



Stellenbosch

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Centre for Sustainability Transitions  
Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development

2024



*Equipping participants with knowledge, skills, and values to effect sustainable change in an increasingly complex and uncertain world.*

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## Programme overview

The Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development is offered by the Centre for Sustainability Transitions at Stellenbosch University. It is an honours-level qualification (NQF 8) comprised of 8 modules that can be completed preferably over one year. If this is not possible a second year is an option. The programme offers transdisciplinary training in the fields of social-ecological systems and sustainability transitions and transformations.

## Institutional setting within Centre for Sustainability Transitions

The Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Sustainable Development is offered by the Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST), which is a research centre located within the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at Stellenbosch University.

The CST is a flagship research and teaching initiative at Stellenbosch University that brings together research on transdisciplinarity, complexity theory, sustainability, and social-ecological resilience to inform pressing national, continental, and global sustainability and development challenges. The CST hosts leading scientists and students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, and fosters collaborations with a variety of departments across the university, nationally and globally, providing a vibrant hub for solution-oriented, transdisciplinary sustainability science.

The primary objective of the CST is to co-produce transformational knowledge on the dynamics of multi-scale social-ecological change in partnership with key stakeholders, and thereby provide strategic insights into the new modes of research and governance that can bring about a just transition to a more equitable and sustainable society, both in southern Africa and globally.



The teaching and learning within the postgraduate programmes is a critical component of the CST's approach to co-producing transformational knowledge to support sustainability transitions. As the various global social-ecological crises deepen, a new generation is rising into leadership positions in the public, private, and non-profit sectors that are required to possess a broad transdisciplinary understanding of the various dimensions of these challenges and related solutions.

The Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development is the foundation of the CST's postgraduate training offering, which comprises the PGDip (NQF 8), MPhil (NQF 9) and PhD (NQF 10) in Sustainable

Development. The PGDip provides the entry point into this wider research and postgraduate training environment. Students who graduate from the PGDip and are eager to continue their academic research training can apply for the MPhil programme, and thereafter the PhD programme.

Participants in the PGDip complete 8 compulsory modules preferably over one year, a second year is an option. Students must attend the 5-day contact block contact period for each module in-person at venues within and around Stellenbosch in the Western Cape, including the Sustainability Institute practice hub.



# Introduction to the Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development

The PGDip gives participants the tools to understand and analyse the global and local challenges facing our world. The learning offers ways to navigate complex concepts that are interconnected across a range of issues from food to energy, cities, and governance. While grappling within the problem space is critical, the focus is on solutions and avenues for transformative change.

Students gain perspective on how transitions, transformations, and alternative paradigms create momentum for promising change. While there are no neat or complete answers, this programme describes vital initiatives that are underway, reshaping how we think about nature, cities, the state, politics, communities, corporations, and the economic system. There is a desire to interrogate the structures of power and ignite a sense of considered agency – to apply our hearts and minds to what is possible and doable, guided by principles of complexity, relational ethics, and sustainability. This focus on agency helps students and staff find ways forward, cultivating the capability to respond to increasingly uncertain and troubling times.

The programme does not presume to deliver answers and cultivate explicit skills, rather it aims to inspire the vision and prepare the ground for the kind of people that we need to be for a radically different and flourishing world. While there is some exposure to the practical experiments in sustainability, the programme is not oriented to people wanting to become sustainability practitioners or sector specialists. Instead, the programme is pitched as an invitation for personal and professional development that creates the openings for the kind of internal and societal transformation that is needed to realise a more sustainable, equitable world.

The PGDip has at the heart of it a deep appreciation for flourishing human-nature relationships, even while it is not an environmental programme. There is no traction for sustainability without this connection to



nature, but we also know that green solutions are not the fullest answer. Institutions, innovative finance, and social movements all have a role to play in how we understand and approach the polycrisis.

Students get the chance to engage in relevant, up to date literature, classroom discussions, and group work that bring together the diverse threads of academic discourse, practice, and ways of being across the thematic concerns of the programme. We use collaborative methods to trace these ideas back to the ways they create and recreate the world we want.





