

Learning for Sustainability Scotland

Submission to the Smith Commission

31 October 2014

Summary

Learning for Sustainability Scotland (LfSS) is a UN recognized network organisation representing a wide range of individual and organizational members seeking to create a flourishing, sustainable world by harnessing the full potential of learning within formal institutions (e.g. schools, FE and HE) and in non-formal (e.g. community, business) and informal (e.g. through media and cultural norms) contexts. The principles and practices of learning for sustainability underpin our support for significant devolution of powers to Scotland. We wish to maintain and expand the successes of our devolved education system; facilitate community empowerment, encourage ethical business and media activity; and promote governance for the wellbeing of Scotland's people and places. Financial costing of devolution and future related activities should thus consider non-financial values such as wellbeing and be framed within long-term perspectives. Finally, we seek greater participation in the devolution process to maintain the active engagement of people, especially young people, and to enable a wider debate on the future of Scotland.

Introduction to Learning for Sustainability Scotland

Learning for Sustainability Scotland (LfSS - Scotland's United Nations Recognised Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development¹) is a network of organisations and individuals working to harness the full potential of learning to create a flourishing, sustainable world; where communities value the natural environment; societies are inclusive, equitable and peaceful; and a vibrant economy contributes to flourishing ecosystems.

LfSS was developed partly in response to the end of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 (UNDESD²). The Decade has influenced many learning for sustainability initiatives in Scotland, and has showcased Scotland as an international leader in this area. This week we see the celebratory end of UNDESD conference held by the Scottish Government and we are sending representatives to the UNESCO conferences in Japan in November 2014 that will draw the UNDESD formally to a close. LfSS will enable us to ensure the momentum that is currently seen throughout Scotland continues beyond the Decade, and we hope to continue to play an international role in learning for sustainability in the subsequent Global Action Programme.

¹ <http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org>

² <http://www.desd.org>

LfSS is a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE), and even without the impetus of UNDES, RCEs have been identified as a mechanism to encourage development and strengthening of education in sustainable development practice across a defined region³. Recognised through the United Nations Universities (UNU), a RCE is a network of formal, non-formal and informal education organisations, mobilised to deliver education for sustainable development to local and regional communities. The RCE is a non-prescribed model, enabling a region to self-define and shape their RCE based on their needs. LfSS is hosted by the University of Edinburgh and is governed by an elected steering group who currently represent schools, further and higher education, community development, NGOs and government agencies. It is part of a growing global network of more than 125 RCEs (RCE Network). This international network allows regions to share and learn from each other, and establish or strengthen international partnerships.

What does LfSS do?

Learning for Sustainability Scotland's 250 members work together to deliver learning for sustainability across all aspects of learning and advance the understanding and practice of learning for sustainability in Scotland so it reaches its full potential through:

- Identifying and sharing existing knowledge, expertise and lessons learned between Scotland's policy makers, educators, institutions, organisations and communities
- Actively generating new knowledge and approaches to Learning for Sustainability through cooperative partnerships, projects, initiatives and research
- Monitoring, evaluating, and gap analysis of progress on learning for sustainability in Scotland
- Providing advice on learning for sustainability to practitioners, policy and decision-makers
- Sharing our learning internationally and providing a mechanism for members to learn from others around the world as part of the RCE Network

Not all of the support for learning for sustainability in Scotland is delivered by LfSS but it is a key aspect of the national focus on this area.

Why is learning for sustainability important in considering the future of Scotland?

In Scotland, the term 'learning for sustainability' has been adopted, firstly, to reflect an expanded focus within schools and, secondly, to demonstrate our wider scope across other formal educational institutions but also informal and non-formal contexts. Within schools, the term denotes an extended concept that weaves together the three fields of Sustainable Development Education, Global Citizenship and Outdoor Learning.

