

Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL) for Soil Health

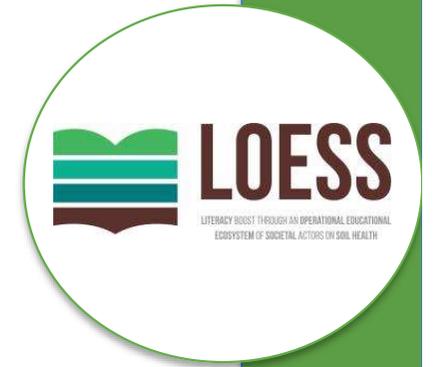
Module for Higher Education Lecturers

Component 3/4: Designing a CERL-Based Learning Activity (Part 1)

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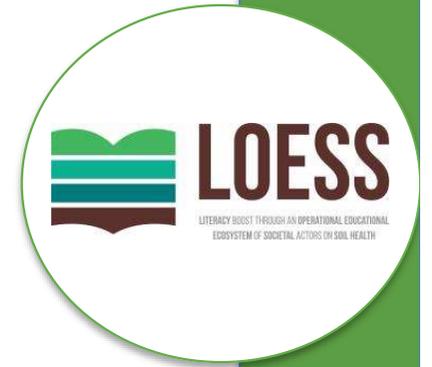
Session Plan



1. Quick reflection
2. Designing and planning for a CERL activity
3. Exercise: Incorporating CERL into your curriculum
4. Additional aspects of planning a CERL activity
5. Next steps & Tasks



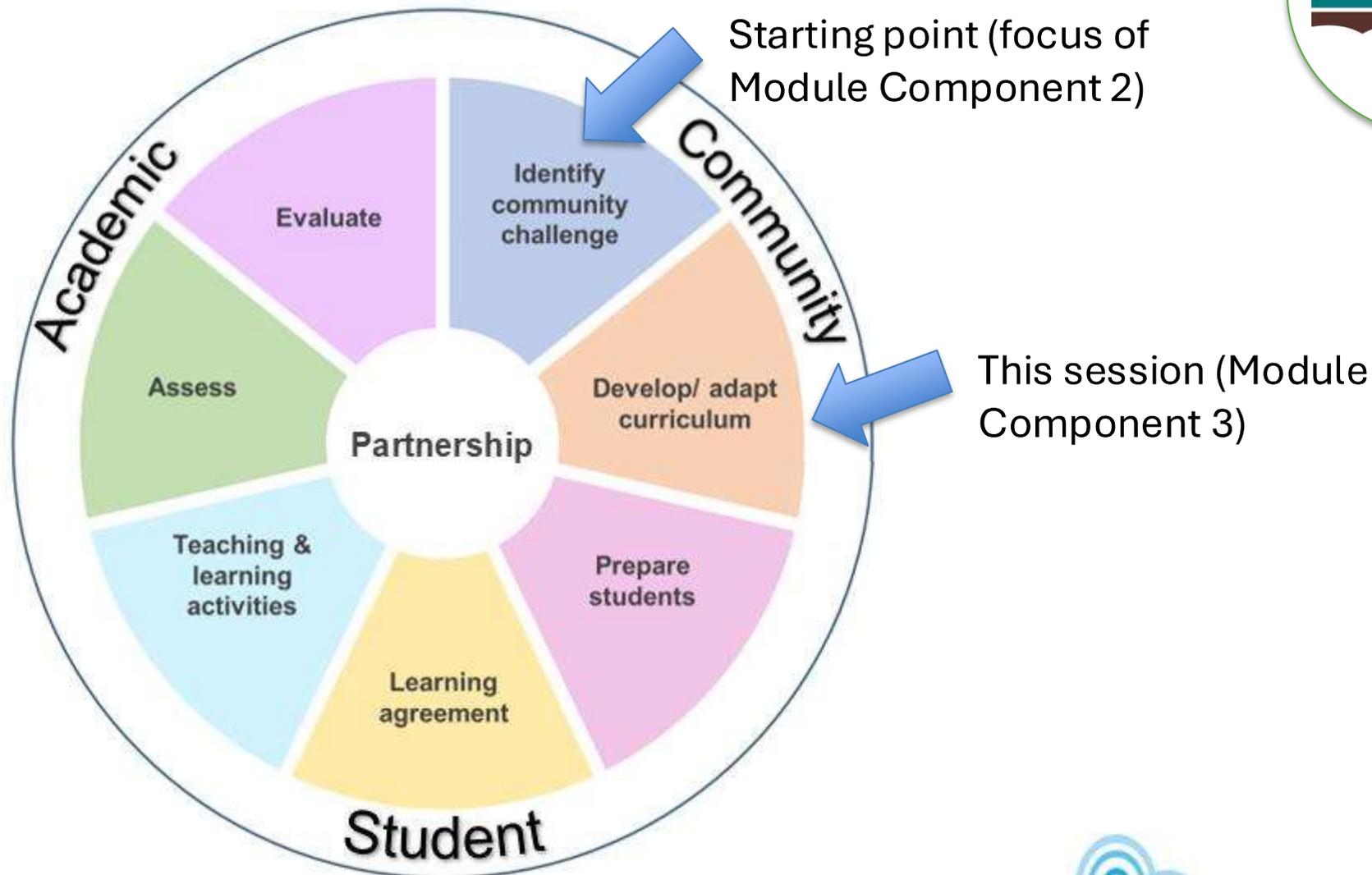
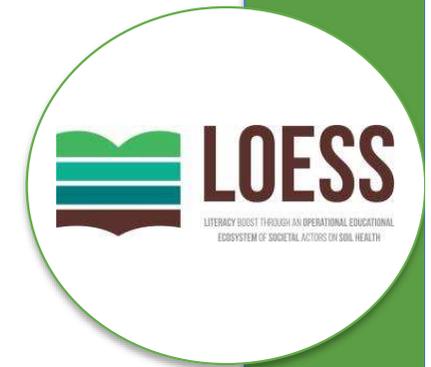
Quick reflection



