



The Higher Education Academy Education for Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

The grant letter from the Scottish Funding Council for 2008-09 signals *Supporting development of L&T in areas such as Education for Sustainable Development* as one of the UK-wide priority areas for the Academy. In addition, the grant letter identifies sustainable development as one of the three priority areas within which it seeks the Academy's support for the Council and the sector in Scotland:

We look to the Academy to work with us in delivering our sustainable development strategy for Scotland's HEIs, and to support institutions in the development of appropriate knowledge, skills and attributes among learners.

This paper aims to give an overview of recent, current and planned activities undertaken by the Academy and its Subject Centres to support the higher education sector in embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in learning and teaching practices, both in the UK as a whole and in Scotland.

2. Methodology

The activities listed in this paper are based on the information provided in the Subject Centre annual reports for 2007-08 and operational plans for 2008-09, as well as the information available on the Academy ESD Project website and Subject Centre websites. As a result, this paper will not claim to be a comprehensive account of all ESD activities; however, it is illustrative of the wide range of ways through which the Academy supports the HE sector in the area of ESD.

3. Higher Education Academy ESD initiatives UK-wide

3.1 The Academy ESD Project

The Higher Education Academy ESD Project operates across the Academy's Subject Network to help institutions and subject communities develop curricula and pedagogy that will give students the skills and knowledge to live and work sustainably (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sustainability.htm>).

It is led by the **Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Sciences (PRS)** and works to the following aims:

- to *research and support* the development of ESD in the HE sector, particularly within subject communities;
- to *build capacity* amongst individuals, subject communities and institutions to embed ESD in curricula and pedagogy; and

- to assist the *coordination and dissemination* of policy, research and practice relating to ESD in institutions, the Higher Education Academy and the wider field.

Some of the initiatives through which the Project has achieved these aims so far are:

- publication of a quarterly e-Newsletter (bi-monthly from December 2008) which pulls together activities, services, resources and publications, funding opportunities and forthcoming events:
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/sustainability/enewsletter>
- providing opportunities for networking at regional level
- funding small- and mini-projects within and across disciplines:
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/sustainability/projects>
- events, e.g. *Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship*, Cardiff, May 2008:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/sustainability/esd_events
- maintaining a website which is a one-stop shop for information related to ESD and learning and teaching:
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/esd>
- input into policy agendas, e.g., through participation with the Scottish ESD Education Policy forum
- facilitating change management at HEIs, e.g., at the University of Gloucestershire
- funding research into employability and interdisciplinarity:
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/sustainability/projects>

3.2 Subject Centre initiatives

A large number of Subject Centres serve as members on the Planning Group of the Academy-wide ESD Project. Subject Centre representatives contribute to the activities of the ESD Project in addition to the activities organised by their own Subject Centres. A majority of Subject Centres have also developed and maintain web pages which contain resources related to ESD or sustainability within their respective disciplines:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/sustainability/sc_work

Below is a selection of initiatives that Subject Centres have previously undertaken or are currently undertaking to support ESD.

3.2.1 Resources, publications and articles

- Several Subject Centres, including the **UK Centre for Legal Education (UKCLE)**, **Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS)**, the **Education Subject Centre (ESCalate)**, and **Engineering**, are contributing chapters to a book on ESD, *Green Infusions: Embedding Sustainability across the Curriculum*. The chapter written by **Engineering** compiles the latest innovations in teaching sustainable development, has examples of embedding ESD in the curriculum, and includes contributed case studies from the Royal Academy of Engineering, student projects, distance learning

models, team-working – as well as previously funded projects from the Subject Centre and exemplar university models.

- The **GEES (Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences) Subject Centre** has a comprehensive list of ESD resources which it updated in late 2007: <http://www.gees.ac.uk/projtheme/esd/resource.doc>. It is currently authoring a 'briefing' on ESD to summarize all of the work done in this area in the last few years.
- The Spring 2009 issue of the **Art, Design and Media (ADM) Subject Centre** magazine, *Networks*, will focused broadly on the theme of sustainability in art, design and media in higher education. It includes content written by colleagues across the ADM sector.
- The **Psychology Network** published a report on *Psychology and Education for Sustainable Development*:
http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/docs/pdf/p20051114_ESD_Final_Report.pdf (PDF 92.3KB)
- The **English Subject Centre** published an article on sustainability, "Reading and Writing Society: The Role of English Subjects in Education for Sustainability", written by Arran Stibbe and which appeared in the Spring 2008 Newsletter:
<http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/newsletters/newsissue14/stibbe.htm>
- The former Subject Centre Director for **GEES** co-edited a forthcoming book on ESD for Routledge.
- The Subject Centre for **History, Classics and Archaeology** has commissioned a teaching and learning guide for ESD in its disciplines.
- The **Subject Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE)** is developing guidance for educators.
- The **Economics Network** funded a case study on ecological economics:
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/witham_ecological.htm

