Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the UK – Current status, best practice and opportunities for the future

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Policy Brief

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Executive summary

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can be thought of as a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities. Building the capacity for such future-oriented action is a key task of education.

This policy brief provides an account of the current status of ESD across the UK. It draws on evidence from independent experts from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (education is a devolved responsibility in the UK) and sets out some of the characteristics of best practice and an analysis of future opportunities for enhancing the core role of education and learning in the pursuit of a more sustainable future.

- Good practice in ESD exists at all levels and in most learning contexts across the UK. It is characterized by good teaching, enhanced learner outcomes and linked to the professional standards and qualifications of teachers who are part of innovative communities and networks of ESD practice which communicate and share best practice.
- Nevertheless, developments in ESD are still relatively small scale, mostly based on projects within fixed time frames and resources, hence, the incorporation of good practice in all sectors is uneven across the UK.
- There is no coherent view at policy or practice level about how ESD can most appropriately be experienced by learners, in a progressive sense across all age groups and how it can contribute to improved learner outcomes.
- In England and Northern Ireland there is currently less policy emphasis on sustainable development and this has inhibited the wider adoption of good practice in ESD.
- In Wales, a significant emphasis has been placed on sustainable development by the Welsh Government although the prominence given to ESD (ESDGC) in national policy has diminished.

- In Scotland, there is a greater focus on a more integrated and coherent approach to sustainable development and ESD with education being recognized by policy makers and practitioners as a key enabler in the transition to a sustainable society.
- There is no overarching UK Strategy for Sustainable Development which sets out a clear vision about the contribution learning can make to its sustainable development goals. This is needed.
- The wider adoption of ESD would benefit from an overall strategic framework which puts it firmly at the core of the education policy agenda in all the UK's administrative jurisdictions. This would provide much needed coherence, direction and impetus to existing initiatives and scale up and build on existing good practice as well as preventing unnecessary duplication of effort and resources.
- A pan-UK forum should be established for overseeing the promotion, implementation and evaluation of ESD across the UK, with a clear remit to work collaboratively with the UK Government and all three devolved administrations, whilst respecting their jurisdictional policy remits.

1 / Introduction

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can be thought of as a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities. Building the capacity for such future-oriented action is a key task of education (UNESCO[1], 2003).

The purpose of this policy brief is to provide a succinct account of the current status of ESD across the UK. It draws on evidence from independent experts from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This policy brief sets out some of the characteristics of best practice which has emerged in the wide range of learning contexts across the UK as well as an analysis of future opportunities for enhancing the core role of education and learning in the pursuit of a more sustainable future.

The UK Government and a wide range of national agencies believe that we need to foster, through education, the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future. The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD: 2005–2014), for which UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) is the lead agency, aims to change the approach to education so that it integrates the principles, values and practices of sustainable development. The UK signed up to the strategy in March 2005.

The goals of the Decade can be broken down into four key objectives:

- facilitating networking and collaboration among stakeholders in ESD;
- fostering greater quality of teaching and learning of environmental topics;
- supporting countries in achieving their Millennium Development Goals through ESD efforts; and
- providing countries with new opportunities and tools to reform education.

1. Ministerial Round Table on Quality Education, 2003, Communiqué, Paris, UNESCO.

The UK Government, under the aegis of the Department for Education, has begun to explore how best "to support this work in ways which maintain schools' responsibility for their own development, and how to exchange best practice in productive ways between the devolved administrations, amongst practitioners from across education sectors and civil society organisations."[2]

This policy brief sets out to provide an analysis of progress in support of the UK Government's objective of sharing best practice in all learning contexts. This wider context has assumed a much more important policy priority given the UK Government's current focus on stimulating economic growth by creating a substantial green economy linked to climate change adaptation in the UK. The enhanced national focus on quality and standards in all forms of educational provision is also highly relevant since most contemporary evidence indicates that good practice in ESD leads to better learner outcomes. It is also timely as UNESCO debates the impact of the DESD and follow-up beyond 2014.

The current, country by country status of ESD is set out below and offers a brief analysis of the key differences along with recommendations to enhance the key role of education in furthering the UK's objectives for a more prosperous and sustainable future.

2. DFE website; www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/policiesandprocedures/a0070736/sd

2 / The Scotland Context

Sustainable development is one of the Scottish Government's key national performance outcomes and features in many aspects of Government policy. A 'greener' and 'fairer' nation is one of their overarching strategic objectives. It has set ambitious targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. In these processes the Government has emphasised the importance of societal change towards a sustainable future and highlighted the role of education in informing that process.

