

COMPANY OF EDUCATORS LUNCHTIME DISCUSSION

On May 18 2010 the Company held a lunchtime discussion meeting at the London South Bank University (LSBU) on the subject of Education for Sustainable Development and its role in building sustainable communities in London. The seminar was led by Ros Wade, Reader in Education for Sustainable Development and Peter Briggs, the Chair of Education Committee, chaired the discussion. There were 18 people present, both Freeman and members of the group at LSBU.

There are a number of sustainability challenges in London including:

- It is a global city with close links between global, national and local concerns.
- It has a high density of population with about 7.5million people.
- There is wide ethnic diversity with about 300 languages as mother tongues.
- The population has a large young and transient element.
- There are governance issues with concerns about flooding, waste disposal.
- The London Olympics creates a new opportunity.

Current views on climate change are leading to concerns about the economy and the natural environment which can help promote social change for sustainability.

Education for sustainable development has been defined by UNESCO as: Education that enables people to foresee, face up to and solve the problems that threaten life on our planet. Regional Centres of Expertise (RSEs) have been created by the United Nations University (UNU) to be a network of organisations and individuals promoting and implementing sustainable development through both formal and non formal learning and to break down the barriers between learning and livelihoods. There are currently 74 worldwide.

The London RCE was accredited by UNU in January 2010 and is the first RCE in a European capital city. The process was led by LSBU with support from the London School of Economics and the University of East London. The London RCE aims to involve educators and education organisations in all phases and also to involve sector organisations in business, non-profit areas and government. It will organise cross sectoral events and develop innovative ESD projects.

The work of the London RCE to date has been in four areas. Firstly, a communications strategy has been developed and examples of the output were available to seminar participants. The second project has been in teacher education to encourage curriculum change with 12 London teacher education providers involved. The third project is on place based learning. The aim is to consider the learning needs of a particular place and to break down curriculum boundaries. An example might be to establish a school garden with vegetables for sale for healthy eating. The fourth project is in higher education (HE) and the aim is to embed sustainability across the HE curriculum in London. This project is being run jointly with the University of East London.

Ros Wade concluded her introduction with some suggestions as to how The Company of Educators might become involved with this work. Her suggestions included:

- Lend endorsement to the London RCE
- Offer advice and expertise
- Organise joint events for example a high level seminar for London vice-chancellors.

In the following discussion various points were made.

- The impetus for sustainability can often come from students initially and it is good to harness this drive.
- In future students might make their choice of HEI based on a sustainability rating. There is already a Planet Green league.
- The RCE movements are part of the UN decade of sustainability 2005-2014 whereby all governments who have signed up to this have to report back on what they have achieved. Research money is targeted to this.
- There is already a certain amount going on in London. The schools building programme has discussions covering sustainability and by 2016 zero carbon schools are planned. Local councils have also provided money to ensure that new buildings have green features. Large companies are putting money into research on carbon neutral buildings.
- There is still a disconnect often between awareness of the issues and what we might do about it.
- There is also a concern that senior managers have not really shown much commitment to sustainability ideas and the main force us at grass roots level.
- Legislation changes can help effect changes for example on cavity wall insulation.
- Communication of ideas and actions is really important.

In conclusion Peter Briggs thanked Ros Wade and LSBU for the stimulating event. The idea on how the Company of Educators might get involved will be taken back to the Company for discussion.