

Marino Institute of Education: Consultation on a National Strategy of Education for Sustainable Development to 2030

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Marino Institute of Education (MIE) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Joint Public Consultation on a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030 (DES/DFHERIS 2021).

MIE is a teaching, learning and research community committed to promoting inclusion and excellence in education. We have a long and proud involvement with education, specifically initial teacher education (ITE), dating back over 100 years.

In the last decade, the academic mission and scope of MIE's activity has been re-envisioned to encompass a deeper understanding of education in and beyond the classroom, to incorporate the continuum of teacher education and the education of specialist education practitioners at early years, primary and further education levels. This is allied with a commitment to education studies encompassing non-traditional education settings and the wider education environment in a pluralist context. MIE currently educates approximately 1200 students, providing high quality programmes, which are validated by Trinity College Dublin and, where appropriate, are accredited by the Teaching Council.

As an institute of education, MIE recognises its responsibility to lead the way with regard to modelling sustainable practice and to impact education for sustainability for future generations. Our role as a respected teacher education provider obliges us to integrate sustainable development into our policies, environments, the capacity-building of educators, the empowerment and mobilisation of young people, and local level action. Sustainability is at the core of our Strategic Plan 2021-26 (MIE, 2021). From September 2021, MIE will have an academic lead in the area of Sustainability; an identified staff member who will further this agenda across all elements of the Institute.

MIE defines sustainability as 'the integration of environmental and social equity concerns and practices to create healthy, thriving and diverse communities now and into the future that have a deep knowledge and understanding of their place in and interconnectedness with the natural world' (MIE, 2021). This reflects our understanding of the multifaceted nature of sustainability, encompassing environmental, socio-economic, cultural and political sustainability. It also captures

the essence of our understanding of education for sustainability, that it must be rooted in connection – to place, to each other and to the other beings with which we share the planet.

This is also reflective of the key elements of sustainability and education for sustainable development (ESD) identified in the consultation paper (DES/DFHE, 2021); that both are grounded in principles of social justice, equity and respect for human rights. The consultation paper further emphasises the aim of ESD to empower learners to take informed action towards a sustainable future. This principle of informed action will be discussed further below.

As an institute that prepares future generations of educators, it is important that MIE not only engages in sustainable practices throughout our campus operations but also embeds teaching and learning for sustainability in all aspects of our curriculum so that our community gains the necessary knowledge and skills to demonstrate sustainable thinking and decision making in the wider world. Our recommendations in this response reflect this commitment, informed by our strong pedagogical expertise and our considerable experience in designing and implementing innovative education approaches.

The consultation paper identifies 5 Key Priority Areas for Ireland's Education for Sustainability Strategy to 2030. These are

1. Policy: Advancing policy/policy coherence.
2. Education and Training: Transforming learning and training environments.
3. Educators: Building capacity for educators and trainers.
4. Youth: Empowering and mobilising youth.
5. Communities: Accelerating sustainable solutions at local level and engaging with the wider community.

Our submission is organised as a response to the guidance questions provided in the consultation paper [Appendix 1].

Focus of the National Strategy for ESD to 2030

We at MIE concur with the identified Key Priority Areas (KPAs) identified in the consultation paper. It is good to see that these are broadly reflective of the UNESCO priorities for ESD as outlined in the UNESCO Roadmap #ESD2030 (UNESCO, 2020).

These KPAs highlight the centrality of ESD to all aspects of educational policy and practice. They recognise that awareness and understanding of sustainable development must be prioritised within education; acknowledge that the skills, confidence and competence of educators is key to the

success of ESD; and encapsulate a holistic and integrative approach across all fields of formal and informal education and beyond.

Achievement Aims for National Strategy for ESD to 2030

These challenging times create an imperative to address sustainability issues comprehensively and definitively. The short timeframe available to us demands an innovative response, with unprecedented levels of cross-sectoral collaboration. Ultimately, the role of education for sustainable development is to raise awareness of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) in education settings; to mobilize action towards the achievement of the SDGs; to promote critical and contextual understanding of the SDGs (UNESCO, 2020). To achieve this, a co-ordinated, cross-sectoral response will be required to support educators and build their skills, knowledge and understanding of ESD, and to encourage and incentivise the embedding of ESD across all programmes of formal and informal education, as recognised in the consultation paper.

