

ESD Exchange 2026: Evaluation and Delivery



Hazel Kerr and Andrew Reeves, De Montfort University

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Introduction

ESD Exchange is a national conference, aiming to provide space for dialogue, connection and sharing of practice/research for anyone engaged with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Green Skills in Higher Education across the UK or beyond.

The 2026 event was initiated by De Montfort University and Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS-UK) and delivered through a 'Universities Partnership' collaboration with the Universities of Leicester and Loughborough.

The in-person event was held from Thursday 16th – Friday 17th April 2026, at De Montfort University, using the Hugh Aston Building on day one and the Queens Building on day two. Two follow-on webinar sessions were also held in the two weeks afterward.

This report describes how the event was delivered and summarises an evaluation of the event, including statistics, comments from attendees, and results of our post-event evaluation form.

Context and Aims

The context of the event was to offer a much-needed opportunity for in-person dialogue and networking on Education for Sustainable Development and Green Skills, focussed on the UK.

- It had been several years since dedicated 'Sustainability in HE' conferences were organised by UK universities with an ESD focus
- AdvanceHE had ceased organisations of annual ESD online practice-sharing events
- Several networks were running periodic practice-sharing and networking meetings (including the EAUC ESD Community of Practice, SOS-UK's Responsible Futures programme and a new network of institutional ESD Leads), but sessions were standardly online.
- ESD is a focussed strand of activity within the annual in-person EAUC Conference

ESD Exchange aimed to offer distinctive value in this context by:

- Providing an in-person practice-sharing and networking opportunity
- Minimising costs and offering bursary support to make the event as inclusive as possible financially
- Placing a strong and unique focus on student experiences and perspectives
- Being relevant both for institutional ESD leads, staff seeking to share their ESD practice (as practice and/or as research) and students wishing to share their experiences and contribute to dialogue on ESD
- Running with a developmental ethos, seeking to offer a platform for all relevant contributions and offering associated dissemination opportunities (blog and linked peer-reviewed journal).

The call for participation is in Appendix A.

Contributions and Attendance

Overall, 82 contributions featured in the final programme, with 71 being presentations and 11 being workshops. By theme, 19 focussed on Strategic issues around ESD; 31 were sharing practice; 12 explored or shared Student-Staff collaboration and co-creation; and 12 explored provocative 'Bid Ideas' related to the agenda. Of these, 11 contributions were led by or co-created with students. See Appendix B for a summary.

The heavy bias towards Presentation submissions led the event more towards a practice-sharing format rather than interactive sessions based on dialogue, though the organisers ensured that every slot in the programme featured one workshop option, and all but one of the sessions after lunch on Day One were workshop-based.

188 people registered to attend overall, 81 as presenters, 98 as attendees-only and 9 as part of the organising team. Sign-ins numbered 128 on Thursday and 73 on the half-day Friday. This was a very positive result, achieving the event aims of attracting a national group of ESD leads and staff/students to share practice and experiences.

Many registered attendees came from the host institutions (51 from DMU, 19 from Leicester and 16 from Loughborough; 86 in all). The event therefore achieved the goal of engaging students and staff from the host institutions more deeply with the ESD Agenda by making a national conference easily accessible and free of charge.

As intended, the event drew participation from across the UK, with 102 attendees from beyond the host institutions, many of which presented. Several universities sent a staff member and a student; blogs drafted afterwards by some of these students highlighted their positive experience.

Key Details of Delivery

The event was made possible in large part through the flexible staffing budget for ESD at De Montfort University, which combines a 10%FTE time allocation for an Academic Lead with an annual budget towards temporary or one-off staffing to deliver on prioritised activities. This enabled staffing in a range of roles supporting overall leadership (co-ordination, administration, student stewards, input from SOS-UK), totalling £6,184 within this existing budget.

Collaboration with staff with ESD roles within the Universities Partnership enabled a team approach to organisation through an organising committee drawn from De Montfort, Leicester and Loughborough Universities and SOS-UK (Appendix C). The committee held regular meetings to agree on how the event was run and collaboratively developed the call for participation, shortlisted submissions and agreed details for running the event.

DMU's existing systems and staff were used including:

- The ability to create and manage a dedicated Wordpress website through 'OurDMU' as a conference webpage and to host blog posts produced by participants
- The DMU Online Store to receive card payments from attendees

- Finance team support to create a dedicated internal budget code and to issue invoices for attendees who could not pay by card using the online platform
- DMU's Studies in Empowering Education journal, used for follow-on outputs (15 received)

With staffing covered through pre-existing budgets and roles and venue use at DMU free of charge, the key running costs were £3064 on catering (hot drinks on both days, lunch on day one), £15 on printing and £653 on bursaries, totalling £3732. Registration fees were set to aim for a break-even point with catering and bursary costs (see Appendix D). The rates used were:

- **£100 (pay-it-forward rate)**, designed for those with available budget for CPD, engagement and/or research dissemination, enabling bursaries to be provided for others)
- **£50 (standard rate)**
- **£20 (reduced rate for students)**
- **£FREE** (For students and staff at three host universities)

For staff paying to attend, the ratio between those paying the standard rate and the pay-it-forward rate was approximately 2:1. Five students and one staff member requested bursary support, which was awarded in each case due to sufficient registration fees paid by others.

