

Response submitted online

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Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee,
House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA

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Dear Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to you on this important topic. Please find below our consultation response on the opportunities and challenges of post-pandemic recovery from the perspective of a Higher and Further Education membership body's perspective.

Inquiry: Post-pandemic economic growth

EAUC – The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education:

Response on behalf of our Members (United Kingdom and Ireland)

About the EAUC

Our passion is to create a world with sustainability at its heart. That's our vision. We exist to lead and empower the post-16 education sector to make sustainability 'just good business'.

The membership of the EAUC comprises higher and further educational institutions, with a combined budget of some £25 billion, responsible for educating over 2 million students supported by half a million staff.

We have regional and country chapters, with member institutions connected deeply with business, industry, health and civic bodies at local levels, with reach internationally via their research, innovation and student mobility.

We believe

- That UK and Irish education should be a global leader in sustainability
- That educational institutions have a responsibility as anchors in their communities to be agents of change
- That education has a unique opportunity to transform lives and communities
- That education is at the heart of global sustainability
- That every student should have access to sustainability education
- That education should reflect best practice in operational sustainability
- In being flexible and adaptable to find solutions for a resilient future
- In the value of international collaboration

Our values

- Pioneering - driving sustainability through innovation
- Independence - our own unique voice
- Collaboration - together we go further
- Role Model - leading by example

- Empowering - supporting and inspiring our members

EAUC summary response to the Inquiry

For there to be post-pandemic economic growth – the very first thing that we must remember is that we cannot treat the economy as a separate and siloed entity to society and the environment. These three pillars form the foundation of a sustainable society, and they must be considered as an interconnected collective. This inquiry should be rephrased as ‘post-pandemic sustainable development’ – and a key element of this is economic recovery and growth.

As with all inquiries of this nature, and particularly with topics as all-encompassing as the pandemic, there will be a clamouring of responses, all lobbying the government to invest in differing areas. Many of these will be fair and right.

The healthcare sector requires investment, as it has for decades – but in particular, it needs it at the moment to ensure we are better prepared in case of another pandemic. Small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) will have been hit hard by Covid-19, with incredibly small margins at the best of time, there will be a high proportion that don’t make a recovery from this. The grants in place are helpful, but not enough. Industries like the construction industry will suffer as a knock-on effect will be felt due to the recession and multi-million pound projects will be cancelled with wide-ranging impact.

These all need support, but to stimulate and future proof economic growth, there is only one thing that can bring about the change required; **education and skills**. There is a huge disconnect with what is required, and what is provided. This has been apparent for a long time, but the pandemic and the need for a green recovery has really highlighted this.

Learning about sustainable development, resilience, mitigation and adaptation is an absolute necessity for all people on this planet. Educate those in the education system with this knowledge and skill set, and upskill everyone else through work place training and community-based training to ensure everyone is equipped to build back better and understands why things cannot stay as they are. To see a seismic change, there must be seismic impetus – and this is where it must start.

Response to the inquiry questions:

- **What core/guiding principles should the Government adopt/prioritise in its recovery package, and why?**

There should be one over-arching principle that guides the Government in its recovery, and that is well-being. This should focus on economic, social and environmental well-being, all of which are the key contributors to health, happiness and prosperity – the very definition of well-being.

Growth and success cannot and should not be measured by GDP – it should be measured by well-being. This is not a new concept, the [Office for National Statistics already track well-being metrics](#) because all the way back in 2010 then Prime Minister David Cameron commissioned them. He introduced these new metrics and [measures by saying](#) : “So, this measure that we are setting out today reaffirms the fact that our success as a country is about more than economic growth. It will open a national debate about how together we can build a better life. It will help bring about a re-appraisal of what matters, and in time, it will lead to government policy that is more focused not just on the bottom line, but on all those things that make life worthwhile.”

A decade later and well-being doesn’t influence Government policy or strategy to the extent it should. Case in point – the Industrial Strategy mentions well-being zero times.

But of course it is the pandemic that has really emphasised this failure. Well-being has not framed Government policy as it should have, nor have there been sufficient provisions to foster well-being in the general populace. We will not focus our response on whether or not the actions taken by the Government to tackle the COVID19 pandemic were warranted, as requested in the outline of this Inquiry. But we will say that considerable additional well-being provision was required, and the majority of this came from local communities including individuals, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, and third sector organisations and charities. Local and national government did make some provision during the pandemic, but moving forward this needs to be a much bigger priority.

