

# From Policy to Practice: Education for Sustainable Development through the Lens of Looking at Our School 2022

Using the Take 1 Programme approach in  
learning and teaching

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**Valerie Lewis**

Take 1 Programme  
Director and Assistant  
Professor of Education  
for Sustainability, School  
of STEM Education,  
Innovation and Global  
Studies, Dublin City  
University

This article outlines the recent policy developments in the formal education space at post-primary level in Ireland, reflecting a global citizenship perspective. It examines the implementation of these policies and the achievement of their objectives and outputs, using the Take 1 Programme training and resources. It highlights the programme's capacity to support a whole-school approach of Education for Sustainable Development, which celebrates collaborative engagement and is inclusive of all learners.

## Introduction

Over the past 12 months, we have been experiencing and emerging from national and international crises, from a global pandemic to a war in Ukraine, and adjusting to all of the related and peripheral challenges that have impacted us personally and collectively. Educational developments which had been paused since 2020 are now coming on stream, with some being influenced by events from recent years. Global citizenship in particular has been redefined, and through various commitments we have witnessed a firm purpose to recognise and enhance the important impact of education on empowering learners to address these interconnected challenges (United Nations, 2015).

In June 2022 the 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development was launched by Ministers from the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). This engagement by three government departments, with education as part of their remit, shows a collective determination to achieve the objectives outlined in the strategy.

Building on the successes of the first Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) strategy, the second strategy provides a framework 'to steer and support the contribution that the education sector is making and will continue to make towards a sustainable future by 2030' (Government of Ireland, 2022). Aligned to it is a comprehensive implementation plan with a detailed roadmap to the planned engagement and actions shared in the strategy. It reflects the continuum of learning from early childhood to third level, and it acknowledges the learning that takes place in communities, youth groups, and other non-formal environments.

### Looking at Our School 2022

In August 2022, the Department of Education issued the latest iteration of Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools (Department of Education, 2022a). Designed for teachers and school leaders as a framework to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, and leadership and management, it is also intended to be used by schools as they engage in self-evaluation (SSE).

The text in this framework largely reflects the approach of the 2016 publication, but it also considers issues and challenges that have impacted education since then. Reflecting greater cohesion across the formal education sector, Looking at Our School (LAOS) supports the holistic nature of student needs and the broader aspects of learning and teaching, including those 'that became all the more significant as schools responded to the needs of their students in the context of COVID-19' (ibid., p.6).

One area seen as a focus of development has been that of learning, teaching, and engagement aligned to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). LAOS 2022 makes explicit reference to sustainability and reflects both student capacity and values and policies at management level.

In the Learning and Teaching dimension, Domain 1: Learner Outcomes, we see new text that recognises students as 'key contributors to our sustainable future', and through the curriculum their understanding of ESD and global citizenship issues is developed to enable them 'to act responsibly for a more sustainable world' (ibid., p.27). In Domain 2: Managing the Organisation of the Leadership and Management dimension, new text in the statements of effective practice ask that a school 'values and promotes a commitment to sustainable development and implements practices and policies that embed the principles of sustainability in the daily routines of the school' (ibid., p.38)

Standards	Statement of effective practice	Statement of highly effective practice
Students demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the post-primary curriculum	Students are recognised as key contributors to our sustainable future. In line with the curriculum, their understanding of environmental, social and economic issues and of active citizenship, with the associated rights and responsibilities in local and wider context is being developed. They are enabled to act responsibly for a more sustainable world.	Students are recognised as key contributors to our sustainable future. In line with the curriculum, their understanding of environmental, social and economic issues and of active citizenship, with the associated rights and responsibilities in local and wider context is being developed. <b>Students are enabled to contribute positively, actively and compassionately towards the creation of a more sustainable and just world.</b>

Figure 1: Statements of practice – Learning and teaching. Domain 1: Learner outcomes. *Looking at Our School 2022* (Department of Education, 2022a)

Standards	Statement of effective practice	Statement of highly effective practice
Manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice.	The school values and promotes a commitment to sustainable development and implements practices and policies that embed the principles of sustainability in the daily routines of the school.	The school <b>prioritises and promotes as a core value</b> , a commitment to sustainable development; <b>the school community collectively</b> develops and implements practices and policies that embed the principles of sustainability in the daily routines of the school.

Figure 2: Statements of practice – Leadership and Management. Domain 2: Managing the organisation. *Looking at Our School 2022* (Department of Education, 2022a)

## Take 1 Programme

The Take 1 Programme supports and enables the objectives of LAOS and the 2nd National Strategy on ESD, translating them from aspiration to action. Developed at Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) in 2019, it is an excellent example of an approach to learning and teaching about sustainability and global citizenship education, which is built in to the learning outcomes of the Junior Cycle curriculum.

