



Government Response to the
EAC Report on Education for
Sustainable Development



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Sustainable Development

Presented to Parliament by the
Secretary for Education and Skills
By Command of Her Majesty
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Response to the EAC Report on Education for Sustainable Development: Environmental Education: Follow-up to *Learning the Sustainability Lesson*

Introduction

We are grateful to the EAC for its report and to the other bodies that submitted evidence to the Committee and we have carefully considered the report and the evidence. When we developed our Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners, published in 2004, we recognised the need to think about the kind of world we want our children to grow up in. The underlying principle of the Five Year Strategy is freedom and independence for frontline headteachers, governors and managers with clear, simple accountabilities and more streamlined funding arrangements, including guaranteed three year budgets for all schools with per pupil increases each year, and the new Ofsted self-evaluation framework. For schools, this translates into more freedom to teach and improve - including to teach about sustainable development and to develop schools as sustainable communities. The Government intends to strip out unnecessary bureaucracy, give teachers and headteachers more confidence, and treat different schools differently – challenging those that underperform, but being less directive with those that perform well. The Government will help schools to engage more effectively with parents and the local community. There will be a major focus on teacher professional development, linking it explicitly to career progression.

The meaning of sustainable development for the DfES should be understood in this context and we are confident that this will enable schools, supported by central and local government and others, to deliver sustainable schools.

The role of the Department for Education and Skills is to set a strategic framework and to enable schools to operate effectively within it. A part of setting the framework is to articulate what the Department expects of schools.

The Strategy makes clear that schools should engage with sustainable development:

“Every school should also be an environmentally sustainable school, with a good plan for school transport that encourages walking and cycling, an active and effective recycling policy (moving from paper to electronic processes wherever possible) and a school garden or other opportunities for children to explore the natural world. Schools must teach our children by example as well as by instruction.”

To make these words have meaning and a positive impact on the lives of millions of children, we have in place a number of statutory and non-statutory requirements and initiatives which together will enable all those responsible for teaching our children to be able to do this; for example the National Curriculum, school travel plans, Growing Schools, building and

procurement assessments and importantly, the Sustainable Schools website.

Though within the statutory framework the Department does encourage schools and provide practical advice, guidance and tools in a number of areas, including sustainable development, it is essentially up to schools how they take these things forward, depending on their own priorities, local circumstances and the needs of their pupils. That said, we have shown that we are prepared to set firm standards where necessary; for example, we specify legal requirements for teaching sustainable development in the national curriculum and we require new school buildings to achieve the Building Research Establishments' Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) standards as a condition of capital investment. The key here is balance - a framework of expectations and requirements, within which we provide support and encouragement for schools to excel in their own ways. In this way, we believe, sustainable development will be a lively reality for schools, capturing the enthusiasm and commitment of pupils, staff and local communities, rather than a bureaucratic, top-down initiative imposed by central government.

We recognise this is a different way of doing things and it will take some getting used to, but the Government wants local people to have the power to do things for themselves, including in sustainable development in education. We hope to show in the coming months and years that this doesn't mean that the Department and its delivery partners will sit idly by. For example the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) will be launching their sustainable development strategies for their respective sectors. There is undoubtedly much more to do for all involved in education, and the Department will not only lead this strongly but ensure that the system is capable of delivering.

Government Commitment to Sustainable Development

Item 1. Ignorance of an individual's role in contributing damage to the environment, such as negative bio-diversity impacts, unsustainable use of natural resources and climate change, is inexcusable and frankly dangerous. The longer the status quo prevails the more frightening the message becomes and the more threatening, to the modern western way of life, the solutions will appear (Paragraph 10)

Item 2. It is important for the Prime Minister to show leadership with regard to the need for sustainable development if the effects of climate change and other environmental impacts are to be tackled. It is vital, however, that all parts of the Government are equally committed. (Paragraph 11)

Item 3. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have a crucial role to play in helping us understand, and promoting, Sustainable Development. The Prime Minister's vision of the threat of climate change, and in particular the urgency he expressed about taking positive action to deal with this threat, must be reflected in those Departments' actions and not just their rhetoric. (Paragraph 12)

The Prime Minister stated in September 2004 that “Our students won’t just be told about sustainable development, they will see and work within it,” and has declared climate change and global poverty as a priority for the UK’s G8 and EU presidencies this year.

