



The UN Sustainable Development Goals and Learning for Sustainability: opportunities for Scotland's Schools

Report of the seminar held on: Thursday November 5th 2015 at Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, chaired by Dr Rehema White, Chair Learning for Sustainability Scotland.

BACKGROUND:

In September 2015, 193 countries across the world agreed the UN's new [Sustainable Development Goals](#). They set a challenge for every country to tackle poverty, inequality, climate change and sustainable development with Education, and learning as a central component. In Scotland Scottish Government ministers accepted in 2013 that all learners in Scotland's schools should have an entitlement to Learning for Sustainability supported by practitioners, a whole school approach, school buildings, grounds and policies. Learning for sustainability incorporates global citizenship, sustainable development education, outdoor learning and children's rights.

This seminar, organised with the support of The Scottish Government, aimed to explore the contribution of Education to the new UN Sustainable Development Goals, provide an update on progress with the recommendations for Scotland's schools made in the [Learning for Sustainability Report](#) and offer an opportunity to discuss how to contribute to this work.

Education and learning in the UN Sustainable Development Goals: a global perspective

Professor Charles Hopkins UNESCO Chair in ESD is an advisor to UNESCO and UN University regarding the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD). He played major roles in both the Rio and Johannesburg UN Summits on Sustainability. He was an author of Chapter 36 of Agenda 21, the Rio Earth Summit Action Plan on Education, Public Awareness and training along with Scotland's Prof John Smyth. Prof. Hopkins participates in meetings and conversations around the world about LfS and how to take it forward.

Prof Hopkins' powerpoint presentation can be found [here](#).

In 2012, 20 years after Rio, negotiations began for the next set of goals to succeed the Millennium Development Goals They began an Open Working Group for civil society, community group, NGOs etc. In Finland they had a huge consultation led by their Ministry of Environment to get everyone engaged. Fortunately UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon agreed to go with the Open Working Group's suggestions and maintain the breadth of 17 goals rather than concede to countries that only wanted about 5 goals. He suggested each country pursue their own goal priorities.

The 17 new UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will comprise one of the big pieces to build on the work of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD). In November last year and again in March 2015 ESD was ratified by ministers as underpinning the education work in the SDGs. The RCE movement was the contribution to the Decade of ESD by the UN University. The RCE movement is taking a lead within one of the 5 pillars of the Global Action Programme (GAP) which was put in place following the UN DESD, Community. For years we wished for recognition of ESD; now we have the pledges but we need to implement these goals.

Behind each SDG is a number of targets. Learning for Sustainability (ESD) sits behind the SDGs underpinning every other programme in the SDGs. The process of countries negotiating with each other was slow to make progress. Regional focus enabled us to focus on local and immediate changes. It brought together messengers within communities (schools, universities, zoos, NGOs etc.) and those making changes (practitioners and people in general) to shift knowledge to action. It is a crucial point now as we see if we can make the transition from the UN DESD and the MDGs to the GAP and the SDGs. The MDGs were addressed to other nations in the developing world and addressed inequalities across nations, but the SDGs demand that each country focuses on SDGs and looks at SDGs within countries as well.

Here in Scotland there was a clear initial statement of adoption of the SDGs. Hence in Scotland we need to identify the support required. Governments have to feel that it is politically safe to move in particular areas. We need to provide the knowledge and mechanisms to implement these.

In formal education 18 high scoring PISA countries, including Scotland, UNESCO completed an analysis to demonstrate that ESD focus increases the quality of education in schools. For example, Malaysia is seeking to enhance educational quality and is thus looking at ESD. At the end of the Decade, the ministers met in Nagoya. Chuck chaired the writing of the report and asked that all ministers reopened the discussion of what is education for? Once we know this we can work out how to assess the quality. Once we know the purpose of education we can develop our tools and methods.

Question: The UN Decade of ESD seemed critical – how will things move on? The critical aspect is to consider the purpose of Education. In Canada it is ‘producing people who will live in a sustainable manner’; in Peru ‘people who will protect Mother Earth’; in Finland ‘how Finnish people can contribute to a better world’. We need more thoughtful ways of expressing what we’re talking about, particularly visions for a sustainable future.

Implementing the Learning for Sustainability Report – an update

Professor Peter Higgins holds a Personal Chair in Outdoor and Environmental Education at Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh. He is currently Co Chair of the Scottish Government National Implementation Group on 'Learning for Sustainability' - integrating education for sustainable development, global citizenship and outdoor education and is the Director of LfS Scotland.

Prof Higgins’s powerpoint presentation can be found [here](#).

We’re in a good place in Scotland – a place many nations would admire. Progress has been made over the period since March 2013 when the minister accepted the 31 recommendations of the Working Group and set up an Implementation Group to take them forward. There are five Key Recommendations and current discussions are about how to assess progress. This is particularly difficult with the ‘entitlement’ to LfS, how will we know when it has been achieved, what level of data is out there already, can we devise a tool to use across Scottish schools?

The systems and structures are now in place. The GTCS Professional Update system is underway including LfS and 96% of those that have gone through the process to date have been successful. The updated self-evaluation tool for schools, ‘How Good is our School’ document, highlights LfS on page 7. A whole school self-evaluation framework is being developed for schools delivering the agenda. GTCS and LfSS are working on a self-evaluation tool for Teacher education institutions to use. The SDGs provide another opportunity to ensure that the momentum at the end of the Decade is maintained.

Question: How can we learn from traditional knowledge, e.g. from the Inuit who have skills for sustainability.

fully endorse the idea that we can learn a lot from developing nations – that’s the great potential with the SDGs. e.g. a University of Edinburgh PhD graduate from Zimbabwe working on the connection between Scotland & Zimbabwe discovered great two way learning.

