



# 10 | The Academy's Role in ESD

In declaring the years 2005 to 2014 as the 'Decade for Education for Sustainable Development' (DESD), the United Nations sent a powerful message about how everyone involved in education could and should contribute towards the sustainable development agenda in a way which emphasises interdisciplinary, holistic and values-based learning that employs critical thinking and participatory decision-making using locally relevant information (see: [www.unesco.org/en/esd/](http://www.unesco.org/en/esd/)).

Schools in the UK are now doing this in ways that are often simple but transformational, yet ESD does not end when students leave school; it is essential for those going on (or back) to higher education (HE) and then onwards into employment. So, in 2004, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) set out a vision that "within the next 10 years, the HE sector in England will be recognised as a major contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability – through the skills and knowledge that its graduates learn and put into practice, its research and exchange of knowledge through business, community and public policy engagement, and through its own strategies and operations" (see: [www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/sustain/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/sustain/)). To help achieve this it tasked the Higher Education Academy (the Academy) to take ESD forward in HE (as did the Scottish and Welsh funding councils soon afterwards). Our remit was to "help institutions and subject communities develop curricula and pedagogy that will give students the skills and knowledge to live and work sustainably".

All subject disciplines within HE have a significant role to play in ESD, especially in relation to the way they work together, so it was important at the outset of the programme to first benchmark ESD activity and what it meant to individual subject areas. The Academy was uniquely placed to do this is through its UK-wide network of 24 Subject Centres. The Subject Centres and Academy carried out surveys and focus groups, the results of which were brought together in The Dawe Report, and showed that all disciplines are involved in ESD at some level, and identified good practice. (See: <http://tinyurl.com/yg8h638>).

As we are now at the mid-point of the DESD, it is appropriate to consider what progress has been made. The Academy's ESD work has developed significantly, and this is reflected in a recent report on ESD activity in Scottish HE, showing the progress made both in terms of curriculum development and attitudes towards sustainable development in HE, a trend also being seen throughout the UK. We continue to make a significant contribution through our strategy to research and support the development of ESD in HE; helping to build capacity to embed ESD in curricula and pedagogy; and assist the coordination and dissemination of policy, research and practice relating to ESD.

This is being achieved through a range of activities. For example, thanks to grant funding, academics at one institution progressed a number of projects that looked at students' skills development and the relationship between curriculum and student volunteering. And a consortium of HEIs undertook community work in a market town, helping the local council develop an integrated green policy. The Academy is also looking at policy development and we are

currently developing a framework learning and teaching strategy that will help institutions consider their own policy development in this area, all the information gathered will be shared through the Academy's bimonthly e-newsletter.

In the bioscience disciplines, we funded the UK Centre for Bioscience to produce a series of leaflets on "How to Make Your Teaching More Sustainable", which outline tips for making field trips, lectures, tutorials, practicals, and your office more sustainable. More recently, the Centre has published a sixth leaflet introducing sustainability concepts into bioscience teaching ([www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/esd/howto.aspx](http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/esd/howto.aspx)). We additionally funded a project at Bradford University, "Embedding ESD in a Life Science Curriculum". This project evaluated the potential for the integration of ESD within a Life Science curriculum and developed a tool for assessing this potential. Disciplines covered included pharmacy, optometry, and the biomedical sciences (see Peter Hopkinson's article on page 9 of this Bulletin).

As we enter the second half of the DESD, there is clearly more to be done, but we have seen a change in attitude in HE over the past five years (see, for example, the update from Scotland) which should form the basis for some exciting developments over the next five years. Beyond that we hope to see increasingly more students graduate with the skills and knowledge to live and work sustainably, and the Academy is committed to supporting and promoting these skills. Please see our website for details: [www.heacademy.ac.uk/esd](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/esd)

## Updates from across the UK



### England

HEFCE's 'Sustainable Development in Higher Education: 2008 Update to Strategic Statement and Action Plan' was revised in light of feedback received through consultation in summer 2008. Overall, the consultation feedback demonstrated a high level of commitment by the sector to the sustainable development agenda.

There is widespread agreement that HE has an invaluable contribution to make to ESD and HEFCE needs to support and encourage this. HEFCE's non-prescriptive and enabling approach was welcomed and the actions proposed raised relatively little negative comment, though some were clearly prioritised by respondents over others. There is also widespread recognition that HE's unique contribution is through both teaching and research.

