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# **Reflections on ESD in UK Schools**

**Stephen Martin, James Dillon, Peter Higgins, Glenn Strachan, and Paul Vare**

## **1 Introduction**

The UK Government, with responsibility for education only in England, believes that “sustainable development is a key responsibility for all of us and everyone has to play their part in making it a reality” (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) 2009: 7), and that schools, as places of teaching and learning, have a particularly important role to play in helping pupils understand the impact they have on the planet. They argue that, as models of good practice, schools can be places where sustainable living and working are demonstrated to young people and the local community. All of which is embraced by the idea of education for sustainable development (ESD). ESD can be thought of as a process of learning how to make decisions that take into account the long-term future of the

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economy, ecology and equity of all communities. As UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization), puts it: “Building the capacity for such futures-oriented thinking is a key task of education” (2003: 4).

Future proofing our children’s education is not an easy task. Any child starting primary school in September 2014 will complete his or her secondary education in around 2028. No one can predict with any accuracy how the world will change over this period, but it is likely to change in many significant ways. An expanding population, increasing globalisation and advances in technology will bring colossal societal and ecological changes, particularly if our unsustainable practices and lifestyles prevail (Pretty 2013). Without significant policy interventions, more people will be consuming more resources; climate change will cause global temperatures to increase; demand for food will double globally; more than four million people in the UK will have diabetes and there will be an ageing population. This is just a taste of what children’s future might look like.

This chapter provides an account of the current status of ESD in schools across the UK’s four national and administrative jurisdictions (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and sets out some of the characteristics of best practice in each of these. It provides an analysis of current barriers to progress, and outlines potential opportunities for enhancing the core role of education and learning in the pursuit of a more sustainable future.

The most recent surveys of progress on the implementation of ESD in the UK were undertaken in 2008, 2010 and 2013 by the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UNESCO UK 2008, 2010, 2013). This chapter builds on that work and sets out a succinct account of the current status of ESD across the UK. It draws on evidence from various sources from England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, some of which is set out in the 2013 Policy Brief published by the UK National Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO UK 2013). The Brief’s main purpose was to inform the UK government of progress on the integration of ESD across all of the learning contexts in which issues relating to sustainability can be taught and learned. It also assessed how far the UK had realised the objectives of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD).

The DESD had four key objectives:

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

The UK government signed up to the DESD in 2005, sharing the belief that education has a key role in the development of the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future.

In addition, this chapter sets out to provide an analysis of progress in schools in support of the UK government's objective for sharing best practice in ESD in all learning contexts. This breadth of view has now assumed a much more important policy priority given the UK coalition government's current focus on stimulating economic growth by creating a substantial green economy linked to climate change adaptation in the UK (DBIS 2010; DECC 2010; Luna et al. 2012). The enhanced focus on quality and standards in the devolved national governments in all forms of educational provision is also highly relevant since contemporary evidence indicates that good practice in ESD leads to better learner outcomes (Barratt Hacking et al. 2010; Martin et al. 2009).

An increasing number of schools are now positioning 'sustainability' as a central guiding principle for all of their activities. Reports by Ofsted (2009), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF 2010), the Co-operative Group (2011), the Scottish Government (2010), all strongly suggest a link between the adoption of sustainability as a guiding principle and the improvement of schools as a whole. In these Schools there is good empirical evidence of improvements in standards, behaviour, teacher and student motivations, attendance, examination results, community linking and environmental performance. A recent review of a small sample of the 17,000 schools registered for the Eco-Schools programme in the UK found evidence of positive impacts on wellbeing, behaviour, motivation and cognitive skills that benefited the whole school (Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) 2013).

## **2      The UK Political Context**

The UK has a partially devolved political constitution which comprises the London based UK government itself, and the devolved administrations and directly-elected parliaments and governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The extent of their devolved policy responsibilities varies significantly, but each has responsibility for primary, secondary and tertiary education provision and their funding, and each can add to the UK's policies on sustainable development (SD) with specific arrangements. These devolved responsibilities preceded the start of the DESD by 5 years. Consequently, different policy emphases on education and different progress on implementing policy on ESD exist across four countries and political jurisdictions.

England has no separate devolved administration and is governed through the UK parliament and civil service. The current policy remit for schools in England is held by the Department for Education (DfE) which states that it is “committed to sustainable development” (The Prime Minister’s Office n.d.) and believes it important to prepare young people for the future. But education’s role in supporting the UK’s SD policy has nearly always been a ‘below the radar’ issue for the UK government. DfE’s approach is based on the belief that schools perform better when they take responsibility for their own improvement and want schools to make their own judgments on how SD should be reflected in their ethos, day-to-day operations and through ESD.

### **3 The UK ESD Context**

The analysis of the current status of ESD in schools across the UK’s four devolved administrations, which follows, sets out 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.

#### ***3.1. Reflections on Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) in Schools in Wales***

##### **Policy Context**

The UNESCO Decade of ESD (2005–2014) offers a forum for Wales to share the progress to date, the developments and the uniqueness of ESDGC in Wales and to learn from others. (DCELLS 2008a: 11)

SD was enshrined as the central organising principle of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) when the devolution of powers, which included responsibility for education, took place in 1999. This commitment to SD has been re-affirmed at regular intervals in policy documents, including *One Wales: One Planet* (WAG 2009). In 2013 the renamed Welsh Government brought forward legislation to further reinforce its commitment to SD in the “Future Generations Bill”. Prior to the start of the DESD in 2005 the WAG was being challenged by those with an interest in ESD, including Oxfam Cymru and the RSPB Cymru, to elucidate on what its commitment to SD meant for education in Wales. In 2002 the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (known by the acronym for its Welsh language title, ACCAC) published a document on ESDGC which listed the following nine key concepts that it believed underpinned ESDGC:

- Interdependence
- Citizenship and stewardship
- Needs and rights
- Diversity
- Sustainable change
- Quality of life
- Uncertainty and precaution
- Values and concepts
- Conflict resolution.

