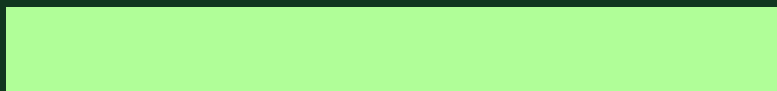


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GREEN MINDSET COLLECTIVE PLAYBOOK



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FOREWORD

As we look towards a greener, fairer and more resilient economy, the skills system is central to making that transition real. Reaching net zero will only succeed if we have people with the skills, confidence and commitment to deliver it, in every community and across every sector. The further education (FE) and skills workforce sits at the very heart of this mission. From educators and leaders in the classroom to those working across estates, finance, people and culture, digital, catering and wider professional services, every role contributes to shaping a sustainable future. Together, they inspire, equip and empower the learners and employers who will build it.

The UK's clean energy and green growth ambitions rely not only on technology and infrastructure, but on people. We need teachers, trainers and leaders who understand the skills needed today and the emerging demands of tomorrow. Equally, we need the teams who manage our buildings, systems, budgets and environments to embed sustainability into how our institutions operate, not as an add-on, but as standard practice. This collective responsibility is what will build the confidence to model the mindset required for a just green transition, one that combines professional expertise with a deep belief in human potential.

This Playbook reflects that ambition. It captures the insights of the Green Mindset Collective and shows what becomes possible when culture, collaboration and professional standards align. It demonstrates how sustainability can move from isolated initiatives to an embedded habit, shaping how we teach, lead and operate across the sector.

Sustainable economic growth demands a coherent, long-term skills strategy rooted in our shared responsibility to each other and to the planet. As this report makes clear, all skills are green skills. Whether in construction or digital, care or catering, every role has a part to play in building an economy that works for people and the planet. Embedding sustainability into curricula, organisational behaviours and local partnerships is now essential to delivering high-quality education and training.

Learners across the country are telling us they want to make a difference. Sustainability is increasingly shaping how young people choose what, and where, they study. Our collective task is to ensure that every college, independent provider and employer can respond with clarity, making sustainability a defining feature of excellent education and training.

As the professional body for the sector, ETF is committed to supporting this journey. We will continue to champion sustainability through our Professional Standards, CPD offer, and our work to strengthen leadership, teaching and organisational development across FE and skills. Together with our partners, and EAUC in particular, we will help the sector build the culture, capability and coherence needed to drive a just and achievable green transition.

All skills are green skills, and all of us have a role to play.



Dr Katerina Kolyva

Chief Executive Officer,
Education Training Foundation

2 INTRODUCING THE GREEN MINDSET

The concept:

A Green Mindset is a way of working, not a new initiative. It's the habit of making decisions with people, place and planet in view across all aspects of the further education and skills sector. In practice, that means culture as the carrier (sustainability shows up in everyday routines, questions and choices, not just new projects) and partnership by default (learners as co-designers; employers, awarding bodies and civic partners shaping what's taught and how it's delivered).

The event:

On 30 October 2025, FE News, ETF and EAUC convened around 50 leaders for a flipped, working conference: The Green Mindset Collective.

We opened with a video address from Rt Hon Jacqui Smith (Minister for Skills), followed by an "in conversation" with Toby Perkins MP and Katerina Kolyva (CEO, ETF).

Two provocative plenary panels explored the national/system picture (led by Charlotte Bonner (EAUC) with contributions from Joanna Moonan (Skills England), Andy Smith (QAA) and Jodie Bailey-Ho (SOS-UK) and the institutional lens (led by Vikki Smith (ETF), with Palvinder Singh (Kirklees College), Lou Mycroft (Green Changemakers) and Olly Newton (Edge Foundation).

All attendees then worked in enquiry rooms which included live polling, group discussions and co-creation of ideas and actions needed spanning four themes:

- 1 Shaping the future (workforce as leaders).
- 2 A just green transition (equity and belonging).
- 3 Place-based changemakers (anchor institutions).
- 4 Breaking the silos (systems thinking/interdisciplinarity).

