

# Learning for Sustainability Scotland

## Scotland's UNU- recognised Regional Centre of Expertise in ESD

***‘Building and sustaining a movement for change’: Connecting, inspiring, engaging, informing and celebrating***

### Strategic Plan 2025-30

#### 1. CONTEXT

There is an undeniable need for a world that is more sustainable: where people and communities value and are engaged with the natural environment; societies are inclusive and equitable; and a vibrant economy contributes to flourishing ecosystems and social justice. We face significant global challenges with evidence that the world is not on track to meet the goals that have been set by member states of the United Nations<sup>1</sup>. We recognise the need to support learning *for* sustainable development and not merely *about* sustainability. We use the term Learning for Sustainability in Scotland to emphasise that we are working not only in formal education settings, but also in broader and lifelong contexts. However, we align with the understanding of Education for Sustainable Development held by UNESCO and many other actors.

*Education for sustainable development (ESD) gives learners of all ages the knowledge, skills, values and agency to address interconnected global challenges including climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable use of resources, and inequality. It empowers learners of all ages to make informed decisions and take individual and collective action to change society and care for the planet. ESD is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education. It enhances the cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning and encompasses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself. [\(UNESCO 2024\)](#)*

Scotland has a long-standing commitment to Learning for Sustainability involving all aspects of learning: formal (e.g. schools, colleges, universities), non-formal (e.g. youth, adult, community, business) and informal (e.g. home, leisure). Concepts have been built upon contributions of distinguished Scottish thinkers including Sir Patrick Geddes who is widely associated with the concept of sustainability and the notion of ‘thinking globally, acting locally’; conservationists such as John Muir who pioneered the National Parks movement; and ecologists such as Professor John Smyth who co-wrote the education chapter of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

The UN’s Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD 2005-14) catalysed activity in all sectors through two Action Plans co-ordinated by the Scottish Government. As the Decade came to an end, the LfS community in Scotland considered that the establishment of a Scotland-wide United Nations University recognized Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) was the most appropriate way to continue the work of promoting and supporting the concept

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Summit of the Future 2024 <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/about>

and practice of LfS in Scotland. The proposal to create Scotland's RCE, the product of the work of a broad and committed community of interest, was accepted unconditionally by the United Nations University in December 2012.

Since its inception the activities of Scotland's UN University recognized RCE - Learning for Sustainability Scotland, have contributed to the Global Action Programme (GAP 2015-2019) on ESD and the UNESCO ESD for 2030 Framework<sup>2</sup> and Roadmap<sup>3</sup> (2020). ESD is acknowledged as a key enabler for all 17 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030.

Our Strategy contributes to the Global RCE Network's 'Roadmap for the RCE Community 2021–2030' which identifies four strategic priority areas for RCEs globally: Serving as local and regional hubs for ESD and showing leadership for innovation; Strengthening the association of RCE activities with SDGs and ESD framework; Expanding knowledge sharing and outreach; Monitoring progress of RCE achievements<sup>4</sup>.

In Scotland, our Strategy acknowledges and contributes to the development and implementation of key emerging policy ambitions such as Scotland's National Performance Framework<sup>5</sup> and Scotland's national Learning for Sustainability Action Plan: 'Target 2030: a movement for people, planet and prosperity'<sup>6</sup>.

Scotland's UN University recognized RCE - Learning for Sustainability Scotland, is hosted by the University of Edinburgh and is part of an extensive and growing global network of more than 190 RCEs (September 2024), allowing regions to share and learn from each other, and establish or strengthen international partnerships and collaboration. As a membership organisation, we inspire, inform and enable those pursuing learning for sustainability in formal (e.g. school, college, university), non-formal (e.g. youth, community, business) and informal (e.g. culture, media) contexts in Scotland and beyond. Our role is to work co-operatively across all forms of learning to advance the understanding and practice of Learning for Sustainability with our members, in communities across Scotland and in collaboration with local and global partners.

