Implementing Education for Sustainable Development

Messages for providers of adult learning and skills, and the agencies that work with them

niace
promoting adult learning

>lsc
Leading learning and skills

Sponsored by the former Learning and Skills Council

Supported by:

eauc
The Environmental Association
for Universities and Colleges

Hull College

LSIS
LEARNING
AND SKILLS
IMPROVEMENT
SERVICE

Contents

1.0   Introduction

1.1   About this report

This report draws on the findings of development work undertaken by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) between July 2009 and March 2010. It sets out key messages for the implementation of education for sustainable development (ESD) in adult learning and skills provision in England. Further information about the project - 'Awareness raising for adult community learning and not for profit providers on education for sustainable development' - can be found in Section 2 of this report.

The project has produced a range of materials and resources to support ESD across the adult learning and skills sector. These include:

- detailed information on the introduction of ESD into the Common Inspection Framework (see the Ofsted presentation on the Excellence Gateway collaborative workroom);
- an organisational ESD audit tool;
- example structure and content for an organisational ESD strategy;
- example structure and content for an ESD curriculum strategy;
- guidance and resources to support staff to embed ESD in the curriculum;
- discussion forums on key ESD topics;
- a comprehensive list of links to ESD-related websites and on-line resources.

The materials and resources can be accessed at the Education for Sustainable Development collaborative workroom on the Excellence Gateway (www.excellencegateway.org.uk).

1.2   Who is the report for and what does it cover?

The report is for:

- adult learning and skills providers, to support them to progress their development of ESD whatever their starting point. This audience includes:
  - senior managers in adult learning and skills providers with responsibility for strategic and operational planning and development;
  - curriculum managers;
  - quality improvement leads.

- strategic agencies that support providers in the adult learning and skills sector through research, development and quality improvement support.

Whilst the report is based primarily on work with adult and community learning and not-for-profit providers, its messages are transferable and will also be of interest to all organisations offering learning for adults.

1.3   What is education for sustainable development?

Sustainable development can be a difficult concept to pin down, and there is no single agreed definition. Most definitions of sustainable development currently adopted in UK policy derive from the so-called Brundtland definition developed at the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987):

> *Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

A narrow view of sustainable development has traditionally tended to associate it almost exclusively with the environment and 'green' issues. However, growing awareness of the challenges and implications of globalisation and climate change is leading to a recognition that sustainable development means addressing the complex relationships between economic prosperity, social justice and environmental protection.

Lifelong learning has an important role to play in equipping society with the skills, knowledge and understanding to meet these challenges with intelligence, creativity and resilience. ESD has many strands, including:

- skills training for 'green-collar' jobs;
- learning about sustainable development issues;
- learning in ways which embody sustainable development principles;
- learning that develops underlying values, knowledge and principles with a view to fostering more sustainable behaviours;
- learning that develops the critical thinking and radical action needed to shift society towards more sustainable behaviours;
- managing the provision of education in ways that promote sustainable practices.

The starting point for developing ESD has to be that the answers to the challenge of sustainable development are contested and evolving, and approaching them is a collective endeavour. It was in this spirit that the awareness raising project was undertaken. The messages in this report are presented not as solutions, but as suggested steps on a journey.

2.0   Project summary

2.1   Background and rationale

In July 2009, NIACE was commissioned by the LSC to develop a programme of awareness raising and support around ESD for adult and community learning (ACL) and Third Sector learning providers.   The work was commissioned because:

- earlier research by NIACE showed that ACL and Third Sector providers were keen to engage with this important agenda, but many needed access to support and resources to start and sustain the journey;
- it was known that ESD was to be introduced into the new Common Inspection Framework (CIF), published September 2009, and recognised that providers would need additional help to prepare for inspection.

2.2   Project aims

The project aimed to:

- raise awareness of these changes to the CIF among adult and community learning and Third Sector providers;
- work with Ofsted, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), learning and skills providers and the LSC, to gather and disseminate information to enable providers to improve their knowledge and practice in relation to ESD;
- identify and develop mechanisms for sharing information, knowledge and approaches to ESD across the adult learning and skills sector;
- feedback information to Ofsted, LSIS and the LSC to inform strategic level decision making and support for providers around ESD.

2.3   Expert advisory group

An expert advisory group was established to provide on-going advice, feedback and support throughout the project. Membership comprised of Ofsted, LSIS, LSC, the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC), and providers with a track record and knowledge of ESD, including FE colleges.

The group met at the beginning and end of the project. It advised on the direction and focus of the work, content for the regional seminars, lessons learned, links to other relevant developments, and how the project can secure impact.

2.4   Regional awareness-raising seminars

Nine regional awareness raising seminars were held during November and December 2009. These events aimed to:

- inform delegates about the introduction of sustainable development in the CIF;
- share practice, ideas, resources and experience in relation to ESD;
- identify information, support and resource needs to aid the development of ESD;
- agree follow up actions and further regional networking opportunities.