Targeting post-primary senior leaders, initially in the Education and Training Boards sector, the Take 1 Programme introduces participants to ESD and then guides them through a process of embedding engagement through subject syllabuses. The training programme highlights how every student in every class, through every subject, can experience the interdependent nature and impact of ESD.

Following Take 1 Programme training, participants are encouraged to put their understanding into action in in-school activities. Take 1 Week, usually occurring annually in late November, is an opportunity for a comprehensive demonstration of engagement, where teachers are invited to teach one class group one lesson about one Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), over the course of one week. Activities can occur in the formal, non-formal, or informal school community and can demonstrate ongoing actions or the start of the school's ESD journey.

# Take 1 Programme

Education for Sustainable Development in Post Primary Schools



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

May Day for Sustainability offers the same opportunity during a single-day event, taking place in early May. Because of the embedded nature of the programme resources, however, learning and teaching about ESD can take place at any relevant stage of the subject syllabus throughout the school year.

### School actions and activities

Since the programme's launch in 2019, post-primary schools have engaged in actions and activities aligned to the breadth of the SDGs in a range of focused and whole-school approaches. The following summaries provide a sample.

*Sustainable Development Goals and everyday life in Roscommon Community College*

“ **Targeting post-primary senior leaders, initially in the Education and Training Boards sector, the Take 1 Programme introduces participants to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).** ”

Since the launch of the Take 1 Programme, Roscommon Community College (RCC) has been committed to embedding the SDGs across the curriculum. Closely aligned with their involvement in the WorldWide Global Schools and Green Schools programmes, they work hard to make students more aware of the importance of ESD and how the SDGs link to their everyday lives.

They are developing the biodiversity area to the rear of the school to create an active learning space and promote a culture of sustainability in the school that students and staff alike are proud of. Linking to SDG 15: Life on Land, the Learning for Life Class have reintroduced hens to the forest, and Civic, Social and Political Education classes have increased areas for pollinators through various planting initiatives. Supported by Coillte, they planted 100 native Irish trees to increase the size of the woodland, and Agricultural Science classes have planted potatoes for an autumn harvest. An SDG pathway of signs in English and Irish has been created along the corridor in the main school building, so the entire school community and visitors can see them daily.

Third-year students created a video linking the SDGs to everyday life in RCC and were amazed at how many examples they found. SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production is seen in action as rainwater is collected at the side of the school and used to water the flowers in the woodland and the flowers and vegetables in the polytunnel. Regular fundraising initiatives take place throughout the year, linking to Goal 1: No Poverty, while the LGBTI+ and allies group worked to promote Goal 5: Gender Equality and Goal 10: Decent Work and Economic Growth, helping the school to become accredited by Belong To as a Safe and Supportive School (Clancy, 2022).

Transition Year student Seán Allen had national success at SciFest and the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition with his project investigating how to find a more sustainable and cost-effective method of keeping nutrients in the soil. Seán will continue this project in Fifth Year ahead of

the SciFest finals in November. This project has numerous practical SDG links, particularly Goals 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 15: Life on Land. Meanwhile, Third Year students Bailey, Cian, and Aaron spent the year examining air quality around the school, measuring NO<sub>2</sub> levels and investigating the factors that affect air quality, linked to Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, Goal 13: Climate Action, and Goal 14: Life Below Water.

Engagement with education for sustainable development continues to grow in Roscommon Community College, and they are proud of the culture of sustainability which is growing in the school, helping the entire school community to become active global citizens.

#### *Limerick and Clare Education Board – community-wide engagement*

Earlier in 2022, in a demonstration of collaborative engagement with ESD, Gina O'Connor from Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board organised an orienteering event as part of a countywide engagement emphasising SDG 15: Life on Land – and availing of an opportunity to work with communities and organisations outside of the school sector. The event was supported by the Burren and Kilfinane Outdoor Education Centres.

Over 500 students from post-primary schools in Limerick and Clare went to Curraghchase Forest Park in County Limerick, a fantastic amenity covering 313 hectares of mixed woodlands, park land, and lakes that provide a rich habitat for a diverse range of animals and plants. Three separate orienteering courses were set out, with students competing in pairs. Conscious of living the spirit of SDG 15: Life on Land, the organisers promoted the message of 'leave no trace', ensuring that participants minimised their impact on their environment by encouraging a 'pack it in and pack it out' ethos.