## **2. PURPOSE**

### **2.1 Vision**

Our vision is for Learning for Sustainability to inspire, inform, and enable a Scotland where we respect and restore nature; societies are thriving, inclusive and equitable; and a vibrant economy delivers prosperity and shared opportunities.

### **2.2 Mission**

Our mission is to work in partnership to harness the transformative potential of Learning for Sustainability

---

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO [Framework for the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development](#) (ESD) (2019)

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO [ESD for 2030: A Roadmap](#) (2020)

<sup>4</sup> UNU-IAS [Roadmap for the RCE Community 2021-30](#) (2020)

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government [National Performance Framework](#)

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government [Target 2030: People, planet and prosperity](#) (2023)

## 2.3 What do we do?

- We **weave connections** across sectors within Scotland and with our international partners
- We **co-produce new knowledge and share skills and resources**
- We **advocate and provide strategic advice** for effective learning for sustainability policy
- We lead, monitor and evaluate **projects and programmes**
- We **seek resources to support our innovative activities**

## 2.4 How do we work?

In line with our vision and mission, we recognise that Learning for Sustainability is about considering and embodying our values as much as the projects we run. As a network, we recognise the benefits of collaborative gain and partnership working. We work strategically, in partnership, to achieve our vision and believe that by adopting the following principles we will be better able to achieve our Mission and Objectives.

**Collaboration** – recognising that we can achieve our aims through working together; acknowledging that we may share a broad vision and ethos but seeing that we may have different perspectives on pathways to sustainability

**Respect** – for ourselves, for each other, for our members, for the community and for the natural environment of Scotland and beyond

**Integrity** - in our intentions and behaviour; respecting and being true to our roles and responsibilities whilst declaring conflicts of interest where appropriate

**Creativity** – in our thinking and action; drawing on the heritage of indigenous and New Scots and of our international friends, engaging with arts and culture, enabling us to envision and innovate for a sustainable future

**Compassion** – for ourselves, others and the non-human world, seeking kind interactions with others and attempting to heal hurts across generations, nations and groups

## 3. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

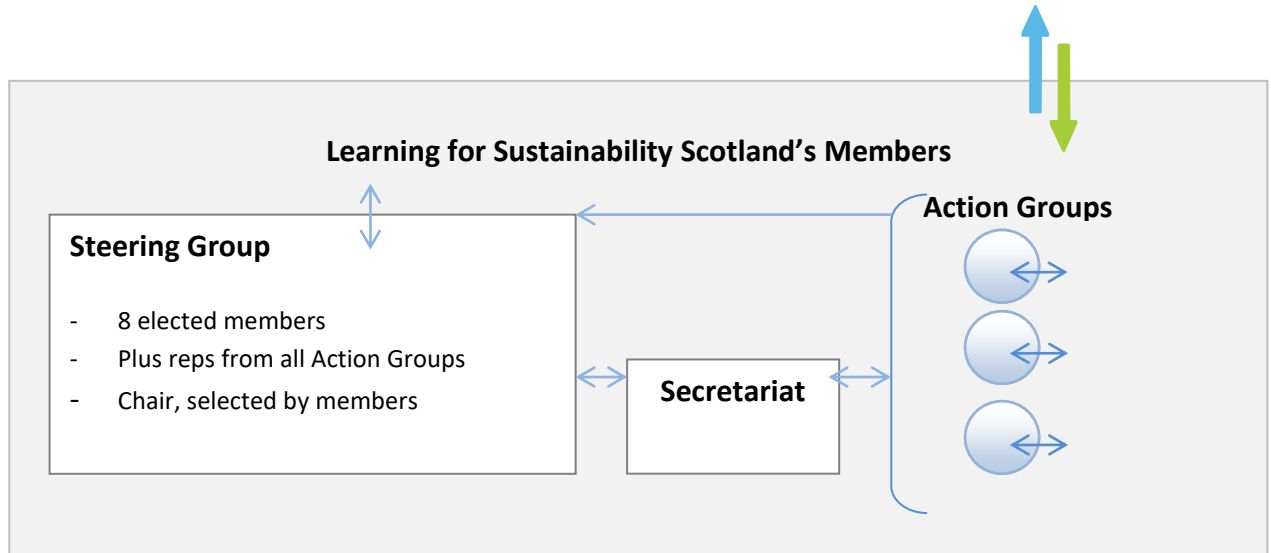
Learning for Sustainability Scotland (LfS Scotland) is shaped collectively by the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) community in Scotland. Its work is underpinned by the principles of equity, openness, co-operation and transparency.

