



Learning for Sustainability Scotland's response to Scotland's Draft Skills Model

18th June 2026

Finally, is there anything else you would like to share from your own perspective or that of your organisation?

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Skills Model consultation. This response is submitted on behalf of Learning for Sustainability Scotland ('LfS Scotland'); Scotland's United Nations University-recognised Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development, and part of a global network of 200 RCEs. LfS Scotland is an open membership network of more than 1,100 organisations and individuals working to harness the full potential of learning across all sectors to create a flourishing, sustainable and just world. (<http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org>).

1. Our response

We welcome the development of a new 'universal' Scottish Skills Model for lifelong learning' which reflects the many different sectors, skills and standards frameworks that children and young people, adults, learners, apprentices and professionals will encounter throughout their life, learning and work.

We recommend, from a Learning for Sustainability perspective, that the overarching term 'skills' is replaced by the term 'competencies', and that a clear definition and description is provided for both skills and the wider term, 'competencies', in the Model.

2. Our rationale: why 'competencies'?

'The concept of competency implies more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it involves the mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands' ([OECD The Future of Education and Skills. Education 2030. Position Paper, 2018](#))

'Competence is herein defined as the developmental capacity to interactively mobilize and ethically use information, data, knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and technology to engage effectively and act across diverse 21st century contexts to attain individual, collective, and global good. This definition recognizes that it is no longer sufficient to enable learners to acquire discrete knowledge, skills, values, etc. It is critical that learners can intelligently make connections across elements of a competence, integrate, and interactively apply them to respond to contextual demands as well as to change their contexts'. ([OECD The Future of Education and Skills. Education 2030. Position Paper, 2018](#))

The use of the term 'competencies' is supported by the OECD in the context of international conversations about the future of education. UNESCO has promoted Education for Sustainable



Development internationally since 1992 in response to the need for everyone to develop the skills, values and attitudes throughout their lives that lead to more sustainable and equitable societies <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education>:

Together the suites of knowledge, skills and capacities that include abilities to value and reflect are set out by UNESCO (2017) as key competencies ([UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444)), representing what learners need to address complex challenges. The eight UNESCO cross-cutting key competencies (Systems thinking, Anticipatory, Normative, Strategic, Collaboration, Critical thinking, Self-awareness, Integrated problem-solving) are designed to be used in addition to subject or learning specific competencies.

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world with very real existential global challenges, education must enable all learners to become agents of change for a more just and sustainable future. Scotland participated in the assessment of 'global competence' (OECD, 2016) as part of the 2018 PISA assessment, and from [2029, 'Climate Literacy' will be embedded in PISA assessments https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/PISA-2029-Climate-Literacy.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/PISA-2029-Climate-Literacy.html) to 'identify how education systems prepare students to respond to climate challenges and contribute to sustainable futures'.

3. The Scottish context

In Scotland 'Learning for Sustainability' is a research-informed conceptual approach to 'sustainability education' developed in Scotland in the period 2012-16. It brings together Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Global Citizenship Education (GC) and Outdoor Learning (OL), and actively embraces the development of values, attitudes, skills and agency of learners as well as knowledge. Knowledge and skills on their own are not enough and the development of values, attitudes and agency is seen as mutually supportive and equally significant. This resonates with the concept of competencies.

- For learners aged 3-18, Learning for Sustainability is an entitlement of all learners and a professional requirement of all teachers and education professionals with a target for 'all 3 to 18 places of education to become a sustainable learning setting by 2030. (See <https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/> and <https://education.gov.scot/resources/sustainable-learning-settings-practitioner-guide/>)
- In Further and Higher Education, the QAA and Advance-HE guidance on embedding Education for Sustainable Development in university programmes and courses (<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/education-sustainable-development-guidance>) is designed for all Schools in universities; including Teacher Education Institutions. The eight UNESCO key competencies for sustainability (see above), aimed at all learners of all ages worldwide, are adapted for higher education and designed to be used in alignment with appropriate learning outcomes.



4. Enhancing the draft Scottish Skills Model

We consider that, despite the ‘honeycomb’ graphic, the term ‘CORE’ indicates a hierarchy of importance.

- All competencies that are central to life, learning and work - and the development of more sustainable and equitable societies - should be considered ‘core’.
- The Draft Model suggests that communication, numeracy and digital relate to learning and work but not life and need to be placed in a separate ‘CORE’ category.
- International and national research indicates that ‘Learning for Sustainability’ has a positive impact on attainment, behaviour, motivation and attendance and therefore should also be considered CORE. Competencies for Learning for Sustainability include a balance of interrelated cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning which are both **PERSONAL and SOCIETAL**. In addition, there are numerous **SPECIALIST**, ie subject/discipline or learning specific competencies that relate to sustainability contexts, and will fit into this element of the Model.

5. Additional information

- 2015 [Education Scotland, Conversations about Learning for Sustainability](https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/lfs3-conversations-about-lfs.pdf)
- 2016 Laurie, P. et al Contributions of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to Quality Education: A Synthesis of Research <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0973408216661442>
- 2021 [Scottish Government, Educational Outcomes of Learning for Sustainability: A literature review](https://www.gov.scot/publications/educational-outcomes-learning-sustainability-brief-review-literature/) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/educational-outcomes-learning-sustainability-brief-review-literature/> and the summary report <https://www.gov.scot/publications/impact-learning-sustainability-educational-outcomes-summary-findings/pages/3/>
- 2024 Scottish government, Exploring the link between Learning for sustainability and attainment <https://www.gov.scot/publications/exploring-link-between-learning-sustainability-attainment>

We look forward to engaging with the further refinement and development of the Model *to enable* a more unified approach to defining and describing the competences we all need to prepare us for twenty-first century challenges and an uncertain future.