The programme does this by cultivating a range of teaching, learning, and assessment approaches based on a rigorous academic foundation and complemented by reflective practice, creative expression, and group work. This all takes place in unique contexts that support the teaching, learning and assessment approach of the programme. Venues for the programme include locations on the Stellenbosch

University main campus, the Sustainability Institute practice hub in the Lynedoch Ecovillage outside Stellenbosch, and other learning environments within and around Stellenbosch. For all modules, the learning experience benefits from being embedded in diverse environment where students' learning is connected to live experiments for alternative, exploratory living and working.



## Programme audience and career pathways

Sustainable development is not a specific discipline that prepares students for specific jobs. The approach to sustainable development offered within the PGDip programme cultivates a way of seeing the world that prepares graduates to engage in complex challenges and co-produce solutions that support just and sustainable futures, wherever they may find themselves professionally.

We invite applications from across a wide range of professional spheres and academic disciplines. At the core, the programme is oriented towards people who are passionate about bringing positive change, are looking for a deeper understanding of the sustainability challenges we face and acknowledge that such change is the emergent outcome of investing in personal and professional development.

This programme has the potential to catalyse a 'reset' in the ways we are invited to rethink values, collaborations, resources, power, history and the future. This 'reset' in skills, values and knowledge is a creative disruption necessary for sustainability scholarship and action in an unjust and complex world. It is recommended that the programme realises its fullest and deepest impact when experienced over one year. For working professionals who find this arrangement too challenging, there is the option of completing the programme over two years.

*The PGDip has introduced new language and modes of connection that I try to consciously practice in my interactions with others and my environments.*

~ A'ishah Ebrahim

There are several possible career and personal development pathways following the PGDip in Sustainable Development. To date, graduates have secured opportunities that span many sectors, such as:

- Government: national, provincial, and local government (planning, local economic development, housing, environment)
- Corporate (consulting, organisation development, strategy development, corporate social responsibility, environmental, social, and governance reporting)
- Academia and research (universities, specialist research agencies, NGOs)
- Commercial or social entrepreneurship (agriculture, food, social development, education, housing, and renewable energy)
- International agencies (UN, NGOs, foundations)
- Tourism
- Architecture and urban development
- Media and journalism
- Banking and finance (commercial banks, development financing institutions, auditing firms)
- Environmental Law
- Extractive industries and mining
- Non-profit organisations, civil society, and social movements

# Programme structure: Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development (NQF 8)

## Overview

This qualification is an excellent choice for participants interested in a diversity of perspectives on how to bring about transformations to just, equitable and sustainable futures. The PGDip is a rigorous academic degree that allows for a diversity of modes of learning, opportunities for practical experience, and group work collaboration.

On completion of the required compulsory and elective modules, participants will exit the programme with an honours-level qualification (NQF 8).

<b>Intake</b>	One intake in January of each year
<b>Duration</b>	1 year full-time: Students complete all 8 modules within 1 year  <b>OR</b>  2 years part-time: Students complete 8 modules over 2 years (e.g., 4 modules in the first year of registration and 4 modules in the second year of registration)
<b>Venue</b>	In-person classes are presented at venues on Stellenbosch University campus and the Sustainability Institute practice hub amongst others
<b>Accreditation</b>	120 credits honours-level qualification (NQF 8)
<b>Modules</b>	A compulsory Orientation, compulsory Foundation Module (Sustainable Development I) and 8 compulsory modules

<b>Format</b>	The programme is offered in a hybrid format which entails a combination of in-person learning during block contact periods of 5 days (Monday to Friday), supported by synchronous and asynchronous learning activities on virtual platforms in between block contact periods. Distance learning, or fully online learning, is not an option.
<b>Attendance</b>	Attendance for the full duration of the block contact period of the module is compulsory. If students miss more than half a day of a module, they will be required to discontinue the module.
<b>Language of instruction</b>	Tuitions, discussions, presentations, and assessments are all conducted in English.
<b>Next steps</b>	PGDip graduates will qualify to apply for the MPhil (Sustainable Development) programme if they obtain an overall average of at least 65%.
<b>Application closing date</b>	31 August of the year before your intended studies.



