

The Future of Education for Sustainability in the UK

National Consultation on Education in response to The Future We Want

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Introduction

The aim of this consultation is to instigate and facilitate dialogue between government and civil society, and amongst stakeholders around this important agenda, not as a means of consensus building but as a strand of evidence and vision within the emerging picture of possible future frameworks for Education for Sustainable Development in the UK: clarifying what the government can do for it self, what civil society can do for it self and how they can mutually support each other.

This briefing presents initial findings of the UK Post- Rio+20 dialogue event with Rt Hon David Heath MP in Westminster (see appendix c) and the resulting consultation.

Context

As recorded in the Future We Want Document, Rio+20 clarified the contemporary situation i.e. that education is integral to addressing the emergent trends of a Green and Fair Society, GDP+ and any Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) while remaining a fundamental objective behind development.

“The Future We Want”; the international agreements reached at Country level and through the EU; has a strong educational strand including: engaging more learners in ESD, improving educational quality; increasing international reach and moving society toward more sustainable development.

Most specifically the outcomes in Paragraphs 229-235 focus on the tools for education: research, innovation, participation, international co-operation and curriculum change as well as youth engagement. In the run up to Rio+20, however, it was the overarching issues like GDP (Para.38), Green and Fair economy (Para.58), skill development (Para.62) and innovation (Para.65) which pre-occupied the roundtables. Additionally, and unfortunately, Youth employment (Para 24) must be one of the most salient issues in Europe.

The holistic nature of the problems and our current interdepartmental approach to their solution led to the stimulus paper “ Rio+20. The UK Future of Education for Sustainable Development – eight responsibilities for education?” in which the EAUC and EDG asked two questions:

Question 1 - Which 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.

Question 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 10 years).

Summary

Key messages emerging from the responses to Question 1

Which 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 (FWW).

Global Drivers

The emerging Green and Fair Economy, and the current reassessment of the effectiveness of GDP as a global tool to measure progress, e.g. our moving towards a GDP+ framework, are highlighted as global drivers that inform the need for ESD

Governmental Responsibilities

Several respondents emphasize the importance of a governmental vision for the role of education in sustainable development (SD) as well as need for coordination of efforts and collaboration across all governmental departments. Although the response from the Department of Education (Appendix B, Page 23) mentions a vision: *“The Government is fully committed to sustainable development and the importance of preparing young people for the future”*, there seems no overt awareness of this vision amongst the respondents. This might indicate inadequate dialogue between the education sector, civil society and government on this agenda. Further, there is a need for funding to enable the educational sector to develop an appropriate curriculum to meet current and future sustainability challenges. However most respondents are mindful of the challenging economic climate and are therefore calling for realignment of funding with the Future We Want (FWW) in mind.

Respondents are calling on the government (not in any particular order)

- To provide cross-departmental coordination and collaboration;
- To include ESD in the education minister’s portfolio;
- To offer incentives for collaboration and partnership building across educational sector, businesses and NGOs;
- To respond to the clear student interest in this agenda by working with sector funding councils to ensure that institutions deliver graduates that are equipped with the knowledge, experience and skills to be part of the solution to environmental sustainability, not just a part of the problem
- To consider realignment of funding towards the Future We Want recommendations, including research and curriculum innovation;
- To offer long term funding rather than short term projects;
- To endorse and support those institutions and organisations that lead the way with good practice;
- To close the door on unsustainable practices that could be classified as *ecocide* through legislation;
- For DECC to work further with colleges on climate action;
- To consider a legislative approach that challenges and nudges the sector rather than dictates;
- To support the growth of green jobs to help the almost 1m unemployed young people.

Formal learning (Education sector)

There are broadly two emerging themes under this heading, curriculum change and the role of the institutions

Curriculum change

Challenges

- Not enough space/time/money to develop the needed enrichment of the curriculum to prepare students for a fast changing society and jobs market.
- Traditional subject 'silos' hamper interdisciplinary curriculum development
- Change the accreditation and measurement systems away from the defunct 20th century model to one which supports what is already emerging - reference cultural creatives, the third industrial revolution as two key ideas/arenas...

