

Submission on ESD to 2030

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General response to the role of HEI's and *ESD to 2030*

As society's critical learning infrastructure, higher and further education institutions (HEI's) have a duty to facilitate a transition away from ecologically and economically unsustainable practices, toward sustainable and regenerative ones. *ESD to 2030* should strongly contribute to assisting HEI's through their teaching, research and societal engagement missions to redesign their day-to-day operations to reduce emissions, nurture biodiversity and assist society to address and adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis. If education is to play a role in such change, it will need to reinvent itself, and change from a system that facilitates competitive individualism, to one that drives social change, values of sustainability, solidarity and responsibility through its day-to-day practices.

Regarding *Ireland's Education for Sustainable Development Strategy to 2030 Consultation Paper*, it is encouraging to note the following:

- The comprehensive nature of the document and the call for consultation is commendable.
- The acknowledgement that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health crisis – it exposes the fragility of our interdependence with nature (and, we would add, 'with ourselves')
- The acknowledgement that Education plays a special role (SDG 4, clause 4.7) in contributing to building a more just and sustainable world
- The prioritization in the document of UNESCO's five integrated priority action areas.

With regard to the UNESCO Framework, we note the following:

- Perspectives on ESD are critiqued: “often ESD is interpreted with narrow focus on topical issues rather than with a holistic approach on learning content, pedagogy, and learning outcomes to bring about the fundamental behavioural shift to sustainable development”.
- ESD is seen as “as a key enabler of all SDGs and ...transforming society”.
- ESD is seen in terms of learning transformation, and enabling learners to “take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity”. It also values “a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education that enhances cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning”.
- UNESCO’s position that: “ESD in action is citizenship in action” and “ESD must pay attention to the deep structural causes of unsustainable development”; and that “ESD has to respond to the opportunities and challenges brought about by technological advances”.
- It promotes a broader critical sociological understanding of ESD “to trigger structural transformations in today’s economic and social systems by promoting alternative values and contextualized methods”.
- It recognises that this critical sociological understanding is always changing, thus, the need “to address the new opportunities and risks on sustainable development posed by emerging technologies”.
- Finally, there is an inherent critique that “education needs to transform itself”.

What key actions could be taken in terms of advancing and further developing the priority areas in Ireland’s Education for Sustainable Development Strategy to 2030 Consultation Paper? Give examples of suggested actions in each case?

Priority 1 Advancing policy:

The current narrow *market oriented* framing of education in much HEI policy, is in need of urgent critique, in favour of a more holistic, humanistic, community-engaged and sustainable model of education for Higher Education. We agree that ESD for 2030 must aim “to build a more just and sustainable world through strengthening ESD and contributing to the achievement of the 17 SDGs”. This requires a paradigm shift in education – a move away from supporting a focus on the market, 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. Education systems and institutions perhaps can, and indeed should, be vehicles for this transformation. However, they are often extremely conservative, mostly acting as a site for reproduction of the established order and related practices. This is in stark contrast to the values we need in place if education systems and institutions are to play an active role in addressing the climate crisis. Thus 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.

Prioritise HEI Civic & Community Engagement and integrate ESD as one core aspect of HEI Third Mission activities.

We recommend connecting *ESD to 2030* with the third mission and civic role of Universities, especially linking with the Irish Universities Association (IUA) Campus Engage initiative, an important fulcrum for advancing civic & community engagement as a key focus of Irish universities over the last

decade. Campus Engage, uniquely positioned to support aspects of the implementation of *ESD to 2030* in the university sector, serves as a sectoral lynchpin for the strategic promotion of engaged research, community based learning, volunteering, outreach and partnerships. In recent times, each University member of the IUA has established an Engagement Office to support and coordinate this national agenda locally.

Higher Education Institutions should have ESD plans that are ambitious, timely and resourced; as well as being regularly monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness

These should include strategic and operational ESD plans; ESD plans for validating and promoting effective researchers and practitioners in the field; and plans for making more visible the status and volume and range of ESD work in the university. Research-informed and action-based practices must be prioritised by the institution.

Higher Education Institutions should 'live and breathe' sustainable development

In teaching, research and engagement policies and practices, the principle of sustainability ought to be 'at the heart' of what it is universities do. Democratising education, giving clear and authentic expression to student 'voice' and enabling empowering educational opportunities on matters relating to 'who we are in relation to nature and to ourselves' is essential for ESD to 'live and breathe' on, across and outside Irish campuses.

Annual funding call and establish a National Forum to collectively progress ESD in the HE sector

Stakeholders within, across and outside the university sector can work towards achieving critical mass for change. These members should meet and be responsible for driving deliverables in ESD. They could hold an annual national forum to give greater visibility to the status and importance of ESD. Well-resourced work could then 'feed into' the National Strategy on Higher Education (which hitherto makes no provision for ESD funding).

Priority 2 Transforming Learning Environments

Respect diverse ways of knowing and reshape the knowledge structures of HEI's to address the complexity of climate change.

Approaches to HEI knowledge development need to change fundamentally. This includes decolonising knowledge production and the recognition of multiple epistemologies. It includes respect for ***engaged research*** and the co-construction of knowledge with society and broadening our research and learning approaches to become more participatory. It involves free and open access to most research findings as an ethical commitment. It involves recognising the rights of communities to develop, own, control, access and possess their own knowledge.

Promote constructivist teaching - inquiry-based and transformative pedagogical approaches (including online collaborative) - across HEI's

There is a need to shift from didactic teaching (imparting curriculum content) to a constructivist paradigm- that is inquiry-based (including online collaborative) and transformative. Approaches to ESD should not only seek out student voice, but actively respond to it, and empower young people to explore issues and take action, incorporating active learning and positioning learners as part of a solution.

Here, there should be a focus on appropriate, relevant pedagogical approaches to ESD. Central to the work of the Irish Universities Association Campus Engage initiative, and by extension each

participating university is **Community Based Learning**, an evidenced based and internationally recognised and proven high impact pedagogy. The IUA's Campus Engage works to embed, scale and promote accredited student community-based learning and teaching (CBLT) on campuses across Ireland. Community-based learning and teaching are academic approaches that seek to enhance student learning outcomes, while working in partnership with society, NGO's and CSO's, to act on local and global societal challenges. This form of experiential education engages students in 'real life' problem solving, and is grounded in principles of knowledge co-production with society that nurture global citizenship and working collectively in a transformative manner on solutions to key global challenges of the 21st Century. *ESD to 2030*, working with the IUA Campus Engage, would have a national mechanism for a coordinated, effective and impactful sectoral approach to integrating ESD within the curriculum of universities.

Take a 'whole of university' approach

Locally UCC's Academic Strategy and *Connected Curriculum*, is a national exemplar framework for a whole university approach to integrating civic & community engagement and sustainability in the curriculum. This framework is supported by a staff professional development effort and related resources. UCC is developing a toolkit for integrating sustainability and civic & community engagement across the curriculum. To be most effective, ESD requires engagement with society. Accordingly, UCC's approach affords our students the opportunity to experience teaching approaches that immerse students in community based learning and problem solving with societal partners. <https://www.ucc.ie/en/registrar/theconnecteduniversity/academicstrategy/curriculum/>.

Refocus the educational mission of institutions to support students to develop the emotional, intellectual and practical capacities to live well with one another and with the planet in the era of climate change.

We recommend that Ireland adopt the *Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (2018), as a whole systems approach across primary, secondary, FET and higher education. A related exemplar is UCC's *Graduate Attributes Programme* (GAP), which refers to the skills, knowledge and abilities of our graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, that are applicable in a range of contexts in their lives. Our whole of university approach emphasises among other dimensions, being *socially responsible* and effective *global citizens*, who recognise and challenge inequality. With a focus on developing core values and attributes, the initiative takes a holistic educational approach to develop our student's character, professionalism and the capacity for critical and creative thought.

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/graduateattributes/>

Priority 3 Building the capacity of educators in HEI's

Promote greater levels of policy coordination across Education Agencies

Specifically, we would like to see clear educational policy connections made between the DES (and related bodies The Teaching Council and the NCCA) and the Department of Further and Higher Education (and related bodies SOLAS, ETBs and Adult & Community Education organisations). This is already happening – for example, in Initial Teacher Education (Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education In accordance with Section 38 of the Teaching Council Acts, 2001-2015) Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is now highlighted as a 'core element'. The meaning of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) includes reference to ESD; well-being (personal and community); Social Justice; and Interculturalism.

Promote a consistent and agreed ESD terminology and standards

It is vitally important that a nationally agreed consistent ESD terminology and standards (formal and informal) are put in place, and be widely communicated and shared amongst the education communities and their partners.

Promote ESD linked staff progression and promotion pathways

Structured Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities should be made available – and extra resources allocated – for ESD training and progression, and staff that (often voluntarily) who commit to doing this work should see new progression and promotion pathways open to them. We suggest that all those who teach in the 21st Century university be exposed to ESD training supports and developments. Linked to this, we would hope that a systematic ESD capacity development appraisal be made across university contexts in Ireland and that action on ESD awareness and provision be effected in the most research-informed and sustainable manner. 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.

Appoint ESD Teaching Fellows

Teaching for ESD is a complex craft (that can be effected in simple ways) and those who are experienced in understanding and practising transformative approaches to teaching should be encouraged to take on a special educator role in the university (for internal staff and outside teacher-professional cohorts). Those who have practised transformative pedagogical approaches and understand how transformative actions occur need to be cherished and promoted in the university. These educators understand that ESD requires a community-engaged participatory approach to teaching and research e.g. partnerships with local communities, NGOs, parents, learners, policy-makers, national and global ESD-focused organisations, established research/scholarly networks (e.g. Academic Network on Global Education and Learning or ANGEL / Development Education Research Centre (DERC) in University College London), etc.

Strengthen links with the Irish Aid funded Ubuntu Network

As educators, we are particularly interested in this priority. The UCC School of Education works with the national (Irish Aid-funded) Ubuntu Network to actively promote Development Education (now commonly referred to as Global Citizenship Education or GCE) within post-primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) – see <https://idestucc.com/>. This is a priority area for UCC and we would like to see it further explored in the new Strategy.

Promote research for ESD as an integral part of the teaching profession and preparation

We in UCC are particularly engaged in meeting SDG Target 4.7. We recognise the challenges involved in raising awareness of this goal; promoting critical and contextualised understandings and critiques of ESD; and mobilising action towards the achievement of the SDGs both within and without the organisation. We suggest Universities help 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. In doing so, include all educators, as each has important role to play in ESD, regardless of their individual subject disciplinary area.

Priority 5 Communities: Accelerating sustainable solutions at local level and engaging with the wider community

Support the civic role of HEI's to build ecologically and socially resilient communities

The third mission and civic role of Universities, is an important aspect of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*. The IUA's Campus Engage initiative, established to drive this agenda forward in a coordinated way across the university sector, serves as a sectoral lynchpin for the strategic promotion of university societal engagement. In addition, each university has established an Engagement Office to support this locally.

We recommend that *ESD to 2030*:

- Supports HEI and Community collaborations across engaged research, community based learning, volunteering, outreach and partnerships.
- Builds HEI research capacity to develop research informed and intersectional approaches to understanding and addressing local and regional equality, diversity and inclusion challenges. Supporting and enabling all citizens to develop a baseline understanding of these issues is important.
- Engages HEI's in providing a robust evidence base to better inform policy, decision making and the development of services in communities. e.g. UCC research support for Lets Grow Together in North Cork. <https://letsgrowtogether.ie/>
- Leverages the research capabilities of the Higher Education sector in particular, to inform policy in the area of education for sustainable development, as well as the teaching of and learning in relation to ESD.

Promote Lifelong Learning as an important focus of university outreach

- Support institutions to rebalance their educational offerings to support retraining and education of adults transitioning away from high-carbon forms of work.
- Embed different levels of environmental literacy within adult provision, particularly in creating new pathways and routes.
- Offer adult learners an entitlement to learn about the environment and climate change and to develop their environmental literacy.
- Use andragogic principles to design learning experiences relating to the environment and climate change, which are meaningful, active, learner led and result in tangible outcomes and positive change.
- Via adult education, focus on the use and application of technologies to explore and develop environmental literacy and to actively address environmental degradation through meaningful learning and knowledge sharing.
- Value the importance of the UNESCO Learning City initiative and its potential and centrality in advancing ESD in the wider community.
- HEI's should be supported to offer a variety of short courses on Data and Digital Literacy to further develop these skills among citizens – as these skills are essential to engaging with and supporting citizens across every SDG. Many of the existing available education in this area is outdated, further exacerbating the digital divide that exists in Ireland and other jurisdictions.
- Digital healthcare is a means of delivering healthcare and health related resources in a sustainable, safe, flexible, accessible, equitable and effective way. HEI's should promote, support, and further develop capacity and capability among healthcare professionals and citizens to engage in/ with Digital Healthcare.