UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/7
26 December 2008

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

Fourth meeting
Geneva, 19–20 February 2009
Item 3(c) of the provisional agenda

COMPETENCE IN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EXPERT GROUP ON COMPETENCES IN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Note by the Expert Group on Indicators for Education for Sustainable Development[1]

Summary

The Steering Committee requested the UNECE Expert Group on Indicators for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to prepare, for consideration by the next meeting of the Committee, a proposal for establishment of an expert group on competences in ESD (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2008/2, para.27).

The Expert Group considered this issue at its eighth meeting (Paris, 15–18 September 2008) and prepared the requested proposal. The present proposal includes: (a) terms of references; (b) working arrangements and timeframe; and (c) resources. It also includes, in three annexes: (a) open questions in relation to competences in ESD; (b) estimated costs for supporting participation in meetings of eligible experts; and (c) background documents and material.

The revised proposal, reflecting comments by the Bureau, is submitted to the Steering Committee for consideration and approval.

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[1] This document was submitted on the above date to allow for consultation with the Bureau.

Introduction

1.   The UNECE Strategy for ESD calls specifically[2] for the development of educators' competences to engage in ESD. The joint session on ESD held at the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007) recognized the competence of educators as a frequent bottleneck vis-à-vis improving the quality of education and agreed that one priority for future implementation of the Strategy should be developing competences in ESD. The first reporting exercise clearly identified the need to further define the nature of competences in ESD and the ways in which these may be developed in the education sector. Furthermore, there is a need to create an enabling policy environment in which this work on competences in ESD can be supported and applied in each member State.

2.   The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) reporting mechanism and the set of indicators for ESD provide a means to monitor broad implementation of the Strategy, including to identify countries' needs for implementing ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education. The report[3] on progress in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD highlights the key role of educators in advancing ESD. While the indicator framework outlines a number of competences for **learners**, there is still a need to identify the specific competences required by **educators** in order to achieve this goal. Thus, further work on competences in ESD would also contribute to the future reporting exercises.

3.   The efforts by countries in the UNECE region to address the issue of competences in ESD will provide an important contribution to the United Nations Decade of ESD.

I.   TERMS OF REFERENCE

A.   Scope

4.   Given the need for effective political action to promote ESD in the UNECE region, the outcome of the work on competences in ESD should serve two audiences: it should be addressed **to** policymakers, while providing clear guidelines **for** educators (see mandate in section C below). The work should build upon the foundation provided by a number of initiatives to define ESD competences in the education sector.

B.   Rationale

5.   There is a widespread concern that our current model of development is unsustainable and that our education systems reflect and support this model to a large extent.

6.   We are faced with a dual challenge of (a) re-casting our model of development while (b) preparing our society for survival in a rapidly changing world. Education alone cannot solve the

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[2] CEP/AC.13/2005/3/Rev.1, paras. 54–55.

[3] Learning from each other: achievements, challenges and the way forward. Report on progress in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/INF/3 - ECE/CEP/AC.13/2007/2).

world's problems, but it is an essential prerequisite for empowering society to make the transition to a sustainable future.

7.   If education is to be oriented toward sustainability, it will demand a corresponding shift in the competences required by educators themselves. Some of these competences are already recognized, while others will require an innovative approach. It is hoped that this new combination of competences will provide the necessary educational setting for effective ESD to emerge.

8.   ESD is based on the competence to think and act in a reflective way; it applies systems thinking and develops the skills needed to contribute to a better future, to accommodate changes and to learn from experience.[4] The concept of competence in ESD is closely connected to the four pillars of learning (learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together) identified in the report to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, *Learning: the treasure within.*[5] The concept needs to be adapted with respect to the special characteristics of ESD, in particular its holistic perspective, value orientation and critical reflective practice. The UNECE Strategy focuses on professional competencies of educators, their needs in terms of understanding ESD and their ability to educate others for sustainable development. Professional educators in ESD need special skills to enable learners to understand the world in which we live, to act on this understanding and to address the complexity of and interconnectedness between social, economical, and ecological areas. These skills are often referred to as ESD competencies. ESD competencies could be assessed within the following categories: as subject competencies, methodological competencies, social competencies and personal competencies[6].

