



UE4SD Innovation Report – Year 3

2015 – 2016

September 2016

Introduction

This Innovation Report is the third annual review of significant developments in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Higher Education (HE), as part of the *University Educators for Sustainable Development* (UE4SD) project. The purpose and focus of the UE4SD project is to reorient the HE curriculum for sustainable development by improving support for university educators to develop professional competences in ESD.

The project has published a leading practice publication on ESD professional development in HE and launched an online platform of resources. It has also piloted an ESD training academy for university teams. The Innovation Reports aim to situate this European project within the changing global landscape of HE, ESD and professional development and to ensure that the core thinking and outcomes of the project are informed by an up-to-date and international perspective.

This third report spans important international developments during 2016 and the landscape for ESD professional development across the world. Specifically, it identifies:

- progression of international dialogues and the issue of new high level publications on education, sustainable development and higher education;
- continuation of strategic meetings within the European region as well as academic conferences that are taking ESD professional development agendas forward;
- recognition for the work that large scale student initiatives are achieving to improve professional skills development and support action on ESD in universities;



- the significance of the UE4SD online platform in meeting the recognized need to support the professional development of university educators in ESD.

ESD in the International Agenda:

Since the unanimous adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, a number of reports and high-level events have shown the potential for education to help achieve the global goals. Most important among these developments are the launch of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report; progress on implementing the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD; the increase in attention given to ESD by the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP); and the celebration of the IUCN World Conservation Congress and 10th RCE Conference.

The 2016 GEM report, *Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all*¹, was launched in September 2016. The Report, which builds on the experience of the previous EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) series, presents compelling arguments and evidence for the types of education that are vital for achieving the goals of poverty reduction, hunger eradication, improved health, gender equality and empowerment, sustainable agriculture, resilient cities and more equal, inclusive and just societies. However, it also warns that education needs to fundamentally change to fulfil the potential and meet the current challenges facing humanity and the planet.

The GEM report points to the need for education systems to specifically address sustainability concerns. For example, it states that while in the majority of countries, education is the best indicator of climate change awareness, half of countries' curricula worldwide do not explicitly mention climate change or sustainability in their content. The document also emphasises the need to ensure that education systems are giving people vital skills and knowledge that can support the transition to more sustainable futures, and create alternatives to change current unsustainable practices. This requires

¹ See <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002457/245752e.pdf>



education to continue beyond the school and university walls, in communities and the workplace, and work with students so that they can understand their personal and professional responsibilities in this area. Finally, the report shows that there is a need for education systems to protect and respect minority cultures and languages in education, quickly respond to the changing job skill sets, tackle inequalities and work with stakeholders from other sectors.

Another example of the continued focus on ESD is the second meeting held by UNESCO to bring together all the partners of the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD, in order to discuss the implementation of this international initiative. On 5-6 July 2016 over 80 GAP partners attended this event in Paris. The meeting served to present and review progress achieved and challenges encountered in implementing GAP commitments; share successful approaches to scaling-up ESD; discuss challenges encountered in reaching target groups; and plan common activities for the year ahead. Partners presented their GAP flagship projects and discussed how these could be scaled up.

An important development this year has also been the commitment made by the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) to include sustainability as a core strategic agenda of the association. This was discussed at its bi-annual meeting² in May 2016 in Alcalá de Henares, Spain, following a presentation on the UE4SD project and discussion of the need to improve support for university educators to address ESD. IAUP is also including ESD as a key theme at their next Conference in Austria in July 2017.

ESD continues to be a key agenda for IUCN who celebrated the World Conservation Congress from 1-10 September in Hawai'i, US. The event included 275 sessions on education and awareness. Another important ESD event this year is the 10th Global RCE Conference organized by the United Nations University, which will take place on 23-25 November 2016 in Yogyakarta. This Conference will discuss strategies to make substantial contributions to the GAP on ESD and the 17 SDGs. The Conference also

² <http://iaup.org/component/content/article/45-frontpage/227-iaup-semi-annual-meeting-at-alcala-university-spain>



aims to reflect on the achievements and challenges of RCEs and discuss how RCEs can accelerate actions by engaging and working with local communities.

