



Submission made on behalf of the Ubuntu Network

<https://www.ubuntu.ie>

Contact: Deirdre Hogan

deirdre.hogan@ul.ie

The Ubuntu Network was established in 2006 to support the integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into post primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Ireland. It works in the formal education sector, specifically within Initial Teacher Education in Higher Education Institutions in Ireland.

The Network comprises teacher educators from Higher Education Institutions (HEI), representatives from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and organisations working in the area of ESD. All members share a commitment to education for social justice, equality and sustainability.

The Ubuntu Network views ESD as an active and participatory educational process that supports the learner to:

- Build critical consciousness and an awareness of inequality, injustice and unsustainable practices both locally and globally,
- Develop the skills necessary to explore development issues – skills such as critical thinking, critical media literacy, information processing and communication,
- Feel a sense of responsibility and agency to be active citizens that work towards positive change.

The Ubuntu Network, which is funded by Irish Aid (Department of foreign Affairs) considers Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Development Education (DE) and Global Citizenship Education to be intrinsically linked and complementary, both considering issues through a variety of lenses including social, economic and environmental. Notwithstanding the difference in the origin of the movements, it considers their content, pedagogy and ideologies to be consistent.

Vision: Through education, the Ubuntu Network contributes to building a world based on respect for human dignity and rights and is informed by values of justice, equality, inclusion, sustainability and social responsibility.

Written Consultation:

The Ubuntu Network conducted two focus groups with members (n = 13) in April and May 2021. The following are the key points raised in relation to the relevant priority areas

The National Implementation Plan should propose that education policy should reflect a paradigm shift towards teaching and learning for sustainability

If education is to truly motivate and empower learners to “become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future” (DES, 2014), then ESD must be a core and fundamental element of education provision. All aspects of education should reflect and promote it, and facilitate the learner to build the relevant knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development and become sustainability change-makers (UNESCO).

Irish Education policies have been criticized for their bias toward economic objectives, and as such for moving the focus of education from the development of the individual or societal wellbeing to the service of the economy. This utilitarian and market driven ethos is at odds with the need to work towards a more just and sustainable world. Education systems driven by economic needs can serve to hinder the development of empathy in the learner, reducing their sympathy with the marginalized, and reducing their capacity to deal with complex global problems. A paradigm shift in education is required to support a move away from the drive for sustainable employment and economic growth towards reflecting enhanced societal equality and environmental sustainability in line with the SDGs. Higher Education Institutions and post primary schools should be vehicles for this transformation.

Rethinking the purpose of education in the era of climate change requires an ontological reimagining of our relationship with a new set of realities - ethical, environmental, social and socio-economic. It requires a paradigm shift in education– a move away from a focus on economic growth and competitive individualism, and a move towards care for planet and people where individuals are supported to lead sustainable lives and be agents of change for sustainability.

ESD cannot simply be interpreted as an addition to the curriculum, but a means to a different view of curriculum, pedagogy, organisational change, policy and ethos. It requires a thorough reorientation of education to focus on the key challenges of our time, adopting an interdisciplinary approach, and a change in pedagogy that goes beyond the “simple rearranging or altering of current curricula”.

A paradigm shift in education places the values of justice, equality and sustainability at the centre of culture and practice in educational organisations. These values should be reflected in all aspects of curriculum including subject content, pedagogical approaches and assessment. Teachers should embody these values in the classroom and in their professional practice. Education institutions should reflect them in their ethos and culture. An important message to convey is that all educators and stakeholders have an important role to play in ESD, regardless of disciplinary area.

Schools should be supportive of ESD, particular for pre-service teachers and newly qualified teachers. One focus group participant commented that “ the system fails them [pre-service

teachers],...they are passionate and want to do it...but the supports in schools aren't there". This is indicative of a culture that does value ESD as it should.

The inclusion of GCE in the Teaching Council Céim standards provides a positive environment for change in ITE over the next 4-5 years. We might consider what supports are needed within ITE to capitalise on this.

The strategy might consider how cultural change can happen in education circles.

This paradigm shift must be recognised at institutional level

We need systemic change in educational institutions. The paradigm shift must take place at institutional level.

In Higher Education Institutions, an active disposition towards sustainable development must be embedded in the culture and ethos. Senior management and administration must drive this agenda in their organisation. ESD should not only permeate teaching and learning, it should be reflected in research and innovation activities as well as university outreach projects. Interdisciplinary collaborations in ESD should be welcomed and facilitated.

Higher Education Institutions should have sustainable development strategies that are ambitious, timely and resources. These should include plans for monitored the effectiveness of the institution in relation to the SDGs, and should include both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Institutions must ask - how genuine is change for sustainability? Does it go beyond a 'box ticking exercise? Is it valued? Is it supported? Is it being blocked? (being mindful that not everyone wants change for sustainability).

Again, we must consider, how we measure cultural change in institutions?

The National Implementation Plan should support ESD in Teacher Education should be supported

Teachers have tremendous opportunity to evoke change through their professional practice. This strategy should maintain a focus on Initial Teacher Education (post-primary and primary), and in doing so align with the work of the Development Education Unit in Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs.

The National Implementation Plan should demand criticality in ESD in teaching and learning

Critical ESD requires that the learner questions and challenges. They explore the root causes of issues and appreciate the complexity of structures, systems and power relations in bringing about change.

There is a need to shift from curriculum content to inquiry-based pedagogies.

