



CAMBRIDGE

Sustainability in the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework



Cambridge
Life Competencies

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability encompasses the knowledge, skills and attitudes we need to ensure a fairer, brighter future for people and the natural world. Although most people think of Sustainability relating mostly to the environment, it is important to recognise that there are environmental, social and economic dimensions of Sustainability and that these are closely interconnected. This is reflected in the breadth of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals with titles such as 'No poverty', 'Gender equality' and 'Climate action'.

Cambridge has a full Sustainability Framework for ELT (see Further Resources). However, the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework supports the development of sustainability skills (and indeed was used as a foundation from which to build the Sustainability Framework for ELT).

In practice, Sustainability competencies might look like:

- Understanding social and environmental responsibilities
- Appreciating how social, environmental and economic factors are interconnected and interdependent
- Understanding human rights and social justice
- Understanding how beliefs and values contribute to sustainable and unsustainable behaviours
- Taking action towards a sustainable future for all forms of life
- Engaging in collaborative problem-solving to address sustainability issues

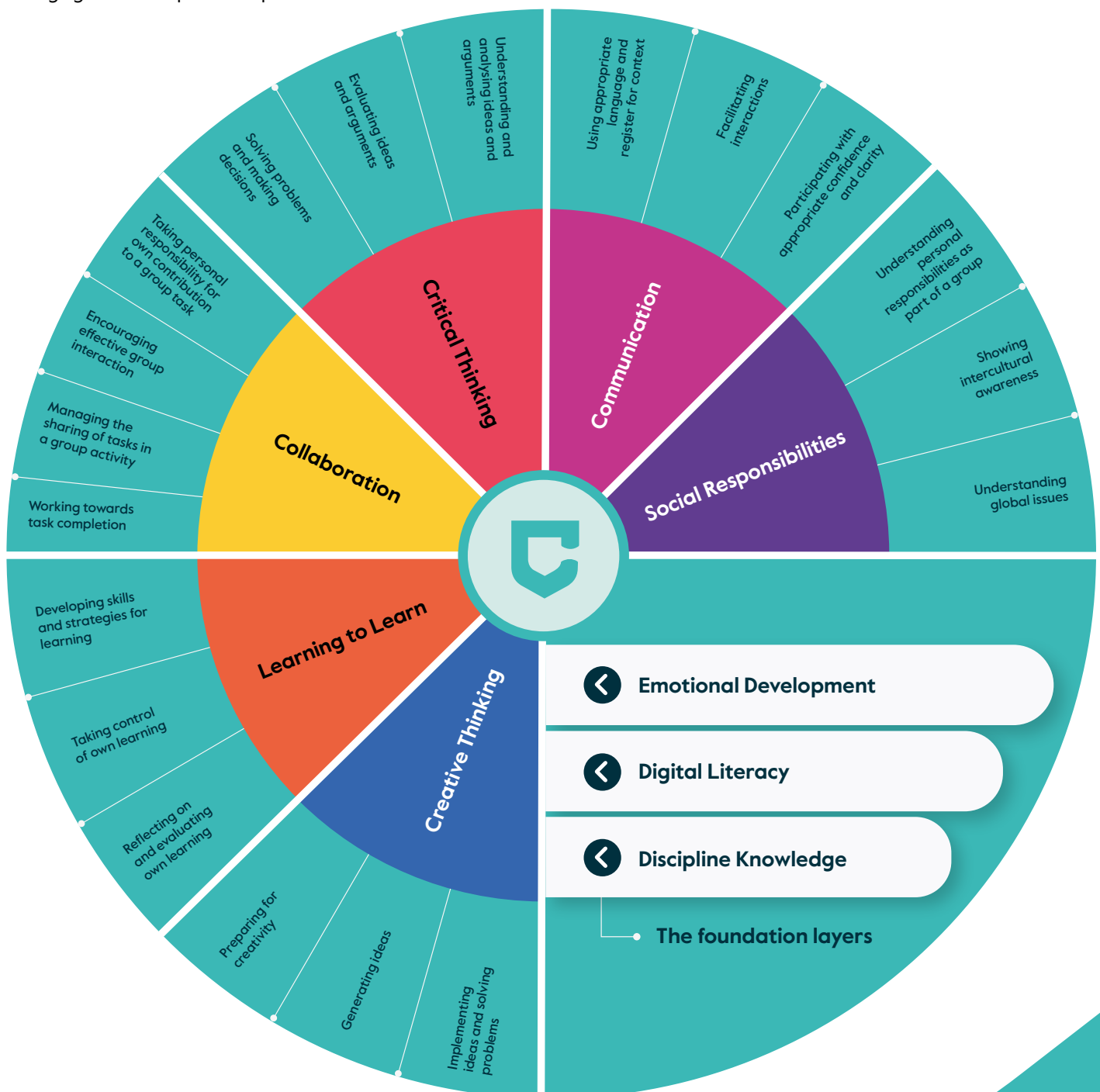
Where can Sustainability be found in the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework?

