Progress report to the 7th meeting of ESD Steering Committee (Finland)

1. How are the recommendations of the Expert Group on Competences implemented at the national level and adapted to national contexts?

Teacher education in Finland - general issues

Teacher training in Finland is organised by higher education institutions (universities and polytechnics).

Pre-school teachers (pre-school and kindergarten): generally Bachelors Degree in educational science (180 cd).

Classroom teachers (comprehensive school and pre-school): Master's Degree in educational science (300 cr)

Subject teachers: Master's Degree (300 cr) that includes studies on subject and pedagogical studies.

Special education teachers: Masters degree in educational science (300 cr).

Vocational school teachers: Most commonly Higher Education Degree plus additional pedagogical studies in polytechnics.

General targets for teacher education are defined in the government degree (2004). The aim is to give teachers capasities to act independently as a teacher, guider and educator. According to the University Act (2010) the universities are autonomous in Finland and they decide on their curricula. Also polytechnics have autonomy in their internal affairs (including curricula).

Survey on SD inclusion and relevance in teacher education in Finland, 2010

In 2010 the informal contact group on ESD organised survey on inclusion and relevance of ESD in teacher education. The questionnaire was targeted for those institutions of higher education (departments of teacher education in universities and polytechnics) that are responsible for organising teacher training in Finland.

Current status of SD in teacher training based on the survey:

In some of the departments of teacher education sustainable development is integrated to the curricula and in some there are separate studies available for students on SD. Integration to curricula seems to be more common approach.

Especially the social and cultural aspects of SD are reflected in the curricula of different departments. The economical aspects therefore are rather rarely considered.

It seems that the curricula are designed in a way that they give the future teachers rather good competences to teach sustainability thinking (inter alia future-orientation, critical thinking, holistic and integrated approach, handling of current subjects like climate change).

However, it was not considered that the curriculas would provide the teachers with adequate capasities to transfer know-how on sustainable lifestyles.

The SD programmes/strategies of higher education institutions and the national network of environmental pedagogy are not adequately known.

- Identified issues for future development:
- All respondents considered important to increase the role of SD in teacher education
- Curricula should be improved to include SD aspects better
- There is more need for in-service training related to SD
- Especially information on the effects of climate change is needed
- There is interest to cooperate more on SD issues between departments of teacher education.

Regional cooperation groups

Regional cooperation groups aim at increasing the cooperation of teachers and environmental educators and experts working at various educational levels. Currently, there are 5 such groups active in Finland. Groups provide for a fora for exhange of ideas and experience as well as possibilities for increasing capasities by organising training events and excursions. In addition, they gather materials relevant for ESD in their webpages (Example: http://www.pirymparistokasvatus.fi/, available only in Finnish).

Sustainable development in in-service training

In-service training is an important part in educating teachers on ESD and the need for furher training possibilities was also identifed in the survey in 2010.

The Finnish Board of Education finances, follows up and develops in-service training targeted for principals, teachers, study advisors and personnel responsible for support services in schools and institutions (except for personnel of higher education institutions). The financing for in-service training is approximately 10 million Euros and gather around 15 000 participants annually. One of the focus areas for the training has for several years been sustainable development. The amount of SD training provided for teachers has however been limited. Also other actors (incl. communities) provide for in-service training.

The recommendations of the Expert Group on Competences has been made available to ESD actors inter alia through the informal contact group on ESD.

2. How is cooperation between governmental departments in the field of ESD promoted?

The main responsibility is shared between Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of the Environment. Ministry of the Environment is spesifically in charge of promoting environmental education and awareness. Ministry of the Environment also hosts the secretariat of Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD, operational since 1993) that is chaired by the Prime Minister and involves all the government departments as well as a wide array of interest groups (i.a. parliament, NGO's, farmers and trade unions).

Education is one of the themes in the National Strategy on SD (currently under revision) and also the national strategy on ESD (2006) was prepared in a sub-committee of FNCSD (the term of the sub-committee ended in 2007). The strategy prepared in the sub-committee was focused on primary education and another, all educational levels encompassing strategy was prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture, also in 2006. The two strategies are complementary. The implementation of the strategies requires actions from several governmental departments as well as regional and local authoties and non-governmental organisations. An independent evaluation of the national ESD strategies and their implementation status will be carried out in 2012. Also recommendations on priority areas for further work are expected as a result.

Since 2008 the Ministry of Education and Culture has chaired an informal contact group of ESD experts that provides for a fora for exchange of information and best practices btw governmental departments, regional actors, representatives from ESD practitioners (schools, universities) and

other actors (environmental and other NGO's). In addition there are regional networks on ESD and a SD fora of the higher education institutions is also active.

3. Are there any ESD activities carried out or planned to respond to the demands of a green economy, especially as regards technical and vocation education and training?

The demands of green economy have so far not been explisitly addressed in VET, as the focus has been on sustainable development, especially on environmental sustainability. Also aspects of social and cultural sustainability have been incorporated to VET. In future, the linkages of environmental and economical sustainability (as well as of social and cultural dimension) will become more crucial. This is also due to the Government Programme (06/2011) that emphasizes the knowledge, technology and innovation related to natural resources, environment, energy and climate as areas of priority development in Finland in the next years.

Some examples on sustainable development in vocational education and training:

(a) National Core Curricula:

Sustainable development is incorporated as one of the key competences of life-long learning into all 52 upper secondary vocational qualifications including a total of 120 different study programmes.

”The student or candidate acts according to ecological, economical, social and cultural principles sustainable development in the profession. He/She observes therules, regulations and contracts of sustainable development prevailing in the sector.”

Skills requirements in NQF-levels 4 and 5 include inter alia: ”works and acts taking sustainable development into account" -> this requirement is taken into account when drafting the core curriculas.

In the renewed (2009-2010) vocational (basic) the core subjects, common to all curriculas:

Compulsory

Arts and culture 1 credit

The targets include that the students observe the principles of sustainable development in his/her choice of materials and in work and understands the meaning of arts and culture in his/her own life and uses their various forms in a multi-cultural community

Optional

Environmental studies, 4 credits

All objectives and assesment criteria aim at sustainable development; inter alia the students observe ways of working and acting that comply with the principles of sustainable development in a way they help him/her achieve and complement vocational skills; works in an energy saving way; prevents waste and sorts waste appropriately and also knows the lifespan of vocationally relevant products; works in a way that minimizes environmental risks and preserves cultural heritage.

Ethics, 4 credits

The objectives and assesment criteria include elements of socially and culturally sustainable development.

Cultural knowledge, 4 credits

The objectives and assesment criteria include elements of culturally sustainable development .

(b) Materials and web-pages produced

Publication: Sustainable vocational education and training, 2009 and 2010

Web pages on SD (available only in Finnish): http://www03.edu.fi/aineistot/keke/index.htm

VET developers participated to the drafting of SD criteria in the development process of the sertificate on sustainable development for schools

(c) Provision of support to promotion of SD by government subsidies (ESF-projects etc.)

Draivi-project (sustainable development in vehicle technology, http://draivi.sykli.fi/, available only in Finnish);

Environmental Passport for Catering Services (http://www.ymparistopassi.fi/doc/Ympristopassi-E.pdf/, in english). Training material and test on environmental issues;

Virtual villahe -project in Natural Resources and the Environment (http://virtuaali.info/, available only in Finnish). Virtual village is a e-learning environment that provides an easy and fast way to familiriaze yourself with businesses in environmental and natural resources and to their daily operations.

In the higher education institutions the interest to develop/renew and establish new study programmes to reflect better the requirements of green economy has risen and some development projects are under way, inter alia in the field of energy.

4. Has the economic downturn impacted ESD activities in your country?

The economic downturn is having impacts on the budget of the government. The 2011 appointed Government of Finland has committed to budget shortcuts in the coming years and also additional cuts are expected. The education and research sector is also facing budget reductions. However, so far the economic downturn has not had direct impacts on ESD activities.

The current Government Programme (2011) places strong emphasis on sustainable development but in terms of education the Programme includes a shift from holistic ESD approach towards environmental education. The current Government Programme emphasizes environmental awareness in general and especially environmental education in elementary schools and in youth policies as well as calls for continued and increased support for non-governmental organisations providing for environmental education services.