

Education for Sustainable Development Request for submissions to inform the development of a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland

DevelopmentEducation.ie submission

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Note: the views expressed in this submission do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the individual member organisations.

Submissions should be returned by e-mail to esd@education.gov.ie or by post to Fatima Mendes, QCAP Unit,

Department of Education and Skills, Marlborough Street, Dublin 1 by close of business on Friday 27 September 2013. Any queries can be directed to Fatima Mendes at (01) 889 6453 or to the e-mail address above.

Outlined below are a number of key questions. You are invited to provide your feedback on each question.

There is also a space at the end of the template for any other more general comments you may wish to make that are relevant to the issue of education for sustainable development.

I. Definition

1. A definition of sustainable development is provided on the background paper as `development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Defined by the Our Common Future (The Brundtland Report) - Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development;

Quoted in Our Sustainable Future - A Framework for Sustainable Development in Ireland, p.10)

How would you define `education for sustainable development'?

ESD is a holistic approach that acknowledges the key importance of education at all levels and incorporates a variety of necessary and appropriate strategies as key medium in promoting a sustainable future.

2. What is the key priority for making education for sustainable development a reality?

Ongoing and long-term commitment, support and effective collaboration between government, schools, civil society (especially NGOs) communities and individuals supported by the necessary policies, resources and, crucially leadership.

II. Objectives, challenges and actions

Objective 1: Embedding education for sustainable development at every level of the education system

3. How can education for sustainable development be most effectively embedded at every level of the education system? Please give practical examples if possible.

ESD is an opportunity to integrate the concept of sustainability into curricula and syllabi and across the wider educational fora in non-formal education, with wider impact in the community at large. The issues at stake for all our futures are global challenges that demand immediate response at the local level. Formal and non-formal educational structures are a pivotally important tool for the generation of public discussion, debate, judgement and consequent action towards a sustainable future.

Initially, a brief and focused review would need be presented that clearly identifies the opportunities that can inform and shape national strategies, outlining required curricula and syllabi updating and support and which would stimulate the necessary energy and enthusiasm among educators and teachers to engage in the process.

The success of previous curriculum initiatives such as the Green-Schools within primary

education demonstrates the energy and leadership that teachers and students are willing to engage in once opportunities are appropriately resourced in a variety of ways and with clear and consistent state support. Programmes such as this have been made possible as a result of an integrated, flexible curriculum that allows many ESD dimensions to be introduced and developed by schools, principals, teachers and students.

There will inevitably be need for some subjects to be updated to include possibilities for inclusion of ESD dimensions and strands, however, there are many subjects that could almost immediately include and expand ESD at Junior Cycle, Transition Year and Senior Cycle levels especially Geography, C.S.P.E., SESE, Economic History, Religion/Philosophy, Agricultural Science, Agricultural Economics, and Engineering. Concentrating initially on where ESD can be relatively consolidated within such subjects is an important starting point as, for example, Geography already covers many aspects and dimensions of ESD without it explicitly being recognised formally as ESD (and Geography teachers are already familiar and experienced in the area).

The introduction of a civics and politics course at Senior Cycle has been in development for over ten years and presents an opportunity to promote ESD as it is already included in the draft syllabus from the NCCA. This could be further strengthened and supported by the Department of Education, especially in informing the context and debates of ESD that young people can engage with when they are potentially at their most reflective and critical capacities in formal education. ESD should be included as a key, long-term opportunity within Politics and Society once introduced. Such an approach would underpin and supplement the work of other key subject areas as described above.

Integrating ESD across the curriculum requires core expertise in the school - one of the weaknesses of CSPE is the lack of experienced, supported and accredited 'specialist' teachers with a good knowledge base in global issues. Having a wide variety of teachers involved is positive, however, there needs to be a core knowledge base such as that currently existing in Geography. Ultimately, for ESD to be taken seriously and to be seen as important educationally, it needs to be accorded status similar to that accorded to the key subjects; if it is perceived or strategised as simply another 'add-on' which teachers and educators are to incorporate without additional support or status, then it will not achieve the intended results.