Recently, HEFCE sought Leadership, Governance, and Management Fund proposals for projects that will support the implementation of their sustainable development strategy and the Universities UK and GuildHE university leaders' statement of intent on sustainable development. For details, see: [www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/build/lgmfund/leadsustaindevel.htm](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lgm/build/lgmfund/leadsustaindevel.htm)

### Scotland

Sustainable Development (SD) has become a policy priority area for the Scottish Government – 'Greener Scotland' being one of the five key themes which underpins its work.

The grant letter from the Scottish Funding Council for 2008-09 signalled supporting development of learning and teaching in areas such as ESD as one of the UK-wide priority areas for the Academy and stated: "We look to the Academy to work with us in delivering our SD strategy for Scotland's HEIs, and to support institutions in the development of appropriate knowledge, skills and attributes among learners."

In support of this a range of activities have taken place and are planned, in collaboration with the Academy, to help embed ESD in Scottish HEIs and to provide opportunities for networking and exchange on various topics.

- Employability and external (public) engagement are two areas in which sustainability may inform curricula. The Academy recently published a report which provides a summary of discussions at an event held at the University of Stirling in April 2009 for Academy Scotland. The event was designed and facilitated on behalf of the ESD Project by Colin Brooks and Alex Ryan, to explore the intersection of ESD with these two related thematic topics.
- Another publication, '2008 Review of ESD in HE in Scotland', looked at engaging HEIs strategically in support of ESD. Alex Ryan carried out the research and interviews for the institutional case studies, analysed the survey responses and composed this report. Overall, the report findings indicated an increase in ESD provision in Scottish HEIs, with embedding of ESD in the curriculum and the development of specific sustainable development programmes.

### Wales

Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) is seen as an important policy area for the Welsh Assembly Government and the Academy has been active in convening, chairing and providing a secretariat to the ESDGC all Wales group.

The group meets formally three times a year, has been active in co-ordinating activity in this area across Wales and played a key role in taking forward the section on HE in the Assembly's Strategy for Action. The Academy have:

- undertaken an audit of curricula in all Welsh HEIs, using a tool/methodology developed at Cardiff University (STAUNCH – Sustainable Teaching Audit for University Curricula in Higher Education) and analysed the institutional responses. Examples of good practice, barriers and approaches to the promotion of ESDGC in the curriculum can be found in the report, available from <http://tinyurl.com/ykwc9ys>;
- organised a major conference to support the 'Commitment and leadership' aspect; "Opportunities for Leadership in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: The Welsh Agenda";
- provided a response in regard to HE for the Assembly's strategy to 2014;
- supported an all Wales bid (with Assembly funding) to establish a UNESCO Regional Centre of Excellence (led by Swansea University and University of Wales, Newport) – which was successful.

The work of the group and the role of the Academy is endorsed in the conclusions/recommendations in the independent review of ESDGC in Wales and international benchmarking, commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council of Wales.

### Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Government has made sustainability a priority area for development and their sustainability strategy sets out how education, including providing access to sustainable development knowledge and skills, will be a part of this. The ESD Project has funded mini-projects at institutions in Northern Ireland and is working with teaching practitioners to support the inclusion of ESD into curricula.

### Simon Smith and Heather Luna\*

Higher Education Academy ESD Project

[sustainability@heacademy.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@heacademy.ac.uk)

\*Corresponding author

### For staff and students feedback can sometimes be . . .

time consuming... unhelpful... repetitive... confusing... frustrating... too late... inefficient... inconsistent.

### The ASSET project works to explore and develop ways to improve feedback provision by:

- exploring the use of video for timely, quality feedback provision through the development of a Web 2.0 resource, 'ASSET'
- encouraging deeper engagement of staff with feed-forward elements of feedback
- enhancing the feedback experience for staff and students

### How does ASSET work?

- Staff set assignment
- Staff record video to support assignment preparation
- Students view video which they can store in a personal playlist
- Students submit assignment
- Staff upload video feedback on assignment
- Students view feedback video and can share comments with peers and staff

For more information, please contact: Anne Crook, [a.c.crook@reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.c.crook@reading.ac.uk) or Julian Park, [j.r.park@reading.ac.uk](mailto:j.r.park@reading.ac.uk) Or visit us at [www.reading.ac.uk/asset](http://www.reading.ac.uk/asset)

