UE4SD Innovation Report – Year 1

2013 – 2014

September 2014

Introduction

This Innovation Report is the first annual review of significant developments in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Higher Education (HE), as part of the *University Educators for Sustainable Development* (UE4SD) project. The UE4SD initiative addresses the need for effective professional development in ESD, for staff who teach and support student learning in HE institutions, in order to reorient the curriculum and extend the contribution of HE to sustainable futures through education and learning.

The project is identifying leading practices, developing resources and piloting a training academy for ESD professional development. The Innovation Reports aim to situate this European project within the changing global landscape of HE, ESD and professional development and to ensure that the core thinking and outcomes of the project are informed by an up-to-date and international perspective.

This first report spans important developments in the first year of the project from September 2013 to September 2014. It focuses on:

- significant international initiatives at the close of the UNESCO Decade of ESD (2005-14);
- the present policy landscape and potential for ESD in the European HE Area;
- signs of rising demand for ESD in the curriculum among HE student populations;
- examples of recent innovations in ESD of relevance to the UE4SD project.

International ESD Dialogues:

In the first year of UE4SD there has been significant activity taking place in ESD across the globe. In 2015 the UNESCO Decade of ESD (DESD) comes to its close and its final conference in 2014 in Nagoya, Japan, will draw

conclusions about the progression of ESD in education systems at all levels. The dialogues taking place at this conference will then feed into the new UNESCO Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD[1], taking account of insights that have emerged in the DESD across all parts of the education sector. The GAP documentation outlines five Priority Action Areas, with an emphasis on the need for partnership approaches at all levels:

1) mainstreaming ESD into education and sustainable development policies to create an enabling environment for ESD and bring about systemic change;

2) integrating sustainability principles in education and training settings;

3) increasing the capacities of educators and trainers for effective delivery of ESD;

4) generating actions among youth; and

5) encouraging local communities and municipal authorities to develop community-based ESD programmes.

The GAP plans also explain the types of activities needed to increase momentum and real impact in ESD:

- strengthening ESD policy development and integration of ESD at all levels of government
- promoting whole-institution approaches in formal education at all levels and in non-formal education,
- integrating ESD in teachers' pre-service and in-service training
- supporting youth-led initiatives for ESD
- developing ESD programmes for local communities/municipalities.

This aligns with the findings of the Global Monitoring and Evaluation (MEEG) report[2] for the UN DESD points to the leadership challenges in embedding ESD in the HE sector and the momentum to address ESD within the curriculum across continents, with evidence of moves away from 'bolt-on' approaches to more fundamental curriculum reorientation to 'build in' ESD (UNESCO 2014, p.120). The report also highlights the substantial need for staff development and capacity-building, to support ESD curriculum development and the associated academic change processes, as well as the importance of HE institutional networks in progressing this agenda.

In line with this focus on professional development and institutional networks to support ESD, the UE4SD project submitted to UNESCO to outline its potential for contribution to the GAP. In response to the suggested

---

[1] UNESCO (2014) *Roadmap for Implementing the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development*, Paris: UNESCO.

[2] UNESCO (2014) S*haping the Future we Want: UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2015-2014) Final Report*, Paris: UNESCO.

actions outlined in the MEEG 2014 report, the UE4SD GAP commitment proposal[3] outlines the potential for partnership working with UNESCO that builds on the UE4SD Training Academy in ESD, to continue this initiative for training university educators and extending the training more widely beyond the UE4SD partnership.

At the same time, events being held in Japan in November 2014 through the UNU (*International Conference on HE for Sustainable Development: HE beyond 2014* and annual RCE conference) and UNEP (the *Global Universities Partnership on Environment for Sustainability* partnership forum) are contributing to dialogues about ESD and cross-sectoral engagement. These forums are providing important opportunities for further reflection among HE stakeholders, about the place and role of HE in ESD, as well as the way HE can connect with other sectors and communities, to support education and learning in this area[4].

The critical importance of ESD within the sustainable development movement is also becoming better understood, internationally and outside the education sector. As dialogues continue following Rio+20, to establish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will support the post-2015 development agenda, there is an expectation that the SDGs will also need to address the provision of training and professional development in ESD, through formal education as well as social learning processes.