# Admission requirements and selection process

## Admission requirements

### OPTION 1

Any bachelor's or BTech degree or a relevant four-year diploma with a 65% pass mark in one of the following major subjects.

### OPTION 2

Any tertiary three-year programme of formal studies and five years' working experience. Your qualifications and experience must comply with the recognition of prior learning (RPL) regulations of the University, the Faculty, and the Centre for Sustainability Transitions respectively (for more on RPL and links to the regulations, see the chapter "General Information" in the EMS Calendar).

**Relevant major subjects:** Town and Regional Planning, Housing, Geography and Environmental Studies, Social Sciences, Psychology, Economics, Public and Development Management, Geology, Botany, Zoology, Forestry, Ecology/Nature Conservation, Mathematics, Statistics, Agricultural Economics, Transport Economics, Civil/Structural/Mechanical/Electrical Engineering, Architecture, Land Surveying, or any other major discipline approved by the Programme Committee.

## Selection process

The number of students selected will be influenced by, among other things, staff capacity and the availability of resources within the Centre, as well as academic merit and University transformation objectives. As staff capacity and resources may fluctuate from year to year, the number of students selected can also differ from year to year.

**Should the number of applicants that meet the admission requirements exceed the available capacity of the Centre for Sustainability Transitions, the applicants are evaluated according to the following criteria to finalise the selection list:**

- Academic excellence: consistent academic performance over and above 65%.
- Work and/or social development experience: relevant and related work and/or social development experience evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- A well-written motivation letter that demonstrates clarity of thinking and logical expression in the written form, as well as proficiency in terms of language, grammar, presentation, and formatting.
- A motivation letter and curriculum vitae that demonstrates a commitment to professional development within the broad field of sustainable development.

The overall composition of the cohort is then considered to reflect a mix of disciplines and work/social development experience.

The programme accepts approximately 60 students per year. On average, modules have 40 participants.



## Structure of the Curriculum

The Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainable Development comprises 120 credits. These credits are achieved through 8 compulsory modules.

The PGDip aims to introduce and deepen students' understanding and knowledge of sustainable development ambitions and challenges during this time of global transition. The programme constitutes a set of eight compulsory modules that reflect the core thematic areas that speak to the heart of our global-polycrisis in the ways they approach both problems and alternatives.

These modules represent a curated learning journey aimed at working professionals and recent graduates who want to strengthen their engagement with current sustainability thinking, research and practice.

The curriculum logic builds a learning journey through current changes underway, inquiring into what lies beneath these changes, what is driving them and in which direction. The curriculum also enquires into individual and collective agency to participate in and shape change processes.

Together these two currents of enquiry come together for what we imagine to be a generative 'reset' for students to be able to exit the programme with skills, values and knowledge to make meaningful impact.

We recommend a one year commitment, but should this prove challenging for working students, there is the option to complete over two years which is considered a part-time commitment. Part-time students are advised to register for 4 compulsory modules in the first year and the remaining 4 in the second. There is not the option of a third year to complete the degree.



# Curriculum

PGDip students can select modules from a range of electives on offer in that particular academic year. Elective modules may differ from year to year. There are a range of topics covered in the elective modules and a final list of elective modules on offer is available on the CST website for the following academic year. 8 compulsory modules are on offer for a concise and cutting edge offering in sustainability studies.

## Herewith a list of 8 compulsory modules offered:

1. Sustainability Transitions and Transformations
2. Relational Complexity and Worldviews
3. Intersectional Environmentalism in the Global South
4. Governance and Institutional Change for Sustainability Transitions
5. Political Economy of Sustainability Transitions
6. Nexus Transitions and Resource Flows
7. Transitions for Sustainable African Urban Futures
8. Relational Practices for Sustainability Transitions

The PGDip is a substantial commitment in terms of the time involved to prepare for and attend the block contact period of the module. The bulk of the modules are worth 15 credits which translates into 150 hours of teaching, learning, and assessment. This is roughly spread across 50 hours of preparation ahead of the block contact period for the module, 50 hours of synchronous class time during the block contact period, and then 50 hours for the writing of assessments.

