ESD to 2030:

Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development

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Foreword

We are facing huge global challenges, such as climate change and growing inequalities. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) promotes and supports the development of the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes that help everyone to take action for a sustainable future and planet.

The Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development: *ESD to 2030*, provides a framework to steer and support the contribution that the education sector is making and will continue to make towards a sustainable future by 2030.

ESD to 2030 spans the continuum of education in Ireland, from early learning and care to third level education and research, and extends beyond to engage with local communities, and youth groups through lifelong learning. Building on the progress achieved under the first National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (2014-2020), ESD to 2030 sets out five key priority areas for action over the coming years.

Crucially, this strategy aims to ensure that ESD is embedded into our policy and operational frameworks, and also seeks to transform our learning environments. Sustainability and inclusion need to be at the heart of education, with these principles not only embedded in our teaching and learning and research, but also in the way we manage and govern our educational environments and our partnerships with local communities. We know that our students are passionate about creating sustainable learning environments and we need to support them in 'living what they learn', and in taking action throughout their lives.

It is vital that we equip our educators with the competencies to embed ESD principles and practices at all levels in our education system, and that tools and materials for ESD are accessible so that people and communities are empowered to make a real difference in their lives.

This strategy aims to enhance ESD leadership in educational institutions and in the community more generally, and it supports the active engagement of, and participation by children and young people, our global citizens of the future, in decision making processes. ESD can enable critical reflection, foster greater awareness, and empower citizens so that new visions and concepts can be explored, and new methods and tools developed. It can assist in preparing society to creatively tackle and envision future scenarios in a sustainable way.

While our three respective departments will lead on this strategy, it will be implemented through a cross-government approach and in close collaboration with early learning and care settings, schools, further and higher education institutions, youth groups, civil society organisations, local authorities, communities, and enterprise.

We know it won't be easy, but this framework will support us in working together to address an issue that impacts on us all now and for future generations.

By working together in innovative ways, we can achieve positive change.

Simon Harris, TD
Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Norma Foley, TD
Minister for Education

Roderic O'Gorman, TD
Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

1 About this Strategy

1.1 Introduction

"We are increasingly asking if what people learn is truly relevant to their lives, if what they learn helps to ensure the survival of our planet. Education for Sustainable Development can provide the knowledge, awareness and action that empowers people to transform themselves and transform societies."

Stefania Giannini
Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO[1]

At the time of formulating this strategy, our world has been made more aware than ever of the fragility of our existence on this planet. Human action is causing dangerous and widespread disruption in nature and affecting the lives and wellbeing of billions of people around the world through climate change, with the people least able to cope being hardest hit[2]. We have seen sweeping changes in geo-political relations, with an increase in hate speech, the outbreak of war, and conflict ongoing around the world. The role of social media in spreading misinformation has become increasingly apparent.

We are also slowly emerging from a global health crisis, which has had a huge impact on education systems across the world, with schools, universities and youth spaces in some countries closed for two years and a risk that some children and young people may never return to education.

This has taught us that the principles and values of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are more pertinent than ever. ESD can and must be a major guiding feature of what we do in education. ESD empowers people with the competencies to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future[3].

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs[4].

Sustainable development is about the interdependent relationship between people and the planet, and is grounded in the idea of intergenerational equity.

As a lifelong learning process, ESD enables people to understand the world around them and to identify the links and interdependencies between our individual actions, wider society and the natural and humanly constructed environment, locally and globally.

ESD is grounded in principles of social justice, equity and a respect for human rights and seeks to foster engaged and active citizens, of all ages, motivated to take action towards a sustainable future. By learning from one another and working individually and collectively, key global challenges of the 21st Century such as climate change, poverty, inequality, sustainable consumption, health and wellbeing, can be addressed.

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1   https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-member-states-map-future-education-sustainable-development

2   IPCC (Feb 2022). https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/press/IPCC_AR6_WGII_PressRelease-English.pdf

3   https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development

4   *Our Common Future/The Brundtland Report* (1987). Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf

Education for Sustainable Development

ESD empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.

ESD is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education that enhances cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural dimensions of learning. It is holistic and transformational and encompasses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment itself.

UNESCO, 2021

ESD happens at the nexus of and is underpinned by three interlinked pillars which are illustrated in Figure 1 and further detailed below:

Figure 1.

- **Social:** Equity, health; education; housing; poverty reduction, population growth; gender equity; cultural diversity; citizenship; peace; human rights; democracy; good governance; international cooperation; multilateralism.

- **Economic:** Economic growth; poverty; food prices; child labour; social exclusion; debt-security; production and consumption patterns; corporate responsibility; decent and fair work; migration; global inequality.

- **Environmental:** Healthy ecosystems, biodiversity and conservation are essential for humanity's continued security and sustainability, and affect all aspects of people's lives (climate change; disaster risk reduction; environmental protection; natural resource management; urban decay; water security).

ESD to 2030, is the Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, jointly developed by the Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), in consultation with key stakeholders. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is a co-sponsoring department for the strategy's implementation.

It builds on the successes of the first ESD strategy (2014-2020) and aims to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7, as well as being a key enabler for the achievement of all other SDGs. The strategy provides a framework to steer and support the contribution that the education sector is making and will continue to make towards a sustainable future by 2030. It is accompanied by a 4.5 year action plan 2022-2026, with an interim review planned in 2026 to evaluate progress and identify any additional actions required to 2030.