The Government agrees that individuals need to be aware of their role in contributing damage to the environment and are fully committed to that end. The DfES and Defra aim to develop positive habits and our approach to this is detailed in the new pan-government sustainable development strategy, launched on 7 March 2005. 'Securing the Future' requires public services and systems to be delivered without negatively affecting future generations or people in less affluent parts of the globe. As stated in the Strategy’s first chapter, the Government has a new purpose and principles for sustainable development and new shared priorities agreed across the UK, including the Devolved Administrations. In the consultation of the new UK Sustainable Development Strategy, we committed ourselves to produce a UK Strategic framework for sustainable development covering the period up to 2020. This has been agreed by the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to provide a consistent approach across the UK.

Sustainable Development in Education

Item 4. Whilst we have reservations about the inappropriate use and, indeed, over-use of the term "sustainability", we have to conclude that what holds back the progress of education in environmental matters is not really a problem with the terminology, whether it be Sustainable

Development, Education for Sustainable Development, Environmental Education or something else, but rather its application, and the fundamental lack of commitment to the basic principle on the part of those with responsibility for promoting it and educating us about it. (Paragraph 23)

We think it was right for the Committee to focus on sustainable development terminology during its inquiry and agree that labels should not be an obstacle to action. The Government is clear about its commitment and how that commitment can be delivered. As we have laid out, a range of education policies contribute directly to either promoting sustainability issues in the classroom, or encouraging school management to adopt sustainable management practices. For example, the new *Sustainable Schools* website will help schools to make sense of this area and the new schools BREEAM will encourage schools to take a holistic view of SD.

Item 12. The lack of leadership from DfES in particular has been a constant theme throughout the course of this inquiry. The fact that the new Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the Rt. Hon Ruth Kelly MP, has decided not to continue to act as Green Minister, as her predecessor did, is disappointing and serves only to emphasise the lack of priority given to this issue in DfES. (Paragraph 50)

We do not agree with the Committee that DfES does not consider sustainable development in education to be important. As outlined above, the Department is doing many things that drive SD in education. DfES was one of the first departments to produce a sustainable development action plan and the Department remains committed to the issue. Maria Eagle MP will be acting as our Sustainable Development Minister.

Item 11. The absence of any system for measurement of progress against the SDAP is a significant failing and threatens the credibility of the Plan itself. This is a critical error on the part of DfES and must be reviewed by the department as a matter of some urgency. (Paragraph 47)

Item 25. We welcome the appointment of Dr Jake Reynolds as Senior Adviser and look forward to seeing what progress he can make on implementing the Sustainable Development Action Plan. One of his first tasks must surely be to ensure that the SDAP is properly monitored, evaluated and reported on (Paragraph 105)

The Department monitors progress towards achieving the plan's objectives. We have completed or made progress with four fifths. We are considering whether the remaining fifth are still appropriate to pursue. We are also looking at how we will update the SDAP, in the same way that all government departments have been requested to do in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

Item 32. It is unclear why there is a delay in the development of the ESD indicator, more than twelve months after we raised the issue with the Secretary of State in DfES. We are left to speculate on whether it is yet another example of the low priority afforded to ESD, or whether it is an indication that Defra and DfES simply don't know what to do with it. Whatever the reason for the delay, it is extremely disappointing and we would urge Defra and DfES to agree a suitable indicator as soon as possible. (Paragraph 122)

DfES and Defra are developing an indicator to show the impact of formal learning on knowledge and awareness of sustainable development. However, we want to ensure that any such indicator is genuinely useful and meaningful and that it can be monitored without disproportionate bureaucratic impact on schools. We will consider the suggestions made in the written evidence to the Committee as we do this.

