

October 2006

Policy context – England

Roadmap of sustainable development and education in
England, October 2006

For the Higher Education Academy

Policy contexts across the UK

Background

In order to be effective in the support of sustainability literacy in the UK it is important to understand the different policy contexts in each of the constituent countries. All four have different educational and sustainable development frameworks, which impact on dissemination strategies. This research maps the policy and capacity landscape in order to assist HE Academy staff to negotiate barriers and take advantage of policy openings.

Roadmap of sustainable development and education in England, October 2006

This public policy roadmap shows key organisations and roles in respect to post-16 education and sustainable development in England. It should be read in conjunction with the document entitled 'UK educational bodies and activities', which shows the organisations and remit included here.

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Forum for the Future - the sustainable development charity - works in partnership with leading organisations in business and the public sector. Our vision is of business and communities thriving in a future that is environmentally sustainable and socially just. We believe that a sustainable future can be achieved, that it is the only way business and communities will prosper, but that we need bold action now to make it happen. We play our part by inspiring and challenging organisations with positive visions of a sustainable future; finding innovative, practical ways to help realise those visions; training leaders to bring about change; and sharing success through our communications.

www.forumforthefuture.org.uk

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1. Sustainable development policy

a. International

In December 2002, resolution 57/254 on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and UNESCO was designated as lead agency for the promotion of the Decade. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development began on January 1 2005 and aims to promote education as a basis for a more sustainable society and to integrate sustainable development into education at all levels and all areas of life including communities, the workplace and society in general. More details can be found on UNESCO's website:

www.portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27234&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

b. European

Under the leadership of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) a regional strategy was prepared to facilitate the introduction and promotion of education for sustainable development in Europe. The strategy was developed through a participatory process involving governments, international organizations, NGOs, academic community and other stakeholders. Noting the diversity in the region, the strategy had been made flexible enough, so that its implementation can be adapted to each country's priorities, specific needs and circumstances. This instrument allows implementing a comprehensive approach, seeking to strengthen cooperation on ESD at all levels within the region. It is a contribution to, and in line with, the DESD Draft International Implementation Scheme and should be used as a foundation for the regional implementation of the Decade. The Strategy was adopted at the UNECE meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 18 March 2005.

c. UK

The UK-wide goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

The UK Government and Devolved Administrations launched their new Strategic Framework, *One future - different paths*, on 7 March 2005. This was launched in conjunction with the UK Government's strategy for sustainable development *Securing The Future*: www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/index.htm

The framework document sets out common goals and challenges and is an affirmation that, although we have devolved government, we will work to common goals without compromising the strengths, which our diversity of approach offers. It comprises:

- A shared understanding of sustainable development
- A common purpose outlining what we are trying to achieve and the guiding principles we all need to achieve it
- Our sustainable development priorities for UK action, at home and internationally; and
- Indicators to monitor the key issues on a UK basis

The framework demonstrates our commitment to work together wherever we live in the UK to meet our shared goals and is supported by separate strategies for each administration. The strategies will include further priorities and be supported by additional measures and indicators.

www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/framework-for-sd.htm

d. England

The UK sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future* (March 2005), requires all central Government departments and their executive agencies to produce SD action plans. The Sustainable Development Commission, founded in 2000, took on the role of official watchdog for SD in April 2006 and the government maintains a website dedicated to SD. The rhetoric of these strategies and organizations emphasises that SD and ESD should be integral to operations, but this ambition has yet to be realised.

The DfES published an updated Sustainable Development Action Plan in 2005/6, called *Learning for the Future*, in line with the requirements of *Securing the Future* (March 2005). It recognises its responsibility for managing DfES estates in line with SD principles and embedding ESD in the curriculum and is mentioned in the *Department Report* (2006). However, SD is not integrated into the more wide-ranging and significant HE and FE policy proposals and a traditional approach to economic growth (as independent of social and environmental growths) is dominant. There is greater focus on ESD in schools, with a 'Sustainable Schools' section on Teachernet.

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools/> In addition, the DfES launched a wide-ranging 'Sustainable Schools' consultation in May 2006.

The majority of HE and FE institutional associations give SD little attention in their policies, although it occasionally appears as an Estates issue.¹ Teaching and academic standards organisations involved in secondary education such as the TDA have well developed ESD programmes but this is not the case in their post-16 education counterparts, although the QCA (which focuses on both pre- and post-16 education) is an exception. The leaders of ESD in the post-16 education sector are the government funding councils, and both HEFCE and LSC have comprehensive and ambitious ESD strategies and explicit commitments to engage other organisations in ESD implementation. HEFCE is currently undertaking a strategic review of sustainable development activity within the sector to provide a baseline to promote sector performance to stakeholders and against which future progress can be measured. The review will be completed in 2007 and will inform their direction until 2011. The Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC) is becoming increasingly active in ESD in Higher Education

In May 2006 the Sustainable Consumption Round Table published its final report 'I will if you will – Towards sustainable consumption'. It concludes that people are ready and willing to change but need strong leadership and support from central Government and business.

