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

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Section I - Definition

A definition of sustainable development is provided on the background paper as `development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

(Defined by the Our Common Future (The Brundtland Report) - Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development; Quoted in Our Sustainable Future - A Framework for Sustainable Development in Ireland, p.10)

1. How would you define 'education for sustainable development'?

A definition of ESD should include the following key points:

- ESD is about empowering people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2002:7). Essentially it is about reorienting education systems, policies and practices to enable the learner to address issues of sustainability and to make clear decisions for action that are culturally appropriate and locally relevant (UNESCO, 2002:10).
- ESD is intergenerational in its nature and purpose.
- ESD requires us to learn from past experiences and to act to shape a just, equitable and sustainable future.
- ESD implies that economic, social and environmental development are inextricably linked and must be considered together.
- ESD, while rooted in local contexts, requires global perspectives that acknowledge the interconnectivity of nations, people and systems. It is about understanding the interdependencies and interconnectivities that exist within the world, and about using this to address problems such as poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, urban decay, population growth, gender inequality, health, conflict and the violation of human rights (UNESCO, 2002:10).

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

The key priority is to identify and build upon existing educational opportunities for ESD within formal and non-formal education, and putting structures in place that extend, strengthen and support them.

Section II - Objectives, challenges and actions

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

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

(1) Build on the opportunities to integrate ESD that are presented in the emerging Junior Cycle Framework.

The emerging framework for Junior Cycle is very much in keeping with the central messages of ESD. This is reflected both in the core skills (e.g. communicating, being creative, managing information and thinking, working with others) and in almost all of the statements of learning (e.g. Statement 9 – understands the origins and impacts of social, economic and environmental aspects of the world around her/him).

As such the DES and NCCA must ensure that all public relations, Continual Professional Development (CPD), consultations, and so on that relate to the Junior Cycle Framework seek to highlight ESD as being central to the Framework. In this context, ESD must become a term that is widely used and widely recognised.

(2) Encourage and support practicing teachers and pre-service teachers to engage in ESD in their subject areas, and in whole school approaches.

ESD is not a standalone entity. Existing curricula (at both Junior and Senior levels) provide opportunities to integrate ESD across post primary education**.** All subjects and curricular areas can and should contribute to a student's understanding of what it means to live and act in a sustainable and equitable manner. As such, there are opportunities to build upon relevant curricular links to integrate ESD into the delivery of Junior and Leaving Certificate subjects. For example, in Junior Certificate Science, students are expected to develop *'an appreciation of the role of science in the everyday world',* 'a scientific interest in the local community and environment' (JC Science). The Leaving Certificate syllabus aims to '*create an awareness of the application of biological knowledge to modern society in personal, social, economic, environmental, industrial, agricultural, medical, waste.'* This provides ample opportunity to explore issues such as improved forms of disease treatment and prevention, green energies,

and environmental protection. Likewise, in Junior Certificate Business, students are expected to develop *'a positive attitude to the creation of wealth and its distribution',* while in Leaving Certificate Business studies, the syllabus aims to help students to *"understand and appreciate ethics in business".* This provides ample opportunity to explore issues such as global supply chains, free trade versus fair trade, and corporate ethics.

For examples of other subject areas and curricular links, please see the NCCA document, *A Study of the Opportunities for Embedding Development Education at Senior Cycle,* (NCCA, 2006).

Steps to ensuring that practising teachers and pre-service teachers are competent in ESD include:

- **Providing support to pre-service teachers to engage in ESD:**
  The Ubuntu Network (www.ubuntu.ie) provides a good example of how this is happening in post-primary Initial Teacher Education. Using the Ubuntu Network *'Framework for Integration of Development Education'*, teacher education colleges are moving towards programmatic changes that embed the concepts and principles of Development Education (DE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across four components of teacher education programmes. The Ubuntu Network is funded by Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs. For more details, please see http://www.ubuntu.ie/our-work/framework.html.

- **Rewarding teachers and pupils for engaging in ESD:**
  It is vitally important that teachers and pupils are rewarded for engaging in critical exploration of the topics relating to ESD. This should be reflected through assessment tools, for example, ESD concepts must be included as part of examination questions, practical tests, and action projects.