**“ In a demonstration of collaborative engagement with Education for Sustainable Development (SDG), Gina O'Connor organised an orienteering event as part of a countywide engagement emphasising SDG 15: Life on Land. ”**

#### *Abbey Community College – our global goals journey*

Abbey Community College in Ferrybank, County Waterford, was an early adopter of the Take 1 Programme approach, joining the collective of schools around the country working to embed the SDGs in learning and teaching. Their aim has been to highlight the SDGs at whole-school level, encouraging all staff, not just Junior Cycle, to make connections between SDGs and their own subject specifications and curriculums.

Take 1 Week each year has been a positive addition to their academic calendar, highlighting the work their school is already doing to raise awareness of the global goals. At the start of their journey in 2019, the school chose one SDG to concentrate on as a whole-school endeavour. As they have progressed, they now realise that almost every lesson taught in school today can be linked directly to one of the 17 SDGs. This year Abbey Community College used the Take 1 Programme to promote the message of collaboration by highlighting the power of SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals, and SDG 4: Quality Education, promoting inclusive and equitable education for all.

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Continuing the SDG journey outside the classroom, the school's Global Citizenship Group have produced the podcast *Student Insights*, which explores global issues through interviews and discussions with students, staff, experts, and special guests. They believe that all voices matter, and they use the motto 'Your Best Self, Our Best World'.

### A lens for engagement

As these examples show, the Take 1 Programme can be applied at all levels, through all programmes, for all student cohorts. It can reflect many of the other aspirations and intentions of the LAOS framework, such as inclusion, student participation, and creativity. Influenced by the SDGs' central transformative promise to 'leave no one behind' (United Nations, 2015, p.1), its structure ensures it can reflect the need to take account of 'students' abilities, stage of development, identified strengths and learning needs' (Department of Education, 2022a, p.26) when considering the statements of practice within the domains.

**“ We await the introduction of the Senior Cycle subject 'Climate Action and Sustainable Development', which responds to student concerns and interests aligned to this topic.**

Aligned to the publication of an updated LAOS framework, schools will now also enter their third cycle of school self-evaluation. SSE will be used to 'identify and reflect on the impact of Covid-19' (Department of Education, 2022b, p.2) and take stock of the effectiveness of SSE to date. In this next phase, which runs from 2023 to 2026, context-specific priorities for teaching, learning, equity, and inclusion will be to the fore, as well as consideration of other national strategies, including the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (Government of Ireland, 2022).

This broad range of areas of attention are not intended to be viewed as additional layers, but rather have the potential to complement each other and, in some cases, be addressed in tandem. The Take 1 Programme provides a lens for this collaborative engagement, addressing student wellbeing, inclusion, and a responsive school curriculum, and reflecting schools as 'dynamic learning organisations' (Department of Education, 2022a, p.9).

In other curriculum developments, we await the introduction of the Senior Cycle subject Climate Action and Sustainable Development, which responds to student concerns and interests aligned to this topic. For students who will not have the prospect of studying this new subject, the Take 1 Programme provides an opportunity that can motivate and empower them to become informed, active citizens. With the capacity to complement this Senior Cycle development, the Take 1 Programme can work alongside this formal curriculum focus to highlight the interconnected nature of global citizenship.

## Towards a more just and sustainable world

The issues and information encompassed in ESD are wide-ranging and potentially complex, often informed solely by media headlines. The Take 1 model engages schools, students, and teachers in a flexible learning approach, ensuring they can adopt and adapt the programme as a built-in model that can be sustained as it grows. Visual and verbal feedback has shown strong evidence of the ease with which learning about sustainability can be integrated into the whole school environment. Each teacher has the relevant information to hand – this is ensured by providing a comprehensive training model and associated resources that map the learning outcomes to the SDGs. This approach supports the attainment of indicators set out in SDG 4.7 and meets the standards for teacher professional development outlined in Cosán (Teaching Council, 2016).

This embedded approach acknowledges and embraces the importance of learning about all 17 SDGs and how their interconnected nature is vital for their continued impact and success. At national level, the Department of Education currently funds the Take 1 Programme and considers it 'an important element of its 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development'. It works towards equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the 'what'), key dispositions and skills (the 'how'), and values (the 'why') that will inspire them to become informed active citizens (Government of Ireland, 2022, p.17).

Internationally the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contained a pledge that 'no one will be left behind' (United Nations, 2015, p.1). It is this principle of inclusion that underpins the spirit of the Take 1 Programme, and that aspires to translate the aims and objectives of policy into the responsibilities and actions of practice towards a more just and sustainable world.

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