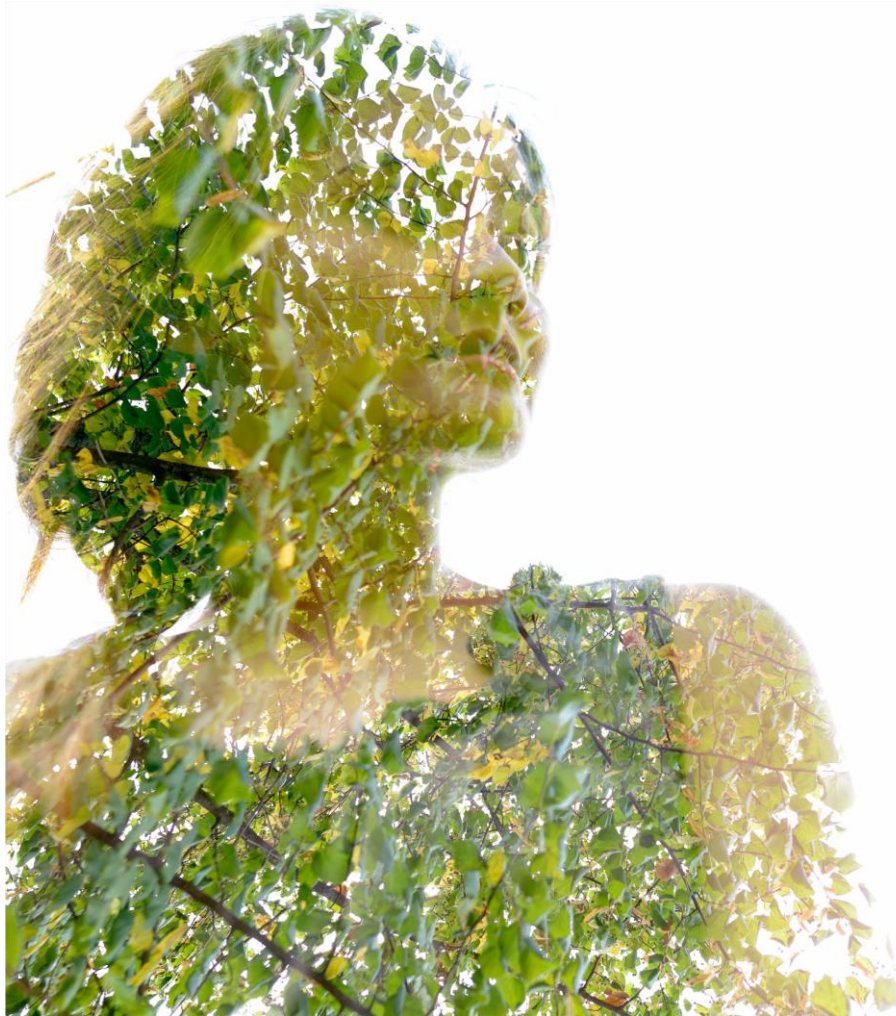




TEACH4SD

GreenComp in Practice:
Ready-to-Use Activities for Vocational education



Odisee University of Applied Sciences
VIA University College



TEACH4SD
Lead the transition
Centres of Vocational Excellence



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Introductory page

This module helps learners apply sustainability competencies in real (vocational) contexts by connecting values, systems thinking, future-oriented thinking and practical action.

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Talk about sustainability competencies using everyday workplace language;
- Recognise and analyse a real sustainability challenge in your own vocational context;
- Suggest practical improvements for a workplace, workshop, service or local community;
- Work with others to design and communicate a small, concrete action for sustainability.

Time usage:

Estimated time to read through and explore the module: approximately 1 hour.

The module introduces several class/course activities: if applied, more time will be needed.

Click “Enter” to start the module. You can always return to this page via the ‘Exit Activity’ button at the top right corner. (Note: when you enter the module, you may notice a slight delay before the content appears. Please be patient. Sorry for the inconvenience.)

Introduction

This module is for trainers and educators in vocational education and training (VET). It gives you a hands-on introduction to sustainability competencies through the GreenComp framework – not as theory, but as practical skills your learners can actually use on the job. It is based on the competency-specific GreenComp modules available on the TEACH4SD ESD Academy.