What do you think the biggest selling point for CERL would be for your colleagues or Head of Department?

Consider your reasoning and make some brief notes about why you come to that conclusion.

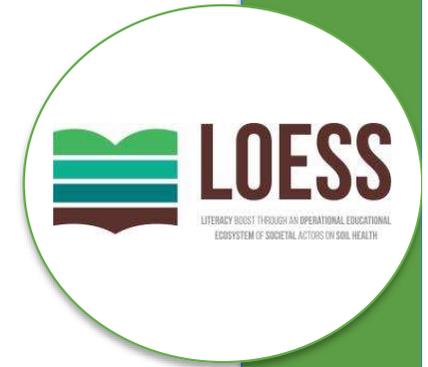
Designing and planning for a CERL activity: CERL Process model*



* Developed in a project with [Campus Engage](#)



What is different about CERL?



Recap on characteristics of Community Engaged Research and Learning (CERL):

- **Experiential learning** – ‘learning by doing’ and applying knowledge and skills in a real world context.
- **Community organisations as valued partners** – the aim is to meet a need they have identified.
- **Reflection** as key component (professional and personal development).
- May involve students working within a **group**.



Photograph by Claire McDonnell, Technological University Dublin

CERL Curriculum Design Options

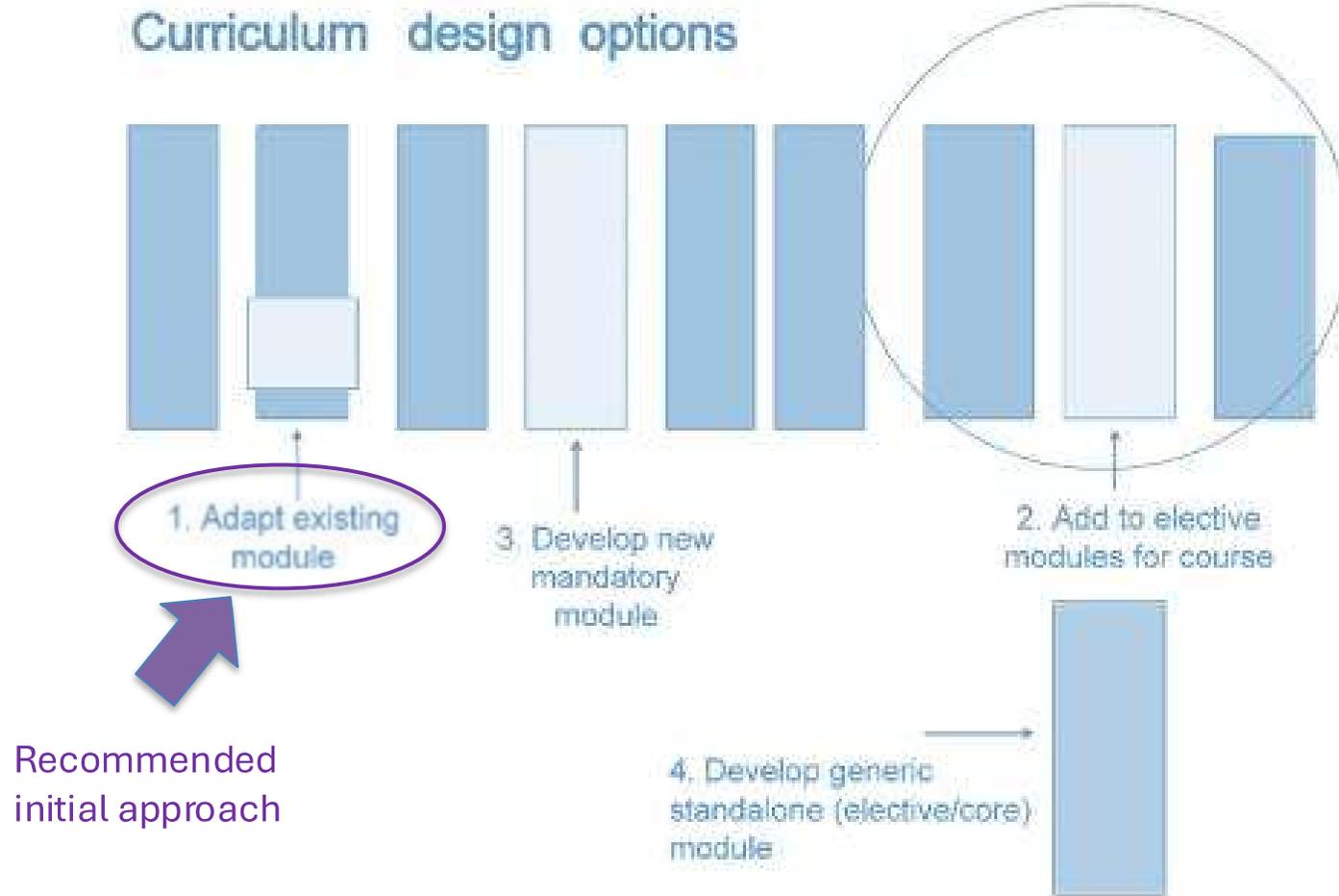
