

2026-2029

The Ayrshire College Sustainability Framework sets out how we will embed sustainability across our learning, operations and partnerships. It provides a clear structure for action and a way to measure our progress as we work towards a more sustainable and resilient future for our students, staff and communities.

Sustainability Framework



Empowering People for a Changing World



SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK 2026-2029

Introduction

The Ayrshire College Sustainability Framework sets out how we will embed sustainability across our learning, operations and partnerships. It provides a clear structure for action and a way to measure our progress as we work towards a more sustainable and resilient future for our students, staff and communities.

This Framework reflects the College's role in supporting both national and global goals. In Scotland, colleges are key partners in achieving net zero emissions by 2045, contributing to the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan, Public Bodies Climate Change Duties and the Just Transition towards a fair, green economy. We are committed to preparing our learners with the skills, knowledge and values needed to thrive in this changing world.

Our approach is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a global framework for action on climate, equality and prosperity. The SDGs offer a lens through which we can view and measure our impact, connecting local progress with global responsibility. At a national level we are committed to the actions of the FE Climate Change Roadmap, and this has helped shape our own plan for sustainability at the College.

The Framework is led and supported by the College's SEES Group (Social, Environmental and Economic Sustainability), who champion sustainability across the College and ensure coordinated progress. Through this approach, the College commits to leading by example — reducing our environmental footprint, inspiring sustainable behaviours and empowering our communities to help shape a fairer, greener future for Ayrshire and beyond.



SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK 2026-2029

Purpose and Scope

The Sustainability Framework sets out how we plan, deliver and review our sustainability ambitions. It brings together our environmental, social and economic responsibilities within a single, clear approach that supports our Strategic Ambition and values.

The Framework guides decision-making across all areas of the College — from curriculum and operations to procurement, partnerships and community engagement. It ensures that sustainability is not a separate activity but a core principle shaping how we teach, work and innovate. Progress will be measured using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring transparency and enabling us to demonstrate the wider impact of our actions.

The Sustainability Framework is structured around three core pillars — Social, Economic and Environmental — which set the overall focus of our ambitions. To support delivery, the Framework also includes three cross-cutting Workstreams: Learning and Teaching; Partnerships and Engagement; and Estates and Operations. These Workstreams operate across all pillars and are based on our SEES group subgroups, ensuring sustainability is embedded in both our educational purpose and our operational practice.

The College recognises that delivering meaningful sustainability outcomes requires long-term commitment and investment. In the current challenging funding landscape for further education, progress will rely not only on College action but also on continued national support and government intervention to enable major infrastructure and decarbonisation projects.

Pillars



Social Sustainability

The College promotes equality, wellbeing and inclusion, ensuring everyone can learn and work in a supportive environment.

Our focus is on reducing inequalities and strengthening our communities through meaningful learning and engagement.



Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability means operating efficiently and responsibly while supporting the region's transition to a green economy.

We build future skills, use resources wisely and ensure long-term value for our students, partners and communities.



Environmental Sustainability

We are committed to reducing our environmental impact by cutting emissions, minimising waste and protecting natural resources.

Through our actions and learning culture, we contribute to a more climate-resilient and sustainable future.

Workstreams



Learning and Teaching

Sustainability is embedded across learning, teaching and research, equipping students and staff with the knowledge, skills and curiosity to drive a fair, inclusive and net-zero future. The College fosters innovation and inquiry that address real-world sustainability challenges and create lasting social, environmental and economic benefit.



Estates and Operations

The College manages its campuses and resources responsibly, reducing carbon emissions, improving efficiency and supporting biodiversity.

Every operational decision considers environmental, social and economic impact.