By well-being, we are not simply referring to social well-being, we are also referring to economic well-being and environmental well-being. All three of these are equally important. We will only succeed in creating a sustainable world by having these three pillars in harmony. Economic growth is important now, but it cannot be looked at in singularity, as it is so interconnected to social and environmental needs.

It would be sensible for the Government to reframe all of its strategies and policies in the context of well-being. This should be the overarching principle, and success would look like improvement of social, economic and environmental well-being as a collective.

If Government is looking for an example closer to home where well-being has successfully been prioritised, they only need to look at the prioritisation in Wales of well-being in the 'The Well-being of Future Generations Act'.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals would be a helpful framework to facilitate this move towards well-being. UKSSD outlined this in their recent letter to the Prime Minister: 'Together the 17 Goals provide us with an internationally agreed framework, which also works at national, regional, and local levels, alongside and reinforcing existing plans and commitments. They enable Government to work cross-departmentally and with stakeholders to create programmes and policies that are coherent with the needs of our economy, society, and environment both domestically and internationally.' The UK committed to these Global Goals in 2015, and only has until 2030 to support the world in reaching them, so they need to be integrated much more effectively and now is a good opportunity to do this.

- **How can the Government borrow and/or invest to help the UK deliver on these principles?**

Invest in education and skills. Public education is well known to be underfunded – give them the funding to integrate sustainability within their curriculum. Local Government should also invest in extra-curricular activities that teach young people about sustainable development, this should work towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Office for Students (OfS) must look at ways it can expand its range in provision of funding. It has replaced the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) without continuing its excellent work in funding sustainable development in Higher Education. This is regressive, and while OfS is offering support, really this needs funding and regulation above all else.

- **Whether the government should give a higher priority to environmental goals in future support?**

It categorically should. The current system of Government is not sustainable because prioritisation sits with the economy, with the hope that securing this will secure a successful society. This is not the case. Sustainability requires the balance of the economy, with societal needs and environmental needs. To favour one does not allow for a sustainable existence. The environment has seen more strategy and policy discussion in the last few years than ever before – but the Environment Bill has been incredibly slow to pass through Parliament (even if we take the Covid-19 delays into account). The Environment Bill must look to create the legally binding targets it announced last week swiftly and efficiently with suitable consultation.

The interim targets should be legally binding as well, and the targets themselves should be 2030 at the latest.

There should also be a requirement to specifically outline how Government output from all departments contributes to the social, economic and environmental improvements needed for a successful recovery. The recovery package itself must have this requirement at the forefront of plans, and it must state this explicitly. We must use this as an opportunity to build back better – and better must be sustainable in all senses of the word.

- **How can the Government best retain key skills and reskill and upskill the UK workforce to support the recovery and sustainable growth?**

Education and skills are fundamental to sustainable growth in this country and all others.

To meet the requirements of the shift towards a low-carbon economy there will need to be a significant change in the knowledge-base and skills of workers and employees across every sector of business. The economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have created further unknowns in terms of opportunities for young people, and the skills that will be needed in the job market going forward. It is now even more important that graduates in particular, but also all workers, are agile in terms of their skills base, and equipped with the right skill sets for addressing future challenges.

We know from our work leading the Future Business Council which consists of executives of many large businesses and post-16 education institutions, that currently there is a disconnect between the graduate attributes employers are looking for, and those that students are being equipped with in Further and Higher Education institutions.

There is a strong emphasis at present from Government on technical skills and STEM degree-level education, which we believe to be fair, particularly as technical and professional skills at level 4/5 (ie advanced manufacturing, professional and business services, digital and AI, health and social care, construction, energy and environmental technologies) are in such short supply. But the other piece of the puzzle is sustainable development skills. These are the skills that allow students to handle complicated problems with an understanding of interdisciplinary perspectives. They are a necessity for anyone with leadership aspirations and an increase in productivity will only be maintainable if people have both sets of skills. This skill shouldn't sit in a silo either, it should be integrated into all study programmes as an investment in graduates across all fields, that will be needed to fill career opportunities created by a low-carbon world. In addition to being integrated into study, all undergraduate degree programmes should have a work placement element as well – this will help to bridge the gap between education and work.

