

National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)

Submission to:

Department of Education and Department of Further and Higher Education Research
Innovation and Science

Topic:

Education for Sustainable Development Strategy to 2030

Introduction

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education (Dept. Ed), currently operating under the aegis of Léargas, set up to advise on policy and strategies for the promotion of a continuum of guidance in the context of lifelong learning, to promote the implementation of best practice in guidance counselling in schools and Further Education and Training (FET) and to contribute to the exchange of information on quality guidance provision and practice with other guidance and employment services both in Ireland and in other member states of the EU. Prior to the establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), NCGE informed the policy of guidance as relates to the Further Education and Training Sector through the Further Education and Skills section of the original department. NCGE Management of Guidance Committee members are nominated by the Minister and appointed by Léargas and include representatives of relevant stakeholders such as the DoE, Department of Social Protection (DSP), Léargas, HEA, SOLAS, ETBI, Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC), Adult Guidance Association, University Directors of Studies of Guidance Counselling and NAPD. The Minister of Education nominates the Chair¹.

NCGE is pleased to make this submission to the national consultation on Education for Sustainable Development Strategy (ESD) to 2030, and to include the comments and suggestions submitted by participants at the National Forum on Guidance in April 2021.

NCGE recognises that the previous National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2014 – 2020 aimed to “ensure that education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge, key dispositions and skills and the values that will

¹ [About Us | NCGE - National Centre for Guidance in Education](#)

motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become active informed citizens who take action for a sustainable future” and that much work has been commenced and achieved across the education sector since 2014.

While the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are particularly relevant to the development and provision of lifelong guidance nationally, across EU and globally, each of these 17 SDGs must inform the development of the national Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Strategy to 2030.

In 2020 -2021 NCGE began the exploration of the requirements of Sustainable Development Goals within the wider guidance community nationally and across Europe. Hosting two consecutive National Guidance Forum meetings (October 2020 and April 2021²) - NCGE invited international and national speakers to present and explore the Role of Lifelong Guidance in Promoting Sustainable Development and Change and to consider the Guidance contribution to Education for Sustainable Development.

Key to these discussions is the recognition that the 17 UN SDGs recognise that *“action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability”*. In this regard ESD to 2030 must be informed by and reflect developments in the other SDG plans of wider Government departments such as Good Health and Wellbeing, Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities, Climate Action, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, etc.

The National Forum on Guidance meetings presented the opportunity for the wider guidance community, across education, training and employment sectors to provide feedback to NCGE and the Dept. Ed on Sustainable Development Goals generally and the ESD to 2030 specifically.

Guidance supporting ESD across DoE and DFHERIS provision

Of note, the UNESCO definition of Education for Sustainable Development ³, that...

² [National Forum on Guidance | NCGE - National Centre for Guidance in Education](#)

³ [What is Education for Sustainable Development? \(unesco.org\)](#)

“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. Education for Sustainable Development is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education. ... It is holistic and transformational...

is recognized as a key enabler of all Sustainable Development Goals and achieves its purpose by transforming society. ESD empowers people of all genders, ages, present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity”

...resonates very closely with the national agreed definition of Guidance (2007⁴) that....

“Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society”.

These stated aims reflect the approach to develop the skills, competences and values of the individual to empower them to make informed choices to plan their lives and contribute actively to citizenship, nationally and globally. The role of Guidance to support individuals to make sense of their educational experiences and to make best choices for their education, career and life-planning is therefore a crucial element in ESD.

Where ESD focuses, in the main on **UN SDG Goal 4 (Quality Education)** – *“to insure inclusive & equitable quality education & promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”* - taking account of the core nexus elements of environment, socio-economic, political and cultural issues require a lifelong learning approach, across schools, Further Education and Training, Higher Education and social inclusion priorities with a co-ordinated approach across the two Departments. Furthermore this co-ordinated approach must be enhanced with external inter-departmental plans, activities and projects. To suggest that social inclusion is the remit of community groups, NGOs or social welfare supports only, completely negates the role of Dept. Ed and DFHERIS in ensuring that Education and Training will enhance the individual’s career and life opportunities.

⁴ <https://www.ncge.ie/national-guidance-forum-2007>

As a result of discussions at the National Forum on Guidance, NCGE proposes that in examining SDG 4 – the strategic developments of DoE and DFHERIS will be required to ensure that Guidance provision will support the delivery of the following within Goal 4:

Goal 4.4 - By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

Goal 4.5 - By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

Goal 4.7 - 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.

DoE and DFHERIS will also be required to ensure that Guidance provision will support the delivery of the following within **Goal 5 (Gender Equality)** by ensuring that girls and women explore all education, training and future career options, from a young age, and contribute to a more equal, less male dominated society

Goal 5.1 - End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Goal 5.5 - Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

With regard **Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth)**, on first reflection on this SGD, it may seem unconnected to the goals of ESD. Goal 8 aims to *"Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all"*

Where "Guidance" focuses on career exploration and planning, the development of career management skills and competences and setting personal and career goals, embedded within education and training across schools, FET and HE will support individuals to be innovative, creative and not just choose traditional career paths, thus supporting Goal 8...

Goal 8.3 - Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation....

Goal 8.5 - By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men

Goal 8.6 - By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

Overarching European agenda

The European Pillar of Social Rights⁵, informed by the UN SDGs and EU Skills Agenda, Gender Equality Strategy, Anti-racism and Youth Employment supports states that...