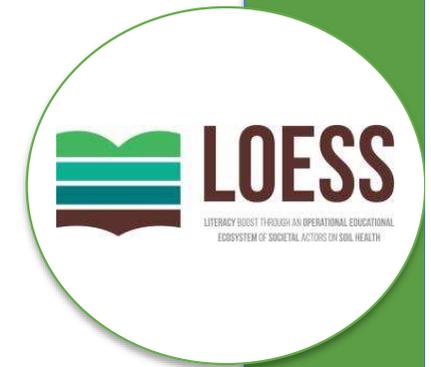
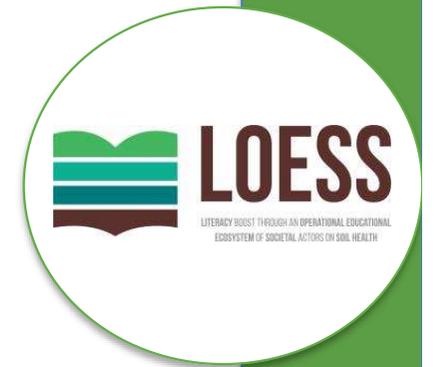


Figure 5. Curriculum Design Options: 1. Standalone, 2. Elective, 3. Mandatory, 4. Generic

(Boland, 2013)

Reflective questions on planning for a CERL activity



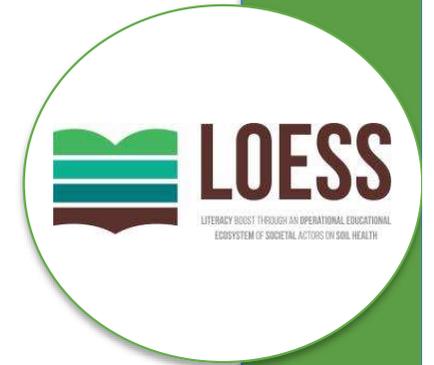
- How open is your discipline / department to CERL activities?
- How can your skills, knowledge, experiences and available time be best harnessed during this CERL activity?
- Have you got a course / module you would like to adapt or refocus?
- Do you want to make CERL compulsory or optional for students?
- Is the module / course itself compulsory or is it an elective chosen by students?
- Individual projects or groupwork or full class?
- How involved could or should the community partner be?
- Do you want students to help to shape the project or do you want to bring them a fully defined activity?
- Are your students already familiar with reflection?