Challenges to delivering on ESD goals/targets

There are a number of challenges to realising the aims of ESD. We identify some of these below, and discuss ways in which these challenges may be met, by linking them with the Key Priority Actions (KPAs) identified in the consultation document.

Awareness of sustainability issues

Despite the news headlines, there is still a lack of understanding of sustainable development concepts, both among the general public and in education. To combat this, ESD must be prioritised across government policy and within education practice (KPA1). As the consultation paper points out, while significant advances have been made over the past 5 years, further efforts are required to ensure all learners are given the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of the issues facing them and what it means to live sustainably.

It is important too to continue to acknowledge the socio-economic, cultural and political aspects of ESD as well as the environmental aspects. Global citizenship education remains central to ESD, and education programmes must reflect that. MIE welcomes the broad and encompassing definition of ESD contained within the consultation paper (p. 4), which recognises the importance of all 4 pillars of ESD.

At MIE, our goal is to include global citizenship and the 17 SDGs in the curriculum of all our programmes, and we are making good progress towards that. ESD and citizenship education are incorporated across all years of our Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Professional Master of

Education (PME) programmes through Social Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), Equality Studies, Intercultural, and Development Education modules. Through the inclusion of a new module on ESD in our B.Sc. in Education Studies programme, and new electives on citizenship education and environmental education on our B.Ed. Programme, we continue to extend our commitment to ESD teaching and learning (KPA3).

Moving from awareness to positive action

Hope, positivity and agency are essential components of ESD. We must be conscious not to burden children with overwhelming and insoluble problems beyond aspects to which they can contribute. Big issues such as climate change, social injustice and biodiversity loss can be frightening. We must take care to teach about issues such as these in ways that inspire positive action rather than despair. Children have a right to understand the crucial issues facing the planet and to know that they can personally and collectively play a role in helping to shape the future. To do this, they must develop skills and competencies to tackle such complex issues (KPA4).

Taking part in age-appropriate positive action is one way to guard against the anxiety and helplessness that children might otherwise feel in the face of these issues. Engaging in social action with others gives a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy (Austin, 2020a).

The use of appropriate pedagogies

If the aim of ESD is to support learners to navigate the complexity of sustainability issues, to recognise connections and interdependencies, to cope with uncertainty, to imagine and articulate positive futures, then we need to define the teaching and learning processes and tools that can empower learners to achieve these outcomes (Wals and Dillon, 2015).

Wals and Dillon further argue that sustainability cannot be taught; rather, teachers must create environments which enable the exploration of sustainability issues such as climate change, food poverty and biodiversity loss. We must be sure that our teachers are equipped to create such environments (KPA3).

Thus, our initial and continuing teacher education programmes must ensure that students experience those environments for themselves, and be given opportunities to engage in activities that are based on appropriate pedagogies - those that are participatory, value the voice and agency of the learner, value criticality and reflection, and leave space for creativity and imagination. Inquiry-based learning (IBL) functions as an action-oriented and transformative approach to ESD, which motivates and empowers learners to connect with, care for and take action to protect their world. At MIE we implement inquiry-based pedagogies throughout our programmes, including specific modules on inquiry-based learning in our B.Ed. and BSc. in Early Childhood Education

programmes, our masters programme in Early Childhood Education and our dedicated masters programme in Inquiry –based learning. We prioritise critical thinking in our exploration of local and global justice issues and seeking of solutions; this is reflected in the approach we take to Global Citizenship Education, which is situated in critical development education perspectives (KPA3).

Curriculum Integration

It is vital that ESD is explicitly recognised and integrated into curriculum across all levels of education (KPA1). The consultation paper highlights the considerable progress that has been made since the publication of the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland 2014-2020 (DES, 2014). Indeed, the interim review of this strategy (DES, 2018) identified several significant achievements, including the integration of ESD into all new curricular developments by the NCCA.