Overall, due to the strong interest in the event, the running costs were more than offset by income from registrations (£4750) and the £350 contribution towards bursaries from PRME UK. This result put £1368 back in to the DMU ESD budget, offsetting some of the £6,184 temporary staffing cost.

Appendix E summarises income and expenditure.

Evaluation

The event was extremely well-received by attendees and UK ESD Community, as the representative comment below illustrates:

"fantastic - really honest and useful presentations, a wonderful sense of community, excellent chairing and lots of support"

Detailed results from the follow-on survey are listed in Appendix F. Appendix G includes comments received by the team afterwards, which were overwhelmingly positive. Key points from these comments were:

- **Excellent organisation and delivery:** Attendees consistently praised the event as highly professional, well-planned, smoothly run, and supported by responsive organisers and effective session chairing.
- **Strong sense of community and inclusion:** Participants valued the welcoming, collaborative atmosphere and appreciated opportunities to connect with others working in sustainability across institutions and sectors.
- **Engaging and inspiring content:** Sessions were described as thought-provoking, inspiring, and diverse, with particular appreciation for the mix of speakers, topics, and perspectives.

- **Student voice and partnership working:** Delegates welcomed the strong student presence and felt the partnership with SOS-UK added significant value to the event.
- **Opportunities for improvement:** Suggestions included creating more space for discussion and networking, providing clearer guidance for session chairs and presenters, improving slide management processes, and exploring ways to sustain collaboration through an ongoing community of practice and future events.

Follow-on discussions with attendees and a sector-level perspective from EAUC has established strong interest in running the event in future. Dialogue is ongoing at the time of writing on how this will be taken forward.

For DMU as the lead host, the strong engagement by staff and students at the event demonstrated the value of hosting, offering the opportunity to present work, engage with ESD as a session chair or to contribute as a member of the organising team.

Given this positive reception and the benefits of hosting for staff/student engagement and demonstrable leadership and contribution for higher education's work on ESD, there is a strong evidence base for continuing the event in future years.

Appendix A: Call for Participation

ESD Exchange aims to offer a much-needed space for sharing practice, research or experience relating to [Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#) and [Green Skills](#) in Higher Education, and a chance to take part in conversations about issues that matter for this work.

Who is the event for?

The event is for you if you are:

- A university staff member seeking to share or hear about **teaching and learning practice**
- An academic or research student looking to **disseminate relevant research** on ESD and Green Skills
- A university lead on green skills or sustainability, looking to **influence strategy at your institution, the higher education sector and beyond**
- A student with a strong interest in these issues looking to **share your experiences and shape the dialogue**
- Professionals with an interest in **how ESD and Green Skills are developed within HE**.
- Any one else keen to **join the conversation!**

We aim to gather both a national/international audience and offer relevant opportunities for involvement for students and staff from the three host universities.

Themes for Contributions

Many sessions at the conference will be organised by theme, with contributions informing facilitated dialogue around issues that matter to participants. We have noted several potential themes for contributions below, but we welcome anything and everything that participants see as relevant for sharing or discussing.

- **Engaging and Effective Teaching and Learning:** What is working well? A space to share initiatives in the classroom or beyond for staff and/or students. Also a chance to share and reflect on initiatives that didn't work as planned.
- **Green Skills and purpose-driven careers:** How should the concept of 'Green Skills' be understood and put into practice within universities, alongside related ideas (graduate attributes, sustainability competencies) and to meet the needs of learners, organisations and the public sector?
- **Civic engagement on sustainability learning:** How can universities effectively support their wider place-based community with learning and action for sustainability. Contributions could explore what practices are working, what policies are supporting and driving this and more.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** Artificial intelligence tools are disrupting teaching and learning practices in higher education, will likely have a large impact on future careers, bring a range of tangible benefits but also significant challenges around the ethics and environmental impact of their development. How should ESD and Green Skills practice engage with AI in this context?
- **Decolonising, Equity and Inclusion:** How does the ESD agenda and practice engage with social inequity, inclusivity and the underlying socio-cultural and economic factors driving this? How does ESD reflect the priorities and contexts for learners and societies across the globe?
- **Strategy, processes, leadership:** In the current context of higher education and recent post-16 white paper in the UK, what are key challenges and opportunities for systemic change in support of ESD?

How is ESD and work on Green Skills supported by the likes of the Teaching Excellence Framework, academic quality assurance processes, course accrediting bodies and more?