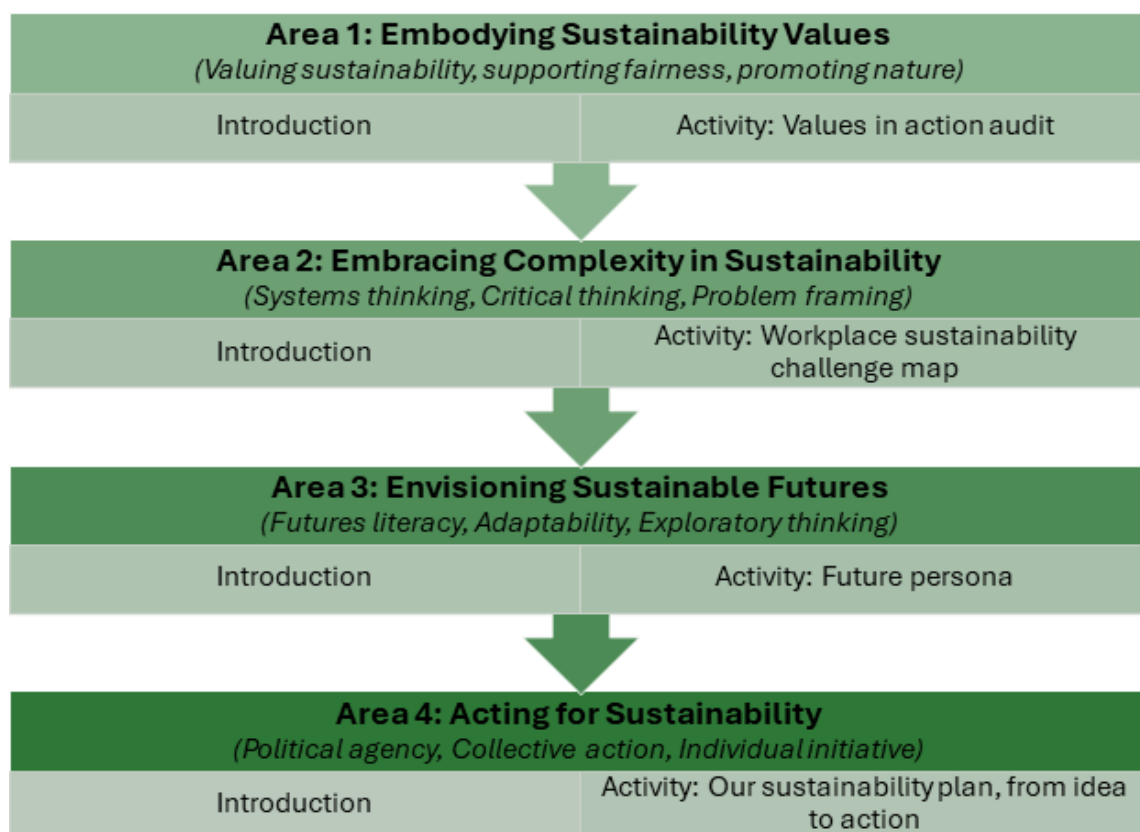
Each section covers one of the four GreenComp competence areas, with a short intro and one ready-to-use activity. Feel free to work through the module from start to finish, or jump straight to the area that fits your current course. For more depth or extra activities, check out the full GreenComp modules on the TEACH4SD ESD Academy.

Estimated time: 4 to 5 hours for all activities (can be split across sessions).

Best suited for: Groups of 8 to 50 learners, although you might be able to adapt the activities to other group sizes as well.

Setting: In-person

Structure of this module:



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Note for educators

This module works best when you adapt it to your learners' specific sector and context. The activities are designed to be flexible: scenarios, topics, and examples can all be swapped out to match what your learners can actually encounter in their professional lives.

Before you start, take a moment to reflect on your own approach as a trainer. How do these principles apply in your practice?

- I build on **what learners already know** from their work experience.
- I make room for **uncertainty**; there is no single right answer in sustainability.
- I link activities to **real workplaces and actual decisions** learners may face.
- I take time to **debrief and reflect**: that is where much of the learning happens.

Use this checklist at the start of a module to set your intentions, or revisit it afterwards to see what worked.



Area 1: Embodying Sustainability Values

Introduction to Embodying Sustainability Values

Before we can act sustainably, we need to know what matters to us – and why. This area helps learners think about their own values, see that others may look at the world differently, and make the link between those values and everyday choices at work and in daily life.

