

The Institution of Environmental Sciences

The professional body for environmental scientists
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Review of Future of Government Advisory Body on Education for Sustainable Development.

A Response by the Institution of Environmental Sciences

The Institution is pleased to respond to this consultation document.

We consider that the Panel has, over the past four years, performed an important function, in particular in the formulation early on of a framework for ESD in England and Wales. It has fulfilled a necessary central and co-ordinating role in an area where fragmentation and duplication of effort can easily occur.

Whilst there remains a requirement for an independent body to continue to exercise this overall co-ordination and overview for ESD countrywide, there is a considerable need for a more proactive initiative. The raising of the profile of ESD and a stronger programme of implementation in schools, higher education, training and the professions is necessary and the promotion of the principles of sustainable development throughout business and industry is essential.

As the role of the Panel has so far been more of an advisory nature, a continuation in similar pattern would not, in our opinion, be entirely constructive. We still believe that the Panel offers the best medium for the initiatives required as described above but to achieve this a different and wider brief will be required.

We would recommend that this be put in hand.

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Dear Sir

Future of Government Advisory Body on Education for Sustainable Development

I write in response to the current review of the ESD Advisory Panel.

First, the Panel under the chairmanship of Sir Geoffrey Holland achieved a great deal in its first year. Its first report took a realistic strategic approach, setting out an appropriate framework for ESD in England and Wales. It also set goals for 2010 and a future work programme.

However, ESD still remains at the margins of mainstream education and training and there is little sign in recent reports and activities that the Panel has really got to grips with the key issues of facilitating the mainstreaming of ESD in schools, FHE, training, the professions and in the work place.

In general, schools and larger companies are farthest ahead with the SDE agenda. The UK has some of the world's leading examples of SDE in industry such as Interface Europe Ltd, the Cooperative Bank and Bulmers Ltd. SMEs and FE colleges are making the least progress, although supply chain (or value chain management) is beginning to make some impact). There are nevertheless some real opportunities to link best practice in business with schools, FE and HE institutions, if the right kind of engagement can be found. A notable example is the partnership between HP Bulmer and the Pershore Group of Colleges in Project Carrot (www.projectcarrot.org).

One of the most significant roles that the ESD Panel could have played is in effective monitoring and reviewing and communicating good practice. The absence of such a co-ordinating mechanism nationally and regionally is a major issue. Many of the regions (e.g. Yorkshire and Humberside, West and East Midlands) have now begun to implement regional SDE strategies and there is evidence of a wide array of good practice. However, there is limited support for co-ordinating and communicating the good practice that exists.

Given the growing regional focus on economic development (and its links with skills and education) it may be timely to reconsider the role of a national ESD Panel and place more emphasis and resources at a regional level.

Overall, the Panel has furthered the concept of ESD in a number of areas, but has been less successful in promoting its effective implementation. Hence, I believe that any further work at a national level requires effective links and representation with appropriate regional structures so that more emphasis is placed on action research and inquiry. This linked to an effective communication strategy would help ESD move from 'good thinking' to 'good practice'.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Martin

Stephen Martin is currently an independent consultant in sustainable development. He is visiting professor at the Centre for Complexity and Change, The Open University. He was the DES (HMI) Advisor in the Toyne Committee and contributed to the consultative process hosted by Forum for the Future, which led to the establishment of the ESD Panel. He has recently been commissioned by Yorkshire and Humberside RDA to develop an operational plan for ESD in the region. He also co-chairs the SIGMA steering group and is a member of the project management group for Professional Practice for Sustainability (PP4SD)