

'CATALYSING A MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE: Learning for Sustainability in Scotland'

Background

In June 2023 The Scottish Government launched Scotland's refreshed Learning for Sustainability action plan - [Target 2030: A movement for people, planet and prosperity "](#), which aims to 'build an inspiring movement for change so every 3 to 18 place of education becomes a sustainable learning setting by 2030'.

At a time of economic, environmental and social crises, this refreshed and much-strengthened Action Plan - based on the original five strategic goals accepted by Scottish Government Ministers in 2013 and the subsequent, [Vision 2030+: Concluding report of the Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group \(2016\)](#) - has cross-party support.

The Plan has been launched in the context of educational reform and system change in Scotland and offers a potentially ground-breaking opportunity to respond to the values, skills and knowledge that are required for learners to thrive in an increasingly complex and interdependent world.

On 30 August 2023, ahead of the Plan's national 'Call to Action' in October 2023, Learning for Sustainability Scotland invited a diverse group from within and outwith Scotland's education system to a creative round-table event to explore and uncover the essential ingredients which will catalyse this 'Movement for Change'.

Bringing About a Movement for Change.

In small group discussions, participants considered three questions:

- From your experience, what is a movement for change?
- From your experience in creating a movement for change what are success factors?
- What are common barriers and how can they be overcome?

The following material is drawn from group summaries delivered in plenary, and the verbatim text on flipcharts.

GROUP SUMMARIES

GROUP 1

- Enabling the educators who are already there and already doing things and supporting them and enabling more people to do this.
- Supporting collective action based on shared belief. Finding a common cause
- What is success? Perhaps it's those two things all mixed together.

GROUP 2

- Interesting point about leadership - do we need a figurehead or is leadership more distributed - or is it both?
- Social media hashtag that works.
- You need structure, but you need flexibility so people can co-create. Evolution and implementation can be positive or negative but it should support 'organic' growth.
- Window of opportunity around education reform. Design principles for new educational agencies, processes and practice should include sustainability.
- The idea needs to be simple. Communicated from person to person.
- The action plan should be flexible enough to be engaged with.
- We need to reach a societal 'tipping point'.

- Barriers - teachers may not be free or empowered enough, there may be a lack of will, systems inertia, language and meaning - are we all on the same page as to what the movement actually stands for? Can policy makers plan for unintended consequences?

GROUP 3

- How do we measure success? How do we ensure inclusion? It's not always about the pass rates - it's about getting involved in achieving something along the way. It comes back to what's actually being measured within policy.
- Lots of people moving in the same direction, but they need to understand what that is and what the goal is and what they're trying to achieve - and that might be difficult at times.
- Policy conflict doesn't help. Policy conflicting with other policy can cause real confusion around what the actual goal is.
- Success factors include emotional connection which is absolutely key. Creativity. Flexibility.
- We need systemic change, as well the shift in power from teacher to student to give them that sense of agency to allow them to lead. It may start with the teacher, but by the end of the project, the students should be able to lead by themselves.
- Sharing of agency is absolutely crucial; as well as bringing people together of all walks of life and ages.
- Barriers. Systems can create barriers, policy can create barriers, busy people. People sitting on the fence - they could be the target group and if we get them on side, we're on to a winner.
- Identity is a pivotal point in terms of positives and negatives.
- 'Solution-ising' education: making it the 'be all and end all' - it's not the only thing. It's critical but the movement for change must go beyond education.
- Is there an existing green social movement in Scotland that we could draw on e.g. the concept of ['dúthchas'](#)? This may be something we could start to use - it's already in place. Start with that and move with that.