The proposed Politics and Society syllabus at senior cycle provides such an opportunity and could be a very effective, and a reasonably inexpensive flagship project for this strategy. The reform of Junior Cycle is in keeping with a sustainable development education message (greater focus on active, participatory and independent learning) as is the Key Skills dimension in Senior Cycle.

Integrating Development education as an element in teacher accreditation by the Teaching Council would support ESD initiative. For example, in France, the new competency framework for teachers (July 2013) states teachers will be able to "Contribute to the implementation of cross educations, including health education, citizenship education, education for sustainable development and the arts and cultural education". A similar competency, could be included in the framework for teacher accreditation in Ireland. This would need to be supplemented with further integration of ESD in initial and in-career teacher education, across all curricular areas, (currently significantly funded by Irish Aid) – with enhanced funding and support from other relevant departments such as the Department of the Environment and Local Government for example. Existing work has established a set of practical and effective examples of good practice in the area and these have been documented and reviewed by the Ubuntu Network for example.

Additionally, ESD should be incorporated into non-formal education policies and strategies where there is already flexibility and opportunity e.g. in literacy and numeracy strategies and in youth work and adult education through the VEC network. ESD cannot and should not be the preserve of formal education; ESD in the non-formal sector of education is a necessary parallel strategy for public education. As with formal education, appropriate support, policies, accreditation and leadership will be required. A project similar to the Development Education initiative in the NYCI could prove to be very valuable.

4. What are the key challenges relating to this objective?

ESD must incorporate international political and economic realities in its approach if it is to succeed; focusing only on 'soft' environmental challenges is inadequate – ESD presents fundamental and challenging choices especially to those living and consuming in developed societies such as Ireland. In this context a wider world perspective on ESD is vital.

Interdepartmental cooperation and coherence across government departments and strategies is absolutely fundamental as policies which preach one message while pursuing entirely conflicting strategies (for example in trade, economic development, consumption patterns and environmental protection) is doomed to failure. Government must develop a formal commitment to ESD through a national policy and implementation framework. ESD will only succeed in its objectives in such a context. Equally, ESD must not be presented as an opportunity and challenge for 'youth' – it is an immediate and compelling issue for everyone, regardless of age.

Without adequate and serious resourcing over a long period of time, ESD will not achieve its stated objectives. The current 'financial' crisis presents a very considerable challenge.

Syllabus and curriculum reviews take a long time. Politics and Society at Senior Cycle has been postponed, which presents a difficulty for the implementation of ESD. Any new changes or initiatives developed need to be coherent and have a long term strategy for being fully integrated into the curricula avoiding 'vogue' initiatives that are unsustainable and distracting from the ultimate agenda of sustainable development.

Another area that is a key challenge for incorporating ESD is the placement of ESD within syllabi. In Geography at Junior Cycle level, for example, human development is placed behind physical geography, while 'development and aid' are relegated to the end of the syllabus, which provides the risk that it is missed by teachers. The scope for critical reflection is also not sufficiently rewarded in marking schema.

5. What actions are required to address the challenges?

A brief and focused national review of educational policies and curriculum areas in both formal and non-formal education through a sustainable development framework is a necessary first step. Focusing through an '*ESD Lens*' will provide the tools for reviewing educational policy and practice towards sustainable development. It should, inter-alia, address the following educational content areas

- Understanding sustainable development and implications for education
- National development policies and their relationship with educational policy
- How ESD can contribute to quality learning outcomes
- How ESD can support improved quality of teaching and learning as well as public education
- How ESD can be actualised and improved in practice including in curriculum

- Planning, teaching methods, teaching and learning materials, assessment
- Practice, teacher education practice, and school management.

