



# Mapping Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at Trinity: Insights from Postgraduate Programmes

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## Context & Objectives

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a core institutional priority at Trinity College Dublin, articulated through the University's System Performance Agreement with the HEA (2024–2028). Indicator 1.2 made a commitment to increasing the **Proportion (%) of postgraduate (PG) programmes with ESD embedded in at least one module**. However, a systematic baseline of ESD integration across postgraduate curricula had not been established.

This project initially developed a **robust, transparent, and replicable methodology** to map ESD across PG programmes. Drawing on **Trinity's ESD Curriculum Design Framework** (Figure 1), the study examined module descriptors across a representative sample of postgraduate programmes to identify evidence of **ESD Themes, Competencies, and Pedagogical Approaches** embedded within the curriculum.

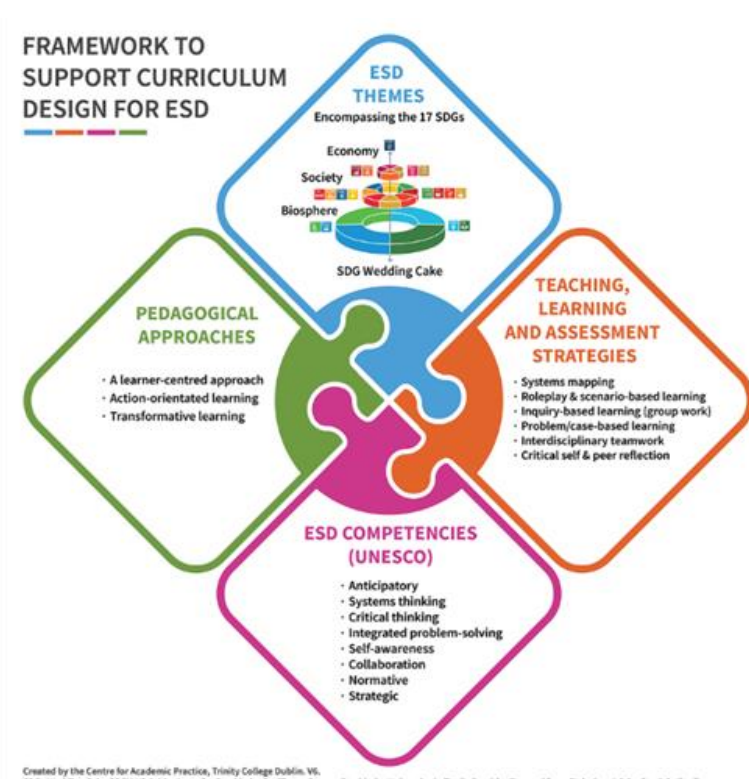


Figure 1. Trinity's ESD Curriculum Design Framework.

The primary objectives were to **establish a clear institutional baseline for postgraduate ESD activity**, support consistent HEA reporting, and **provide actionable insights to inform future curriculum enhancement**. Crucially, the mapping approach was designed to be descriptive and supportive, highlighting existing strengths within PG teaching while identifying opportunities to further embed sustainability in meaningful and discipline-appropriate ways.

The **methodology for mapping ESD** required the adoption of GenAI to extract evidence from module descriptors within postgraduate programme handbooks. Each programme was evaluated across the three dimensions (ESD Themes, Competencies, and Pedagogical Approaches), and the programme score was based on two stages:

1. Firstly, a **score for each dimension** is tabulated based on evidence of ESD Themes, Competencies, and Pedagogical Approaches, and this produces a **ESD score for each module**.
2. Then, an **aggregated score** is defined for the PG programme based on evidence relating to the **level of embeddedness of ESD within the PG programme**.

A sample scorecard that summarises the scores relating to the level of embeddedness of ESD in each module is presented in Figure 2. These scores are used to produce a **final programme score**.

MODULES DETAILS				MODULE SCORING			
No.	Code	Title	ECTS	ESD Themes	ESD Competencies	ESD Pedagogical Approaches	NORMALISED TOTAL SCORE
1	ABC101	Module 1	5	2	3	2	6
2	ABC102	Module 2	5	3	3	2	8
3	ABC103	Module 3	5	2	2	3	6
4	ABC104	Module 4	5	1	3	2	3
5	ABC105	Module 5	5	3	3	3	9
6	ABC106	Module 6	5	2	3	2	6

Figure 2. Sample of ESD Scorecard, with scores for each of the three ESD dimensions of scoring (ESD Themes, ESD Competencies, and ESD Pedagogical Approaches) for six Modules in a hypothetical programme.