Education for sustainable development in formal education

The Scottish Government has made a substantial commitment to the DESD. It has stimulated activity in Scotland through policy initiatives and the core justification for these has been laid out in a series of documents, the most recent of which, *Learning for Change,* sets out expectations for schools, universities and colleges, and communities, highlighting that 'creating a sustainable future for Scotland will require widespread understanding and huge cultural change – and the key to achieving this is education for sustainable development'.

In 2011 the incoming government made a manifesto commitment to explore the concept of 'One Planet Schools'. This signalled an intent to help schools move towards a One Planet future – where they will gradually reduce their use of resources and develop a values orientation that addresses sustainability. The intention is to take a whole school approach to this through the integration of three equally important facets – Education for Sustainable Development, Global Citizenship and Outdoor Learning. The Ministerial Advisory Group report was published in December 2012 and Scottish Ministers will respond in early 2013. The report's recommendations chime with the work of the now independent General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) which finalised the revision of its 'Professional Standards' in December 2012. These now require

all teachers to address 'Learning for Sustainability' (defined as for "One Planet Schools") in their teaching. This is a significant development that will require a national commitment to pre-service and in-service training of all members of the profession.

The recent major revision of the curriculum in Scotland, 'Curriculum for Excellence' (CfE), and its phased introduction has allowed ESD to be fully integrated into many aspects of the curriculum, particularly in technologies, science and social subjects. More broadly CfE provides the overarching philosophical, pedagogical and practical framework and context in which ESD ought to be applied. One of the four core capacities of all learners defined in Curriculum for Excellence, that young people should become 'responsible citizens', signals a strong impetus towards living sustainably and equitably.

Sustainability is often a feature of the informal or extra-curricular work of Scottish schools. Almost all schools are registered with the government-supported Eco-Schools scheme, with nearly 50% having achieved a 'Green Flag'. Other initiatives, such as the John Muir Award, Rights Respecting Schools, Fair Trade Schools and Forest Schools have also facilitated a wider understanding of ESD in schools. However, as these are not curricular initiatives they are not available to all school pupils, and there is a clear tension between the valuable role of the 'third sector' and core mainstream provision.

Education for sustainable development in non-formal education and the community

A range of initiatives has been established to encourage local communities to engage with sustainable development (SD). These non-formal education streams have been successful modes of learning and embedding SD across Scotland. The Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) made funding of £37.7million available to communities in the period 2008–12, supporting 345 communities across Scotland to take action on climate change and thereby deriving educational benefits. A proportion of all future CCF will support projects run by and for young people; this activity will be titled the Junior Climate Challenge Fund.

In addition to Scottish Government funded initiatives, schemes to build sustainable communities have increased in strength over the years, embracing a 'for themselves, by themselves' philosophy, such as those supported through CADISPA (Conservation and Development in Sparsely Populated Areas). Since establishment in 1987, CADISPA has supported grass-roots community-led initiatives across rural Scotland and offered guidance on how to address sustainability issues in local areas through a focus on experiential and non-formal learning through place-based action research.

The Transition movement has had some impact in communities with a growing number of groups in Scotland.[3] There have also been projects in university communities at the University of Edinburgh and the University of St Andrews. The St Andrews project has worked with both the university and the local town community, recently winning a grant for joint sustainability projects.

A United Nations University recognised Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development (UNU RCE) for Scotland was approved in December 2012.[4] It has the support of the Scottish Government and will maintain momentum as we approach the end of UNDESD, providing new opportunities for collaborative working between practitioners, academics, government and civil society.

3. www.transitionscotland.org/
4. http://rcescotland.org/

3 / The Wales Context

In Wales, the terminology used is *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship* (ESDGC). Wales is unique in writing sustainable development into its constitution via the Government of Wales Act 2006.

The Welsh Government is committed, via a Sustainable Development Bill currently being consulted on, to make sustainable development a "central organizing principle" for all activities and decisions of the government and public bodies in Wales and also to create an independent sustainable development body for Wales. During early consultation on the Bill, ESDGC stakeholders were quick to point out the absence of any mention of education as a means of supporting sustainable development behaviour. They argue the lack of convincing evidence of the 'mainstreaming' of ESDGC thus far suggests the need for further statutory support for ESDGC.

