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written by John Beates

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION PANEL - 1st year report
Comments from the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES)

1. The IES welcomes the document as a valuable contribution to the planning for Sustainable Development Education in England and Wales. We congratulate the Panel on the progress it has made in its first year and look forward to it continuing its work. We hope our comments and suggestions will assist this process.
2. The work of the Panel in general and this Report in particular is helping significantly to raise the profile of Sustainable Development Education amongst key education policy makers and the professionals responsible for implementing those policies. It is our belief that the future programme of the Panel will play a major role in determining the form and extent of the inclusion of Sustainable Development Education in formal and non-formal education programmes.
3. We consider that the Submission to DfEE/QCA on Education for Sustainable Development in the schools sector is an excellent contribution to the review of the National Curriculum and offer our endorsement of it.
4. As a professional institution we particularly welcome the references to professional bodies (Para 30c) but consider that insufficient recognition is given to the contribution of professional bodies and their continuing professional development schemes in helping achieve the goals the Panel has set. Representation of the professional associations on the Panel could help this. Details are included of a project which IES is undertaking in partnership with the Council for Environmental Education, the Natural Step and the Environment Agency and which is supported by the Environmental Action Fund. The project is developing training materials on sustainable development for use by professional bodies in their continuing professional development schemes.
5. We are concerned that the tone of the document does not follow the philosophy of participation and partnerships which is the foundation of sustainable development. It reads too much like a typical consultative document with a top down approach. For example it states "the Panel will approach the stakeholders directly with these recommendations and discuss with them how they might be delivered". The stakeholders should have been involved in setting the goals, developing recommendations and determining the means of achieving them. Similarly the emphasis is on "delivering" sustainable development messages (Para 18) determined by experts rather developing participation and partnerships to help people identify problems and find solutions.
6. The document omits the international dimension to sustainable development. While it is important to achieve sustainable development in the UK this must not be done at the expense of environments in other parts of the world.
7. The document does not do enough to set Sustainable Development Education into the wider context of other similar areas of education. For example, what is the relationship between Sustainable Development Education, Environmental Education, Development Education, Biodiversity Education, Education for Global Citizenship and so on? Without further guidance, educators are likely to be confused and as a result avoid teaching them.
8. The document does not seem to recognise the progress that has already been made in environmental education. Past successes can be built on. It seems from the recommendations that we are starting from scratch. In Higher Education the Toyne Report has already made recommendations for Institutions to play their role in promoting sustainable development. Some participated in the HE21 programme to develop and test models from which others could learn. In the workplace, the public and private sectors staff are taking advantage of training courses covering sustainable development issues provided by Universities, Management Schools and in-house training providers. One of the success stories of for Sustainable Development Education is within Local Agenda 21. Within LA21 there are numerous examples of education programmes that have and are developing good practice.
9. We found the diagram on page 8 unhelpful - it needed some explanation.
10. We consider that the document should make reference to policy decisions by Government that are undermining the opportunities for Sustainable Development Education in schools. For example, it appears that environmental education may be taken out of Key Stage 1 altogether.

11. We consider there should be a recommendation for continuing professional development (para 40) to support the goal in para 30c.
12. The IES is already engaged in fulfilling the activity described in para 43f and would be happy to take the lead in helping the Panel carry this activity forward.
13. In conclusion, we do welcome the Report and offer our support for the continuing work of the Panel because we think it is likely to be one of the main sources of policy guidance for the Government. We wish the Panel success and hope our comments will be of use in determining how the Panel develops its work.