Opportunities

- Teacher Training to include training in ESD.
- Awarding bodies and exam boards could provide powerful incentives for ESD.
- HEA funded research undertaken by NUS over the last three years has shown that the majority of students in higher education want to learn about sustainability through their time in higher education.
- Both the Department of Education and Rt Hon David Heath MP refer to 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'.

Role of institutions

It was recognized that Educational Institutions have an important role to play in their communities beyond their official remit. Respondents recommended they should

- Break down the walls of formal education;
- Offer leadership in SD and act as beacons of good practice in society;
- Work closely with local communities;
- Provide support for those young people who do not take formal further education;
- Genuinely devolve power and process to local communities and focus relentlessly NOT on excellence but on areas of weakness.

Informal learning (Education Sector and NGOs)

Although there are not many references to informal learning in the responses, some points came to the fore and could offer a starting point for further dialogue:

- Listening to the voice of youth is paramount, they need to be involved in the development of new educational paradigms;
- NGOs should overcome narrow focused agendas and aim to collaborate on this agenda, with each other, and the formal education sector;
- NGOs are encouraged to collaborate with HEIs to keep informed of latest research in SD and work together on solutions.

An in-depth analysis of the responses can be found in Appendix B

Key messages emerging from the responses to Question 2

Question 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 10 years).

The breadth of actions is clearly already engaging the entire education system: curriculum, training offers, formal institutions, informal learning, UK governance and International governance.

The analysis (Appendix B) points to three specific current loci of influence or spaces where actions are concentrated:

- firstly, interacting with and influencing UK governance of ESD by developing ESD communities and leadership;
- secondly, focusing on ESD principles like addressing equality or disadvantage and engaging young people including the student body; and,
- thirdly, managing, measuring and improving Corporate Social Responsibility across the education system. A later submission from Global Responsible Leadership Initiative detailed aims to catalyse a global alternative for business education by addressing three tiers; educating globally responsible leaders, enabling sustainable organizations and engaging in societal transformation.

Interestingly, while a greatest diversity of actions are found at the global and international level, none are favoured; it appears that organizations have differing priorities. A similar picture is emerging across and between institutions and across the curriculum.

At this stage, the consultation can only give a flavour of what is happening in the UK around ESD, and of how civil society and government might perceive the responsibilities and opportunities within the FWW. Gaps are evident between what we are already doing and what we think should be done, and this paper should stimulate some new questions e.g.

- i) Are the ESD communities and partnerships opening dialogue around salient issues like natural capital, GDP+, Green and fair economy and climate action?
- ii) Will our curriculum efforts be sufficient to address the required accelerated outcomes such as problem solving for real world issues and enhancing capability or building capacity?
- iii) Can we stem the cracks in the learning offer, like whole systems thinking and understanding of interdependence, without changing what is taught and how it is assessed?
- iv) Are we producing leaders and teachers who are up to the challenges of training students to thrive in and shape a Global yet Greener Economy?

Responses in order of submission

- 1 Natural History Museum, Bob Bloomfield
- 2 Scottish Funding Council, Mark Batho
- 3 University and College Union (UCU), Graham Petersen
- 4 South West Learning for Sustainability Coalition (SWLfSC), Paul Vare
- 5 Higher Education Funding Council Wales, Chris Cowburn (own view)
- 6 University of Westminster, Myszka Guzkowska
- 7 Association of Colleges (AoC), Ian Munro
- 8 Leadership Foundation, Rebecca Nestor
- 9 Transition Network, Isabel Carlisle
- 10 Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges, Iain Patton
- 11 Copernicus Alliance of Universities for Sustainability, Daniella Tilbury
- 12 Eradicating Ecocide, Nina Owen
- 13 Department of Education, Catherine Clark
- 14 Education Dialogue Group (EDG), Mairi Kershaw
- 15 Higher Education Authority (HEA), Simon Kemp (own view)
- 16 Global Responsible Leadership Initiative, Mark Drewell
- 17 National Union of Students (NUS), Charlotte Taylor

Responses in full **Appendix B**