



WWF-UK

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WWF-UK POLICY POSITION STATEMENT

Education

April 2011

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this Position Statement is to set out the changes WWF-UK wants to see in formal education so its prime purpose is to equip students to actively build and support a truly sustainable global society. We have worked in this sector for 30 years as it is central to our engagement with civil society for the development of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour. Education is a highly politicised arena with many interested parties vying for influence so WWF needs to clearly define the changes we hope to see in formal education, both in the UK and globally.

This Policy Position Statement covers WWF-UK's position with regard to our work in formal education. By 'formal education' we mean the system and associated bodies which provide the human and institutional resources required to deliver school-based education in England and Scotland. Whilst directly addressing formal education in the England and Scotland, we seek to take a generic, internationally applicable position which we can share with other educators in the WWF Network to support their policy and advocacy work as achieving sustainability requires a global response.

This Policy Position does not cover WWF-UK's Youth Strategy except where that strategy is relevant to the formal education system.



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The Hon Lady Ogilvy KG, GCVO
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Summary of WWF-UK position

There is an urgent need for people to change their relationship with the natural world because humanity is currently using our planet's natural resources 50% faster than they can be replenished. This requires the learning of new attitudes and behaviour, values and skills, or the rediscovery of old ones, so we can re-establish a sustainable place for humanity in the natural world. Currently most national education systems are educating their young people for an unsustainable, consumer-based society with little regard for nature or environmental limits.

WWF-UK believes it is critical that the purpose of formal education is re-orientated to enabling students to become independent learners, happy and active citizens of a sustainable world, living equitably within the Earth's environmental limits.

To achieve this will require change throughout the formal education system, in both policy and practice. In other words, a transformation of the system demonstrated by a whole-school approach to sustainability, based on the following principles:

Principles underlying WWF-UK's understanding of learning for sustainability:

- Social equity – entitlement and access for all to sustainability education
- Collaborative/social learning – learning together
- Experiential and active learning – learning by doing
- Reflective and reflexive learning – how and why does learning happen
- Educating the whole child – knowledge (academic/head), skills (vocational/hands) and values (emotional/heart)

A curriculum for sustainability must cover the four pillars of environment, society, economy and governance, with both local and global perspectives. The teaching approaches and school ethos must work with students in building personal resilience, future proofing skills and confidence in risk taking through opportunities for experimentation and learning from failure as well as success.

Key policy recommendations:

England

- The Department for Education requires all Free School and Academy applications to provide a sustainability statement defining their infrastructural, curriculum and governance policies to meet Ofsted inspection requirements.
- The Department for Education's revised National Curriculum includes an entitlement to learning in nature and practical life skills for all children throughout their education.

- Qualified Teacher Standards require the development of knowledge and skills for teachers to be confident and competent in learning for sustainability.
- The National College has embedded sustainability as a whole school issue in school leadership training programmes
- The revised Ofsted inspection framework includes sustainability criteria in areas of leadership and school culture as well as curriculum and school management.

Scotland

- Learning for sustainability should be embedded in the remit of the SEQIA and this remit delivered through school inspection process and curriculum support.
- The Scottish Government and GTCS should ensure that teacher training in Scotland's seven ITE universities meets the professional standard's global citizenship and sustainable development criteria
- Learning for sustainability should be embedded in teacher education through the Scottish Government's response to the Donaldson Review of teacher education.

Background

For many years our culture and society in the UK have been travelling along a trajectory which has made us less and less sustainable as our level of 'development' has risen. We have now progressed to the point where we are over-exploiting the Earth's resources and are heavily reliant on unjust global political and economic relations (Living Planet report, 2010). An integral aspect of this developmental trajectory has been education.

Education systems are key vehicles for expressing the shape and priorities of a society in terms of validating what is appropriate and necessary to teach our young people. An education system makes explicit what knowledge is, and what knowledge is important to that society. Therefore, if WWF is aiming to change society and to influence our collective thinking, the education system is a critical system to work with.

In order to create a sustainable society, we need to equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to manage change, think critically and positively about what sort of society they want to live in, as well as have the values and ideals to create a positive, democratic and sustainable society into the future.