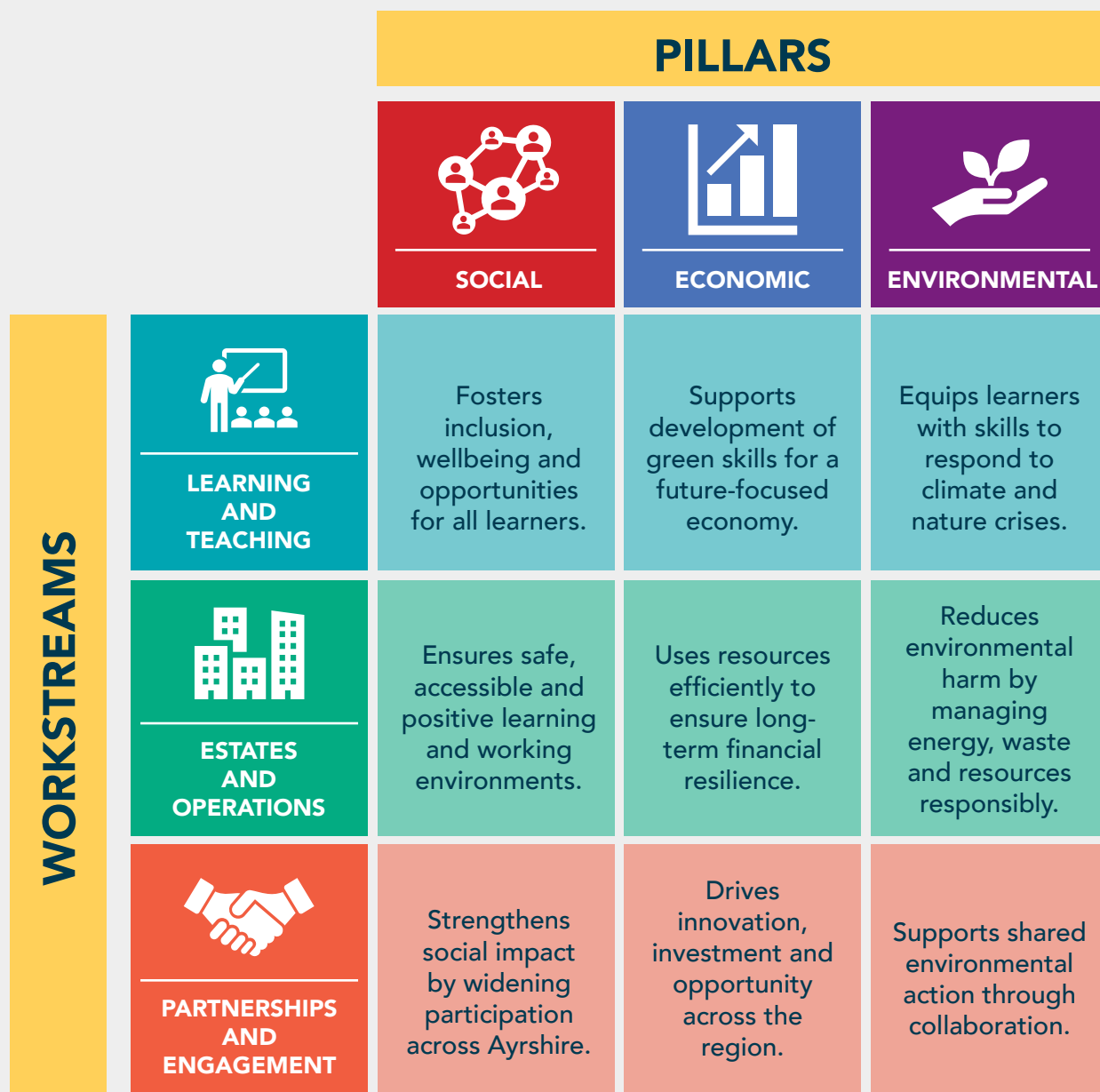
Partnerships and Engagement

Working collaboratively with students, staff, employers and communities, the College promotes shared responsibility for sustainability.

Partnerships strengthen regional resilience and support Scotland's just transition to a green economy.