In 2004 there was already an ESD panel in Wales, but one which had a strong environmental education (EE) bias, and there was also a separate Global Citizenship (GC) panel. Both panels were conscious of the common aspects in their work and agreed to form a joint ESDGC Panel made up of representatives from WAG, from the formal sectors of education and from NGOs. The title ESDGC, while it overtly recognised the importance of GC, indicated the coming together of two adjectival education traditions rather than making a step change that would lead teachers to seeing this approach to education as a fully integrated whole.

The ESDGC Panel, supported by funds from WAG, produced *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: A Strategy for Action* in 2006 (DCELLS 2006). It covered five sectors of education: schools, youth, further education and work-based learning, higher education, and adult and community education. To ensure a whole-institutional approach the Strategy identified actions across the following five “Common Areas”, applicable to all the formal sectors of education:

- Commitment to Leadership
- Teaching and Learning
- Institutional Management
- Partnerships
- Research and Monitoring.

### **Interplay Between Policy and Practice**

In 2006 Estyn (the education inspectorate in Wales) commissioned research from which the outcomes highlighted a lack of understanding about ESDGC at classroom level (Estyn 2006a). In response to this research Estyn published *Update in Inspecting ESDGC* in September 2006, resulting in all school inspections being required to report on ESDGC (Estyn 2006b). In January 2007 the WAG appointed a “Champion” for

ESDGC on a 3 year contract, accountable to the Panel, with a brief to drive the implementation of ESDGC across all the education sectors.

The initial focus on schools following the publication of the ESDGC Strategy was to engage with teachers and achieve a better understanding of what ESDGC meant for primary and secondary schools across Wales. The ESDGC Panel commissioned the research and development of *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: A Common Understanding for Schools* (DCELLS 2008b), published in July 2008 and sent to all schools in Wales—similar documents were subsequently produced for the other sectors of education in Wales. While the nine concepts identified by ACCAC (2002) were retained in the *Common Understanding* it was felt that a set of themes, which could cover the broad scope of ESDGC, would provide accessible entry points for teachers to integrate ESDGC into the curriculum and school life generally as well as linking to existing WAG documents such as the *Skills Framework for 3–19 Year Olds in Wales* (DCELLS 2008c). The following set of seven themes presented in the *Common Understanding* document were used to map the content, skills and values associated with ESDGC.

- Wealth and Poverty
- The Natural Environment
- Identity and Culture
- Health
- Climate Change
- Choices and Decisions
- Consumption and Waste. (DCELLS 2008b: 14)

By 2008 there were a number of supporting policies, guidance, and related drivers to encourage teachers and schools in Wales to engage with and implement ESDGC, including the following examples:

- The legitimacy offered by the WAG's commitment to SD;
- Estyn inspecting and reporting on ESDGC;
- The ESDGC Panel, including the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, setting strategy and administering the ESDGC Action Plan and awarding small grants for ESDGC projects;
- An ESDGC Champion delivering the Action Plan and providing a central point of contact for all aspects of ESDGC in Wales;
- A common document in all schools outlining the content and approach of ESDGC (DCELLS 2008b);
- The Directors of Education in the 22 local authorities in Wales nominating a representative to be a conduit for disseminating ESDGC information.

While there was central support and drivers to implement ESDGC, it was left to individual local authorities and schools to decide how to respond to the ESDGC agenda, with some local authorities giving it a higher priority than others. There were other initiatives that supported various aspects of ESDGC, such as EcoSchools, Forest Schools and international school linking. What ESDGC added to these initiatives was the fact that it was broader than any one individual initiative and it was an on-going approach to education that was not completed when an award was achieved.

The “Enabling Effective Support” project in Wales, funded by the UK Department for International Development, was a good example of cooperative working on the ESDGC agenda. It ran ten regional forums across Wales for educators which linked with the ESDGC Champion and obviated the need for a separate ESDGC network. During this period the WAG continued to produce guidance and support materials that contributed to ESDGC in schools as well as other sectors of education. These included *Out of Classroom Learning* (DCELLS 2007) and *ESDGC: Information for Teacher Trainees and New Teachers in Wales* (DCELLS 2008d).

The ESDGC Panel submitted a response to the consultation on the review of the National Curriculum in Wales conducted in 2007. The new Curriculum integrated ESDGC into Science and Geography (DCELLS 2008e, f) and featured it prominently in Personal and Social Education. ESDGC also figured in the Learning Pathways 14–19 and the Welsh Baccalaureate. The ESDGC in the curriculum was a significant contribution to Teaching and Learning, but that was only one of the five Common Areas in the 2006 Strategy and the overall aim for schools was to embed ESDGC across all the five Common Areas. The broader scope of ESDGC was reflected in Estyn’s inspection of schools and evidence from the inspection reports illustrates that this has been achieved, at least in some cases, as shown by the following extracts referring to individual schools:

The provision for education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) is outstanding and fully embedded in the life and work of the school. The school makes every effort to act in a sustainable way and pupils regularly monitor energy and water consumption and are involved in re-cycling, composting and waste minimisation schemes. The school’s commitment to the Fair Trade ethos is excellent and pupils have a clear understanding that the actions of people in one country can have a direct, beneficial impact on the lives of those in other countries. (...) Global citizenship is further promoted through initiatives, such as the links programme with Bangladesh, and it has gained the Foundation Level of the International School Award. (...) The school is part of the eco-schools award scheme and is justly proud of achieving the European Green Flag in

recognition of its commitment to conservation and the environment. Pupils are very proud of their school grounds and local community and genuinely feel they can make a real difference, both locally and globally, through active citizenship and care for the environment. (...) The school is fully committed to the national priorities for lifelong learning and community regeneration. The school is at the heart of the regeneration of the local community and the working relationships forged with a range of agencies and personnel, including Communities First, are exemplary and of great benefit to the children and their families. (Estyn 2010: 18–19)

The school has firmly embedded and strategically planned ESDGC thoroughly across the whole school; it is an outstanding feature of the school. (Estyn 2009: 6)

The ESDGC co-ordinator actively promotes and champions the ESDGC agenda with support from members of the school council, SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and staff. The school has been involved in a large number of initiatives aimed at raising pupils' awareness of sustainability and their role as citizens of the world. (Estyn 2009: 23)

The end of the ESDGC Champion's contract in December 2010 coincided with the appointment of a new Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning and there was a decline in the priority and resource given to ESDGC by the WAG, a decline which has continued through the latter half of the DESD. The results from 2010 PISA (the OECD Programme for International School Assessment), which focused on Literacy, Numeracy and Science, placed Wales well down the rankings. The response of the new Minister was to boost the policies and resources in these subject areas, in part at the expense of other initiatives such as ESDGC. The 'push' by the WAG between 2006 and 2010 to embed ESDGC in schools was only partially successful as borne out by Estyn inspections. According to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, between 2010 and 2013 judgements on the standards of ESDGC in schools show 76 % of primary and 66 % of secondary schools are either "excellent" or "good", while the rest are described as "adequate" or "unsatisfactory".<sup>1</sup>

The continued profile of ESDGC in schools up to the present day is a result of the extent to which ESDGC has been genuinely embedded, the enthusiasm for this approach to education by some teachers, headteachers and local authority leaders, and the continued inclusion of ESDGC in Estyn inspections.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures presented by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales at an ESDGC Forum in Cardiff on 17.06.2013.

A practitioner based ESDGC Schools Network was established in 2011, which has facilitated conferences and forums, but without core funding the future of the Network is constantly in doubt.

The Welsh Government has recently consulted on introducing a legal requirement for larger public bodies in Wales to address specific issues relating to SD. The “Future Generations Bill”, if it is adopted, may add impetus to certain aspects of ESDGC at school level through its legal impact on local authorities and on higher education institutions in Wales.

A key debate that would have significance for the future of ESDGC in Wales is around the differences in the approach to learning inherent in ESDGC compared to the approaches being promoted by the Welsh Government to drive up standards in Literacy and Numeracy, and whether ESDGC offers longer term benefits to the quality and standards of learning in Wales. These issues require a much wider debate at all levels, from the Welsh Government to school classrooms, than they are currently receiving.

There is pride in Wales with regard to achievements associated with ESDGC and SD generally. The commitment to SD as a central organising principle of the Government in Cardiff means that the majority of the developments in ESDGC in Wales would have happened regardless of 2005–2014 being identified by the UN as the DESD. One of the UNESCO initiatives for the Decade, the Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) in ESD, was slow to be established in Wales, primarily because the initiative taken by the WAG and the appointment of the ESDGC Champion meant that the functions of an RCE were largely being covered.

Some of the findings of the original Estyn research in 2006 (Estyn 2006a), such as the variation in the level of understanding about ESDGC at classroom level, still persist and development across the schools in Wales has been uneven. During the academic year 2013–2014 Estyn has been tasked by the Welsh Government to conduct a review of the impact of ESDGC in schools, using the 2006 research as a baseline. The outcome of this research will be published in June 2014 and it is likely to have a significant effect on the future of Welsh Government policy with regard to ESDGC. However, while the extent to which policies and initiatives over the last decade have embedded ESDGC is still debatable, there are sufficient committed practitioners in Welsh schools to ensure ESDGC persists at some level into the future.

### ***3.2 Critical Reflections on ESD in Schools in Scotland***

#### **Policy Context**

In Scotland, interest amongst practitioners in what later became ‘ESD’

began in the 1960s and 1970s, and in 1974 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMIE) in Scotland published a significant and progressive report on Environmental Education (EE) which was well ahead of its time (HMIE 1974). Further reports, such as the highly significant *Learning for Life* which fully located EE as a process involving formal, informal and non-formal education (Scottish Office Environment Department 1993) followed. Analysis of this and other reports in the period to 2007 can be found in Lavery and Smyth (2003) and McNaughton (2007). Throughout this period there was no lack of interest in ESD and the educational community made efforts to raise the profile to encourage policy commitment. However, this support was not forthcoming for a variety of reasons, such as inflexible educational structures and at least, prior to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, a lack of autonomy in educational policy formation. Higgins and Lavery (2013) have detailed the research and policy advice, the stages in policy development, the slow pace of change and the reasons for this.

However, paradoxically, from the 1990s, Scotland already had a significant influence on international conceptualisation and practice in the field, initially through the involvement of John Smyth in the 1992 Rio de Janeiro "Earth Summit" who was a key architect of the strong focus on education in the report. Similarly, Scotland was one of the small group of countries participating, from the outset in 1998, in the UNESCO group on "Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainable Development".

One feature of the early conceptualisation of Sustainable Development Education (SDE), until recently the favoured term in Scotland, was the centrality of outdoor learning experiences to the concept, certainly through the 1990s (Higgins and Lavery 2013). This has again become a key feature of the current philosophical and policy discussion. However, throughout the past two decades, the curricular location of ESD has been uncertain, and this has been the result of two primary factors; the range of academic and 'personal attitudes' fields that sustainability can be justifiably linked with, and its fundamentally interdisciplinary nature. Furthermore, as it frequently challenges the political *status quo*, a historical lack of political support for a core curricular place for ESD seems unsurprising.