Around 220 participants registered for the seminars. The events were aimed primarily at learning providers from ACL and the Third Sector, but attracted a wider audience with a minority of participants being drawn from colleges, HE and private training providers. Third sector delegates came from consortia and other umbrella organisations, as well as individual providers from a range of occupational sectors including health, the environment, older people, families, housing, the arts, and digital media. ACL delegates were predominantly from local authority adult learning services.

Each of the seminars included a presentation from Ofsted on ESD in the new CIF, and one to two further presentations from a local provider or providers sharing their experiences of introducing ESD within their organisation. Presentations were given by representatives from:

- Cambridge Regional College
- Bedford College
- Derbyshire Adult Community Education
- WEA North East
- Lancaster and Morecambe College
- University of Brighton
- Somerset Adult Learning Service
- South Staffordshire College
- Doncaster Adult, Family and Community Learning Service
- WEA Yorkshire and Humber

Participants attended a choice of two discussion sessions on the following themes:

- Strategic planning and a whole organisation approach
- ESD and self assessment
- ESD and curriculum development
- Managing energy and resources

In each workshop, participants addressed the questions:

- What do we need to do?
- How can we go about it?
- What support do we need to move forward?

Feedback and comments from each of the discussion sessions across the nine seminars has been collated and uploaded to the Excellence Gateway collaborative workroom (see Section 2.5).

Delegates attending the events described a range of ways in which they intended to use what they had learned, including:

- sharing information with senior management teams and colleagues to ensure that ESD was taken forward at both a strategic level and across the organisation; umbrella organisations intended to cascade information to their members;
- carrying out an audit of current ESD-related activity;
- integrating ESD into policies and procedures, and/or developing an ESD policy;
- developing staff training and inductions to include ESD;
- publicising and raising the profile of ESD and the work that their organisation is doing in this area, internally and externally;
- supporting the embedding of ESD across curriculum areas.

2.5 Excellence Gateway collaborative workroom

With assistance from LSIS, a collaborative workroom on Education for Sustainable Development was established on the Excellence Gateway (www.excellencegateway.org.uk). The workroom provides space for networking and sharing of resources. It currently has around sixty members.

Outputs from the thematic workshops at the seminars, together with further resources identified and developed during the project, have been added to the workroom. There are also discussion forums on key topics.

2.6 Development of key resources

The regional seminars helped to identify a number of key resources that were urgently needed to support providers' ESD activity. An additional strand of work was therefore initiated within the project to develop:

- an audit tool;
- example structure and content for an organisational ESD strategy;
- example structure and content for an ESD curriculum strategy;
- a framework for the development of content for discrete and embedded ESD in different curriculum areas.

A small working group of providers was set up to develop and trial the resources, which were then piloted more widely and revised to reflect feedback. The final versions of the resources are available through the Excellence Gateway collaborative workroom.

3.0   Key messages

Consistent messages to assist strategic agencies, senior managers, and curriculum leads to support the development of ESD were identified by participants. These are set out below.

3.1   For strategic agencies

Raising awareness of ESD among their staff and partners

Providers will look to strategic agencies, in particular the Skills Funding Agency, LSIS, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) and the Institute for Learning (IfL), and their partners for support to develop their ESD practice. Ofsted will also have a central role to play in raising awareness of ESD through the implementation of the new Common Inspection Framework. In order to fulfil this role effectively, it will be important for these agencies to develop the awareness of ESD among their own staff and their partner organisations.

Supporting networks and the sharing of experience

Providers welcome the opportunity to share experiences, insights and approaches both within and between sectors. This proved to be a powerful way of fostering understanding about ESD, especially among managers in organisations in the early stages of developing their work in this area. Delegates at all the regional seminars expressed a desire for face-to-face regional and sub-regional ESD networks to facilitate shared learning and development.

Supporting the development and sharing of good and interesting practice across sectors

There is emerging good and interesting practice and curriculum development in all sectors of adult learning and skills. It is clear that some providers within the FE college sector have moved furthest in embedding ESD across the organisation, while some adult and community learning and not for profit providers have developed creative and interesting approaches. Providers can learn much from other sectors, but practice is not always readily transferable without adaptation to the context in which it will be offered. More support needs to be given to translating the lessons across sectors so that they are meaningful for all types of adult learning provider.

As the lead body for quality improvement in ESD, LSIS is well placed to support further capacity building across all parts of the sector, including FE colleges, adult and community learning organisations, not for profit and work-based learning providers. This support could include: leadership and management development; curriculum development; staff development programmes; the production of toolkits and resources for managers and staff at different levels; and research into effective practice.

LSIS, the Skills Funding Agency and Ofsted in particular can support the on-going identification, analysis and dissemination of evolving good practice across the learning and skills sector to facilitate awareness raising and quality improvement. This could include, for example, supporting the sharing of evidence about evolving definitions, interpretations and applications of ESD emerging from providers' practice.

Embedding ESD in national frameworks and standards for staff training and continuing professional development (CPD)

There is a need to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding of managers, tutors and trainers, and staff in all parts of organisations in order to embed ESD across the work of adult learning providers. The following agencies in particular have potential roles to play:

- LLUK could ensure that ESD is included within the relevant National Occupational Standards;

- IfL could ensure that ESD is covered within the reflective elements of CPD.

