



Learners explore climate change and get hands-on with flood defence systems during a 'Ready for Emergencies' learning event.

Every school day, 677,000 unique children and young people arrive in their place of learning. They all have ambitions and hopes for the future, just as we do for them.

As teachers and educators, we have the privilege and opportunity to inspire a generation of learners. We can help them to want to learn – to develop that lifelong passion for learning that's at the heart of success. That passion can influence their families and communities too. And indeed, if we achieve this then Scotland will become the kind of equitable and successful country we think it can.

Learning for sustainability is now a core part of the GTCS Professional Standards for all practitioners and school leaders. Read on to find out how you can embed learning for sustainability within your professional values and actions.





Credit: GfL & LTL, Malcolm Cochrane

We can be proud of the commitment to learning for sustainability (LfS) shown by our staff in schools, early learning and childcare settings. We have embedded social justice and children's rights in our professional standards and that's leading to strong practice. Our Eco-Schools programme is seen as world-leading with around 50% of local authority schools now having achieved Green Flag status, and our successes are recognised by UNESCO no less. That's a lot to celebrate, but we're not complacent. So this discussion paper seeks to raise awareness further by exploring how LfS is key to the kind of learning that will inspire children and young people to want to learn – namely great learning.

WHAT IS LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY?

LfS is concerned with knowing and understanding our world and about equipping children and young people with values, knowledge, attitudes, capabilities and skills to enable them to contribute effectively to the common good.

The term 'learning for sustainability' may be relatively new but the substance of what it represents will be very familiar. Many schools, early learning and childcare settings will know it as [global citizenship](#) and will rightly connect it with the work they are doing in, for example, [outdoor learning](#), [children's rights](#), [sustainable development education](#), [international education](#) or [education for citizenship](#). LfS is both a theme across all areas of the curriculum and an approach to learning within it. It weaves together many of the ideas you can see in the word cloud opposite, and at its best it turns these into coherent rewarding experiences.

Learning for sustainability is about who we are and the type of communities and world we want to live in. It is about improving the quality of life and wellbeing of all. It is very much about the here and now, the present day, but also about the future.





Diagram 1: Learning for sustainability word cloud





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Activities led by Eco-Schools Scotland, Fairtrade, UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools, Connecting Classrooms, John Muir Award, and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme have introduced many of us to LfS, as have many other such programmes. The health and wellbeing curriculum is rich with LfS, and the vibrant legacy of the [Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games](#) has had a profound impact on many. Learning outside of school has also contributed. This learning is often delivered in partnership with youth work organisations, community development trusts and voluntary groups. It can also involve family learning.

We know that when everyone involved has commitment, enthusiasm and gives leadership, then LfS comes alive and learners are inspired. As such, LfS is now embedded in the GTCS Standards for Registration, Career-Long Professional Learning and Leadership and Management – this is a major step forward because it will help all practitioners to become confident in their knowledge and understanding of the challenges facing society locally and globally.

In summary, a whole school and community approach is one that impacts on the curriculum, campus, community and culture of the establishment.