Whilst the curriculum in Scotland has always been distinct and separate from the other jurisdictions, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 fostered greater confidence in developing a new approach to educational autonomy, and a new 3–18 core curriculum—*Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) (Scottish Government 2009a)—was launched across Scotland in 2009. This has placed great emphasis on the "capacities" of learners, and in the past decade, changes in both the social and political acceptance of the need to address sustainability have paved the way for its inclusion in CfE.

Climate change has been a significant driver in the perceived relevance of ESD, and the Scottish Government has made this issue a priority through the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 (Scottish Government 2009b) and supporting strategies for reducing waste and increasing renewable energy production. The Act is “regarded as the most ambitious legislation of its kind in the world” (Education Scotland 2011: 2). The government’s current economic strategy now includes the “Transition to a Low Carbon Economy” as one of six priorities, and highlights the ambition that all Scotland’s demand for electricity should be met by renewables by 2020, and that a greener economy could support 130,000 jobs by 2020 (Scottish Government 2011). Preparing the general public and a workforce for this transition gives specific focus and urgency to the role of ESD in all education sectors.

## **The Interplay Between Policy on ESD and Its Impact on Practice**

As well as the reports noted earlier, the period from 2000 onwards was characterised by a number of advisory and working groups which had variable degrees of influence and duration. Notably, however, the announcement of the DESD and the changes to the curriculum spurred Scotland’s learning and teaching advisory agency (then called Learning and Teaching Scotland) to convene a Sustainable Development Education Liaison Group (SDELG) to advise on ESD for schools and government (Higgins and Kirk 2009), and this was a key influence on policy until 2012. It contributed to two key Scottish Government policy responses to DESD—*Learning for our Future* (Scottish Government 2008) and *Learning for Change* (Scottish Government 2010), both of which outlined plans and targets for all education sectors and communities. Perhaps the most significant legacy of the Scottish response to the DESD was that global citizenship education and ESD were embedded in the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government 2009a).

For schools, curricular inclusion has meant that aspects of ESD are located in specific “experiences and outcomes” of the curriculum ‘subjects’ Social Studies, Science and Technologies and in the senior phase of the national qualifications and examinations (Higgins and Lavery 2013). Before and since these inclusions a strong external contribution has been made by Eco-Schools Scotland, with almost all schools being registered, and about half holding its “Green Flag” (Eco-Schools Scotland 2014). Its popularity is due in part to Scottish Government support and funding to the Eco-Schools programme and to the enthusiasm of education professionals and school staff. Other awards and support for ESD and

related areas such as “Rights Respecting Schools” exist but as with Eco-Schools these are not mainstream curricular arrangements and therefore not available to all schools and students. This situation may lead to the hazardous assumption that ESD is appropriately covered in schools, whereas charitable-sector and optional provision and partial curricular coverage are no substitute for a *central* focus in the curriculum.

The period since the last Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2011 has seen some distinctive developments and as we approach the end of the DESD there is a sense of real progress being made. The incoming government made a manifesto commitment to exploring the concept of “One Planet Schools” and this led to the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group. It was given the remit to explore “One Planet Schools” in the context of *Learning for Change* (Scottish Government 2010) and CfE (Scottish Government 2009a). The ensuing report to Scottish Ministers on *Learning for Sustainability* (LfS) (Scottish Government 2012) made 31 recommendations relating to the whole student 3–18 experience within CfE, including curricular, community and campus elements. It established the concept of LfS as having an equal focus on ESD, global citizenship and outdoor learning. The Government accepted the report in full (Scottish Government 2013) and has established an implementation group with a 2-year remit to conclude its work in 2015. The focus on the whole school environment and pupil experience is distinctive as is the intent to address sustainability through the integration of three equally important facets—ESD, Global Citizenship Education and Outdoor Learning. The inclusion of outdoor educational experiences as a core feature acknowledges the importance of both intellectual understanding of planetary ecological and geophysical systems, and the significance of affective and sensory experiences in developing a values orientation towards sustainability (Christie and Higgins 2012).

For the “Learning for Sustainability Implementation Group”—established in February 2014 by the Scottish Government and tasked with driving forward the above mentioned 31 recommendations of the *Learning for Sustainability Report*—to be effective it will need close links with education professionals in formal education and the private sector, and the recently established UN University Regional Centre of Expertise in ESD for Scotland (<http://rcescotland.org>, accessed 15 April 2014) that has been identified by the Government as a key means of providing this support and two-way communication.

In 2013 the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) published its revised “Professional Standards”, part of a national framework for teachers’ professional development. These standards relate to “registration”, “career-long professional learning” and “leadership and

management”. “Learning for sustainability” is embedded in the professional values and personal commitments sections of the standards, and all registered education professionals such as teachers and lecturers will be expected to demonstrate this in their practice. Whilst this is a highly significant and distinctive feature of the new structure of Scottish education, establishing the standards, and in particular a positive commitment to learning for sustainability throughout the teaching profession is a major undertaking that will require a focus in pre-service training and extensive in-service provision, and this will need commitment by the GTCS, Education Scotland<sup>2</sup>, Education Authorities and Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs).