*“Everyone has the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects. This includes the right to receive support for job search, training and re-qualification” and aims to “empower individuals to participate in learning throughout their lives and careers also requires rethinking policies.... Accompanied by well-designed quality frameworks, as well as **guidance** and validation of skills, they can play an important role...”*

The national ESD approach must consider the implications of this European Pillar of Social Rights in determining its Strategy to 2030.

The European Green Deal⁶ outlines the EU objective to be climate neutral in 2050. Reaching these targets will require action by all sectors of our economy, including the lifelong learning, education and training sector with investment in environmentally friendly technologies, supporting industries and working with national and international partners. In this regard, the inclusion of SDG related curricular subjects, and inter and intra-curricular programmes, activities and competitions across primary and post-primary schools, FET, Apprenticeships and HE will require a new model of curriculum development, involving both Departments, QQI and NCCA.

Considering that the individuals who will create the industries of the future are now attending schools, or may already be registered on FET, Apprenticeships and HE, it is incumbent on both DoE and DFHERIS to reflect on the appropriate supports available to these individuals, in areas of funding, mother tongue and English language supports and mitigating disadvantage. To encourage

⁵ [European Pillar of Social Rights | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e300197/1/1/EN/Policy-Document/European_Pillar_of_Social_Rights.pdf)

⁶ [A European Green Deal | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e300197/1/1/EN/Policy-Document/European_Green_Deal.pdf)

their participation, and those of future generations in this “Green” Agenda will require focus on “Green” Careers in science, technology, social and psychological support.

Post-pandemic

Continuing to engage with the positive aspects of the use of digital technologies in a post-pandemic education sector is essential to this ESD Strategy. Furthermore, nationally, across all ages, sectors and communities, Ireland has acknowledged the essential need to ensure inclusivity and to manage and support individuals’ mental health and wellbeing during this pandemic, in work, unemployment support and in the education and training sectors. ESD to 2030 now provides the Dept. Ed and DFHERIS with the prospect to plan for, facilitate and offer equal and effective opportunities to 'ALL'.

Report and Feedback from participants at National Forum on Guidance 2021

While NCGE has incorporated here the key messages from the participants at the Forum, NCGE invites Dept. Ed and DFHERIS to review the two articles (included in *Appendix A and B*) and various presentations and resources available from the two National Forum on Guidance⁷ events. In respect of the importance of the wider public and stakeholder voice to this consultation, please see *Appendix C* for detailed comments of participants from the wider guidance community which should inform this ESD strategy.

Conclusion

In the context of ESD, it is no longer appropriate for the Dept. Ed and DFHERIS to consider that “guidance” should continue within the schools and FET sector with the current resources provided. Furthermore, duplication of services and online websites and portals requires duplication of funding and resources which does not reflect ‘sustainable achievement’.

The exploration of and introduction to “Careers” in primary schools will enhance understanding of education and careers available to men and women, of all backgrounds (**Goal 5**).

⁷ [National Forum on Guidance | NCGE - National Centre for Guidance in Education](#)

The provision of Whole School Guidance for All, For Some and For Few, in post primary schools requires sustainable funding, with additional resources targeted at the most marginalised to prevent early school leaving and ensure students learn career goal setting and planning skills as part of a career learning curriculum from 1st to 6th year **(Goal 4)**.

Impartial equality of access to *all individuals* on information for education, training, apprenticeship, jobs labour market information, funding and voluntary work is crucial to ensuring all individuals understand and believe that the national systems are available to them **(Goal 8)**.

Supporting the provision of such publicly available and accessible information requires a service supported phone line / text / online- chat facility (like that provided annually via Springboard+⁸ freephone line) which is in turn supported by regionally based guidance services accessible to all. The proliferation of various websites and portals providing information needs to be reviewed in the context of the National Guidance Strategy as recommended by the Indecon Report (see FET Strategy 2020-2024, pg. 54⁹).

If Education for Sustainable Development is to be considered as a nationally implemented plan, it is vital that reference to other agreed and politically supported national strategies are included, such as: National Access Plan for Higher Education, FET Strategy, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Skills Strategy, National Skills Strategy, Languages Strategy, Wellbeing policies in schools, STEM Education etc. Crucial to the provision of sustainable, accountable and impartial guidance across the schools, FET and HE sector is a National Guidance Strategy to contribute to the ESD to 2030. On too many occasions to date, national strategies on various topics have been launched with no follow through or accountability. If ESD to 2030 is to succeed it will require agreed political and senior official commitment to co-ordination and co-operation across the two Departments to ensure a seamless and genuine lifelong learning approach to Education for Sustainable Development Goals.

Submitted on behalf of NCGE by - Jennifer Mc Kenzie (Director).

⁸ [HEA - Springboard+ \(springboardcourses.ie\)](https://springboardcourses.ie)

⁹ https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf



Appendices

Appendix A

National Forum on Guidance – October 2020 – Summary Report

‘An initial investigation into what is the role of Lifelong Guidance in promoting Sustainable Development and Change’

<https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/NCGE-GM5-General-Forum-Report.pdf>

Appendix B

National Forum on Guidance – May 2021 – Summary Report

‘Promoting Sustainable Development and Change - What is the contribution of Lifelong Guidance?’

<https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/NCGE-GM6-Feature-Forum.pdf>

Appendix C

Detailed comments from participants in attendance at National Forum on Guidance - May 2021

<https://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/NFG2021-Slido-Ideas-140421.pdf>