C.   Mandate

9.   Pursuant to the outcomes of the high-level session on ESD organized at the Belgrade Ministerial Conference, the Steering Committee decides to establish an expert group on competences in ESD with the following mandate:

10.   To prepare a document to include:

        (a)   General recommendations for policymakers, so as to provide them with a tool to integrate ESD into relevant policy documents with a view to creating an enabling environment for the development of competences across all sectors of education, with particular emphasis on formal education;

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[4] See also Sleurs, Willy (ed.): Competences for ESD. A framework to integrate ESD in the curriculum of teacher training institutes. Produced by the Comenius 2.1 Project.

[5] http://www.unesco.org/delors/

[6] Candice Stevens, Competences for Education for Sustainable Development, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Available at:
http://www.oecd.org/document/16/0,3343,en_2649_37425_40771408_1_1_1_1,00.html

(b)   A range of core competences in ESD for educators, including defining these, as feasible, to serve as a tool to facilitate the integration of ESD into all educational programmes at all levels, as well as guidelines for the development of these competences among educators.

11.   This document might address the three elements **why? what?** and **how?** of developing educators' competences in ESD.

12.   The **why?** could include a vision of education for sustainable development and identify a variety of open questions relating to competences that might require consideration at the policy level (see annex I).

13.   The **what?** could provide a flexible framework or model to facilitate the identification and development of competences in the education sector.

14.   The **how?** could explore the practical implications of developing these competences and could provide illustrative examples from existing good practices across the UNECE region. It might also include reflections on how competences are assessed and suggest effective means of evaluation.

15.   There is a dynamic interconnection among these three elements that should be taken into account by the expert group on competences in ESD. Processes, for example, may be needs-driven either by the educators or by the policymakers (i.e. supply and demand). The outcome document should provide a clear analysis of possible intervention points in policy/practice, e.g. training and re-training staff and encouraging educators to share experiences (CEP/AC.13/2005/3/Rev.1, para. 55).

16.   The complexity of this issue, which entails bringing together professional and individual competences as well as the methods for acquiring and assessing them, means that we cannot expect a definitive model; rather, the outcome will provide a useful framework for the practical application of ESD in a broad range of educational settings. ESD is still developing as a broad and comprehensive concept, encompassing interrelated environmental, economic and social issues. It broadens the concept of environmental education (EE), which has increasingly addressed a wide range of development subjects (CEP/AC.13/2005/3/Rev.1, para. 14). Thus, competences in ESD should be developed through an integrative and holistic approach.

17.   The outcome should be linked clearly to the UNECE Strategy for ESD, the reporting mechanism and accompanying indicators.

D.   Reporting

18.   The expert group will report on its work to the Steering Committee at the Steering Committee's future meetings.

E.   Composition

19.   The expert group will be composed of members with an extensive experience related to: (a) national and international ESD policies; (b) competences in teaching EE and ESD; and (c) the management of institutions that are implementing the "whole-institution approach".

20.   The members of the expert group will be designated by Governments; international organizations, in particular UNESCO; and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Candidatures should be submitted to the UNECE secretariat by **31 March 2009**. Thereafter, the selection will be undertaken by the future chairperson of the expert group, with support from the secretariat, in accordance with the selection criteria outlined below.

21.   The proposed key selection criteria for the group are as follows:

(a)   A maximum of 18 members;

(b)   A balanced geographical representation of UNECE member States;

(c)   A balanced composition to include the required expertise;

(d)   UNESCO should be represented;

(e)   Relevant stakeholders should be represented (e.g. academia, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and NGOs;

(f)   To include one or more experts from the UNECE Expert Group on Indicators for ESD, with a view to ensuring synergies between the work of these two expert groups.