As far as possible, the block contact period for each module will be delivered at fixed times and these dates will be confirmed at the start of the academic year.

Attendance is compulsory and students must participate in all learning activities. Students who miss more than half a day of a module's block contact period will be required to discontinue the module.

The block contact period takes place between Monday and Friday. During the week, the programme runs each day between 08:15 and 17:15 from Monday to Friday.

In between modules, students are free to return to their place of work, i.e., leave the venue, and return for the next module for which they are registered.





## Teaching, learning, and assessment approach

The programme makes use of interactive and collaborative teaching and learning methods. The techniques include a combination of formal lecturing, facilitated discussions, case study explorations, and structured group work projects. Online learning platforms support engagement between the block contact period and allow students to participate in asynchronous activities.

The teaching, learning and assessment approach in the programme enables participants to learn from each other and establish strong working relationships. Facilitated discussions and case study learning are included as a complement to formal lecture sessions. In addition, the programme incorporates a variety of creative, reflective, and place-based learning methods that are made possible by the venues where modules are offered.

This innovative combination of approaches ensures that participants complement reading and listening with active, embodied, and experiential learning that builds the capacity for sound judgement and practical wisdom.

Between the contact period for the modules, course participants who return to their places of work will need to work largely on their own and connect to others via Stellenbosch University's online learning platforms (SUNLearn and MS Teams) or else via email and/or social media. Approximately 100 hours of self-managed work time will be needed between blocks for reading and writing up of the assignments required for each module.

This structured study programme consists of separate modules. The programme does not make use of traditional examinations. The evaluation approach is based on a combination of group and individual assessments, tailored to the content and approach of the respective



module. In all modules, students are required to complete a preparatory assignment, individual assignment, group work project and reflective learning journal.

## Programme venues

Venues for the PGDip include learning spaces within and beyond Stellenbosch University main campus. Each module is located at a unique venue that enables optimal engagement with the theory and practice of the content. In addition to venues at Stellenbosch University, modules also take place at the Sustainability Institute (SI), off the R310 Baden Powell Drive, Lynedoch, Stellenbosch. This location services offers an opportunity for contextual and place-based learning. In the programme, students are invited to explore the various spaces, initiatives and practices offered by these venues. Embedding the academic programme within an array of learning environments creates opportunities for practical engagement with sustainability experiments and pathways towards just and sustainable African futures.

More information about the Sustainability Institute can be found [here](#).

*The rigorous academic programme also challenged me to think and rethink many aspects of my life and how I can change and remain adaptable to the complexity of the world. The high quality of teaching was particularly impressive to me, motivating me to keep learning and asking important and challenging questions.*

~ Ryan de Villiers



# Fees

## Module fees

**R7481 per module\***

To calculate course fees for the year, multiply the number of modules for which you plan to register in a particular year by the module fee above. You can also generate a provisional quotation of fees at [www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies).

Students will be charged for modules that they repeat; additional modules over and above the 8 core modules; and any additional fees that their electives may entail.

*\*These course fees are provisional amounts for budgeting purposes only and are not binding on Stellenbosch University or any of its employees or representatives. Accommodation and meals are not included in the course fees. All prescribed learning materials are included.*

*Fees for 2024 will be finalised in November 2023.*

## International fees

All international students pay additional fees. Please refer to [www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies) for more information.

International students are required to make a minimum compulsory initial payment towards the tuition fees, international registration fee (IRF), academic services fee, residence fees (where applicable) and meal quota (where applicable), prior to or upon registration. The International Tuition fee (ITF) (where applicable) is payable in full before registration.

The University, as represented by the duly authorised decision-making body, reserves the right to amend all fees payable to the University. As a result, the above-quoted fees may change by the time that registration takes place in January. The Centre for Sustainability Transitions and the staff associated with the management of this programme cannot be held accountable if, for any reason, the above quoted fees are changed by a duly authorised University decision-making body.