- **Monitoring and Evaluating ESD:** How can institutions, educators and learners best understand the impacts of ESD practice within the taught curriculum and beyond, over the short and long term? How can monitoring and evaluating also serve to motivate, engage and support learning?
- **Future of ESD:** In the context of global changes to higher education, accelerating changes to the earth's climate and political polarisation, what are the priorities for ESD? Is 'ESD' as a concept still fit for purpose for the transformative action-learning agenda it aims to support?

These are a range of relevant themes and provocations, but all contributions are welcome. We will aim to cluster contributions together around purpose-driven sessions wherever possible, including themes that emerge from the received submissions.

Session types and type of Contribution

We are inviting contributions as either:

- Presentations (10-15mins)
- Lightning Talks (5-7 mins)
- Workshops (40 mins)

You can also use the call for contributions form to highlight issues/questions/provocations/themes which are important to you which you'd like to see explored through a session at the event.

The organising team will actively convene the event so that sessions are purpose-driven around a common theme or challenge, drawing on contributions and facilitation to enable an engaging dialogue. We will also run some sessions with a diverse range of practice or research-based presentations or two complementary workshops.

We aim to find space for as many submitted contributions as is feasible; this may mean that you are offered a shorter presentation slot, or the chance to present at a webinar session rather than at the in-person event.

Finally, we are designing the event with a developmental focus, which includes other dissemination opportunities.

- For academic submissions, we are also offering the chance to produce an Extended Abstract which will be published online with a Digital Object Identifier (DOI).
- For any contribution, we also welcome blog posts linked to your contribution, which we can publish on the conference website and disseminate on social media.

We aim to identify academic journals which can provide a follow-on publishing opportunity linked to contributions from the event.

Appendix B: Agenda and Attendees

Thursday

Time	A	B	C	D	E
11am to 11:55am: Parallel Session 1	Whole Institution Approaches HU1.49	Green Skills Workshop HU1.48	Head, Heart, Hands ESD HU1.50	Lightning Talks – provocative ideas HU0.08	Practice-based: Life Sciences HU1.51
12:00 to 12:55pm Parallel Session 2	AI and ESD HU1.48	Whole Institution Approaches HU1.49	Green Skills Practices HU1.50	Lightning Talks – practices HU0.08	Practice-based: Business HU1.51
2pm to 3:25pm: Parallel Session 3	Games-based workshops HU1.48	Diverse Practice-based HU1.49	Staff-Student Partnering HU1.50	PRME Practice workshop HU1.51	ESD Mapping HU0.08
4pm to 4:55pm: Parallel Session 4	Student-Staff Co-Creation HU1.51	Civically Engaged ESD HU0.08	Whole Institution Approaches HU1.50	Big Ideas (Walking) - Open Space HU0.10	

Friday

Time	A	B	C	D
9.15am to 10.10am: Parallel Session 5	Diverse Practice-based Q0.15	Climate Action Initiatives Q0.13	Emotions and Activism Q0.12	ESD Strategic Change – Open Space Q0.10
10.15am to 11:10pm: Parallel Session 6	Diverse Practice-based Q0.15	Whole Institution Approaches Q0.13	Philosophical Critique Q0.12	ESD Practice - Open Space Q0.10
11.40am to 12:35pm: Parallel Session 7	Sector-wide Evaluation Q0.10	Diverse Practice-based Q0.13	Student-led Initiatives Q0.12	

Session Themes

Practice-sharing
Strategic Approaches
Student-Staff Collaboration
Big Ideas

Plenaries:

Thursday: HU0.08

Friday: Q1.10

Quiet Rooms:

Thurs: HU1.10 (post-plenary), 1st floor lounge (above entrance), ground floor lounge (near café)

Friday: Q0.09

Per-Session Attendance (where available)

2A: 38 attendees 2B: 28 attendees

1A: 2 attendees 4A: 27 attendees

3B: 21 attendees 2E: 1 attendee

6B: 31 attendees 6C: 17 attendees

7A: 10 attendees 3A: 14 attendees

7B: 19 attendees 3D: 15 attendees

Webinar 1: 29 attendees, 8 hosts/presenters Webinar 2: 19 attendees, 5 hosts/presenters

Presentations/Talks Numbers

Overall: 82 contributions

Strategic Approaches – 17 presentations, 1 workshop, 1 open space (19)

Practice-sharing – 31 presentations, 2 workshop, 5 lightning talk, 1 open space (39)

Student-staff collaboration – 12 presentations (12)

Big ideas – 6 lightning talk, 2 presentations, 3 workshop, 1 open space (12)

Led by or involving students – 1 plenary, 2 lightning, 7 presentations, 1 workshop (11)

Registrations

Overall: 188 overall, 81 presenters, 9 core team, 98 attendees

Thursday 16th: 134 overall, 49 presenters, 9 core team, 76 attendees

Friday 17th: 111 overall, 41 presenters, 7 core team, 63 attendees

Staff: 76 presenters, 7 core team, 57 attendees

Students: 5 presenters, 2 core team, 41 attendees

On-the-day Attendance

Thursday 16th: 128 signed-in

Friday 17th: 73 signed-in

Appendix C: Team and Acknowledgement

The conference organising team is:

- [Dr Andrew Reeves](#) (Academic Lead, Education for Sustainable Development) – De Montfort University
- [Bessie Lester](#) (3rd Year Law Student) – De Montfort University
- [Prof Sarah Gretton](#) (Academic Lead for ESD and Director of the Education Academy) – University of Leicester
- [Alice Jackson](#) (Academic Engagement Officer for Sustainability) – University of Leicester
- [Kedijah Eaves-O'Connor](#) (Sustainability Projects Officer) – Loughborough University
- [Dr Victoria Wright](#) (Strategic Partner Research and Innovation Projects and Change – Loughborough University
- [Sonya Peres](#) (Senior Project Manager, Education) – Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS-UK)

The collaboration is drawing on support and insight from several national and international networks:

- The [Universities Partnership](#) for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, which brings together all three local universities, local government and other organisations for the benefit of our region.
- The Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) for Education for Sustainable Development for the East Midlands, part of the [global network of RCEs overseen by the United Nations University](#).
- The United Nations Academic Impact Hub at De Montfort University, for which DMU serves as a [Global Hub for Sustainable Development Goal 11](#).
- [Responsible Futures](#), delivered by SOS-UK, which brings together universities and student unions to collaborate on ESD across the UK and internationally.
- The UK network of [Local Policy and Innovation Partnership Hub Fellows](#) – as a hub fellow, DMU's Dr Andrew Reeves will support dialogue on place-based approaches to green skills development and sustainability education at the event.

Appendix D: Registration Information

ESD Exchange has been designed as a low-cost and inclusive event with a range of fee options designed to minimise barriers to participation whilst covering our core hosting costs. There are four registration rates noted below.

- **£100 (pay-it-forward rate)**, designed for those with available budget for CPD, engagement and/or research dissemination, enabling bursaries to be provided for others)
- **£50 (standard rate)**
- **£20 (reduced rate for students)**
- **£FREE** (For students and staff at three host universities, subject to capacity. For other attendees, if you wish to attend but cannot afford a registration fee, contact Bessie Lester from the organising team on bessie.lester@dmu.ac.uk, for information on a free bursary place and the form to register if awarded. Free attendance is prioritised towards students and student union officers.

Bursary Support with travel and accommodation.

Bursaries are on offer to minimise barriers to participation, particularly for student attendees from across the UK. A second round of bursaries will be awarded in late-March; to express interest please email Bessie Lester on bessie.lester@dmu.ac.uk with a brief rationale.

The bursary options are:

- £50 towards travel/accommodation
- £100 towards travel/accommodation

Appendix E: Income and Expenditure

RUNNING COSTS:

Catering Costs Total: £3064

- Day One Drinks £643.50
- Day One Lunch: £1950
- Day Two Drinks: £470.25

Bursaries Total: £653

- Five students and one staff member, towards travel and accommodation.

Printing: £15 (A1 poster for outside venue)

INCOME:

PRME Student Bursary Sponsorship: £350

Registration fees: £4750

COSTING OF STAFF TIME:

Staff time was taken from DMU's existing Education for Sustainable Development staffing budget for 2025/26, so did not represent an additional cost. To support planning of future events, an estimate of time commitments and associated costs is noted below:

Role	Activities	Time	Cost
DMU Academic Lead	0.1FTE overall co-ordination; website text; call for contributions; review of submissions; liaison with external organisations; supervision of staff.	c. 50hrs	N/A
University of Leicester and Loughborough planning team	Planning group meetings, review of submissions, support with practical arrangements, plus attending event	c. 20hrs x 4	N/A
Unitemps (Co-ordinator):	Developing web page, programme, leading practical arrangements of in-person event and webinars	93hrs	£2368
Unitemps (Administrator):	Arranging online payments, planning meetings, stewarding on the day	43hrs	£813
Unitemps (Student Stewards)	Stewarding the in-person event	25hrs total	£483
SOS-UK Contribution	Review of submissions, convening opening and closing plenaries, promotion	4 days	£2520

For future organisers of ESD Exchange or similar events, some issues to consider are:

- Items in green can likely be covered through existing staff capacity.
- Student Stewarding could perhaps be a voluntary role linked to some form of recognition, perhaps via an existing internal university recognition scheme.
- With only the items listed in Green, the event would need no further funds for staffing if delivered by staff members within their existing roles.

Appendix F: Evaluation Form Responses

40 responses were collected from the post-event evaluation form. Of these, 33 rated the event as “very good”, 6 as “good”, and 1 as “poor”.