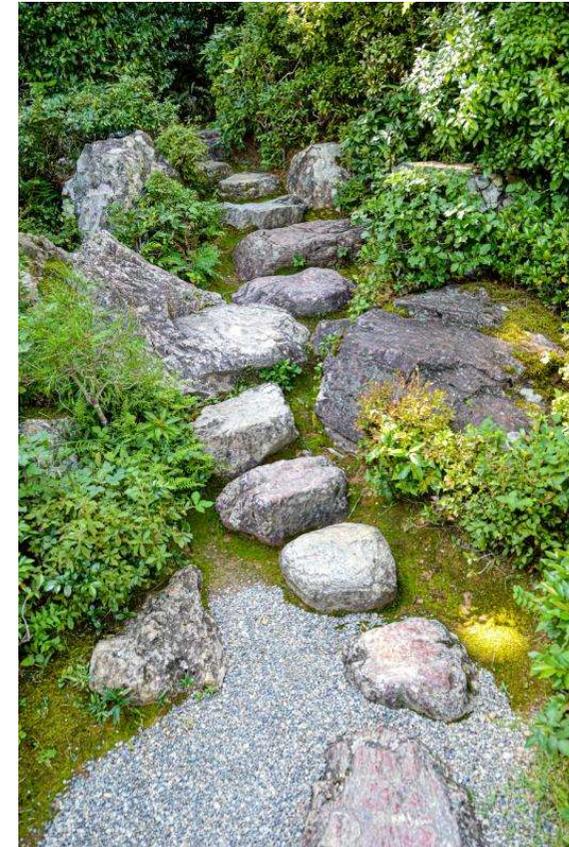
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See page 17 of [CIRCLET Guide for lecturers](#)

Advice for getting started



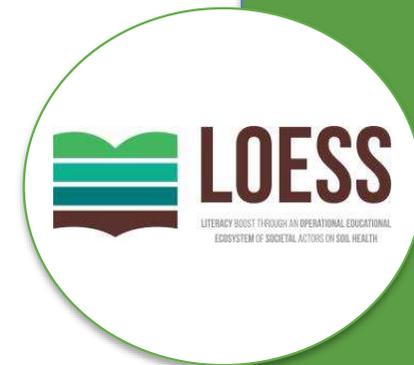
- Establish the **skills and knowledge that your students will bring**.
- Check **relevant guidance** in your department or university e.g. student project / research / placement requirements. Identify regulatory aspects; for example safety and risk assessment, insurance, ethics, working with children or vulnerable groups.
- With the community partner, narrow down ideas to a realistic, small-scale pilot activity. Try it and see how it goes.
- Build in regular check ins with students and partner
- Build in peer support for yourself (may be from outside your department or university)
- Seek the support of relevant colleagues and managers



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See [LOESS guidelines pages 13–16](#)

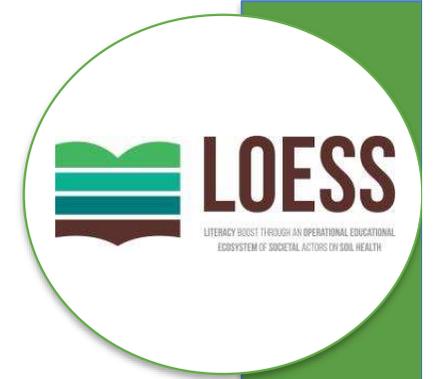
Identifying a suitable module / course



- One that already has a focus on **soil health or on sustainable development or environmental science** (learning outcomes may relate to technical skills and / or being able to discuss and apply concepts).
- One that involves students **addressing a research question** (wider range of disciplines).
- One that develops **transversal skills** (communication, information literacy, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork, leadership and self-management).
- A module/course that **already uses field trip or case study activities** and that has a continuous assessment component .