## How to Apply

Please find information on the application process on the CST website: [www0.sun.ac.za/cst/study/teaching-hub/](http://www0.sun.ac.za/cst/study/teaching-hub/)





# Frequently asked questions

*I heard about the programme from a friend who visited the Sustainability Institute. How are Stellenbosch University and the Sustainability Institute connected?*

The programme is offered by the Centre for Sustainability Transitions at Stellenbosch University. Stellenbosch University is responsible for all aspects of designing, delivering, and administering the PGDip, and when participants register, they become students at the CST. Students graduate from Stellenbosch University but attend some in-person classes at the Sustainability Institute practice hub.

The SI is an independent organisation, separate from Stellenbosch University. The SI is a non-profit trust that works in transformative education for just and generative futures. During the programme, students will discover how the SI practises sustainability in its everyday operations, as a demonstration of the linkages between theory and practice.

*When does the course start?*

The intake commences in January or early February of each year.

*When do applications open?*

Applications for the programme open in April preceding the year during which participants wish to study and are completed online at [www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies)

*When do applications close?*

Applications close on 31 August.

*What qualifications/background do I need to enrol in the PGDip Sustainable Development programme? How do I gain admission into this programme?*

Applicants need a 3-year Bachelor's degree, or a relevant 4-year Diploma, with a 65% pass rate in a major subject, for provisional admission to the PGDip (Sustainable Development) programme. During selection, an applicant's academic history, relevant working experience, and motivation (applicants submit a 1000-word essay with their departmental application) are considered. The CST Admissions Committee compares applications and selects the strongest applicants for the spaces available – i.e., applications are not only assessed individually, but also within the application pool as there are a limited number of places available.

*How are classes scheduled?*

The PGDip in Sustainable Development is a block-modular course. Students attend classes during the block contact period allocated for each of their registered modules (refer to the dates list published on the CST website) and are not required to be on campus during the time between their modules.

*Are the same modules offered every year?*

Yes, the same compulsory modules are offered every year. There are no electives.

*Are there funding/bursary opportunities available?*

Information on funding opportunities is available on the Postgraduate Office web page at [www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies).

*I am an international student. Do I pay application fees?*

No, international students do not pay application fees.

*My qualifications were obtained at a foreign (outside South Africa) university. Do they meet the admission requirements for the PGDip (Sustainable Development) programme?*

Foreign qualifications are evaluated by the University's Postgraduate Office after completion of an online application. We cannot advise on the status of your qualifications prior to your application.

*I am in my final year of undergraduate studies and have not yet graduated. Can I apply for the PGDip (Sustainable Development) programme?*

Yes, students in their final year of undergraduate studies can apply. If their application is successful, applicants will have to provide their graduation certificate to be registered for the PGDip programme.

*How does registration work for international students?*

International students can only be registered if they have a valid passport, study permit, and medical insurance and have made upfront payment of some of the required fees. Please consult the web pages of Stellenbosch University's Postgraduate Office and International Office for all requirements.

*Is it possible to take some of the year courses as short courses before registration in order to accumulate credits ahead of the start of the programme?*

Unfortunately, students will not be allowed to accumulate credits before being officially registered for the programme.





*This is no ordinary postgraduate diploma. So be prepared to be challenged in ways you will be thankful for. Be prepared to gain skills and knowledge that will assist you, not only in a career in sustainable development, but in life.*

~ Sandi Theron



*When does Recognition of Prior Learning apply? I have a 3-year Diploma? Would I still qualify?*

RPL is applicable if applicants do not have a 3-year bachelor or a 4-year diploma qualification. If such an applicant is provisionally admitted to the PGDip Programme in Sustainable Development, they will be registered as a Special Student in the EMS Faculty and be required to complete three out of the range of elective modules from the PGDip in Sustainable Development curriculum with a total average mark of 65%. They will also be expected to attend Orientation and Sustainable Development 1 and various non-credit bearing learning activities at the start of their first semester as a Special Student. Credits for the 3 modules in a successful RPL application may not be transferred to the PGDip Programme in Sustainable Development i.e., a successful candidate will be required to register for a further 8 modules towards a PGDip (Sustainable Development) qualification. The RPL process is costly and time-consuming and there is no guarantee of success. It is recommended that applicants discuss possibilities with the Programme Administrator.

