

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR SCHOOLS AND SKILLS MAUREEN WATT MSP AT  
UN DECADE OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT,  
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Intro

Thank you Jan for your kind welcome.

It is a great pleasure to speak at this event to celebrate Scotland's contribution to the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development. As Jan has explained, we are reaching an important milestone in the Decade – the half way point. Now is the time to take stock of what we have achieved so far, but also to look forward and plan what we want to achieve during the remaining five years of the Decade.

I am delighted to welcome Mark Richmond, UNESCO Director with responsibility for the Decade. It is with great pride that I showcase the excellent progress Scotland is making on Education for Sustainable Development and to demonstrate the Scottish Government's commitment to this strand of the United Nations work.

Setting the Scene – The Government's Purpose

Sustainability is central to this Government's Purpose of creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.

We aspire for growth to be achieved in an equitable way – to the benefit of all Scottish people; to the benefit of all regions of Scotland; and by respecting the interests of future generations rather than squandering their inheritance in this one.

We can only build a Scotland that is Smarter, Greener, healthier, wealthier and fairer and safer and stronger if people are equipped with the skills, expertise and knowledge for success.

Learning has a key role in helping us rise to the challenge of making Scotland a better place for all, with higher levels of sustainable economic growth. We need successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to build a sustainable Scotland.

Learning is also about developing the ability to rise to challenges; solve problems; and adapt to changing circumstances.

### Learning for our Future

Adaptability is at the core of 'Learning for our Future', Scotland's Action Plan for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in our schools, colleges, universities and wider communities.

Scotland's educational institutions are ideally placed to lead by example in

- addressing their own contribution to climate change.
- educating others and
- helping to develop the solutions and technologies that will be needed for Scotland to be at the forefront of the global response.

The challenges are huge - Scotland has recently published the most ambitious Bill to tackle climate change anywhere in the world. It includes targets to reduce Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels) by 50% by 2030 and 80% by 2050.

Educational institutions - like all businesses and organisations - have a role to play in delivering on climate change - and education in its broadest sense is recognised as vitally important in our approach to tackling this issue. The good news is that excellent progress is being made.

I am very pleased to announce that as of 12 January, 35 of Scotland's universities and colleges will have already signed up to the Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland.

This innovative framework recognises the scale and speed of climate change and the likely effects on Scotland's economy, society and environment. This is a public commitment from the further and higher education sectors to allocate time and resources to implementing measures that will reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprints.

I congratulate the many organisations that have come together to develop this commitment.

Within 12 months, universities and colleges signed up will publish a 5-year climate change action plan that will include measurable targets and timescales to achieve a significant reduction in emissions from all business operations and activities. This commitment is a massive achievement and demonstrates enormous commitment from these sectors.

### Universities and colleges

Of course, this isn't new for many institutions who are already tackling these issues. In addition to the universities and colleges climate commitment - colleges and universities are making valuable contributions to the Decade – in areas such as course content, research, estate development and student action.

### Course Content

We now have 32 undergraduate programmes and 42 postgraduate programmes either focusing on sustainability or featuring a sustainability element.

St Andrews University, for example, offers an honours degree in sustainable development, which involves eight different departments and allows students to specialize in areas such as environmental or management issues. The first students have now graduated from this programme. I am delighted that we have students from St Andrews with us today to tell us about their experience of SD at the University.

Similarly, in Colleges, the results of a recent survey of Education for Sustainable Development activity in Scotland's colleges showed substantial progress being made towards embedding Sustainable Development Education in curricula.

### University Research

Scotland's universities undertake substantial research in the area of sustainable development.

The *University of Edinburgh*, for example, has a centre for the Study of Environmental Change and Sustainability; Centre for Carbon Storage; and International Development Centre. Similarly, *Glasgow Caledonian University* has the Caledonian Environment Centre, Centre for Research on Indoor Climate & Health and Sustainability Centre.

## Student Activity

Let us not forgot the valuable contribution that students themselves make through voluntary activities and work in the community. Work such as that done by the Beauty Therapy students at Langside College. These students have carried out a number of volunteering activities in the community, including:

- providing treatments for the elderly in care homes and for hospital workers in local hospitals
- fundraising for charities.

One of the benefits of this volunteering was to strengthen the links between the college and the community.

## Estate Development

In 2008, the Scottish Funding Council issued guidance to universities and colleges on sustainable development in estates and a number of showcase developments have recently been built in Scotland.

In the college sector, there have been several innovative estates developments, highlighting both carbon conscious development and the key role of colleges in relation to the maintenance of sustainable communities.

John Wheatley College and Queen Margaret University are excellent examples of sustainability within the design of the building - achieving the highest BREEAM ratings - with features such as natural ventilation and biomass boilers. Students, staff and members of the public are exposed to new, more eco-friendly working, learning and living practices. All of this helps to demonstrate, at the local level, the practicalities of living and working in a 'low carbon' environment.

## Greener schools

However it's not just universities and colleges that are leading the way - schools are playing their part too.

The Scottish Government announced just two weeks ago a package of measures which will work towards a lower carbon school estate - meeting the Government's commitments to have renewable generation in every school as well as contributing to

reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the Climate Change Bill.

Environmentally friendly school buildings and facilities, with features such as information panels showing how much energy the school is generating, can only enhance the learning experience for teachers and students, by making Education for Sustainable Development real.

By encouraging institutions to deliver a curriculum with sustainability running through it we can start to address many of the challenges we face. Looking back at the UNESCO's goal for the Decade – 'To integrate the principles, values and practices of Sustainable Development into all aspects of education and learning' this is what we are already doing in Scotland and will continue to do so. This goal frames the wider context for ESD in Scotland.

