

Summary of ASE response to D.f.E.S. consultation on Sustainable Schools Document

August 2006

Q: If you do not work in a school, what is your interest in schools?

The Association for Science Education is the UK's largest subject association with 18000 members drawn from all areas of science education, providing a powerful force to promote excellence in science teaching and learning. Through a national network of teachers, technicians, lecturers and advisors as well as a team of permanent staff, ASE creates conferences, online resources, publications, INSET and many varied projects to offer support and encouragement to everyone involved in science education. www.ase.org.uk

Q: If you are not sure about our vision for sustainable schools and our future expectations, where would you appreciate clarification?

To what degree will developing sustainable practices and processes within and around the school be compulsory, strongly encouraged or optional through the Sustainable Schools Self Assessment tool - as an integrated part of the Ofsted school self evaluation process? Using the tool appears to be voluntary and so may well not be effective in securing change as envisioned. To what degree will LEA strategic decisions (e.g. in planning the level, designs and locations of future school provision) be expected to give environmental sustainability justifications? This is in part answered by all major new builds or refurbishments since March 2005 achieving a minimum BREEAM rating of 'very good', which we find encouraging. It would be beneficial to be clear about the distinction between financial sustainability and environmental sustainability.

Q: Are you clear about your own role in promoting sustainable schools?

There is a clear link between science teaching and learning and several of the 'doorways' to sustainability. - Energy, Water, Travel and Traffic, Food and Drink Nutrition, Purchase and Waste, School Buildings and Grounds. ASE will be able to encourage and equip its members to draw out these links; particularly through curriculum changes at KS4 science in the area of How Science Works which looks at applications and implications of science plus data, evidence, theories and explanations in particular. Current ASE projects also support sustainability initiatives; specifically The Global Dimension to Science, Outdoor Science (both on www.ase.org.uk) and Science Across the World programmes (www.scienceacross.org), plus science learning for students with additional needs (www.ase.org.uk).

Q: What sort of support would be most valuable for schools to have the capacity to establish and follow clear road maps to become sustainable schools?

A menu of easy 'first steps' and how to implement them to maximise both the environmental benefit and the educational benefit. In business, an analogy of 'picking the low apples first' is often used. Successful implementation of easy measures would develop motivation for more far reaching measures. The Sustainable Schools self assessment tool will be helpful in serving multiple purposes; an appraisal of a school's actual position, pointing out where current practices are in line with sustainability, and being the basis for action plans and progress checks. It is hoped that schools look seriously at this tool in their self evaluation processes, but they may need incentives to do this

Q: Who do you think is best placed to provide this support?

A range of support providers to include; LEA for issues related to grounds and premises management, subject and teacher associations for curriculum, teaching and learning support and businesses and NGOs for developing the role of exemplifying sustainability (technology and management) to the community. A central government role for tracking progress and disseminating good practice may be useful

Q: What practical actions could you take as a next step?

Ongoing ASE projects to highlight aspects which could form part of a school's move to sustainability - out of classroom learning across all the sciences, Science UPD8's up to the minute resources based on current science news and issues (www.upd8.org.uk), Global Dimension and Science Across the World programme resources to highlight sustainability links and opportunities in science teaching and learning. Promotion of A.S.E.'s Lab Designs for Teaching and Learning resource to complement 'doorways' on School Buildings and Grounds. The revised KS4 science programme of study offers many opportunities for addressing sustainability issues - particularly through How Science Works, so this is an ideal time to introduce sustainability into schemes of work etc. The planned revisions to the science curriculum at KS3 should provide further opportunities from 2008.

Q: If you feel that schools need incentives to support their progress towards becoming sustainable, what kind of incentives would you favour?

Measures to reimburse start up costs in relation to the premises and grounds - perhaps via a short proposal requesting funding for equipment or bought in expertise. Examples would be rainwater collection systems, improved insulation, bicycle racks. Some measures would have a finite payback time, others would encourage sustainable behaviour. School catering to have incentive (or at least disincentives removed) to use locally produced and handled food. Advice to schools that being responsible for a sustainability programme, with SMART targets, would make a teacher eligible for a TLR payment - provided the role included the embedding of sustainability in schemes of work across departments and key stages.

We welcome the BREEAM awards of 'very good' for all major new builds or refurbishments from March 2005.

Better dissemination about the recognised benefits to student learning and attainment should provide indirect incentives for improved sustainability practice at all levels.

Q: Which incentives do you think would be most effective?

A combination of a responsible teacher and the ability to apply for and use sustainability 'start up' grants. If 'sustainability' is seen as having a high initial cost, this may discourage schools without budget surpluses from engaging.

Making the self assessment tool an integrated and necessary part of the Ofsted self-evaluation process.

Q: What is your opinion of voluntary award schemes such as Eco-Schools, Healthy Schools and International Schools?

Part of the solution

Q: What else do you feel is required?

'Buy in' from all teachers, departments and other stakeholders with an approach of continuous improvement. Awards could be either an incidental result of the school wanting to and succeeding in developing sustainability, or they could be a target, with no further progress after the award is given. The former situation should be the model as sustainable development is an ongoing and continually developing process with no fixed end point.