GROUP 4

- Breaking down the silos. How do we collaborate and work in partnership?
- Having a vision for LfS – what does it look like, where are we going, how do we reference the 'bigger picture'?
- Has to be a whole-system approach: bigger than education, benefiting the whole of society. Get everyone on board.
- We need to be uncomfortable about the vision - need to be ambitious, it shouldn't sit easy with us.
- Is it about curriculum reform or implementing the SDGs through the National Performance Framework? It could be both or is it one or the other - in which case we'll need to think about different approaches.
- Learning from what others are already doing e.g. using examples from primary schools as to how they have disrupted things in the wider community and be the catalyst for change.
- Think about the journey -how we plan the journey; celebrate milestones along the way; how can we be inspired by others, how we can go 'viral'.
- What if we are at the start of human civilization, rather than the end? We might see things differently!
- Could the LfS Action Plan be a way of breaking down barriers between formal and informal education?
- Charting the journey along the way. This could be a driver for developing not just the LfS action plan but many other policy initiatives as we go

FLIPCHART TEXT

What is a 'movement for change'?

GROUP 1

- An honest reflection of where we are, where we want to be and realistically how we want to get there
- Mobilise the power of those directly affected by change to take action
- Collective action based on shared beliefs and objectives
- ...Results from a catalyst that prompts shared feeling – a critical mass
- ...An intention, aspiration, but is often against existing structures and policies
- Shared language and structures
- Must be systemic: can change/improve part of the system but not effective in the longer term; shared understanding; how to sustain momentum, agency
- Collaborative action, collaborative learning. How to sustain through secondary and higher education?

GROUP 2

- Not created
- A 'tipping point' needs to be reached
- May involve more than one Movement

GROUP 3

- Energy, passion, feeling, agency
- Stronger, more demanding policies. Lots of people moving in the same direction

What are key success factors?

GROUP 1

- Autonomy
- Supportive communities of practice
- Collaborative learning

GROUP 2

- Clear ask
- Simple ideas or principles
- Can be 'customised' – run with by people
- Action Plan simple enough to be engaged with
- Ownership and agency for all
- Leadership which is distributed, champions supported
- Social media hashtag that works
- Use education reform (change) as a window of opportunity
- Make sure design factors include sustainability
- Role of agencies and organisations in connecting and empowering
- Provide nudges

GROUP 3

- What will be measured? Measurement to be inclusive of those who have tried, not needing 100% completion#
- Creativity, emotional connection, flexibility
- Power of education as part of system change
- Shift in power from teachers to students/pupils to share agency.
- Need to understand what it is, what the goal is
- Bringing people together
- Create a sense of place/culture (e.g. Gaelic dúthchas)
- Is there an existing social movement in Scotland that this could build on?

GROUP 4

- Breaking down silos. How can we work in partnership?
- How do we connect things to the bigger picture? It has to be bigger than education?
- What does LfS look like? Where are we going?
- Collective perception of what's wrong. What does better look like? Agreed vision
- Needs to be uncomfortable if we are to be ambitious, or we are not challenging ourselves
- Bring wider community engagement eg Stow Primary School Disrupters: Community Partnerships, school catalysed community change
- Whole system approach required, and making the case for how it is going to benefit the whole of society
- Need to celebrate and share journeys
- Needs to 'go viral'
- Climate isn't the hook for everyone #nowrongjourneyforLfS. Social and economic transformation
- Need tangible checkpoints to avoid short term thinking

What are common barriers and how can they be overcome?

GROUP 1

- What are the quantitative/quantifiable measures of meeting the objectives?
- Professional autonomy
- Monitor and evaluate
- Educational structures
- Cluttered curriculum

GROUP 2

- Evolution and implementation could be barrier or opportunity
- Language and meaning of LfS
- Structures could be a barrier
- Lack of will, system inertia

GROUP 3

- Systems can create barriers. Need to place 'education at the centre' and ensure that policy conflict doesn't happen.
- Busy people that consider 'this doesn't affect me'

GROUP 4

- 'Is the LfS Action Plan about implementing SDGs in NPF or is it about curriculum reform?
- Make it easier for CLD to work with formal education, Capacity CLD teams very stretched
- Financial constraints challenge. Could Lottery funding be used for schools?