#### Sustainable Development Education in schools – Curriculum for Excellence

And this *is* happening in our schools. We are integrating the principles, values and practices of sustainable development. One way we are doing this is through Curriculum for Excellence. Curriculum for Excellence is about promoting a fresh culture across the whole of Scottish education. Pupils are inspired and interested in sustainable development, international and citizenship issues. They want to grow up in a sustainable world where people care about the quality of the environment and their fellow citizens - whether they live across the road, in another city, country or far off continent facing struggles for the essentials of life which we can barely imagine.

The Scottish Government strives to develop a education system that provides pupils with a knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it. This is a thread that runs throughout the Curriculum for Excellence for all young people at all stages of their learning. This is what we need if we want outward looking and confident citizens who care about themselves and their nation and have a modern enterprising world view.

There are many ways to develop Scotland's young people as international and sustainable citizens; whether it be linking with schools in another country or a teacher study abroad. It is only when we see ourselves from afar that we really begin to comprehend our place in the world and understand what we have to offer to it.

This is the future of learning in Scottish schools through Curriculum for Excellence and I can assure you it is very exciting and full of promise.

## Eco schools

Another way we integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development is through the Eco Schools programme. Scotland is already one of the leading countries in the world in Education for Sustainable Development through the Eco Schools programme.

I am pleased to say that Eco Schools in Scotland continues to go from strength to strength. The pupil-led nature of the programme is helping our young people to develop the skills they will require as tomorrow's citizens to make decisions about the world they live in. It is providing more and more pupils with increasing opportunities to engage in active learning about sustainable development issues and protecting our environment and communities.

In Scotland, we now have over 3,000 schools and pre-school centres registered with the Eco Schools Programme. That includes a massive 93% of all local authority schools in Scotland.

Scotland is one of the best performing countries in terms of eco schools with 21% of our schools having been awarded the most prestigious Green Flag award. Individual schools are also making their mark and in the past year Scottish schools have attracted widespread recognition. For example, in October of last year, Shawlands Academy in Glasgow won the UK Sustainable School of the Year Award. I am delighted that they are here today to tell you about their Sustainability journey.

And more recently Port William Primary School in Dumfries and Galloway won the UK award in the National Yellow Pages Competition. This is a tremendous achievement from both schools and illustrates how well Scotland's schools are inspiring and involving our young people.

## Community Learning

There have been many achievements in the first part of the decade. As you can imagine I could talk for much longer than 20 minutes, highlighting all the good examples of best practise! But I'm trying my best to stay on time!

One important area where there has been less activity directly linked to the decade is in community learning and development. However this doesn't mean that nothing relevant has been happening in communities across Scotland.

In fact, learning that takes place in communities, closely linked with people of all ages taking action on the issues that they are concerned about, has a key part to play in making education for sustainable development a real force for positive change. And there are some excellent examples of how this is happening.

Young people at the Whalsay Youth club in Shetland worked with the 'Wind2Heat' Project to address issues of energy sustainability for this island community. As a result, the club has been able to access funds to support the development and purchase of its own wind turbine.

The activities of the club also inspired the local school to incorporate learning about sustainable energy into the curriculum on rural skills.

Showing how learning and action in our communities can complement – and sometimes provide the inspiration for – what happens in schools and colleges. Education for sustainable development needs to be a part of our lives as well as part of the curriculum. And the Curriculum for Excellence, which embodies this same principle, provides us with the ideal means of joining up the work that is going on in schools and in communities to get the biggest impact from both.

Learning in communities can make "education for sustainable development" real and relevant for people right across Scotland. In fact, it can be one of the ways that we can help people who up to now have had bad experiences in the education system to start to turn their lives and their communities around.

That is why, in the second half of the Decade, the Scottish Government, working with the Sustainable Development Commission and other partners, will ensure that community learning and development is recognised as having a key part to play in driving forward this agenda.

To provide the momentum for this, the Sustainable Development Commission and the Scottish Government are working together with the Community Development Alliance Scotland. We are jointly organising an event next month called *Learning to work*

*together for our future.* This will look specifically at how we can do more to support action by people in communities that applies the principles of sustainable development.

### Moving into the next 5 years

I hope you all get the picture of just how much we have achieved over the last 5 years, and how proud we can be on our contributions to the Decade. And the next 5 years offers us the opportunity to achieve much more.

In schools we hope to build on the great work that is already taking place in schools all around Scotland. And the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence provides us with a wonderful opportunity to ensure this happens – in every school, and benefits all our young people.

We will be ensuring the outcomes of the Curriculum for Excellence pilot projects are disseminated across schools and authorities. By sharing information and experiences we can learn so much; what works, what doesn't, and how others have tackled challenges.

As I mentioned, the Eco schools programme in Scotland continues to go from strength to strength. We will continue to encourage and support schools to join the programme and achieve their Green flag status.

In universities and colleges we expect course design, estate planning, research and student activity to develop further, and for sustainable development to become embedded in all aspects of further and higher education.

The next 5 years will also see universities and colleges carrying out the commitments into which they have entered through the Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment for Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has asked the Funding Council to work within the context of the National Performance Framework to support the delivery of national outcomes - considering how colleges and universities can contribute to well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need; reducing our local and global environmental impact and ensuring that our built and natural environment is enjoyed by Scots both now and in the future.

What I have covered in this talk is very timely as UNESCO has just announced the 2009 world conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Bonn. This will provide a



clear focus on moving into the second half of the Decade. This afternoon you will be discussing in sector groups your plans for the next 5 years and what approach Scotland will take. I do hope your discussions will be fruitful and look forward to hearing the outcomes. We have achieved so much, we need to give ourselves a pat on the back but be determined to keep up the hard work!