Supporting ESD through leadership and management training and staff development

Managers of adult learning providers need support to develop their skills to lead and manage change in relation to ESD. They also need the support of relevant materials, resources and communities of practice to enable them to increase the skills, knowledge and understanding of ESD among their colleagues and staff.

3.2   For senior managers

Leading and managing change

The implementation of a whole organisation approach to ESD may demand a transformation in the way that an organisation thinks and acts. Senior managers need to access appropriate leadership and management support to enable them to take forward the change in a way that secures commitment from other managers, staff at all levels, learners and the wider community that the organisation serves.

Identifying what is already taking place

Many adult learning managers are surprised to recognise how much their organisation already does that contributes to the ESD agenda. Carrying out a systematic audit of current ESD-related activity that is taking place across the organisation is valuable for a number of reasons:

- it identifies the organisation's starting point;

- it stimulates motivation by highlighting and celebrating what is already being achieved;
- it fosters collective learning and responsibility;
- it helps to identify priorities for strategic planning and action planning and future actions, including both 'quick wins' and longer term objectives.

Strategic planning

Developing an organisational strategy and action plan for ESD, with clear targets and timescales to drive forward implementation, enables adult learning providers to foster a whole organisation approach to ESD. This ESD strategy can both reflect and inform the organisation's overarching strategic plan, and should address both curriculum and wider organisational concerns. Depending upon the individual organisation's structure, the ESD strategy can be separate from or embedded within the wider organisational strategic plan. It may be helpful to start with a separate ESD strategy which becomes embedded as the work gathers momentum and recognition. ESD can also be addressed within organisational self assessment reports. An ESD strategy that is being actively implemented and links to quality improvement processes is likely to be one of the key ways in which providers will be able to demonstrate their commitment to ESD at inspection.

Staff training and development

Effective implementation of ESD means securing the commitment of the whole organisation to the project. Reviewing staff inductions and training to include reference to ESD as appropriate is an important way of raising awareness of the agenda and its relevance to the work of staff in different roles.

Involving learners

Many learners may already have an interest in, and commitment to, sustainable development. They can be a valuable source of knowledge, energy and passion on which providers can draw using a range of approaches including blogs, learner forums, learner champions, and social networking sites. Capturing learner stories can also provide powerful testimonies of the impact of ESD on values, attitudes and behaviour.

Building links with the wider community

Adult learning providers can develop the reach, impact and creativity of their ESD work by exploring opportunities for linking with groups and organisations in the wider community. Potential partners include local employers, campaigning organisations and voluntary groups with specific interests in the sustainable development agenda. These links can open up valuable channels for the exchange of information and expertise between learning providers and the community and can encourage the development of active

citizenship, volunteering and understanding of the global dimension of ESD among learners and staff.

3.3 For curriculum leads

Strategic planning

Developing a curriculum strategy for ESD will help to give focus and coherence to both discrete and embedded ESD. Creating a curriculum strategy can be used to secure commitment to ESD from managers, tutors and learners, so it is important to involve all these groups in the process.

Individual providers will need to determine whether it is more appropriate for them to have a curriculum strategy for ESD that is separate from or embedded within their organisational ESD strategy, whether to have separate curriculum strategies for discrete and embedded ESD, and whether to have one curriculum strategy across the organisation or individual strategies for each curriculum area.

Using the resources that are available

Make use of the resources developed by this project and the LSC to support embedding of ESD in the curriculum, and the development of discrete and embedded provision where appropriate.[1]

Reviewing existing practice

Review course materials and schemes of work to identify where ESD can be incorporated.

Securing commitment from sub-contractors

Monitor the curriculum offer of sub-contractors, and if necessary introduce formal requirements within their contracts that they will address ESD as appropriate.

Staff development

Create staff development sessions which encourage tutors to explore what materials and resources are available to support the embedding of ESD within their own curriculum area.

---

[1] See ESD Consultancy and Learning and Skills Council (2009) *Embedding Sustainable Development in the Curriculum. Guidance for staff within learning institutions on how to embed sustainability into what and how they teach.* Available at http://www.eauc.org.uk/sorted/files/cg_embedding_(2).pdf; Excellence Gateway Education for Sustainable Development Collaborative Workroom, available at: www.excellencegateway.org.uk.
.

Sharing practice and resources

Develop a methodology for sharing practice and resources within and between curriculum areas. Potential methods include: use of the organisational intranet; the development of communities of practice; and moodles.

Acknowledgements

NIACE acknowledges the contribution of all the organisations and individuals who have helped to develop the work of this project through their participation in regional seminars and the Education for Sustainable Development collaborative workroom.

It particularly wishes to acknowledge the support and generosity of the following organisations, which contributed to the project Advisory Group and the working group which developed the tools and resources:

- Learning and Skills Council
- Ofsted
- Learning and Skills Improvement Service
- Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges
- Federation of Community Development Learning
- Hull College
- Enfield Community Learning Service
- Doncaster Adult, Family and Community Learning Service
- Somerset Skills and Learning Service
- Groundwork UK