Communication

Item 5. The consensus amongst those who have contributed to this inquiry, a consensus with which we would agree, is that the Government is failing to get the ESD message across to the general public. (Paragraph 24)

Item 6. Defra still has much to do to get the Sustainable Development message across to the public. Having made a positive start by commissioning research in this area it is important that Defra now puts the lessons learned from this research into practice, not only within Defra but across Government. (Paragraph 26)

Defra has the responsibility to raise sustainable development awareness among the general public and schools are indeed an important forum to improve the understanding of SD. However, we need to be clear about what “getting the message across” means. We would argue that it is preferable for the general public to understand what sustainable development is, in terms of being enabled to make the right choices for themselves and live in a more sustainable way, rather than simply having an academic understanding of what is a very complex term.

In line with the research findings, rather than an overt sustainable development communications campaign aimed at the mass public Defra is now working to:

- ensure that sustainable development is referenced in mainstream communications relating to 'doorstep issues' issued or funded by Defra, other government departments and delivery partners. The forthcoming climate change communications campaign, with supporting funding of £12 million for the period 2005-2008, will provide a key opportunity for this.

- identify and exploit appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable development itself to receptive 'early adopters' / 'opinion leaders' within the general public.

Defra have recently launched an online package of materials to help Defra staff integrate sustainable development in everything that they do. The package includes case studies, a toolkit based on the RIA cost/benefits checklist and a film on SD in Defra.

Item 7. The National Museum of Science and Industry, whilst relatively new to the ESD scene, has shown commitment and innovation in its approach to ESD and should be congratulated on its progress so far. Defra and DCMS should work with the Museum to see how its experience could be shared with museums across England (Paragraph 29)

We acknowledge the important work that the NMSI has taken forward so far on promoting education on sustainable development. We are supporting the sharing of best practice in education across the museums sector via a programme, jointly funded by DfES and DCMS, known as strategic commissioning, and via the Renaissance in the Regions programme of funding for regional museums. NMSI is currently running two projects with a sustainable development component through its museums in Wroughton and Shildon, in partnership with local museums and schools, funded by strategic commissioning. NMSI have also agreed to provide training on sustainable development for the Horniman Museum, which is a London Regional Hub museum. We will keep in contact with NMSI to follow their developing policy on sustainable development. In the meantime, it may also be worth noting that the Natural History Museum offers a range of specialist consultancy, research and education services on a range of sustainable development issues, on an international basis.

Item 9. What we found during the course of this inquiry was that it was impossible to judge with any certainty just how widely known the SDAP was outside of the NGO sector in England. This is because there is absolutely no way of knowing who has seen the SDAP and who is actually doing anything to achieve the objectives of the Plan. (Paragraph 38)

It is impossible to judge with certainty how widely the document was known outside the NGO sector in England. It should be made clear that this was not a document aimed primarily at schools. In terms of actions to achieve the objectives of the plan, the Department has kept this under review since the plan was launched.

Item 10. DfES must review the way in which it communicates key strategic documents, such as the Sustainable Development Action Plan, to those in the Department who need to know about it and who may well have responsibility for delivering parts of the Plan. (Paragraph 45)

The SDAP was developed by the relevant officials in the Department, who meet regularly to discuss progress.

Funding

Item 26. It is regrettable that DfES has failed so completely to understand or accept the extent of the funding crisis in the ESD sector and even now continues to turn a blind eye to it. DfES must show leadership and work quickly to contain the damage already done by developing a national strategy to provide effective long-term funding to ensure that there is sufficient and continued support for ESD at all levels. (Paragraph 106)

Item 28. If the Government is serious about climate change and about protecting and enhancing the environment, then it also has to be serious and realistic about the levels of funding for ESD. (Paragraph 111)

Item 29. Unless and until there is a strategic review of the way in which ESD is perceived and prioritised within government, and within DfES in particular, so that there is a coherent, long-term plan for progressing ESD, it is likely that what little funds are allocated to ESD will not be used to best effect. To increase funding without this review and commitment would be unwise and counter-productive. We look forward to hearing from the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Schools, Derek Twigg MP in the very near future and once he has had time to deliberate on the ESD funding crisis. (Paragraph 114)