There is also a lack of foundation knowledge missing from our education system. To remedy this, we have been calling for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to be embedded in the curriculum for years. Sustainability learning is side-lined as a bank option in the curriculum options outlined by Ofsted. Some students will have little to no teaching about sustainability, the sustainable development goals, the injustices in this world globally at present, and the challenges they will face as adults. It puts them at a huge disadvantage, and they will struggle to be resilient, mitigate and adapt in a world in which they will definitely have to deal with the Climate Crisis and all of its ramifications. ESD should be in all subjects, and it should have a strong emphasis on carbon literacy to help increase the knowledge required to reach net zero.

In addition to supporting young people and the skills agenda, we consider it of high importance that the Government also looks to upskill those in work and those seeking employment and/or involved in business start-ups. We would ask for the Government to identify a '50-year Curriculum' that focuses on through-life learning. We would include here enterprise/ entrepreneurial skills as well as those related to the circular economy.

We support Teach the Future's call for a government-commissioned review into how the whole of the English formal education system is preparing students for the climate emergency and ecological crisis. As well as their call for inclusion of the climate emergency and ecological crisis in teacher training and a new professional teaching qualification. Though we would suggest this might more widely focus on Education for Sustainable Development. Following on from a review, we support the call by Aldersgate Group to 'develop a national low carbon skills strategy that embeds sustainability and net zero delivery across the whole education system.' This should be overseen by a National Skills Commission, also outlined by Aldersgate Group. This must be a cross-cutting group, with representation from young people, education institutions, education sector bodies and organisations, business and Government.

The key weakness in the skills agenda revolves around a lack of collaboration between those involved. If we look at economics for example, there is a real need for universities and colleges to connect their business and outreach teams with industry, to open up their incubation and innovation hubs to the community, to connect deeply with economic development teams and civic society. Local Enterprise Partnerships could have paved the way for this collaboration, but the current arrangement appears to be too weak around the local skills strategy, and as such further attention needs to be given to how to drive place-based and sector-based skills and education. There is also a lack of knowledge transfer to enable tertiary education to better understand the skills required by graduates. Labour market intelligence is reportedly not readily available without a significant cost. Similarly, highly effective employer engagement is very resource intensive. All of which proves challenging. The Government should further address these issues through the National Skills Commissions.

The key weakness in the education agenda is a lack of mandated and consistent education for sustainable development. Teachers lack the knowledge and training to deliver this – and it should therefore be incorporated into teacher training and qualifications, and should be monitored by Ofsted with updated training opportunities provided often. ESD should be a mandatory requirement within the curriculum at all levels of education.

[You can find our consultation response on education and skills to the Department of Education in 2018 here.](#)

- **Is the Industrial Strategy still a relevant and appropriate vehicle through which to deliver post pandemic growth?**

The Industrial Strategy needs some work. It needs to be looked at again with a well-being lens and incorporate a better understanding of the interconnected nature of the economy, the environment and society. We cannot look at these areas in singularity anymore – or we will never reach net zero and we will never reach the 2030 UN Global Goals that we committed to. While the Industrial Strategy does mention sustainability, it lacks both detail and real action on the need for a just and clean transition. Similarly the Green Finance Strategy lacks real detail on a just transition plan.

The Industrial Strategy also needs to better incorporate the links between economic growth and education and skills, as outlined above.

You can find our consultation response submitted on the [Industrial Strategy in 2017 here.](#)

- **What opportunities does this provide to reset the economy to drive forward progress on broader Government priorities, including (but not limited to) Net Zero, the UK outside of the EU and the 'levelling up' agenda? What should the Government do to ensure that delivering on these priorities does not exacerbate the vulnerability of businesses, consumers and communities/workers that have been impacted by COVID-19?**

- **What lessons should the Government learn from the pandemic about actions required to improve the UK's resilience to future external shocks (including – but not limited to – health, financial, domestic and global supply chains and climate crises)?**

This answer responds to both of the questions above.

We fully support the Aldersgate Group (of which we are a contributing member) and the report they published in July titled [‘Rebuilding to last: how to design an inclusive, resilient and sustainable growth strategy after covid-19’](#). This outlines recommendations on how to align the recovery and growth needed with Net Zero and other key challenges.

We can also supply some insight from the Higher and Further Education Sectors, and how some institutions plan to optimise opportunities at this time.

The entire world has been hit hard by Covid-19. We understand it is tempting to go back to ‘normality’ and govern this situation as would have been done previously. But we are being offered a unique opportunity to build back better. We must learn from this, and re-prioritise the things that are important to us as a society. Those things are primarily orientated around well-being. Economic well-being forming an integral part of this – so it is fair and right that we look at economic growth, but the way in which we look at economic growth must be different.