### **The Practice Context: The Formal and Informal Curriculum, Impacts on Learner Outcomes, Quality Standards and Inspection**

Whilst the curricular foundations are in place to support ESD becoming a central feature of all schooling, inspection and evaluation processes are necessary to monitor progress and establish the most effective ways of achieving positive change. *Learning for Change* committed Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education (HMIE) to supporting “the development of sustainable development education within Curriculum for Excellence through self-evaluation and the school inspection process” (Scottish Government 2010: 16). Whilst in 2012 a new inspection process was introduced, HMIE are expected to continue to include ESD in evaluations as an aspect of learning, and a new self-evaluation framework for ESD and outdoor learning in educational institutions is under development. Whilst welcome, this is still a long way from ensuring that ESD is a central feature of the inspection process.

It is a proposition clearly worth consideration that addressing complex interdisciplinary issues, such as SD and social responsibility and using a whole school approach to do so, might be correlated with broader improvements in pupil development. Scott has proposed a set of holistic characteristics of school leavers that would indicate that the school has properly prepared them for life in a complex modern society, and has

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<sup>2</sup> Education Scotland is the government educational advisory body that replaced Learning and Teaching Scotland following its merger with Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Education in 2011.

suggested that educational programmes in such schools would “have a wide range of (...) the characteristics of effective ESD, that are congruent with the Decade aims” (Scott 2013: 17–18). Rather more instrumentally, Scotland is one of 11 nations involved in a study sponsored by UNESCO (Hopkins 2013) investigating links between ESD and educational attainment and achievement. However, without some standardised reporting by teachers, headmasters and other stakeholders, any potential relationship will be difficult to discern.

A central emphasis on ESD in inspections would not guarantee that schools committed enthusiastically to ESD. But it would emphasise the significance of ESD both in schools and their 32 regional authorities. In Scotland education budgets are raised through taxation at a local level and these funds are diminishing in real terms so it seems unlikely that spending on ESD will be a priority. Other approaches are necessary. For example Education Scotland is helping <sup>1/4</sup> “teachers who have succeeded in enhancing SDE [ ESD] in their schools by encouraging them to act as mentors for staff in other schools, building peer-support and collaboration” (Higgins and Lavery 2013: 342). However, as Higgins and Lavery point out “such approaches are far from being a national policy or even expectation”, and unless appropriate structural provision is made in terms of policy expectations, training and inspection future progress is far from assured.

## **Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development**

Whilst across the higher education sector there is considerable growth in demand for SD and social responsibility oriented undergraduate degrees with many more courses and healthy uptake, this is not the case in teacher education institutions (TEIs). Despite the GTCS having agreed the revised professional standards to include ‘learning for sustainability’ Scottish TEIs are not *required* to include detailed coverage of SD in their programmes, and any inclusions are dependent on local institutional and staff interest. This is a clear impediment to deeper embedding of ESD in Scottish schools at a time when an encouraging message to potential applicants for courses, current students and the profession should be clear—that ‘learning for sustainability’ as a core element of the professional standards is the responsibility of all education professionals.

As will be evident, the historical context, current policy framework, political will and professional structures are all in place for a transformative phase in ESD or ‘learning for sustainability’ in Scotland. However, such change needs to be signalled as an imperative to all those currently involved in all aspects of 3–18 education, and all those

considering education as a career. Overall, at the level of political and administrative rhetoric, some progress has been made in official documents, but much now rests on the collective impact of the various initiatives outlined above.

### ***3.3 Reflections on ESD in Schools in England***

In providing an account of ESD in England's schools it is tempting to identify the UK General Election of 2010 as a pivotal moment. For many supporters of ESD this was when “the clock was turned back” and Government support for sustainable schools declined. At the school level however, change is rarely so drastic.

Despite recent policy reversals, the situation in relation to ESD in English schools remains little changed; indeed it has evolved over decades, growing from rural studies and agricultural education to Environmental Education (EE), supplemented with development education and thence to various permutations of education with/about/for sustainability (ULSF 2001). A brief account of the policy background will inform the snapshot that follows.

### **Policy Context**

According to Disinger, interest in EE had grown by 1969 to “occasion the development of definitional statements” (1985: 61–62) such as those formalised by IUCN (1970) and at Tbilisi in 1977 (UNESCO-UNEP 1978). At that time central government exercised little control over what was taught in England’s schools beyond broad guidance and largely supportive visits by Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMIs). EE itself was supported through the distribution of Tbilisi Conference papers to local education authorities with some advice and guidance being offered by HMIs (Hansard 1978).

The 1988 Education Reform Act ushered in England’s (and Wales’s) first National Curriculum; henceforth advocates of EE would have to fight their own corner within an increasingly politicised system. EE was omitted from the original government-defined National Curriculum included in the Act but political lobbying helped it to become one of five cross-curricular themes to be covered by non-statutory guidance (NCC 1990). EE remained popular at classroom level throughout to such an extent that “the document [National Curriculum] itself was perceived as being redundant by many schools” (Palmer 1998: 25).

In 1997, under the New Labour Government, the Departments of Education and Environment established the Sustainable Development Education Panel (SDEP) whose first report linked education outcomes to seven SD principles. This suggested coherence between ESD and SD but its failure to define ESD in terms of *educational* principles or structures obstructed integration into mainstream education (Vare and Scott 2013). Meanwhile a report on “citizenship education” (QCA 1998) referred to EE and SD as “important contexts and content to support the aim and purpose of citizenship education in schools” (*ibid.*: 41).

When the term ‘sustainable development’ first appeared in *The National Curriculum: Handbook for Primary Teachers in England Key Stages 1 and 2* (QCA 1999), a contemporary analysis (Chiatzifitou 2002) observed a lack of clarity in defining terms such as ‘environment’ and ‘sustainable development’ while noting how values-based components only received attention in the non-statutory sections.