The strategy embodies a lifelong learning approach, spanning the continuum from early learning and care to third level education and research, and extending beyond to engage with local communities, youth groups and enterprise.

The structure of the strategy is aligned with UNESCO's Framework for ESD for 2030 and includes five key priority action areas:

Priority Action Areas

1. Advancing Policy
2. Transforming Learning Environments
3. Building Capacities of Educators
4. Empowering and Mobilising Young People
5. Accelerating Local Level actions

The key principles that underpinned the first National Strategy on ESD have continued to guide our thinking in the development of *ESD to 2030* and its accompanying implementation plan and we recommit to them here.

Key Principles

ESD in Ireland will aim to:

- Promote lifelong learning and engage all sectors of the education system, including the non-formal and informal education sectors.

- Balance social, environmental and economic considerations.

- Be an agent for positive change in reorienting societies towards sustainable development.

- Emphasise social justice and equity, climate justice, anti-racism and interculturalism.

- Focus on values and promote active democratic citizenship and inclusion as a means of empowering the individual and the community.

- Be locally relevant while also linking the local to the national and global.

- Be interdisciplinary and recognise interdependence and interconnectivities across other sectors.

- Promote and use a variety of pedagogical techniques that support active and participatory learning, critical thinking and the development of key dispositions and skills.

Since 2014, ESD has been considered as an umbrella term and the strong commonalities between ESD and other forms of values education continue to be recognised in this strategy, in particular with global citizenship education and development education. There are also synergies with environmental education, human rights education, intercultural education and peace education. We will work with partners to build links and maximise our shared impact through this strategy.

1.2 ESD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

ESD is a key element of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnerships. Ireland played a central role in the development of the 17 SDGs, which were adopted in September 2015 by all UN Member States. The SDGs came into force on 1st January 2016, two years after the development of the first National Strategy on ESD.

The SDGs (also called Global Goals) apply to high, middle and low income countries, with common but differentiated responsibilities. Ireland has committed, through a whole of government approach, to integrating the SDGs into policy and planning at both a national and international level.

Figure 2: ESD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

DoE, DFHERIS and DCEDIY share lead responsibility for implementing SDG 4: Quality Education. It is widely recognised that ESD is an integral element of SDG 4, as well as being a key enabler of all the other SDGs[5].

SDG 4.7 targets that:

> "by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

This integrated nature of the SDGs is a key feature of their design – with ESD at the heart of what an education system should deliver for learners and society, the wider targets under

Goal 4 are also of great relevance and importance to the ESD agenda, embodying themes such as inclusion, gender equality, skills for decent work and a global perspective. For that reason, we endeavour to ensure that *ESD to 2030* is strongly informed by all ten targets under Goal 4.

Although this strategy is not intended to be the sole driver towards meeting these ambitious targets for the education system, a strong focus on ensuring policy alignment and coherence with other government strategies

has been taken to maximise impact across the various domains.

Our three departments are represented on the SDGs Inter-Departmental Working Group, Senior Officials Group, and the SDGs Data Governance Group and will work closely with relevant stakeholders, including the Central Statistics Office, to ensure that monitoring and reporting on SDG 4.7, as well as the wider targets under Goal 4 are progressed over the period of the strategy.

Figure 3: SDG 4 targets

- 4.6 Youth & Adult Literacy
- Gender Equality & Equal Access for All — 4.5
- 4.7 Sustainable Development & Global Citizenship
- Skills for decent Work — 4.4
- Equal Access to TVET & Higher Education — 4.3
- 4.a Safe & Inclusive Learning Environments
- Early Childhood & Pre-Primary Education — 4.2
- 4.b Scholarships for Higher Education
- Quality Primary/ Secondary Education for All — 4.1
- 4.c Professional Development of Teachers

5   https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366797.locale=en p. 2. Accessed 23rd March 2022.

The image below, from *Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 – Report on Indicators for Goal 4 Quality Education* (CSO 2020)[6] captures some of the most recently published data relevant to Ireland's position on achieving Goal 4 targets:

Figure 4: Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 – Report on Indicators for Goal 4 Quality Education.

As Ireland seeks to further embed ESD across the continuum of education, it will undoubtedly also support the achievement of the other 16 SDGs. ESD seeks to build understanding of the interconnections between social, economic and environmental systems and fosters the development of skills and the motivation to take action for a

sustainable future. This strategy endeavors to build connections, through partnerships and synergies with national plans, supporting cohesive delivery of the SDG agenda.

This approach is in line with that of a number of other European countries. Countries such as Germany and Sweden also support the view that education systems can have positive

impacts across the range of SDGs, while retaining Goal 4 as the priority. Iceland too stresses the message that a good, inclusive education system will automatically be a system that fosters ESD and underscores the importance of supporting students with special educational needs, school attendance and the voice of students in this regard.
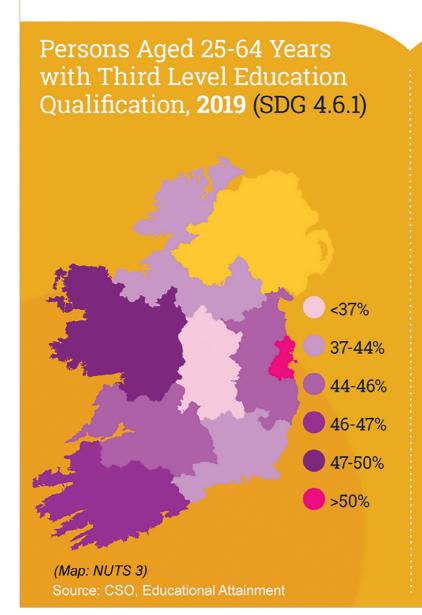