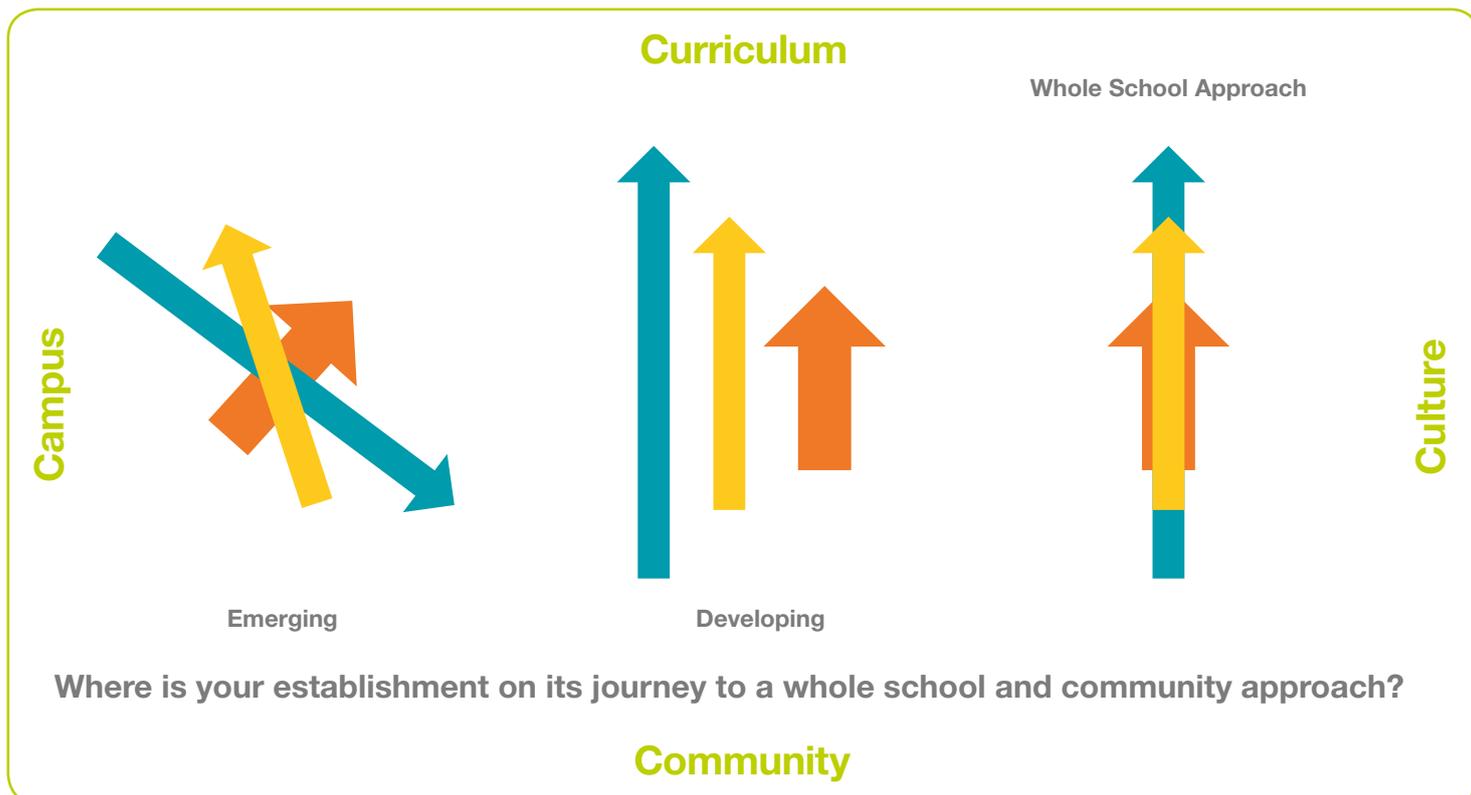
WHAT IS A WHOLE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY APPROACH?

A whole school and community approach to LfS develops professional practice and enables all involved to take decisions which promote a sustainable and equitable world. It is one where LfS is 'hard-wired' into the curriculum, right in the very fabric of school life, through which it reaches every learner. It also involves the local community and it harnesses the community experiences provided. Buildings and grounds can also reflect the ethos and principles of LfS, and in so doing promote awareness. This might include, for instance, how they are managed to protect the environment, or enable community partnership activities, or indeed provide opportunities for everyone to have contact with nature.



WHY IS IT CALLED LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY?

The [One Planet Schools Working Group](#) was established in 2011 to provide advice and guidance in this area. It offered 'learning for sustainability' as a useful term to simplify and bring coherence to the language being used by different agencies. Its aim was to help schools, early learning and childcare settings see how global citizenship, outdoor learning, and sustainable development education activities overlapped and could be joined up. The group wanted to help schools weave all of these themes together so that the collective impact would be greater than the sum of the parts. It recognised that a whole school and community approach is best achieved when the themes contained within LfS are fully connected and aligned.



Scottish Government Ministers have accepted the recommendations outlined in the [Learning for Sustainability](#) report produced by the One Planet Schools Working Group:

1. **All learners** should have an entitlement to learning for sustainability.
2. In line with the new GTCS Professional Standards, **every practitioner**, school and education leader should demonstrate learning for sustainability in their practice.
3. **Every school** should have a whole school approach to learning for sustainability that is robust, demonstrable, evaluated and supported by leadership at all levels.
4. **All school buildings**, grounds and policies should support learning for sustainability.
5. A strategic national approach to supporting learning for sustainability should be established.





WHAT IS GREAT LEARNING IN LfS?

Great learning is an ambition for all of us, but it is not a definition. It might occur when children and young people are inspired by their learning experiences so that they become self-motivated to learn. There is a growing recognition that LfS is now everyone's business, and as such is becoming key to improvement across the curriculum. It can help improve achievement, ethos and relationships. It can help focus on tackling inequity by building partnerships with parents and the community, and it can promote essential skills for learning, life and work.