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK 2026-2029

Framework in Action





WORKSTREAM OBJECTIVES

Learning and Teaching

- **Integrate sustainability into the curriculum across all courses, using the Responsible Futures Framework for accreditation.**
- **Provide carbon literacy training for all staff and students to raise awareness and promote sustainable practices.**
- **Encourage and support projects focused on sustainability and climate change**



SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK 2026-2029



#PassingPositivity

Mental Health United is a student-led initiative designed to support positive mental health and wellbeing across Ayrshire. Developed by HND Sports students at the College, the project uses the power of sport, physical activity and human connection to encourage open conversations and support those who may be struggling. The initiative emerged at a time of rising suicide rates in the region, motivating students to take action as peers and community advocates.

Over the course of a year, the campaign created a programme of visible, inclusive activities aimed at getting people active, connected and talking. Students organised school outreach sessions, community sports festivals, fitness challenges, wellbeing workshops and social events. A strong campaign identity, supported by branded sportswear and the hashtag #PassingPositivity, helped build momentum and awareness both on campus and online.

To extend its reach, the group partnered with The Kris Boyd Charity, founded after personal loss experienced by the former Scotland international footballer. Together, they hosted high-profile mental health awareness events, including a major charity football tournament at the College's Kilmarnock campus featuring 18 teams and attendance from Kris Boyd, Paul McNeill from the Scottish FA, and former professional Andy McLaren. Support organisations including Breathing Space, Choose Life and the Samaritans provided direct access to advice and services on the day.

The impact has been significant. The project has engaged thousands of students, staff and community members, helping to reduce stigma, build confidence and normalise conversations around mental health. With support from national sports figures, celebrities and the wider community, the message of #PassingPositivity spread far beyond Ayrshire, amplifying hope, visibility and connection.

Mental Health United continues to grow, demonstrating the power of student leadership, partnership and collective action — and reinforcing the belief that a single conversation, activity or moment of support can make a meaningful difference.



"I am truly honoured to be part of MENTAL Health United. I've witnessed first-hand the powerful difference this group makes in people's lives, offering support, hope and a sense of belonging when it's needed most."

Kris Boyd

Former Professional Footballer and Scotland International

"Football is a powerful tool to engage with people and create opportunities to talk about life and mental health. Bringing people together in this way allows conversations to happen naturally and can make a real difference, showing how sport can support people and help them feel connected."

Andy McLaren

Former Professional Footballer and Scotland International



SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK 2026-2029



Mental Health United: Football Supporting Mental Wellbeing

The College is using football as a powerful tool to support mental health through Mental Health United, which forms part of its Community Sports Hub. The Hub connects sports clubs and organisations to promote wellbeing, inclusion, and social connection.

The programme runs weekly drop-in sessions that blend physical activity with open conversation in a relaxed, welcoming environment. Each session includes two 30-minute football games led by Sports Lecturer David Dougan, followed by a 15-minute "Team Talk". The Team Talk is co-facilitated by David and Richard, a Mental Health Nurse and staff volunteer. Both take part in the games alongside participants, helping to break down barriers, build trust, and create genuine connection.

With 43 registered members, the group is open to anyone whenever they feel ready to attend. If someone hasn't been along for a while, they receive a supportive check-in to make sure they're okay, reinforcing the sense of care and belonging at the heart of the programme.



Building Belonging and Confidence

Participants are rewarded with branded t-shirts, hoodies, hats, and backpacks, helping to build pride, confidence, and a strong sense of community identity. The Team Talk has proven especially impactful, giving men a relatable, football-focused space where they feel comfortable opening up about their mental health.

Inclusive and Impactful

The group brings together people aged 17 to 58, including school pupils, college staff, individuals experiencing unemployment, and those in recovery from addiction. Referrals come from organisations such as Police Scotland, Salvation Army, Student Services, and the East Ayrshire Recovery Hub.

These sessions have successfully united people from very different backgrounds, helping to reduce isolation and broaden perspectives. One participant from Nigeria shared how the experience helped him better appreciate the opportunities available in Scotland and feel more connected to his community.



