Global Skills and Lifelong Learning:

Future challenges

Development Education Association

Promoting **change** through education

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The Development Education Association (DEA) published *The Global Learning Challenge: Strengthening global perspectives in lifelong learning* in 2002. It presented the case for integrating global perspectives throughout all lifelong learning.

Progress has been made, the debate has moved on and global perspectives are more widely included in education and training programmes. The skills debate is back on the agenda with the Leitch Review, but the debate has been framed too narrowly. The current challenges are to deepen the level of *critical enquiry* and to move from *increased awareness* to *action for change*.

This thinkpiece seeks to trigger, inform and influence the debate about the future direction of lifelong learning. This is a dialogue in which all stakeholders in lifelong learning should engage and in which the DEA, its members and partners in adult learning have a major role to play.

The DEA defines development education as lifelong learning that:

- explores the links between people living in the "developed" countries of the North with those of the "developing" South, enabling people to understand the links between their own lives and those of people throughout the world

- increases understanding of the economic, social, political and environmental forces which shape our lives

- develops the skills, attitudes and values which enable people to work together to take action to bring about change and take control of their own lives

- works towards achieving a more just and a more sustainable world in which power and resources are more equitably shared.

Putting the World into World Class Education (DfES 2004) describes the *global dimension* as consisting of eight concepts: (global) citizenship, social justice, sustainable development, diversity, values and perceptions, interdependence, conflict resolution and human rights. This document uses the term *global dimension* to refer to learning where links between local and global are explicit and which embraces these eight key concepts.

Introduction

Awareness of global interconnectedness has increased considerably in recent years in the UK. In education, business and civil society, it is evident in relation to the challenges of climate change, migration, financial markets, international terrorism and national security, combating poverty, global health, and disease control on farms.

Sustainable development, globalisation, interdependency, global citizenship, and the global dimension appear with increasing regularity in government policies, school, college and university curricula, and in the media.

We live in a knowledge-rich society, where definitive solutions based on sound science are sought. The questions are becoming increasingly complex and often contain moral and ethical dilemmas, for example, clinical drugs trials in countries with high levels of poverty, where the concept of informed consent is outweighed by the desire to acquire food to feed family members. Straightforward answers have never been more elusive; nor the need for focused, informed action by individuals, institutions and governments, so strong.

There remains a challenge for policymakers and educators to reconcile those who consider social justice and global citizenship or sustainable development to be the key concept in *Global Skills and Lifelong Learning*:

- Climate change is firmly on the agenda. But how to address this complex issue is contested. The debate about nuclear power as central to reducing the UK reliance on fossil fuels, for example, has environmentalists on both sides. The social justice campaigns on the disproportionate impact on the poorest communities in the South are relatively recent.

- There is continuing concern about the overall increase in world population and the recognition that Europe faces an employment gap with its aging and decreasing population. Economic migration might seem to provide solutions, yet links are perceived in some quarters, between immigration and global security, cultural dilution and social instability.

- The gap between the *haves* and *have nots* continues to increase within Europe and the US and between Europe and the US and Africa. Yet the gap between Europe and the US and China and India is rapidly decreasing as the latter develop their economic, commercial and educational bases.

In education there has been a shift towards employability and equipping young people and adults with the skills for 'life in a global society and work in a global economy' (DfES *Putting the World into World Class Education* 2004).

The debate has undoubtedly moved on. No longer is there a question as to whether we should be equipping people for the global society or that we have a role to play in influencing the nature of that global

society. No longer is there any doubt that we have a vested interest in the effective management of the natural resources of the planet and the active promotion of social justice.

In education and training, the question is: *how* do we prepare people for their role towards the alleviation of poverty, sustainable development, reducing tension and conflict, and a more equitable use of resources? And crucially, how do we effectively combine a social justice agenda alongside the desire to increase the UK's economic competitiveness?

These kind of changes will not take place purely through young people and adults being better informed. We need to ask how education and training can actively promote a greater critical engagement in issues and lead to 'impact-oriented behaviours', in other words, actions which will bring about change at local, national and global levels. This thinkpiece briefly surveys the government agendas that have fed into thinking in this area and then goes on to map the future challenges and priorities for different stakeholders.

Government agendas and policies

"The global dimension is increasingly being seen as an integral part of supporting the up-skilling of our citizens. Skills both empower the individual and lay the foundations for a successful economy; by extension, skills enable employers to compete in the global market and help lay the foundations of an inclusive society where social mobility and opportunity are open to all. We need to look to the future. If we fail to do so our competitors will not."

Bill Rammell, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, 14 June 2006

Across government, globalisation and interconnectedness are accepted as realities. The Government's Development Awareness Fund for 2007/8 stands at over £5m: unimaginable five years ago. Tackling climate change and combatting poverty feature prominently in government and opposition agendas.

Education and training remain central to government initiatives in equipping UK citizens, of all ages, for the future. Education and training policy is being developed with an increasing focus on the role of business, strategic international partnerships, skills acquistion for employability and achieving competitive advantage.

21st Century Skills: Realising our potential (DfES 2003) increased the focus on employability and the role of the employer in decision-making about learning programmes. This was accompanied by a shift of focus away from the process of learning towards the acquisition of skills.

The Skills We Need: Our Annual Statement of Priorities (Learning and Skills Council 2004) echoed this, emphasising improving the skills of workers, meeting the needs of employers and attracting business investment.

Putting the World into World-Class Education: An international strategy for education, skills and children's services (DfES 2004) sets out three goals:

• Equipping people for life in a global society and work in a global economy, through incorporating a global dimension to learning, extending language and generic skills for a global economy and the mutual recognition and transparency of qualifications.

• Engaging with international partners to achieve their goals and ours, which includes the realisation of the 'Lisbon' goal of making the European Union *"the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world"*. Alongside this is encouraging international strategic partnerships and contributing to the improvement of education and children's services in developing countries.

• Maximising the contribution of our education and training sector, and university research to overseas trade and inward investment.

Securing the Future: Delivering the UK sustainable development strategy (2005) demonstrates wide commitment by the UK government to sustainable development. This is implemented through departmental action plans including:

- *Learning for the Future: The DfES sustainable development action plan (2005/06)* which has four areas of focus; the first is education for sustainable development, two more are concerned with environmental impact, and the last is local and global partnership activity.

- The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has a strong commiment to soclal justice and inclusivity in its Sustainable Development Action Plan focusing on building cohesion and respect across communities and reinvigorating local democracy and stong partnerships.

From Here to Sustainability: The Learning and Skills Council's Strategy for Sustainable Development (2005) echoes the strong environmental concern balanced with social justice, achieving a sustainable economy, promoting good governance and using sound science.

On 5 December 2006, The Leitch Review of Skills, *Prosperity for all in the global economy: World class skills*, reported on 'what the UK's long term ambition should be for developing skills in order to maximise economic prosperity and productivity and to improve social justice'. The Government's response to Lord Leitch's report is due to be published in summer 2007.

These policies and initiatives signify a new approach to education and training for the 21st century with sustainable development at the heart of government policy and a focus on acquiring skills for employability and competitive advantage in a global society. Strategic international partnerships are actively encouraged with resource-rich countries, which will increase the UK's ability to compete in the global market place. However, relationships with the poorest countries continue to be primarily based on donor-recipient dynamics.

The DEA argues that there are key tensions which need addressing:

- That employees need skills for employment is not in question. However, the impact of education also extends to people's wider role in society. People, young and old, need to be able to deal with complex social, environmental and financial issues.

- That education and training for a global society should lead to the acquisition of skills is not in question. However, unless this includes essential skills in critical engagement and also leads to the adoption of impact-oriented behaviours, learning will be ineffectual. Learners need to make their own informed decisions but educators and trainers should understand the factors which promote behaviour changes, in their private sphere (for example a commitment to domestic recycling or choosing to make ethical purchasing decisions) and in the public sphere (for example supporting policy development or campaigning).

- That generic skills to compete in a global economy need to be embedded in education and training is irrefutable. However, there is an urgent need for debate on how these skills can be set in a framework of poverty reduction, human rights and sustainable development as opposed to a competitive euro-centric economic perspective.

- That language learning needs a far stronger focus is undeniable. However, is language acquisition focused on competing in the global marketplace and ensuring the continuation of western-centric concepts and values? Or is it on communicating with a wide range of people overseas, not just the English-speaking minority, in order to engage with other cultures, understand different perspectives, and recognise the value of knowledge and innovation we can access through this?

- That strengthening and extending international partnerships and learning from experiences overseas are crucial is indisputable. However, the focus on competition and the drive for Eurocentric superiority is unlikely to foster the kind of international relationships which are required to address global challenges such as terrorism and migration.

- That sustainable development is crucial is not in question. However, there is a danger that sustainable development is still seen through environmental lenses only with the social justice element as peripheral or secondary. How can education for sustainable development contribute to enhanced skills for engagement in a global society?

We argue that further debate is needed around education as "a process that prepares … for successful participation in an increasingly interdependent world … fostering global understanding and developing skills for effective living and working in a diverse world" (Francis 1993). This debate needs to define the skills needed and also actively promote changes in consumer behaviour, active citizenship, policy support and activism. (See *Global Success for All*, DEA 2003)

Taking the agenda forward: the next challenges

All actors and agencies have crucial roles to play, in partnership with learners, in ensuring that the global dimension is embedded across adult learning. Action needs to take place from curriculum planning and staff development to strategic planning which will influence approaches to learning through to criteria for funding and inspection.

Government policies and initiatives from other key players provide a framework for the future. The Development Education Association suggests that the following four aspects are central in the ways in which policy and practice are taken forward.

Global dimension: balancing the key concepts

The global dimension embraces eight key concepts: (global) citizenship, social justice, sustainable development, diversity, values and perceptions, interdependence, conflict resolution and human rights all of which are applicable across *social, economic environmental, and political* areas. Whilst there is a current acceptance that as a society we cannot afford to ignore climate change, or political instability, these should not be at the expense of social justice or human rights. There is a need for:

- social justice and human rights to be at the core of education and training, alongside sustainable development

- greater analysis of the potential impact of policies on the less well off in society at a global level.

Promoting skills for global engagement

The Leitch Review of Skills has created debate on the generic skills required to maximise productivity and economic competitiveness. This debate needs to go much further and to explore:

- the relationships between maximising economic competitiveness and global citizenship

- skills for engagement in a global society based on mutually beneficial relationships, social justice, combating poverty, and sustainable development

- acceptance that all knowledge is partial and open to questioning and interpretation

- increased focus on informed responsible actions as essential aspects of global engagement.

Process of learning and action

Learners increasingly need to understand complex global issues in order to make challenging and responsible choices as citizens. However, even when people recognise that specific actions are needed, they often do not choose to act. There is a need for ongoing:

- debate on the processes of learning; in particular, developing critical literacy, exploring assumptions behind information, and reading text from different perspectives

- increased understanding of the links between learning and action, the forces that result in changes in behaviour, including activist and

non-activist behaviours in both public and private spheres

- research into the impact of approaches to teaching on learning and action

- development of new approaches to teaching appropriate to the 21st century.

Multiple perspectives

International partnerships are actively encouraged through policy and funding initiatives. These partnerships can provide valuable opportunities to explore other perspectives and engage in collaborative learning, or they can perpetuate narrow thinking and promote a single way of viewing the world. There is a need for:

- increased awareness of the implications of limited perspectives, in particular, western-centric thinking

- an increase in listening to, and learning from, international partners

- increased awareness of the factors which lead to exploitative international relationships

- a questioning of the underpinning assumptions and power relations behind international partnerships, leading to a greater understanding of the processes involved in partnerships

- an increase in drawing on the diversity of perspectives in UK-based groups.

The table shown over the following pages provides some examples of how the different actors and agencies can influence the future direction. The DEA and its members are available to link with partners to drive forward the agenda through providing materials, training, continuing professional development (CPD) and support in curriculum and strategic planning.

Priorities for key stakeholders

Actors and agencies	Global dimension: balancing the key concepts	Promoting skills for global engagement	Processes of learning and action	Multiple perspectives
Tutors and lecturers	• recognise the full range of the key concepts • maintain a balance between environmental, social, economic and political • recognise that teaching is not value neutral and the role of explicitly modelling values within the teaching context • explicitly link the local and global.	promote: • critical thinking, critical literacy • mutually beneficial relationships based on social justice, sustainable development and poverty alleviation • respecting the individuality, rights, culture and autonomy of others • working in collaboration with other people rather than out-competing others • learning from resource-poor, as well as resource-rich contexts • impact-oriented actions • identifying the parallels between local and global contexts.	• engage in staff development about the processes of learning and teaching • accept that all knowledge is partial and open to challenge • extend the use of collaborative learning • increase focus linking learning to individual actions • disseminate new approaches.	• draw on the diversity of perspectives within groups and institutions • ensure a range of perspectives are heard and valued • develop mutually respectful international links • are aware of power relationships in partnerships • actively challenge western-centric thinking.
DECs, colleges and other providers	• recognise the full range of the key concepts • maintain a balance between environmental, social, economic and political • explicitly link the local and global • integrate policies on sustainable development, social inclusion and diversity, equity.	• develop and promote skills for global society alongside skills for a global economy (see above for examples).	• promote approaches to learning which encourage critical literacy and action for change • encourage innovative leadership in learning and teaching • provide explicit opportunities for CPD in learning and teaching.	• question the nature and purpose of international partnerships • ensure curricula are adapted to suit local contexts by involving local people in curriculum development • draw on the diversity within the institution.
LSC, LSDA	• offer workshops and seminars on the global dimension to learning • explore the relationship between the global dimension and sustainable development.	• offer workshops/ seminars around developing skills for a global society and global economy (see above for examples).	• contribute to the debate on processes of learning and teaching.	• engage in consultation across a wide range of perspectives.

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Qualifications and curriculum authorities eg: QCA in England	• contribute to the debate on the relationship between the global dimension and sustainable development.	• contribute to the debate on skills for a global society and global economy (see above for examples).	• promote debate on processes of learning and teaching.	• develop criteria for international partnerships • ensure curricula are adapted to suit local contexts.
Accrediting and awarding bodies	• develop criteria for embedding the global dimension into learning which embrace environmental, social, economic and political aspects.	• engage in the debate around skills for a global society and skills for a global economy (see above for examples).	• encourage the use of reflective assessment where students explore their own process of learning as well as their acquisition of knowledge and skills.	• place greater focus on local culture and learning in curriculum development for overseas courses.
Professional bodies and special interest groups (AOC/ UCU)	• encourage debate on the global dimension to learning and its relationship with sustainable development.	• explore the tensions between skills for a global society and skills for a global economy • explore the impact of increasing skills for a global economy on international partnerships (see above for examples).	• develop increased awareness of the processes involved in learning and teaching • promote debate about the process of learning.	• encourage strategies for collaborative exchange.
Inspection and quality improvement bodies, eg: Quality Improvement Agency	• embed social justice alongside and/or within sustainable development.	• promote skills for global society alongside skills for a global economy (see above for examples).	• explicitly encourage non-traditional approaches to learning which promote critical enquiry and participation.	• develop criteria for international partnerships.
Central government	• ensure that policy on the global dimension and education for sustainable development are coherent and complementary.	• give equal weight to skills for engaging in a global society and skills to compete in a global economy (see above for examples).	• balance the focus on skills with renewed interest and funding in creative approaches to learning and teaching.	• ensure 'learning from' is an element of all partnerships. • avoid a bi-polar approach to international partnerships where some are strategic partnerships and others are one way donor-recipient in nature.

References and Resources

Development Education Association (DEA):

The Global Learning Challenge: Strengthening global perspectives in lifelong learning (2002)

Global Success for all: A skills strategy in an unequal world (2003)

both downloadable from: *www.dea.org.uk/publications*.

For further information about DEA's work in the sector, visit: *www.dea.org.uk/adult*

Department for Education and Skills (DfES):

21st Century Skills: Realising Our Potential: *www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/21st Century Skills.pdf*

Learning for the Future: DfES Sustainable Development Action Plan: *www.dfes.gov.uk/aboutus/sd/docs/SDAP 2006 FINAL.pdf*

Prosperity for All in the Global Economy (Leitch Review of Skills): *www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/uploads/documents/Leitch Review.pdf*

Putting the World into World Class Education (international strategy): *www.teachernet.gov.uk/internationalstrategy/*

Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG):

Sustainable Development Action Plan: *www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1164438*

Learning and Skills Council (LSC):

From Here to Sustainability: *http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/2005/ourbusiness/strategy/from-here-to-sustainability-lsc-strategy-for-sustainable-development.pdf*

UK Government Sustainable Development:

Securing the Future: Delivering the UK Sustainable Development Strategy: *www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/*

Other useful websites:

Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry (OSDE): *www.osdemethodology.org.uk*

United Nations Millennium Development Goals: *www.un.org/millenniumgoals/*

Youth Matters: *www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/youth*