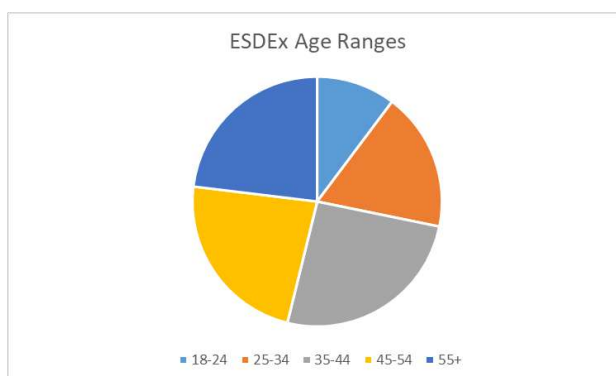
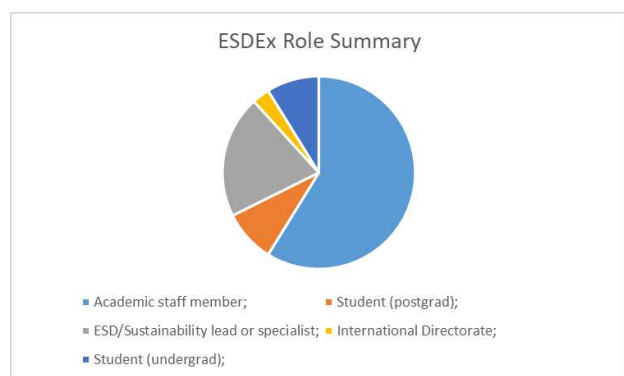
This suggests that respondents found the event overall very positive: further investigation into the “poor” response found that the respondent was struggling with concentration on the sessions when attendees were late arriving to parallel sessions, and recommends prompt attendance being promoted at future events.

26 respondents described themselves as women, 12 as men, 1 preferred not to disclose, and 1 non-binary person responded. This suggests a good level of gender diversity among the cohort of respondents.

The largest group of respondents were in the 35-44 age range, followed by 45-54 and 55+. 18-24 had the fewest number of respondents. This, in combination with the data on career level, suggests that academic staff responded most to the form, and undergrad/postgrad attendees responded least, but highlights the need to try and integrate further student perspectives in the data.

The majority (20 of 34) of respondents to the question on role/career level were academic staff members, followed by ESD or sustainability leads or specialists. This suggests that academic staff were the primary attendee group, followed by institutional attendees, and that further work needs to be done to integrate student perspectives into future events.

A goal for the form evaluation was to gather specific insights into the impact of the event, and insights into what attendees learned about enhancing the student experience of ESD in their institutions. Two specific questions were included to assess these factors.



Impact assessment – Question 2

Attendees described a number of valuable takeaways from the event. Firstly, the theme of inspiration from the community was strong in the responses, and stated that the event created a sense of collective purpose. Many attendees enjoyed the breadth of sessions available at the conference, and left with new examples of best practice to use in their own work. The impact of evaluation was strong in the minds of respondents, with new tools for impact evaluation and a better mapping of courses being highlighted as takeaways. Respondents strongly highlighted the need for student

engagement and student involvement, and how students need to be active leaders in sustainability work at institutions.

Student experience – Question 6

Respondents came away from the event with a great deal of information, as well as inspiring perspectives, about enhancing the student experience of ESD. Meaningful co-creation was highlighted as a necessity for producing better outcomes for students. Paid roles were highlighted as an enabler of more sustained student engagement. Engagement with students emerges best when integrated into a whole-system learning environment, including active pedagogy, inclusive practice, and partnership between staff and students on projects. Many respondents noted the shared challenge across institutions with embedding sustainability and engaging less-engaged students. Finally, sustainability was recognised as widely valued among students and staff, but many still need help in recognising the relevance of sustainability in their sectors.

What we got right/wrong – Question 4

Open comments from the attendees were also gathered as to what they felt went well at the conference, and what could have been improved. Overall, comments were very positive, suggesting a well-organised, friendly and inclusive conference environment. Some specific comments from attendees highlighted improvements:

- Online access to the plenary sessions and breakout sessions was challenging: hybrid access was not a priority for the event
- Some sessions lacked organisation, specifically the workshop session in 3D
- Some attendees requested additional space for reflection and discussion between sessions, and noted the dense nature of the programme
- As previously mentioned, timekeeping for sessions impacted the experience for one attendee
- One attendee suggested the communications cadence was too much for the conference email-wise
- Finally, two attendees requested alternative milk options for catering (cow/oat, over soy)

Appendix G: Follow-on Feedback

Feedback Received over email

Thanks to you and everyone who organised the ESD Exchange - it was fantastic - really honest and useful presentations, a wonderful sense of community, excellent chairing and lots of support on directions etc.