"It's a safe space to play football and talk about mental health"

Simon Donnelly

Former Scotland International

"We see deeper and more meaningful connections each week"

Richard Hughes

Lecturer, Health & Social Care

Supported by the Sporting Community

The programme is supported by the Kris Boyd Charity and OnlySport, and has welcomed guest speakers from across the footballing world. These include Andy McLaren, Chris Burke, Garry Hay, Simon Donnelly, and Kris Boyd, further strengthening the programme's impact and visibility.



WORKSTREAM OBJECTIVES

Estates and Operations

- **Measure the College's carbon footprint and set targets to reduce emissions, including Scope 3 emissions**
- **Implement strategies to reduce energy use, such as upgrading to energy-efficient lighting and heating systems**
- **Develop a fossil fuel divestment plan and transition to renewable energy sources for the College estate**
- **Establish a new Space Management Policy to improve space utilisation and reduce operational costs**



SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK 2026-2029



Furnishing Sustainability

The College has forged a pioneering partnership with Saxen Commercial Interiors — Scotland’s leading provider of new and refurbished commercial furniture — to embed environmental and economic sustainability into its campus environments. Since launching the collaboration, the College has invested nearly £15,000 in upcycled, recycled and refurbished furniture supplied by Saxen. This investment supported furnishing across multiple campus spaces, most notably the College’s café, which was recently fitted out using Saxen’s sustainable furniture solutions.

Saxen’s approach aligns closely with circular-economy principles: they refurbish existing furniture through their “Refurbhub”, restoring all kinds of office furniture, from lounge seating to desking, pods, booths, and storage, at a fraction of the cost of new pieces. This process extends product lifecycles and avoids landfill. Some of the furniture also incorporates eco-friendly materials such as recycled textiles and plastics, helping reduce resource consumption and embodied carbon.

In addition to sourcing from Saxen, the College supports furniture donation. Surplus items from the College are passed on via Saxen to local charities and community organisations, boosting reuse, community benefit and resource circulation.

By adopting Saxen as its “first port of call” for furniture procurement, the College is embedding sustainability into everyday decisions, aligning with its broader institutional commitment to social, environmental and economic responsibility. The result is attractive, functional spaces on campus that symbolise care for people and planet — and a practical demonstration that reuse and circular procurement can deliver value, reduce waste and support local communities.

“Saxen is delighted at Ayrshire College’s support and faith in us, we are incredibly proud of the work we do to bring sustainability into every project we undertake. We look forward to seeing what the future brings and embracing this journey”

Lyndsey McLarney,
Interiors Solutions Manager, Saxen

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK 2026-2029

Nourishing our Community

What began as a simple idea to support student retention has grown into a core expression of the College's commitment to social and economic sustainability. Several years ago, the College introduced free soup and porridge to ensure that no student was learning on an empty stomach. While initially supported by external funding, the success and importance of the initiative led the College to embed it permanently into the College budget, recognising it as an essential part of how the College cares for its community.

Today, the initiative runs across all three campuses and has become important to many learners. The offer is simple, accessible and stigma-free: no questions asked, no eligibility criteria, just a warm, nourishing meal available to everyone. For many students balancing study, work and rising living costs, this small daily support can make a significant difference to energy levels, concentration and overall wellbeing. The scale of the initiative reflects its value. In the 2024–25 academic year, the College provided 13,561 bowls of soup and 5,765 bowls of porridge—more than 19,000 servings of nutritious food made freely available to learners.

The impact reaches beyond individual wellbeing. By embedding the programme into its operating budget, the College is demonstrating leadership in addressing food insecurity, reducing barriers to education and supporting a fairer, more resilient region. What started as a retention measure has become a powerful, practical example of how the College lives its values—nourishing not only learning, but community and opportunity.



"Our priority is to deliver tangible benefits in the regions where we operate and invest. Supporting this initiative for Ayrshire College reflects our commitment to building meaningful local partnerships and create lasting benefits. Students are the emerging workforce of the future – our commitment here starts with a nutritious meal to support learning."