Item 30. DfES, in reviewing both its commitment to ESD and the SDAP, should make full use of the wide range of expertise offered by the NGOs to help create a coherent framework for their work, thereby ensuring consistency of approach throughout the education sector. (Paragraph 115)

We note the Committee's views on funding. We welcome the contribution of NGOs and other organisations within the strategic framework outlined in our response and believe we can continue to work together fruitfully to support schools in their work. As well as funding a number of NGOs on specific sustainable development projects, DfES finances SD in many ways. To give just three examples:

- over £5 billion a year is being invested in school buildings. We now require all major new build and refurbishment projects valued at over £500,000 for primary schools and £2 million for secondary schools and involving rebuilding or complete refurbishment of more than 10% of the floor area of a school to achieve a 'very good' rating under the new schools BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method). This means that sustainable development will be integral to school design.

- DfES and Department for Transport are providing £50 million support between 2004 and 2006 for local authorities and schools to implement school travel plans. This encourages, for example, more walking, cycling and use of public transport.
- Through the extended schools initiative we are exploring ways in which schools can actively support sustainable development in their local communities. Building on, or developing, links with community-based services provides a sustainable solution to the extended schools agenda and helps to remove the possibility of duplication or closure of existing services. £160m has been invested in Extended Schools to date, with a further £680m being allocated over the period 2006-2007 to 2007-2008.

Each of these projects is part of the bigger SD picture and contributes positively to it.

Teaching and Learning

Item 8. It is clear that the most positive signs of achievement against the SDAP, as opposed to "activity" which is not the same thing at all, can be found in relation to Objectives Two, Three and Four. Whilst we welcome this progress, and commend DfES on these initial achievements, we cannot help but draw attention to what can only be seen as a very serious failing of Objective One of the SDAP - education for sustainable development. (Paragraph 37)

Item 18. It is clear to us that for far too many schools, ESD is either not known about or is judged to be a low priority.

Item 19. It seems increasingly clear to us that DfES is able to be much more focused on developing schools which aspire to be designed built and managed sustainably, but is unable, or perhaps unwilling, to make the same commitment to teaching pupils about ESD

Item 20. The best that can be said about the integration of ESD into the National Curriculum is that it is 'patchy'. This represents a failure of DfES policy so far.

Item 21. Switching the method of dissemination and communication of important information from hard to electronic copy might be better environmentally, and may also prevent teaching staff being overwhelmed with paper, but it does not address some fundamental issues. Whether hard or electronic copy, the information still has to be accessed, read and then, in some cases, actioned by teaching staff who have no greater time to devote to this than previously. Combine this with the fact that as it currently stands, there is no real priority attached to ESD, nor is it an aspect of the curriculum against which teachers and schools are judged, and it is little wonder that we have so

very few schools that are aware of the SDAP, or that teachers are not comfortable teaching ESD.

We welcome the Committee's acknowledgement of the success against Objective 3 of the SDAP and the important contribution which the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme is making to sustainable development in the public sector. We plan during 2005 to embed the use of the new schools BREEAM and to publish best practice guidance on sustainable school design.

Aim 2 of the National Curriculum includes the statement that:

"It [the National Curriculum] should develop their awareness and understanding of, and respect for, the environments in which they live, and secure their commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level. It should also equip pupils as consumers to make informed judgements and independent decisions and to understand their responsibilities and rights."

It is important to remember that the National Curriculum sets out what is to be taught, not how it is to be taught. Four subjects have sustainable development integrated as a statutory component. Some of the views from the evidence sessions were clearly about whether or not schools take on board a whole school approach, rather than the extent to which sustainable development is reflected in the curriculum.

The Committee also rightly draws attention to the new, or strengthened Schemes of Work Units prepared for science, design and technology, geography and citizenship. Teachers use Schemes of Work to prepare medium term plans for teaching their subject, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) Schemes of Work have been widely adopted, and indeed adapted by teachers since they were produced following the review of the National Curriculum in 2000. This suite of units will give teachers new insights into how to plan sustainable development aspects into their subject teaching. We believe teachers should be able to exercise their professional judgement and this new set of units will help them do that.