This Playbook:

The pages that follow report the findings: the shared themes, tensions, and opportunities; the mindset shifts we need; and priority actions at micro (individual), meso (institution) and macro (system) levels.

A separate Provocation Pack turns these into ready-to-use briefs for meetings, CPD and planning.

In short: the mindset is the north star; the Collective generated the insight; and this Playbook turns both into next steps we can all use to strengthen and secure the FE and skills sector's role in a sustainable future that works for people and planet.

3 THE COLLECTIVE'S VISION

We want a sector where sustainability is the default lens for decisions: so every learner, in every programme, leaves with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to succeed in a changing world.

That means teaching through sustainability across subjects, building agency and belonging, and partnering with learners as co-designers. It means FE and skills sector organisations – from providers to awarding organisations to sector agencies – building sustainability into their core offer, acting as responsible organisations, taking whole organisation approaches, modelling sustainable practices, and being transparent about impact.

We also want a skills system that's easier to navigate and quicker to adapt. Providers, employers and combined authorities working as an ecosystem: clearly articulating local green skills needs; co-designing modular, stackable provision that supports lifelong learning for current and future cohorts; and using shared data to focus on scale, pace and impact. National bodies use the levers they already have, funding, inspection, standards, to send consistent signals, reduce duplication and close gaps faster.

Equity runs through it all: opportunities are accessible, progression routes are visible, and the transition creates good jobs across every occupation, not just STEM.

Within this, AI is treated as one tool among many: used responsibly to improve teaching and operations, with attention to ethics, inclusion and digital sustainability, and without widening gaps.

In short, the Green Mindset equips people for life and work, helps organisations walk their talk, and turns fragmented effort into coordinated, place-based progress on the UK's biggest challenges.



4 WHAT WE HEARD

a. Consensus themes and what they mean for practice

These are the cross-cutting points of agreement that surfaced repeatedly across plenaries and enquiry rooms. They summarise what most participants felt matters now, why it matters operationally, and where the main friction points and opportunities sit for practice.

- 1 Culture before projects:** Sustainability should be instinctive, not additive—teaching and leading through sustainability.
 - **Friction/opportunity:** Project-itis vs. whole-organisation habits.
 - **What this means in practice:** Prioritise everyday routines (meeting questions, KPIs, procurement choices) over one-off initiatives; free time by stopping low-value work.

- 2 System coherence:** Fragmented signals across funding, inspection and standards slow delivery
 - **Friction/opportunity:** Policy churn and duplication creates system gridlock vs. aligned expectations that ensure accountability, resources, flexibility, and professional trust.
 - **What this means in practice:** Use existing levers in concert; enable providers and practitioners to act.

- 3 Curriculum agility:** Modular, stackable, demand-led models (incl. weekend/intensive) can move now.
 - **Friction/opportunity:** Slow review cycles vs. fast refresh calendars and exemplars.
 - **What this means in practice:** Update within existing programmes; prototype micro-quals with employers.

- 4 Equity is integral:** Sustainability without social justice is incomplete.
 - **Friction/opportunity:** Exclusion risks vs. belonging and progression.
 - **What this means in practice:** Co-design with diverse learners (incl. SEND/minoritised); remove practical barriers (timings, travel, language).

- 5 Employer partnership with a business case:** Engagement sticks when productivity, risk and pipeline benefits are explicit.
 - **Friction/opportunity:** Limited employer bandwidth vs. targeted, ROI-framed asks.
 - **What this means in practice:** Nominate liaisons; use levy/micro-qualifications; host measurable projects.

- 6 Place matters:** FE and skills providers as anchor institutions; LSIPs should be the glue, not another layer.
- **Friction/opportunity:** Siloed activity vs. visible, repeatable collaboration.
 - **What this means in practice:** Publish plain-English local “green asks”; use of single, shared, open dataset; spotlight wins.

- 7 Tech with care:** AI is an enabler and risk
- **Friction/opportunity:** Hype or harm vs. thoughtful, equitable adoption.
 - **What this means in practice:** Build AI literacy and model digital sustainability (ethics, accessibility, energy use).