The education system also has a wide reach and touches the lives of large numbers of people. Schools not only fundamentally affect the young people currently in education, but also reach out to parents, families and communities across the country. Schools are often seen as a hub in their community and function as the focus for information and learning. Perhaps more importantly, they can set an example to the local community and other schools, influencing others to become involved.

Education not only validates knowledge and skills, but the experience of attending school and undergoing education profoundly influences children and powerfully shapes the rest of their lives. Aspects of the school environment, the teachers' values and behaviour, the relationships that are formed, the expectations and the way that children are expected to learn are all elements which deeply influence children's subsequent social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development.

The English Context

In England, WWF chiefly works in the formal, compulsory state sector, which is state-regulated and involves all children aged 4 to 16, unless they are among the 7% who are privately educated. Since 2000, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been included in the core national curriculum, in particular in geography, science, personal, social and health education, design and technology and citizenship. [ref: <http://www.esd.rgs.org/link9.html>] There are, however, other non-statutory ways for schools to engage with ESD in a more sophisticated sense. Principally, this involves treating ESD as a cross-curricular dimension. There are areas in all subjects which can link to sustainable development intended in its widest sense, for example, through looking at citizenship for political engagement or through studying the historical development of technologies and the consequences on the environment.

Other government initiatives for education have supported the development of ideas around sustainability in schools. The most important of these is the National Framework for Sustainable Schools, which was co-developed with WWF and the Sustainable Development Commission in 2006. This framework allows schools to decide how and to what extent to engage with different areas of sustainability, with the explicit aim of embedding sustainability in the culture of the whole school.

There is a growing body of research evidence to show that working with sustainability in schools can raise and support student attainment and lead to wider school improvement (Ofsted, 2008 *Education for Sustainable Development: improving schools, improving lives*) (Scott, W. et al, 2010 Evidence of Impact of Sustainable Schools))

The Scottish Context

The new curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence, began in August 2010. Sustainable development issues are found across several curriculum areas but particularly in science and social studies. The Scottish Qualifications Authority is currently revising school qualifications to bring them in line with the Curriculum for Excellence. Action is being taken to ensure these qualifications include sustainable development. The new qualifications will be taught from 2012.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Learning and Teaching Scotland (the curriculum agency) are in the process of merging to create the Scottish Education Quality Improvement

Agency (SEQIA). Action is underway to ensure that sustainable development is included in the remit of SEQIA, which will come into existence on 1st July 2011.

For over ten years successive government administrations have supported the Eco Schools Programme. 98% of Scottish state schools are now Eco Schools and around a third have achieved Green Flag status. Ecological Footprint training for schools is being rolled out through Eco Schools.

The Scottish Government has a 5 year Action Plan for the latter half of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). This Action Plan includes action to further the embedding of sustainable development in school, college, university and community education.

Sustainable development is currently included in the standards for teacher education; however research shows that this is not reflected in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses. A three-year, NGO-led project is underway to embed sustainable development in the ITE courses of all seven of Scotland's ITE universities.

There is no central body in Scotland that provides either Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training for qualified teachers or training for the Qualification for Headship. Each of Scotland's thirty two local authorities makes their own arrangements for the provision of this training. Whether or not sustainable development is included in this training depends on the local authority.

The issues

Greater autonomy for schools in England

With the change of government in May 2010, in England there has been a move away from centrally driven education initiatives towards greater individual school autonomy, especially in regard to curriculum and pedagogy. The consequence for sustainability is that the national Sustainable Schools Strategy and its linked 2020 targets are no longer actively supported by DfE. However, the department is still promoting the need for schools to include sustainability in their curriculum and schools must report on carbon emissions as part of local government carbon reduction commitments.

The DfE is also encouraging the development of new schools within their 'Free Schools' policy. These will lie outside local authority control and their establishment is approved by the DfE, according to compliance with centrally set criteria. Similarly, DfE is encouraging already established schools to apply for Academy status.

WWF-UK recommends that the DfE requires Free School and Academy applications to provide a sustainability statement defining their infrastructural, curriculum and governance policies to meet Ofsted inspection requirements.

A Learning for Sustainability Curriculum

A curriculum for sustainability must cover the four pillars of environment, society, economy and governance with both local and global perspectives.

