DfE Sustainability and Climate Change Education - Strategy for education and children's services systems

Comment from the Edge (www.edgedebate.com)

Firstly, we really welcome this strategy as a vital step forward in achieving a meaningful education curriculum for all age groups from nursery to post-grad and the necessary attention given to improve the long-term performance of the education estate.

A useful strategy sets goals and priorities, it determines actions to achieve those goals, and mobilises resources to execute the plan thus describing how the ends (goals) will be achieved by the means (resources) with a timetable.

The draft strategy goes some way towards these ends over its five action areas, but we put forward some overall initial responses:

- It would be useful to set out the delivery dates in the 5 'Action areas' in one table to ensure that they are congruent and complement each other and are going to deliver within the tight timescales that we now have to meet in response to the climate emergency. For example, evaluating the best money approach to retrofitting the school estate seems to be planned for 2025 – we suggest that the programme should be rolled out ahead of this date as it will take time and resource to complete over the following years.

  It would also be useful to clarify who owns each action area – will this be led by a department official or a minister?

- There needs to be more certainty of funding and an agreed, deliverable programme for the retrofitting of the education estate to create sufficient confidence for those who will undertake the work to commit resources to doing so.

  Question:
  What is the plan if no additional funding is made available?

- In the introductory text: *Costs are also significant; schools alone spend around £630m per annum on energy*.

  Question:
  How are the potential cost savings reflected in the funding assessments?

- For buildings, there is a focus on operational carbon, but no mention of embodied carbon.

  Questions:
  - Is it correct that the Genzero schools' pilot is looking at net zero embodied carbon and encouraging timber construction?
  - Is this the situation with current contractor frameworks or do they focus on operational carbon only?
  - Should a circular economy approach also be taken into account?

- There is a lot of discussion about 'pilot projects' which, we recognise, can be useful to generate standardised solutions for the typical school building types for

the contractor framework to deliver, but we would suggest that is there is sufficient knowledge and experience to now set out what is needed and focus on real delivery projects.

- It is vital to have performance verification of the school estate and this must be more than a tick box exercise.

  Question:
  Has the DfE carried out post occupancy (POE) exercises and have there been any useful outcomes to guide the way forward?

- HE is included but not spelled out in either the curriculum actions or the building actions. Presumably university buildings are outside the DfE remit, but should the strategy not set a requirement for a similar update timetable and programme?

Further questions and comments on each section below:

Scope/purpose; foreword and introductory overviews

- The challenge and opportunity set out for 'education' does look somewhat limited – surely education needs to support the transition in ways of living that will be needed including the need for behaviour change (House of Lords Environment and Climate Committee inquiry https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/628/) ; an understanding of how the way we live will be different in terms so that there is more willingness to live and work in the same place, not assume that flying is a sustainable option etc. They need to discuss how to make a good life in a new climate and nature conscious reality where the local is valued? Is there also an opportunity to encourage more community engagement and use of shared school buildings and grounds to make the best use of the investment?

- Green jobs and skills: while 'green jobs' are important and it is useful to identify more clearly what these might be and what long term careers they can offer, they are not the only jobs for which climate and ecological literacy will be important and apply to all jobs including those in the arts and creative industries.

- National Education Nature Park:

  Question:
  How does this link with other national strategies such as nature recovery networks and biodiversity net gain?

Action Area 1: Climate Education

Through a better understanding of the facts, a greater appreciation of nature, and practical opportunities to participate in activities to increase climate resilience and enhance biodiversity, we will empower all young people to be truly global citizens, able totake positive steps to improve their local communities, their country and the planet.

Comment:

- The focus then seems to switch to science, geography and citizenship programmes with an A level course in Environmental Science.

- We are arguing for climate and ecological literacy to be included throughout the curriculum at primary, secondary, FE and HE

- Political debate: should we not be teaching people that the climate and ecological emergency is so serious that it should be above party politics like the establishment of the Committee for Climate Change. There is an urgency (and a willingness) for all the UK's political parties to actually speak with one voice on the issues.

- Schools, FE…what about the need for climate and ecological education at HE level…as there will be people entering university courses now who have not benefitted from climate education during their school days? For example, all students attending the University of Wales Trinity St David were asked to put forward their individual proposals for making their time at the university more sustainable – this was regardless of their particular subjects.

- Where is the teaching about behaviour, mind-sets and lifestyle changes to respond to the climate and ecological emergency? It is a cross-cutting issue.

Action Area 2: Green skills and careers

It is critical young people not only have the ability to think and live sustainably, but also have the green skills that allow them to build careers and participate as Britain leads the world into the Green Industrial Revolution… We will continue working with industry, through programmes such as Tomorrow's Engineers Code, to showcase the diversity of roles and people that make up the STEM sector, encouraging more young people from different backgrounds to choose a career inthe sector.

Comment:

- There are more jobs and careers than 'green skills'

- Despite discussion above, focus is back to the STEM sector – we need to think sustainability in every sector from banking to concert halls.

- Again, no mention of HE and both professional courses and wider topics that influence how we respond to the climate and ecological emergency.

Action Area 3: the Education Estate

A green, sustainable education estate that is resilient to the impacts of climate change will normalise and inspire young people to live sustainable lives, with impact felt widely intheir families and communities.

Work with BEIS to trial the delivery of smart meters in schools to reduce energybills and emissions while provide learning opportunities for data analysis and understanding ***the impact of human behaviour****. Evidence will be used from the pilots to inform future action.*

Question:

- How effective are the proposed measures, are they still leaving too much to chance…'support schools to make the transition'…'support schools and colleges to access funds'?

Comment:

- The second paragraph above is the first mention of 'human behaviour' and in the context of the buildings and use of smart meters! This needs to be better understood and included in more of the strategy and embedded in the whole curriculum.

The data from the meters must be used in the curriculum

- Concerned that evaluating the best value for money approaches for retrofitting the education buildings and developing standards for retrofit and repair…will not be in place until 2025.

- Also retrofitting the school estates alone will require a serious programme given the issues of supply – contractors to carry out the work for a start.

Action Area 4: Operations and supply chains.

Comment:
OK…bit muddled in presentation, but picks up some relevant points.

Action Area 5: Data

Across the various education and care sectors there are different reporting mechanisms with regards to sustainability and climate change. DfE will empower sectors to report inthe way most appropriate for them.

The Department for Education will implement effective data gathering mechanisms to achieve a collective view on how the education system is progressing towards net zero and environmental targets.
Comment: do these two paragraphs contradict each other? Surely there needs to be a rational and common approach to data collection?

Also in the introductory text: *Schools and universities represent 36% of total UK public sector building emissions.*

Comment:
Should this be the key performance indicator (KPI)?

By 2025
Evaluate interventions, trials and pilots and appraise the ability to be embeddedwithin our delivery programmes and business as usual.

Comment:

- There can be no place for 'business as usual' unless it means normalising better behaviour.

- How many interventions, trials and pilots are needed to inform the delivery programme? All parts of the supply chain need to have clear achievable metrics and reporting requirements.

Finally, the Edge has a very wide range of members representing all aspects of the built environment and higher education and several members have expressed a willingness to help on the working parties where this would be useful.

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