What then might great learning in LfS look and feel like? To help us find out, let's see what children and young people, parents and community members, practitioners and education leaders said during conversations in 2014. These are recorded in Education Scotland's [Conversations about Learning for Sustainability](#) report which was produced to mark the end of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

You might like to discuss these conversation notes with others.

“ In this school, they know the trick to make you learn and pay attention.”
Learner

Touching the heart, hands and head – LfS is the very fabric of who we are. It is about personal values and the ethos of the communities in which we live. It is about our collective spirit and what we hold dear. Learning which touches the heart will endure. Learners speak about learning that will ‘last a lifetime’ and learning ‘that they would remember for ever’. The hands have a role to play too – learners and staff speak of the wonder learners had of squeezing mud through their fingers or walking barefoot on the grass. These are the first experiences of coming to understand nature and being able to connect physically to our landscapes and environment. As for the head – if we are to cherish the world, love it and care for it then we first need to know and understand it. We need the facts and knowledge and we need to understand how it works and how we can change things.



Credit: John Muir Award, Katrina Martin

“ Forest School is a great leveller. Children who have ASN can excel outdoors as they can share their skills. We have a group of boys who are very motivated outside and produce a much higher standard of work.”
Headteacher



Leading learning – If children and young people are to contribute to their communities and schools, and change the world, then they need to learn about leadership. In early learning and childcare settings learners are leading learning. Some lead expeditions into the woods on adventures. Others choose to stay in one spot for over an hour and gaze at the sky. In each case, the learner is in control and completely immersed in the experience. Learners' views are listened to carefully resulting in the ongoing transformation of their establishment grounds into magical places that are connected to nature. In secondary schools, learners are engaging in learning rounds, observing lessons and making suggestions as to how learning can be improved for all. Great learning occurs when young people are listened to and given the chance to lead their learning. This builds confidence in young people and gives them a sense of their abilities.

“ Instead of being stuck inside and being given a book, we get to actually do it.”
Learner

Learning by doing – Learners speak passionately about the importance of ‘doing stuff’ or learning by doing. They value opportunities to be active citizens and to engage in learning that is relevant to their lives and to their future. Practitioners say that learning about rights creates an ethos of mutual respect and trust. It helps them reduce low level disruption and create a climate where young people are ready to learn. Children with additional support needs learn about risk and resilience by struggling up a muddy hill in their school grounds. They then show leadership by helping others to the top. They also speak about launching a successful campaign targeted at politicians to make their school entrance safer. Learners in primary school brim with pride as they speak about how they are transforming their school and about the challenges they encounter and overcome. In secondary schools, learners speak of how opportunities to visit partner schools and communities overseas ‘change their lives’. These learning experiences are very real and highly motivating for learners. School leaders speak of how engaged learners are in their learning and how the quality of work and attainment improves. Teachers and parents report how learners ‘are never absent’ because they love school so much.

“ I loved being part of the school community and looking after it. I hope to take what I learned in the Eco-Schools committee into the world.”
Former learner



MAKING CONNECTIONS

A group of learners took part in a 2014 Commonwealth Games challenge. They researched and analysed the United Nations [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs), which they re-worked and performed as a rap. The MDGs provided an opportunity to make connections between extreme poverty around the world and how individual actions can make a difference. By studying the values and aspirations that unite many countries, learners came to appreciate the need for mutual respect and solidarity. Making contact with children in other countries increased their empathy and helped develop their communication skills. It also motivated them to raise awareness and take action in their local community.



Making connections across countries and cultures allows children and young people to foster mutual respect, friendship and solidarity.





Collaborative and social – Great learning in LfS is about building positive relationships and ethos and building safe, happy and healthy communities. LfS is fundamentally social in nature and is about creating a strong common purpose based on common values. Interactive and participative approaches are fundamental to LfS, whether in the classroom or outdoors. They provide a means for addressing real life, and often controversial, issues. Practitioners report that LfS activities are very effective in developing social and communication skills of learners. Special schools report that children with autistic spectrum disorders are more likely to engage in group work and collaborate with peers when engaged in outdoor learning. Other establishments report an enhanced community cohesiveness and spirit.

“ Parents are much more likely to send their kids here now. I think every school should be doing similar so everyone can benefit. I love the way they work together.”
Parent



Credit: Food for Life Scotland

S1 pupils at Currie Community High School in Edinburgh, foraging for wild foods in their school grounds.