I just wanted to write to thank you for what was a fantastic event - such a well thought out schedule and a super range of sessions. Congratulations to you and the team! It was great to meet so many other people working on sustainability stuff and the SoS-UK partnership aspect seemed to work very well. Apart from one session (the PRME/Systems Thinking 'workshop') all of the sessions that I attended were very good with an interesting mix/balance of presenters/topics. Thought provoking, inspiring and challenging at times.

Thanks again for the excellent conference - from a participant's point of view it came across as very well organised and was engaging. Just wanted to begin the dialogue (with Richard cc'd) to perhaps begin exploring possible collaborations in the social science + energy space. And how this might link to best practice/ESD in masters modules engaging with this theme. Also please let me know that link to the cities game you mentioned.!

Don't worry about a reply to this but wanted to send a quick note following my attendance at the ESD Exchange yesterday.

You organisation was absolutely on point. Massive thanks and hat tip to the team for putting on such a great event.

I really enjoyed the conference; it was great to be a part of a group passionate about sustainability, who were supportive on the of contributors' endeavours. So uplifting and inspiring too, to hear from all the students.

Thank you for the opportunity of speaking last week and being part of such a positive event. You planned it all brilliantly and was so welcoming and inclusive, it was great to hear the student perspective highlighted. Apologies again Andrew for not checking my slides were ready and thank you for supporting me.

I felt like everything was very well run, I was only able to join for the afternoon (and I think I probably had a badge waiting for me to collect at the registration desk which I didn't pick up so apologies) but when I got to my room I had everything I needed. My presenters were all there and outside of one slight technical hiccup, which we sorted (someone had made a last minute update to their presentation and wanted to use that version), everything went very smoothly. I didn't need to do anything other than hold up my 2 minute sign.

For me I think questions after each presentation may have worked better but I can appreciate that's only because I had wonderful (and very interesting) speakers) who were all on time. It wasn't a problem to do them at the end and we had plenty of questions from the room.

It was a really lovely session and I got to hear some lovely talks so thank you for having me as a session chair.

I just wanted to drop you and the team a note to say 'congratulations' once again for a truly wonderful event.

I would like to discuss how we sustain this new Community of Practice; and two things in particular. 1. Regular in-person events. 2. How we use digital spaces to ensure we sustain the conversations and collaboration between in-person events.

Thanks for this. The sessions I chaired went really well, the only real glitch I had was that we couldn't upload the slides that were provided on the day to OneDrive so I'm not sure if these have been shared. I also noted that the workshop I chaired wasn't well attended and that meant the short presentation in the same session had a small audience.

I did have a conversation with someone who left early and whose feedback I requested verbally. They were very supportive of the concept of the conference and thought it was well run but they felt the programme was too crammed with no enough space for discussions. They also felt that the reviewers could have been more selective in the talks accepted as some of them weren't ready for presentation (they cited an example of someone who talking a process they were planning on implementing). I don't necessarily agree with their feedback but I think it's only fair to pass it on.

Many more points in the first ("Loved") category as you can see as it really was a great event - more explanation for the second category 😊

Loved: Org team super responsive - thank you!! You all created a wonderfully kind atmosphere Great follow up with the journal, webinars, etc Food was excellent

Pace of sessions and space of the location was good, great idea to offer reflection and connection / walking session for those overwhelmed with input or just fancying some networking and chats

Loved the time cards for helping people stick to time, super helpful!

Super sad to miss second day - first day was so excellent, and I loved the opening plenary

Brilliant to have students join Great diversity of inputs The social / quiz was super lovely! One of the most warm and welcoming I've been to.

Consider for improvement: Helping chairs to run things smoothly: Got thrown in the deep end as chair, being the first and also only having 10 mins between morning plenary ending and session starting, felt really tight - maybe allow a bit more time here next time if possible. Have a slide that introduces the chair, too? Would have been nice to see their names (most introduced themselves quickly but went in a flash). One speaker showed up just right when the session was about to start, which was quite stressful (would they show? Where were their slides?) - make clear for speakers to be early so session can start on time and calmly, as better for all involved including listeners.

Getting slides was a bit messy as very few had sent them in advance. It's fine if people want to make last min changes - could you set up shared powerpoint files that speakers can access any time they want, but that are in a central point and can be easily loaded onto the local PCs? That, or set a clearer deadline for people to send slides (sometimes clarity is kindness, and we all have a responsibility to make sure these events go well for everyone - not just the organisers 😊)

Have a clear one stop shop list for chairs on what they need to do - you sent something early on which was helpful, but then a few things changed and I think some chairs were a little unsure. An email the day before with a reminder of what will be happening, what chairs will be doing, etc could make it smoother and even easier and more consistent.

Sessions generally:

I didn't get the chance to take part in any workshops so not sure if that happened more there - but I wonder if there are more creative approaches to get listeners in sessions to engage with what they

have heard from speakers? E.g. Have table discussion, speakers posing reflective prompts, etc. Aware that could take more organisational effort and capacity, but might be worth a try to create more meaningful learning and takeaways for people.

