

Consultation on the Revised Education for Sustainable Development Guidance - Online Survey

Response from Learning for Sustainability Scotland/EAUC Scotland January 22nd 2021

About you

1. Are you responding to the consultation as: Institutions EAUC Scotland and Learning for Sustainability Scotland
2. Details:

The guidance

3. If ESD is not already designed into your curriculum, does the guidance encourage you to do so?

- Yes
 No
 Not applicable

4. Does **Section 1 ('Education for Sustainable Development: What is it and why is it important?')** provide readers with the information needed to gain an understanding of ESD and convey its importance?

- Yes
 No

If you answered no, please indicate what other information could be included here:

We respond on behalf of Learning for Sustainability (Lfs) Scotland
<http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org>, Scotland's United Nations University recognised Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and EAUC Scotland, the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education.

Our response is informed by consultation with Lfs Scotland and EAUC- Scotland members at a webinar held on 15.01.21.

Section 1 was generally well- received. The section gives an effective overview and encouraging flexibility and offering the SDGs as a starting points and not a mandatory requirement of ESD - although the competencies appear to be presented in this way. The following points were made to enhance understanding of ESD and convey its importance:

- More emphasis is required to actively encourage constructive and critical evaluation of the SDGs (page 8) , which represents a key role for universities, our staff and students.
- There was disappointment at the ‘return’ to the somewhat outdated and misrepresentative Brundtland definition for SD, on which the document builds its guidance around. There are other more broadly appropriate and relevant alternative definitions available that should be considered.
- There was discussion of how to include ‘economics’ more in the document (eg P7 ‘unprecedented economic, social and economic challenges’) . Although this is not the aim of SD, economics is a driver to SD and is a key pillar or enabler for social and environmental development. It is seen to be important in terms of livelihoods, offering decent work and helping reconfigure our socio-economic systems towards a circular economy etc.
- Engagement in nature/human relationships and empathy should be highlighted. Creativity is missing from the competencies currently, as is empathy, although embedded in collaboration competency, Creativity is required for problem solving and anticipatory competencies, and so deserves explicit mention.
- In ‘Why ESD and why now ‘, there should be more emphasis on the need for the development of graduates with a new set of competencies required by employers (noteworthy is the introduction of ‘emotional intelligence’ and ‘creativity’ in the new list of critical competencies by the World Economic Forum). Need to emphasise that the driver is moving from being predominantly students as evidenced in NUS surveys, to employers too (could point to useful references for this which can aid advocacy for ESD). Also, the emphasis on how ESD supports skills and attributes development is key.
- Global citizenship - does this feature anywhere in the document? Surely this is a primary objective of ESD.
- Important to emphasise the need for the primary person in the institution driving the ESD agenda to have the relevant level of authority, and for all staff to engage, but also potential for department/faculty staff and student champions to promote, raise awareness and help dissemination of best practice.
- Challenges around remote learning for ESD specifically - not noted and this is an area of growth.

5. **Does Section 2 ('Designing education for sustainable development') provide you with the information you need to position sustainability within your curriculum?**

- Yes
 No

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The following suggestions were made to provide the information needed to position sustainability within the HE curriculum

- The document needs to express engagement overall with the humanities and social sciences, and provide examples for how and where this has been achieved e.g. literature within this section.
- This guidance appears to focus on embedding ESD in curricula during opportunities such as curriculum reviews or new course development, and should also seek to cater for an ongoing incremental approach to embedding ESD (e.g. adding new content to existing modules, programmes etc).
- This guidance needs to inspire and give more 'how to' examples and references showing how ESD can be embedded and assessed in all disciplines
- In the introduction (Page 4) and the introduction to Section 2 (page 9 'The role of HE in creating a sustainable future') this should be introduced as part of a whole institution approach to ESD.
- P9 paragraph 2:
"The most significant impact SD will have is on the behaviour of graduates and how they live, learn and work. "
There was disagreement with this statement. Is this first point actually the most important of ESD? What about values and actions? Correct SD to ESD and perhaps change to:
"The most significant impact ESD will have is in supporting the competencies - the skills, attributes and values - that students and staff develop to enable them to contribute to a more sustainable future, transforming their thinking so that they have a positive impact throughout their lives as effective global citizens. "
- Emphasise (Page 9) the change in staff as well as students. In particular we need to more strongly target the staff who are not on board with (or aware of) ESD already - as it is, the document reads mainly for geography, natural sciences, where staff are already more aware and active than those in other disciplines. An example for embedding in colleges for diverse areas was Dumfries and Galloway College's engagement with engineers, hairdressers etc.
- Include mention of how institutions should empower staff to 'embrace the uncertainty' associated with becoming more involved in ESD in order to give them the confidence required to explore and introduce SD in their teaching. Provide guidance on how they can achieve this e.g. provide staff incentives such as acknowledgement in staff Annual Development Reviews, promotion criteria etc
- On Page 9 "Supporting students to appreciate the complexity of our world and the 'wicked problems' we have caused." Wicked problems are introduced here as a term but without definition or explanation or reference, This could be

removed or more explanation/definition provided. These can be difficult for staff to grasp never mind students, although approaches exist to support learning around these that could be pointed to.

- “Vision of the future” seems a vague term and needs more explanation.
- There needs to be stronger links between curriculum and campus e.g. on p9 before professional bodies. Also between research and curriculum.
- More emphasis is required on the connection between extra-curricular activities e.g. University Transition Groups , operational aspects and curriculum.
- A section on engaging with policymakers and degree accreditation bodies would be helpful. This is essential for supporting advocacy. Also, mention the role of SOS-UK Teach the Future in this context.
- Engagement with policy makers and decision makers, as well as other stakeholders with influence (namely degree accreditation bodies) is key to advancing ESD agenda. The policy - practitioner loop is vital, where policy can support practitioners in promoting and implementing ESD, and practitioners can continually inform policy.