In vocational education, this is especially relevant: a plumber choosing eco-friendly materials, a chef sourcing local food, a logistics coordinator reducing unnecessary transport... these are all expressions of sustainability values in action.

Relevant competencies for sustainable development related to Embodying Sustainability Values are:

- Valuing sustainability
- Supporting fairness
- Promoting nature

Valuing sustainability:	Supporting fairness:	Promoting nature:
Reflect on what matters to you, recognise that people's values differ and change, and check how your own values match with sustainable ways of living and working.	Act in ways that promote fairness and justice for people today and in the future, while learning from past generations to make better choices.	Understand that humans are part of nature, and show respect for the needs and rights of other species and ecosystems so that nature can stay healthy and resilient.

Key question for your learners: *"What matters to you, and how does that show up in the work you do?"*

Observation checklist for educators

Use this checklist while observing learners during the activities. It gives you a quick and structured way to assess their sustainability competencies in action.

Area 1 – Embodying Sustainability Values:

- ☐ The learner identifies personal values related to sustainability.
- ☐ The learner recognises that others may hold different values.
- ☐ The learner connects their values to concrete choices in their professional context.

Rating scale (optional): 0 = not yet visible | 1 = emerging | 2 = clearly demonstrated



Activity: Values in action audit

This activity covers the competencies Valuing sustainability, Supporting fairness, and Promoting nature.

Learners investigate a real vocational practice and explore it through three lenses: sustainability values, fairness, and nature.

Time: approximately 60 minutes

Group size: Any

Materials: paper and pens, optional: print-out with topics and the worksheet questions below.

Steps:

1. Choose a topic (10 minutes)

In pairs or small groups, learners choose one familiar practice (related to their sector), such as:

- Food preparation and waste in a catering class
- Material use in a construction or engineering workshop
- Cleaning products and routines in hospitality
- Stock, packaging and sourcing in retail
- Equipment use and consumables in hair and beauty
- Laundry, chemicals or infection-control routines in care settings
- ... (feel free to start from your own experience)

In large groups, you can print a number of topics on hand-outs and hand them out randomly.

2. Audit (30 minutes: 10 minutes per topic)

Learners carry out a short audit using three questions:

- **Values:** what is this practice prioritising in reality: speed, cost, convenience, quality, safety, sustainability or anything else?
- **Fairness:** who benefits, who is excluded, and who carries the environmental or social cost?
- **Nature:** what is the effect on waste, water, energy, and biodiversity?

3. Share (20 minutes)

Discuss in the group and record your findings: use the worksheet questions below or a blank sheet of paper. For each topic, note down: the current practice, the hidden trade-offs, one realistic improvement, and one stretch improvement.



As an educator, you can create your own template using the questions below:

Values in action audit: Worksheet questions

Sector/practice: ...

- a. Values:
 - What does this practice prioritise? ...
- b. Fairness:
 - Who benefits? ...
 - Who is excluded? ...
 - Who carries the cost? ...
- c. Nature:
 - What is the impact on waste, water, energy and biodiversity? ...

One realistic improvement: ...

One stretch improvement: ...

In very large groups, bring a few small groups together to share with up to 3 other groups.



Area 2: Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

Introduction to Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

Sustainability challenges are never simple. They involve many people, systems, and difficult trade-offs. This area helps learners think in systems, question their assumptions, and describe problems in a way that leads to better solutions.

In vocational contexts, this means understanding that a decision made in one part of a workplace (for example, changing from one supplier to another) can have ripple effects on quality, working conditions, and environmental impact elsewhere.

Relevant competencies for sustainable development related to Embracing Complexity in Sustainability are:

- Systems thinking
- Critical thinking
- Problem framing

Systems thinking:	Critical thinking:	Problem framing:
Look at sustainability challenges from different angles, considering time, place and context, to understand how different parts of a system influence each other.	Evaluate information and arguments carefully, question assumptions, and recognise how your background and experiences shape your thinking.	Define a challenge as a sustainability problem by identifying who is involved, what the difficulty is, and the time and location it affects, so you can choose the right approach to prevent or address it.

Key question for your learners:

"When one thing changes, what else is connected to it?"

Observation checklist for educators

Use this checklist while observing learners during the activities. It gives you a quick and structured way to assess their sustainability competencies in action.