## Key Outcomes & Impact

52 programmes of the 244 operating PG programmes in 2025/26 were identified to support the baseline mapping, of which **34 uniquely coded offerings were evaluated** (28No. Masters, 3No. P.Grad.Dip. and 3No. P.Grad.Cert. programmes). This included a representative sample of programmes across the three faculties, and a total of **303 modules were evaluated**.

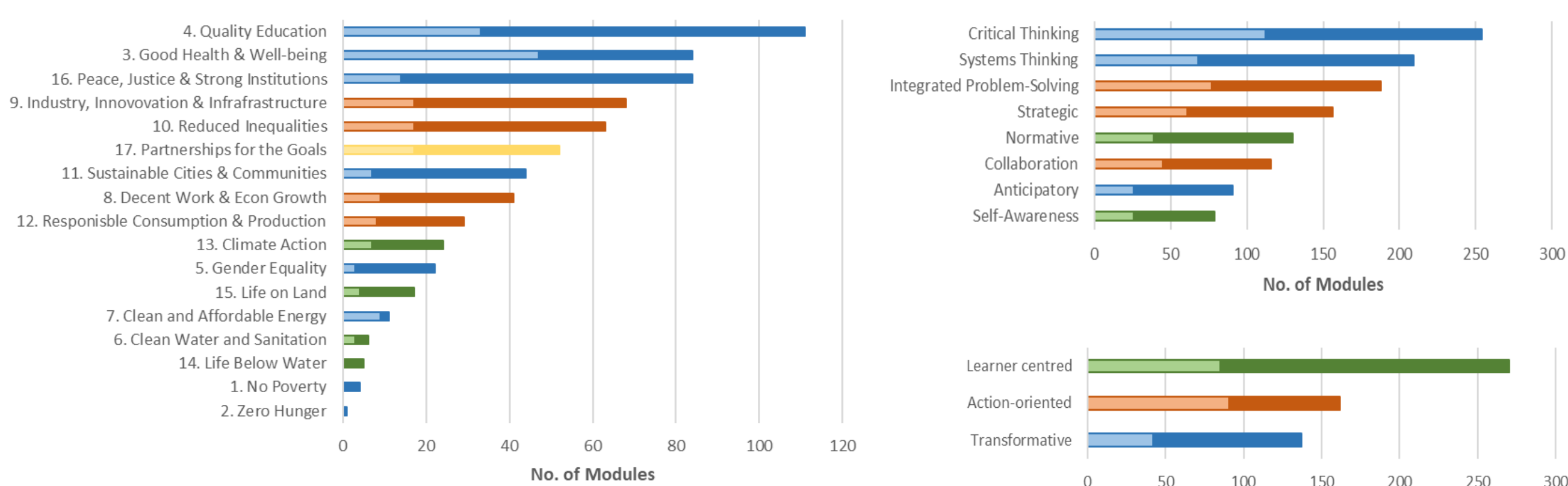


Figure 3. Summary of scores from 303 modules in which evidence of ESD Themes, Competencies, and Pedagogical Approaches (as fully embedded (3 - lighter shades) or partially embedded (2 - darker shades) exists).

- **10% of PG programmes demonstrate high levels of embedded ESD** in core modules.
- **Over half of the PG programmes** evaluated show moderate ESD embeddedness with strong competency development.
- **ESD competencies and pedagogical approaches** are well embedded across nearly all programmes.
- **Biosphere**-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remain the **most significant gap**.
- **Elective modules often strengthen ESD** exposure but do not guarantee consistency for students.
- This methodology supports HEA reporting and future scaling.

## Reflections

- GenAI tools substantially **improved efficiency**, but it is highly dependent on module descriptor quality.
- **Variability in module descriptors** limits consistent interpretation of ESD.
- ESD Mapping **revealed existing strengths**, not deficits, across PG teaching.
- **Small adjustments** to the curriculum could **significantly raise ESD performance** in PG programmes.
- The process has **encouraged productive dialogue** with programme teams (even indirectly).



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