



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development Development of a National Strategy for ESD in Ireland



Learning outcomes

- The role of the Department of Education and Science
- Education for Sustainable Development
- The implementation of a strategy and how it is formulated and delivered.



Introduction

"The mission of this Department is to provide high-quality education which will (a) enable individuals to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society; and (b) contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development."

(Mary Hanafin, Minister for Education and Science)

The Department of Education and Science is engaged in a wide range of activities covering the key elements of policy planning, quality assurance, resourcing, regulation and evaluation, as well as providing a broad range of support services for the education sector.





The Department's priorities include the promotion of equity and inclusion, quality outcomes and lifelong learning; planning for education that is relevant to personal, social, cultural and economic needs; as well as improving its own internal capacity in policy, service delivery, and research and evaluation. These priorities require carefully planning and the implementation of clear strategies.

Education for Sustainable Development is one such strategy.

What is the UNECE strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)?

Following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, some 178 UN countries committed, under the title of Agenda 21, to take action globally and locally to promote sustainable development. They focused on such issues as addressing poverty, protecting the environment, maintaining biological diversity, promoting human health and equality, as well as strengthening the role of farmers, workers, businesses and the scientific community in achieving these objectives. This broad approach to sustainable development was reaffirmed in a further World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002. At that stage, it was considered that education systems throughout the world should play an important part in promoting the knowledge, skills and values among young people and adults which would help shape a sustainable future for all.

Accordingly in 2003, UNECE (the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, one of five regional commissions in the United Nations with remit in promoting co-operation on economic, environmental



and energy issues) was asked to draw up an overall strategy for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). In 2005, this strategy was adopted and the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development was launched, to run from 2005 to 2014. Member States are required under the plan to develop and implement a national strategy for education for sustainable development, and to collaborate internationally to achieve its goals. The Ministers for Environment and Education across the Member States are involved in this (www.unece.org/env/esd/welcome.htm). The Department of Education and Science is leading the development of the Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland



The EU has also adopted Sustainable Development as an important theme underpinning its social, environmental and economic policies, and in 2006, committed to a renewed strategy on sustainable development (www.ec.europa.eu/sustainable/welcome/index_en.htm).

Sustainable Development (SD) is defined as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It rests on three separate pillars - economic, social and environmental - which need to reinforce one another to ensure sustainable development. The economic, social and environmental consequences of all policies thus need to be examined in a coordinated manner and be taken into account when those policies are being drawn up and adopted. The EU SDS strategy describes this as

"It is about safeguarding the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity and is based on respect for fundamental rights, including freedom and equal opportunities for all. It aims at the continuous improvement of the quality of life and well being on Earth for present and future generations. To that end, it promotes a dynamic economy with full employment and a high level of education, health protection, social and territorial cohesion and environmental protection in a peaceful and secure world, respecting cultural diversity."

Promoting a strategy for Education for Sustainable Development covers such areas as: poverty reduction, citizenship, peace, ethics, responsibility in local and global contexts, democracy and governance, justice, security, human rights, health, gender equity, cultural diversity, production and consumption patterns, corporate responsibility, environmental protection, natural resource management and biological and landscape diversity.



Depending on their state of development, different countries will highlight their own priorities within the strategy. In Ireland, the ESD strategy will focus on education in the broad themes of:

Environment - production and consumption patterns, corporate responsibility, environmental protection, natural resource management and biological and landscape diversity.

Society/Economy/culture - poverty alleviation, citizenship, peace, ethics, justice, security, human rights, equality, cultural diversity.

Development - awareness of development issues in third world countries and how we can help address them, and understanding the interdependence between decisions and actions taken locally and their impact on the wider world.

These themes arise across a range of subjects in school such as Civic Social and Political Education, Social Personal and Health Education, Religious Education, Business Studies, Science, History and Geography, Home Economics, Art, Music etc.

The strategy requires that Member States look at such issues as training of teachers, development of curriculum materials, research, schools and further and higher education, and media awareness, training of business people and professionals, and education across the population generally, particularly for workers, farmers, and employers. The strategy also requires a partnership between statutory bodies and agencies and non-governmental organisations.

The objective of the Strategy is to incorporate the key themes of sustainable development in all education systems.

Development of a national implementation plan

The Department of Education and Science has established a steering group to oversee the development of the ESD strategy. This includes representatives of:

- The Department of Education and Science
- The Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government
- Irish Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- Curriculum Development Unit of City of Dublin VEC
- Comhar – the Sustainable Development Council



Comhar - Sustainable Development Council

Comhar was established in 1999 as the forum for national consultation and dialogue on all issues relating to sustainable development. Comhar works in three-year cycles and began its third term in January 2006.



Formerly the National Sustainable Development Partnership, it was renamed as Comhar - Sustainable Development Council.

Comhar's 25 members are drawn from five sectors: the State sector, economic sectors, environmental NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations), social/community NGOs and the professional/academic sector.