Approaches to ESD should not only seek out student voice, but also responding to it, and as such empower young people to explore issues and take action.

This strategy must question the quality of ESD delivered. Good practice should be captured and shared. Research must be conducted into measuring effectiveness of approaches to teaching and learning in particular contexts.

The National Implementation Plan should seek to centralise ESD in the Higher and Further Education Sector

The strategy needs to make a bigger impact in the Higher and Further Education sectors. While some programmes on sustainable development are now on offer, all higher education programmes should be incorporating a strong justice and sustainability element to their core. Higher Education Institutions are autonomous and competitive. They are driven by funding, status and rankings. A commitment to sustainability should be a prerequisite for funding.

Making funding available to incorporate ESD in teaching and learning, research and community initiatives in Higher Education. Projects should be collaborative (across institutions or across disciplines) Build upon the emergence of the SDGs in Higher Education, the appetite for such initiatives arising out of the Times Higher Education rankings. Initiate a call for practice-based research on ESD that can enhance provision, share learning. Develop a National Research Centre on ESD in Higher Education. Support initiatives that bring educators together to share and discuss initiatives.

The National Implementation Plan should flag the importance of actions to measure and evaluate ESD.

Particular attention must be given to measuring the nature and effectiveness of ESD in Higher Education Institutions. For example, the midterm review of the 2014-2020 national ESD strategy indicated that the HEA reported that “90 undergraduate and postgraduate courses include a module on or an element of Sustainable Development” (DES, 2021- consultation paper). While this metric is a useful indicator, it is important to measure what is taught and how it is taught. We need to distinguish between ‘education about sustainability’ and ‘education for sustainability’.

This will serve to identify and feed into Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the SDGs.

The National Implementation Plan should prioritise building capacity of educators in ESD

Building capacity of pre-service teachers and teachers in post primary schools

Building the capacity of teachers (initial and in-service) is crucial to addressing sustainability in the classroom. Teachers should feel competent to engage in pedagogical approaches that support inquiry, exploration and criticality in the learner. They should not fear moving beyond curriculum content to engaging in real world applications of knowledge.

Teachers should be supported to engage in sustainability within and beyond their subject areas. More so, they should be supported to move away from the siloed nature of teaching to connect with interdisciplinary approaches to teaching about sustainability and justice issues.

There may also be the potential to build a research movement for ESD among teachers, possibly supported by the Teaching Council in their drive to promote research as a central part of teacher identity.

The strategy may also consider a recommendation that identifies and profiles schools as exemplars of good practice in addressing a range of issues associated with the SDGs.

Building capacity of educators in Higher Education Institutions

Educators in Higher Education should be supported to build and share capacity on the integration of ESD practices and principles into teaching.

Such experiences would support educators to self-reflect and consider their own identity as educators, with a particular focus on the values that they embody as an educator. They should be encouraged to consider how they can place sustainability at the centre of their teaching and professional practice. They should be supported to carry out research (particularly action research) on innovative approaches to ESD in the context of their own areas of expertise. Such research should be valued in the educational organisation and structure and be disseminated widely. It should serve to benefit their professional advancement of the educator.

Peer to peer support and collaboration is an important part of capacity building. For many, ESD/GCE is a relatively new term, it can be daunting. Capacity building endeavours should bring together teacher educators in collaborative and supportive groupings to work together towards common goals as well as to share learning, research and experiences of teaching for sustainability. Such endeavours may have a disciplinary focus or an interdisciplinary focus. [example – UL and GMIT collaborating around sustainability in the teaching of technology] [example – cross disciplinary work in St. Angela’s college]. A sense of collegiality and solidarity towards achieving sustainability should be fostered among teacher educators in Higher Education Institutions.

Unless teacher educators place sustainability at the centre of education (rather than as an ‘add-on’), and this cultural mind shift takes place, then the learner (pre-service teacher) may experience a distorted, piecemeal and incomplete message on sustainability

This may be supported by (1) providing funding for research in the area (2) providing a platform for sharing learning and experiences of ESD in disciplinary and interdisciplinary fora.

Particular attention should be paid to supporting capacity building of institutional leadership or the University executive so that they can drive the institutional agenda for sustainability.

The National Implementation Plan should ensure that all educational endeavours for sustainability are informed by research, and research should be conducted to inform the sector.

Approaches to teaching and learning on ESD should be research informed. Moreover, educators should conduct research (particularly action research) on their practice to determine what works, with whom and why. This should contribute to a growing field of knowledge on ESD in Initial Teacher Education.

Research on ESD should feature in the upcoming national Strategy on ESD. A systemic change towards sustainability in HEIs should include opportunities for research and innovation on good practice in ESD in ITE. Funding should be provided for such research and its dissemination.

Mechanisms to support research on ESD in HEIs could include:

- Joint research funding calls with the Irish Research Council.
- Fund the Ubuntu Network to conduct research in ESD in ITE.

The National Implementation Plan must demonstrate commitment from the government that ESD is at the heart of quality education.

We must continue to shift the focus of education onto ESD. We need to continue to pull ESD from the periphery to the core. We need to increase its visibility, credibility and status in education.

It is negligent of a government department to launch an initiative towards sustainability without adequate funding to fulfil the plans within. If an initiative is considered important, it should be resourced as such. Funding for ESD would support publications, public events, working groups, marketing and communications, consultations, online platforms and dedicated personnel.