The proposed detailed composition is as follows:

ESD actors	Area of expertise	Number[7] of members
Government	ESD-related policymaking	4–5
UNESCO	ESD competences	1
IGOs (e.g. Central Asian Working Group on EE and ESD, OECD, the European Commission and UNICEF[8])	ESD competences	2
Academia (research)	ESD competences, including the whole-institution approach	2–3
Academia (teachers/educators), including representatives of headmasters; teacher associations	ESD competences, including the whole-institution approach	3-4
NGOs	ESD competences	1–2
Bologna process[9]	ESD competences, including the whole-institution approach	1

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[7] The number may vary depending on the submitted candidatures and the expertise.

[8] United Nations Children's Fund.

[9] See http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna_en.html and http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/

II.   WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND TIME FRAME

22.   The organization of work will depend on the lead country and the availability of funds for this activity. The working arrangements will be agreed among the members of the expert group on competences in ESD. UNECE will provide secretariat support to the expert group in accordance with UNECE rules and practices.

23.   [Name of the country[10]] will take the leadership[11] for this process. Countries wishing to take an active part in this process, e.g. by hosting the expert group's meetings, are invited to inform the Secretariat in advance of the Steering Committee's fourth meeting.

24.   The foreseen duration of work is a minimum of two years, with a minimum of five three-day meetings.

25.   A tentative schedule and focus of these five meetings could be as follows:

Body/meeting/date	Objective
Steering Committee, fourth meeting, 19–20 February 2009	Decision on establishing the expert group.
Expert group on competences in ESD, first meeting, September 2009	Familiarization with the mandate; consideration of work already done in the area of competences; clarification of the methodology of work; agreement on a workplan and a time frame; identification of and agreement on the key issues and elements, as well as definition of expected outcomes.
Expert group, second meeting, December 2009	Work on the three elements of the outcome: (a) developing the vision part (the **why**) of the document; and considering the parts (b) for policymakers and (c) for teachers/educators, including identification of specific needs for different levels and target groups, in particular brainstorming on the framework for competences in ESD. Reporting on the progress of work to the Steering Committee in 2010.
Steering Committee, fifth meeting, March 2010	Progress report.
Expert group, third meeting, May 2010	Taking into account the Steering Committee's comments, as well as the recent developments in the area of competencies, and further work on the document.
Expert group, fourth meeting, September 2010	
Expert group, fifth meeting, December 2010	Finalizing the document for the Steering Committee meeting in 2011.
Steering Committee, sixth meeting, March 2011	Final report.

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[10] Currently under consultation.

[11] This would include providing the chairmanship of the process, hosting some of the meetings of the expert group, reporting on the progress to the Steering Committee, promoting the process in relevant forums and ensuring the coordination and synergies with other related process.

III.   RESOURCES

26.   The UNECE secretariat would organize and service the meetings of the expert group.[12]

27.   Meetings would be hosted by the lead country and other interested countries. The host country would be expected to:

(a)   Designate a contact point for organizing the meeting;

(b)   Provide the venue for a three-day meeting of up to 20 participants;

(c)   Financially support travel, accommodation and meals of the eligible experts[13], and the travel and accommodation of one representative of the UNECE secretariat;

(d)   Make necessary visa arrangements for experts[14];

(e)   Prepare an information note for participants containing practical information[15];

(f)   Provide technical equipment[16];

(g)   Facilitate the booking of hotel rooms close to the meeting venue;

(h)   Provide coffee/tea breaks[17];

(i)   Address other logistical matters that may arise during the preparation of the meeting.

28.   The host country's expenditures would depend upon internal domestic procedures and available facilities for meetings. The approximate costs for point (c) above are presented in annex II. Member States are welcome to inform the secretariat of their interest in hosting one or more of the expert group meetings.

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[12] Subject to the funds made available through voluntary contributions to the ESD trust fund.

[13] Coming from countries with economies in transition and the representatives of NGOs – some six people.

[14] Provide experts that require visas to enter the host country with an official invitation letter copied to the host country's embassies in the respective countries.

[15] E.g. about the venue, accommodation, transfer from/to the airport, public transportation….

[16] E.g. a computer connected to the Internet, a big screen for projecting the text, possibilities for printing and making copies of materials, a flipchart.

[17] If possible, also lunches to save time.