All children are entitled to an education which enables them to know and understand the natural world and their role in it. This includes opportunities to spend time in nature, handling animals, plants and the soil in which they grow. There are growing numbers of research reports demonstrating the benefits to physical and mental well-being of contact with nature (Louv, R., *Last Child in the Woods*, 2008)

Other recommended inclusions in the curriculum:-

- learning about the interdependencies of biodiversity and the environmental systems that our human society is based on: how they work as systems, how they serve us and how they are damaged and threatened; and the links between personal consumption choices and environmental impact.
- an awareness of political processes involved in how decisions are made which affect us all. 'Student voice' promotes active participation in decision-making in school and local communities and is a key aspect of learning for sustainability. This is essential in building young people's capacity to take action on issues which affect other people, from those which affect the local community to those which are of importance to the planet. The capacity to act for the common good can be seen as a fundamental part of education for a healthy democratic society.
- an emphasis on learning about global systems and dynamics, to place our society and culture within a global community, including understanding that large parts of the world do not share the material benefits we enjoy and the reasons why not.
- learning to learn through personal reflection: learning how they learn best and learning to value learning as a part of life, leading to lifelong learning.
- emotional literacy and management: learning to resolve or avoid conflict, to respect others and value difference and diversity: learning to work cooperatively and collaboratively and how to take part in a peaceful society.
- the development of practical and manual skills, as well as thinking and creative skills
- building personal resilience and confidence in risk taking through an acceptance of failure and experimentation as necessary learning experiences.

In England changes in government policy and education agencies have seen the closure of the Qualifications, Curriculum and Development Authority (QCDA) which was the agency responsible for curriculum innovation. The latest versions of the National Curriculum, which greatly enhanced the place of sustainability as ESD was a cross curriculum 'dimension', were not fully implemented by the new government.

A new curriculum review is underway which is intended to reduce the content significantly, allowing schools to develop their own curricula with only a core centrally set. Although we agree that the curriculum should be developed with reference to the school's local physical and social context and needs, it will be important that the core content promotes understanding of the global nature of many sustainability issues. Many schools will not have the capacity to develop such a curriculum after years of following 'off the shelf' prescriptive published schemes. Also there is little external incentive for schools to put time and effort into developing sustainability as this is not a statutory requirement and there are no longer any targets to achieve. Most schools will only do this if they see learning for sustainability as being more generally educational good practice.

WWF-UK recommends that the DfE's revised National Curriculum includes the breadth of a learning for sustainability curriculum, an entitlement to learning in nature and practical life skills for all children throughout their education.

In Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Learning and Teaching Scotland (the curriculum agency) are in the process of merging to create the Scottish Education Quality Improvement Agency (SEQIA). This new agency will be responsible for improvement in the quality of Scottish education through inspection and curriculum support.

Scottish schools are already implementing the new Curriculum for Excellence but capacity building is still required to enable schools to engage with the areas of knowledge, the pedagogical approaches and the whole school approach that the new curriculum requires. The knowledge, pedagogy and whole school approaches required by the Curriculum for Excellence are also those required by learning for Sustainability. What is lacking is capacity building for teachers and guidance by which schools can access their progress on embedding learning for sustainability in their school.

WWF-UK recommends that learning for sustainability should be embedded in the remit of the SEQIA and this remit delivered through school inspection process and curriculum support.

Leadership and Teacher Education

Successful sustainable schools have a central ethos based on the values which underpin sustainability - social justice and equity, inclusion and participation, valuing and respecting diversity, care for each other and the environment. This is demonstrated through a whole-school approach where sustainability is seen in the curriculum content and teaching approaches, management of the school buildings and grounds, leadership of the school community and its relationships with the wider local community. For this ethos to become established the school leadership team and the whole school community must share these values. The active, personal support of school leaders is crucial for effective sustainable schools to develop as they have a remit for the whole school. Thus school leadership professional development must include

sustainability as a whole school process, not simply an environmental management and energy/budget saving approach. Research into the key attributes of successful leaders of sustainable schools was undertaken by WWF-UK in 2007 for the National College (previously known as the National College for School Leadership) (Jackson, L., *Leading Sustainable Schools: what the research tells us*, 2007).

The need for better teacher education in development/sustainability education was reported by Ofsted (*Schools and Sustainability: A climate for change?*, 2008), likewise the DEA review of *Teachers' Attitudes to Global Learning* (2009). These reports highlight that teachers lack the knowledge and confidence to integrate the highly complex and interdependent nature of development issues into their teaching. New pedagogical approaches are needed to develop the critical understanding, skills and values which young people require to lead fulfilling lives in a changing and interdependent world (DEEP, *The European Consensus on Development: The contribution of Development & Awareness Raising*, 2007).

WWF-UK therefore recommends that in England the Government ensures that the Qualified Teacher Standards require the development of knowledge and skills for teachers to be confident and competent in learning for sustainability.

The National College has embedded sustainability as a whole school issue in school leadership training programmes in England.

The Scottish Government and GTCS should ensure that teacher training in Scotland's seven ITE universities meets the professional standard's global citizenship and sustainable development criteria

Learning for sustainability should be embedded in teacher education through the Scottish Government's response to the Donaldson Review of teacher education.

Embedding sustainability in the operations of schools

In addition to the impact of what is taught, the education infrastructure of the UK is also a major source of unsustainable consumption. The UK school estate alone contributes 15% of the public sector carbon emissions, thus reduction of carbon emissions from the school estate will have a significant impact on the UK's carbon footprint. The processes used within schools can also be used to demonstrate and influence possible community approaches to footprint reduction.

For this reason a whole-school approach, which includes the school senior management teams/business manager/bursar's decision making on procurement as well as the caretaker and administrative staff use of consumable resources, is necessary if sustainability is to be effective throughout the school.

WWF-UK recommends that in England the revised Ofsted inspection framework includes sustainability criteria in areas of leadership and school culture as well as curriculum and school management.

Why is WWF concerned with this issue?

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature. This is reflected in the Network's two Meta-goals:

- By 2050, the integrity of the most outstanding natural places on earth is conserved, contributing to a more secure and sustainable future for all
- By 2050, humanity's global footprint stays within the earth's capacity to sustain life and the natural resources of our planet are equitably shared.

If we are to achieve our Meta-goals and bring about a 'One Planet Future', humanity will need to acquire the knowledge, skills and values to live sustainably. As Sir Peter Scott, WWF founder, said "The most important task, if we are to save the Earth, is to educate."

WWF's Global Programme Framework clearly identifies the priority species, places and drivers on which we focus to achieve our goals. Protecting these priorities and tackling these drivers requires a shift in the values, attitudes and behaviour of many people who make decisions in a multitude of situations; as citizen, decision-maker, producer, consumer and voter. Education is an effective process by which a shift in values and attitudes can be achieved.

The Education Sector - schools, colleges and universities - is used by governments as a key driver of economic growth and hence unsustainable consumption but has the potential to be a key driver of sustainability. It is the third largest area of spending by the UK governments at over £100 billion per annum. The formal education system directly involves over 17% of the UK population and indirectly involves over 26% of UK households, thus it provides an excellent opportunity to reach a large part of our society and help them understand the impacts of decisions they make on the availability of global resources and the maintenance or loss of biodiversity.

Current Key Activities in WWF UK/Scotland

Policy work – influencing and advocacy for supportive education policy contexts. We work with a number of policy and strategy groups in Scotland and England to embed learning for sustainability into legislation and standards which govern the formal education systems. We also produce evaluative research evidence showing the impact of good sustainability practice on all aspects of school life, including attainment, behaviour,

Capacity building – identifying and developing good practice within the system. We work with bodies responsible for the professional development of school leaders and teachers to embed sustainability in their courses. Through collaborative research with schools and their communities we identify good practice which we share with teacher educators and policy makers.

Schools resources – activities and materials for teachers and students. We produce a wide range of resources for teachers and their students to use. These range from assemblies and lesson ideas to school musicals and art projects. We are also working with students to promote their voice in decision making processes through our Green Ambassador programme which provides guidance for how to run effective school councils.

Feedback

We are keen to receive your views and comments in response to this Policy Position Statement which we will be updating on a regular basis. We also need to be aware of any new piece of work/research/evidence that you have undertaken that may affect this Policy Position Statement. There may also be gaps within the current position which we may not be aware of and which you may wish to highlight for any future review. Please click [here](#) to email your feedback. Please ensure you state which Policy Position Statement you are referring to.

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