Since 2009 the picture for ESDGC has changed, possibly reflecting a wider 'cooling' of interest or support. This was evidenced by the transfer of responsibility for ESDGC to the European and International Education section within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) at the Welsh Assembly Government; ESDGC is no longer managed as a standalone agenda but is now considered to be mainstreamed in wider government sustainable development obligations. Currently explicit responsibility for ESDGC and sustainable development sit within the remits of two Welsh Government Departments, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Environment and Sustainable Development. A challenge remains to ensure that education is seen as a powerful means by which Sustainable Development can be implemented in all policy areas.

Education for Sustainable Development in Formal Education

To begin the process of creating a more sustainably literate and globally aware population, the government originally appointed an ESDGC Champion to

work with all education sectors and the youth sector. ESDGC – *A Strategy for Action* was published in 2006 (and updated in 2008) for implementation across all the sectors. Five themes were agreed for the Strategy and which are still current: *Commitment and Leadership; Learning and Teaching; Organizational Management; Partnerships and Community; and Research and Monitoring*. A series of documents were developed to support the Strategy including a *Common Understanding for the Youth Work Sector; ESDGC in the Further Education Sector in Wales; A Common Understanding of ESDGC in Adult and Community-based Learning; ESDGC – A Common Understanding for Schools and Information for teacher trainees and new teachers in Wales* (all 2008).

Over 90% of all schools in Wales are registered on the Eco Schools programme which is managed by Keep Wales Tidy. Much of the support for schools, colleges, (as well as youth and adult groups, businesses and the public) in Wales comes from national or regional member-led organisations. A leading one in this context is *Cyfanfyd*, an NGO which promotes ESDGC in the school, lifelong learning and youth work sectors with the support of the Welsh Government Department for International Development. The ESDGC Schools Network, operating under the auspices of *Cyfanfyd,* offers teachers, lecturers and others professional development, resources and coordination.

Many schools and colleges have developed excellent practices in terms of environmental management which link to the formal and non-formal curriculum. Many schools and colleges have succeeded in gaining various levels in the Welsh Green Dragon environmental management scheme, with eight further education (FE) colleges reaching the highest level. A small number of FE colleges have been very successful in the Green Gown Awards with Coleg Gwent and Pembrokeshire College being particularly active. Welsh Higher Education presence in these awards has diminished recently.

In the most recent version of the national curriculum for 11–19 year olds in Wales (2008), ESDGC is one of the five themes in the Personal and Social Education (PSE) framework. This aims to foster positive attitudes and behaviour towards sustainable development and global citizenship. The framework sets out measurable learning outcomes for ESDGC for 7–11 years and post-16 phases. Local education consortia formed in 2012 have begun to coordinate ESDGC in their regions, for example, the South East Wales Sustainable Education Network.

The education inspectorate in Wales, Estyn, published guidance on inspecting ESDGC in schools in 2006 and their self-assessment guidance for FE colleges and Welsh for Adults Centres includes a section on ESDGC. More recently, Estyn has published sector-leading practice in outdoor schools and wellbeing linked to SD. The National Grid for Learning (NGfL) developed web pages containing links to resources, support and guidance on implementing ESDGC in schools alongside case studies and examples of good practice.

The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales strongly supported the HE sector in evaluating its curricula for ESDGC content and related learning outcomes, in developing and implementing an Environmental Management System, and funded the development of a set of ESDGC indicators for HE in Wales (the ESDGC Development Framework).

Education for Sustainable Development in non-formal education and the community

On a regional level, the Swansea Environmental Education Forum (SEEF) provides resources for schools, youth and adult groups, businesses and the public and runs the Swansea Sustainable Schools Scheme. Cardiff has the Cardiff Sustainable Education Network (CSEN), which works with schools, colleges and the public. Various higher education institutions have links with these groups.

4 / The Northern Ireland Context

Responsibility for Sustainable Development policy in Northern Ireland currently resides within the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), which takes a convening role for policy formation and strategic direction. In 2010 OFMDFM published the latest Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy, 'Everyone's Involved', into which all government departments in Northern Ireland made contributions and commitments. Since 2007 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been a statutory requirement within the school curriculum and falls under the aegis of the Department of Education.