- 8 Language and story carry weight:** Shared terminology reduces friction; human case studies build belief.
- **Friction/opportunity:** Jargon/confusion vs. clarity and spread.
 - **What this means in practice:** Replace slogans and “green confetti” with short, copy-able exemplars.



b. Golden nuggets

These are the pocket-size ideas people kept returning to: easy to remember, powerful to act on.

- **The power of early adopters – 3% can influence 85%:** a small, confident, visible minority can catalyse culture shift, especially if connected.
- **Teachers’ lived experience is a resource:** Staff often bring deep vocational experience - they can facilitate rather than simply instruct if given space.
- **Optimism as a strategy:** “Hope is a renewable energy” framing sustainability through agency, optimism and moral purpose attracts rather than alienates.
- **Global practice-sharing is underexplored:** Examples of going abroad (eg Netherlands) show appetite for outward-looking collaboration.
- **Estates as both opportunity and contradiction:** Outdated buildings undermine sustainability messages. The estate must align with the message (and all the stuff that comes with this).

c. Mindset shifts needed

From new courses and projects	→	whole-organisation culture
From alongside the FE and skills sector	→	sustainability part of business as usual
From STEM-only	→	all jobs can be green jobs, green skills are for all
From projects	→	ongoing practice
From compliance	→	purpose with accountability
From evidence-first	→	learn-by-doing and share what work
From “it’s the sustainability lead’s job”	→	shared responsibility

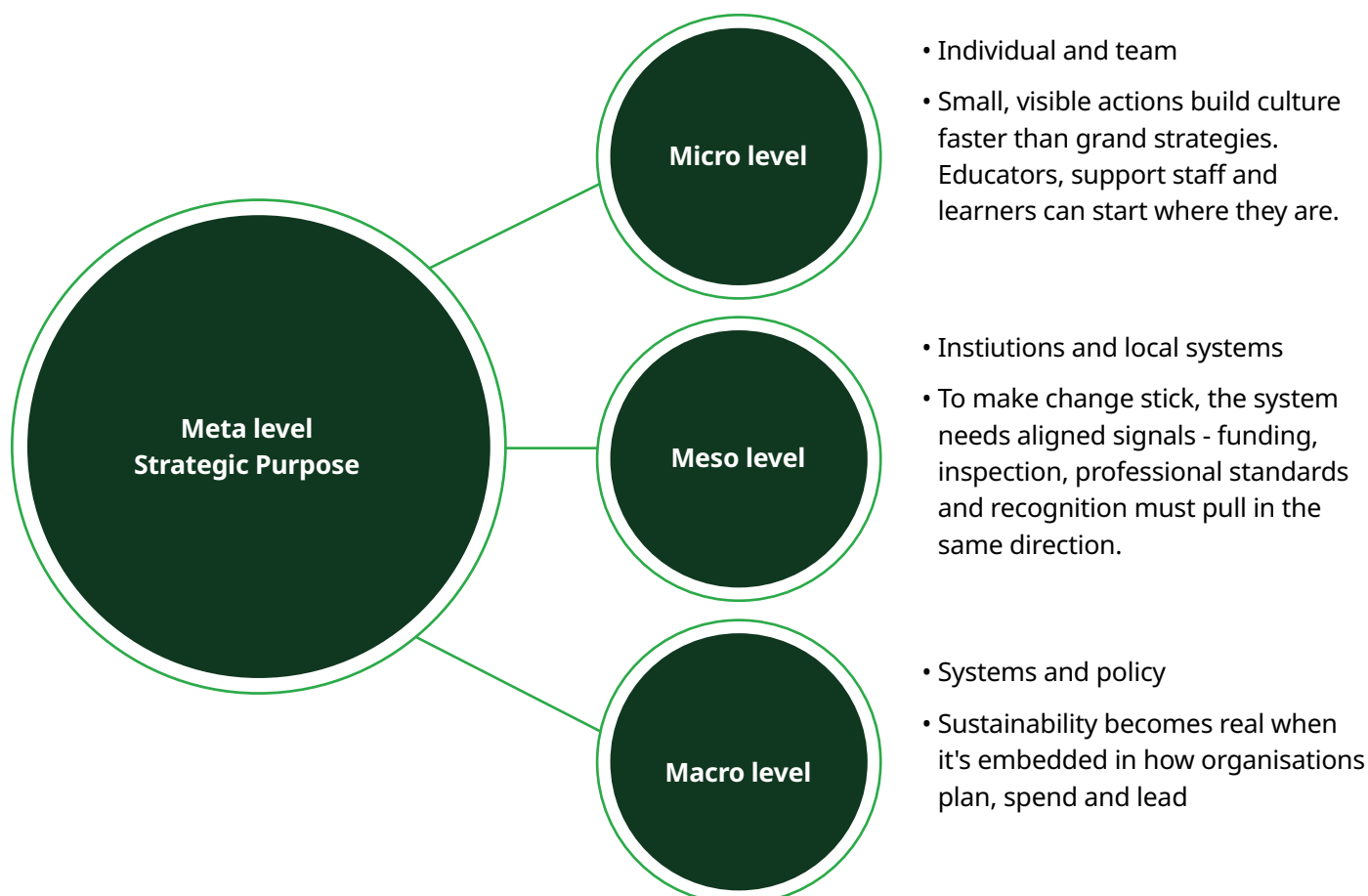
Alongside the playbook, facilitators from the four breakout sessions have shared their reflections on the main topics we explored on the day:

- 1 Paul Smith on Shaping the future (workforce as leaders)
- 2 Sorah Gluck on a just green transition (equity and belonging)
- 3 Lou Mycroft on Place-based changemakers (anchor institutions)
- 4 Toby Shergold on Breaking the silos (systems thinking/interdisciplinarity)



5 **TURNING INSIGHT INTO ACTION**

The Green Mindset Collective confirmed what many across FE and skills already feel: the will for change is strong, but the system must make it easy to act. This section translates insight into practical steps, at individual, institutional and system level, to help every part of the FE and skills ecosystem move from green confetti to green culture.



Micro level - Individuals and teams

- Teach through sustainability: bring people–place–planet perspectives into everyday lessons, reviews and projects. If you're not an educator, you can still bring sustainability into your work.
 - Act as a 3% Changemaker: identify yourself or colleagues as visible champions; protect two hours per week for experimentation and sharing.
 - Use stories, not slogans: share short case studies, learner projects or "how we did it" notes through staff meetings or internal comms.
 - Build agency: co-design initiatives with learners (eg 'One Big Thing' campaigns) and celebrate progress publicly.
 - Reflect and record: use QTLS/ATS portfolios or CPD logs to show how sustainability is shaping your practice.
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Meso level - Institutions and local systems

- Adopt a whole-organisation sustainability strategy, covering curriculum, estates, culture and governance.
 - Empower and connect your 3%: name them, brief them, and give them a platform in internal events or communications.
 - Align incentives: integrate sustainability KPIs into performance reviews, procurement choices, and board reporting.
 - Collaborate, don't duplicate: work with other local providers, LSIPs and employers to co-design micro-qualifications and modular learning.
 - Model the message: ensure estates and operations demonstrate the same sustainable values that teaching promotes.
 - Tell your story: publish plain-English updates and celebrate learner and staff leadership.
-

Macro level - System and policy

- Embed sustainability across all skills policies (Apprenticeships, T Levels, V Levels, LSIPs and inspection and regulatory frameworks).
- Launch a national 'All Skills Are Green Skills' campaign led by ETF, Skills England and partners.
- Fund universal sustainability CPD so every educator can access learning, reflection and practical tools.
- Establish mechanisms for recognising impactful and innovative sustainability practice at individual and organisational levels, to evidence and celebrate progress.
- Introduce sustainability indicators in inspection and accountability frameworks focusing on culture, leadership and impact.
- Coordinate action through Skills England, publishing annual updates on green skills delivery.
- Support FE estate decarbonisation, ensuring physical environments reinforce the message taught in classrooms.

