



Consultation on the new National Strategy in Education for Sustainable Development
RCE Dublin Submission
27th June 2021

The Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development (RCE Dublin¹) at Dublin City University gained recognition from the United Nations University as a centre of excellence in educating, innovating and researching in ESD in 2014. RCE Dublin therefore has international recognition for excellence in ESD for its work on promoting education for sustainability across the nexus of formal and non-formal learning, and for frontier research on innovative pedagogies for integrating ESD in higher education. Moreover, RCE Dublin currently contributes to policy recommendations relating to ESD at the global level, through the work of its Director with the G20 policy think-tank² on matters such as youth-led transformative actions for ESD and ways to monitor and assess progress vis-a-vis SDG 4.7 at local, national and trans-national levels. The partnership of RCE Dublin³ welcomes this opportunity to contribute toward discussions for the framing of the new National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development. The RCE Dublin contributions within this submission address the priority areas of policy, education and training, and youth-led actions for sustainability.

Policy

At the governmental level, there must be allocation of appropriate levels of funding to education institutions and related-organisations for the implementation of the new National Strategy in ESD, to support the necessary re-orientations of curricula, pedagogies and related practices. In terms of the latter, there will also be a need to channel some funding through established regional and national ESD entities, such as RCE Dublin, that can harness existing networks to progress SDG 4.7 across both formal and non-formal learning contexts. Furthermore, there is a need to establish clear protocols for monitoring and assessing the integration of ESD at local, regional and national levels. This should be guided by good practice vis-à-vis policy formation for quality ESD at international levels⁴, and by culturally-responsive frameworks proven to be effective in holistically assessing transformative actions for sustainability at local and regional levels.

Education and Training

At an operational level, the new Irish National Strategy on ESD must include a national action plan for accelerating the integration of ESD across formal and non-formal learning contexts. To prepare young people to address issues of production and consumption, climate change and other SDG challenges, educators need to foster values-based, sustainability-oriented ecologies

¹ RCE Dublin in ESD, DCU: <https://rcedublin.ie>

² <https://www.t20italy.org/news/>

³ RCE Dublin was founded and is coordinated by Dublin City University and its partnership includes: Educate Together, An Taisce, Fighting Words, ECO-UNESCO, Just Forests, Dublin City Council, and Exchange House.

⁴ It may be beneficial for the relevant government departments to review the guidance within policy recommendations made in 2020 by Holland et al. to G20 leaders with respect to the monitoring and evaluation of ESD integration at national levels - Holland, C. et al. (2020) "Policy Brief: Collaborative strategy for SDG 4 Target 4.7: Monitoring progress in education for sustainable development and global citizenship education."
https://t20saudiArabia.github.io/PolicyBriefs/T20_TF7_PB2.pdf

of learning (Wals 2019) informed by a range of signature pedagogies including but not limited to: problem-based⁵, design-based⁶, challenge-based⁷ and technology-enabled learning. To support this, the action plan needs to prioritise the following:

1. Design and develop a suite of compact modules on ESD, that can be deployed with educators from pre-primary through to further and higher education. The modules should include coverage of the core concepts, principles, signature pedagogies and key competencies (as outlined by UNESCO 2017⁸) in education for sustainable development. They should also include case studies of effective ESD integration aligned within thematic areas outlined within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
2. Design and develop ‘capsule’ sustainability modules which can be integrated as short stand-alone inputs on sustainability, or combined for more sustained learning for sustainability within formal and non-formal education contexts.
3. Review curricula at all levels of formal education with a view to assessing and enhancing the infusion of SDG-related thematic content.
4. Monitor and assess progress on an on-going basis (using culturally-responsive frameworks) with respect to the implementation of ESD in formal education contexts, in collaboration with educational institutions, national centres of excellence in teacher education and professional bodies.
5. Conduct research to assess the outcomes from ESD practices across formal and non-formal contexts, with a focus on identifying ESD interventions that successfully develop agency for transformative action within the Irish context.

Youth

The new Irish National Strategy on ESD must integrate specific recommendations that enhance youth voice in decision-making for sustainability and that support youth-led transformative actions on sustainability, through consideration of the following:

1. Promotion of authentic youth participation in national policy and strategy formation in Ireland, by for example reforming registration rules and/ or lowering any age-based criteria as recommended by the OCED (2020)⁹.
2. Targeted financial and human resourcing to coordinate youth-inspired projects and to scale-up youth-led actions for sustainability at local, regional and national levels.

For more information, please contact the Director of RCE Dublin, by email on: rcedublin@gmail.com

⁵ Problem-based learning (Barrows 1996) is a student-centred approach in which learners engage in open-ended or real-world problem solving as a way to promote learning of concepts and principles (as opposed to direct presentation of facts and concepts).

⁶ Design-based learning (Nelson 1983) is an inquiry-based form of learning that integrates design thinking and design processes, that require collaboration with articulated roles, and the generation of ideas, prototyping and construction of artefacts.

⁷ Challenge-based Learning (Nicols and Cator 2009) is a framework for learning while solving real-world challenges, and is collaborative and hands-on in nature, involving sustained investigations through the identification and generation of big ideas, deep questioning, discovery and ultimately, the production of solutions aimed at solving the challenge.

⁸ Core sustainability competencies outlined by UNESCO in 2017 include but are not limited to: Systems thinking competency; Anticipatory competency; Values thinking competency; Strategic competency.

⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OCED. “Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?”, OCED. (2020). Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>