The governance and management structure that has been established is intended to enable members, no matter what their working sector or the size of their organisation, to come together on an equitable basis to work co-operatively to advance LfS knowledge and practice, sharing learning nationally and internationally. The structure is also intended to ensure that all viewpoints can be heard, all perspectives considered and that policy-making is based on the best available expertise. The structure will be regularly reviewed to ensure that the

aspirations of LfS Scotland are being met.

### 3.1 Membership

Membership of LfS Scotland is open to individuals and organisations in Scotland that contribute to Learning for Sustainability in Scotland, adhering to the organisation's Vision,



Mission and Objectives. Members complete an application form but membership is free; members may pay a differential rate for non-funded events and seminars.

Members of LfS Scotland are entitled to attend LfS Scotland events, participate in initiatives and vote in the decision-making processes of the LfS Scotland including the Annual Meeting of members at which the Steering Group will be elected. Members will be given at least 21 days notice of the date of the Annual Meeting. The quorum at an Annual Meeting shall be at least 8 members. This number may be reviewed at an Annual Meeting. All questions arising at any meeting shall be decided by a simple majority vote of those present. In the case of an equality of votes, the Chair of the meeting will have a casting vote. However, it will be a principle of all decision-making that consensus will be sought wherever possible.

### 3.2 Steering Group

The purpose of the LfS Scotland Steering Group is to represent members, providing strategic advice and direction to support Learning for Sustainability Scotland's Vision, Mission and Objectives by:

- Ensuring that activities undertaken by Learning for Sustainability Scotland meet with its agreed Vision, Mission and Objectives
- Providing expertise, advice and support to the Secretariat in delivering the Vision, Mission and Objectives
- Contributing to the development of the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plans
- Signing off the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plans on behalf of members
- Encouraging and approving Action Group initiation and receiving Action Group reports
- Receiving and reviewing progress and financial reports as appropriate
- Helping to strengthen and extend the membership of LfS Scotland
- Helping to build the profile of LfS Scotland nationally and internationally

- Providing expertise, advice and support to secure the organisational and financial sustainability of LfS Scotland

### **3.2.1 Steering Group - Membership**

The Steering Group is responsible to the members and will normally meet at least 4 times a year. The Steering Group will consist of elected members and Task Group representatives. At the Annual Meeting members will elect a maximum of 8 representatives from the membership, for a two year term, to steer LfS Scotland on their behalf. Should the number of members willing to serve on the Steering Group exceed 8, selection will be by secret ballot. Members willing to serve on the Steering Group should inform the Secretariat of their intention at least 7 days before the Annual Meeting. Any member willing to continue to serve on the Steering Group after a two-year term can present themselves for re-election. Because there is a risk to continuity and organisational memory in the case of a new Steering Group being elected, the new Group will have to right to co-opt one or more members from the previous Group for a period of one year. Each Action Group will also elect one member to represent them on the Steering Group.

Steering Group members will elect one of their number as Chair and one as Vice Chair of the Group. All questions arising at any meeting shall be decided by a simple majority vote of those present. In the case of an equality of votes, the Chair of the meeting will have a casting vote. However, it will be a principle of all decision making that consensus will be sought wherever possible. Members of the Secretariat will participate in the Steering Group as non-voting members. Additional non-voting members will be invited to attend Steering Group meetings and may be coopted onto the Group to provide expertise as required.