European HE Landscape and ESD:

The first year of the UE4SD project identified policy developments for ESD at the national level. There are now an increasing number of national level policy statements on ESD emerging, although many of these lack specific focus on HE or recognition of the important role of HE in advancing ESD. The early indicators showed that:

- 3 examples of national development plans for HE that give some focus to ESD
- 12 HE Acts mention ESD specifically (5 in the West, 3 North, 3 East, and 1 South)
- 11 countries have national legislation addressing ESD in HE (6 East, 2 North, 2 West, and 1 South)

---

[3] UNESCO (2014) Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development – Launch commitments: COPERNICUS Alliance & UE4SD: https://unesco4esd.crowdmap.com/reports/view/172

[4] The UE4SD project will be represented at these events by the Project Director and the Steering Group Members from Spain, Germany and Czech Republic. This participation will be financed by external agencies. The Group discussed how best to share the goals of the UE4SD partnership and the outcomes to date.

However, UE4SD mapping processes at regional level indicated that only 9 countries to date have called for professional development in ESD for the HE sector (3 in the South, 3 in the East, 2 in the North and 1 in the West). HE sector initiatives for the professional development of academic staff responsible for teaching, learning and curriculum are currently rare or they are in the early stages of development.

As EU countries have joined the Bologna process over recent years and many regions are working to modernise their HE systems, opportunities to connect ESD with these wider changes are being identified. For example, as the Bologna Follow-up Group considers proposals and principles for shared Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European HE Area, there is potential for ESD to inform dialogues on curriculum quality and educational enhancement (an area in which the UK Quality Assurance Agency has recently published its own sector guidelines – see below).

The UNECE Strategy for ESD[5] (adopted in 2005) is a flexible framework for implementing ESD and is to be adapted by member states based on their needs and priorities. Its main aim is to encourage countries to integrate ESD into all forms of their education systems and covers all levels from primary to tertiary, including vocational and adult learning. One of the priority action areas of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development for implementation phase III (2011-2015) is to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into teacher education. At its eighth meeting in March 2013, the Steering Committee voiced its strong commitment to continue implementing the Strategy for ESD on the regional (UNECE) level beyond implementation phase III. Priorities for a continued implementation phase regarding HE will be to expand the focus on schools to other forms and institutions of education, in particular to pre-school and HE, as well as continued focus on teacher education.

Further opportunities are emerging at the regional level, which will help to ensure that the work of UE4SD on ESD professional development remains closely connected to European-level developments in sustainability in HE. The *Copernicus Alliance* network is an important network in this area, which has prioritised ESD themes at its conferences in 2013 and 2014 and is actively promoting the UE4SD project. At national level in specific

---

[5] UNECE Strategy for ESD can be accessed at: http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/areas-of-work/education-for-sustainable-development-esd/about-the-strategy-for-esd/the-strategy.html

European countries, networks of senior HE leaders that are working actively to advance sustainability, such as the CRUE-CADEP network in Spain[6], will become important channels for the strategic development of ESD.

HE Student Perspectives:

In the years immediately prior to the UE4SD project, there have been signs of growing interest in ESD among student populations, linked to their concerns about changeable and unpredictable economic and business scenarios, the globalisation of working environments and the rise of 'green economy' discourses, environmental degradation, global conflict and rising inequalities.

This increase in student attention to sustainability issues and demand for ESD curriculum reorientation has been captured by the MEEG 2014 report, in countries as diverse as Australia, Zimbabwe and Colombia (UNESCO 2004, p118). In the UK, the National Union of Students (NUS) has published research annually between 2011 and 2013, in collaboration with the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA), showing increasing demand for ESD in the curriculum and the importance of this for graduate employment prospects.

"Research conducted in collaboration with the NUS shows that over 80% of students would like their university or college to cover sustainability, with over two-thirds hoping to see sustainability included in as part of their programme."[7]

Similar evidence is beginning to emerge in other countries; for example the MEEG report highlights research from France, reporting that 80% of 10,000 French HE students are now seeking an integrated approach to ESD across the curriculum (UNESCO 2014, p.119).

The work of student associations and societies on campus, as well as sector-wide student networks, is growing in importance as a mechanism for supporting education change towards ESD. The UK National Union of Students (NUS) has provided substantial funds to UK Student Unions since 2013 through its *Students' Green Fund* initiative, to support ESD leadership and skills development, as well as the wider engagement of students with sustainable development actions.