The review tools, orientations and suggestions for using the tools and opportunities for decision-making and action planning are provided by the UNESCO Education Sector in the 'Education for Sustainable Development Lens: A Policy and Practice Review Too' resource, Education for Sustainable Development in Action Learning & Training Tools no.2 – 2010 (hyperlink: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001908/190898e.pdf>)

Objective 2: Promoting public awareness of education for sustainable development

6. How can the public awareness of education for sustainable development be promoted?

State led and supported initiatives like Green-Schools at the primary level has enabled popular support and a public presence for the agenda of sustainable development and in particular ESD to occur. It is now crucial that these initiatives continue to be supported and promoted at secondary level and within the adult, youth and community sectors for a holistic, more widespread country wide awareness that reaches out to all constituencies.

Initiatives such as Tidy Towns that use sustainable development approaches with a predominantly local dimension. The global dimensions of waste, consumption, recycling, preservation, sustainable practices, use of natural resources and sustainable energies, etc. should be a core element of local initiatives that build on local sustainability as a starting point. Looking to the experiences of Fair Trade Towns and Fair Trade Week in balancing this kind of public education (and practice) in mixing global and local dimensions positively is a strong reference point for consolidating public awareness of ESD.

Collaboration with development NGOs and the Development Education sector in Ireland provides the support and forum for wider reference and awareness of the crucial issues at stake in providing for our sustainable future. This would provide civil society support and ownership of the agenda that currently positively responds to the Irish government's support for overseas development.

Transparency, setting up of accountability mechanisms and budget monitoring at committee level will enable the trust of general public and engagement with the agenda.

7. Who are the key stakeholders in promoting public awareness of education for sustainable development?

National and local government, business, trade union, civil society organisations, development and development education and environmental NGOs, teachers and educators, students, young people and the general public. ESD must be seen as immediately relevant and intrinsically important for all sectors and must not be presented as the preserve or particular mandate of some groups and not others. The business sector has a crucial and necessary role of play in ESD and this cannot be 'postponed' until economic circumstances are more 'positive'.

8. What are the key challenges relating to this objective?

Generating positive incentives for participation is a key challenge. This includes participation models adopted by state agencies, NGOs, groups, businesses and schools and how “the public” are viewed as supporters/fundraisers/drivers and the spaces for agency and action that are promoted through ESD.

Lack of coherence, commitment, energy and input at all levels of the agenda, real or perceived. Lack of effective leadership across society will undermine ESD fatally.

The ESD agenda can appear overwhelming to educators who are not supported in responding to the needs of ESD. The provision of appropriate, up-to-date, carefully developed resources and materials that are user friendly and respond to the educational needs of the target audience. Ireland already has considerable experience in this regard and is a valued contributor to the field internationally. Making effective use of already existing expertise will be important.

The challenges posed by ESD are very considerable and could contribute to additional public fatigue and confusion; the presentation of sustainable development in both a positive and forward looking manner and in accessible and meaningful language will be crucial (jargon and ‘expert narratives’ will put people off).

Promoting ethical trading initiatives such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance etc. should be educationally supported (from a values base: *Who, what, where, why?*) in public. Beyond press releases, there is a challenge in converting good news stories on ethical trading practices in Ireland for example, into popular appeal.

9. What actions are required to address the challenges?

Establishing a ‘green economy’ requires lifestyle changes, and in economic terms this means tax incentives. The challenge is not in introducing one tax or another, but expressing sustainable development initiatives that the public can invest practically and ethically. Ireland needs to take a lead role that is supported through interdepartmental initiatives.

Objective 3: Promoting capacity building in support of education for sustainable development

10. How can we promote capacity building in support of education for sustainable development? Please give practical examples of how this can be done.

Through the integration of ESD as part of Teaching Council professional accreditation. ESD should not exist apart from standard educational teaching practice and certification in the form of an optional course.

