has reflected on and identified their short-term impacts and outcomes in relation to positive outcomes for students.

IO004) The Partnership has reflected on and identified their long-term impacts and outcomes in relation to positive outcomes for students.

IO005) The Partnership has reflected on and identified their impacts and outcomes in relation to positive outcomes for staff.

Outreach

OU001) The Partnership has embedded the issues related to Responsible Futures into their community outreach activities.

OU002) Within the last two years, the Partnership has proactively engaged one or more students' union or educational institution on the issues related to Responsible Futures.

OU003) Within the last two years, the Partnership has presented on their work relating to the Responsible Futures agenda at a sector event.

OU004) The Partnership has published case studies highlighting SRS-related achievements, impacts and outcomes.

OU005) Within the last two years, the Partnership has sought out opportunities to learn from a range of educational institutions on how to progress sustainability in learning.

Self-Defined Criteria

SD001-SD003) Self-defined by the partnership to highlight the innovative, creative, and unique practices of each Partnership.