

## The UK Future of Education for Sustainable Development – eight responsibilities for education?

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### Key Questions for Post Rio +20 Event

Stakeholders, government representatives and government agencies are invited to respond in less than 500 words to the following two questions.

All responses will be collated into a future publication, aiding discourse and facilitating collaboration.

**1) What supporting mechanisms should government and civil society put in place to enable and strengthen UK delivery of the educational commitments agreed in ‘The Future We Want’<sup>1</sup>.**

**2 What actions are your organisation/institution/party taking to facilitate delivery on this agenda immediately, in the near future (by 2015), and in the longer term (next ten years).**

### Discussion paper

This paper aims to instigate an open discussion about how this crucial agenda can be taken forward and to investigate how Government can work with NGO’s, civil society and the private sector to accelerate constructive change for sustainability through formal, informal and non- formal education.

Eight key themes with strong educational relevance emerge from the ‘Future We Want’ (FWW). This paper extracts those themes in the order in which they appear within the document, they are not positioned in order of importance. Any extracts from FWW are italicised.

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## 1 Position of youth and children

### *Future We Want<sup>1</sup>*

24. We express deep concern about the continuing high levels of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people, and note the need for sustainable development strategies to proactively address youth employment at all levels. In this regard, we recognise the need for a global strategy on youth and employment building on the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

31. We emphasise that sustainable development must be inclusive and people-centred benefiting and involving all people, including youth and children. We recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment are important for sustainable development and our common future. We reaffirm our commitments to ensure women's equal rights, access and participation of young people in decision making processes as the issues we are addressing have a deep impact on present and future generations, and as the contribution of children and youth is vital to the achievement of sustainable development. We also recognise the need to promote intergenerational dialogue and solidarity by recognising their views.

### **Comments**

At Rio+20, Heads of State reconfirmed their commitment to sustainable development and to ensuring the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for the planet and for future generations. The UK is committed to effectively following up the Conference, both as a Member State of the EU and through formulating its own Country position. In September 2012, at the 67th UN General Assembly, the EU agreed to sponsor a resolution on the Rights of the Child. However, with the loss of the strong youth and child advocacy role previously undertaken by the Sustainable Development Commission<sup>2,3</sup>; the strengthening of the EU 2020<sup>4</sup> Policy with regard to improving European youth employment within sustainable development; and the international failure of the proposal for High Level Representation for Future Generations at Rio+20; how can the UK Country position best be maintained and improved regarding the rights, responsibilities and voices of our children and young people regarding sustainable development?

## 2 Natural Capital Accounting

4. We recognize that poverty eradication, changing unsustainable and promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development. We also reaffirm the need to achieve sustainable development by: promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living; fostering equitable social development and inclusion; and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems that supports inter alia economic, social and human development while facilitating ecosystem conservation, regeneration and restoration and resilience in the face of new and emerging challenges.

97. We reaffirm the intrinsic value of biological diversity, as well as the ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values of biological diversity and its critical role in maintaining ecosystems that provide essential services, which are critical foundations for sustainable development and human well-being. We recognize the severity of global biodiversity loss and degradation of ecosystems and emphasize that these undermine global development, affecting food security and nutrition, provision of and access to water, health of the rural poor and of people world-wide, including present and future generations.

### **Comments**

Is there a role for education in ensuring that social and economic capitals are referred to within Natural Capital accounting; so that the methodology of this '6<sup>th</sup> Capital'<sup>5</sup> is a more useful metric; limiting our potential to commodify the commons and price the priceless? The UK is pioneering thinking in this area and yet meanings are being misinterpreted through language: natural capital, human capital social capital, human and social capital, natural and built capital, and economic and man - made capitals are just some of the terms used. Does the education community, through the UK Natural Capital

Committee have a position to which we can all refer?

#### **GDP+**

38. *We recognize the need for broader measures of progress to complement GDP in order to better inform policy decisions, and in this regard, we request the UN Statistical Commission in consultation with relevant UN System entities and other relevant organizations to launch a programme of work in this area building on existing initiatives.*

#### **Comments**

GDP is an inadequate measure of progress partly due to annual measurement timescales, inclusion only of those goods and services that move through the market, and an inherent inability to capture how the 'products' impact on people's lives. The UK has started work compiling and contrasting metrics which measure 'wealth' and 'value' rather than monetary growth. Professor Stiglitz et al<sup>6</sup> cogently argue that; 'What we measure influences what we value,' with our choice of metrics partly determining the direction of societal travel. How can we best enact the recommendations within the report, ensuring that measurements capture the relationship between education and well being throughout a person's life, individually or by family?

#### **4. Skills for a Green economy**

59. *We view the implementation of green economy policies by countries that seek to apply them for the transition towards sustainable development as a common undertaking and we recognize that each country can choose an appropriate approach in accordance with national Sustainable development plans, strategies and priorities.*

#### **Comments**

UK reports into evidence regarding skills and training for a sustainable future indicate that in general most businesses are unsure about which skills are required by the Green and Fair Economy<sup>7</sup>. Energy generation industries, the construction industry and the food and agriculture sectors identify specific skills; sectors identified from the outset by Education 21 as pivotal to learning for sustainable development. However the Green and Fair economy is not only about the survival of the planet but also about re-directing the economy in the context of a global economy

that is increasingly collaborating over servicing a circular economy. Trends moving employers and employees toward re-skilling, flexible skilling and skilling up the workforce are integral to the Green and Fair Economy agenda but the government does not pick winners. Meanwhile education is privileging new learning with the Circular Economy,<sup>8</sup> Se-ed<sup>9</sup>, the Green Economy Alliance<sup>10</sup>, and the AoC<sup>11</sup> all exemplifying green skill training and 'showing what we mean by a Green economy' as recommended by the Environmental Audit Committee<sup>12</sup>. Will the Government take a leadership role in determining which skill areas are considered pivotal in supporting green economy policies aiding national transition toward sustainable development?