However, the current Draft Primary Curriculum (NCCA, 2020) could do more to promote education for sustainable development. There is little evidence of prioritisation of ESD and integration into the curriculum at this level. Indeed, there are just two mentions of ‘sustainability’, one of ‘climate change’, and none of ‘citizenship’ within the document (compared to 27 instances of ‘wellbeing’). Given the recognised centrality of sustainable development and education for sustainability at government level both nationally and internationally, we feel that sustainability must be highlighted as an emerging priority for children’s learning.

The national and international research literature frequently cites the effectiveness of inquiry-based methodologies in supporting the development of students’ understanding of the world around them. Hence, an even greater emphasis on Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) in the revised curriculum framework is warranted. Ideas of children’s voice, choice and agency could also be emphasised in the framework. Effective sustainability education demands participatory pedagogies and therefore these must be supported within the new framework.

Key Actions for Priority Areas (up to 3 key actions/KPA)

KPA1: Advancing policy/policy coherence.

Key to advancing policy and ensuring policy coherence is ensuring that all stakeholders are consulted and given a voice, as evidenced by the current consultation process.

Opportunities for peer sharing through the provision and support of networking opportunities for institutions and organisations will also be central. The consultation paper suggests “Further focus should be given as to how trainers of educators can systematically provide opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, where pioneering educators can share knowledge while demonstrating how ESD can

be integrated step-by-step into daily teaching practices, and also to how educators themselves can employ innovative pedagogies to empower learners to become agents of change” (p.18). Support for Teacher Education Networks (such as the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education), strategic partnerships between academic institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and community organisations will be essential. MIE already benefits from a number of cross-sectoral partnerships, with organisations such as Irish Aid and Proudly Made in Africa, and through networks such as Development and Intercultural Education (DICE).

With regard to policy alignment, there must be cross-sectoral collaboration to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals and global citizenship are explicitly and comprehensively incorporated into curriculum at all levels.

The development of Quality Assurance Criteria for ESD, as suggested in the consultation paper, would both incentivise and prioritise the embedding of ESD across education programmes. We welcome the inclusion of Global Citizenship Education as a core element of the Teaching Council Céim Standards for Teacher Education, as an excellent example of embedding ESD across policy and practice.

[KPA2: Transforming learning and training environments.](#)

While sustainability principles have been integrated into teacher education along the continuum, we would agree that sustainable development links could be made more explicit. MIE has recently introduced a dedicated module on *Education for Sustainable Development* into its B.Sc. in Education Studies programme, and one on *Inquiry in the Natural Environment* in its B.Sc. in Early Childhood Education programme.

Opportunities to celebrate and incentivise the integration of ESD into teaching and learning should also be exploited. The Global Teacher and Green Campus awards good examples of what can be achieved through this approach.

Support for sustainability initiatives at operational and programme levels in institutions is also vital. At MIE we take a whole institution approach to sustainability, where learners are living what they learn. Sustainable practices are built into all areas of our campus operations, and embedded into our teaching and learning. We have recently brought together a team of student and staff advocates to lead sustainability initiatives in conjunction with the development of a Green Campus committee, to oversee our application for a Green Campus award from An Taisce.

MIE is also actively promoting the use of campus outdoor space as a learning environment. There have been many studies over the past decade which demonstrate the multiple benefits of learning outdoors. In the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic, there is a new emphasis on bringing teaching and learning outdoors, beyond the confines of the classroom. Recent developments on the MIE campus include the creation of a Geoboard, for teaching and learning in Mathematics and Visual Arts, a log seating circle for group work, and Labyrinth for reflection and meditation. We are lucky to have extensive woodland and meadows on our campus, and students regularly engage in activities such as den-building, sound-mapping, bug hunts and tree interviews as part of their learning in SESE.

It is important to note here the extent to which we as educators reflect upon the academic knowledge we present to learners, and how much we question our own assumptions and worldviews when planning content for teaching and learning. It is through challenging these perceptions, through a dialogue that acknowledges both academic and everyday knowledge, and holds both up to the light of interrogation, that we help learners to develop the intellectual tools to critically assess both, and it is in the interplay between the two that learners' understandings of the world may be challenged and reshaped. Our Strategic Plan (2021-2026) also commits us to staff training and development in all areas of diversity and inclusion, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Opportunities such as this are vital to the creation of a sustainable community of practice in our Institution, and could be replicated in other education institutions across the country.