“ I am being educated through him! He's telling me so much about rights across the world.”
Parent





Parents from Thornlie Primary School, Wishaw, pitch in to dig an artistic trench in the school grounds.

Connecting to our communities – Outdoor learning is helping to bridge the gap between schools and the communities which they serve. Providing learners with opportunities to get to know people locally gives them a chance to participate in community transformation and to develop pride in where they live. Early learning and childcare settings take children into the community regularly to visit local parks, charity shops and recycling facilities. Older learners visit homes for the elderly to participate in intergenerational learning. Others support community allotments and garden projects. Taking learning outdoors opens up many opportunities for great learning. When this happens in conjunction with learning about issues like globalisation, interdependence or rights, it allows young people to broaden their horizons. They begin to critically explore the complexities and different levels at which issues can play out in their local and global communities.

Involving parents – Parents and practitioners recognise the importance of developing children and young people as moral, social and ethical human beings. They appreciate that they are ‘developing the very qualities they will need to use throughout their lives’. Schools, early learning and childcare settings are involving families in transforming their grounds. Parents and grandparents all pitch in, digging ground to plant vegetables or trees. The project becomes a community enterprise and those involved develop a sense of ownership. The enhanced grounds become a resource for the whole community and incidences of vandalism decrease. In some cases parents engage more closely in their child’s learning – as volunteers on the forest school programme, or by supporting visits into the community. It provokes parents to think about their approach to parenting and the responsibility, space, freedom and experiences they provide for their children.



Interdisciplinary – John Muir, the Scottish-born conservationist, once said, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” Great learning in LfS is about understanding how interconnected everything is. It is inherently interdisciplinary.

Great learning in LfS helps learners understand that, as consumers, we are connected to people, societies and economies around the world. It provides learners with the opportunities to draw on their learning within the disciplines and to apply it in new ways to find creative solutions. Climate change, for instance, requires more than just knowledge of science; it requires a deep understanding of human behaviour, technology, society

and the global economy. The teaching of higher order thinking skills allows learners to make connections between related areas of climate change and produces learners capable of thinking creatively and analytically. They understand systems thinking and recognise that changing things in a piecemeal way will never bring about the desired results.

“ Children have ownership of learning and have a say in what they want to achieve and can do. That has a direct impact on attainment and achievement.”

Principal teacher



When teachers love it – Teachers and leaders report that engaging with learning for sustainability has given them greater enjoyment of teaching, more freedom to be creative and follow their own passions. They speak of loving their job and how much they value the responsibilities and trust they have been given. In some cases school leaders report that this has even translated into a reduction of staff absence due to increased professional satisfaction. Great learning in LfS occurs when teachers find their own passions for learning and plan thought-provoking and innovative experiences for learners. The practitioners enter into a virtuous cycle where inspired learners inspire great practice on the part of their teachers.

“ Staff find it really motivating to take on responsibility. Your job is different every day and exciting and challenging. We need to be the same way as we expect of learners.”

Teacher



Activity 1

What does great learning in LfS look like?

Start as you mean to go on! Find creative ways to take these professional learning activities outdoors – either into your school grounds, local greenspace or community. You may also wish to involve learners, parents and members of the community.

1. Share inspirational occasions where learners showed great enthusiasm and motivation for learning or surpassed expectations. Reflect collectively on what makes these experiences transformative or 'great'. Compare examples identified with those offered by learners and parents.
2. Write the term 'learning for sustainability' and post it where your group can see it – on a flipchart, wall or the ground. Around the central text, record the words and phrases that the group associate with this term.
3. Compare the words and phrases identified by the group with those listed in the LfS word cloud (diagram 1). What are the similarities and differences? In what ways are the terms listed consistent with the principles and values of Curriculum for Excellence? Evaluate the breadth of learning across LfS themes taking place in your establishment.
4. Arrange learning conversations with children and young people, staff, parents and members of the wider community. Invite them to share their views and understanding of LfS. What impact do they see it as having on values, attitude to learning, skills development, community partnerships and raising attainment? How are their views about impact supported through evidence gathered by the school?
5. Split into groups and allocate a different curriculum area to each one. Invite participants to develop web diagrams which demonstrate how LfS themes and approaches can be developed creatively through the experiences and outcomes within their allocated curriculum areas. Discuss how a strategic approach to planning can support this type of learning across the experiences and outcomes. How can LfS support transitions? How can progression be tracked?
6. Identify a social, economic or environmental issue that has real relevance to your learners. In partnership with them, and with parents and community partners, construct a learning experience which opens up great learning. Use the outputs from the activities above to guide the planning. Ensure you build in effective evaluation to measure impact. After the learning has taken place, reflect on the core principles and approaches that can help transform every day learning experiences.



