

# Making the SDGs Real:

## TEESNet Tenth Annual Conference – 14th September 2017, Liverpool Hope University

### Introduction

TEESNet (Teacher Education for Equity and Sustainability Network) promotes a cross-sector community of practice, between university-based teacher education, schools and non-government organisations, to share research and practice and develop new understanding of Education for Sustainable Development/ Global Citizenship Education (ESD/GCE) within teacher education in the UK and beyond.

In focusing the tenth annual conference theme on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, TEESNet sought to offer a space to explore questions about what quality education means in the context of the SDGs broadly and SDG 4.7 in particular. It also sought to provide a vehicle for influencing policy makers and developing a critical dialogue around the SDGs.

### Conference Overview

Developing the conference programme is a careful process of identifying speakers who can inspire, stimulate and appeal to the different sectors represented. Our first keynote was by Irmeli Halinen, who led the recent school curriculum reform in Finland. Irmeli offered an inspiring example of a process of re-visioning education, which identified themes of joy and meaningfulness of learning, the active role of pupils, collaboration, lifelong learning and sustainable lifestyles and well-being as main curriculum goals. Central to this process was the collaboration between policy makers, researchers and teachers.

Inspiration was also provided in the second keynote by Alison Bellwood from Project Everyone and Harriet Marshall, a lead adviser for the UK Global Learning Programme. Whilst orientated towards persuading teachers of the benefits of enga-

ging with the 'global goals', Harriet sought to emphasise the process of learning in moving from awareness raising to action and impact; a theme also running through workshops led by schools and Development Education Centres. For example, Cumbria DEC explored participatory approaches to the SDGs by examining questions of what 'ownership' (of the SDGs), 'social responsibility' and 'agency' means for young people.

Twenty one paper presentations traversed the space between research and practice. Presentations addressed questions of quality at an international, network or policy level. Reporting on an international review of ESD/GCE in teacher education, Phil Bamber and Doug Bourn proposed a number of over-arching themes for measuring progress, including (Global) Social Justice, Professional Ethics and Transformative Pedagogy. Some presentations addressed the impact of attempts to make the SDGs locally relevant. Helen Clark and Sharon Witt shared outcomes from a project aimed at fostering a relational approach to ESD with trainee teachers, through exploring the liminal space between land and sea in a local area of coastline. Presentations also explored challenges of engaging critically with complicity in and the complexity of the issues raised by the SDGs. Karen Pashby and Louise Sund drew on Vanessa Andreotti's HEADSUP tool and research with young people and trainee teachers to address some of these challenges.

In the final session a community of inquiry approach was used to invite participants to reflect together on conference themes, content and implications for their work, and identify emergent questions. Some questions were directed to the final keynote, Stephen Twigg, a local Member of Parliament and chair of the International Development Committee. These focused largely on the role of government and policy in furthering the SDG

agenda nationally. Wider questions emerged too, including the need for more critical debate, for example in how quality is conceived within a dominant discourse of competitiveness. These diverse questions reflect both TEESNet's aims and some challenges in deciding where to focus its attention in ongoing activities. However, evaluations from the day also highlight the value of providing a space for such questions to emerge and be explored. <http://teesnet.liverpoolworldcentre.org/home/teesnet-2017/>



fig. 1: Conference Participants in discussion; Source: Andrea Bullivant, TEESNet & Liverpool World Centre

*Andrea Bullivant*

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