The Sustainability elements are most present in the **Social Responsibilities** competency. Although the elements of Sustainability could be mapped to multiple components within this competency, the mapping below shows only the component to which each element is **most** strongly aligned.

Competency	Core areas	Components	Sustainability elements included
Social Responsibilities	Understanding personal responsibilities as part of a social group	Understanding responsibilities within a social group	Understanding social and environmental responsibilities
	Understanding global issues	Engaging with a range of global issues	Appreciating how social, environmental and economic factors are interconnected and interdependent Understanding human rights and social justice Understanding how beliefs and values contribute to sustainable and unsustainable behaviours
		Developing personal agency and sense of global citizenship	Taking action towards a sustainable future for all forms of life Engaging in collaborative problem-solving to address sustainability issues

In addition, the other competencies of the framework are aligned to Sustainability in the following ways:

- **Creative thinking:** Helps learners generate innovative solutions to sustainability challenges and imagine alternative possible futures.
- **Critical thinking:** Strong critical thinking skills allow learners to evaluate information on sustainability topics, analyse data and make informed decisions.
- **Learning to learn:** Developing the skills for autonomous and lifelong learning will help learners stay informed about sustainability challenges and support them in reflecting on which sustainability-related skills they need to develop in the future.
- **Communication:** Strong communication skills allow learners to effectively share key messages about sustainability and inspire others to become more engaged with topics of importance.
- **Collaboration:** These skills are essential for collaborative problem-solving and working together on sustainability projects to address global issues.
- **Emotional development:** Empathy skills can enhance learners' motivation for caring for future generations and for other species. Emotion regulation and resilience skills can also be helpful in managing eco-anxiety and supporting persistence in the face of setbacks.
- **Digital literacy:** These skills help learners find reliable sustainability information online, and engage with others in online communities dedicated to addressing sustainability issues.



What does Sustainability look like at each stage of learning?

The tables below include some example Can Do statements and language from the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework that could be used in materials to develop competencies around Sustainability for each stage of learning. These are not intended to be comprehensive. For further ideas on how to develop Sustainability competencies, please see the **Further resources** section at the end of this booklet.

Pre-primary

Competency	Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Social Responsibilities	Understanding personal responsibilities as part of a social group	Understanding responsibilities within a social group	Describes in basic terms positive behaviours in the school environment (e.g. helping others, picking up litter).	I help [my friends].
	Understanding global issues	Engaging with a range of global issues	Uses simple language to describe environments.	Water/Tree/Bird
			Identifies whether someone is treated in a fair way or not (e.g. in a story).	That's (not) fair.
			Can express simple values about helping others.	It's good to [share].
		Developing personal agency and sense of global citizenship	Describes ways they can safeguard the environment (e.g. save water, recycle, etc.).	Recycle bottles/ plastic/paper.
			Works with other children to keep spaces clean.	We help together.