Mark Vyvyan-Robinson

Business Development Director for Highview

Powering Learning Sustainably

The College is proud to be a key beneficiary and partner in the Nethermills Hydro Scheme — an innovative renewable energy project that brings clean, zero-carbon power directly to our Riverside Building in Ayr. Located on a historic stretch of the River Ayr once home to 26 watermills, the project represents a modern revival of local innovation. Developed by Energy Agency Renewables Limited, it blends environmental restoration, heritage and engineering while delivering long-term benefits for the College and wider community.

The scheme centres on a 4-metre Archimedes screw turbine, a fish-friendly, efficient technology with minimal ecological impact. Construction began in 2021 and required careful planning to manage river conditions and install the 25-tonne screw imported from Belgium. The powerhouse was designed to sit sensitively in the landscape, including a sedum roof to boost biodiversity, and more than 30 local businesses contributed to the build, demonstrating strong regional collaboration.

Since becoming operational in February 2022, Nethermills Hydro has generated 977 MWh of renewable electricity for the College, with 750 MWh (76%) used directly onsite and the remainder exported to the grid. This locally produced energy reduces carbon emissions and operational costs, strengthening our commitment to environmental sustainability.

The scheme is also a valuable educational asset. Students created a mural for the powerhouse and are designing an interpretive display, while the site supports technical learning. A fish counter operated by Ayrshire Rivers Trust further contributes data to national research. Nethermills Hydro stands as a clear example of how Ayrshire College supports — and benefits from — innovative, community-embedded renewable energy solutions.

Nethermills Hydro Scheme is a powerful example of what can be achieved when organisations share a commitment to sustainability and innovation. Ayrshire College has been an exceptional partner in helping transform a historic stretch of the River Ayr into a modern source of zero-carbon electricity that directly supports the College's sustainability goals. The Energy Agency is immensely proud of this project, not only for delivering clean, reliable renewable energy, but also by helping to inspire the next generation. Being able to support students with access to a real-world learning resource is particularly rewarding.

Alan McGonigle

Managing Director, Energy Agency





WORKSTREAM OBJECTIVES

Partnerships and Engagement

- **Work with local authorities, businesses, and the community to improve local biodiversity and promote sustainable practices**
- **Participate in the Global Goals Teach-in and establish a climate action network with the local council**
- **Share best practices and collaborate with other colleges and universities to advance sustainability efforts**



Driving Sustainable Growth: The College and the Ayrshire Growth Deal

The Ayrshire Growth Deal (AGD) is seen as a catalyst for embedding sustainability within the College's operations and strategic direction. As part of the regional economic strategy, the Growth Deal emphasizes clean growth, innovation and inclusive development. These principles align closely with the College's Strategic Ambition (2024–2027). This alignment has influenced several key areas:

Estate and Infrastructure Development

Investment priorities under the Growth Deal will support the modernisation of the College estate, enabling energy-efficient upgrades and the adoption of low-carbon technologies. These improvements should reduce the College's carbon footprint and contribute to Scotland's net-zero targets.

Curriculum and Skills Pipeline

The Growth Deal's focus on sectors such as engineering, aerospace and clean growth has informed curriculum planning. The College now integrates sustainability principles into course design and delivery, ensuring learners acquire skills relevant to a green economy. This approach strengthens the regional workforce and supports long-term environmental goals.

Collaborative Partnerships

Through Growth Deal initiatives, the College has deepened partnerships with local businesses, public agencies and third-sector organisations. These collaborations foster innovation in sustainable practices and create opportunities for joint projects that advance environmental stewardship across Ayrshire.

Governance and Reporting

The College's sustainability reporting framework has evolved to reflect Growth Deal priorities. Annual climate change data submissions, risk assessments and action plans now incorporate regional objectives, ensuring transparency and accountability in delivering sustainable outcomes



The Ayrshire Growth Deal is a catalyst for embedding sustainability at the heart of our College's operations and strategic direction. Its emphasis on clean growth, innovation and inclusive development aligns perfectly with our own strategic ambitions for 2024–2027. This partnership not only accelerates our progress towards a low-carbon future but also ensures that our learners, staff and wider community benefit from a more resilient, forward-thinking institution"

Alan Ritchie

Vice Principal - Finance and Infrastructure, Ayrshire College



Collaborating for People, Place and Sustainability

The College plays an active role in shaping the future of the region through participation in key strategic partnerships that support regeneration and sustainability. As a member of the Kilmarnock Town Centre Regeneration Taskforce, the College works alongside local authorities, community representatives and regeneration specialists to support the delivery of the Kilmarnock Town Centre Master Plan.

