



## SUSTAINABILITY

# GENERATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE NOW

Empowering students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to meet the greatest challenge of their lives is a necessity, says Tony McNally, managing director, Climate Change Solutions

"A thing understood is a qualitatively different thing from the same thing not understood – therefore the logic of understanding can create new things." Hegel (1770-1831)

A generation going through school today can anticipate an average life expectancy of around 100 years, double that of their great grandparents. But there are mixed prospects to look forward to.

They have just witnessed on their TV, or mobile phone, the unfolding catastrophe of Japan's major earthquake triggering a tsunami that has caused consequential destruction greater than the combined atomic and nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, though much less loss of life (estimated 25,000). It has severely damaged the nuclear power plant, causing widespread power failure and radioactive pollution of people, land, sea and the wider ecosystems. Japan, with the most advanced educated and technologically equipped society in the world, proved unable to withstand the force of nature but also has exposed its vulnerable dependence on generating its energy to power the society from nuclear sources.

This generation of youngsters are also witnessing unprecedented scenes of forest

fires from Russia to Australia, extreme floods in Pakistan, the accelerating melting of the Arctic and Antarctic Poles and with it rising sea levels.

The United Nations scientific community is pointing to the overwhelming evidence that global warming, from increased greenhouse gas emissions, is propelling us towards an irreversible runaway melting of the ice caps and northern permafrost while rising temperatures cause massive forest fires. This will produce devastation for much of life as we know it, within half the lifetime of this school generation. Coincidentally, this same generation are witness to global financial crisis, threatening the prospects of their post school education, careers and future quality of life.

### SHAPING THE FUTURE

Can this mutually threatening scenario change the content of school curriculums to equip those who do not bear responsibility, but who will suffer the consequences, with the knowledge and commitment to help to shape a low carbon clean energy and technology future?

Empowering current school students with

the knowledge, skills and motivation to meet the greatest challenge of their lives is not a luxury but a necessity, for them and the rest of us as well. Yes, it is imperative that the curriculum content addresses these issues in a holistic way, as integrated social, economical and environmental sustainability is central to the low carbon future. But it can also offer practical applications, from redesigning to retrofitting schools, homes and eventually the wider community to this end.

### MEASURING YOUR FOOTPRINT

Measuring the carbon footprint of the school is the beginning of a journey towards its carbon neutrality. This journey involves

- leadership with knowledge and commitment
- behavioural change
- resource efficiency (energy, water, waste and transport)
- smart integrated technologies (meters, computers and lighting)
- renewable technologies.

It's a great tragedy that one of the first measures following the last election was the cancelling of the Building Schools for the Future Programme, after David Cameron, Prime Minister, declaring it was going to be "the greenest government ever". Fortunately, there is still a great deal that can be achieved with the collective commitment of heads, governors, teachers, students and other staff if they adopt this common vision. Engaging with local authorities, parents, businesses and academic communities (colleges and universities) is an imperative for strengthening this objective.

### A GROWING SECTOR

It's critical for the prospect of further education and training for employment in what will be a growing low carbon clean energy and technology sector. We have the means to capture all the energy we need from under our feet (geothermal), from the air (wind), sun (solar), sea (tidal), rivers (hydropower), biomass, or sewage and other "waste" etc.

We have the ability to design, develop, produce, install and market these clean technologies, affecting buildings and transport modes of the 21st century. For this to happen it is necessary for our financial institutions to invest in the sustainable low carbon economy of the future, rather than repeated casino capitalism leaving the poor in the community to bear a disproportionate burden of the banks bailout, including high youth unemployment and extortionate university fees for many post school students.

There's no future in seeking to return to business as usual; rather it is important that we learn to work together to make the transition to the low carbon future or suffer the unsustainable consequences – as clearly highlighted in the Stern Review. ■

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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