Annex I

**OPEN QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO COMPETENCES IN
EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

1.   The field of education is very broad, so when discussing ESD, the expert group needs to take into consideration the following questions:

For whom?

(a)   Should the work focus only on teachers in the formal school system or also on educators engaged in teaching in diverse fields, e.g. in the business sector, the policymaking sector and/or in non-formal and informal education?

(b)   Should the work focus only on students in the formal education or also on learners in informal and non-formal education?

(c)   Should ESD competences target only ESD specialists (i.e. those specialized in ESD teaching), or target all educators?

Where and when?

(d)   Should the training of educators, with a view to equipping them with competences in ESD, be done mainly at the initial teacher training level and/or also during in-service training? (If so, what would be the specific approach for the latter?)

(e)   Should the training of educators focus mainly on the shift from teaching oriented to a given subject, discipline, individual or classroom to teaching oriented at the inter- and multidisciplinary nature of the ESD/whole-institution approach, taking into account the specificity of different disciplines/subjects in relation to sustainable development (SD) themes (e.g. addressing SD through teaching about the environment)?

How?

(f)   Should **learning** be regarded as **instrumental** (providing information and developing skills with a view to achieving a predetermined behaviour change) and/or as **emancipatory** (building the capacity to think critically about and beyond sustainability messages – "learning to learn"), i.e. to changing the focus from **what** to **how**? Should the outcome supply a "receipt for competences in ESD" or should it stimulate educators and learners to start their own process of "new" awareness?

(g)   Should academic freedom be allowed or should it be standardized (particularly at the higher education level)?

(h)   On the assumption that today's education faces backwards and that it reflects the current unsustainable society, how do we shift the focus of education towards a more sustainable local and global future?

       (i)   Should the outcome be a model/template or should it be a general concept that allows for its adaptation to national and local needs and priorities?

       (j)   ESD is process-oriented and therefore it is difficult to assess and to show visible/measurable results in the short term. In this regard, what should be the best approach for Governments and policymakers to adopt it?

2.   These questions may include considering the balance between the following elements:

(a)	Formal education	<=>	non-formal and informal education
(b)	Students and learners	<=>	teachers and leaders
(c)	ESD subject specialists	<=>	all educators
(d)	Initial educator training	<=>	in-service training
(e)	Specific subject(s)	<=>	multidisciplinary approaches
(f)	Promoting positive behaviours	<=>	learning to learn
(g)	Academic freedom	<=>	addressing global priorities
(h)	National and regional priorities	<=>	international standardization
(i)	Processes	<=>	products
(j)	Understanding an unlimited variety of approaches	<=>	delimiting what is to be called ESD

Annex II

ESTIMATED COSTS FOR SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS OF ELIGIBLE EXPERTS

1.   The information in the table below provides an estimate of costs for travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) for five eligible experts, on the assumption that the meeting is held in Geneva. Respectively, the costs for five meetings in Geneva would amount at US$ 52,500. For meetings outside Geneva, the expenses for one staff member of the UNECE secretariat should be taken into account in addition to the experts' expenses.

Participants from	Days / participants / DSA (in United States dollars[1])	Costs (1) (in United States dollars)	Travel (in United States dollars) / participants	Costs (2) (in United States dollars)	Total costs (1) + (2) (in United States dollars)
Eastern Europe	3 x 1 x 321	963	900 x 1	900	1,863
Caucasus	3 x 1 x 321	963	1,300 x 1	1,300	2,263
Central Asia	3 x 1 x 321	963	2,000 x 1	2,000	2,963
South-Eastern Europe	3 x 1 x 321	963	800 x 1	800	1,763
Western Europe (e.g. NGO representative)	3 x 1 x 321	963	500 x 1	500	1,463
Total					10,315
Total (rounded)					**10,500**

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[1] The DSA changes in accordance with the USD to CHF exchange rate.

Annex III

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS AND MATERIALS[2]

A. Background documents (http://www.unece.org/env/esd/SC.Meet.htm):

- Discussion paper on competence in ESD in the education sector (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2008/7).
- Reporting format (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/10).
- Guidance for reporting (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/5).