The Committee's evidence also highlights the tension between a point of view that says schools should 'do' ESD as a discrete and labelled activity, and a different approach which would encourage schools to identify how their many activities and their subject teaching already make a contribution, and then to demonstrate ways of extending those. The Government is clear that freeing up schools to make their own decisions within a slimmer accountability framework will enable them to work within national priorities and at the same time respond to local circumstances and pupil needs to raise standards. We will combine this new relationship with schools with encouragement to incorporate environmental or wider sustainability issues into teaching and management practices.

We are developing a *Sustainable Schools* web service within TeacherNet that will encourage schools to take sustainable development on board. With the rapid, flexible and stimulating developments in ICT, we have new opportunities to support and engage schools. The new contractual entitlement for teachers to have at least ten per cent of their timetable teaching time for planning, preparation and assessment comes into effect from September, and will free up teachers to do just this sort of investigation of resources. Since September 2003, teachers with leadership and management responsibilities (which would include heads of department) have had a contractual right to a reasonable allocation of time in which to carry out their responsibilities, giving them the space to do some planning and development for their department. And of course, support staff might be able to play a wider role too particularly in championing sustainable development practices within the school.

The new service will provide access to the many organisations that support different aspects of sustainable development, and to the enormous resource base of classroom and other materials. It will provide a framework to enable schools to explore sustainable development, assess their current situation and plan new work, and to share their work with others. It will host tools to enable managers to assess their practices and explore the business case for more sustainable activity. Other tools will help teachers assess different resources and choose those that best meet their needs. We will draw on different avenues of communication to promote and publicise the web service. The many different stakeholders have much to gain from a service which brings together strategically the current fragmented and inaccessible support, resources and information.

Sustainable development has been promoted through communications targeted at teachers and linked to specific initiatives, for example highlighting the Sustainable Development Action Plan on the Department's web site and in the sustainable development area of TeacherNet.

FE and colleges and HE institutions are autonomous independent organisations. They and other providers have the power to set their own curricula and manage their institutions in the way they see best. The LSC and HEFCE have recently been consulting on draft strategies for sustainable development for their respective sectors. Those draft strategies made reference to teaching and learning. They will be publishing their SD strategies in 2005.

We recognise there is much more to do in working with our delivery agencies in embedding SD in their work and to make this a higher priority. On the international front the Department has published 'Putting the World into World Class Education - An international strategy for education, skills and children's services' which lists sustainable development as one of the eight key concepts for instilling the global dimension into the learning experience of all children and makes a strong commitment to develop and offer educational support programmes to developing countries, especially Africa. The implementation plan for the strategy is currently being developed.

The Department has also created the Global Gateway website (www.globalgateway.org). Administered on our behalf by the British Council, the website enables those involved in education across the world to engage in creative partnerships, helping to ensure that education crosses national boundaries and that young people become truly global citizens.

Item 22. The difference between ESD and citizenship is marked and we are left to ponder what the deciding factor is here. Is it the case that ESD is not high profile enough, not distinct enough as a subject, to merit Ofsted inspection? Or is it low priority and indistinct exactly because it is not inspected? In fact, it is a combination of both, a vicious circle which is unlikely to be broken until DfES takes the decision to attribute sufficient status to ESD and to request that Ofsted include it in its inspection framework (Paragraph 84)

Item 23. We are not persuaded that an inspection based on a system of self-evaluation, which allows schools to decide whether or not to include material on ESD is any kind of improvement. We have already heard that very few schools attach priority to ESD and we cannot see this new system changing that fact. Unless ESD is made a mandatory part of the self-evaluation conducted by schools we see little value in the system. (Paragraph 86)

As was stated above, we do not believe that ‘education for sustainable development’ should be treated as a discrete and labelled activity rather than being embedded in a range of subjects.

The importance of sustainable development is made very explicit within a range of subjects, one of which is Citizenship. The Programme of Study (PoS) for the subject explicitly identifies sustainable development among the required knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens which pupils must be taught.

