Enabling The Future We Want: Education for Sustainable Development in the UK

A Manifesto for dialogue, collaboration and action Post Rio+20

Facilitated by

eauc

Implementing

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Preface

The intergovernmental agreements coming out of Rio +20 ('The Future We Want') included commitments to quality education, to improve quality of life, to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and to embark on a process toward Sustainable Development Goals. One year on it appears that the Post 2015 Development Agenda is expected to incorporate Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). How this unified Global Development programme, aimed at poverty alleviation in the context of sustainable development is realised, is yet to be decided, but timings are crucial and the role of education is recognised as being pivotal. Principles like universality, listening to outcomes of stakeholder participation, a foundation in human rights and the need for prioritisation at the national level are emerging. This consultation into the future of education for sustainability and the manifesto both act on our UK Rio+20 commitments and takes account of the global context.

This manifesto calls on governments, education sectors, NGOs and civil society in the United Kingdom to work closely together to strengthen the role of education as an enabler of Sustainable Development.

This document is the result of a UK-wide consultation with NGOs, Government funded agencies, Government Departments, politicians and formal and informal education sectors. The consultation took place from November 2012 to May 2013[1] in response to the Rio+20 outcome document 'The Future We Want'.

'The Future We Want' has very strong educational commitments including explicit objectives such as engaging more learners in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and improving educational quality, as well as implicit commitments around education's role in moving society toward more sustainable development. Most specifically the outcomes in Paragraphs 229-235[2] focus on the tools for education: research, innovation, participation, international co-operation, curriculum change and youth engagement.

Rio+20 clarified that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is key to achieving both a Green and Fair Society and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as well as being a key component of a quality education.

The Manifesto

Supporting mechanisms that governments and civil society should put in place to enable and strengthen UK delivery of the educational commitments agreed in The Future We Want.

Governmental responsibilities

The UK government and the devolved governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have a responsibility to articulate and support the important role that education plays in achieving poverty eradication[3] in the context of sustainable development, and in meeting the United Kingdom's targets for the reduction of greenhouse gasses. We acknowledge that some parts of the UK have made more progress than others in advancing policy for ESD[4].

We are calling for:

1. Better coordination of efforts and collaboration between governments and across government departments on formal and informal learning for sustainable development

Recommended actions
- The Environmental Audit Committee to regularly put ESD related issues on its agenda and facilitate dialogue
- UK government departments (BIS, DEFRA, DECC, DFT, DoE, and DfID) and devolved government agencies to identify how they will support ESD in formal and informal learning settings to meet their own targets for SD

2. Improvement of dialogue between the education sector, civil society and government departments

Recommended actions
- Offer incentives and opportunities for collaboration and partnership building across education sectors, business, and environmental, developmental, educational and faith-based NGOs
- Funding to focus on the long term
- Ensure youth and student voices play an active role in this dialogue

3. Enabling education sectors to develop an appropriate curriculum to meet current and future sustainability challenges through a realignment of funding with The Future We Want in mind

Recommended actions
- Inclusion of ESD in education ministers' portfolios
- Endorsement and support for those institutions and organisations that lead the way with good practice

Formal learning (Education and Training sectors)

The formal education sector recognises that it has a critical role in sustainable development as it has a moral responsibility to prepare young people for the future and equip them with the skills, attributes and knowledge needed to contribute to sustainable development as citizens and future professionals. It also recognises that it needs to provide opportunities for up-skilling the workforce to advance the Green and Fair Economy and community learning for innovation and resilience.

We are calling for:

4. Curriculum change

Recommended actions
- Teacher Training to include training in ESD
- Education quality and enhancement bodies to provide incentives for ESD
- Include learning about sustainability issues and solutions in national curricula objectives
- Immediate implementation of the commitment in the Natural Environment White Paper that includes the aspiration that 'we want to see every child in England given the chance to experience and learn about the natural environment'
- Involvement of students in curriculum design
- Encouragement of interdisciplinary learning opportunities

5. Institutional change

Recommended actions
- Education institutions to provide leadership in SD and act as beacons of good practice in society
- Education institutions to work closely with local communities
- Education institutions to provide support for those young people not engaged in formal further education

Informal learning

Learning also takes place in communities and at home. Faith groups, charities and community networks play an important role in life-long learning, citizenship, up-skilling volunteers, resilience building and developmental work.

We are calling for:

6. Increased collaboration between NGOs and formal education providers

Recommended actions
- Environmental, developmental, educational and faith-based NGOs to collaborate more on this agenda (with each other, and the formal education sector)
- NGOs to collaborate with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to keep informed of latest research in SD and work together on solutions

Emphasise the connection between ESD and the economy

Both the need for a thriving Green and Fair Economy, and the reassessment of the effectiveness of GDP as a global tool to measure progress, moving towards a GDP+ framework, highlight the need for ESD.

We are calling for:

7. Increased collaboration between governments, NGOs, business and education sectors to ensure young people are sufficiently prepared for the opportunities and challenges of a Green and Fair Economy

Recommended actions
- Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to continue to recognise the importance of sustainability in their guidelines
- Business Schools to take an active role in the realignment of the economy with planetary boundaries and poverty eradication

Footnotes

1 Over 50 organisations have been engaged in dialogue in response to a stimulus paper (The UK Future of Education for Sustainable Development – eight responsibilities for education) around educational priorities within 'The Future We Want': They include: Association of Colleges, Black Environment, CADISPA Network, Chris Cowburn (HEFCW), Copernicus Alliance of Universities for Sustainability, Department for Education, Department of Food and Rural Affairs, Earth Charter UK, Education Dialogue Group, Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges, Environmental Audit Committee, Eradicating Ecocide, Global Responsible Leadership Initiative, Green Party, Higher Education Academy, Learning and Skills Improvement Service, London South Bank University, National Union of Students, Natural History Museum, OFSTED, Policy Studies Institute, SGI-UK, South West Learning for Sustainability Coalition, Sustainability and Environmental Education, Transition Network, Universities UK, University & College Union, University of Westminster.

2 The Future We Want

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

3 A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through Sustainable Development (The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda).

4 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the UK – Current status, best practice and opportunities for the future, March 2013, United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO.

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