B. Reference documents, UNECE (http://www.unece.org/env/esd/welcome.htm):

- UNECE Strategy for ESD (CEP/AC.13/2005/3/Rev.1).
- Vilnius Framework for the Implementation (CEP/AC.13/2005/4/Rev.1).
- Explanatory notes to the Strategy (CEP/AC.13/2004/8/Add.2).
- Ministerial Declaration (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/8, paras. 11–12) and Chair's Summary (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/9, paras. 17–26) of the Sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe".
- Joint Statement on ESD by Ministers of Education and of Environment (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/4/Add.1).
- Chair's Summary of the Joint Session on ESD (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/4/Add.3).
- Report on progress in implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD "Learning from each other: achievements, challenges and the way forward" (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/INF/3 – ECE/CEP/AC.13/2007/2)
- Pilot reports submitted by UNECE member States (available on http://www.unece.org/env/esd/Implement.Gov.htm).
- Learning from each other: achievements, challenges and the way forward. Report on progress in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD (ECE/BELGRADE.CONF/2007/INF/3 - ECE/CEP/AC.13/2007/2); all collected good practices are available at: http://www.unece.org/env/esd/GoodPractices/index.html
- Work Plan for implementation of Phase II (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2008/5).
- Reports of the meetings of the Steering Committee (CEP/AC.13/2005/7, ECE/CEP/AC.13/2006/3, ECE/CEP/AC.13/2008/2 and ECE/CEP/AC.13/2009/2).

C. Reference documents (other)[3]:

- Agenda 21 (http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21toc.htm).
- Center for Ecoliteracy (http://www.ecoliteracy.org/education/competencies.html).
- Chinien, Chris (2003), *Skills to last: broadly transferable sustainable development skills for the Canadian workforce,* National Centre for Workforce Development, University of Manitoba, Winnepeg, Canada.
- CSCT[4] project (www.csct-project.org).

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[2] This annex provides references to the available information resources related to the issue of competences in ESD, which were known to the Expert Group at the time of its eighth meeting (Paris, 15–18 September 2008).

[3] Some of the references under this section are incomplete. These will be completed for the final paper to be submitted to the Steering Committee.

[4] Curriculum, sustainable development, competences, teacher training.

- Development Education Exchange in Europe (DEEE) Project (www.deeep.org).
- Eco-schools (www.eco-schools.org).
- Environment and School Initiatives (ENSI) projects (www.ensi.org).
- European Union Eco-Management and Audit (EMAS) Scheme, ISO 14001.
- Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) Blue Flag Programme (http://www.blueflag.org/Sponsors).
- OECD DeSeCo[5] project (www.deseco.admin.ch/).
- OECD work on competences for ESD (http://www.oecd.org/document/16/0,3343,en_2649_37425_40771408_1_1_1_1,00.html).
- Project report, "BNE[6] - competence study" (www.phzh.ch, under Ueli Nagel kom).
- Quality criteria for ESD schools (www.ensi.org).
- Recommendations and guidelines, "Here and now: education for sustainable consumption".
- Report of the United Kingdom Sustainable Development Education Panel (1998)[7].
- Rost. J. (2005), Messung von Kompetenzen Globalen Lernens. Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik, (ZEP) 28 (2), 14–18.
- Rychen, D. (2003), *Basic competencies for a successful life and a well-functioning society*. Göttingen, Germany, Hogrefe and Huber.
- Tilbury, D. (1993). "Teacher education competencies in education for sustainability: a grounded theory", University of Cambridge (United Kingdom), PhD thesis.
- Tilbury, D and D. Wortman (2005), *Engaging people in sustainability,* Gland, Switzerland, International Union for Conservation of Nature.
- Transfer 21: Teilkompetenzen der Gestaltungskompetenzen und ihre Vermittlung (www.transfer-21.de).
- Works by Gerhard de Haan, Peter Posh, Bill Scott and Steven Sterling.

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[5] Definition and selection of competencies: theoretical and conceptual foundations.

[6] Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung.

[7] http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/defra/educpanel/index.htm