Defra are focussing on embedding SD in the National School of Government curriculum (which provides training for civil servants and the wider public sector). The Government wants to encourage professional bodies to change their professional standards (building on the Engineers). They are very keen to link occupational competencies to professional competencies and to use their influence on Skills for Business (the joint name for the SSDA's and SSC's) since Skills for Business has the important role of identifying skills needs of individual sectors. Skills for Business has no capacity at the moment, however they are key players in linking employer demand to provider supply and in identifying future skills needs and gaps.

DfID has the Development Awareness Fund and are interested in embedding ESD through international learning programmes and partnerships.

¹ Association of Colleges, Estates Briefings.

http://www.aoc.co.uk/Members/estates_network/briefings2005/estates0805/view

2. Education and education-related public policy

a. Policy context

The Treasury has commissioned the Stern Review on the economics of climate change. The report is due in October 2006 and is likely to provide a strong impetus for action. The forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) has identified climate change as a key challenge to be addressed.

The Leitch review, will report in 2006 on skills for the UK Economy in 2020 and word has it that it is likely to be quite radical in its recommendations about the structuring of delivery bodies.

The Treasury's new synthesis 'Economic growth, social justice and environmental care advance best when they all advance together' (20 April 2006) will be a key feature of the CSR. In addition, it is highly likely that Gordon Brown will make this a central pillar of his premiership.

b. Scope of higher education sector

There are 132 higher education institutions, including 87 universities plus 45 specialist institutions and general colleges funded by HEFCE along with 143 directly funded further education colleges.

c. Further and higher education agenda

The latest White Paper on FE reform, *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (March 2006), focuses on the 'economic mission' of FE institutions 'to develop in both young people and adults the skills that are necessary for the productive and competitive economy that underpins our quality of life'. The accompanying White Paper, *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work* (March 2006), also emphasised the need to orientate the provision of skills towards employer's requirements to ensure business successes and economic competitiveness.

A similar approach marked the latest White Paper for HE reform, *The future of Higher Education* (January 2003), and was met with criticism from the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, which commented: 'A significant conclusion that can be drawn from the White Paper is that the Government sees universities and colleges principally as economic agents; there is very little in the document about intellectual or cultural life in higher education, or the broader development of the individual. The economic role of universities is significant, but it would be wrong to suggest that the only benefit of higher education for society in general or for individuals in particular is an economic one'.²

Other papers on HE produced by the DfES have focused on race, widening participation, regulation and funding with the latter two attracting most attention. Sir Andrew Foster's review of the future role of further education colleges, *Realising the Potential* (November 2005), found that the FE sector was over-regulated and too complex; a reaction against bureaucracy is a current theme in the post-16 education sector. DfES has also participated with the DTI and HM Treasury to formulate *The Science Investment Framework 2004-14*, which presents science as "the bedrock of our economic future" and clearly shares the principles, which underpinned the FE and HE White Papers.

The Academy of Sustainable Communities is currently developing learning programmes for all professions and occupations that are involved in developing sustainable communities.

Key relevant drivers in education policy are:

- Personalisation agenda – learner centred
- Employability
- Entrepreneurship within institutions
- Bologna process
- Internationalisation agenda and the opportunity of the UK to differentiate its universities and make sustainability literacy part of what attracts students to UK universities.
- Increasing development of league tables by newspapers and others and the driver this produces

Developing knowledge and skills for sustainability is not incompatible with any of these agendas, while there is recognition of this, there is a lack of joined up direction on how to embed it.

² House of Commons Education and Skills Committee: 'The future of Higher Education', 5th report of session published 2002/3. para. 213.

d. Initiatives in the further and higher education sectors

The Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) initiative has two main aims: to reward excellent teaching practice, and to further invest in that practice so that CETL funding delivers substantial benefits to students, teachers and institutions. There are 74 in total. The CoVE programme and NSAs are central to the Learning and Skills Council's aim to improve and develop skills for employers that are needed to underpin business success and economic competitiveness. These programmes are focused on delivering vocational skills that meet particular sector and industry needs through the development and delivery of high quality, specialist training across a range of sectors.

The CoVE network of around 400 approved centres was completed in January 2006, but the programme continues to evolve to meet changing circumstances and priorities in the world of vocational training.

The first four National Skills Academies are currently developing business plans; they will cover construction, manufacturing, financial services and food and drink manufacturing. Each is supported by the Sector Skills Council (SSC) and major employers from its sector. It is expected that up to eight more Skills Academies will move into business planning in October 2006. Each Skills Academy is expected to work closely with CoVEs, specialist providers and schools.

CEL is conducting action research into leadership for sustainability in the FE sector to inform its leadership strategy. A conference to launch this will take place in Spring 2007.

HEFCE is currently consulting on its procurement policy.