In 2003 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published its Sustainable Development Action Plan with the first objective being ESD. Shortly afterwards a new national SD strategy *Securing the Future* (HM Government 2005) appeared with a chapter on education featuring a highly supportive statement from the Prime Minister. The schools inspection service, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), captured the *zeitgeist* with a survey of ESD practice in schools that led to the publication of its report *Taking the first step forward* (Ofsted 2003). This later on fed into more comprehensive guidance for schools inspectors (Ofsted 2010), highlighting ways in which English schools might address SD through positive behaviour, community links and cross-curricular working. The judgements of Ofsted inspectors have huge consequences for schools, so this level of interest in

ESD was potentially a highly significant development.

By comparison, the DESD (2005–2014) (UNESCO 2004), had little impact at the school level, unsurprising given the lack of enthusiasm demonstrated by the then Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke, in an interview with the UK Parliament’s Environmental Audit Committee (EAC):

(Mr Clarke) . . . I believe strongly... that statements and declaratory remarks do not take us very far, including in terms of the UN Decade. I think it is a question of what we actually do. I think we are absolutely full up to here with declaratory statements . . . if I was to say that I gave major priority to our location within the UN Decade, the truth is I do not. I give major priority to try to sort out our school transport policy, to try to get a curriculum which moves forward. . . . (EAC 2003, § 208).

Beyond revealing the marginal status of international documents, this extract demonstrates the extent to which political vision appears to have given

way to a focus on individual components within the system. As David notes, despite the rhetoric of ESD and citizenship education, educational debate since the 1990s has been “preoccupied with ‘what works’ with respect to ‘raising standards’” (David 2007: 431).

## The National Framework for Sustainable Schools

A pragmatic approach is evident in England’s *National Framework for Sustainable Schools* (DCSF 2008). Launched in 2006 this non-statutory guidance comprises three interlocking parts: (a) a commitment to care; (b) an integrated approach linking campus, curriculum and community; (c) eight ‘doorways’ or thematic entry points. While the second part promotes integrative thinking, the doorways have been seen as problematic:

... there are risks inherent in a doorways approach; for example, presenting sustainability as a series of fragmented and unrelated ideas in what is a rather conservative and limited approach to the issues we face. (CREE 2009: 10)

Furthermore, the doorways omit biodiversity, a crucial ESD component in terms of ecological understanding and first-hand experiences of nature. Despite these concerns, the Framework helps participating schools to build upon their existing efforts and importantly provides a system of monitoring through the Sustainable Schools Self-evaluation tool (S3) (DfE 2011).

## Interplay Between Policy and Practice

Evidence of the positive impact of tackling sustainability in schools suggests improved student engagement and attendance (Gayford 2009) and enhanced well-being across a number of indicators (KBT 2013). Further evidence of impact is available from a wide-ranging review conducted by Centre for Research in Education and the Environment at the University of Bath (DCSF 2010).

The UK Coalition Government elected in 2010 has demonstrated an antipathy towards ESD by shelving proposed ESD inspection guidelines (Ofsted 2010) and dropping the previous Government target of all schools becoming ‘sustainable schools’ by 2020. The National Framework remains available on a voluntary basis although much of the support material has been removed from the Department for Education webpages (Martin et al. 2013).

In 2013, initial proposals for a revised National Curriculum made no

reference to sustainability and even omitted climate change; the latter issue was restored after a public outcry and intervention by the Government's own Energy Secretary (Wintour 2013).

Other areas of Government offer some support; funding for "global learning programs" is available to local authorities (DfID n.d.) and the *Natural Environment White Paper* (Defra 2011) emphasises the importance of connecting people with nature and endorses the work of NGOs, including the Sustainable Schools Alliance (SSA 2012), although no additional resources are available to this national network or to schools.

Local and national NGOs continue to offer a variety of programmes on specific themes. A comprehensive ESD-focused service to schools has been provided by the NGO "Sustainability and Environmental Education" (SEEd), offering conferences, webinars and a policy forum. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF 2012) offers a refreshingly critical approach with its focus on the 'circular economy'. Numerically most significant is the Eco-Schools programme with over 70 % of schools in England (17,000) registered (KBT 2013). Not all registered schools participate while those that do so may focus on practical activity with teams of enthusiastic pupils rather than on embedding the learning across the curriculum (Vare forthcoming). Keep Britain Tidy itself, the organisation running the programme, has enjoyed long-standing Government support for promoting Eco-Schools although this is currently in question.

Forest Schools (Learning Outside the Classroom, LOTC 2014) is increasingly popular at primary level but, like Eco-Schools, this usefully tangible framework carries the danger of limiting practice as schools focus on the programme rather than the wider ethos of learning outside the classroom or sustainability.

Indeed, Sayer (2000) suggests that a clear framework of what *should be* can lead to empty moralising by those who 'follow the script' or lead to the false assumption that what is proposed will somehow come into being. Thus supportive Government directives could lead many to think that the job has been done when nothing could be further from the case. We might take heart therefore, that a 'clear message' from Government need not be the most critical factor in embedding ESD. South Africa's curriculum, for example, has been underpinned by social and environmental concerns for 20 years yet transformation is slow (Lotz-Sisikta and Schudel 2007).

Schools in England as elsewhere are inherently conservative institutions responding incrementally to curriculum reform but also adapting any innovations to their own ethos, their locality, media preoccupations and occasionally, Government-sponsored non-statutory guidance. If governments are frustrated by the uneven way in which their reforms are adopted (BBC 2012), proponents of international strategies, such as the

DESD, should be even more wary of expecting rapid change, estranged as they often are from classroom practice.