### **3.2.2 Steering Group Chair - Role**

The role of the Steering Group Chair is to:

- Act as principal contact between the Steering Group and the Secretariat
- Create meeting agendas, in association with the Secretariat
- Chair meetings of the Steering Group, LfS Scotland Conference and other appropriate meetings
- Sign off draft minutes of Steering Group meetings before circulation
- Sign off communications, statements and decisions such as policy consultation responses, briefings and statements to the media, made by LfS Scotland on behalf of its members.
- Sign letters on behalf of LfS Scotland
- Act as primary media spokesperson for LfS Scotland.

The Vice Chair will represent the Chair in this role when required.

### **3.3 Action Groups**

The purpose of LfS Scotland's Action Groups is to enable members and the Secretariat to work individually or together to carry out specific pieces of work or projects that relate to the Vision, Mission and Objectives of LfS Scotland.

There are two types of member-led Action Groups: Task Groups and Interest Groups. Operational Groups are internal to the Steering Group and led by the Secretariat.

### **3.3.1 Task Groups**

Task Groups are initiated by members according to need and interest. They are not time limited or time bound, but are likely to focus on specific tasks with a defined purpose and outputs.

The LfS Scotland Steering Group will receive and approve applications to initiate a Task Group to ensure that the work of the Task Groups is aligned with the Vision, Mission and Objectives of LfS Scotland. Task Groups may be commissioned by the Steering Group for specific strategic purposes. Each Task Group will appoint one of its members to represent it on the Steering Group and attend LfS Scotland Steering Group meetings. This representative will report on the work of their Task Group to other Steering Group members to ensure continued alignment with the Vision, Mission and Objectives of LfS Scotland and the on-going co-ordination of work across Task Groups.

A nominated contact person from the LfS Scotland Secretariat will liaise with a nominated contact person from each Task Group assisting with the development of their Work Plans and funding proposals. This will ensure Task Group plans are presented in a consistent manner and LfS Scotland fundraising activities are coordinated.

A Communications Protocol will be agreed between each Task Group and the Secretariat setting out how general communications between group members will take place, how external communications (e.g. with government, media and funders) will take place and who will take responsibility for these. The Communications Protocol will also include an agreement on the use of logos and LfS Scotland letterhead. All Communication Protocols will be subject to the agreement and sign off of the Steering Group.

### **3.3.2 Task Group Responsibilities**

Each Task Group will be responsible for:

- Identifying the LfS Scotland members involved in the Task Group and communicating this to the LfS Scotland Steering Group via the Secretariat
- Appointing a person to represent the Task Group on the LfS Scotland Steering Group
- Appointing a nominated contact person to take responsibility for liaising with the Secretariat
- With support from the Secretariat, developing a Work Plan for the Task Group identifying:
  - how the Group's work will contribute to LfS Scotland objectives
  - the Group's objectives, the activities that will be carried out, the intended results and timescale
  - the resources (people, funding or other) needed to carry out the work and how these will be secured
- In liaison with the Secretariat, develop funding proposals and funding applications to secure resources required
- Reporting to funders where required

- Undertaking the proposed activities to the agreed budget and timescale
- Agreeing a Communications Protocol to be approved by the Steering Group
- Providing quarterly financial and progress reports for LfS Scotland Steering Group meetings
- Contributing to the LfS Scotland Annual Work Plan

### **3.3.3 Interest Groups**

Interest Groups are initiated by members according to need and interest. They are not time limited or time bound, but are likely to be topic or sector-focused with a defined purpose. They must provide updates to the Steering Group quarterly.

### **3.3.4 Operational Groups**

Operational Groups are led by the Secretariat, with members drawn from the Steering Group. They must provide updates to the Steering Group quarterly.

### **3.4 Secretariat**

The Secretariat is responsible to members through the Steering Group, and comprises staff and members of LfS Scotland, with specific skills, who are co-opted through the Steering Group. The Secretariat will be managed by the Director of LfS Scotland, who will be a member of staff from the host organisation. The Director of LfS Scotland will be responsible for ensuring that the running of LfS Scotland complies with the legal, financial and charitable standards of the host organisation.

