



Sustainable Development Bill Team
Welsh Government
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EAUC Consultation Response

Sustainable Development Bill – White paper

Formal response: submitted 4th March 2013

ABOUT US: The Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges is the sustainability body for tertiary education in the UK. The EAUC seeks to work with members and partners to drive sustainability to the heart of further and higher education.

The EAUC Vision is a university, college and learning and skills sector where the principles and values of environmental, economic and social sustainability are embedded.

Our Mission is that we will lead, inspire and equip Members and stakeholders with a shared vision, knowledge and the tools they need to embed sustainability within curriculum and operations.

Our membership is made up of over 300 member institutions comprising some 3700 professionals.

This consultation response has been compiled in dialogue with our university and college members in Wales to whom we are very grateful.

EAUC CEO

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Q1: What are your views on the proposals for a new duty to embed sustainable development as the central organising principle of selected organisations in Wales?

Sustainable development (SD) has to be given a higher profile to achieve the aim of creating a truly sustainable Wales. The new duty has the potential to do this by raising the status of SD among government, public bodies and the wider public; it can help enable more long term, joined up decision making.

We welcome the approach that the duty will apply to the strategic decision making processes, the processes by which decisions are made and outcomes are achieved. The importance of this duty in accounting for social, economic and environmental factors in decision-making cannot be understated and therefore a focus must be maintained on making clear the implications, for organisations, of the term 'the central organising principle'. Embedding sustainable development means that this must be 'the' central organising principle rather than one of a number of organising principles in order to ensure that the true strength of this ground-breaking legislation does not become weakened.

Rather than being seen as a barrier to investment by business, we would want to see the sustainable development duty promoted as a benefit. Wales can be at forefront of developing some of the skills and expertise in the field of sustainability, particularly in areas of international research expertise existing within Wales.

We support the proposal for statutory guidance and believe that absolute clarity in defining sustainable development, social, economic and environmental wellbeing is critical to effective implementation of the proposed legislation within organisations where decision-making is outcomes based. Further, we are encouraged to learn that the proposed legislation will integrate future and existing legislation. We support the flexibility offered by the legislation for organisations to determine the most effective ways of achieving outcomes and the need to ensure indicators of progression which reflect high level the strategic decision-making process. We are also pleased to see that existing annual reporting arrangements can be used under the obligations laid out in legislation.

We welcome the statement that "The Welsh Government recognises the need to take into account the impacts outside of Wales given that Wales' wellbeing cannot be seen in isolation." Indeed it would be right to support and encourage international partners also to develop in this area, and this approach could also complement Welsh SD skills development and business partnership development referred to above.

Q2: What are your views on the proposals for an independent sustainable development body?

We welcome the proposal for a new SD body to include high level, cross sector representation and to challenge Government and organisations when needed.

We believe the responsibility of the independent body to challenge organisations is a critical role if sustainable development as a central organising principle is to be 'driven' within organisations. We believe that the body itself must provide assurance that public funds are being used in a way that provides value-for-money and provide annual reports on progress and therefore we welcome this aspect of the proposed legislation.

Q3: What are your views on the proposed phasing and implementation of the duty, including the timing of the establishment of the independent sustainable development body?

We believe that many educational organisations are already progressing with sustainable development issues and many have well established strategies. We suggest that the phasing timeline for FE/HE should be brought forward to 2015. We support the phasing timeline for the independent body as this clearly needs to be in place as the Bill comes into force.

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Q4: What are your views on the proposals to improve the accountability framework for sustainable development in Wales?

Ensuring accountability via existing compliance audits and frameworks for sustainable development is welcomed.

We welcome the plan to consult on the sustainable development indicators. Improving the indicators and the way progress is measured is vital for informing policy development and taking action on sustainable development. Critically, and underplayed in the past, conflicts and synergies between indicators of SD should be recognised and explicitly dealt with at all stages.

Q5: We have asked four specific questions. Do you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, for example with regard to the implementation of the proposals? Please use the consultation response form to express your views.

Educational organisations have a unique opportunity to help students become the change-makers of the future in addition to ensuring that students are not simply 'work-ready' but 'future-ready'. Indeed, we believe that this is a right of students. ESDGC has a fundamental role in this respect and we believe that, in addition to the arrangements within the ESTYN framework, ESDGC requires a specific legislative entry.

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