For better or worse, England's schools *do* respond to the Ofsted inspection framework; this reflects Government priorities, which in turn respond to popular concerns. Thus, as SD issues increasingly arrest popular consciousness, we can expect these to be absorbed into the fabric of the English education system, regardless of the political preferences of the Government of the day.

### ***3.4 Reflections on ESD in Schools in Northern Ireland***

#### **Policy Context**

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

At primary level (students aged 4–10 years) ESD is found in the World Around Us area of learning, whilst for 11–14 year olds, it is included in the statutory areas of Learning for Life and Work and Environment and Society. Related key aspects of the Northern Ireland curriculum (CCEA 2014) are Mutual Understanding, and Local and Global Citizenship. Schools and teachers are provided with resources designed to help explain and encourage SD principles within a pupil's overall learning experience. A good practice guide, developed by the Interboard Education for Sustainable Development Group (2005), was produced partly as a response to the beginning of the DESD. However, this useful guide has not been updated since 2005. The continued delay in setting up a single Education and Skills Authority in Northern Ireland (DENI 2012) may be hindering further progress on this issue. Undoubtedly, such a single authority could play an important coordinating role in increasing the ESD resources available to schools in Northern Ireland.

In January 2009, the Department of Education published *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools* (DENI 2009). Whilst this document does reference SD principles and the Northern Ireland SD Strategy, it is clearly describing SD terms of infrastructure and capacity,

not in terms of directly engaging and encouraging ESD. As the authors of the document itself state: “The focus of this document is on the longer term viability of schools provision” (DENI 2009: 3).

It was hoped by many, including the SD Commission in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland SD Commission 2010), that a mandatory commitment to ESD would be included in the 2010 Education (school development plans) Regulations. However, despite the inclusion of an ESD clause in the consultation paper, this did not happen. Rather, an appendix to the final regulations allows for a more ad hoc, school-by-school, approach to develop (DENI 2010).

A commitment to highlight and encourage ESD principles was contained within the 2008–2011 Northern Ireland Programme for Government (NIE 2008) through a SD and Environment awards scheme. The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM 2012), 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. The Eco-Schools programme has over 930 registered schools in Northern Ireland, accounting for 75 % of all schools (Eco-Schools Northern Ireland 2014).

### Interplay Between Policy and Practice

Such success as there has been in advancing ESD in Northern Ireland schools has been marshalled by the NGO sector. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Red Cross have been especially active and a broad coalition of organisations, under the banner of the ESD Forum (ESD Forum n.d.) which embraces the universities, several local authorities and government agencies, as well as a range of NGOs. The Forum provides valuable networking opportunities, training events and regular communications for its wide membership base. Their influence and resources enable ESD committed teachers to deliver some excellent work in schools.

Schools in Northern Ireland are encouraged to adopt an approach to ESD that takes on more than a curriculum focus. The school buildings and building regulations, management of school resources, waste management, and sustainable transport for example, should all be actively encompassed within a framework for SD, alongside the development of strong links with the local community, other local schools and businesses, and the community and voluntary sector. A 2010 Northern Ireland 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. The Report highlighted a number of case studies from schools across Northern Ireland which the authors felt represented effective practice in ESD. These are some of the key outcomes of this report:

Environmental education is now very much embedded in the whole culture and ethos of the school with learner pledges, classroom charters, whole school assemblies, events and competitions all dedicated to promoting environmental awareness and action. There is a clear overview of where ESD issues are explored through the curriculum. (Northern Ireland Education and Training Inspectorate 2010: 6)

The school has recognised that awards can be an important vehicle for the development of environmental initiatives within the school but that they cannot just be an add-on and need to be explicitly embedded within the curriculum. To facilitate this, the role of Eco-coordinator has now been distributed to the senior management team (SMT) and the World Around Us co-ordinators. (*ibid.*: 8)

...learners in Key Stage 2 started a school based campaign to raise awareness about energy use and its impact on climate change. In ICT class, the learners designed posters and stickers urging staff and learners to “switch off and turn down”. Eco monitors go around turning off lights and screens in classes, and shutting doors and windows; points are given to the most energy saving classroom. (*ibid.*: 9)

The ESD work in the school is managed and driven by the learners. The school’s Eco-Committee, which consists of elected representatives from each class, meets weekly to co-ordinate the ESD work of the school. (*ibid.*: 15)

Crucially much good ESD practice in Northern Ireland takes place in partnership with learners and the wider school community, such as NGOs and community and voluntary organisations. Schools that encourage learners to contribute and lead on ESD projects report that this sense of ownership leads to more engagement with the principles of ESD, more understanding of the long term behaviour changes required, and more willingness to carry on ESD related activities outside of the confines of the school and the curriculum. This active participation and ownership has increased positive interaction between learners, staff and the wider community, building powerful coalitions of interest and action.

A particular aspect of ESD in Northern Ireland which is of particular interest is its positioning within the curriculum. As a cross-curricular issue ESD is taught across a range of subjects, for example, geography and science in secondary schools (World Around Us in primary schools), as are

the themes of Mutual Understanding and Local and Global Citizenship. These themes have particular relevance and importance in Northern Ireland as they address some of the issues learners and communities face as members of a divided society emerging from conflict. A combination of early evaluations and research into Education for Mutual Understanding provided a critique that underlined the need for a stronger focus on human rights, civic responsibility, justice and democracy, particularly in the context of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good\\_Friday\\_Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_Friday_Agreement), accessed 5 May 2014). Smith (2003) argued for the inclusion of an inquiry-based approach to citizenship education that is defined in terms of citizens' rights and responsibilities rather than their national identities.

The 2010 Inspection Report makes a number of recommendations which would help to further cement ESD as a fundamental part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, including, increased training and support for teachers, sharing of good practice, and improved access to information and resources. Above all, the report recommends that all schools understand the importance of ESD and that the curriculum also reflects this.