6. Do the reflective questions in Section 3 ('A toolkit to inform the ESD process') cover the relevant aspects of curriculum design?

- Yes
 No

7.

If you answered no, please indicate what may be missing:

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The following suggestions were made to enhance the reflective questions:

- Questions provided are useful prompts, but more guidance is required on how curriculum designers should USE these questions and this ‘toolkit’ to design ESD into their curricula.
- Include/strengthen the action focus within this section to include student experience and impact within the student time at the university.

ESD Competencies

- Critical thinking competence - evidence based position (pg26). A more explicit recognition that there are different ways of knowing the world alongside science would be welcome. .Consideration of creative areas, music art etc. would strengthen the report to acknowledge/open this up.
- Consider whether it is worth signposting institutions towards tools and methods for consultation with stakeholders.
- Ensuring assessment includes reflective methods - self assessment and mapping of competencies.

- Table 2 - we like this as a guide - really useful - can there be higher levels integrated in here as examples?
- Assessment tools - could the link be to a live webpage where institutions can share experiences and methods and keep this as a living document?
- Could a similar live repository be provided to share experiences in driving inter-disciplinarity within institutions? There is learning needed in this area particularly trying to work across university structures/silos.
- Table 3 must include outdoor learning as an approach.
- It was felt that there is an opportunity to expand in normative competence throughout. One area discussed was how staff and students input into the curriculum alongside policy makers in order to represent the thoughts, values, future thinking considerations and voice for educationalists as well as the next generation who will lead industry and ESD.
- Trade-off is mentioned (page 23), but it was felt that more information is needed around how this could be achieved.
- Discussion included that much curriculum content is heavily influenced, and in some cases 'dictated', by external organisations and professional bodies. There is scope within the document to include input from influential stakeholders and organisations such as the Scottish Funding Council. This would highlight their support for ESD alongside the inclusion and use of a toolkit whilst giving them an opportunity to engage with the wider sustainability conversation in HE.
- There was a feeling that many elements within the toolkit could work to aid student's knowledge and understanding of sustainability and its application in the workplace. There was discussion around how ESD is often based in governmental politics and thus filters in to educational politics. There was a consensus that the students need to understand the influence of politics and this could be more explicit in the document.

8. Will Section 3 be useful to both experienced staff and those new to education for sustainable development when designing courses and modules?

- Yes
 No

If you answered no, please indicate how they might be adapted to become more useful:

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- Stage 1 key stakeholder engagement was missing a few other key groups - charities, professional bodies etc.
- Stage 1 could benefit from support encouraging a classification and prioritisation of the stakeholder to engage with - e.g. a primary and secondary classification - it should not be the case that the report classifies them itself but more encourages the course design team to consider the stakeholders deeper than simply a list of people

to engage with and assists prioritisation.

- In Stage 4 'Developing learning environments' (page 17) the emphasis on community engagement, non-classroom environments for learning is key.
- There is a missing element after stage 4 that is around evolving the teaching as the class is delivered, e.g. reacting to new information that becomes available from stakeholders in a live project that shapes the next steps of a project design.
- .Emphasis should be placed on the interconnectedness of the SDGs in learning and the need for an interdisciplinary approach. .
- Gaps in this section are:
What specific barriers exist to advancing ESD in an institution, how can we identify these, and overcome them?
How can we analyse what ESD offering already exists within our institution?
- Guidance refers to mapping SDGs onto disciplines, but this could easily result in more silo-based learning.
- How agile is the document for a changing employment, economic landscape, e.g. dealing with global pandemics (and changes to teaching practices and educational legacy of this) and other local and global changes? Despite being published in Dec 2020, there is no mention at all of COVID and the potential opportunities and impacts this may have on the ESD agenda - socio-economic recovery, human/nature relationships and pandemic recovery, and how this fits with ESD agenda. How do we 'bounce back'? Some mention of a societal response and the role of ESD in this would be welcome.
- Emphasise the importance and value of cross-institutional collaboration, networks and communities of practice to help promote and implement ESD at your institution.
- More guidance is needed on how to undertake ongoing monitoring and evaluation of ESD provision.

9. Do you think the resources in **Section 4** are useful? Can you suggest any that should be added?

Yes
 No

If you answered no, please indicated how they may be adapted to become more useful:

Can you suggest any that should be added?

10. Do you have any other feedback that has not been covered within these questions, for example, the length, accessibility of language?

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The following additional suggestions were made:

- Overall there was a positive response to the document, but it could be more inspiring and imperative; needs to be more engaging and include more voices e.g. from the humanities and social sciences; and needs stronger emphasis on a whole institution approach.

The document as a whole could be more assertive in its tone around the urgency to educate and deliver on ESD for our students and future generations.

- The document's introduction is framed for curriculum designers, which is welcome and useful, but we need to make clear in the introduction that this is only part of a whole institution approach to ensure more engagement with senior management and students. Although this point comes later in the guidance, we recommend this be made clear at the outset of the document. It would also be useful to frame the introduction in terms of wider university (and general educational) goals and how these have traditionally aligned with SD, and continue to do so.

Full details of the consultation are available at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/supporting-resources/consultation-on-revised-education-for-sustainable-development-guidance