#### **5. Sustainable Development Goals. Re: education (229-235)**

229. *We reaffirm our commitments to the right to education and in this regard, we commit to strengthen international cooperation to achieve universal access to primary education, particularly for developing countries. We further reaffirm that full access to quality education at all levels is an essential condition for achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, gender equality and women's empowerment as well as human development, for the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals, as well as for the full participation of both women and men, in particular young people. In this regard, we stress the need for ensuring equal access to education for persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, local communities, ethnic minorities and people living in rural areas. Also see 245-250 re: process.*

#### **Comments**

The UK is well placed to influence the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda, given our Prime Minister's pivotal role in Committee; however certain NGO's have expressed genuine concern that any SDG's do not jeopardise the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and that Post 2015 there is a global streamlined process for development. Environmental limits or planetary boundaries could crucially factor in any new goals, which must be time-bound, deliverable and universally applicable while the UK steer in shaping the emerging SDG's, should ensure they are as relevant to the developed world as to the

less developed world, particularly regarding education. The second MDG goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015 is a given in the UK, and while currently the FWW term 'Quality education' describes our desired outcome, should the education community draw on existing research around 'Education For All' and ESD pedagogies<sup>13</sup> to clarify useful terminology and Goals for the UK?

#### 6. ESD across formal sectors.

*230. We recognize that the younger generations are the custodians of the future, as well as the need for better quality and access to education beyond the primary level. We therefore resolve to improve the capacity of our education systems to prepare people to pursue sustainable development, including through enhanced teacher training, the development of curricula around sustainability, the development of training programmes that prepare students for careers in fields related to sustainability, and more effective use of information and communication technologies to enhance learning outcomes. We call for enhanced cooperation among schools; communities and authorities in efforts to promote access to quality education at all levels.*

*233. We resolve to promote Education for Sustainable Development and to integrate Sustainable development more actively into education beyond the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).*

*234. We strongly encourage educational institutions to consider adopting good practices in sustainability management on their campuses and in their communities with the active participation of inter alia students, teachers, and local partners, and teaching sustainable development as an integrated component across disciplines.*

*235. We underscore the importance of supporting educational institutions, especially higher educational institutions in developing countries, to carry out research and innovation for sustainable development, including in the field of education, to develop quality and innovative programmes, including entrepreneurship and business skills training, professional, technical, vocational training and lifelong learning, geared to bridging skills gaps for advancing national sustainability.*

#### Comments

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ESD in formal sectors was well defined in theory through the work of the Government Sustainable Development Education Panels<sup>14</sup> of 1998, 2001, and 2003 and then through policy within the Department for Education. Sector-wide interpretation and implementation followed, resulting in Higher Education adopting both a leadership role in ESD and an innovative stance around interdisciplinary, systems thinking and resilience. Adult Education widened perceptions through 'Learning to Last'<sup>15</sup> then focussed on sustainable skills; while the schools sector thoroughly engaged with ESD content, pedagogy and participation. Current Government priorities perhaps reside with campus and risk assessment i.e. Carbon reduction strategies and climate change adaptation and mitigation.<sup>16</sup> However a new curriculum opportunity exists; to make sustainability, or more specifically 'stewardship of resources' a core aim of the whole school curriculum<sup>17</sup>, satisfying a request from the students themselves that sustainability should be core to their educational purpose. HEFCE<sup>18</sup> and the Higher Education Academy<sup>19</sup> have also made recommendations for Education for Sustainability. Ofsted<sup>20</sup> highlights Education for Sustainable Development as an indicator of quality enhancement and the QAA<sup>21</sup> is considering guidance for curriculum enhancement processes in this area. At this juncture, could education systems usefully re-engage cross-sector dialogue around sustainable development and ESD to engender the best fit with Rio+20 outcomes?

#### 7. ESD across informal/non-formal

*231. We encourage Member States to promote Sustainable Development awareness among Youth, inter alia, by promoting programmes for non-formal education in accordance with the Goals of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.*

#### Comments

Informal education sectoral ESD came late to the notice of the government Education for Sustainable Development panels of 1998-2003, but the sector proved pivotal in implementing societal and behavioural change. The third sector<sup>22</sup>, Local Authorities and NGO's continue with the informal sector leadership role; however non-formal sectors such as the media are dispersed through both public and private arenas. Would societal evolution toward a Green and Fair economy be enhanced through a new collaboration between formal and non-formal

learning for ESD? The Earth Charter<sup>23</sup> articulates global values - based guidelines for a sustainable future that could be useful in exploring how formal and informal learning might interact.

## 8. The global dimension.

232. We emphasize the importance of greater international cooperation to improve access to Education including through building and strengthening education infrastructure, increasing Investment in education particularly investment to improve the quality of education for all in Developing countries. We encourage international educational exchanges and partnerships, including the creation of fellowships and scholarships to help achieve global education goals.

Development Education is a well established component of ESD in the formal sector with many Schools, Colleges and Universities engaged in forging our global future.

What new platforms are needed to ensure that development education activity suits the demographics of the post Rio+20 world as well as our colonial past?

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