It is interesting to note that a 2009 Evaluation of the introduction of Local and Global Citizenship into the Northern Ireland Curriculum (UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster 2009) reached many of the same conclusions as the 2010 Report on ESD in Northern Ireland, calling for senior management engagement and a 'whole school' approach to the issue, along with an enhanced pupil voice, greater connection to other school policies, and the need for increased status and sustained professional development for teachers. It seems that an approach which emphasises the importance and centrality of ESD for teachers, management and the school community (as with Local and Global Citizenship) is key to successful delivery.

The Five Nations Network (n.d.), a forum sharing practice in education for citizenship and values in England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, formed in 2000, has enabled dialogue between teachers, educators, policy makers, curriculum planners, members of the inspectorate, representatives of NGOs and young people from across the UK and Ireland. Its work is overseen by a Strategy Group with country representatives from each of the five nations. Perhaps an equivalent body for ESD across Britain and Ireland could provide the coordinated impetus that is required. The SEEEd Charity (SEEEd 2012) also provides a good example of ongoing collaborations.

Some schools in Northern Ireland are using ESD projects to raise awareness of cultural diversity and to promote good relations and mutual understanding between people of different races, religions and political

opinions. The 2010 Northern Ireland Education and Training Inspectorate Report on Effective ESD practice in Northern Ireland comments: “Environmental Initiatives help schools to deliver the Northern Ireland Curriculum requirement to foster attitudes and dispositions such as community spirit, concern for others, inclusion and respect” (2010: 13). The primary school outlined in the following case study delivered part of its ESD programme through the lens of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and The World Around Us:

The learners have researched ethnic groups in the area and considered the differences in dress, diet and beliefs that exist. In religious education classes, they considered the values and ethics taught in Christianity and in Hinduism. Subsequently, they discussed how they treat others and how they would like to be treated by others. The school has placed a particular emphasis on the value of cultural diversity and stresses the importance of helping learners to become informed about the local and global dimensions of the world in which they live. The programme encourages the learners to broaden their horizons and to adopt the attitudes of respect and acceptance which will help them become responsible citizens, better able to contribute positively to their own communities and to society as a whole. (Northern Ireland Education and Training Inspectorate 2010: 13)

Whilst this joined up approach is commendable in terms of its approach to community understanding in Northern Ireland, it is important to ensure that a balance is maintained and that the crucial aspects of ESD as a driver for a lifelong understanding and commitment to SD principles are maintained. The 2011–2015 Northern Ireland Programme for Government (NIE 2011) commitment to ensure that all learners in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to take part in ‘shared’ education programmes by 2015 provides an opportunity to ensure that sharing in education can also be part of a wider strategy to deliver ESD purposefully.

There are some excellent examples of ESD in schools in Northern Ireland resulting from the drive, commitment and understanding by school communities, aided by clear curriculum instructions and informed support from NGOs and other outside bodies. However, in the absence of a single Education and Skills Authority and the vacuum that this may have created, there is a need for a more coordinated approach to maximising the potential of the subject in Northern Ireland. There is also a need to ensure that ESD is understood and taught on its own merits, fully supported by educational authorities.

#### **4      Conclusions**

In 2010 the education landscape of England changed as a consequence of

the formation of a coalition government for the UK. For England, education and SD policies were significantly influenced by a political ideology and advocacy which supported smaller and less directive government in some fields and substantial central, rather than local, controls in others. This led to the withdrawal of central policy support for a range of issues in England of which SD and ESD were important examples. The most visible expressions of such changes can be found on the DfE website which illustrates some of the benefits of a sustainable school, and contains relevant resources, but the policy emphasis is now on individual schools deciding whether ESD is important to them. In the devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland arrangements for school organisation and curriculum are different. Much of the development of policy and practice on SD and ESD has continued albeit at a different pace and with clearly differentiated national activities and priorities. Likewise, the coalition government withdrew central funding from the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) which had led much of the SD agenda across the UK administrations under the previous UK-Labour government for the best part of 9 years (from 2000 to 2009). One of the singularly most successful outcomes of the work of the SDC was its role in countering the lack of buy-in from different parts of government in part by supporting the development of SD Action Plans across whole departments in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London. Since 2010 much of this progress and central policy impetus has disappeared which has diminished the wider UK development and adoption of ESD in all forms of education and learning provision. Whilst this chapter is not an exhaustive account of current UK ESD development and activity it illuminates the good practice in ESD that exists in many schools and at all levels across the UK, which is characterized by good teaching and enhanced learner outcomes. It is linked to the professional standards and qualifications of teachers who are part of innovative communities and networks of ESD practice. The overriding conclusion from many sources suggests that: “schools that embrace ESD are also schools which succeed and do well” (KBT 2013: 2).

In England and Northern Ireland there is currently less policy emphasis on SD and this has inhibited the wider adoption of good practice in ESD. In Wales the prominence given to ESDGC in national policy has diminished in spite of the significant emphasis placed on SD by the Welsh (Assembly) Government. In Scotland there is a greater focus on a more integrated and coherent approach to SD and ESD, with education being recognised by policy makers and practitioners as a key enabler in the transition to a sustainable society. However, good practice is not widespread in UK schools largely because there is no national strategic

frame- work which puts it at the core of the education policy agenda in all the UK's administrative jurisdictions. Without it the much needed coherence, direction and impetus of existing activity is limited and patchy. The absence of an overarching UK Strategy for SD which sets out a clear vision about the contribution learning can make to its SD goals is a major barrier in scaling up existing good practice, as well as helping to prevent unnecessary duplication of effort and resources.

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