*What is the minimum pass rate?*

To pass a module, an average final mark of 50% is required for the module, plus a 50% pass mark for the Individual Assignment that needs to be submitted for each module. All modules require a final mark of 50% to pass the PGDip course.

*Is the PGDip (Sustainable Development) programme offered as distance learning?*

The Programme is offered in a hybrid format which entails a combination of in-person and online learning platforms. Distance learning is not an option.

*I do not live near Cape Town. Will I be able to do the Postgraduate Diploma Programme in Sustainable Development?*

Yes, it is possible for students outside Cape Town to participate in the Programme. Because of its block-modular structure, students are required to be on campus only during the time period allocated for each of their modules, whereafter they return to their home and place of work.

*I work full-time. How will I manage PGDip (Sustainable Development) studies?*

Working students are encouraged to do the PGDip, understanding that there will be nine weeks of contact time if you are completing the degree in one year. If your work is unable to accommodate this time off, you are advised to complete over two years making you a part-time student. It is advisable to take four modules of your choice in your first year and the remaining four modules in your second year. Space them well to give you ample planning, breathing and professional work time.

*How much time am I expected to spend on my studies? A module is 5 days long – is that all that is required of me?*

Each module will require approximately 150 hours of time, where 50 hours is contact/class time, 50 hours is reading time and 50 hours will be spent on completing assessments for each module (to be submitted 6 weeks after the module has taken place).

*Is there accommodation on offer? Where do I stay?*

Some of the younger students in the programme stay in Stellenbosch University's residences, most stay in private accommodation. Students flying in for their modules stay with family or friends or in tourist

accommodation. The Lynedoch Ecovillage does not offer formal student accommodation, but there are AirBnB stays available in the Eco-Village and tourist accommodation on many of the surrounding farms. Regrettably, the programme administrators do not have the capacity to assist students with finding accommodation.

*The prospectus reflects the current year's fees. What will the fees be for next year?*

Fees for next year will be confirmed in November. A provisional quotation of fees can be generated at [www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies).

*I am an international student. What documents will Stellenbosch University require from me when I apply?*

Information and guidance for all prospective applicants is available at [www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies) and [www.sun.ac.za/international](http://www.sun.ac.za/international).

*The PGDip gave me an opportunity to interact with different people with varying backgrounds who are all aiming to do one thing - make the world better. It was inspiring to come together and think of relevant solutions for our times. Through these encounters I also formed meaningful relationships that have opened up more doors of opportunities.*

~ Chawa Mhango



## General information

### Payment options

Refer to the information at [www.maties.com](http://www.maties.com).

### Bursaries and scholarships

Information on financial aid can be found at the following links:

[www.sun.ac.za/calendar](http://www.sun.ac.za/calendar)

[www.sun.ac.za/english/pgstudies/Pages/Funding.aspx](http://www.sun.ac.za/english/pgstudies/Pages/Funding.aspx)

### International students

Information on visas, fees, language requirements and long-term accommodation can be found on the website of the International Office: [www.sun.ac.za/international](http://www.sun.ac.za/international)

### Accommodation

Students are responsible for their own accommodation arrangements. Students typically find university or private rented accommodation in Stellenbosch or surrounds. Follow this link to find learn more.

[www0.sun.ac.za/international/about/accommodation-in-stellenbosch.html](http://www0.sun.ac.za/international/about/accommodation-in-stellenbosch.html)

### Transport

Students are responsible for their own transport arrangements. Most travel by car and often arrange lift shares amongst themselves on the first day of a module.

## Enquiries

### About the online university application

#### University Call Centre

T: +27 21 808 9111

E: [info@sun.ac.za](mailto:info@sun.ac.za)

### About funding, visas, language proficiency, etc.

Postgraduate Studies: [www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies](http://www.sun.ac.za/pgstudies)

SU International: [www.sun.ac.za/international](http://www.sun.ac.za/international)