See Tables 1 and 2 on pages 14-17 of the LOESS document 'D3.1: Methodology and Guidelines for Community Engaged Research and Learning in HEIs and online module', McKenna and Weinberg, 2025. <https://loess-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/D3.1-LOESS-Guidelines-for-CERL-in-HE.pdf>

Exercise: Incorporating CERL into your curriculum

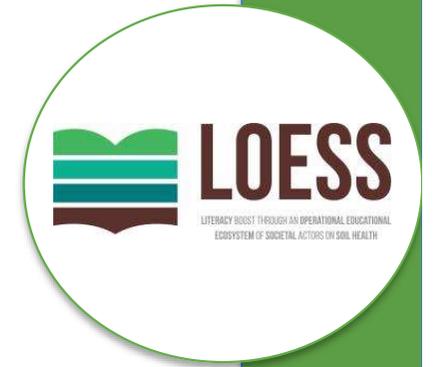


Take some time to think and make notes about your responses to the following questions (approximately 15-20 minutes):

- What approach are you planning to use to incorporate CERL for soil health into your curriculum?
- What aspects are you still not sure about when planning to incorporate CERL for soil health into your curriculum?

If you are working through this module with colleagues, take some time to share and discuss your responses with each other.

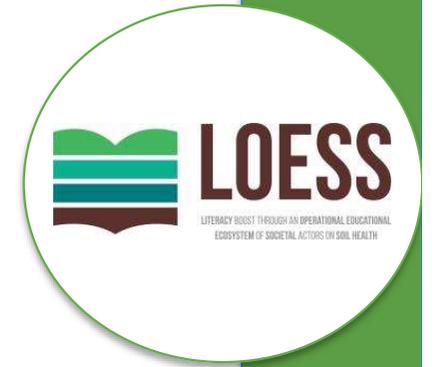
Additional aspects to planning a CERL activity: Who do you need to engage with internally?



- Are there colleagues who you need to inform or to collaborate with? E.g. this could include a Line Manager, Head of Department, course/module coordinators, colleagues teaching on the course/module.
- What will you say to persuade / negotiate? E.g. relevant university strategic goals (increasing external engagement, enhancing student employability, etc.), professional bodies often value the authentic and experiential learning in CERL projects, evidence of benefits (see Session 1 and Mason O'Connor *et al.*, 2011).
- Are there colleagues in Partnership / Engaged Research / Teaching and Learning Development who can support you?
- Is there any budget / funding available for course activities? E.g. to bring students to visit a community partner venue.

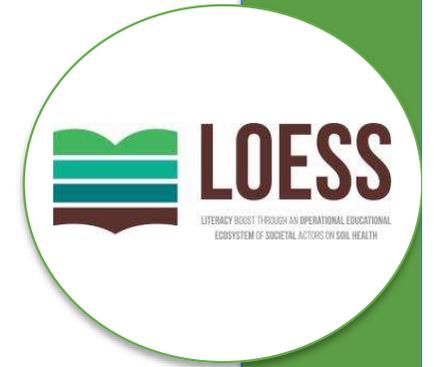
See pages 22-28, *CIRCLET Guide for lecturers*

Additional aspects to planning a CERL activity: How might you assess the CERL activity?



- Focus on learning outcomes of module (e.g. transversal skills as well as technical and discipline-specific skills and knowledge)
- Consider using several components (e.g. award a team mark for project work/presentation and individual mark for reflection). Will both the process and product/output be assessed?
- Do you want some feedback from the community partner before marking? If so, will that process be time-consuming for the partner?

Real world learning opportunities



You will need to **accept that there is a level of uncertainty** in the process and that this **deepens the learning** for you and your students.

Flexibility is important. You may need to review your original design more than once.