An Phríomh-Oifig Staidrimh Central Statistics Office

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Goal 4 - Quality Education

Persons Aged 25-64 Years with Third Level Education Qualification, **2019** (SDG 4.6.1)

<37%
37-44%
44-46%
46-47%
47-50%
>50%

(Map: NUTS 3)
Source: CSO, Educational Attainment

Student Assessment Proficiency Level - 15 Year Olds, **2018** (SDG 4.1.1)

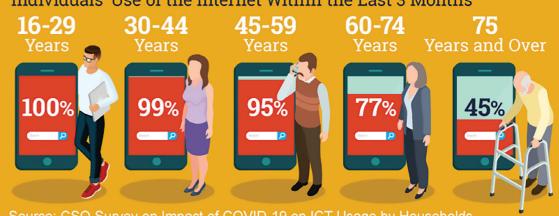|	Reading	Maths
Above Level 1	**88%**	**84%**
Level 4+	**36%**	**29%**

Source: Educational Research Centre, PISA 2018

Participation Rate of Youth and Adults in Education, **2018** (SDG 4.3.1)

Leaving Certificate Retention Rate

91.5%

Source: Department of Education & Skills

Enrolment Rate in Full-Time Primary Education, **2015** (SDG 4.2.2)

	Age 4	Age 5
Both Sexes	**33.8%**	**96.7%**
Male	**32.2%**	**96.8%**
Female	**35.5%**	**96.5%**

Source: Department of Education and Skills

Youth and Adults with IT Skills, **March 2020** (SDG 4.4.1)

Individuals' Use of the Internet Within the Last 3 Months

16-29 Years	30-44 Years	45-59 Years	60-74 Years	75 Years and Over
100%	99%	95%	77%	45%

Source: CSO Survey on Impact of COVID-19 on ICT Usage by Households

6   https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-sdg4/irelandsunsdgs2019-reportonindicatorsforgoal4qualityeducation/

1.3 Our Policy Context

International Context

As set out in the previous sections, the overarching framework provided by the UN SDGs and Goal 4.7 in particular, is a key driver underpinning this new strategy. A Decade of Action, 2020-2030 was announced by the UN General Assembly in September, 2019, to accelerate efforts to deliver on the ambitious, universal and inclusive 2030 Agenda.

UNESCO, as the lead UN agency on ESD, has developed a 'roadmap' to guide national policy makers in mainstreaming ESD in education systems and to support the achievement of the SDGs during this Decade of Action. It was agreed that the UNESCO Roadmap: '*ESD for 2030*'[7] would be the guiding document for formulating the new strategy, providing a framework of priority action areas and facilitating alignment with the SDGs. These priority action areas were used to inform the consultation process with the public and key stakeholders and provide the structure for this new strategy.

There have also been a number of key developments at a European level in recent years with relevance to ESD.

- The **European Green Deal**[8] was announced by the European Commission in December 2019 and includes a significant focus on future proofing jobs and skills for the green transition. It recognises that schools, training institutions and universities are well placed to engage with pupils, parents, and the wider community on the changes needed for a successful transition[9]. The development of a sustainability competence framework is one of the policy actions set out in the European Green Deal; "*GreenComp*"[10], will be a catalyst to promote learning on environmental sustainability in the European Union and will help in assessing knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development.

- The **European Education Area Communication**[11] emphasises the importance of inclusion, gender equality and investing in education and skills for the twin green and digital transitions, as being key to Europe's future resilience and prosperity. It highlights the "*need to enable a profound change in peoples' behaviour and skills, starting in the education systems and institutions as catalysts*", including a focus on transforming learning environments to be more sustainable.

- In June 2022, the European Council adopted a **Recommendation on Learning for the Green Transition and Sustainable Development**.[12]

- The **Council of Europe** has published a Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture[13] and accompanying guidance documents, which are of direct relevance and support in our ESD work.

- A **European Declaration on Global Education to 2050: The Dublin Declaration**, is being drafted in 2022, led by the Global Education Network in Europe (GENE), which will recall and build on the 2002 Maastricht Declaration on Global Education and international and European commitments to global sustainable development, human rights, peace and global justice, which recognise the importance of global education and public engagement; including Agenda 2030.

- **Horizon Europe** 2021-2027, is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation with a budget of €95.5 billion. It will help to tackle climate change, accelerate the green transition and support the achievement of the SDGs, adopting a grand challenges approach to societal transformation.

- The **European Strategy for Universities**[14], aims to empower universities as actors of change in the twin green and digital transitions. Actions will include a focus on promoting whole of institution approaches and mainstreaming environmental sustainability.

- The **European Council** stresses that *"young people are important change makers and essential partners in the implementation of the European Consensus on Development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change and recognises their creative and innovative potentials and abilities. Investing in, and working with, by and for youth, is of paramount importance to build stronger, more legitimate, peaceful and democratic societies, where human rights and the rule of law are respected and where no one is left behind"*[15].