3.2.2 Project funding

- Sustainability in Education was the 2007 theme for **ESCalate's** research grant funding scheme. Examples of funded projects are *Promoting Education for Sustainable Development in Schools and Colleges through HE Action* and *COASTAL: (Curriculum, Outcomes, and Sustainable Teaching, Assessment, Learning) Sustainable Development in HE*:
<http://escalate.ac.uk/index.cfm?action=projects.current&grantTypeID=2>
- **Engineering** disseminated mini-project resources on:
The Wider Teaching of Sustainability based upon Student Perceptions and the Expectations of Professional Bodies (report published in December 2007):
<http://www.engsc.ac.uk/downloads/scholarart/penlington-sustainability-report.pdf> (Dec 2007 PDF 4.7MB)
Education for Sustainable Development in Engineering - Report of a Delphi Consultation (published in April 2008):
<http://www.engsc.ac.uk/downloads/scholarart/delphi-consultation.pdf> (Apr 2008 PDF 748KB))

It has also commissioned two new mini-projects on sustainable development topics: *Embedding Sustainable Development into Structural Design Teaching Using Sustainability Assessment Tools* and *Socio-centric Sustainability for Engineers and Product Designers*:

http://www.engsc.ac.uk/an/mini_projects/index.asp#MainContent

- ESD has been one of the themes for **GEES**'s funding of three small-scale projects:
The Carbon Footprint of Field Work: A Tutor Resource Pack:
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/projtheme/smallfund/2007/projs07.htm#Ribchester>
Graduate Employability Skills: Environmental Responsibilities and the Workplace:
<http://www.gees.ac.uk/projtheme/smallfund/2007/projs07.htm#Robinson>
- **Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies** funded a project which aims to identify the opportunities for students to develop sustainability skills in volunteering activities and work placement, as well as in aspects of the curriculum: *The Integration of University Careers and Volunteering Services, Curriculum Provision and Local Voluntary Organisations*:
<http://www.llas.ac.uk/projects/3000>
- **Psychology** is offering grant funding for ESD projects.
- The **Economics Network** funded a student to participate in the Academy ESD Project's *What Makes a Town Sustainable?*
<http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/esd/town.htm>

3.2.3 Events

- **GEES** runs departmental workshops on ESD in conjunction with the Centre for Sustainable Futures (CSF) CETL at the University of Plymouth.
- **Materials** plans to run two to three environment/ethics-themed events jointly with the Plastics Subject Specialist Network Group in spring 2009.
- **HCA** ran a two-day event, *History and Sustainability: Environmental History and Education for Sustainable Development*, in Cambridge, September 2007, and is planning talks at two workshops and a conference.
- **CEBE** was involved in and sponsored *Designs on the Planet*, an event in January 2008 that looked at how architectural education might respond to issues related to climate change. It is also running two national workshops (England and Wales) for ESD in Architecture.
- **PRS** is planning a networking event.
- **Psychology** is planning a workshop on ESD.

3.2.4 Networks

- **ESCalate** was involved in setting up a UK community of ITE practice in ESD launched in July 2007: <http://escalate.ac.uk/4001>
- **CEBE** has funded a SIG looking at integrating SD into the Built Environment curricula, including the design of modules, case study production and consideration of the role of professional bodies.
- **GEES** and the **Economics Network** each have a mailing list for academics who have expressed interest in ESD to whom email updates are sent. Additionally, the **Economics Network** provides a directory of economists researching sustainable development.
- **UKCLE** and **PRS** each have plans to develop a network around ESD issues in their disciplines.
- **Engineering** is a member of the HE Working Group of the East Midlands Regional Centre for Expertise (RCE) in ESD, which has a remit to facilitate pedagogic linkages across educational sectors in the East Midlands (schools, through colleges, FE and life-long learning) with HE research into ESD: <http://www2.le.ac.uk/projects/rceem>

3.2.5 Sustainable practice

- As a continuation of the development of the Subject Centre's sustainability strategy, **GEES** has contributed five percent of its travel budget to Moor Trees (<http://www.moortrees.org>), a regional carbon offset charity, and has donated one day of their time volunteering for the charity as a team-building exercise. GEES is also conducting a green audit of its Centre this year.
- **Psychology** commits to continued sustainable practice through efficient and sound use of resources and producing publications using ethically-sourced materials.
- **LLAS, ADM, Economics, English, Engineering, and Law** are all devising sustainability strategies for their Subject Centres this year.

