A.S.T.I Submission

to

Consultation on Education for Sustainable Development

June 2021

Introduction

The ASTI welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the second national strategy for education for sustainable development (ESD). The ASTI is aware that the consultation is the first step in the process: the second step will engage in a more in-depth manner with the education stakeholders. Accordingly, in this submission the ASTI will set out what it considers are the key issues of concern for second-level teachers. This submission is also informed by its membership of the international networks with which the ASTI interacts. They include Education International, the Global Campaign for Education, UNESCO Futures of Education and the OECD Education 2030 Learning Compass project. The ASTI is also a member of IDEA, DSAI and the Irish Forum for Global Education. In the wider SDG-agenda context, ASTI's membership of the ICTU's Global Solidarity ensures it has a particular interest in both SDG 4/education and SDG 8/decent work for all. Collectively, these domestic and external political and policy spaces are an important source of social learning for the ASTI and other teacher unions in Ireland, especially in relation to the inter-related global challenges which constitute the focus of ESD.

Definitional issues

In its recent submission to Irish Aid's consultation on Development and Global Citizenship Education strategy, the ASTI noted that there is a multiplicity of definitions associated with global citizenship. This is not necessarily a disadvantage as multiple 'narratives' reach and influence multiple communities. [1] However, this heterogeneity can also be confusing! The definition in the current ESD strategy is strong and is based on the UNESCO key competencies framework. Moreover, it clearly aligns with the purpose of the ESD strategy, namely, to ensure 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 ASTI strongly recommends retaining this definitional clarity and purpose.

Policy alignment and coherence

Policy alignment and coherence are acknowledged as systemic challenges in policy implementation. Context is critical particularly in the education sector where schools are required to discharge a multiplicity of roles, curriculums, frameworks and national strategies. 'Innovation overload' is accepted as a major challenge for teachers and school leaders. Underinvestment in human resources in our schools is impacting on the capacity of schools to realise goals and meet national objectives. [2] The next ESD strategy should pay particular attention to ensuring alignment with other policy frameworks in schools, in particular the new Digital Learning Strategy, the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, the iterative process of review of senior cycle curriculum and the likelihood of a second Inter-cultural Education Strategy contingent on the second National Action against Racism.

---

[1] https://www.asti.ie/document-library/asti-submission-to-irish-aid-consultation-march-30th-2021/

[2] https://www.asti.ie/document-library/astir-november-2020/

Teacher professionalism

Education is, at its core, based on relationships. Learning is primarily a social practice as has been dramatically demonstrated by the shift to remote teaching over the last twelve months. Teachers are agents of change for young people: when they teach, they motivate, support, assist and socialise young people. Teacher professionalism in Ireland is internationally acknowledged and is the driving force for the quality education that is our hallmark. At the same time, the state does not provide sufficient supports to the profession to support their continuously evolving role. Teachers have heavy workloads and work in institutions which are acknowledged as experiencing intensification and overload. [3] Supports such as access to CPD, professional time for non-teaching work, career progression and mobility are significantly under-developed in comparison to other EU and OECD systems.

The literature to date on teachers and ESD foregrounds the role of the individual teacher in 'championing' ESD in the school. [4] This model is, however, shifting towards a more collective engagement arising from the design of subject specifications containing content knowledge, key skills and learning outcomes. The 2018 NCCA review of ESD in the curriculum attests to this change.[5] It is noteworthy that the NCCA reiterates UNESCO'S concern that more work needs to be done to reorient teacher education to approach ESD in terms of content and teaching methodologies. This has happened to a significant degree in initial teacher education in terms of the standards for initial teacher education/Céim. It is also of note that the Consultation Paper acknowledges the need to make the ESD links more explicit both in professional development and practice.

Teaching ESD in culturally diverse classrooms requires deep understanding of both. Understanding relates to teachers' beliefs and values which form the foundation of their relationships with students. As part of any teacher professional development, teachers need time to engage in explicit reflection on their beliefs and values in dialogue with their peers. This is, moreover, an iterative process as teachers gains experience and pedagogical skills. Unfortunately, the dominant model of teacher professional development in Ireland is the 'transmission model' wherein information is provided to teachers on new curriculum. Increasingly, the Department of Education is providing this model outside of teachers' working time. This model is no longer fit for purpose: teachers need time in their working year to engage in formal and informal learning to address the complex and inter-related issues shaping their students' lives and development – wellbeing, online lives, existential angst in relation to climate change, relationships and sexuality, diverse learning needs including disabilities and special educational needs, ethnic status, community environments and educational disadvantage, racism and misogyny. They also need professional time in the school day to engage in the collaborative practices central to the effective implementation of all national strategies and frameworks. While these are not issuing which the second ESD Strategy can directly address, it is important that the ASTI identifies in this submission the barriers to teacher professionalism and transformative practices in the classroom.

