

**Response submitted online**

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[Review of Post-18 Education and Funding: Call for Evidence](#)

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES (EAUC):**

### **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
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**We have opted to concentrate on one core question within the online survey. Please find our response below:**

*Part 3: Delivering the skills the UK needs*

*11. What challenges do post-18 education and training providers face in understanding and responding to the skills needs of the economy: at national, regional and local levels? Which skills, in your view, are in shortest supply across the economy? And which, if any, are in oversupply?*

### **Skills in short supply – Education for Sustainable Development**

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 on technical skills and STEM degree-level education, which we believe to be correct, 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 allows 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.

Therefore, we ask that Education for Sustainable Development is identified as essential curriculum and considered a necessary life skill. Similarly there should be investment in this as a lifelong learning. [Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is described by UNESCO as “enabling us to address present and future global challenges and create more sustainable and resilient societies by changing the way we think and act. This requires quality education and learning for sustainable development at all levels and in all social contexts” (Source: <https://bit.ly/2HmyaMW>). This can be done in a range of ways, and we would encourage the government to explore the concept of living labs in particular as vehicles of applying cross disciplinary academic learning to solve organisational or societal problems.

This wider contextual understanding is a key graduate attribute for businesses and organisations as consumer awareness and purchasing power lean heavily towards ethically-sourced products/services and they are increasingly finding themselves facing challenges that require resilience and socially-aware ways of thinking. Only recently Nespresso Chief Executive Jean-Marc Duvoisin was talking about the competitive advantage sustainability gives a business. Businesses like Unilever, M&S and Mars all have Chief Executives forcing sustainability to the top of their business agenda – moving away from the idea that it is a ‘nice to have’ these days and reinforcing its position as the foundation for good business. Equally, students want these skills. They value sustainability, ethics and the notion of social responsibility. New NUS research shows 3 in 4 students would choose to work for a company that pays less but has a strong environmental and social record. But less than half of post-16 education institutions have sustainability related attributes in the graduate attributes developed by their institution. That’s over half of colleges and universities in the UK that are not even recognising this as an important skill. The top three barriers to institutions doing more on environmental sustainability and social responsibility have been described by our members, (who are predominantly staff with a formal or informal remit to deliver

environmental sustainability and social responsibility), as 1) finances / budgets / budget cuts; 2) lack of senior management commitment/strategic direction; and 3) lack of staff resources.

Special attention in particular needs to be given to vocational learning and apprenticeships, Further Education institutions and SMEs. Most recognise all of the above, but are often disproportionately limited in their resource capacity. Vocational learning is at the heart of most of the industrial sectors and there needs to be a consistency in standard and delivery of Education for Sustainable Development across all of tertiary education. Lifelong learning on this topic, similarly, needs to extend as a requirement to all employers.

There is a definite demand for sustainability skills from business, and a demand from those going through the education system, but there is a gap in the delivery of these skills by the education sector and we believe this requires government mandates to ensure it is addressed. As an absolute minimum, there should be incentivisation for institutions to incorporate Education for Sustainable Development.

Building on this, we also believe there is a stronger role for the tertiary education sector to play in developing the various sector strategies in the Government's Industrial Strategy work – in both research and learning. We would encourage wider consultation on this.

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are now considered to be a global 'to-do list' and as a country the UK has committed to reaching them by 2030. Government departments have been tasked with embedding these within their strategy and business has rapidly seen and understood the value in them. In addition to embedding Education for Sustainable Development in the curriculum, embedding SDGs into educational objectives could be another good route to ensuring students have a better knowledge of sustainable development ready for the world of work. We have created an SDG Accord ([www.sdgaccord.org](http://www.sdgaccord.org)) that asks institutions worldwide to commit to doing more to reach the SDGs and reporting on their progress and to date 55 institutions that have signed it. But really all institutions should be taking part. Some kind of mandate to report on SDGs in public and higher education could help ensure institutions are delivering sustainable development skills and playing their part in contributing to wider society. Research from the NUS in January 2018 found that two thirds of students hadn't heard of the SDGs. We cannot hope to meet the SDGs by 2030 if we continue to produce graduates that have no idea what they are and the economic, environmental and social challenges they represent.

### **Lifelong learning**

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.

### **Challenges**

The key weakness in the skills agenda revolve 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



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local skills strategy, and as such further attention needs to be given to how to drive place-based and sector-based skills and education. The Government should address this issue with the LEPs and play a facilitating role while this issue is resolved.

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. It is for this reason that last year the EAUC Future Business Council was established to facilitate a dialogue on labour skills between employers and academia.

Finally, a huge challenge faces our world – climate change. If we are not educating students on this matter and equipping them with the sustainability knowledge and systems thinking skills needed to rethink consumption and production, emissions reduction and climate adaptation, our economic and social systems will fail.