

**KEYNOTE SPEECH FOR THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND
LIFELONG LEARNING FOR THE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ON THE CHALLENGE FOR HIGHER,
FURTHER AND ADULT EDUCATION – 17 MARCH 2003**

Roeddwn i'n falch iawn i dderbyn y gwahoddiad i siarad yma heddiw. Diolch yn fawr iawn. Rwyf yn falch iawn fod yma heddiw i roi y prif arraith ar ddechrau eich cynhadledd flynyddol. Mae hwn yn amser cyffroes i addysg yn gyffredinol. Mae'n rhoi llawer o gylleoedd a heriau i ni gyd sy'n ymwneud a addysg. Sustainable development has to be a focus for us all and a challenge we must confront and win.

Many thanks for the invitation to speak here today.

Sustainability is a powerful concept, but achieving it is not a simple task. Our challenge here in Wales, and that of the world is to modify our social and economic institutions and living patterns so that the way in which we go about meeting the needs of the present does not compromise our ability to meet our own future needs and those of our younger generation.

The history of human beings is one of change—sometimes the slow change of evolution, sometimes the dramatic change of revolution. Twenty years ago the first Earth Day increased our appreciation of the value of the natural world, an evolutionary consideration to improve our guardianship of the Earth's resources. Today we ask ourselves if this evolutionary improvement is enough. We can't really afford to change slowly, perhaps the significance of sustainability demands revolution in our management of, and indeed our relationship to our planet Earth.

[...]

The planet's resources are being consumed at an astounding rate. Our one species already appropriates for its own use 40 per cent of all the plant matter produced on land. Currently, global resource use by humans is growing at about 5.5 per cent each year; at that rate, human demand on the earth's resources doubles every 13 years.

One of the most effective ways of ensuring we appreciate the importance of sustainable development is through the education process. Clearly it cannot start too soon, it must be ongoing and it must provide us all with consistent messages. It is vital that all of our young people are educated for sustainable development because they are our future. If they fully understand the issues and act upon them they will build our future based on justice and respect, respect for all people and for all living things! A lack of understanding of issues or a rejection of them will lead, quite frankly and bluntly, to no future at all.

Effective education and global citizenship will ensure that children and young people have a fuller understanding of the world around them. It will provide young people with the opportunity to begin to value the world's cultural richness and diversity and provide an appreciation of the issues facing our world and of the impact that they have on those issues.

[...]

To help with the achievement of our aims, I established in May 2001 an Advisory Panel on Education and Sustainable Development to incorporate education for sustainable development more effectively into the education system. [...]

This Panel includes representatives from a cross section of organisations and is involved

- in curriculum developments and identifying the best ways of disseminating good practice among educators;
- incorporating education for sustainable development into Initial teacher training and continuing professional development; and
- communicating sustainable development across the major sectors in Wales, including the private, voluntary and higher education sectors

As an important adjunct to the work of the Panel, the Welsh Assembly Government has made available from 2002-03 some £50,000 per annum for a 3 year period to fund pilot projects to support this agenda. This has helped a number of organisations to pilot and test innovative proposals. For instance, we are seeking to support the establishment of a virtual directory that will provide a comprehensive database for all projects across Wales, which are engaged in this important area of activity. Complementing it, would be one that will provide an e-mail forum through which individuals and organisations will have the opportunity to consider ESD related issues and, hopefully, develop new ideas. [...]

[...]

I have little doubt that everyone here today by virtue of the fact that you are here, understands that sustainable development is a fundamental challenge that all societies face if we are to avoid long term damage to the Earth's basic life-support systems.

Young people within your higher and further education establishments will be the decision-makers of the future, in both their personal and professional lives. They need to learn to live in ways that increase quality of life for themselves and others without eroding the Earth's resources at a rate quicker than they can regenerate.

Education for sustainable development brings a context and a motivation to learning. Young people care about their future and about the kind of world they live in, but many feel powerless to change anything. A sense of powerlessness can lead to apathy and, at worst, destructive behaviour. Education for sustainable development can help our young people to develop the understanding, skills and values to contribute in a positive way, which enhances self-esteem and increases motivation

[...]

In Wales [ESD] has seven key concepts:

- Interdependence;
 - Citizenship and stewardship;
 - Needs and rights of future generations;
 - Diversity;
 - Quality of life and Equity;
 - Sustainable change;
 - Uncertainty and precaution.
- **Interdependence** in that it provides that understanding of the connections and links between all aspects of our lives and those of other people and places at a local and global level, and the fact that decisions taken in one place will affect what happens elsewhere.
- **Citizenship and stewardship** by recognising that we have rights and responsibilities to participate in decision-making and that everyone should have a say in what happens in the future.
- **Needs and rights of future generations** – that learning how we can lead lives that consider the rights and needs of others, and that what we do now has implications for what life will be like in the future – in other words our own personal responsibility.
- **Diversity** – one of the overarching principles of the Assembly itself. That understanding the importance and value of diversity in our lives -- culturally, socially, economically and biologically -- and that all our lives are impoverished without it
- **Quality of life and equality** - recognising that for any development to be sustainable it must benefit people in an equitable way, it is about improving everybody's lives

- **Sustainable Change** - acknowledging that there is a limit to the way in which the world, particularly the richer countries, can develop and that the consequences of unmanaged and unsustainable growth are increased poverty and hardship, and the degradation of the environment, to the disadvantage of us all
- **Uncertainty and Precaution** - realising that as we are learning all the time and our actions may have unforeseen consequences, we should always err on the side of caution in our approach to the welfare of the planet

It is these concepts that I know will form the basis of your valuable discussions today and the challenges that you will face as individuals and institutions. The young people you come into contact with on a daily basis will be keen to develop the knowledge, skills and values they need to be active and informed citizens, contributing to a better world. What they need is the opportunity to put these qualities into practice. This means creating a learning environment in all our education establishments that gives sustainable development the priority it demands to secure our future.

Both the individual and the community play a very important role. The activities of involved people transform the lives of other people, organisations and entire societies. People working together are vastly more powerful than individuals alone. Over the next decades every aspect of our life on earth will change. Through awareness, innovation and participation we can help shape the direction those changes will take

I wish you the very best for a successful conference. I am sure the outcomes from today will go a long way to continuing the exciting development of Education for Sustainable Development within Wales. This aspect of education really is our future. By working together we can ensure we build a positive future and a Wales where people are able to sustain human culture which will mean improving the quality of human life for us all.

Once again, many thanks for your kind invitation.