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Activity 2

How do I demonstrate professional commitment to LfS?

1. Individually, recall a teacher who brought learning to life or demonstrated LfS in their practice. Share thoughts with the group about the attributes and values they had and the impact they made. Record these visually. Now invite the group to reflect on their own personal values. What are they and how do they define teaching styles? How can they be embedded into professional practice?
2. Imagine learning for sustainability was not permitted in Scottish schools. How would this change:
 - Relationships in the establishment?
 - Contexts which had been chosen for learning?
 - Engagement with parents and external partners?
 - The overall experiences of the learners?
3. Learning for sustainability is integral to the GTCS's Professional Standards Framework. Visit the [GTCS website](#) for reflective questions to support self-evaluation.
4. As individuals, reflect on the words and phrases in the LfS word cloud (diagram 1). Identify the themes regarded as a strength or personal passion. Similarly, identify areas where further professional learning may be required. Share these with the group to create two lists entitled 'strengths/passions' and 'professional learning needs'.
5. Using the output from above, identify areas where staff can support each other or use their strengths and passions to contribute to the development of LfS. Similarly, identify areas where groups of staff have a particular need for collective professional learning. Use this to develop a strategy to build capacity in your school. How can this be supported on an ongoing basis through the professional review and development process?
6. How are you ensuring that the entitlement of all learners in your classes or care in relation to LfS is being met? What evidence can you provide to demonstrate this is the case?



The beauty of all this work is how it has brought the school together.

Teacher



Activity 3

How are we progressing towards a whole school and community approach to LfS?

1. Write 'our approach to learning for sustainability' in the centre of a piece of paper or interactive whiteboard. In a radial pattern around the central phrase, list all the activities and ways LfS is being taken forward in your school, early learning or childcare setting. Remember to consider the four Cs within your establishment – curriculum, campus, community and culture.
2. Using the output from part one, find ways to join up the different aspects of LfS. Record these on your sheet to show how connections between global citizenship, outdoor learning and sustainable development education can be supported.
3. Go on a walking tour around your school, early learning or childcare setting. Discuss how your campus and grounds reflect the principles of LfS. Identify learning opportunities and things that need to be changed. Take photos as you go and use these to make a 'where we are now' display. Add in data about your school's energy use, global footprint and also transport or procurement policies. Use this as a reference point for progress made.
4. Discuss what would happen if your school's LfS champion was to leave or LfS learner group was to disband. How is leadership actively being built at all levels in relation to LfS – involving the school leaders, staff, learners, parents and members of the wider community?
5. How well do you know the community in which your establishment is situated? Plan regular lunch-time walks to get to know the local area – its people, greenspaces, community assets, issues, learning opportunities and biodiversity. How is LfS relevant to the community? What do learners do when they are not in school? What experiences from community settings can they bring to school with them? What practical things can learners do to be active citizens and transform their communities?
6. Read the ['Having a say at school'](#) research about the effectiveness of pupil councils in Scotland. Invite learners to gather the views and experiences of their peers. Do learners feel that they are being listened to and that their participation in decision-making is genuine? Collectively devise a strategic approach to increase levels of participation.
7. Alongside community partners, create a plan for a whole school and community approach that is robust, demonstrable and evaluated. Consider appropriate timescales, milestones and indicators of success. Consider how progress can be achieved through continuous cycles of improvement.



“ The difference with learning for sustainability is how easily it lends itself to the theme of connections – how it links. By definition, learning for sustainability has to get beyond your fence and school grounds into your community. Learning for sustainability can't be insular.”
Headteacher





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FURTHER SUPPORT

Four steps to success:

1. Sign up for Education Scotland's monthly LfS ebulletin - get the latest news about events, professional learning, support and resources from a wide range of partners and providers. <http://bit.ly/lfsebulletin>
2. Visit Education Scotland's website for background information. Read the Learning for Sustainability report and case studies in the Conversations about Learning for Sustainability report. <http://bit.ly/lfsonline>
3. Visit our LfS blog to keep up to date with national developments and news from Education Scotland and LfS organisations and providers: <http://bit.ly/bloglfs>
4. Speak to your school leader and local authority about opportunities for professional learning in relation to LfS.