MIE is also actively involved in sustaining and developing programmes that aim to diversify the education profession and broaden its socio-economic base. At MIE, we have developed several such programmes, for example:

- The Migrant Teacher Project aims to increase the participation of Immigrant Internationally Educated Teachers (IETs) in Irish primary and post-primary schools. Established by MIE and co-funded by the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Education, the project provides information, advice and training to migrant teachers who have qualified outside of Ireland, to help them to continue their profession in Ireland.
- TOBAR is a project aimed at increasing participation in initial teacher education for members of the Travelling community. TOBAR is funded under the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH).
- MIE's Storytime Project, in operation since 2010, supports children and parents in marginalised communities to develop a love of storybook reading by providing coaching in dialogic story reading.

- MIE is a member of the DICE project (<https://thediceproject.ie/>), a national strategic educational initiative, which promotes the integration of development education and intercultural education in Initial Teacher Education at primary level in Ireland. The DICE Project is implemented by four providers of initial teacher education at primary level, namely: Dublin City University Institute of Education; Marino Institute of Education; Mary Immaculate College and the Froebel Department in Maynooth University. MIE, through DICE, contributed to the recent consultation on the development of a new Irish Aid DE and GCE Strategy 2021 to 2024.

We recognise the importance of critical thinking leading to meaningful action and are committed to building skills for informed, meaningful action that is collective in nature. This is evidenced by the establishment of a student-led Sustainability Committee in MIE during 2020-21, which has been working towards a number of key campus-wide targets, supported by a number of key staff members. Students are thus engaged in imagining and exploring solutions for a better world.

KPA3: Building capacity for educators and trainers.

UNESCO's vision for educators is that, through the systematic integration of ESD into pre-service and in-service training, educators will have opportunities to develop capacities that will lead to transformative societal change towards a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2020).

Educators must provide learners both with the skills and the learning environment that will empower them to explore, navigate, and untangle the complex web of cultural and material processes that comprise global sustainability issues. Students are more likely to become critical thinkers if educators have established a culture of critical inquiry in their classrooms.

Inquiry provides a holistic approach to learning; it is multidimensional, encompassing the self, the local, and the global. It empowers learners to explore the affective and moral dimensions of social justice. A stance of inquiry invites us as educators to change our thinking about learning, and about our role in the classroom. Inquiry recognises the co-learning that takes place between teachers and students as they engage in their investigations. It is, by its nature, a participatory process. Teachers often fear handing over control to their students, but students need to know how to determine what is significant and worth pursuing – they need to be able to 'question the questions', to find which problems matter and are worth solving. Thus we must support teachers, both during initial teacher education and continuing professional development, to embrace the inquiry approach (Austin, 2020a). As recognised in MIE's strategic plan, developing an inquiry stance is core to the preparation of educators who demonstrate agency, integrity, deliberative decision-making skills, and a clear professional voice (MIE, 2021).

The consultation paper calls for enhanced continuing professional development (CPD) processes that support ESD. MIE currently offers such CPD opportunities through their Master of Education Studies (MES) programmes:

- The MES in Intercultural Learning and Leadership (MES-ICLL), which has been endorsed by the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), and which is open to practising teachers, takes a global justice lens to its examination of race and racism, linguistic and religious diversity, global citizenship education, school leadership models, and societal equity and justice.
- The MES in Inquiry-based Learning (MES-IBL) is an innovative and unique Masters course that taps into the widespread and growing interest in inquiry-based learning at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education. A key feature of the course is to build a community of inquiry among participants, with a focus on collaborative tasks both online and face-to-face.

Building on a series of webinars offered during 2020-21, which reached hundreds of practising teachers in English- and Irish-medium schools across the country, MIE also plans to establish a structured national programme of CPD for primary school teachers in association with selected Education Centres. These webinars would be supported by TeachMeet sessions to enable teachers to share their expertise, a website forum for the pooling of quality resource materials, and regular drop-in meeting opportunities with specialist staff on the programme, including with representatives of NGOs. The potential reach of online CPD is enormous, and support for initiatives such as these would be welcome.

KPA4: Empowering and mobilising youth.

As stated in the consultation paper (p.18), “Education aimed at young people should have a key focus on empowerment in taking action.”