Education for Sustainable Development in Formal Education

At primary level ESD is built into the World Around Us Statutory Area of Learning, whilst at key stage 3 it is included in the Statutory Learning Areas of Learning for Life and Work and Environment and Society. Related key aspects of the Northern Ireland Curriculum are Education for Mutual Understanding and Education for Local and Global Citizenship. Schools and teachers are provided with a series of resources designed to help explain and encourage sustainable development principles within a pupil's overall learning experience. A 2005 good practice guide developed by the Interboard Education for Sustainable Development Group was produced partly as a response to the beginning of the UN Decade for Sustainable Development.

Schools are encouraged to adopt an approach to ESD which takes on more than a curriculum focus. The school buildings and building regulations, management of school resources, waste management, and active travel, for example, should all be actively encompassed within a framework for sustainability, alongside the development of strong links with the local community, other local schools and businesses, and the community and voluntary sector.

A 2010 Education and Training Inspectorate report in relation to ESD across a sample of schools in Northern Ireland, highlighted the central role of strong and inspirational leadership in establishing ESD as part of a 'whole school ethos', ensuring that ESD is effectively integrated into school development plans, giving a clearly defined role to an environmental coordinator in schools, and involving all staff (teaching and non-teaching) in taking the lead in developing ESD.

It was hoped by many that a mandatory commitment to sustainable development would be included in the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. However, despite the inclusion of a sustainable development clause in the consultation paper, this did not happen. Rather, an appendix to the regulations stipulates that *'schools are strongly encouraged, in preparing their school development plan, to address ways in which they might promote sustainable development through the schools teaching and learning, leadership and management and engagement with its community'*.

In January 2009 the Department of Education published, 'Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools'. Whilst this document does reference sustainable development principles and the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy, it is clearly describing sustainability in different terms. As the document itself states, 'The focus of this document is on the longer term viability of schools provision'. This, for many, was seen as a missed opportunity for developing a wider culture of ESD in and around school communities in Northern Ireland.

In the Northern Ireland Executive Sustainable Development Strategy Implementation Plan 2011–14, 'Focus on the Future', the Department of Education has undertaken to ensure that provision of learning and skills 'responds to the needs of the low carbon economy' whilst also acting as the lead department in extending the 'implementation of sustainable development within all schools and other educational establishments'. The Department states that ESD has a critical role to play in delivering these objectives.

Nevertheless, the Eco Schools Programme has over 840 registered eco-schools in Northern Ireland, accounting for 69% of all schools. Of these 261 have

achieved Green Flag Status and in the past academic year 97 schools either achieved or renewed their first Green Flag status.

Higher and Further Education in Northern Ireland

In Higher and Further Education a number of ESD initiatives have been taken. The Environmental Sciences Research Institute at the University of Ulster focuses on the organizational and other barriers to implementing ESD; on staff and student awareness and understanding of sustainability issues and on student-led climate change initiatives. The University of Ulster has also made significant advances on its estates, investing heavily in energy conservation and the installation of renewables. Queen's University Belfast's Institute for a Sustainable World is an international centre for interdisciplinary excellence in education and research which aims to provide innovative solutions through science, engineering and the social sciences to the challenges of "one-world living".

Northern Ireland Colleges have been quick to implement their curricular response to climate change and the economic opportunities presented by green technologies. Specialist courses on wind, biomass and marine energy technologies are widely available. Belfast Metropolitan College has established EnviroMET as part of the College's response to staff and student feedback during the Change Management Review process in 2010 to demonstrate the College's commitment to the principles of sustainable development throughout all areas of its curriculum and corporate activities.

Education for Sustainable Development in non-formal education and the community

Such success as there has been in advancing ESD during the Decade has been marshalled by the NGO sector. The RSPB and the Red Cross have been especially active and a broad coalition of organisations, under the banner of the ESD Forum, embraces the universities, several local authorities and government agencies, as well as a range of NGOs. The Forum provides networking opportunities, training events and regular communications for its wide membership base. Where there is genuine ESD activity in Northern Ireland, it has been primarily fostered by these groups. Their influence and resources enable committed teachers to deliver excellent work in schools in this area.

A commitment to highlight and encourage ESD principles was contained within the 2008–2011 Northern Ireland Programme for Government, through a Sustainable Development and Environment Awards scheme. OFMDFM, in partnership with the Department of the Environment has hosted 'IMPACT' Awards in 2010 and 2012 recognising and rewarding young people from schools and community groups across Northern Ireland. Some high quality projects served to underscore the critical role of enthusiastic, committed teachers – most winning entries were the result of exemplary extra- curricular activity.