Area 2 – Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

- ☐ The learner identifies multiple causes and stakeholders linked to a sustainability challenge.
- ☐ The learner distinguishes between facts and assumptions.
- ☐ The learner formulates a clear and specific problem statement.

Rating scale (optional): 0 = not yet visible | 1 = emerging | 2 = clearly demonstrated



Activity: Workplace sustainability challenge map

This activity covers the competencies Systems thinking, Critical thinking, and Problem framing.

Learners analyse a real sustainability challenge as a system rather than a single fault.

Time: 35-40 minutes

Group size: 4-40 learners (individual reflection, then group discussion)

Materials: pen & blank sheets of paper, or create a worksheet using the questions below.

Workplace sustainability challenge map: Worksheet questions

- Sustainability challenge: ...
- Main issue: ...
- Causes and contributing factors: ...
- People involved (stakeholders): ...
- Short-term impacts: ...
- Long-term impacts: ...
- What is solid evidence vs. what is assumed? ...
- What is actually within our control? ...
- Disruption scenario (what if something unexpected happens?): ...
- Problem statement (rewrite the issue in one clear sentence): ...
- Two evidence-based intervention ideas:
 - ...
 - ...

Steps:

1) Start from a practical problem

You could come up with a sustainability challenge related to the sector of the learners, or you could invite a guest speaker from a business or organisation that could provide a case. Some examples:

- High material waste in a workshop
- Repeated replacement (of machines/clothes/furniture/other items) instead of repair
- Excessive single-use packaging
- Overheating or poor energy use in a training environment
- Water waste
- Unsold stock or food waste
- Poor access or unfair service design
- ...

2) Learners build a challenge map showing...

- The main issue
- Causes and contributing factors
- People involved
- Short-term and long-term impacts
- What evidence is solid and what is assumed
- Which part of the problem is actually within their control

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- 3) Then, they add a disruption: What if something unexpected changed?
For example: a new regulation bans the material they rely on, or the main supplier drops out. How does the system respond? How could they adapt?
- 4) Finally, they rewrite the issue as a properly framed problem statement.
For example: "Material waste in the carpentry workshop is not only a disposal issue; it is also a planning, storage, training and procurement issue affecting cost, efficiency, and sustainability."

Output: a systems map, a disruption scenario, a problem statement, and two evidence-based intervention ideas.



Area 3: Envisioning Sustainable Futures

Introduction to Envisioning Sustainable Futures

This area is about imagination: the ability to picture futures that do not exist yet, and to ask what it would take to get there. Futures thinking is not about predicting the future – it is about exploring what could happen if we made different choices. What might your sector look like in 10 years? What skills will learners need by then? And what role can they play in making their profession more sustainable?

Relevant competencies for sustainable development related to Envisioning Sustainable Futures are:

- Futures literacy
- Adaptability
- Exploratory thinking

Futures literacy:	Adaptability:	Exploratory thinking:
Imagine different possible sustainable futures, explore what they might look like, and identify the steps needed to move toward the future you prefer.	Handle change and uncertainty in sustainability situations by staying flexible, making informed decisions, and adjusting your approach when needed.	Use creativity, experimentation and cross-disciplinary thinking to explore new ideas, methods or connections that support sustainability.

Key question for your learners: *"What could your workplace (or your profession) look like in 2040 if sustainability was truly at its core?"*

Observation checklist for educators

Use this checklist while observing learners during the activities. It gives you a quick and structured way to assess their sustainability competencies in action.

Area 3 – Envisioning Sustainable Futures

- ☐ The learner imagines a realistic and concrete future scenario.
- ☐ The learner considers what would need to change to reach that future.
- ☐ The learner makes a connection between the future vision and current actions.

Rating scale (optional): 0 = not yet visible | 1 = emerging | 2 = clearly demonstrated



Activity: Future Persona

Based on the Future Persona activity (Futures literacy module), this activity covers the competencies Futures literacy, Adaptability, and Exploratory thinking.

Groups create a fictional person who works in their sector in the year 2040, in a world where sustainability has become central to everyday professional life. By giving this future professional a name, a daily routine, and a set of values, learners make abstract futures concrete and personal.