- The UN **Committee on the Rights of the Child** in a general comment on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change[16], highlight the numerous adverse impacts that environmental harms, including climate change, are having on the life trajectory of children. They provide guidance to State Parties to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures in a child-rights approach to environmental issues with a special focus on climate change.

Our departments commit to joint engagement with relevant agencies, such as UNESCO, Council of Europe and the European Union in support of ESD over the course of this strategy.

7   https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374802

8   https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

9   European Green Deal Com (2019) 640 final. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

10 https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128040

11 Com (2020) 625 final. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625&from=EN

12 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/16/council-adopts-recommendation-to-stimulate-learning-for-the-green-transition/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Council+adopts+recommendation+to+stimulate+learning+for+the+green+transition+and+sustainable+development

13 https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/guidance-for-implementation

14 https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

15 Council of the European Union – Youth in external action – Council conclusions (5 June 2020). pdf (europa.eu)

16 OHCHR | CRC_GC26_concept_note 2021.

National Context

At the national level, the co-sponsoring departments for the strategy's implementation phase, DoE, DFHERIS and DCEDIY, will work to ensure strong alignment and complementarity between *ESD to 2030* and relevant education and research policies and strategies of the three departments. In particular, links with the following strategies will be made:

- Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy for schools (in development).

- Successor to the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (second framework in development).

- Adult Literacy for Life Strategy – 10 year adult literacy strategy.

- Future FET: Transforming Learning Strategy.

- National Skills Strategy 2025.

- Impact 2030 – Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy.

ESD actions also intersect with the role of a number of other Government departments and *ESD to 2030* therefore adopts a whole of government approach.

Close liaison will take place with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in relation to the Global Citizenship Education Strategy[17] and in support of the development of a new European Declaration on Global Education to 2050, led by GENE.
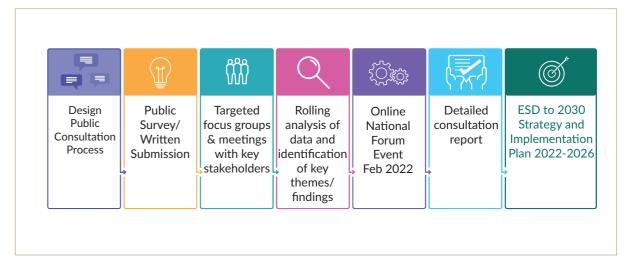
The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) leads on the SDGs National Implementation Plan[18], which will support and coordinate action to implement the SDGs across government. They also lead on the Climate Action Plan[19] (2021), which is a whole of government plan for taking decisive action to achieve a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and setting us on a path to reach net-zero emissions by no later than 2050. Our departments are actively engaged in and supporting these plans and will work to ensure strong alignment with the ESD strategy as it is implemented.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) has lead responsibility for the Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024 "*Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*"[20], the National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025[21], and the Public Libraries Strategy[22]. Our departments will work with DRCD to maximise opportunities for collaboration on ESD and the SDGs across these various strategies.

Through this strategy, DFHERIS will support synergies with Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan, overseen by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), with its' strong focus on green skills.

Links will also be forged with strategies and policies of a number of other government departments, including the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) and the Department of Transport, among others.

Figure 5: Strategy development and consultation process.

1.4 Shaping the Strategy

The first National Strategy on ESD, which was led by the Department of Education and Skills, ended in 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. The education system has experienced unprecedented challenges and change throughout this period and has had to be innovative and agile in its responses. The approach to planning for a successor strategy, *ESD to 2030*, has similarly had to be agile.

In August 2020, the formation of a new Government department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, provided an opportunity for a joint approach to be taken to the development of *ESD to 2030*, working collaboratively with DoE (formerly Department of Education and Skills). A public consultation process was jointly hosted by the two departments and launched by Minister for Education, Norma Foley, T.D. and Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris T.D., on *Earth Day*, 22nd April, 2021. This remained open until 30th June, 2021.

A public consultation paper was developed to inform submissions, the structure of which was aligned with the priority action areas identified in UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development roadmap: *ESD for 2030*[23].

Through the consultation process, some specific areas of interest to the Irish context were further explored, such as the role of culture and cultural institutions in advancing sustainable development. Consideration was also given to whether research should feature as a discrete pillar in the new strategy. Taking feedback on board, research has been included as a key element under the 'Advancing Policy' priority area, while recognising the relevance of research across all of the five priority action areas.

An overview of the strategy consultation process is provided in Figure 5.

The full suite of consultation instruments and the report on the public consultation process can be sourced at the following link: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/02952d-national-strategy-on-education-for-sustainable-development-in-irelan/.

The process was inclusive of a wide range of stakeholders, with high quality engagement throughout. 90 substantive written submissions and 150 responses to the online public survey were received and a series of focus groups, consultation events, interviews and bilateral meetings with external stakeholders took place.

17 https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/publications/Global-Citizenship-Education-Strategy.pdf

18 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7cde9f-the-sustainable-development-goals-national-implementation-plan-2018-/

19 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6223e-climate-action-plan-2021/

20 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d8fa3a-sustainable-inclusive-and-empowered-communities-a-five-year-strategy/

21 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/3cba6-national-volunteering-strategy/

22 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/56d1d4-our-public-libraries-2022-inspiring-connecting-and-empowering-commun/

23 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374802

The Annual National Forum on ESD was held online in February 2022, as the final stage of the public consultation process, with over 80 participants taking part in detailed discussions on key issues. Feedback on the draft key themes, objectives and a range of actions identified for the new strategy and implementation plan was collated.