As highlighted above, participatory and critical pedagogies, such as IBL, empower children to make informed choices in their lives, and to participate in decision-making about issues that affect them as individuals, as members of society and as citizens of the world. That is why it is crucial that teachers have the capacity and confidence to use these pedagogies in the classroom. Thus, as we have argued above, we must ensure that the principles of inquiry, and of being-with the world, are carried through to the teacher education environment, so that the learning in this environment can more authentically reflect a school environment that nourishes these principles for our children (Austin, 2020b). Teacher education institutions have a critical role to play in embedding ESD in schools.

KPA5: Accelerating sustainable solutions at local level and engaging with the wider community.

Transition theory points to the importance of establishing a contextualised framework for ESD, where schools can establish a localised curriculum that connects their young learners to existential issues in a way that is relevant to those learners – giving them space to investigate global issues within a local context. This means linking schools with their communities. At MIE we are committed to our local community, through initiatives such as Dublin Learning City and our partnerships with community groups such as Living in Marino and Dublin Beekeepers. We have a number of beehives onsite, managed by a local beekeeper, and these serve as a learning environment for our students with regard to food security, biodiversity and the All Ireland Pollinator Plan. Our research partnership with TCD Botany Department means that our campus serves as a study site for sustainability- and pollinator- related studies.







































At MIE we are also working with a number of local heritage sites, museums and cultural institutions to enhance their education programmes and develop initiatives in which the principles of ESD are embedded (for example, as a member of the Dublin Learning City Initiative; as a partner with Dublin Cemeteries Trust; through the My Primary School is at the Museum network).

ESD-related Research at MIE

MIE is a teaching, learning and research community committed to promoting inclusion and excellence in education. Good quality education has a well-recognized enabling role for many areas under the SDGs, e.g. decent work and economic growth, reduced inequality and health. While education was identified as a standalone goal (SDG 4), MIE is involved in a range of research projects specifically linked to ESD. The examples below offer insight into long standing and more recent efforts in strengthening MIE's ESD approach. Table 1 shows how current projects at MIE are linked to a UN-SDGs.

The *My Primary School is at the Museum* (MPSM) project looks at how to support educators' skills, confidence, understanding of inquiry pedagogies in environmental education. The *Supporting Inclusion and Diversity in Teaching* (SiDiT) project examines successful integration of migrant children in the classroom regardless of their socio-economic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, or abilities. The *Migrant Teacher Project* (MTP) aims to increase the participation of immigrant internationally educated teachers in Irish primary and post-primary schools. Finally, the TOBAR project aimed at increasing participation in initial teacher education for members of the Travelling community.

Table 1 Current MIE projects mapped to UN-SDGs

MPSM	SiDiT	MTP	TOBAR	Goals
				 1. No poverty
				 2. Zero Hunger
				 3. Good health and well-being
				 4. Quality Education
				 5. Gender equality
				 6. Clean water and sanitation
				 7. Affordable and clean energy
				 8. Decent work and economic growth
				 9. Industry, Innovation and infrastructure
				 10. Reduced inequality
				 11. Sustainable cities and communities
				 12. Responsible consumption and production
				 13. Climate action
				 14. Life below water
				 15. Life on land
				 16. Peace and justice strong institutions
				 17. Partnerships for the goal

Conclusion

It can thus be seen that MIE has embraced new modes of teaching, learning and engagement, harnessing our agility and reimagining our future. We promote criticality amongst our staff and students, to re-imagine our future in an ethical, sustainable and engaging way. We welcome this opportunity to contribute to government policy development around ESD with our response to the consultation on a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030.

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Appendix 1: Guidance questions from Public Consultation on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030

- Do you feel that the key priority areas proposed and outlined in this paper should constitute the main focus of the new National Strategy for ESD to 2030?
- What other priority areas, if any, do you think should be included?
- Should any of the priority areas proposed be excluded?
- What do you feel we should aim to achieve in respect of the above?
- What key actions could be taken in terms of advancing and further developing these priority areas? Please give three examples of suggested actions in each case.
- What, in your view, are the main challenges you/we face in delivering on ESD goals/targets?
- Are you or your organisation involved in research linked to ESD or the UN SDGs? If so, what is the main focus of your research?