5 / The England Context

Since the election in 2010, the government emphasis on sustainable development has been reduced, and climate change is not the strong driver it was. NGO and business engagement on this, on sustainable consumption, and on transitions to a low carbon economy, remain strong, however.

Education for Sustainable Development in formal education

This reduced government focus on sustainable development has resulted in increased uncertainties amongst educational institutions and practitioners about how much emphasis to place on sustainability within teaching and learning. Commitment on the ground is strong, though rarely part of mainstream practice. There are, however, compelling examples of innovation:

The Department for Education website says: "Multiple sources of evidence suggest that being a sustainable school raises standards and enhances young people's well-being." Networks and partnerships in schools include *Sustainability and Environmental Education* (SEEd) which provides a wide range of professional and school development activities for teachers and schools. Activities include conferences, webinars, a policy forum, and a curriculum project with monthly discussions. The *Sustainable Schools Alliance*, which SEEd supports and which was endorsed by the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper, encourages schools to put sustainability at the heart of their thinking. Previous interest by Ofsted in sustainability and the curriculum has diminished since 2010.

The Natural Environment White Paper encouraged *learning outside the classroom*, and welcomed the educational work of the environmental NGOs that promote this. Eco-schools claims considerable "reach" into English schools with 16,676 registrations (>70%), but there is no proven impact on either learning, or on schools' effectiveness as sustainable institutions. It remains comparatively straightforward to gain and retain Green Flag Status.

The Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC)supports FE and HE activity through, for example, *Learning in Future Environments* (LiFE) and the *Sustainability Exchange*, each funded by HEFCE through its Leadership, Governance and Management Fund (now ended, though not evaluated). This has also supported work on ESD and the quality assurance of educational provision, though this should not to be equated with the quality of education provided.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) has an ESD Advisory Group, and funds a number of innovative projects such as the Green Academy which promotes institutional development, and research by the NUS which shows positive undergraduate attitudes towards sustainability and its link to employability. It convenes policy think tanks, and has a part-time academic policy officer. Recent research shows a majority of students wanting to learn about sustainability because of its potential impact on their employability. The English University Funding Council (HEFCE) is becoming less focused on supporting the development of sustainability-focused learning and teaching within institutions, passing this responsibility to the Higher Education Academy. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)for HE has recently published a code of practice for teaching and learning which incorporates ESD.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) strategy and action plan (2010) responded to a "growing appetite in the sector to understand, apply and champion sustainable thinking and practice". Through this, LSIS provides sustainability-focused programmes, including ones with a learning focus; for example, Leaders of the Future in Sustainable Development, and the Sustainability Leaders' Toolkit. LSIS supported the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges in developing the SORTED online sustainability resource. Post-16 sector (FE colleges and work-based learning) provision on sustainability remains patchy. The Skills Funding Agency supports LSIS as the major driver for change, however, this will need to be re-thought following the recent government decision to close LSIS. Vocational provision in construction has made significant progress in integrating sustainability into its courses.

Education for Sustainable Development in non-formal education and the community

All sectors make a contribution to ESD. Schools can expose all young people to foundation ideas and skills which prepare them for roles as future citizens. HE and FE can contribute through their close links with employers and the professions, and a specialist focus on employment-related education and training. Community-based ESD activity can be crucial in making a difference to people's lives. However, none of this is yet done systematically or well enough.

A range of networks provide professional and institutional support. These include the Sustainable Development Alliance for Learning and Skills, the Sustainable Development Youth Work Forum, and the National Youth Agency. There are also government, business and charity partnerships; for example, Business in the Community, Forum for the Future, and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

There is considerable activity in the NGO sector in support of schools and in relation to adult, community, youth and voluntary activities, but there is a lack of connection and little synergy between learning experiences in formal education and those in community involvement and third sector capacity building. The growth of the *Transition* movement represents one example where social learning through community-led innovation is beginning to be supported by academic research.

In business, industry, and the professions, the green economy is a growing focus of professional development, although it is a minor initiative when set against professional training as a whole. The idea that educating educators and trainers ought to be the priority of priorities is a UNESCO ideal, but there is little sustainability-related activity in mainstream programmes that focus on the professional development of teachers in schools. The *Teaching Agency*, which sets out this curriculum for school teachers, currently does not demonstrate interest in sustainability.