Meta level- the Green Mindset Collective's partner roles

As the professional body for FE and skills, ETF will:

- Embed sustainability in the Professional Standards, QTLS and ATS.
- Offer and encourage uptake of relevant CPD, prospecting a Green CPD Framework.
- Explore its role in recognising individual and organisational recognition.
- Work with EAUC to support sustainability Communities of Practice for the sector, connecting the 3% changemakers.
- Commission practitioner-led research and publishing open-access insights.
- Champion sustainability as the next chapter of professionalism in FE and skills.

The FE News will:

- Continue to report on sustainability issues relevant to the FE and skills sector – helping to spark and sustain a green mindset.
- Ensure that sustainability considerations are embedded across wider collective activity – recognising that environmental responsibility touches all parts of the sector.
- Deliver a regular spotlight series translating sector innovation and award-recognised sustainability practice into relatable stories that encourage uptake and replication (covering processes, partnerships and measures). Collaboration with specialist bodies may be invited to enable this.
- Champion and amplify campaigns and initiatives that recognise all skills as green skills, supporting sector-wide engagement in sustainability.

As the leading body for sustainability in the post-16 education sector, EAUC will:

- Promote whole organisation approaches.
- Provide tools, programmes, resources and support for those working in post-16 education to be able to apply their green mindset.
- Raise the status of the post-16 education sector and recognition of its role in taking sustainability action.
- Collect and analyse data to gain insights into sector trends and needs.
- Convene impactful communities of practice, enabling networking and collaboration opportunities for practitioners, professionals and leaders across the sector.
- Work collaboratively with Government, sector bodies and other decision makers to inform policy and practice.

System change begins with mindset change — but mindset change needs visible action.
Start small, connect often, and measure what matters: culture, confidence and coherence.

6 SIGNPOSTS AND RESOURCES

We know there's already a wealth of guidance, tools and good practice to help the FE and skills community develop and apply a green mindset. Rather than recreate what exists, this section curates a small set of trusted starting points: places to explore, discover and get going quickly. Dip in for frameworks, exemplars and CPD you can lift straight into meetings, planning and delivery.

Sector insights

- **Experiences of ESD in the FE and skills sector** - research report sharing insights into perceptions and experiences of ESD amongst the FE and skills sector workforce: <https://etfoundation.co.uk/professional-development/etf-offer-by-topics/education-for-sustainable-development-esd/esd-in-further-education-fe/experiences-of-esd-in-the-fe-and-skills-sector/>
- **FE News** - sector analysis, updates, news and opinions: <https://www.fenews.co.uk>
- **Sustainability in College Learning and Teaching** - research report of a qualitative study baselining barriers, opportunities, and most impactful actions for sustainability in learning and teaching: <https://www.eauc.org.uk/Resources/Documents/Content?g=04a01ff0-a025-40d3-8c5a-68b74058779f>

Communities of practice

- Peer networks covering a range of sustainability themes as well as regional groups, policy spaces and change making networks from EAUC and partner organisations: <https://www.eauc.org.uk/community/networking-and-communities>

Tools and resources

- **ETF's ESD landing page** – a gateway to reports, tools and CPD: <https://etfoundation.co.uk/professional-development/etf-offer-by-topics/education-for-sustainable-development-esd/>
- **EAUC's publications page** – toolkits, roadmaps, templates, learning packs and more: <https://www.eauc.org.uk/resources>
- **Sustainability Support for Education** – a Department for Education funded resource hub that supports the development and delivery of climate action plans across the whole education sector: <https://www.sustainabilitysupportforeducation.org.uk/>

Exemplars and storytelling

- **Green Gown Awards** case studies from finalists and winners across multiple categories, showcasing the most innovative and impactful examples of sustainability action from across post-16 education: <https://www.greengownawards.org>
- **FE News** (website) case studies and “what worked” stories to build momentum. <https://www.fenews.co.uk>

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