Time: 50–70 minutes

Group size: Groups of 3–4 learners

Materials: Large paper or cards, markers, optional printed persona template

Steps:

1) Introduce the scenario (5–10 min)

Tell learners: "Imagine it is 2040. Your sector has gone through a major sustainability transformation. New materials, new regulations, new consumer expectations, new ways of working. Imagine someone who works in your profession in that world."

The changes they imagine could be based on current trends (very obvious changes in society such as the role of AI, which is gaining importance in many sectors), or so called "weak signals": seemingly minor things that are happening now, which could potentially grow into a trend in the future.

2) Build the persona (25–30 min)

Each group completes the persona profile below on a large sheet of paper.

A printed template works well for this: it keeps groups focused and makes it easy to compare personas afterwards.



Name	
Age in 2040	
Job title (this may be a job that does not exist yet)	
A typical Tuesday (what does a regular working day look like?)	
Achievement (What sustainable practices are simply normal in this job?)	
Challenge (What difficulties does this person still face?)	
What changed since the current year? (What shifted between now and 2040 to make this possible? Think of changes regarding technology, culture, regulation...)	

Tip: print one template per group on A3 paper and display them side-by-side during the presentations. Seeing different personas together makes for a richer group discussion.

3) Present and discuss (20–30 min)

Groups present their personas to the class. After each presentation, discuss in class:

- *"Is this future realistic? What would need to happen to get there?"*
- *"What skills or knowledge would someone in this role need?"*
- *"What can we do today (in this classroom, in this course) to start preparing for this?"*

Tip for educators:

Encourage creativity, but also realism. If a group's vision feels utopian, ask: "What would have to change for this to be possible? Who would need to make decisions?" This connects imagination to action.



Area 4: Acting for Sustainability

Introduction to Acting for Sustainability

Knowing about sustainability and imagining a better future matters – but change only happens when we act. This area focuses on working with others, taking initiative and making a real contribution to sustainability in your workplace or community.

In vocational education, this is perhaps the most direct connection: learners are training for professions where they will have real influence. A construction worker who advocates for greener materials, a nurse who reduces medical waste, a chef who changes a menu: these are acts of sustainability.

Relevant competencies for sustainable development related to Acting for Sustainability are:

- Political agency
- Collective action
- Individual initiative

Political agency:	Collective action:	Individual initiative:
Understand how political systems work, recognise who is responsible for (un)sustainable practices, and speak up for policies that support sustainability.	Work together with others to create positive change.	Recognise your own strengths and opportunities to contribute to sustainability, and take action to improve your community and the planet.

Key question for your learners:

"What is one thing you could actually do, starting this week, to make your workplace or community a little more sustainable?"

Observation checklist for educators

Use this checklist while observing learners during the activities. It gives you a quick and structured way to assess their sustainability competencies in action.

Area 4 – Acting for Sustainability

- ☐ The learner proposes a specific, local and actionable improvement.
- ☐ The learner identifies relevant stakeholders and potential obstacles.
- ☐ The learner commits to a personal next step.

Rating scale (optional): 0 = not yet visible | 1 = emerging | 2 = clearly demonstrated



Activity: From sustainable idea to action

Based on the Joint Action Planning and Stakeholder Mapping activities (Collective Action module), this activity covers the competencies Political agency, Collective action, and Individual Initiative.

Groups identify a real sustainability challenge in their workplace, school, or community, and design a concrete, realistic action plan to address it. The emphasis is on *doing*: Who will do what? By when? With whom?

Time: 90–120 minutes (can be split across two sessions)

Group size: Groups of 4–5 learners

Materials: Large paper, sticky notes, markers, optionally a Gantt chart template

Steps:

1) Choose a challenge (15 min)

Each group selects a sustainability challenge they have actually encountered or could realistically address. It should be specific, local, and actionable:

- Specific: not "climate change" (too vague) but "our workshop produces a lot of packaging waste"
- Local: something they have some influence over
- Actionable: something that could realistically change

Examples by sector:

- *Catering*: "We throw away a lot of food at the end of each day"
- *Construction*: "We don't sort our waste properly on site"
- *Healthcare*: "We use too many disposable gloves unnecessarily"
- *IT/Technology*: "Old devices are thrown away rather than repaired or donated"
- *Retail*: "Customers rarely bring reusable bags"

Tip: If learners completed Activity 2 (Workplace sustainability challenge map), they can use the problem statement they developed there as the starting point for their action plan. This helps them move from analysis to action in a concrete way.