However, 'learning for sustainability' is also critical within further and higher education, as illustrated by recent activity within LfSS, by the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC), by several institutions across Scotland and beyond

³ <http://ias.unu.edu/en/research/education-for-sustainable-development-rces-and-prosper-net.html#outline>

and by the recent release of QAA Guidelines on ESD in HE⁴. In addition, Scotland has always recognised the importance of ‘community’ in establishing a flourishing society. ‘Learning for sustainability’ in communities enables the release of existing capacity; empowerment; articulation of ideas and collective action for a better future through grassroots mobilisation. ‘Learning for sustainability’ is also a part of the remaking of our economic systems, towards ethical and responsible businesses and the revitalisation of social enterprise. And ‘learning for sustainability’ is also part of the informal process of awareness by which individuals gather information and develop their attitudes and behaviours; influenced by the media, by peers and by cultural norms as well as by more formal education processes. It is part of the purpose of learning for sustainability to encourage individuals to also critically interrogate these influences, and when learning for sustainability reaches its fullest potential, it is a transformative experience: changing our understanding of the world, our place in it and our interactions with it. It thus influences how Scotland’s citizens will establish priorities for the future of Scotland and be equipped to pursue them.

Principles of learning for sustainability

Learning for sustainability is based on the understanding that social justice and environmental integrity are interconnected and are essential to develop a more equitable society that can live within resource limits. Learning for sustainability acknowledges the right of everyone to participate in decision making, and the better decisions that emerge from such processes. Learning for sustainability recognises that sustainable development is a process, a dynamic and complex undertaking.

Assessment of the current situation regarding devolution

Individual and organisational members of LfSS will hold a range of political views but LfSS is neutral with regard to support of any political party. Our assessment of the current situation is that the pursuit of a better future in Scotland could be strengthened through learning that empowers people, enables them to reach their individual potential and fulfil their democratic role, and is predicated on the need for social justice and environmental integrity.

Suggestions in relation to devolution

In line with our principles, we would, firstly, support a wider debate on the priorities for devolution, enabling the participation of people from all backgrounds and building on the vigorous and inclusive debates we all witnessed prior to the referendum. We see such continued debate as furthering establishing the capacity of people to contribute to society and to be active and engaged in their local and national agendas. In particular, we recognise the value of the recent engagement of the youth of Scotland in this debate and would see further support of their democratic voice as being a critical part of future plans.

⁴ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Education-sustainable-development-Guidance-June-14.pdf>

Secondly, we value the current formal educational system, in which we have made significant progress in learning for sustainability over the past decade, and which is the envy of many other nations. This devolved area of education has demonstrated the advances Scotland can make in particular sectors.

Thirdly, we recognise the importance of community in multi-level governance and we promote continued debate over development in this area. This will have consequences for the potential devolved area of energy, since many community movements with which we are engaged see low energy processes or development aided by renewable energy production as being a key aspect of their future goals.

Fourthly, we acknowledge the need for an enlightened media and business context within which the future of Scotland can be debated honestly and openly according to universal principles rather than short-term corporate or personal gain.

With regard to the financial implications of devolution, we are concerned that financial implications are often calculated merely as profit or loss to large companies. We would prefer the negative and positive *value* of devolved processes to be calculated, or at least estimated where data do not exist. Hence, for example, we would see long-term value estimation as being important; value in terms of natural, human and social capitals as well as financial capital as being relevant; and would recognise intrinsic and indirect values as being pertinent. We would favour estimations such as those of the HM Treasury commissioned ‘Stern Review’⁵ regarding climate change, rather than limited short-term views.

Further consultation

This response was developed in the brief period available for consultation within the Steering Group of LfSS. This debate should be expanded more widely across LfSS members and beyond. We thus ask that further participation be enabled, in a way that empowers people within institutions and communities to create and buy into future change for Scotland. LfSS considers that through its members, it has a relevant voice to contribute to this debate.

Contacts:

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⁵ Stern Review on the economics of climate change
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm