

Contribution from the United Kingdom

1. England

England does not have a National Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). However, there is activity taking place at national and local level by government, practitioners, the voluntary sector and schools to continue promoting the benefits of Education for Sustainable Development.

Sustainable development is part of the UK's Coalition Agreement, which states that we 'need to protect the environment for future generations, make our economy more environmentally sustainable, and improve our quality of life and wellbeing'.

The Department for Education is committed to sustainable development and believes it is important to prepare young people for the future. Our approach is based on the belief that schools perform better when they take responsibility for their own improvement. We want schools to make their own judgments on how sustainable development should be reflected in their ethos, day-to-day operations and through education for sustainable development. Those judgments should be based on sound knowledge and local needs.

Multiple sources of evidence suggest that being a sustainable school raises standards and enhances young people's well-being. Research supports the idea that this is because sustainable schools engage young people in their learning, thereby improving motivation and behaviour, and also promote healthy school environments and lifestyles. Saving resources such as energy and water can also save schools significant sums of money. There are also physical and psychological benefits related to walking or cycling to school, eating more healthily and spending time in nature

One of the Prime Minister's first announcements on taking office in May 2010 was that this would be the 'greenest government ever'. In February 2011, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced that government would mainstream sustainable development across all Whitehall policies and operations. In the Department for Education, this includes producing a Departmental Adaptation Plan, which is part of the National Adaptation Programme required by the Climate Change Act 2008. The plan focuses on the effect of overheating on children, our school building programme and how we operate our own estate.

Support for schools

The Department is helping schools to be more sustainable by working closely with the Sustainable Schools Alliance. The lead umbrella organisations, Sustainability and Environmental Education (SEEd) and the National Children's Bureau, are working together to provide a clear and compelling offer of support to all schools in the country. This will help and encourage schools to put sustainability at the heart of what they do.

The Department posts information for schools on ESD on its website including a recently updated "Top Tips for Sustainability in Schools". We also work with other government departments and organisations to promote energy efficiency in schools.

2. Scotland

Scotland has produced a web-based Action Plan: “Learning for Change”. If you are unable to access the document, please let me know and I will send it to you. Scotland has also provided the following statement, which is published on their website.

UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development began on January 1, 2005 and aims to promote education as a basis for a more sustainable society and to integrate sustainable development into education at all levels and all areas of life including communities, the workplace and society in general. More details can be found on UNESCO's website.

The Scottish Government has launched a web-based Action Plan - Learning for Change- setting out the actions to be taken forward in the second half of the Decade. This is supported by supporting sections on schools, universities and colleges, and Community Learning and Development. Information on recent sectoral activity can be found by clicking on these links.

To continue the strong collaboration and engagement with stakeholders which was a feature of the first half of the Decade, each of the three areas set up a steering group to oversee progress in delivering its actions, and a continuing programme of conferences involving all sectors of education in Scotland has been delivered, the latest of which, “Values in Sustainability Education”, was held on 13 December 2011.

The conference explored what was meant by values and how they influenced attitudes and behaviour with particular reference to education for sustainable development. Delegates were given the chance to discuss how values were relevant in their respective sectors of education, take part in case studies on projects aimed at achieving environmental behaviour change, and reflect on possible ways of continuing to deliver education for sustainable development once the UN Decade has concluded.

3. Wales

Wales have produced “Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship – A Strategy for Action”. This can be viewed here. If you are unable to access the document, please let me know and I will send it to you.

If you wish to view further documents that Wales have produced in relation to ESD, these can be accessed under the “related links” section of this page. Please note that the summary web-text on this page will be updated next month.

