



**WALES
CYMRU**

RESPONSE TO:

A Sustainable Wales Better Choices for a Better
Future

Consultation on proposals for a Sustainable
Development Bill

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Introduction

The University and College Union (UCU) represents more than 7,000 academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians and postgraduates in universities, colleges, prisons, adult education and training organisations across Wales.

UCU Wales is a politically autonomous but integral part of UCU, the largest post-school union in the world: a force working for educators and education that employers and the government cannot ignore.

UCU Wales was formed on 1 June 2006 by the amalgamation of two strong partners - the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and NATFHE-the University & College Lecturers' Union - who shared a long history of defending and advancing educators' employment and professional interests.

UCU Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to A Sustainable Wales Better Choices for a Better Future, Consultation on proposals for a Sustainable Development Bill.

UCU Wales welcomes the introduction of the Sustainable Development Bill. This Bill offers a real change and a demonstration of leadership that Sustainable Development should be at the heart of everything we do in Wales.

Trades unions have had a long history in Welsh workplaces and have campaigned on all three elements of sustainable development: Financial, unions have campaigned that economic forces should not have an inequitable effect on Welsh communities, socially; unions have championed for social justice in the workplace and in Wales as a whole and Environmentally, unions have long challenged poor environmental practices in Wales. UCU Wales is fully supportive of the One Wales, One Planet ideology behind this Bill.

Q.1 What are your views on proposals for a new duty to embed sustainable development as a central organising principle of selected organisations in Wales

Embedding Sustainable Development as a central organising principle will require new approaches and knowledge. This in turn will require significant changes to the curriculum in the tertiary and school sector. The Bill should make it a requirement on the education sector to embed sustainability. Further and Higher Education institutions should report their progress in achieving this objective.

As one of the main trades unions in the sector UCU Wales will encourage our members to monitor progress on institutional performance. Progress on this will impact on the future employability of both staff and students as well as meeting new legal requirements. For this reason UCU Wales considers that there should be a legal duty to consult staff and recognised trades unions on how public sector organisations intend to implement the principle.

Given that there is already a duty that all public bodies should have a sustainable developmental management system in place, this White Paper offers the chance to embed all layers of staff in the decision making process. The Sustainable Development Act should place a duty on the identified public sector bodies to:

- Automatically recognise Union Green Reps (UGR)
- Give additional facility time for the role
- Promote a proactive cooperation between UGRs and senior management

This can offer a number of advantages:

- Promoting ideas from within all parts of the organisation, by involving (UGRs) those who do the work at the front line of the organisation.
- Smoother transition of necessary changes that may need to be implemented, thus reducing costly industrial conflict.
- Furthering the education of the workforce on environmental issues and the workplace. Behavioural change can lead to the most significant changes and savings.
- All Public Bodies already have systems in place for consultation and co-operation between different levels of decision-making and unions with collective bargaining recognition, thus reducing the need for replicating expensive negotiation bodies.
- Energy, waste and water savings in the Public Sector may bring down the costs of running the service.

Trades Unions have already been organising around sustainable developmental issues for a number of years. The role of the Union Green Rep is now an established role with recognised functions such as, environmental auditing, engaging with the employers, educating the workforce and working with local communities.

Many public bodies already have environmental committees with union representation on them. A number of organisations have coordinated their health & safety duties with their environmental commitments to produce a combined approach with shared objectives by working towards, both ISO 14001 and ISO 18001.

The UGR works closely with other union representatives such as health & safety reps, ensuring that sustainable changes do not endanger the workforce. UGRs work with union learning reps to organise training on environmental issues, including: saving energy at home, local shopping, recycling and waste reduction and eco friendly transport options.

Unions are able to offer free training, advice and support for the UGRs. The TUC Cymru Green Reps course is accredited through Agored Cymru and can be delivered through TUC centres or in the workplace. The TUC and its affiliate unions have already produced a wealth of information and training material including: case studies, best practice, guides to environmental legislation and tools for surveying the workforce and auditing materials.

Nationally, the TUC are working with the European Trades Union Institute on the Green Workplaces Project to help develop a common approach to tackling climate change and reducing the carbon footprint of European workplaces. Five projects are already set up in England with both the public and private sectors including Harlow District Council, ACAS and HMRC Euston Tower London plus others. The TUC have also run highly successful projects in the past including Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children London, the National Museum Liverpool and Leicester City Council.

A brewery in Wales, InBev Magor has already shown what can be achieved through the use of UGRs and a collective approach. In the last three years, the company has saved over £2 million in bills from initiatives suggested by the workforce. The majority of these were low investment, behavioural changes. Since the start of the project, InBev have reduced their water consumption by 46% and their electricity usage by 49%.

The InBev workforce are not especially environmentally aware and nor did they join the project because they wanted the savings for themselves. The workers participated while it was run and promoted primarily through the UGRs and could see the benefits it would have upon not only their own lives but that of their children and grandchildren too. They are currently working with local businesses in the area in sharing best practice and innovation.

Q.2 What are your views on the proposals for an independent sustainable development body?

An independent sustainable development body is essential to the success of public sector organisations fully embracing the ideals of the White Paper. The body should have the ability to inform advice and offer guidance with best practice. However the Commissioner should also have the right to inspect the Welsh Audit Office arrangements to satisfy their independence. The Commissioner should also offer reports to the Wales Audit Office to ensure proficiency. The body should reflect the stakeholders in the affected public bodies. Reference should be made that all members of the body share an equal position to ensure non-bias.

The introduction of all major stakeholders in the membership of the body will offer positives such as:

- Transparency for all concerned
- Take account of all stakeholder interests
- Provide an equitable and social balance within the membership of the body
- Smooth transitions of necessary changes within organisations (reduced expensive consultations as each member can report back to his/her own stakeholder).
- Fully democratic
- Embed best practice from all stakeholders

Transparency within all independent bodies is crucial to maintain a credible service. Any body that provides advice and guidance should hold the peoples trust by demonstrating it operates with everyone's best interest and not those of a minority. By including all major stakeholders in the independent body, scrutiny of other public sector organisations may perform without bias.

Union membership of the independent body will provide a structure, which involves a viewpoint from those who may be affected. All of the organisations that would be subject to the duty already have collective bargaining agreements with trade unions. Trade union membership can also call up on expertise from European and International partners such as ETUI, ILO, ITUC.

Q.3 What are your views on the proposed phasing and implementation of the duty including the timing of the establishment of the independent sustainable development body?

The implementation of the duty to be spread out over three years lays a clear path for all concerned. While the White Paper does acknowledge that a number of organisations have started to embed Sustainable Development, the implementation should set a deadline for all, of 2015. A provision may be made that any organisation that will not be able to reach the deadline should be able to request an extension by the Commissioner. Organisations should also have sufficient time to communicate with one another in order to reach common and achievable goals. The Library of Wales may discuss common procurement practices with other bodies in the immediate vicinity such as further and higher education institutions.

Q.4 What are your views on the proposals to improve the accountability framework for sustainable development in Wales?

The full disclosure of sustainable developmental auditing including records of long term planning should be provided for audit. Auditors should have access to all members of any organisational committee to ensure transparency. This could be set out in the Code of Audit. As in 5.9 the scrutiny need not be excessive however it should be suitable and sufficient.

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