

University of Leicester

'Sustainability Enterprise Partnership'

1) Name of institution

University of Leicester

2) Name of the initiative

Sustainability Enterprise Partnership Project (SEPP) module

3) Initiative outline

The Sustainability Enterprise Partnership Project (SEPP) is a credit-bearing, interdisciplinary, final year UG, work-related learning module that embeds employability directly into the curriculum through real-world sustainability consultancy with partner organisations. The module brings together students from across disciplines to act as sustainability advisors to local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), delivering professional audit reports and implementation plans based on real organisational data.

4) Context/history/need for initiative

The module evolved from an institutional project providing sustainability audits for local businesses. As this externally funded project came to a close we wanted to be able to continue offering the service and working with professional services staff who have direct business contact, so the decision was made to embed this within the curriculum.

5) What happens and how is it assessed

Students collaborate with businesses, working initially in interdisciplinary groups of up to six and latterly individually, to analyse raw data and produce reports assessing sustainability performance and outlining actionable initiatives, informed by their integrated Carbon Literacy Training (CLT). Since the pilot in 2022–23, the module has engaged nearly 300 students. Each semester, students work with typically two to three partner businesses, with multiple student groups analysing each business dataset. Outputs from the strongest group analyses are synthesised by staff into a single, high-quality report that is shared with each business partner, ensuring clear, actionable insights.

The CLT accreditation costs of the independent Carbon Literacy Project are departmentally funded (£15 per student). This ensures that all students can access a recognised sustainability qualification, removing financial barriers and supporting inclusion.

The module is based on a Living Labs approach and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) principles. Students are placed in authentic professional roles as sustainability auditors, responding to genuine stakeholder needs, engaging with feedback, and communicating recommendations in a professional context. Assessment reflects this applied, practice-based approach, combining group-based analytical work with individual assignments and the successful completion of Carbon Literacy Training (see Table 1).

Assessment	Assessment Type	Assessment Format	Weight
Carbon Literacy Form	Formative	Individual	0
Written Industry Report single section	Formative	Group	0
Written Industry Report	Summative	Group	50%
Detailed Implementation Plan	Summative	Individual	40%
Professional Reflective Portfolio (includes Carbon Literacy)	Summative	Individual	10%

Table 1: The assessment structure for the SEPP module

6) Green skills developed or applied

Students develop a combination of technical, transferable and transformative skills. They analyse sustainability data and produce evidence-based audit reports and implementation plans across themes such as procurement, energy, waste and travel. They develop professional communication and stakeholder engagement through working with partner organisations, and interdisciplinary teamwork, project management and problem-solving skills by working within groups.

The module also supports the development of transformative competencies aligned with international frameworks (e.g. UNICEF and ESD guidance). Students engage with systems thinking by exploring how environmental, social and economic factors interact, and develop environmental stewardship through applying sustainability principles to real-world challenges. The action-oriented nature of the projects also fosters anticipatory and strategic thinking. Reflective practice is embedded throughout, enabling students to articulate their skills development, values and emerging professional identities, and to critically consider their role in contributing to sustainable development.

7) Contributions to leverage points

The SEPP module most strongly aligns with:

- **LP2 Stakeholder communication and engagement:** Students work directly with partner organisations to interpret data, respond to feedback and communicate sustainability recommendations.
- **LP5 Organisational model innovation and transformation:** Students develop evidence-based recommendations that support the integration and scaling of sustainability practices
- **LP8 Reporting and disclosure, transparency and assurance:** Students produce audit reports, contributing to evidence-based assessment and transparency.

8) Impact, successes, challenges

Students report increased confidence and a clearer understanding of how academic learning translates into professional practice, while businesses benefit from structured sustainability support, effectively building capacity alongside the student experience. The module also strengthens partnerships between the University, local businesses and suppliers.

Delivering an interdisciplinary, partner-based module at scale presents challenges, particularly as this was the first of its kind at the university. These include coordinating stakeholder engagement, managing timelines and expectations across multiple external organisations, and supporting students to work effectively across disciplines.

To mitigate risks such as variable group performance the module incorporates structured partnership management processes. Clear expectations are set with businesses from the outset regarding the nature of student outputs. The module team provides a single point of staff contact and ensures consistency in how student queries are managed. The role of the teaching team in synthesising outputs into a single, high-quality report reduces the risk of underperformance impacting partner organisations while maintaining academic integrity. The inclusion of professional services expertise within the teaching team further strengthens partnership coordination.

9) Advice for others

The SEPP model demonstrates how higher education can integrate sustainability and employability within the curriculum to support authentic green skills development in our students, while supporting real world change for local organisations. It provides a replicable approach to developing graduates who can work across disciplines, engage stakeholders and contribute to more sustainable futures.