European HE Landscape and ESD:

The need for reorienting education systems towards sustainable development has also been reinforced in key European meetings and events through UNECE and the COPERNICUS Alliance. In June 2016, ministers and heads of delegations from 44 countries in the UNECE region attended the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference³ in Batumi, Georgia, alongside representatives from UN agencies, intergovernmental organisations, regional organizations and civil society. At the Conference, delegates adopted the Batumi Ministerial Statement on ESD and the Framework for the future implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD.

This new framework confirms the commitment of governments in supporting ESD and has a strong focus on the training of educators. More specifically, it focuses on the following areas:

- Encouraging whole-institution approaches by establishing ESD school plans, or embedding ESD in existing school plans, for every school by 2019.
- Promoting the extension of ESD in teacher education and in the training of all educators.
- Strengthening technical and vocational education and training in support of sustainable development and the transition to a green economy.
- Strengthening integration of ESD in both international and national ESD policies and other relevant processes.
- Linking ESD in formal, informal and non-formal education.
- Acknowledging the important role of networks, including those of civil society, academia and science, non-governmental organizations, business and enterprises, in implementing ESD.

³ <http://efebatumi.com/en/>



Another important event at the European level has been the 2016 COPERNICUS Alliance Conference⁴ held on 14-15 September 2016 at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna, Austria. The Conference was focused on the sustainability transformation of institutional, national and international science systems and aimed to reflect on policies and practices that support or hinder researchers and educators of HE institutions to practice inter- and transdisciplinary approaches of sustainability science. The Conference culminated with an annual meeting where partners reviewed and elaborated the COPERNICUS Charta.

HE Student Initiatives:

The Green Impact programme⁵, which has been running for ten years, is the National Union of Students UK's (NUS-UK) flagship sustainability engagement programme and one of the largest, most successful student-led sustainability schemes in the world. Green Impact was recognised in September 2016 with the UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD, recognising its value and reach in development of professional sustainability competences through direct experience among students.

Green Impact is centred on student mentors and auditors, over 1,000 each year, who support staff to green their workplaces through bespoke workbooks. It is currently being run in 270 organisations, with 1,889 Green Impact teams or departments, reaching 29,191 staff. This programme proves the power of peer to peer learning in ESD and the need for intergenerational learning to enhance professional development practices in this area. This is the second time that UNESCO has awarded a student-led initiative in higher education which has as a fundamental pillar the capacity building of HE students and staff. This highlights the growing strength of student networks and groups in driving change for sustainability in higher education.

⁴ <http://www.copernicus-alliance.org/vienna2016>

⁵ <http://sustainability.nus.org.uk/green-impact>



ESD Professional Development Tools:

Authoritative documentation such as the GAP on ESD or the new UNECE ESD implementation framework has recognised the important need for educators and students to develop transformative approaches in their own pedagogy and practice. These documents call for member states and institutions to improve the professional development offerings in this area.

A recent development in this area has been the launch of the UE4SD online platform of resources⁶ which contains a range of practical materials of use by anyone who teaches, supports learning, or works in staff development, particularly in the HE sector. This resource has examples, reflections, ideas and tools, to bring ESD into education practice and professional development for educators. The material was collected from across Europe and offers the latest thinking and practice from across 33 countries involved in the UE4SD project.

Summary of Headline Points

1. There is an increasing ***global commitment to support education and ESD*** in order to achieve the SDGs.
2. Strategic work on ***ESD continues in Europe with the adoption of the new framework*** to support the implementation of the UNECE strategy and the development of educators' competences in ESD.
3. ***Student-led initiatives are driving ESD agendas*** in HE and supporting the training of staff and students in this area.
4. Key ***professional development tools are emerging*** to support universities and educators to develop ESD competences.

University Educators for ESD Project Website: www.ue4sd.eu

⁶ <http://platform.ue4sd.eu/>