IV

(Notices)

NOTICES FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, BODIES, OFFICES AND AGENCIES

COUNCIL

Council conclusions of 19 November 2010 on education for sustainable development

(2010/C 327/05)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

HAVING REGARD TO:

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy, first adopted in Gothenburg in 2001 (¹) and subsequently reviewed in 2006 and 2009 (²), which provides a framework for a long-term vision of sustainability in which economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection go hand in hand, and which highlights the key role of education as a prerequisite for promoting the behavioural changes and providing all citizens with the key competences needed to achieve sustainable development.

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), which seeks to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning (³), and the 2009 UNESCO world conference on education for sustainable development held in Bonn, which — in its concluding declaration — agreed that investment in such education is an investment in the future and indeed, in some cases, a life-saving measure (⁴).

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (⁵), which calls on Member States to ensure that each citizen has the key competences to adapt flexibly to a changing world in which everything is highly interconnected. The eight key competences outlined are mutually supportive and underpinned by skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, initiative taking and decision making, all of which are essential for achieving the objectives of sustainable

development. Of particular relevance in this context are basic competences in science and technology, as well as social and civic competences.

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (⁶), which emphasises that education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens today and in the years ahead.

The Europe 2020 strategy for jobs and growth (⁷), which seeks to turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy capable of delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion, and to which education and training are highlighted as having a major contribution to make.

RECOGNISES THAT:

1. The European Union faces a considerable number of inter-linked challenges in the early 21st century, including the economic and social consequences of the global financial crisis, climate change, declining water and energy resources, shrinking biodiversity, threats to food security and health risks.

2. In a continuously changing world, all European citizens should be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to understand and deal with the challenges and complexities of modern day life, whilst taking due account of the environmental, social, cultural and economic implications, as well as to assume their global responsibilities.

(¹) European Council conclusions of 15-16 June 2001 (SN 200/01).
(²) Docs. 10917/06 and 16818/09 respectively.
(³) www.unesco.org/eu/esd
(⁴) www.esd-world-conference-2009.org
(⁵) OJ L 394, 30.12.2006.

(⁶) OJ C 119, 28.5.2009.
(⁷) European Council conclusions of 25-26 March 2010 (EUCO 7/1/10 REV 1).

3. The 2010 report on Skills for Green Jobs (¹) emphasises that every job in future will need to contribute to a continuous improvement in resource efficiency, and that developing a low-carbon economy will depend more on improving existing skills and integrating sustainable development concerns into existing areas of learning, than on fostering specialised 'green skills'.

4. Education for sustainable development (ESD) in a lifelong learning perspective is essential for the achievement of a sustainable society and is therefore desirable at all levels of formal education and training, as well as in non-formal and informal learning.

EMPHASISES THAT:

1. ESD has an important contribution to make to the successful implementation of both the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development and the new Europe 2020 strategy.

2. The most important role for ESD is to equip individuals and groups with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to make conscious choices aimed at achieving and preserving a world which both they and future generations will deem fit to live and work in. Educational institutions, local communities, civil society and employers are all key players in developing and promoting such competences.

3. ESD fundamentally concerns the way we think about our complex world and the way we behave. It promotes values, principles and practices that help people to respond effectively and confidently to current and new challenges. It therefore has implications for education and training at all levels which may go beyond simply including sustainable development as another subject in the curriculum.

4. Sustainability can play an important role in national lifelong learning strategies and can be used as a tool to enhance quality at all levels of education and training.

CONSIDERS THAT:

1. Education and training are indispensable to achieving a more sustainable Europe and world. ESD should be regarded as crucial in the process of lifelong learning and should, where appropriate, be mainstreamed into all levels and aspects of education and training, in order to strengthen the capacity of citizens to cope with imminent unpredictable problems and to find long-term solutions for these in many different situations throughout life.

2. The three fundamental pillars of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental — should be addressed in a balanced and integrated manner.

3. In many Member States, aspects of ESD already feature in environmental, global, health, peace, citizenship, human rights, consumer, financial and development education constituting entry points for integrating sustainable development into a lifelong learning context.

4. Increasing public awareness and understanding about sustainable development and ESD is essential.

5. ESD should be built on value-based and interdisciplinary learning which promotes systems thinking and teaching, and which develops new knowledge, skills and attitudes. It should emphasise creative thinking, innovation and the long-term perspective, particularly our responsibility towards future generations. ESD is not a stand-alone subject, but more a set of underlying principles and values such as justice, equity, tolerance, sufficiency and responsibility (²) to be conveyed more transversally. ESD can also play a role in developing the competences required to enhance employability. Since skills relating to sustainable development are best acquired through personal experiences, the learning process should be oriented as far as possible towards inclusive learning, action and motivation.

6. Given its complex and comprehensive nature, ESD can be particularly useful in developing the transversal key competences of learners […].

7. When being implemented, ESD should be tailored to each level of education, taking into account the specific context. Pre-primary schools can begin by fostering basic values, attitudes and knowledge in children, which can then serve as the foundation for further learning about sustainability. At primary and lower secondary level, ESD can focus on awareness-raising and the development of key competences, and be adapted to take account of the particular context and subsequent stages of learning. In VET and higher education, ESD should be strengthened and attention focused on developing more specific skills and the competences needed within various occupations, as well as on addressing issues such as responsible decision-making by individuals and communities and corporate social responsibility.

8. Teacher education and in-service training should be given a crucial role in shaping a perspective on ESD and determining how concretely to implement this in schools, VET and higher education institutions. Depending on what they usually teach, teachers and trainers at all levels of education and training will face a variety of specific pedagogical challenges in teaching a transversal subject such as ESD, and will therefore require appropriate training.

(¹) Cedefop: Skills for Green Jobs, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010.

(²) See Bonn Declaration, paragraph 8 (http://www.esd-world-conference-2009.org/fileadmin/download/ESD2009_BonnDeclaration080409.pdf).

9. Developing a 'whole-school' approach to ESD can help to harness the motivation and commitment of all pupils and students, to develop their critical thinking and to improve their educational attainment in general. Educational institutions at all levels should themselves strive to be sustainable organisations and to act as role models, by integrating the principles of sustainable development in policy and practice, i.e. through energy-saving, building and working with natural resources, and developing a sustainable purchasing and consumer policy. In a school context, this requires the active participation of all stakeholders: school leaders, teachers, pupils, the school board, administrative and supportive staff, parents, NGOs, the local community and business.

ACCORDINGLY INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO:

Take appropriate measures at the relevant level of responsibility — local, regional or national — in order to encourage the further development and implementation of ESD and its integration into the education and training system at all levels, in non-formal and informal learning just as in formal learning. In particular, these measures may include:

(a) Ensuring that policy, regulatory, institutional and operational frameworks support ESD, and in particular that:

— ESD becomes a feature of national lifelong learning strategies aimed at citizens' personal, social and professional development;

— ESD is, where appropriate, mainstreamed into curricula;

— interdisciplinary and cross-curricular approaches are developed and implemented at all levels of education to address the challenges of sustainability;

— a 'whole-school' approach to ESD is actively promoted and supported, including by removing barriers to institutions which are pursuing the sustainable use of their resources.

(b) Equipping teachers, trainers, school staff and school leaders with the awareness, knowledge and competences required to promote and include the principles underlying ESD in their approaches to teaching and management, particularly by:

— raising awareness among teachers, trainers and school leaders at all levels of education and training of the importance of ESD, and of the benefits of using this as a particularly useful tool in promoting transversal key competences;

— ensuring that teachers and trainers are adequately equipped to teach complex issues linked to ESD, through initial education as well as in-service training,

and providing them with appropriate and up-to-date tools and learning materials for ESD;

— encouraging multi-and interdisciplinary cooperation between teachers in the same establishment to promote teaching and learning on cross-cutting ESD issues;

— promoting networking, including online networking, among teachers in different establishments to ensure the continued development of, and exchange of new ideas on, ESD;

— fostering cooperation with — and the greater participation of — parents, the local community and all the other relevant stakeholders.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, WITHIN THE LIMITS OF THEIR RESPECTIVE COMPETENCES, TO:

Support education for sustainable development and promote these Council conclusions by:

(i) pursuing ESD within both the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and the Europe 2020 Strategy;

(ii) promoting research on and knowledge of ESD, especially in areas where there is little experience or the evidence base is weak, such as VET and higher education;

(iii) promoting networking between educational institutions on the issue of ESD, making optimum use of existing networks and strengthening cooperation on ESD at all levels by building partnerships, including by encouraging:

— national and cross-border cooperation among schools;

— partnerships between educational institutions, business and/or NGOs;

— networks of researchers of ESD;

(iv) identifying and registering good practice in a compendium of ESD on the Knowledge System for Lifelong Learning (KSLLL) website ([1]);

(v) addressing ESD issues among the priorities of the Lifelong Learning programme and other relevant existing or future programmes;

(vi) making optimum use of the 2011 European Year of Volunteering with a view to focusing on education for sustainable development and partnerships between educational institutions, business and NGOs, as well as on strengthening the visibility of existing good practices in voluntary activities in this field;

([1]) www.kslll.net

(vii) considering including ESD among the priority areas for the next cycle of the 'ET2020' strategic framework in education and training.

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

Contribute to Member States efforts to support education for sustainable development and promote these Council conclusions by:

(i) organising peer learning activities on specific aspects of ESD, such as teacher training, the 'whole school' approach, and partnerships for ESD, with a view to developing a policy handbook and guidelines for educational establishments and teachers;

(ii) strengthening cooperation with other international institutions, in particular UNESCO and UNECE, in the field of ESD.