The move to a shorter, sharper and more focused school inspection event forms part of a wider set of changes to the way that central and local government relates to schools, so as to release greater initiative and energy in schools in a way that helps standards to rise further. The New Relationship with Schools brings with it a new accountability system for schools and the changes to inspection are a key element of this package of reform. These changes are consistent with the Government’s principles for inspection, with increased emphasis on self evaluation and a more proportionate approach.

With these changes, Section 5 inspections will not be able to cover sustainable development routinely in the way that is possible under the system in Wales. It will be picked up as a strength or weakness in some schools as inspectors follow up on schools’ self-evaluation. Alongside its subject survey programme which will capture some evidence, we are funding Ofsted to conduct a three-year survey, commencing in June, of the potential of sustainable development as an approach for Whole School

Improvement in a sample of schools. The Ofsted survey will be shadowed by an independent research into individual attitudinal change in teachers and pupils in the same sample of schools, which includes primary, secondary and special schools as well as an Academy. Drawing on findings from these, consideration will be given to extending the Ofsted survey work in 2007/8 to a more widespread review to explore how one would go about inspecting sustainable development in education.

The Tomlinson Report and the 14-19 White Paper

Item 14. What we found, however, was a total absence of ESD in the Tomlinson Report, despite ESD being recommended to the Working Group as a "key cross-cutting theme" by many of those who responded to the consultation. (Paragraph 55)

Item 15. Whilst the Tomlinson Report may well have provided an opportunity for ESD to be somehow "hooked on" to the various references in the Report to vocational and skills training, the Report itself falls far short of expectations. When introducing the Sustainable Development Action Plan, the Rt. Hon Charles Clarke MP was quite clear that sustainable development should no longer be a "bureaucratic add-on" but this is exactly what the Tomlinson Report consigns it to being. (Paragraph 60)

Item 16. Whether intentionally or not, as a result of poor communication, deliberate omission or ignorance on the part of those who set the remit for the Tomlinson Working Group, ESD was not considered by the Group. (Paragraph 63)

Item 17. Both the Tomlinson Report and the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper have failed to recognise Education for Sustainable Development as a priority. As an indication of the way in which ESD is viewed by DfES this omission cannot be ignored. The implications for any progress to be made in moving ESD forward in any meaningful way have been significantly reduced as a result. (Paragraph 66)

The Working Group on 14-19 Reform (Tomlinson) was an independent working group and the final report of the Group was an independent publication. However, both the Tomlinson report and the 14-19 White Paper were looking strategically at the historic problems of the overall 14-19 phase of education. This included low participation and achievement, concerns over young people's literacy and numeracy skills, poor vocational routes and problems differentiating between our brightest young people. Both reports set out, in broad terms, their proposals for tackling these weaknesses.

The implementation of the 14-19 programme of reforms, as set out in the White Paper '14-19 Education and Skills', will require schools, colleges and other training providers to review the provision they offer and how they do this. In the guidance we issue on different aspects of these reforms, we will encourage providers to adopt approaches which are sustainable and which

enhance the opportunities of young people to learn about sustainable development in a practical and relevant way.

We recognise the potential for sustainable development in education to motivate young people in learning, in particular in helping to ensure that potentially disenchanted learners are included in the education system. This is an area that the Department will be exploring in the next six to twelve months.

Teacher Training

Item 24. It is, in part, a fear of litigation, but also a lack of training and experience on the part of teaching staff, which dictates whether or not a class will venture outside of the classroom. An overcrowded curriculum, and the perception that ESD is a low priority for schools, serves to stifle any remaining urges to decant from the classroom. (Paragraph 92)

We draw the Committee's attention to the Government response to the Education & Skills Select Committee report into Education outside the Classroom, and to the announcement made by Ruth Kelly on 15 February, that DfES will work with partners to develop a 'Manifesto for Education outside the Classroom'.