There was general agreement at the Forum that the proposed approach, aligning with UNESCO's Framework for ESD for 2030, was correct. A number of key points of feedback raised by participants are highlighted below and will be addressed as part of implementation:

- While the breadth and ambition of the draft strategy was welcomed, the need to ensure effective coordination and avoid excessive bureaucracy was highlighted.

- The important role of civil society in furthering the ESD agenda was emphasised, with a need for mechanisms to ensure the voices of children and young people, community organisations and NGOs are heard clearly and consistently.

- The need to embed holistic approaches to ESD across educational institutions and to map existing and future supports to ensure their optimum availability and usage was highlighted. Building networks that support collaboration and mutual understanding of ESD and its goals will be of importance.

While two departments led the development of this new strategy and action plan it was informed by a wide range of stakeholders who helped to shape its development. It will now be implemented with support from other government departments, notably DCEDIY who will be a co-sponsor of the strategy's implementation phase.

2 Progress to date

The first National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), *Education for Sustainability*, was published in July 2014 with the aim of:

> *ensuring that education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the 'what'), the key dispositions and skills (the 'how') and the values (the 'why') that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future.*

The 2014 strategy originally set out forty-four recommendations for action by the DES, other departments, agencies and partners as relevant. These actions were grouped under eight key priority areas:

- Leadership and coordination.

- Data collection and baseline measurement.

- Curriculum at pre-school, primary and post primary.

- Professional development.

- Further Education and Training.

- Higher Education and Research.

- Promoting participation by young people.

- Sustainability in action.

Ireland's approach has sought to ensure that ESD is viewed by all as 'good practice' and an embedded commitment to transforming our lives and our world, rather than as an additional demand or expectation upon those 'delivering' or 'receiving' education. ESD may be broken down into categories, actions and micro-targets, but ultimately it is about making sure we sustain a planet that can be lived in, and a planet that is worth living in.

These priority areas formed the basis of an action plan for implementation, and were further expanded into sub-themes and specific actions, with lead responsibility assigned to relevant bodies as appropriate. As a steering strategy, the plan avoided setting empirical targets, instead aiming for holistic impact across the sector. Progress was monitored in an ongoing manner, with a mid-term review taking place in 2017- 2018. Recommendations from the 2018 review were included in a revised action plan, with sixty-three further actions identified to progress in the period from Q4 2018 to Q4 2020.

The 2018 mid-term review, demonstrates the significant progress that was made in terms of ESD over the period. Among the key successes identified were that:

- ESD has been integrated into the curriculum across all levels and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has published an audit of ESD linkages in the curriculum.

- ESD has been built into formal post-primary assessment, where feasible.

- ESD has been integrated into both initial teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities.

- ESD is being integrated into the school inspection and quality assurance processes.

- ESD has been integrated into the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020.

- ESD has been prioritised as a key area for research calls.

- An increase in ESD related programmes at Further Education and Training level and in Higher Education has been achieved.

- Significant ESD resources have been developed to support delivery, through a dedicated portal at: https://www.scoilnet.ie/go-to-post-primary/science/organisations/esd/.

- Improved alignment of the strategy with the SDGs was achieved, following the interim review.

A number of actions within the original strategy were not progressed as well as had been hoped, with Covid-19 presenting some additional challenges in the final period. The proposed establishment of sub-groups of the ESD Advisory Group did not proceed for a number of reasons. The need to repeat consultative sessions with children and young people on ESD, to have ESD included as a standing item for curriculum steering groups and to establish ESD communities of practice and support them further via the ESD portal on Scoilnet, will be reaffirmed under this strategy.

It is accepted that more progress must be made too in transforming our education and training environments into sustainable learning environments.

3 The Priority Action Areas of *ESD to 2030*

The overall goal of *ESD to 2030*, is to build a more just and sustainable world through strengthening ESD and contributing to the achievement of the 17 SDGs, in particular Target 4.7.

The strategy is structured around five priority action areas, in line with the UNESCO Framework for 2030. By implementing actions across these five areas, by 2030 we will see the following outcomes:

1. **Advancing policy:** ESD is embedded in education and other relevant policies and frameworks as part of a lifelong learning approach.

2. **Transforming learning environments:** Learners have opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions needed to promote sustainable development and to experience sustainable development in action through a whole of institution approach to ESD.

3. **Building capacities of educators:** Educators have the opportunities to develop capacities to foster societal transformation for a sustainable future, with ESD integrated into the offerings of education and training providers.

4. **Empowering and mobilising young people:** Young people are supported to be agents of change for sustainable development.

5. **Accelerating local level actions:** Enhanced collaboration exists between education providers, local authorities, local communities, civil society organisations and enterprise in ESD as part of lifelong learning, towards achieving sustainability at a local level.

3.1 Priority Action Area 1: Advancing Policy

While considerable progress was made under the first strategy in advancing the policy environment for ESD, this context continues to adapt and change and so it is of vital importance that the strategy retains a focus on creating an enabling environment for the successful scaling up of ESD in formal, non-formal and in-formal settings.