Rather than 15+15+15+maybe Q&A, could speakers be broken up more with short discussions in between contributions? Could just be a "5 mins to reflect and chat" in-between or something. Just felt quite a lot at times going from one presentation straight to the next.

Set up: Is there an icebreaker corner or connections space you could set up for delegates to meet new people? Or even a little game you can play throughout the event (e.g. delegate bingo, having to find people who meet different professional or personal criteria, e.g. likes gardening, works not for a university, collaborates with campus staff on sustainability projects, etc?)

Overall, an absolutely excellent event - thanks again SO MUCH for organising, stellar job!

LinkedIn Comments

In-person meet-ups really are where the magic happens.

What a privilege it was to attend the [#ESDExchange](#) event in Leicester last week on behalf of [Learning for Sustainability Scotland](#). An absolutely fantastic couple of days of sharing, learning, connecting, and reflecting with colleagues old and new from across the UK. Back at my desk today with new ideas, new perspectives...and new (and old!) contacts to follow up with.

My warmest thanks goes to [Andrew Reeves](#), [Sonya Peres](#), [Daniel Kerr](#) and their colleagues at [De Montfort University](#), [University of Leicester](#), [Loughborough University](#) and [SOS UK](#) - as well as everyone at [#RCEEastMidlands](#) for such an inspirational and flawlessly-executed two days.

Let's keep the conversations and collaborations going! Already looking forward to our next gathering...

Kirsten Leask (Learning for Sustainability Scotland)

The last two days have been the ESD Exchange conference, held at [De Montfort University](#). [Andrew Reeves](#) first approached me in October to be part of the organising team, and it felt like an amazing opportunity to undertake after completing my placement year. It has been an incredible opportunity work with everyone involved (shout outs to [Daniel Kerr](#), [Sonya Peres](#), [Sarah Gretton](#), [Kedijah Eaves-O'Connor](#), [Alice Jackson](#), and Victoria Wright)

Whilst helping organise this conference, I found the ability to grow the skills I had already developed during my placement year, like email communication and graphic design (my poster and slides were used everywhere!) as well as learning new skills like creating the ticket process on the DMU online store. I feel significantly more confident in my skills now, and will take every opportunity to grow my new ones!

The most important part for me was the opportunity to deliver a small part of the opening plenary speech. Sonya asked me, [Lauren Roberts-Turner](#) and [Nayaab Mahomed](#) to deliver a short speech about our experiences within sustainability at our respective institutions. I was nervous to begin with, but the ability to deliver such an important speech to such a large group of people really set the scene for the event as a whole.

I attended some amazing talks whilst at the conference, and much food for thought was

gained. Thank you again to all the speakers who contributed, it was incredible watching it all go from initial submissions to speeches on the day. I was able to chair [Shweta Salvi's](#) session today on how modernity shapes education, and I certainly learnt a lot!

I also want to give a special shoutout to Andrew and Dan, who were both absolutely incredible and did so much for the conference.

I will always look back on these two days fondly, as my first real experience being part of the organising team of such a large event, and learning different practices from HE institutions across the country.

Bessie Lester (DMU)

Loved the ESD Exchange run by the ever inspirational [Andrew Reeves](#) and numerous colleagues. Especially proud of our Env Science final-year undergrad, the brilliant [Luke Farhall](#) for sharing the important findings from his dissertation at his first national conference! The comments and questions alone demonstrated the quality of his presentation. Such a great advocate for the School of Geography and Environmental Science and the [University of Southampton](#) 😊

If ever there was evidence that we need more regular [hashtag#ESD](#) in-person knowledge sharing and wellbeing boosting meet-ups it was amply provided at the event! Always great to catch-up with so many friends and colleagues (too many to tag), but especially heartening to see so many incredibly impressive people that I've not been lucky enough to meet before.

Thank you to everyone involved from [De Montfort University](#), [University of Leicester](#) and [Loughborough University](#) for such a necessary, superb event! Until next time everyone.....

Simon Kemp (Uni of Southampton)

On my way back from the ESD exchange event. A really enjoyable and inspiring event today, presenting on our work developing sustainability education provision, learning from and connecting with peers working on ESD and green skills. Huge thanks to the organising team and De Montfort University for providing the opportunity.

[#esdexchange](#) [#greenskills](#) [#highereducation](#).

Jordan Peel (MMU)

ESD Exchange Conference 2026: A personal milestone! 🌟

I attended and presented at the UK's national Education for Sustainable Development conference, hosted at [De Montfort University](#).

Over two days, I participated in sessions that challenged me, reassured me, and expanded my thinking about sustainability education. Here are some key takeaways:

- Provocative ideas reminding me that imagination is a tool for change, not a luxury.
- AI and ESD discussions reframing technology as something that demands values-led governance.
- Staff–student partnership insights echoing everything I've learned through SSAB relationships are the true infrastructure.
 - Co-creation spaces showing the power of shared authorship.
- Emotions and activism highlight that the emotional dimension of sustainability is essential, not optional.