6 / Analysis

1. Since 2010, respective governments' emphasis on sustainable development policy has diminished in England and Northern Ireland. In Wales, the Sustainability Bill is a major feature of Welsh Government policy, however, there is evidence of less emphasis being given to ESD in education policy, although not in schools' practices. As a consequence, the position of ESD in these jurisdictions has become less prominent.
2. The exception is Scotland where the government has placed a much greater emphasis on social equity and the environment as key policy targets. The Scottish Government has set itself the target of making Scotland a world leader in securing its own energy needs from renewable sources and sees this as a significant driver for job creation and addressing social inequality. Here ESD is seen by the government as playing an important strategic role in implementing its policy objectives.
3. In Northern Ireland, Wales and England the reduced emphasis on ESD is explained in part by:

    - a degree of ambiguity about what policy ought to be in relation to education and training more generally and in particular what role they might play in supporting the emerging green economy; and
    - a view that supports smaller and less directive central governance and giving more responsibility to institutions at a local level.

    This has resulted in a loss of policy coherence across government and leads to mixed messages and confusion for many of those in formal and non-formal educational contexts.
4. Responsibility for policy formulation on sustainable development is often shared across several government departments and whilst, in principle, this is no bad thing, in practice it leads to a narrow focus and 'silo' approach to sustainable development. It also leads to less commitment to its implementation and a lack of coherence in policy. In this respect,

the role of ESD in support of the objectives of a sustainable society is often marginalized.

5. Whilst there is much to celebrate in terms of activity levels in developing initiatives and projects under the banner of ESD, much of this is through relatively small initiatives and shifts in policy, none of which are too demanding in themselves, and which may ultimately lead to a more sustainable society. Modest incrementalism may be too little too late if we are to drive a more fundamental reform of our economy and our society towards a sustainable and climate-resilient future.
6. Although networks and embryonic communities of practice exist, these tend to be within sectors. This is a problem for those engaged in strategic policy-making in terms of how to promote, influence and help link and coordinate learning and sustainability within and across the diverse learning contexts.
7. There are no educational institutions which have set out through policy and practice to embrace a restorative process in relation to natural and social capital as exemplified by the University of British Columbia. Education and skills funding agencies should explore how such innovation could be promoted.

7 / Recommendations

For the UK

1. It is essential to develop an overarching UK Strategy for Sustainable Development which sets out a clear vision about the contribution learning can make to its Sustainable Development Goals.
2. ESD would benefit from an overall strategic framework which puts it firmly at the core of the education policy agenda in all of the jurisdictions in the UK. This would provide much needed coherence, direction and impetus to existing initiatives and scale-up and build on existing good practice. Importantly, at a time of austerity it could help prevent unnecessary duplication of effort and resources. As yet, there is no coherent view at policy or practice level about how ESD can most appropriately be experienced by learners, in a progressive sense, from, say ages 4 to 21 and beyond. A commission set up to examine and report on this question would help institutions plan effectively.
3. A pan-UK forum should be established for overseeing the promotion, implementation and evaluation of ESD across the UK, with a clear remit to work collaboratively with the UK Government and all three devolved administrations, whilst respecting their jurisdictional policy remits.

For UNESCO

The UNESCO Executive Board of October 2012 expressed its preference for the creation of a programme framework to follow up the DESD. The Board resolved that the programme framework should cover the period to at least 2021, address education at all levels and in all forms, be based on a comprehensive sustainable development agenda, and encourage strategic focus and national commitment.

4. UNESCO should review how effective the Decade has been in supporting the implementation of ESD. Most evidence indicates a rather ill-focused

and half-hearted awareness campaign leading to a patchy impact. We recommend that the programme framework should place more emphasis on promoting the good practice that has taken place in recent years; communicating and celebrating those successes that have become embedded in main-stream educational provision and which have contributed directly to enhanced quality through improved learner outcomes and achievements.

8 / Acknowledgements

This policy brief was produced on behalf of the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) by Professor Stephen Martin, Faculty of Environment and Technology, University of West of England, with lead contributors James Dillon, University of Ulster, Professor Peter Higgins, University of Edinburgh, Dr Carl Peters, University of Wales, Newport and Professor William Scott, University of Bath with Gary Brace, Board member of the UKNC with responsibility for the Education portfolio and James Bridge, UKNC Chief Executive.

The views contained in this policy brief are those of the UK National Commission for UNESCO and do not necessarily reflect those of UK Government or the individuals or organisations who have contributed to this report.

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