Planning at national level is similar to planning in a business. It involves clearly setting out objectives and how they are going to be achieved. Plans need to be precise, specific and clear in relation to what is expected and what activities would be anticipated. There should be indicators by which progress can be measured. Plans should be achievable, realistic and have a proper timescale, thereby allowing sufficient time for proper implementation. Flexibility should also be built in to allow for unexpected events or changes. Of vital importance is control. This normally takes the form of some means of evaluation against agreed standards.

Well-constructed objectives are **SMART** objectives.

Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Realistic – Time-related

The Steering Group determined that to develop the elements of a national strategy, it would have to consult widely, map existing activity, identify gaps, develop a draft plan with proposals, host a national forum to discuss the plan, and then finalise the strategy. The Department invited tenders from interested individuals, organisations or consortia to undertake a consultancy on the development of a national strategy for education for sustainable development. The services to be provided were:

- a review and summary of key research on the theme of education for sustainable development, identifying how it can inform and Irish strategy
- preparation of a summary of the main activities to date in Ireland on ESD building on research already undertaken and discussions with key stakeholders
- undertaking of a consultation process with the main stakeholders in Ireland on ESD
- preparation of a Discussion Paper which will set out the background to the development of a national strategy, the main activities already under way, the issues which emerged in consultations and draft recommendations for a national strategy.
- support the organisation of a national conference at which the Discussion Paper will be discussed and feedback sought
- prepare a summary report on the issues emerging from the national conference and from the feedback on the Discussion Paper

All show a clearly planned strategy with expected outcomes.

The National Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development has appointed ECO-UNESCO as consultants for the development of a National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development.

Communicating the message

The Plan will require that the message is communicated to the public and to students in schools that sustainable development is a priority. The project wants materials to be available in schools, along with specific programmes for students to get involved in, such as the Green-Schools initiative.

There also is a need for education and training of teachers and other professionals in how to promote sustainable development. This could be achieved through Continuous Professional Development.

Media initiatives and proper marketing, such as the 'Power of One' campaign, are seen as essential to raise awareness.

NGO activities should also encourage ESD.

Finally the promotion of research on ESD, including methodology and processes, is supported.

Programme

The programme is planned in two phases:

- Phase One – 2008 National Strategy for ESD in place
- Phase Two – 2010 Implementation well underway

Some of the initiatives already in place are highlighted in the panel.

Green-Schools Programme

Green-Schools, known internationally as Eco-Schools, is an international environmental education programme, environmental management system and award scheme that promotes whole-school action for the environment. In Ireland the programme is co-ordinated by An Taisce in partnership with local authorities. Some 2700 schools in Ireland participate, and 1116 of these have been awarded a Green Flag.



There are seven stages to the programme:

- Establishing a green schools committee of students, teachers, parents and management
- Reviewing the environment of the school to identify actions
- Developing and implementing an action plan
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Integrating curriculum work on environmental issues into lessons
- Informing and involving the wider community
- Developing a Green Code showing the objectives the school will adopt to promote environmentally friendly practices

As well as involving students, teachers and parents in promoting an environmentally friendly school, the Green-Schools initiative supports partnership between students and teachers, leadership and planning, the skills and values for citizenship, and involves students in decision making in the school. Schools that have successfully completed all the elements of the programme are awarded the 'Green-Flag'.

Power of One Initiative

The 'Power of One' is a Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources



initiative. It is a comprehensive public awareness campaign designed to promote energy efficiency in Ireland. It gives 10 tips on how individuals can take action to save energy at home, at work or travelling. www.powerofone.ie

Power of One boasts a full advertising campaign targeting mass audiences nationwide, including a 40-second television advertisement. The campaign's Power of One logo, which shows a "1" symbolising the well known off-switch is an icon with which the Irish public has become very familiar.

Conclusion

The consultation process seeks to record activities and initiatives existing already in the areas of Sustainable Development and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), examine the barriers/challenges related to ESD in various sector, and gain insight into specific developments or actions that could be included in a National Strategy and what possible support measures would be required. ECO UNESCO have convened a number of regional seminars, have interviewed key interest groups, and have issued a questionnaire to hundreds of organisations. The feedback from this will identify what is happening already which can be built on for the future, where the gaps are, and what issues various organisations would want to see prioritised in the national plan. A draft plan is currently being finalised in preparation for a national conference in December.

Therefore it can be seen that the main areas of planning, organising and controlling, so emphasised in business, also apply across other sectors such as education. By following these business principles, strategies can be successfully implemented.

Student activity

1. Explain what is meant by planning.
2. Identify the key elements when formulating a plan.
3. The Department of Education and Science consulted with a Working Group. Why is this important?
4. Choose a business or organisation of your choice. Discuss how it has planned and implemented a strategy.
5. Identify a number of ways a business can promote sustainable development.