While our departments will be the primary drivers of the strategy, we aim for both the strategy and its related implementation plan to impact within and outside the Irish education community. Aligning the strategy with the SDGs, supports us in meeting national and international commitments and enhancing policy coherence across government.

A crucial role is identified for research-led policy development throughout the duration of this new ESD strategy. This is in line with UNESCO's recommendations that research at country level ought to underpin and examine the impact of policy advancement across the decade. It specifically recommends that countries:

Conduct thematic research related to ESD and the SDGs, based on the key issues, trends and questions raised in relation to the five priority action areas. Higher education and research institutions should play a key role in this type of research activity, which can be included as a part of country initiatives on ESD for 2030.

What Taking Action Means

At the cornerstone of the action areas envisaged under Priority Action Area 1, is **collaboration**. This will be aimed at strengthening international, inter-departmental and multi-stakeholder coordination, to facilitate information sharing, accountability and engagement on ESD. Collaboration will be essential to embed and normalise ESD practice up to 2030. The strategy recognises civil society as key contributors to ESD and appropriate representation will be included in structures established to monitor and oversee delivery of the strategy.

The strategy aims to support **policy alignment** and coherence across government and among government agencies, in areas linked to ESD. No one underestimates the challenges of creating a cohesive approach across a range of departments and agencies, and to this end we see **communication** as a hugely important action in its own right, raising awareness and understanding of ESD and its centrality to lifelong learning among key stakeholders.

Knowing where we are starting from is crucial to identifying directions up to 2030. To this end, **mapping and monitoring is important**. This will focus on existing and new frameworks and tools to monitor and evaluate progress on ESD and enhance accountability. Key performance indicators for the strategy will also be identified.

The actions already mentioned will be vital to the development of an enabling environment for **research** related to ESD and the SDGs. Research should cut across the five priority areas and include areas such as: embedding ESD in curriculum and learning environments; and identifying and assessing the outcomes of ESD practices across formal and non-formal education contexts so as to identify ESD interventions that successfully develop agency, and bring about social and behavioural change for transformative action within the Irish context.

This research focus aligns again very well with UNESCO's view that national strategies should seek to *disseminate and review the outcomes of research to create learning opportunities to raise critical questions, in particular on the inter-linkages and tensions between the different SDGs.*

This emphasis on research will also contribute to aligning **funding and incentives** with the key aims and requirements of ESD. Naturally, as research contributes to the identification and dissemination of good ESD practice, it will also support the ongoing **award standards** associated with ESD provision.

Priority 1: Advancing Policy
1.1 **Collaboration:** Strengthen international, inter-departmental and multi-stakeholder coordination, to facilitate information sharing, accountability and engagement on ESD.
1.2 **Policy alignment:** Support policy alignment and coherence across government and among government agencies, in areas linked to ESD.
1.3 **Communication:** Raise awareness and understanding of ESD and its centrality to lifelong learning among key stakeholders.
1.4 **Mapping and monitoring:** Develop existing and new frameworks and tools to monitor and evaluate progress on ESD and enhance accountability.
1.5 **Research:** Create an enabling environment for research to inform effective policy and best practice for ESD.
1.6 **Funding and incentives:** Explore potential to align funding and incentive systems with substantive and structural sustainability and ESD.
1.7 **Award standards:** Progress inclusion of ESD in award standards.

3.2 Priority Action Area 2: Transforming Learning Environments

Transforming learning environments represents a whole of institution approach to ESD, creating learning environments 'where learners learn what they live and live what they learn'.

We must acknowledge that much has already been achieved in promoting ESD-relevant learning environments through the efforts of educators and students, curricular and pedagogical reform, innovation, a focus on self-directed learning and on enabling the voice of the learner. School and campus initiatives, among other civil society and youth-led climate initiatives, have helped to heighten awareness and action around the need for sustainability to be at the heart of our school and campus environments. We will draw on the expertise of civil society to ensure that their expertise and experience within the ESD domain is incorporated in the design and implementation of ESD in Ireland.

We must build on these foundations to support further progress and innovation in the operation of our educational environments, in particular in light of the ambitious targets for reductions in carbon emissions set out in the Climate Action Plan 2021. This provides a detailed plan for taking decisive action to achieve a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and setting us on a path to reach net-zero emissions by no later than 2050, as set out in the Climate Act 2021. In order to achieve these targets, inter alia, a deep energy retrofit programme for the school sector, as well as for the higher and further education sectors will be required. This will involve significant investment in upgrading learning environments. Deep energy retrofits will not only reduce the emissions of buildings but will also improve the comfort and air quality of the learning environments.

What Taking Action Means

Leadership is a major driver in transforming learning environments, as we have already seen in Ireland. We aim to **develop and support leadership for ESD** at every level, in individual institutions, across the system and throughout wider society. We aim to find the right balance between individual and collective leadership, as we must never lose sight of the fact that ESD is for everyone and must be driven by everyone.

The strategy will continue to support the identification and achievement of learning outcomes which foster **ESD competencies and transversal skills**, in line with international guidance. We aim to continue support for the use of research-informed **ESD pedagogies** among educators. The strategy will help to further **embed ESD in curricula and programmes** at all levels through a lifelong learning approach, to ensure learners acquire knowledge, skills, values and dispositions to promote and advance sustainable development. The relevance of ESD to all subject areas and to whole of institution activities will continue to be promoted. The introduction of a new Leaving Certificate subject on Climate Action and Sustainable Development in certain secondary schools starting in 2024, will provide learners with an additional opportunity to delve deeper into these specific areas.