In a recent piece of research conducted by DevelopmentEducation.ie that audited Irish development education (DE) resources produced over the last 13 years (2013 – see <http://www.developmenteducation.ie/audit/>), it was found that 25 DE resources were produced over this period with a specific focus on Climate Change and/or Sustainable Development across formal and non-formal education sectors. Resources with a local environmental focus (to Ireland only) were not included in the audit. The audit found that Senior Cycle was not supported at all, while primary education and the youth sector featured strongest. Resource provision for capacity builders (educators) to deliver ESD has been consistently weak over this period, with a few exceptions. Any agenda seeking to deliver on ESD must provide for and support production of a range of resources that contain an ESD approach, much like development education has achieved. A scoping exercise across all

formal and non-formal sectors is recommended for considering the 'demands' for ESD resource production. (Note: demand is measured by SD trends, debates and focus; curriculum gaps and; end-user needs).

11. What are the key challenges relating to this objective?

A key challenge in providing for capacity building programmes is the risk of duplication, project isolation and practice that is hidden and not shared by an ESD community. A cooperative platform for capacity builders operating in schools, NGOs, etc. should be developed. Common approaches, sharing of good practice and the sharing of resources between capacity builders would create common ground and a series of potential networks to motivate, provide mutual support and sustain an ESD agenda.

The slow pace at which changes to the curriculum are realised.

If not appropriately developed and supported runs the risk of educator disinterest, difficulty/reluctance in engaging effectively with the agenda.

Funding and central support and commitment for the agenda will risk implementation.

12. What actions are required to address the challenges?

An implementation strategy that is fully supported at all levels, includes active engagement of participants in the formal and non-formal education sector and collaborates interdepartmentally, and with the development and development education sectors.

Objective 4: Promoting high standards of environmental management in education institutions Why only educational institutions, this singular focus is problematic.

13. How can we most effectively promote high standards of environmental management in education institutions? Please give practical examples if possible.

Through good practice and sharing of good practice e.g. the UBUNTU Network, existing curriculum centres, Green Schools, Fairtrade, www.developmenteducation.ie etc.

Provision of incentives to promote good practice

Regular monitoring, review and appropriate and flexible reporting

Appropriate funding for initiatives

Engagement from all government departments

Emphasis on the role of all subjects and not just specialist ones

Establishment of management guidelines in promoting SD

Specialist technical support in developing policies, practices and initiatives

14. What are the key challenges relating to this objective?

The current situation in schools generally, the unfair and ongoing criticism of teachers, cutbacks and an over-emphasis on 'vocational' education to service industry – ESD runs the risk of being viewed as another 'demand' placed on an already over-burdened education system without concern for the reality of 'school' and 'educational' life.

Lack of commitment, lack of/insufficient inputs, non-engagement of teachers, lack of specific

technical knowledge for wider sharing.

15. What actions are required to address the challenges?

Commitment, engagement, collaboration, wider sharing, support – including financial and technical. Above all, effective leadership.

III. Additional views

16. Comments on the background paper would be appreciated:

17. Please make any other point you consider relevant to the issue of education for sustainable development.

For its part www.developmenteducation.ie is willing to play its part in this agenda; it already has a series of ESD resources online and has identified and prioritised need in the area and has developed a strategy to engage over the coming 3 years. As a consortium based project, it is well placed to contribute appropriately to the agenda. The website will continue to highlight the intimate relationship between human development and sustainable development and will continue to give priority to the needs and agendas of the world's poor and excluded who must be factored into Ireland's ESD policy and strategy.

The consortium will continue to monitor national strategy in ESD and will endeavour to respond positively and effectively to the opportunities and challenges such a strategy poses.

18. If there is documentation you are aware of relevant for this topic could you please provide a web link or reference:

- An audit of Irish development education resources (2013) by Tony Daly, Ciara Regan and Colm Regan. Bray: DevelopmentEducation.ie Online link: <http://www.developmenteducation.ie/audit>
- 'Sustainability: the defining development issue' by Roland Tormey in *80:20 Development in an Unequal World* (2012) edited by Colm Regan. Bray: 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World. Online link (purchase) <http://www.developmenteducation.ie/8020-the-book>
- *Education for Sustainable Development Lens: A Policy and Practice Review Too'* resource, Education for Sustainable Development in Action Learning & Training Tools no.2 – 2010 Online link: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001908/190898e.pdf>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this template. Your feedback will help to inform the development of the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development.