---

[6] Sectoral Commission on Environmental Quality, Sustainable Development and Risk Prevention (CADEP): http://www.crue.org/Sostenibilidad/CADEP/Paginas/default.aspx?Mobile=0

[7] UK Higher Education Academy website: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/workstreams-research/themes/education-sustainable-development/students-and-esd

Student-led calls for ESD are also emerging at the international level and within specific subject areas; for example, in the field of economics, an open letter demanding new educational responses to address global sustainable development challenges was published by ISIPE in 2014[8], signed by 65 associations across 30 countries worldwide, representing a worldwide call for change across the academic community.

Recent ESD in HE Innovations:

This section highlights selected examples of notable developments and initiatives during 2013-2014 from across the globe with particular relevance for the UE4SD project, due to their value in supporting the professional development and extending the capacity of university educators to respond to ESD:

National or Regional initiatives for ESD in Europe:
- In 2014 Ireland launched its new ESD strategy which includes a specific focus on professional development and makes recommendations for the development of ESD (and research into ESD) within the HE sector, as one of its key priority areas.
  *Weblink:*http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/National-Strategy-on-Education-for-Sustainable-Development-in-Ireland-2014-2020.pdf
- In 2014 the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD) was finalized, with specific objectives to promote the development of policy and frameworks as well as practical tools and co-operation, to support the embedding of ESD and development of competences in this area.

HE quality assurance for ESD in Europe:
- The UK Quality Assurance Agency published national guidelines on ESD and learning outcomes in 2014, building on its inclusion of ESD in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education* framework, which informs curriculum development and standards across the HE sector.
  *Weblink:*http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Education-sustainable-development-Guidance-June-14.pdf

---

[8] International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics: http://www.isipe.net/open-letter/

- In Belgium, the Flemish government has begun to explore the inclusion of ESD in quality assurance processes (which for HE are overseen by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders), with the intention to take actions in this area forward by 2015.

ESD enhancement initiatives in Europe:

- In 2013, UNECE published *Empowering Educators for a sustainable future*, containing tools for workshops linked to its ESD Educator Competences framework it developed and launched in 2011 as part of the UNECE Strategy for ESD (adopted in 2005).
  *Weblink:*http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/esd/Images/Empowering_Educators_for_a_Sustainable_Future.pdf

- In 2013, the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) published its new research on *Flexible Pedagogies,* which included an overarching report on pedagogical innovation and the future of the HE curriculum, connecting ESD with the new dialogues around flexible learning in the globalised HE environment.
  Weblink: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/flexible-pedagogies-new-pedagogical-ideas

International Initiatives in ESD in HE:

- New ESD curriculum innovation guidelines are under review in 2014 that have been produced by the Environmental Education and Training Unit (EETU) in partnership with Rhodes University, South Africa, involving a pilot process in African and Asian universities with over 200 participants, for UNEP's Global Universities Programme for Environment and Sustainability (GUPES).

- In 2014, the Australian Office of Teaching and Learning awarded its high profile *National Senior Teaching Fellowship* to Professor Geoff Scott, to undertake an international study that is developing an approach to quality enhancement and effective assessment of graduate outcomes aligned with ESD and the changing skills needs of the 21st century, for use across the curriculum in all subject areas.
  Weblink: http://olt.gov.au/olt-national-senior-teaching-fellow-geoff-scott

- The Australian Office of Learning and Teaching has awarded an Extension Grant (2014-15) to Latrobe University to lead on the creation of new professional development activities and resources as well as a practitioner-led action network for ESD, building on the findings of the international *Turnaround Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education* (TLSHE) project (2012).
  Weblink: http://sustainability.edu.au/about/what-community-practice/efs-community/

Summary of Headline Points:

1. The direction of dialogues and plans in the ***post-DESD GAP***, for ESD professional development and ESD at HE level, will be an important ***strategic point of focus*** for the UE4SD project outcomes.

2. The UE4SD project should identify any possible opportunities to connect with ***European quality assurance bodies*** and other regional-level HE agencies on the potential for ESD development.

3. HE ***student demand and employer demand*** for ESD will provide important contexts for the UE4SD project in helping to frame and focus the kind of professional development needed for HE staff.

4. ***Cross-regional and/or national level networks*** within Europe will provide important platforms to ensure that UE4SD project outcomes and activities are geared towards ***practical implementation and leadership concerns*** in providing ESD professional development opportunities.

University Educators for ESD **Project Website: www.ue4sd.eu**