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Learning for Sustainability in Scotland's schools in practice- an update

Ian Menzies is the Senior Education Officer, Sciences and Learning for Sustainability, Education Scotland. He is a member of the Learning for Sustainability Implementation Group.

Ian Menzies's powerpoint presentation will be made available in due course.

One of the strengths of Learning for Sustainability in Scotland is collaboration. Ian highlighted some examples of good practice in the [Conversations about LfS Report](#) 2014. Cowgate Under 5s, have created a magical outdoor space for adventures. Dumbarton Academy focussed on the Rights for the Child and have evidence of improved more respectful relationships allowing teachers to explore new pedagogies in the classroom. The Senior phase in secondary schools is one of the hardest places for LfS. Drummole Primary School – a school for children with additional support needs- has connected with community, local schools and partners through LfS

There is still work to do.

1. **Raising the profile** of LfS. LfS is a new term and it will take up to 5 years to become a common place phrase. GTCS is communicating about LfS through its Teaching Scotland magazine. Education Scotland has produced a poster with a useful wordcloud. Communication is key, using an e-bulletin, Glow community, blogs which partners feed into and twitter feed to continue the dialogue.
2. **Building capacity** at a time of austerity. A practitioner network was launched in October 2015 and key practitioners and leaders from local authorities will develop resources, innovations and approaches with partners guiding and supporting.
3. **"Unleash our leaders"** – real leaders need to be embedded in the system, receiving professional recognition from GTCS for LfS and passionate for getting LfS happening. In three local authorities, Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk, Education Scotland is working with teachers and officers to make connections across the authorities and resource a group of leaders who can work collaboratively to really make an impact on every school, on every learner across the authorities. The local authorities have committed to mentoring other authorities. The first meeting will be in January 2016 – it's not just for schools & authorities to find out how to take this forward, it's for all of us.
4. **Embed this in the system** – LfS is now in 'How good is our school?' and the GTCS Professional Standards for practitioners, but not yet early years.

Question When will the self-evaluation tool you're working on be available?

This is currently being developed by the Working Group and should be available in early 2016.

Group Discussions- Contributing to the Learning for Sustainability in Scotland's schools in the context of the SDGs

Key points from discussions were:

- The importance of school leadership in promoting change and giving the opportunity to embed LfS in schools.
- Schools are doing a lot of it already and pointing this out to teachers, joining up current activity and sharing good practice (using the LfS word cloud) is helpful
- There's a real excitement about the engagement and potential engagement in the teaching profession and in all the networks. The challenge is teachers' time and budgets.
- Challenges are opportunities! There's real value associated with LfS, wellbeing, attainment can all be positively affected with LfS.
- Use of technology in LfS can be empowering.
- There is potential to create more dialogue between research and policy makers / partners and use this to inspire practice.
- There are 17 SD goals, and people will look at them all individually but the role of LfS is helping people to understand the goals and how they connect to each other and to individuals.
- Involvement in more practical outdoor learning will help to change the outdoor environment of schools

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- Need to sustain sustainability, avoiding this being a flash in the pan and start locally to think globally..
- Opportunity with the SDGs to move beyond school, joining the dots and include intergenerational learning, community learning, industry.
- LfS and the SDGs involve finding the hooks that would add meaning and relevance to people's lives as well as being fun.

Scotland's engagement with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Joanna Keating is Head of International Development Team, International Division, Scottish Government Scotland is this week celebrating 10 years of its International partnership with Malawi and Joanna has recently returned from visiting Malawi with Minister Humza Yousaf.

Joanna Keating's powerpoint presentation can be found [here](#).

Question: There are 17 SDGs. Has Scotland discussed its priorities or are we going to have several projects crossing many?

The International Development team is currently thinking about all the goals. So many of them are already being mapped through the National Performance Framework and are being delivered but we are also looking at the gaps. All the goals are important and crucial for development. A real cross sectoral approach is needed.

Concluding remarks, Dr Rehema White

'I'd like to introduce an analogy – we're driving along the road, in our rear view mirror we can see what's unsustainable behind us. We can see in our past we've had some positive countryside we've gone through and that we started off, and perhaps we can finish by looking far ahead at the horizon. Our SDGs are what we want to head towards. What are the pragmatic ways of finding our path towards these global goals – how do we get to them?

We had horizon type discussions – what is the purpose of education? It's important to do that. Is it Societal preparation, cogs for the economic machines, allowing people to reach their potential? Scotland with CfE has come up with pragmatic ways to let people embrace balance. We've had policy leadership and it has been good to have Chuck Hopkins telling us that – sometimes we forget how lucky we are in Scotland. We're not very good at singing our own praises so thank you for reminding us!

We've had nice examples of what is LfS and what it is not. It is not just about nature, it's a pathway to address challenges we have around attainment, equality, making our schools more effective, supporting individual learners, and teachers. Also how we work together in Scotland – we have good networks. We are struggling to make communications – blogs, twitter, and to attend meetings where there's less finance and resource and we know teachers are pushed to deliver what they can at the moment.

Although Scotland is small it can still make a big difference. We have top down support from civil service and government and bottom up from practitioners and learners. We hope that this report will feed into our national agenda in LfS and our international agenda. We hope you will take these conversations back into your work places and continue them. We should be proud and inspired that we have this national agenda and willingness and permission to engage in these things but we should be pragmatic about how we go on and achieve. When you go out there, do try to have fun – as you're heading toward your horizons don't forget to pull over and have a picnic'.