Higher and further education institutions are in a similar position to businesses. They must look at how to make their institution economically viable in a Covid-19 setting. The majority of leaders in the education sector recognise that innovation, sustainability and well-being are integral to a just economic recovery, and this is a unique opportunity to provide much needed resilience within their structures. We are currently working with the sector, to support them in embedding these principles in strategy and governance, across their large campus estates and into their curriculums which educate and influence a combined 4.5 million students (in UK colleges and universities). Many are also looking at upskilling their staff.

There is, however, a recognised lack of consistency with some of these measures – and this needs regulation and investment from appropriate bodies including the Department for Education, Office for Students, Ofsted and QAA amongst others.

The need to reach Net Zero by 2030 has been an increasing priority for the education sector, growing in prominence with the student strike movement. Many institutions see the Climate Crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic as interconnected, and have used their experiences with Covid-19 to inform changes they need to make to tackle the Climate Crisis. This is something the Government should be doing, as should we all. We set up the [‘Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education Students and Leaders’](#) last year, in partnership with Association of Colleges, GuildHE and Universities UK. The commission catalyses action to create real impact and drive change towards Net Zero in the tertiary education sector. It aims to develop an Action Plan in response to the UK government’s stated climate emergency and draw together a strategic sector-wide approach to the Climate Framework.

This is what the Government needs to do. There is an opportunity, and a need, for a much more tangible action plan from the Government on how it is going to better ensure its citizens are resilient, and able to mitigate and adapt to crises. This time, it was a health pandemic, there does not need to be a next time on the scale we have experienced if we can equip society with these skills, and we tackle emerging issues early on. The Climate Crisis is not at an early stage, and to stop this being the next Crisis, it needs intervention now that goes beyond words and declarations. The education sector has many of the answers to this – in its research and knowledge exchange, in its capacity to educate and influence a future generation of leaders, and in its estates where sustainability and innovation have been fostered for decades. Stakeholder

Recommendations we urge the Government to undertake based on the above evidence:

- Reframe the recovery package with a well-being lens, and use sustainability in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals as its core framework. Economic growth can only be achieved in combination with environmental and social improvements.
- Recognise the importance of education and skills to the economic growth agenda, and therefore the need to have better engagement with the education sector. (More information will be available in a report on equipped students with the right skill sets for addressing future challenges.)
- Undertake a Government-commissioned review of the education system, looking at how the English formal education system is ensuring future-fit students, equipped with resilience, mitigation and adaptation skills, and Sustainable Development knowledge, with a particular emphasis on the climate emergency and ecological crisis. ([More information about this available on the Teach the Future website.](#))
- Create a National Low Carbon Skills Strategy that embeds sustainability and net zero delivery across the whole education system, led by a National Skills Commission. This Commission should also ensure the right courses and content are being offered by education institutions, and identify gaps, to start to bridge the skills disconnect that will occur as low carbon jobs increase. The low carbon economy is predicted to grow four times faster than the rest of the economy over this decade according to research from the Open University. ([More information available from Aldersgate Group.](#) They will also be releasing a report more specifically on skills shortly.)
- Mandate inclusion of Education for Sustainable Development in all HE and FE courses. This should be included in teacher training courses in particular.
- Upskill all practicing teachers to make them sustainability literate.
- Mandate businesses provide free sustainability literacy training to all staff, with a heavy emphasis on carbon literacy. The Government should work with the Education and Training Foundation and the EAUC to create an e-learning course that could be supplied. This should be available for free to small and medium sized businesses so they are not disproportionately affected by the cost of upskilling. This should be incorporated into a longer lifelong learning programme to keep staff up-to-date with the changing sustainability landscape.
- Encourage all higher and further education institutions to include a workplace element into all courses. Encourage businesses to collaborate with institutions to create these work placements. This is needed to bridge the skills disconnect found between perceived graduate attributes and real-life work place knowledge and skill requirements.
- Better integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into Government departments and their output. It is not enough to simply mention them in Single Departmental Plans. They must form a key part of objective, and there should be more rigorous monitoring and reporting on progress towards them. ([More information about this is available on the UKSSD website](#) and you can find our feedback on the [SDG VNR process here](#))

Yours sincerely,



Iain Patton, CEO, EAUC