Primary

Competency	Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Social Responsibilities	Understanding personal responsibilities as part of a social group	Understanding responsibilities within a social group	Describes responsibilities they have to help people and protect the environment.	I [clean my room] and [save water].
	Understanding global issues	Engaging with a range of global issues	Recognises how environmental problems affect people's health and finances.	When [water is dirty], people [get ill and have to spend money on medicine].
			Identifies and explains basic human rights (e.g. healthcare, education etc.)	[Going to school/ Education] is a human right.
			Explains different people's beliefs about global issues.	Some people think we should [protect animals], others don't.
		Developing personal agency and sense of global citizenship	Takes positive actions to protect their local environment.	I help pick up litter.
			Works with classmates to solve environmental or social issues at school.	Let's make a poster about [planting a vegetable garden].

Secondary

Competency	Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Social Responsibilities	Understanding personal responsibilities as part of a social group	Understanding responsibilities within a social group	Recognises their responsibility to prevent and respond to bullying at school.	If I [see bullying], I should [tell a teacher].
	Understanding global issues	Engaging with a range of global issues	Can explain how environmental, social and economic issues are connected.	Some fast fashion factories use harmful chemicals that make their workers ill so they cannot work and earn money.
			Demonstrates awareness of human rights issues around the world.	Young people have the right to [go to school/ feel safe].
			Analyses how different values lead to sustainable or unsustainable practices.	Some societies value [economic growth more than wellbeing].
		Developing personal agency and sense of global citizenship	Takes concrete actions to create a more sustainable future.	I buy [Fairtrade chocolate].
			Works with others to develop solutions to sustainability challenges.	Let's [find out what the causes of this problem are].

Higher education

Competency	Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Social Responsibilities	Understanding personal responsibilities as part of a social group	Understanding responsibilities within a social group	Evaluates which social and environmental responsibilities should be individual and which should be taken on by particular groups.	The responsibility for [green energy] should lie with [the government/ businesses].
	Understanding global issues	Engaging with a range of global issues	Analyses and evaluates interconnections between global issues, events and trends.	[Rising sea levels] increase [migration], which [creates political tensions].
			Critically analyses human rights and global social justice issues.	What causes [child labour] to continue despite [international laws]?
			Evaluates how different belief systems and values influence environmental behaviours.	[Indigenous] cultures that value [land as sacred] may [have better conservation practices].
		Developing personal agency and sense of global citizenship	Develops and implements strategies for sustainable living.	I [use public transport] wherever possible.
			Collaborates with others to design solutions for complex sustainability challenges.	What are the barriers to [action] and how do we overcome them?

At work

Competency	Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Social Responsibilities	Understanding personal responsibilities as part of a social group	Understanding responsibilities within a social group	Identifies personal responsibilities for social and environmental issues in the workplace.	I'm responsible for creating a psychologically safe environment in my team where everyone is included.
	Understanding global issues	Engaging with a range of global issues	Analyses and evaluates interconnections between global issues and the world of business.	Our [automation technology] may contribute to [rising unemployment rates].
			Analyses how business practices impact human rights and social justice issues.	We ensure that our whole supply chain respects workers' rights.
			Evaluates how organisational values influence sustainable business practices.	One of our core values is [people before profit]. This means that we ...
		Developing personal agency and sense of global citizenship	Implements concrete actions to improve aspects of sustainability at work.	I've introduced a new initiative which aims to ...
			Collaborates across organisations to address sustainability challenges.	We're meeting with key organisations in the industry to ...

Further resources*

Cambridge University Press & Assessment's Sustainability in English language teaching website (includes Sustainability Framework, white paper, activity cards and teaching resources): <https://view.ceros.com/cambridge/sustainability-elt/p/1>

Reed Johnson, J.A., Marston, S., Happle, A. & Majid, N. (2025). Climate change and sustainability education framework: an opportunity for pre-service teaching, *Cogent Education*, 12(1), pp1-24. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2460412>

UNESCO. (2017). Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>

UNESCO. (2020). Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374802>

* Please note, these resources are current at the time of publishing – January 2026. However, newer resources may be available at the time of reading and/or some of the links included may no longer work.

Suggested search terms: 'sustainability' 'sustainable development goals' 'education for sustainable development'



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