

Our response to the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026 - 2031

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Learning for Sustainability Scotland's Response to the Scottish Government's Programme for Government

Learning for Sustainability Scotland, Scotland's UN University recognised Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development, is a pan-sectoral network organisation with over 1,000 members.

We welcome the Scottish Government's new Programme for Government and its emphasis on '*building a Scotland that is truly fair, healthy, prosperous, secure, skilled, sustainable and connected*'.

We see a strong alignment between aspects of the Programme for Government and our recent Policy Briefing for the 2026 Scottish Parliament: [Transforming Learning for a Just and Sustainable World](#).

- We support the recognition that effective cross-sectoral partnership is needed to deliver change. We recognise the ambition to strengthen collaboration across government and with civil society, communities and the private sector and look forward to clarity on how these synergies will be implemented and supported.
- The five-year framework provides a strong foundation for long-term strategic planning, while allowing flexibility to respond to change.
- We welcome the commitment to fairness, equality and social justice and strong consideration of human rights.

Education, lifelong learning, community and culture

We are pleased to see education and learning present in this programme. Education is central to addressing the twin climate and nature crises, inequality, wellbeing, democracy and Scotland's future prosperity. It should support people to develop the knowledge, capabilities, values and competencies needed to contribute to a fair, prosperous and sustainable Scotland.

- We, therefore, believe there is an opportunity to recognise **education as a key enabling factor** across the Programme for Government, rather than primarily within individual policy areas and agencies. For example, the National Skills Plan should include sustainability knowledge, skills, values, and competencies.

- We strongly welcome the recognition of school reform in the Programme for Government. However, while it highlights leadership, attainment, literacy and numeracy, there is **less emphasis on the critical capacities and competencies needed for a changing world**. We also seek further emphasis on the **role of further and higher education in developing future change agents and leaders**.
- We endorse the **role of schools as important focal points within communities**. They can support partnership working, community engagement and integrated services, helping address poverty, inequality, climate change, crime and violence while strengthening communities. This provides an opportunity for systems thinking and joined-up action.
- We recognise the opportunity to **position education as supporting both individual potential and systemic change** through transformative learning and participation in social change, alongside employability and economic growth.
- We support the strong focus on early years and recognition of the learning journey into school. However, this should extend to a **lifelong approach to learning**; connecting early learning, schools, further and higher education, community and adult learning, workplaces, and cultural participation. Recognising these interconnected learning environments can help reduce inequality, strengthen communities and enable people to participate fully in society.
- We value the emphasis on “democracy matters” and community empowerment. **Participation should extend beyond consultation**, facilitating communities to influence or make decisions, priorities and resources.
- We **strongly welcome the recognition of the contribution of culture and the arts to identity, wellbeing and livelihoods** and we applaud the funding commitment to support culture and the arts, including continued support of the Gaelic language. We also wish to see support for Scots and Shetland.

Prosperity, sustainability and global engagement

We welcome the ambition for prosperity for all.

- We recommend exploring of **alternatives to GDP as measures of prosperity and suggest the OECD’s Beyond Growth work** as a useful reference point.
- We note there is limited reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Scotland’s existing measurement of indicators was developed in alignment with the SDGs target indicators and provides a strong foundation to assess progress in Scotland. **We recommend that the National Performance Framework (NPF) is clearly connected to the SDGs.**

- We note there is **also limited recognition of the global influences shaping Scotland's future**. Scotland should continue visible participation in global debates such as the UN climate and nature conferences and UNESCO education initiatives - and should engage in shaping the post-SDG global framework.

Our contribution through Learning for Sustainability Scotland

We are ready to support Scotland's Programme for Government through our **expertise, professional learning** and **national and international partnerships**.

We connect formal, non-formal and informal learning; support policymakers and educators to embed Learning for Sustainability; and work with communities to strengthen place-making and sustainability action.

As a pan-sectoral network organisation, we connect education, community, arts and culture to foster the critical, values-based and cultural understandings and actions needed to create positive change.

Through partnership, knowledge-sharing and evaluation, we can help to translate the Programme for Government's ambitions into practical action for people, planet and prosperity in Scotland.

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