- **Increasing the status of ESD by introducing Politics and Society at Senior Cycle:**
  A cross curricular approach to ESD would greatly be supported by the introduction of Politics and Society at Senior Cycle. Introducing Politics and Society at Senior Cycle could be a very effective, and reasonably inexpensive, flagship project for this strategy.

- **Ensuring that the Teaching Council of Ireland visibly acknowledges the importance of ESD.** The Teaching Council of Ireland should acknowledge ESD and its importance in teacher education and teacher professional practice. It should be specifically named in all such documentation, and it should be explicitly included as an element in teacher accreditation by the Teaching Council. In France, the new competency framework for teachers (July 2013) states teachers will be able to *"Contribute to the implementation of cross educations, including health education, citizenship education, education for sustainable development and the arts and cultural education".*

(3) Stakeholders to recognise the vast similarities that exist between ESD and Development Education, and hence to build upon efforts to deliver high quality ESD/DE.

All stakeholders to recognise that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is very closely aligned with Development Education (DE), and that DE is strongly supported in formal education by Irish Aid. Both ESD and DE:

- Explore issues such as poverty, social exclusion, climate change, food and water security, migration, debt and human rights.
- Consider the concepts of development and sustainability.
- Emphasise the links between local and global contexts.
- Have an intergenerational focus.
- Emphasise the development of skills such as systems thinking, critical thinking, critical media literacy, problem solving, decision making and communication.
- Draw on active teaching and learning approaches, empowerment of students, and civic engagement.
- Relate to a range of curricular areas in formal education.

Stakeholders must seek out opportunities to support and build upon existing ESD/ DE work in formal education that promotes the knowledge, skills and understanding that are central to ESD. Programmes/ projects like those below are currently funded largely by Irish Aid. Such funds should be continued and enhanced by other relevant departments (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; Department of Education and Skills).

- The Ubuntu Network (supports the integration of DE and ESD into post-primary Initial Teacher Education, working across 13 higher education institutes to plan, deliver and evaluate appropriate DE/ESD interventions in teacher education programmes).
- The DICE Project (integrating Development Education and Intercultural Education into primary Initial Teacher Education).
- WorldWise Global Schools (operating to integrate Development Education into post-primary schools).
- IDEA (a network of practitioners in Development Education, with a focus on collaborative support and capacity building).

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

The key challenges include:

- Establishing a structure for meaningful and 'joined up' thinking between stakeholders, particularly between the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) - and with Irish Aid's strategy to incorporate DE across all sectors.

- Addressing the examinations system. An examination system that best rewards areas of study with definitive answers is not conducive to ESD. For example, in Leaving Certificate Geography, it is easier for the majority of pupils to score higher marks in the Geo-ecology option than in the Development option.

- Evaluating the effectiveness and impact of ESD in the curriculum.

5. What actions are required to address the challenges?

The following actions are required:

- Increased opportunity for dialogue between stakeholders.
- Identification of advocates and contact points for ESD within the DES.

Objective 2: Promoting public awareness of education for sustainable development

No submission for Objective 2.

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

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

(1) All initiatives to promote an emphasis on ESD in education should be accompanied by opportunities for teachers to build capacity in this area through appropriate CPD workshops. These workshops may be offered through in-service, through workshops offered by organisations such as the Ubuntu Network, or through initiatives such as the WorldWise Global School projects.

(2) Pre-service teachers should engage in capacity- building interventions on ESD, similar to those currently supported by the Ubuntu Network and the DICE project. The importance of the multiplier effect is important here. For example, in the Academic Year 2012-2013, approximately 1,357 student teachers enrolled in the Professional Diploma in Education (post-primary teaching).

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

The key challenges include:

- Quality assurance of CPD offered.

- Motivation of teachers to engage in CPD.

- Financial support for such initiatives.

12. What actions are required to address the challenges?

The following actions are required:

- Support for an organisational structure to coordinate and facilitate appropriate and evidence based CPD.

- Funds to be made available.

Objective 4: Promoting high standards of environmental management in education institutions

No submission for Objective 4.

III Additional Views

16. Comments on the Background Paper would be appreciated

We are concerned about the dominance of 'economic development' as being the most important part of Sustainable Development (in spite of the definition addressing all 3 aspects – social, economic and environment).

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

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

- Ubuntu Network: Teacher Education for Sustainable Development - www.ubuntu.ie