See page 18, *CIRCLET Guide for lecturers*

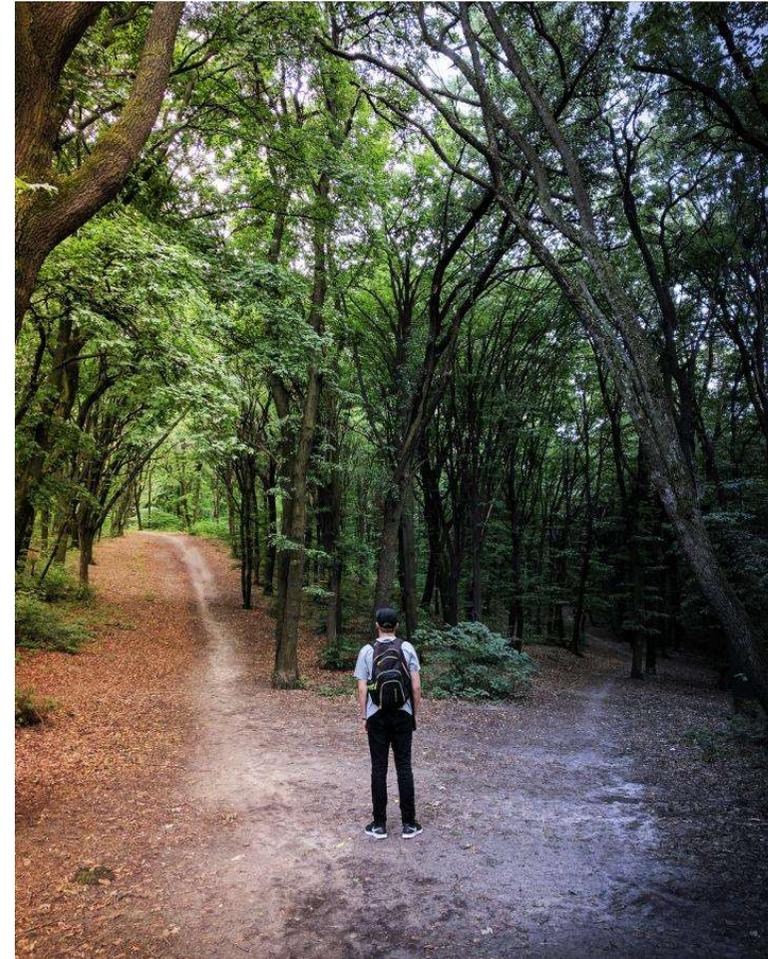
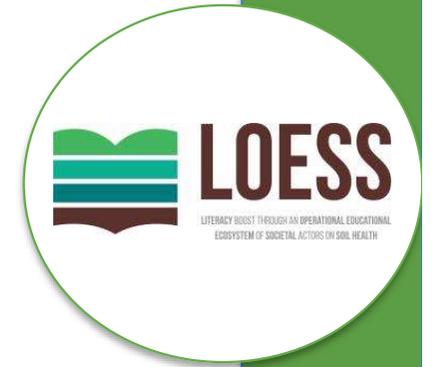


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Next Steps: Module Tasks / Activities



The accompanying task worksheets for each of the four module components are accessible via the LOESS project website: <https://loess-project.eu/cerl-module-for-lecturers/>

By completing these tasks in sequence and with reference to the learning materials, you will build a practical foundation for integrating CERL for soil health activities into your teaching and curriculum.

Tasks for module component 3:

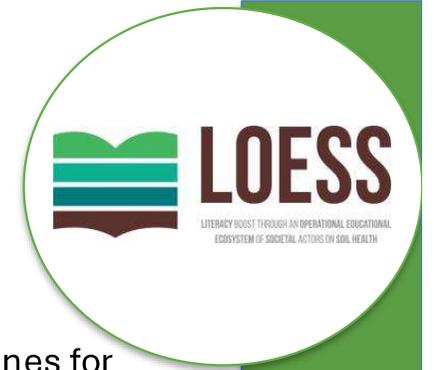
Task 3.1 (20 minutes)

Reflecting on your meeting with LOESS partner

Task 3.2 (150 minutes)

Outline of your CERL for Soil Health project

References



McKenna, E. and Weinberg, L. (2025). LOESS Deliverable document 'D3.1: Methodology and Guidelines for Community Engaged Research and Learning in HEIs and online module'. Available at: <https://loess-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/D3.1-LOESS-Guidelines-for-CERL-in-HE.pdf>) Accessed 02/10/2025.

McKenna, E. (2022). CIRCLET Guide for Lecturers: Resources to Implement Community Engaged Research and Learning in University Teaching and Pedagogy. Available at: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/media/CIRCLET%20Guide%20for%20Lecturers%20Resources%20to%20Implement%20Community%20Engaged%20Research%20and%20Learning%20in%20University%20Teaching%20and%20Pedagogy.pdf>

Boland, J (2013). Curriculum development for sustainable civic engagement in Farrell, C and O' Farrell A. *Emerging Issues in Higher Education: from capacity building to Sustainability* Dublin: Educational Developers Network of Ireland. Available at: <https://researchrepository.universityofgalway.ie/entities/publication/1da02c8c-a066-4c47-9062-a7a0a34239ad>

Mason O'Connor, K., McEwen, L., Owen, D., Lynch, K., and Hill, S. (2011). Literature review: Embedding community engagement in the curriculum: An example of university-public engagement. National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement, University of Gloucestershire, and the Higher Education Academy. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/224880720_Literature_Review_Embedding_PublicCommunity_Engagement_in_the_Curriculum_An_Example_of_University-Public_Engagement



THANK YOU

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