## **4. RESOURCES**

### **4.1 Host organisation**

In the two years prior to the establishment of LfS Scotland, the University of Edinburgh provided financial and administrative support for the development of the LfS Scotland application. Since its establishment in 2013, the University of Edinburgh has generously hosted LfS Scotland and provides administrative support as an in-kind contribution.

The in-kind support from the University of Edinburgh includes the provision of office accommodation for the LfS Scotland staff within the Moray House School of Education and Sport campus, Edinburgh and full servicing for the Centre including payroll, HR, telephone and internet, IT support and the use of the University's meeting spaces. LfS Scotland staff salaries are underwritten by the University of Edinburgh. LfS Scotland operates under the University of Edinburgh's charitable status. This avoids the need for LfS Scotland to audit and report its activities separately to meet the requirements of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulators (OSCR). Instead, the activities and financial transactions of LfS Scotland are included in the University of Edinburgh OSCR return, removing a significant financial and administrative burden from LfS Scotland.

Whilst LfS Scotland is housed within the University of Edinburgh, it is an autonomous body, with its own Vision, Mission, Objectives and strategic decision-making power. As part of the hosting agreement with the University of Edinburgh, and as a condition of LfS Scotland operating under the University's charitable status, LfS Scotland is expected to operate in a manner compliant with the University's internal HR and accounting procedures, policies and regulations.

## 4.2 Staff

The current (2024) LfS Scotland Secretariat comprises:

- Director of Learning for Sustainability Scotland – Dr Beth Christie (from June 2024). The Director is appointed by the host organisation, and is responsible for managing LfS Scotland staff and ensuring that the running of LfS Scotland complies with the legal, financial and charitable standards of the host organisation. The Director's post is supported by the University of Edinburgh, allowing Dr Christie to give time to LfS Scotland.
- Learning for Sustainability Scotland Development Manager (0.6 FTE) – Betsy King (from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013)
- Learning for Sustainability Scotland Project Manager (1 FTE) – Kirsten Leask (from January 2019)
- Learning for Sustainability Scotland Administration and Finance Officer (0.7 FTE) Jenny Haggarty (from January 2018)

The Secretariat works with members to develop and coordinate LfS Scotland initiatives and support the development of core LfS Scotland business. Project staff will be appointed to conduct funded programmes, as required.

## 5. Work Plan 2025

5 year objectives and goals	2025 activities
<b>1. We weave connections across sectors within Scotland and with our international partners</b>	
1.1 Increase engagement in LfS in Scotland across all sectors	
1.2 Share knowledge, achievements and opportunities for members	
1.3 Organise and co-host events for members, within and across sectors	
1.4 Co-ordinate Action Groups to address issues of concern and interest for our members	
1.5 Share our learning with others across the UN RCE Network	
1.6 Engage partners in our goals, governance and activities	
<b>2. We co-produce new knowledge and share skills and resources</b>	
2.1 Play a leading role in debating, enabling and monitoring the UN SDGs in Scotland and beyond (especially but not exclusively SDG 4.7)	
2.2 Contribute to the conceptualisation as well as the practice in this field	
2.3 Develop and facilitate professional development for educators	



<b>3. We advocate and provide strategic advice for effective learning for sustainability policy</b>	
3.1 Lead on and contribute to policy debates In Scotland, UK and internationally	
3.2 Provide advice to practitioners, policy and decision makers	
3.3 Lead and contribute to expert groups to address LfS issues	
3.4 Work with local authorities for progress across Scotland in sustainability capacities	
<b>4. We lead, monitor and evaluate projects and programmes</b>	
4.1 Pursue the implementation of LfS in the school sector, including teacher education at all stages	
4.2 Support learning in communities and the Third Sector	
4.3 Engage with the Further Education and Higher Education sectors to integrate and embed LfS	
4.4 Undertake consultancy projects to progress LfS	
<b>5. We seek resources to support our innovative activities</b>	
5.1 Develop partnership funding proposals	