This in turn will require availability and access to **high quality resources for ESD**, including resources which encourage **whole institution approaches**. The strategic goal for 2030 is that Early Learning and Care settings, Schools and Campus environments are genuine **places and educational spaces for sustainability**.

In terms of the 'practicalities' of ESD, we will, for example, continue support for **biodiversity** across the system, and ongoing improvement in areas like the **sustainability of transport, energy consumption, educational buildings** (design and construction). **Waste management** is another area in which we need to maintain a constant effort to improve.

Priority 2: Transforming Learning Environments

2.1 **Leadership:** Develop and support leadership for ESD.

2.2 **ESD Competencies / Transversal Skills:** ESD competencies are core to learning outcomes.

2.3 **ESD Pedagogies:** Promote and support the use of ESD pedagogies among educators.

2.4 **Embedding ESD:** Further embed ESD in curricula and programmes at all levels to ensure learners acquire knowledge, skills, values and dispositions to promote, advance and take action for sustainable development.

2.5 **Educational Resources:** Enable access to high quality resources for ESD.

2.6 **Whole institution approaches:** Transform Early Learning and Care settings, Schools and Campus environments into places and educational spaces for sustainability.

3.3 Priority Action Area 3: Building Capacities of Educators

Building educator capacities has been and continues to be a key focus of Irish education. Areas such as curricula review and reform and the work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education have seen the upskilling of educators and reflective practice brought to the fore.

As society grapples with modern challenges, from populism to climate-change denial and the suppression of rights-based agenda globally, the strategy commits to promoting and educating about sustainable living and life choices among educators and learners. We view the SDGs as the core blueprint for this action, through Goal 4 and all of the

seventeen goals, which support environmental, societal, economic and just transition.

In an Irish context, we also believe that the area of culture, including the arts and creativity, can have unique roles to play in underpinning transformative pedagogical approaches. The new Leaving Certificate subject on Drama, Film and Theatre Studies, planned from 2024, offers potential cross-pollination opportunities with regard to ESD. While emphasising this as a strong Irish dimension, we note it as a direction fostered by UNESCO in *ESD for 2030*:

> *Within UNESCO, the Education Sector will further strengthen its inter-sectoral partnership with other Sectors, especially Culture and Science, integrating the implementation of ESD for 2030, where possible, into their relevant programmes. These include, among others, World Heritage sites, intangible cultural heritage, the network of Biosphere Reserves, Geoparks, Small Island Developing States, and local and indigenous knowledge.*

What Taking Action Means

Capacity building requires systematic and comprehensive emphasis within the education, professional development and accreditation of educators, as well as training of the leadership and management of our education providers at all levels. Our departments will adopt a lifelong learning approach and will continue to build educator capacity at pre-primary, primary, post-primary and tertiary education, as well as supporting the capacity building of educators, youth workers and volunteers involved in youth work.

In line with feedback from our consultations, this action will also seek to provide **peer learning** opportunities and sharing of good practice in ESD, through as wide and as relevant a range of 'spaces' as possible. We also recognise the merits of developing and expanding initiatives to recognise and **reward excellence and commitment** to ESD.

Priority 3: Building Capacity of Educators

3.1 **Capacity building:** Systematic and comprehensive ESD capacity development in the education, professional development and assessment of educators at all levels of the formal and non-formal education system.

3.2 **Peer learning:** Provide opportunities for peer to peer learning and sharing of good practice in ESD.

3.3 **Rewards:** Develop initiatives to recognise and reward excellence and commitment to ESD.

3.4 Priority Action Area 4: Empowering and Mobilising Young People

Young people have been to the fore in demanding change from our leaders, in particular on climate change, as it is they who will suffer the future consequences of inaction. The #FridaysforFuture school strikes, is a notable example of this, which has inspired many young people to raise their voices and take action.

Our departments all have important roles to play in **empowering and mobilising young people**, working in collaboration with partners across government, the education sector and non-governmental organisations. Education and training, whether in formal, non-formal or informal settings, can be a catalyst and motivator for young people to upskill and take action for a more sustainable future. We recognise those who work and support young people to engage on these issues in formal and non-formal education settings – early years and other educators, teachers, as well as the youth work community of practice. This includes youth workers and youth leaders, youth work managers, affiliated and independent youth work organisations, volunteers, trainers, researchers, educators of youth workers, boards of management, local communities and local government, National

Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth, young people themselves, youth work partners, and policy makers at all levels of governance.

We further commit to the meaningful involvement of young people in policy decisions and developments across the ESD spectrum, accepting and adopting the maxim in support of youth participation, 'Nothing About Us Without Us'. Ireland's young people, within and outside the formal and non-formal education sectors, have shown themselves to be tremendous advocates for ESD, and this strategy will also support opportunities for youth-led actions and peer learning. We want our strategy to provide a welcome for young people to express themselves and be listened to, as UNESCO proposes:

> *It is today's youth and following generations who will be left to face the consequences of unsustainable development. It is their present and future that are at stake. In return, it is young people who are becoming increasingly vocal and active, demanding urgent and decisive change and holding world leaders accountable, in particular to address the climate crisis. They have, and continue to envision, the most creative and ingenious solutions to sustainability challenges. In addition, young people are an important consumer group and the way their consumption patterns evolve will greatly influence the sustainability trajectory of their countries. Empowering and mobilising young people of all genders, therefore, is a central part of ESD implementation.*

What Taking Action Means

The strategy and action plan recognises **young people** as key contributors to our sustainable future. We commit to ensuring that our young people are included in the design, delivery and monitoring of policies and programmes on ESD. We will support relevant **training and development** opportunities and tools for young people to enhance their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions to make themselves heard.

