

A History of Sustainability in the Curriculum

It's 50 years since Rachel Carson and 'Silent Spring'. It's also 50 years since SEEd (formally CEE), and other environmental charities started. Most had education as a charitable objective. CEE expressly wanted to get environmental education into schools.

So what has happened since then?

1980's there were environmental education advisors in all local authorities (about 400)

1992 – Rio Earth Summit – Chapter 36 on ESD, focus was governments and LAs

2000 – statement in the National Curriculum values and aims:

“Pupils should develop awareness and understanding of, and respect for, the environments in which they live, and secure their commitment to sustainable development at a personal, national and global level.”

Plus included in Geography, Science, D&T and citizenship subjects

2002 – Johannesburg Earth Summit – agreed on a decade for ESD

2003 – Decade for ESD starts (until Nov 2014). DCSF is the first government department to develop a Sustainable Development Action Plan

2005 – DCSF with SDC develop Sustainable Schools – around campus, curriculum, community and 8 doorways. First Education Commissioner for the SDC

2006 – QCA develop their overview of the curriculum and create 'The Big Picture' – puts sustainability and global citizenship as a cross curricular theme, (one of 6 or 7)

2010 – new government, Sustainable Schools initiative is closed down from the government perspective

2011 – Sustainable Schools Alliance is launched (by Lord Hill, the DfE Green Champion) after 3-month consultation with Stakeholders. SDC is closed down, EAC takes on responsibility for monitoring and holding Government to account on its new sustainability plan. Later that year receive a letter back from Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister in response to ours saying much was being lost due to lack of resources and loss of LA staff, but he did approve of our thinking about sustainability in the 'school curriculum'.

2011 (Dec) – As part of National Curriculum review process an expert panel was asked to review successful education jurisdictions around the world. They recommended 5 objectives including one on environmental stewardship. Disregarded.

2012 – SEEd launches its Sustainability Curriculum Project. SSA is relaunched with a Management Board. Schools have to publish their school curriculum. In July 2012 WWF, the NCB and SEEd funded the TES Sustainable Schools Award.

2013 – NC consultations. Campaigns for nature, food, climate change (over 60,000 signatures) and sustainability in the curriculum (2320 signatures online SEEd – plus letter led by SEEd and KBT with 18 signatures). CC was brought into KS3 not just 4. Food plan released. All others were not successful. Final NC document released outlining core knowledge required – no use of the word sustainability, but hope in geography and science. Not all subjects or KS guidance released yet.

2013 - Rio+20. All governments sign up to:

*“We recognise that the younger generations are the custodians of the future,We therefore resolve to improve the capacity of our education systems to prepare people to pursue sustainable development, including through enhanced teacher training, **the development of curricula around sustainability**, the development of training programmes.....[95]”*

EAC write to DfE about Rio+20 education commitments:

“The Government is fully committed to sustainable development and the importance of preparing young people for the future. Our approach to reform is based on the belief that schools perform better when they take responsibility for their own improvement. We want schools to make their own judgments on how sustainable development should be reflected in their ethos, day-to-day operations and through education for sustainable development. Those judgments should be based on sound knowledge and local needs... [100] “

2013(Sept/Oct) - KBT join SEEd in campaign. SSA and ELSA also agree. 3C engaged to help with campaign. Ongoing support from Joan Walley, Chair of the EAC.

Sept 2013 - Objectives and an advocacy strategy was developed with some invited guests. They were:

Campaign objective

The reinstatement of sustainability in the curriculum.

To ensure the UK education system can lead on the transition of society to one that equips and enables its young citizens to manage the social, environmental and economic uncertain challenges of the future.

Suggested advocacy approach

Stage 1 - inclusion of the objective in the 2015 party election manifestos (particularly Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green as success less likely with Conservative)

Stage 2 - if successful (and supporting party/parties are in power), work to ensure implementation. If not, work to keep the campaign 'live'

Stage 3 - in the medium term, incorporate the objective into an amended Education Act*.

2013 (Oct) – Response from DfE regarding enquiry about their DfE Sustainability champion:

“The Department for Education is committed to sustainable development. As set out in our current Business Plan, covering the period 2012-15, we will ‘assess and manage environmental, social and economic impacts and opportunities in our policy development and decision making’.

Individual policy teams take responsibility for the environmental, social and economic opportunities of their policies. Our Central Capital Unit works closely with the Education Funding Agency to ensure that new schools reflect the best environmental practice. The Government decided that children should learn about climate change as a compulsory element of the new national curriculum, and colleagues in the Curriculum Policy Division are continuing to ensure that the new programmes of study for geography and science cover this issue in depth at key stage 3 and above.

We continue to work with DEFRA (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), DECC (Department of Energy and Climate Change) and DfID (Department for International Development) to ensure that while focusing on the Department’s key priorities we also meet our cross-government, international and legal obligations.”

**NOTE: There are 3 levels of curriculum in England*

- *The 1944 Education Act amended over time. Gives overall aims and objectives for a state education system, plus makes RE and sex education statutory, this is the overarching framework for the school and NC*
- *School curriculum (developed and designed by the school) and*

- *More recently a national curriculum was added (1998 onwards)*