2) Map the stakeholders (15–20 min)

Ask groups to write down everyone who is connected to this challenge: colleagues, managers, customers, suppliers, local government, community groups. Then discuss:

- Who could help make change happen?
- Who might resist it, and why?
- Whose voices are often missing from this conversation?

3) Design the action plan (30–40 min)

Each group creates a simple action plan on a large sheet of paper or using the template below. A printed version works well: groups can hang it on the wall/whiteboard and use it during the feedback round.



What is the challenge?	
What is our goal?	
What are your three main actions and who is responsible for each action?	
<i>What</i> do we need to get started?	
<i>Who</i> could support us?	
What might get in the way?	
How will you know if it is working?	

4) Present and give feedback (20–30 min)

Groups present their plans. After each presentation, the class gives structured feedback using three prompts:

- "One thing that's strong about this plan, is..."
- "One question we still have, is..."
- "One suggestion to make it more feasible or inclusive, is..."

5) Personal commitment (10 min)

To close, each learner individually writes down on a card: *"One thing I will do in the next two weeks as a result of today."*

Cards can be kept by the learner, shared with a partner for accountability, or pinned to a class "commitment wall."

Tip for educators:

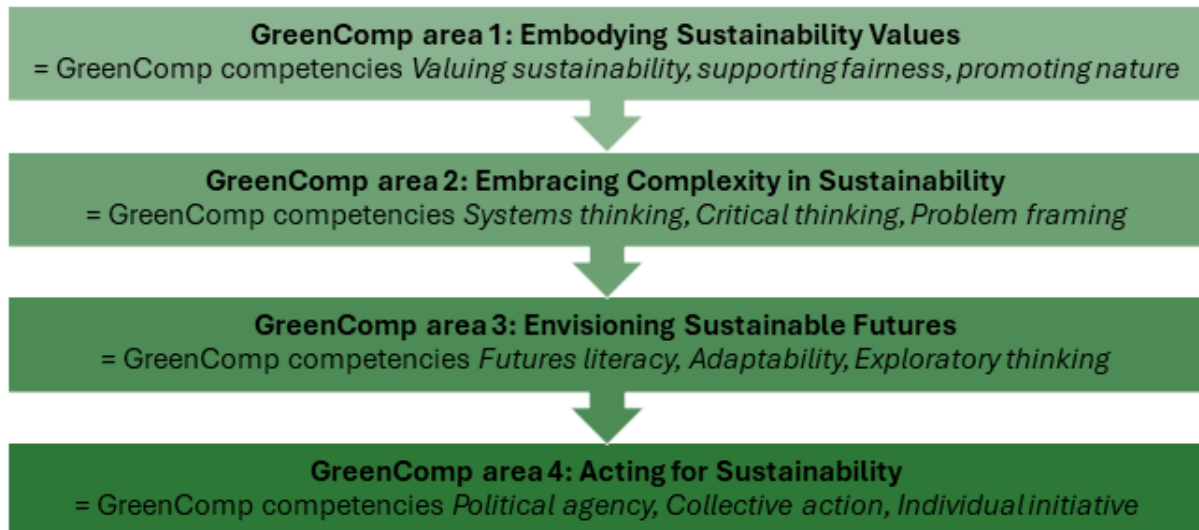
If time allows, follow up in a later session to ask learners how their commitments went. This transforms a one-off exercise into an ongoing practice, which is exactly what sustainability requires.



Final notes

This module summarises the competency-specific GreenComp modules. If you want to have a deeper understanding of the competencies involved, more inspiration regarding activities, have a look at the corresponding [GreenComp module\(s\)](#) on the ESD Academy.

An overview:





Literature

- Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., GreenComp: The European sustainability competence framework, Punie, Y. and Bacigalupo, M. editor(s), EUR 30955 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-46485-3, doi:10.2760/13286, JRC128040
- Brundiers, K., Barth, M., Cebrián, G., Cohen, M., Diaz, L., Doucette-Remington, S., Dripps, W., Habron, G., Harre, N., Jarchows, M., Losche, K., Michel, J., Mochizuki, Y., Rieckmann, M., Parnell, R., Walker, P., Zint, M. (2021). Key competencies in sustainability in higher education—toward an agreed-upon reference framework. *Sustainability Science*, 16(1), 13-29.
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