Item 27. Given the lack of understanding of the complexities of Sustainable Development, which we are told is prevalent in so many schools, we are interested to know what additional training school governors and managers are to receive to help them make informed decisions with regard to what ESD support they buy in to the school. (Paragraph 108)

We agree that this is complicated and difficult for headteachers and governors. The bursar/business training programmes which were developed with the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) have been reviewed to take account of sustainable development. An environment module for the school business management programme has been piloted successfully, and will be incorporated in the certificate School Business Management from Spring 2005.

The Department has been working with the NCSL to explore how school leaders at all levels, and those being trained and prepared for leadership roles, are able to integrate sustainable development into the leadership and management of their schools. NCSL have developed documentation on sustainable development for use within the *National Professional Qualification for Headteachers* (NPQH) and further materials have been developed by WWF for inclusion in the College's Leading from the Middle programme. We are aware that senior management at NCSL need to be engaged to help establish overall strategic integration across the programmes and initiatives.

Sustainable Development Education Panel

Item 13. DfES and Defra should consider how it fills the gap left by the demise of the Government's Sustainable Development Education Panel, to provide a central home for important conceptual thinking on ESD and thereby help to provide a strategic dimension to the work of DfES. (Paragraph 52)

We will take the Committee's recommendation into consideration. However, the Panel was convened to decide how education would need to be reformed to be more sustainable in general. The way forward was considered to be to work with individual bodies by sector to make the SDAP happen. We do work with bodies within the education and skills sector, critically HEFCE and the LSC, in order that they develop their own strategies.

One example of this way of working is the Sustainability Integration Group (SIGnet). SIGnet is a pioneering network of the bodies that fund, plan and regulate the post-school sector. Its aim is to work together to integrate sustainability literacy into the curricula. This is the first time all of the different bodies have come together to talk about how they can deliver sustainable development to learners. SIGnet is funded by DfES and is facilitated by Forum for the Future.

We recognise the Department's role in influencing and co-ordinating sustainable development activity across the Department's delivery partners. We will be exploring how to support establishing a network of sustainable development practitioners at regional and national level.

Conclusions

Item 31. We accept that some of the initiatives and programmes of work referred to in the Strategy are new and will need time to bed down before any serious analysis of their worth can be conducted. We hope that our successor Committee will return to the subject of Education for Sustainable Development during 2006 and this will be one of the key areas of that inquiry. (Paragraph 121)

Item 33. It is in regard to ESD in formal education, perhaps more than anywhere else in the Strategy, that the Prime Minister's "moratorium on further words", requested in his preface to the new Strategy, is most needed. What is important now is focused action, not more rhetoric. (Paragraph 124)

Item 34. It is now clear that the Prime Minister's sense of urgency about the threat of climate change, and his commitment to do something about it, is not matched by the actions of the Department for Education and Skills. DfES has failed to ensure sufficient funds for ESD, has lost the impetus that led to the creation of the Sustainable Development Action Plan and continues to treat ESD as a "bureaucratic

add-on", and a low priority one at that. We are deeply concerned about this failure and look to the Prime Minister, if necessary, to ensure that DfES moves ahead and gives ESD the financial and policy priority that it needs. (Paragraph 128)

We do not accept this analysis. DfES does not treat ESD as a "bureaucratic add-on", rather exactly the opposite.

We think that perhaps part of the reason the EAC has reached this conclusion is that, though the Department has many projects underway which support ESD, they are not explicitly labelled 'ESD', and therefore the contribution to sustainable development is missed; the Extended Schools initiative would be one such example. This initiative is designed to increase the value added by schools to their local communities and could provide a vehicle for stronger community engagement, including educational activities. We gave other examples in our written evidence to the Committee.

To sum up, a number of positive things (some of which respond directly to the EAC's recommendations) are happening: we will be developing an indicator(s) to measure sustainable development in education; LSC and HEFCE will be publishing their SD strategies and most importantly we will launch the Sustainable Schools website, which will bring together sources of advice and practical support for teachers and school heads and governors. It will provide an on-line community, disseminate good practice and offer a 'shop window' for the many schemes to promote their service to schools.

That said, we acknowledge that more does need to be done, both in terms of communicating the good work that is going on and providing support to schools and their leaders to enable them to put sustainable development into practice. We are clear about our role in leading and enabling this.



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