We will also endeavor to create opportunities for young people to engage, upskill and use their voices for sustainable development, through youth-led and **youth-focused initiatives**, groups, organisations and networks. Peer-to-peer learning will be encouraged and supported. This will include an increase in awareness and uptake of **volunteering** opportunities among young people.

Priority 4: Empowering and Mobilising Young People

4.1 **Young People's role:** Recognise young people as key contributors to our sustainable future and ensure that they are meaningfully included in the design, delivery and monitoring of policies and programmes on ESD.

4.2 **Training and development:** Support relevant training and development opportunities and tools for empowering young people to engage at local, national and global levels by enhancing their knowledge, skills, confidence, values and dispositions to make themselves heard.

4.3 **Youth-led initiatives:** Create policy and participation opportunities for young people to engage, upskill and use their voice for sustainable development online and offline, through Youth-led and youth-focused groups, organisations and networks at local, national, and global levels. Encourage and support peer-to-peer learning, as part of this approach.

4.4 **Volunteering:** Increase awareness and uptake of ESD and SDG-related volunteering opportunities among young people, which take place at local, national and European levels.

3.5 Priority Action Area 5: Accelerating Local Level Actions

It is imperative that the implementation of this new strategy will impact significantly in **accelerating local level actions**. Individual communities all over Ireland have become major advocates for the ESD agenda. Often, this advocacy has been organic, building from identified local needs and ranging from environmental issues, challenges of social inclusion to support and equity for those newly arrived to our shores.

With enhanced cooperation and coordination between education providers and local communities, civil society organisations, local authorities and enterprise through our new strategy, we believe this dynamism and passion can be fostered to new levels. Education can and must be a key driver of sustainable development, through a lifelong learning approach.

UNESCO emphasises the need for 'active cooperation' between learning institutions and the community. There are many examples of such links in place already between early learning and care settings, schools, higher education institutions and stakeholders at the local and regional levels. Educators and community activists can be rightly proud of these links and we aim to further reinvigorate them post-COVID-19. With an ESD lens, the strategy will explore and advance such targeted collaborations as can be advanced, with genuine commitment to partnership and to the advancement of local sustainable development priorities.

What Taking Action Means

This strategy and action plan will support **community collaboration** wherever possible. The strategy's approach proposes collaboration with local authorities and community structures to educate, raise awareness and understanding of the need for action and engagement on sustainable development.

Civil society in Ireland plays a key role in ESD engagements, at local and national levels. This strategy will enable and foster engagement between education institutions and civil society organisations. This supports the multi-stakeholder approach of the SDGs.

Fostering and expanding **links between education providers and their local communities** is essential to these actions, and we aim for increased dialogue and partnerships throughout the decade to 2030. The strategy particularly aims to support **local authorities**, in coordination with enterprise and all concerned stakeholders in the community, making educational institutions central elements of localised action planning. We see this linkage with communities as key to providing opportunities for all citizens to become ESD change agents.

Priority 5: Accelerating Local Level Actions

5.1 **Community linking and collaboration:** Foster, support and expand links and collaboration between education providers and their local communities, civil society organisations and local authorities to educate, raise awareness and understanding of the need for action and engagement on sustainable development.

5.2 **Local authority engagement:** Local authorities, in coordination with enterprise and all concerned stakeholders in the community, should consider and develop an action plan for how the whole community can become a learning laboratory for sustainable development and an important element of ESD for 2030 country initiatives, providing opportunities for all citizens and learners to become change agents.

4 How will we get there?

4.1 Implementation and monitoring

The implementation of this strategy and accompanying action plan will require a partnership approach. All partners and stakeholders have a role to play in realising the shared vision we have for ESD by 2030. While Government will play a lead role in the delivery of many of the actions, it will be done collaboratively with stakeholders across the sector.

There is a huge amount of ESD expertise in civil society and other sectors. Civil society organisations have been delivering ESD in informal, non-formal and formal education settings for many years. This strategy recognises civil society as key contributors to ESD and will ensure that civil society is included in the design, delivery and monitoring of policies and programmes on ESD.

A review of the membership and structure of the ESD Advisory Group will be undertaken, to ensure it is fit for purpose. A key role for this group will be to advise on the implementation of the strategy and the identification of appropriate key performance indicators and measurement tools to monitor progress and measure success. It is envisaged that a combination of research, mapping and the establishment of baseline data will be used.

In addition, a number of multi-stakeholder sub-groups will be established to progress action on particular themes / aspects as appropriate, to support and feed into the advisory group and facilitate information sharing and exchange of good practice.

Updates on the implementation of this strategy will be produced every 18 months. It is intended that a mid-term review of its impact will be effected during 2026, with a view to sustaining and reinvigorating any actions that may need renewed effort at that stage and up to the end of 2030.

5 Appendices

5.1 Acronyms

CPD	Continuous professional development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DoE	Department of Education
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ITE	Initial teacher education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland