

National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030

Submission from the DICE Project to Department of Education and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science June 2021

DICE is a national strategic educational project implemented by four partner institutions responsible for initial teacher education at primary level: Marino Institute of Education (MIE); Froebel Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Maynooth University (MU); DCU Institute of Education (DCU) and Mary Immaculate College (MIC). This collaborative project began in 2003 and the overall aims of the DICE project are to develop and extend staff capacity and expertise in the four partner institutions and integrate development and intercultural education into primary level initial teacher education (ITE) programmes. The DICE Network has significant experience as researchers and experts in the field of teacher education and global citizenship education.

DICE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this ambitious National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030. We are in agreement that whilst the current global challenges are great, our commitment as a country to ESD to ensure a safe and sustainable future for all is essential. Improved communication between DFA and DES has resulted in greater openness towards a cohesive delivery of development education and at sectoral level, there has been increased cooperation between agencies, formal education and non-formal education sectors.

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?

The selection of the key priority areas in alignment with the priority action areas of the UNESCO ESD to 2030 roadmap is useful and provides a coherent framework within which Ireland can contribute. The development of collaboration between initiatives around sustainability is a success and the start of a journey towards a place where the parallel areas of synergy in development and sustainability can be established.

In relation to Area 2 - the Education and Training priority area; the current lack of oversight of ESD across the continuum of education from early years through primary, post-primary and higher education levels is a gap that warrants further research which could guide the strategy. Placing ESD as a core part of education is vital to achievement of the strategy. This centralising of ESD could ensure deep engagement with the concepts and methodologies required for meaningful education for sustainable development, but only if it involves a criticality in ESD teaching and learning.

In relation to Area 3 – Educators; as professional teacher educators, we acknowledge that at a primary level, there is considerable scope for working with NQTs and DICE Alumni within the Droichead framework, and a clear need for the inclusion of GCE/ESD workshops within that programme. The need for relevant CPD for all teachers exists within the continuum of teacher education and all providers of CPD should be of high quality with expertise in the relevant area. This capacity development of educators would be enhanced by peer-learning opportunities and a collaborative approach to learning from good practice and relevant action research.

Acknowledging the success of certain programmes at different levels within the education sector, there is a need that the new strategy incorporates research findings and is not based just on programme evaluations.

What other priority areas, if any, do you think should be included?

In light of the greater diversity in Irish society and in student cohorts at HE level, and the growing consciousness around racial inequalities in Ireland, there is a need for the complexity of racial justice to be addressed in schools and communities. The new strategy should acknowledge the importance of intercultural education. It is crucial that race equality is not neglected in the discourse. This is a complex area that touches on one's own privilege and fragility and on sensitivities about historical and contemporary inequalities both in an Irish context and globally; whilst some might find this challenging, it is essential that it is part of the new strategy. Based on the experience of The DICE Project, there is clear appetite among student teachers to deepen their understanding of race issues as they enter classrooms. However, for those already working in schools, there must be an opportunity to update one's knowledge and understanding in relation to inter-culturalism and race equality.

Across the strategy, there is also a need to address the differing terms of inclusivity and interculturalism, in tandem with the use of the terms in the Céim Standards. A position paper on language and terminology which may illuminate some of these issues and tensions in a more in-depth manner would be welcomed to ensure that a shared understanding and appreciation of each can be ascertained and not serve to distract from the essence of the educational value of each term and its historical context.

As it stands, there are many, varying and sometimes overlapping definitions of development education, intercultural education, global citizenship education and education for sustainable development that practitioners avail of in Ireland.

DE practitioners in the UK and Europe operate from a similar starting point and what is common throughout their definitions is that DE is a dynamic and participatory process which aims to deepen people's understanding of global inequality and the interconnectedness of people and events around the world. For teaching and learning to have a DE focus, it should include multiple perspectives, a link between the local and the global, critical thinking and encourage action toward a more just and equal world. DE questions political and unequal power relations between the developing and developed nations and encourages us to consider our own complicity in global injustice.

Should any of the priority areas proposed be excluded?

Policy, Education and Training, Educators, Youth, Communities – are all worthy priority areas and the expansion of research to guide the work in these areas would be a welcome move to ensure the longevity and sustainability of the ESD Strategy across these sectors.

What do you feel we should aim to achieve in respect of the above?

1. Policy – Alignment and coherence within Ireland and the wider EU and UN strategies. Particular structures need to be in place to ensure that there is clarity around the roles of the two Departments involved and how it complements other government department policies e.g. DFA Irish Aid strategies.

The inclusion of the National Action Plan Against Racism is important in the list of policies with which coherence is sought.

ESD/DE/ICE/GCE is a complex and contested discipline. In addition to defining them, it is necessary to understand its intersectionality with other issue-based educations. From a DICE perspective, it is important to note that in Ireland, DE is most commonly associated, in particular in initial teacher education, with intercultural education (ICE). The NCCA conceptualises ICE as education which respects and celebrates the

normality of diversity and supports students to identify and challenge prejudice and discrimination in their daily lives. ICE converges with DE in terms of ‘almost all’ (Fitzgerald, 2007) its key values, with a particular focus on a social justice base and scaffolding concerned agency among students.

There is much complexity associated with the conceptualisation and implementation of DE, stemming from its diverse and pluralistic nature (Bryan and Bracken, 2011). As a result, the positive side of this complexity is that DE draws on a myriad of perspectives and wealth of cross-disciplinary knowledge for its pedagogy. This richness and diversity should be represented in any future iterations of a strategy on ESD to ensure that teaching and learning could be approached in an authentic, contextualised and coherent way. Clarity on the terminology in the policy would be a welcome addition.

2. Education and Training – Recognition of the differences between primary and post-primary is important to consider in any new strategy. Differences across the levels of formal education need to be respected and accommodated. Primary schools do not have the same patronage/management systems and networks that post-primary schools have. The high proportion of small 4-5 teacher schools with multi-class settings needs to be considered when developing resources or programmes for primary schools. There is also a risk of focus on what schools are doing towards a rewards scheme over the depth of what the children are learning. As we seek to contribute to the deeper understanding of global justice issues, it is crucial that there is a focus on learning, in addition to activities. This is an important but complex process that requires a longitudinal approach and sophisticated research and analysis beyond quantitative data collection.

3. Educators

Through DICE, there are specialist modules in GCE in ITE and as such has a cohort of knowledgeable and experienced teachers graduating. Options for their further in-service development is a gap at the moment. Longitudinal work with NQTs and DICE Alumni would help inform our teacher education programmes. The use of rich qualitative research methods to garner information on effective creative methodologies used with children to address the issues of global justice and inter-culturalism would be an asset.

4. Youth and 5. Communities

A mapping exercise showing the areas where organisations are working on GCE and DE topics would be useful for both formal and non-formal education sectors.

Further clarity on the definition and measurement tools of ‘engagement’ would increase the understanding in relation to depth and breadth of ESD initiatives.

There is a need for investment in longitudinal research in GCE and ESD. As a network of researchers, DICE feels it is important that there is diversity in the research funding beyond measuring impact and evaluation.

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.

1. For the strategy to be on par with the numeracy and literacy strategies which were widely adopted across schools, it must be funded. The National Strategy on ESD is important and this importance is often recognised when funding supports its implementation through financial provision for events, consultations, personnel and communications.
2. A central point of case studies, resources, providers and research would be a welcome addition and could be achieved through an online platform accessible to all. This could help to further develop the sharing of good practice across institutions and within sectors. It could involve a stakeholder mapping exercise including both public and private engagements with schools, youth and communities.
3. Technology can assist the teaching and learning of global citizenship education in a number of different ways. Much of DE is concerned with the inclusion of multiple perspectives, in particular, Southern voices in debates and discussions on development issues. The use of technology in this regard could have scope to explore links of solidarity between people in different parts of the world and examine how actions taken in one place can have consequences locally, nationally or internationally.

What, in your view, are the main challenges you/we face in delivering on ESD goals/targets?

A. Impact of Covid 19 on Strategy Development at this time

While reflecting on the complexities of the Covid-19 crisis, it might be tempting to rush to 'lesson-learning' in order to help us make sense of our experiences over the last year. However, it is important to remember that we are still in the throes of this crisis and as a result it is not yet possible to make recommendations in any confident or evidence-based manner. The pivot to remote delivery of development education across a wide range of educational contexts over the last year, was done in the context of an unprecedented global emergency. While this might have had a positive impact on the reach of educational interventions, whether it had an impact on the quality of the education that was delivered has yet to be determined.

As a result, at this juncture, it is essential to remember the critical pedagogy of development education. The focus on debate, discussion and dialogic praxis in DE is at the core of its emancipatory roots. Active and participatory methodologies have a huge part to play in encouraging learners to be proactive agents of change. In DE there is a focus on inclusive, dialogic and non-didactic ways for the teacher to impart information to their class. These methodologies take learners through a process of awareness raising, to critical thinking which then leads to informed action.

The shift to the online delivery had a real impact on the extent to which active, participative and dialogic methodologies could be modelled in an online space. In teacher education, lecturers have worked hard to create a space for students to examine global issues, reflect on their positionality and explore their underlying values system. In spite of efforts to meet this challenge in a confident, creative and skilful manner, these objectives have been extremely challenging to meet in an online environment. In some instances, complex and/or sensitive content had to be postponed as online learning would not have done justice to the themes/topics. From a DICE perspective in teacher education, the 'digital divide' and equitable access to online content was an issue for some learners. Some students struggled to engage in the remote delivery due to inadequate wifi, unreliable access to devices, or because they did not have a safe or appropriate study space where they could participate meaningfully in class discussions. The sense of isolation and distance that many learners experienced during this time warrants further examination.

The flexibility of online learning carries the potential to utilise a variety of media and teaching techniques e.g. small group work, independent tasks, checking in with students; using a variety of formative assessment strategies. From a pedagogical perspective, digital learning can be used to scaffold independent research on a global topic among pupils, to incorporate interactive games/ quizzes/ stimulus questions into class time, or within the strand of media education, to analyse how certain global topics are approached in different forms of media in different parts of the world. Recommendations arising from a recent report in Ireland on the potential of digital technologies to advance GCE in schools include: the need to focus on pedagogical strategies rather than specific technologies; a focus on the possibilities that technology can offer teachers CPD through blended programmes; well designed initiatives that include aspects of connecting with others using digital technology enhances a more nuanced understanding of the world; digital literacy and GCE are two dynamic and diffuse fields that are integrated areas of formal education, rather than discrete subject areas (Martinez-Sainz & Barry, 2020). Full report:

https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/chrce/digital_technologies_to_advance_gce_in_schools.pdf

B: Public Understanding

It is crucial to note that development educators advocate for a much wider brief than public awareness; whereby DE is conceptualised as a space where people are equipped to problematise contemporary global justice issues. New iterations of policy in this area should avoid the tendency to see the idea of increasing awareness of ESD used synonymously with the concept of development education. These are two separate endeavours which should arguably have discrete objectives, diverse outcomes and separate reporting mechanisms.

This remains a key debate for the DE sector – how to balance the need for public information and confidence in aid programmes or charitable organisations, and the importance of acknowledging the power of DE as a broader educational process. This debate could be enhanced by on-going dialogue about the appropriateness of a results-based approach to DE which is characterised by a focus on numbers, results and ‘measurable’ outcomes. An empiricist preoccupation with targets and indicators is not always appropriate in an education context where some outcomes may take considerable time to emerge. Medium and long-term participative reflections on process and outcomes are an invaluable part of any evaluation and learning process and educational success and attitudinal changes develop over much longer periods of time.

C: Research

Research is a key area in need of strategic investment and will result in a better-informed and enhanced delivery of ESD. A research focussed working group or advisory board would be a valuable asset in helping to decide on the research gaps that currently exist and the VfM around longitudinal studies. Any new programme in schools should be based on a needs assessment and research, and changes in curriculum should have input from expert teacher educators.

Engagement of the various parties currently involved in CPD for primary teachers could greatly enhance the in-service provision of DICE related topics by identifying gaps and developing a collaborative approach. Acknowledging the need for both qualitative and quantitative data, a discussion on how the information being collected by Government Departments can be used to inform decision-making would be worthwhile.

Developing the research capacity of all involved in ESD beyond monitoring and evaluation would have far-reaching benefits for ESD in Ireland.

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?

Each of the DICE Lecturers in the four partner institutions of DICE are involved in research as follows and full details can be found on these links:

- Brigid Golden, Mary Immaculate College: <https://www.mic.ul.ie/staff/216-brigid-golden>
Development education; global citizenship; education about ethics; intercultural education; critical thinking, and teacher education.
- Rowan Oberman, Dublin City University: https://www.dcu.ie/researchsupport/research-profile?PERSON_ID=1888293#tab-research
Children's rights, human rights education, climate change education and global citizenship education.
- Dr. Barbara O Toole, Marino Institute of Education: https://www.mie.ie/en/about_us/staff_directory/dr_barbara_o_toole.html
Intercultural education; anti-racism; global justice education; human rights education; religious diversity and intercultural education, Teacher education,
- Aoife Titley, Maynooth University: <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/aoife-titley#2>
Development education policy and practice; Intercultural education policy and practice; Diversifying teacher education; Activism in primary schools; International service learning (sending programmes); Human rights education.