Regular Taskforce meetings bring together all partners and the Master Planning team to coordinate activity, share progress and ensure that regeneration efforts are aligned, collaborative and responsive to local needs.

Through this involvement, the College contributes its expertise in skills development, education and community engagement, helping ensure that regeneration supports inclusive growth and long-term resilience.

The College's presence within the Taskforce strengthens connections between education, employability and place-based development, reinforcing the role of the town centre as a vibrant hub for learning, work and community life.



South Ayrshire Council Sustainability Strategic Delivery Partnership

The South Ayrshire Sustainability Strategic Delivery Partnership (SDP) brings together the Council, community planning partners, and local organisations to coordinate action on sustainability across South Ayrshire. Ayrshire College is an active member of this partnership, bringing valuable expertise in education, skills development, and community engagement.

Working across the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) priorities, the partnership focuses on turning shared ambitions into practical delivery. As part of this, Ayrshire College contributes by supporting skills for the green economy, embedding sustainability within curriculum and campus operations, and offering opportunities for collaboration on research, innovation, and community projects.

By collaborating with community planning partners, the partnership supports adaptation to a changing climate and promotes a just transition to net zero, ensuring environmental action contributes to improved and inclusive outcomes for local communities now and in the future.

"Ayrshire College plays a valuable role in our South Ayrshire Sustainability Strategic Delivery Partnership. By working together as partners through the SDP we are better able to collaborate to respond to the climate and nature emergencies, ensuring through our actions that local people and communities thrive on the path to a more resilient low carbon future. The Community Planning approach allows us to better work together, learning together and weaving our response across all our activities and services, supporting each other and our communities."

Lorna Jarvie

SDP Chair, South Ayrshire Council.



GOVERNANCE



Measures and Accountability

Objective:

To create momentum and ensure alignment on what happens next.

Commitment:

To keep ourselves accountable, and to weave sustainability into College governance by:

- Developing and implementing a format for reporting on sustainability, including a sustainability dashboard
- Publishing annual sustainability reporting, including the annual Public Sector Climate Change duties data, to track progress and maintain transparency with stakeholders
- Signing the SDG Accord and submit required evidence
- Developing KPIs across the College to reflect our commitment to sustainability and reviewing climate change risk mitigations and controls to ensure relevancy and that they are up-to-date
- Further embedding and enhancing the role of the SEES Group in College decision-making
- We are accountable to College Board of Management through People, Infrastructure and Finance Committee

Anchor Institution



We are an anchor institution in Ayrshire, and **we support over 800 jobs** in the region



Recycling Rates

Our on-site waste recycling rate **increased by almost 10%** between 2023/24 and 24/25



We are a Disability Confident employer

Electricity

Our electricity usage has **decreased by 4%** between 2023/24 and 24/25



Gas

Our gas usage has **decreased by 15%** between 2023/24 and 24/25



18 Teams

competed in our charity football tournament to promote mental health

Cost of Living

We supported almost **1900 students** with additional payments during the cost of living crisis in 2024-25



We gave out over 19,000 free bowls of soup and porridge to our students in 2024/25



We are a proud Living Wage employer



We have achieved a 50:50 gender balance on our Senior Leadership Team



Automated Meter Readings

We are investing in our water infrastructure, and now have Automated Meter Readers (AMRs) on all 3 sites.

£10.9m

We awarded over £10.9m in student grants in 24-25 supporting over 3000 students.



378 Trees

With our catering partners, Coffee Conscience, we planted 378 trees in 2024/25



Our use of biomass, a clean energy source, has **increased by 26%** between 2023/24 and 24/25