- Diverse practice-based work revealing the many entry points for students to lead.

These sessions emphasised the interconnectedness of different aspects of our work, including imagination, governance, relationships, activism, and community, all of which shape the ecosystem that students navigate daily. This understanding was particularly evident in my own Session 7C, where I presented on "Student-Led Sustainability Through Society-Driven Governance". Additionally, I shared my reflections in the closing plenary alongside some remarkable students, [Aadya Gupta](#) and [Adithi Sathiyar](#), creating a memorable moment that summed up a great experience. Thank you, [Sonya Peres](#)!

AI: Battle of Attention & Advancing ESD

[Simon Kemp](#) and [Romas Malevicius](#) led standout sessions for me. It opened the floor to conversations that were open, uncomfortable and genuinely intriguing. What struck me most was the discussion about bias: how can we expect technology to be fair or "objective" when it is built inside systems that aren't? It made the room pause. Because it's not just a technical challenge, it's a cultural one and hearing perspectives across ages, disciplines and backgrounds made it clear that honest conversations about imperfection are essential if AI is going to support sustainability rather than distort it.

Looking ahead

I'm bringing the insights and lived-experience solutions from the conference back into my work. Like many young people in this field, I've felt sustainability burnout and walking in with that weight, alongside the usual anxiety of presenting.

The honesty, the shared hopes, and collective visions for ESD re-energised me, reminding me why this work matters. Sustainability leadership often happens in the quiet, unseen hours, so having strangers respond with curiosity, thoughtful critique and genuine support made the work feel less solitary and its impact more visible.

Every voice, conversation and small change contributes to something bigger.

Many thanks to [Chris Ribchester](#), [Andrew Reeves](#) & [SOS UK](#)

[#ESDExchange2026](#) [#ResponsibleFutures](#)
[#SustainabilityEducation](#)

Reece Buckley (MMU)

Finally have a moment to share my thoughts on this. On 16th and 17th April, I was at De Montfort University for ESD Exchange, convening around 150-200 people to share research and practice relating to ESD.

The idea for the conference started off as a comment from [Andrew Reeves](#) at DMU, and I'm really proud of the the organising team (DMU, SOS, Loughborough and Leicester) developing this from a comment, to a full blown national conference. Shout out in particular to Andrew, [Mollie Lester](#) and [Daniel Kerr](#).

SOS UK supported with logistics, but importantly to centre student voice. We helped students to present their work and worked with institutions to bring students along. Many institutions had a student representative, and most sessions involved discussion between academics, practitioners and students.

At the event, I facilitated the opening and closing plenary, inviting students to speak about their experience of sustainability - thanks so much for contributing [Aadya Gupta](#) [Alex Watmore](#) [Reece Buckley](#) [Adithi Sathiyar](#) [Lauren Roberts-Turner](#) [Nayaab Mahomed](#) [Mollie Lester](#). I asked students to address what reached them in terms of sustainability and how - what didn't and why? I then encouraged participants to develop their vision for a graduate and to think deeply about how their role, and experience at the conference can help them to contribute concretely to this vision.

At the closing plenary, I invited students to speak about their conference experience (for many it was their first conference!). Students mostly noted how welcomed they felt and reported a sense of increased confidence to be in these kinds of spaces. I then reshared responses on visions for a graduates, and asked participants to reflect on how the conference has gotten them closer to this vision.

I chaired various sessions, including on a QAA-funded Oxford Brookes project to close the gap between student, employer and academic understanding of green skills, student-staff partnerships for ESD and whole institution approaches.

I was so pleased to see Responsible Futures mentioned and presented on formally in many sessions (shout out to [Neva Mowl](#) (Salford) and [Sara Agbenro](#) and [Alex Watmore](#) (Exeter) who did sessions on their audit experience and Responsible Futures interns), and informally in conversations I overheard. [Katie Coubrough](#) also presented our joint curriculum mapping project at Strathclyde SIPBS.

It was SO nice to see colleagues I have been working with for 5-6 years and have never met in person, I felt I was part of a lively community full of folks doing such impactful work. Andrew, [Chris Ribchester](#), [William Finnegan](#) and I were in a pub quiz team and placed second (thanks to Andrew's Leicester knowledge).

On my way back from the train I stopped at Soft Touch Cafe - a spot giving young people work experience & supporting them to make art. Had a lovely chat with the people who worked there & had a delicious burrito & coffee - would recommend!

Sonya Peres, SOS-UK

In-person meet-ups really are where the magic happens. We recently had the privilege of contributing to 'ESD Exchange': a conference designed to provide a platform for dialogue, networking and sharing of research and practice related to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Green Skills in higher education across the UK – and internationally. Full blog post here: <https://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/2026/04/22/esd-exchange-weaving-sustainability-across-higher-education/>

Blog post from LfS Scotland