3.2.6 Collaborations

- **CEBE, ESCalate** and **PRS** are working closely with the ESD-related CETL CSF, e.g., CSF provides a regular column for CEBE's news update publication.
- **CEBE** and the Royal Town Planning Institute co-fund a junior researcher to work on an ESD research project and to disseminate CETL outputs.
- **GEES** collaborates with the IDEA CETL, continuing the CETL's project theme on 'environmental ethics' through discursive focus groups.

3.2.7 Other

- **GEES** plans to provide consultation for institutions and departments on ESD, including keynotes at institutional learning and teaching conferences.
- **Materials** will organise and deliver an online photographic competition for schools on recycling.

4. The Academy's ESD Work in Scotland

Sustainable development has become a policy priority area for the Scottish Government – 'Greener Scotland' being one of the five key themes which underpin its work. The Government set out its aspirations for ESD in *Learning for Our Future*, the action plan for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2004-2014):

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/25143907/0>

The Academy is keen to support this government agenda, and a range of ESD activities are currently taking place to help embed ESD in Scottish HEIs and to provide opportunities for networking and exchange on various topics.

4.1. Research

The Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland and the Higher Education Academy have recently been working in partnership by designing jointly two pieces of research to scope progress in ESD at HE level. The first investigation was a survey conducted by Universities Scotland in May 2008, which explored the extent to which sustainability is integrated in governance processes, academic functions and estates management practices of Scottish HEIs. The second investigation used qualitative consultation methods to explore in more detail teaching and learning approaches to ESD in a sample of four case study institutions. It has taken a broad view of ESD within and beyond the curriculum, including formal interdisciplinary sustainability programmes, elements of embedding sustainability in different disciplines, and other means of engaging students at institutional level and outside the formal curriculum.

The Academy ESD Project has carried out the analysis and both sets of findings have been synthesised in a final report *Review of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Higher Education in Scotland*:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/esd_SFCreview08

4.2. Events

The Academy is also running a series of events in Scotland during this academic year. A seminar already took place in December at UHI to facilitate strategic organisational change and provide a forum for discussion about its future trajectory on sustainability. Two other ESD interdisciplinary, multi-institutional seminars were planned for the remainder of the academic year. The first

seminar, on ESD and off-campus learning and employability, which was in Stirling this spring, focused on issues such as community engagement and active learning for students. The second seminar, on transdisciplinary approaches to education, in July 2009, will focus on curriculum design and development, covering both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

In addition, the Academy is planning an event in autumn 2009 on student involvement in the development of ESD, building on the event in autumn 2008 led by SFC and NUS at which the Academy facilitated some workshop sessions.

4.3 Projects

Three small grant ESD projects from Scottish HEIs have been funded recently:

- *Sustainable Development in Practice*, University of St Andrews
- *Developing e-Learning Materials for Sustainable Construction Management*, University of Dundee
- *Welcome to the Sahel*, University of Stirling.

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/sustainability/projects>

4.4 Networking

The Academy is building upon the current Scottish ESD mailing list and creating a network of ESD champions at the disciplinary level to encourage sharing practice and future collaboration.

5. Conclusions

This overview is an indication that the Academy is already involved in a wide range of work in the area of ESD, both in the UK as a whole and in Scotland, from providing repositories of ESD resources to collaborations with other related bodies and active engagement with the academic community through, for example, events and project funding.

ESD appears to be an emerging area with a lot of potential for development. Support for staff in HEIs through Subject Centre activities seems quite comprehensive; however, support for institutions to adopt ESD approaches is an area which could be further developed, although it must be acknowledged that resources for the ESD Project are limited. Involving students to a larger extent in the Academy's sustainability activities is another area which could merit exploration across the Academy.

The Academy should also consider adopting sustainable practices across the whole network (Academy York and the Subject Centres). At the moment, only a limited number of Centres report on their sustainable practices..