An outstanding omission in the continuum of teacher education is the fact there is no accredited post-graduate programme for teachers in ESD. In its afore-mentioned submission to Irish Aid, the ASTI

---

[3] http://www.asti.ie/document-library/teachers-work-work-demands-and-work-intensity-march-2018/

[4] G. Jeffers and N. Quirke-Bolt (2019) *Teachers' professional identities and development education* in Development Education and Gender, Issue 29, Autumn 2019

[5] https://ncca.ie/media/4899/education-for-sustainable-development.pdf

recommended that it engage with the Teaching Council with a view to introducing accredited programmes for second-level teachers in development education and ESD.

School leadership

School leadership is determinative on all aspects of school life, in particular the school's ethos and culture. The personal commitment of school leaders and other members of the school management teams to an ethos of diversity is critical in realising an inclusive school culture. A defining feature of school leadership in recent years is role expansion and intensification in response to rapidly changing societal and educational demands. At the same time, school leadership is significantly under-resourced in second-level schools. The ASTI has reiterated its concern that not only is there insufficient numbers of middle leadership posts (Assistant Principals), in voluntary secondary schools the latter do not have reduced teaching timetables to enable them to engage in their post duties. This is an untenable situation and is undermining the capacity of schools to meet needs and achieve goals.

Curriculum enrichment

Curriculum enrichment activities are a really important feature in second-level education. National competitions/exhibitions such as Young Social Innovators and BT Young Scientist provide a platform for schools to showcase their innovative projects on ESD themes and issues. The Worldwise Global Schools Global Citizenship Education Programme is really critical in terms of the range of supports and opportunities for schools. It is a 'jewel in the crown' of Irish Aid's development education project. Irish Aid also provides supports to the many NGOs which engage in global citizenship projects with schools, in particular EcoUNESCO, ActionAid, Concern, etc. Other funded projects such as DICE, UBUNTU and the growing range of online pedagogical resources are having an impact. The synergies which these projects collectively generate in the school system are powerful and must be sustained into the future.

Diversity in the teaching profession

There is unanimity in the research on the need for the teaching profession to reflect the cultural diversity of society.[6] This is a particularly important area of education policy and it is a matter of concern that the 2020 Teacher Supply Action Plan does not reference this need. In Ireland, 99% student teachers identify as 'white Irish', as compared to 85% of the population. In 2014, only one person from the 2,437 students who applied for primary teacher training identified as being from the Traveller community.[7] Entry to the teaching profession is largely predicated by social class. Apart from the high costs of initial teacher education for individuals (the 2-year PME ranges from €11,000 to €16,000), barriers which migrant school-leavers face include lack of familial experience of third-level education, knowledge of the Irish education system – both forms of cultural capital - and the high academic standards required to access initial teacher education.

The research is unequivocal on the benefits of having a diverse teaching profession. In particular, it highlights that teacher from diverse backgrounds set high expectations for students from marginalised groups, and act as mentors and advocates for them, often with transformative results. Moreover, it

---

[6] http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/ee14cd84-ffa7-11e5-b713-01aa75ed71a1.0003.01/DOC_1

[7] https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/lessons-in-diversity-the-changing-face-of-teaching-in-ireland-1.4120546

has also been shown that the advantages of a more diverse teaching profession extend beyond the experience of students from minority groups, bringing crucial benefits to the entire student cohort. This is because internalised and unconscious beliefs about inferiority and difference are overcome when children see people from disadvantaged groups as professionals and authority figures. In 2017 the Department of Education in partnership with the Higher Education Authority, funded six centres of teaching excellence across Ireland, under the Programme for Access to High Education (Path) scheme, to widen access to initial teacher education for underrepresented groups. The Department must continue with interventions of this nature to ensure diversity in the profession.

Conclusion

The development of the second National ESD Strategy represents in important opportunity for the Department of Education in particular to address the barriers to the successful implementation of the first Strategy. The ASTI has set out its views on the latter above. It looks forward to continued engagement with the Departmental stakeholder group on this vital area of education policy.