

21 May 2010

Low Carbon Skills Team  
Department of Energy and Climate Change  
By Email

Dear Sir/Madam

**Response to DECC consultation URN 10/849 – Meeting the low carbon skills challenge**

**Introduction**

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We strongly support your overall strategy as laid out in your consultation document, but building on evidence from research, our professional expertise and DEA's Global Learning Charter<sup>1</sup> we believe that your view of the skills challenge is too narrow.

In this response we focus primarily on consultation question four, setting out an evidence-based argument for taking a broader view of the skills challenges than that which is in the current consultation document. We also respond to consultation question 24.

Please consider this as a joint response from each of the signatory organisations: DEA, RSPB, the Geographical Association, People and Planet, the East Midlands Network for Global Perspectives in Schools, and Osborne Middle School. It has been developed by DEA in consultation with representatives of each organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> DEA's Global Learning Charter makes the argument that we will only solve global challenges such as the low carbon skills challenge by unleashing the power and creativity of an engaged public. The Charter has been signed by over 230 diverse and high profile organisations. Full details available here: <http://www.dea.org.uk/page.asp?p=4836>

## Response to specific questions

### Question 4: Is our overall analysis of the skills challenges, as outlined in this document, correct?

The document provides an excellent analysis of the *technical* skills challenges posed by a low carbon transition. However, if the UK is to be successful in achieving the objectives set out in the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan, we cannot only focus on technical challenges.

#### **A low carbon transition also poses significant *adaptive* skills challenges.**

By adaptive skills we mean the ability to respond quickly and effectively to new challenges and opportunities as they arise.<sup>2</sup> The ability to adapt to new challenges and opportunities in this way relies on: thinking critically about the nature of the challenge, the opportunities arising from it, and the most appropriate individual and societal response; weighing up conflicting evidence; making decisions and taking effective action under conditions of uncertainty; and viewing particular issues within a wider systemic context of a shift to a low carbon society.

**Adaptive skills are invaluable precisely because we do not yet know what a low carbon society and low carbon economy will look like.** As we make the transition, new challenges will be thrown up that we cannot yet predict. As an example our transition away from high carbon fuels led us to develop and market bio fuels. Yet the mass production of bio fuels has led to new challenges around land-use pressures, deforestation and rising food prices that we did not predict. These new challenges are having severe impacts on international development, poverty and inequality, highlighting the interdependence between tackling environmental issues and tackling poverty.

Members of society, businesses and employees with low adaptive skills will be hampered by these new challenges. By contrast, **the same actors with high adaptive skills can assimilate new information quickly and develop an effective response to the new challenges, maximising new opportunities.** In the case of bio fuels this might mean developing the use of crops that grow on marginal land, such as *Jatropha*, or by seeking alternatives to bio fuels for transport. Similar challenges are likely to arise in coming years in the interaction between low carbon development and poverty eradication, as well as low carbon development and biodiversity loss, amongst many other areas. Adaptability in the face of these challenges will be crucial if we are to meet our objectives as set out in the Low Carbon Transition Plan.

The technical skills challenge that you set out in your consultation document and the adaptive skills challenge we set out above cannot be seen as separate, because they interact systemically. As we develop the technical skills to meet the low carbon skills challenges, new adaptive challenges will emerge, for which we will need adaptive skills. Conversely, as we respond to these new adaptive challenges we will require new and as yet unforeseen technical skills. **Therefore in order to meet the low carbon skills challenge we must develop both technical and adaptive skills concurrently.**

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<sup>2</sup> Please note: throughout this response we use the term *adaptive skills* to refer to the ability to adapt quickly to new situations as they arise. This usage of the term is distinct from *skills for adaptation*. This distinction is discussed in more detail in our response to question 24 below.

## **How can we enable the public, businesses and employees to develop adaptive skills?**

Responding quickly and effectively to new challenges as they arise requires us to encourage all members of society to develop the skills set out above. Our organisations and our members and stakeholders have considerable experience of enabling people to develop these skills through educative interventions in schools and youth work, businesses and communities. For example DEA and others have worked closely over the past ten years with the Department for International Development (DFID) and Department for Education (DfE) on a Global Learning Strategy.

This strategy encourages people to think critically and creatively about the challenge of how to eradicate global poverty, and research indicates that it has strong impacts on the adaptive skills of the public. For example, Ipsos MORI have found that those who have the opportunity to learn about global poverty after leaving school are more than twice as likely to support action to tackle global poverty,<sup>3</sup> and DFID's own research indicates that those who are 'active enthusiasts' about tackling poverty are more than five times less likely to feel that there is nothing that they personally can do to reduce poverty.<sup>4</sup>

**Based on the evidence and analysis above, we suggest that DECC could strengthen your Low Carbon Skills Strategy by incorporating similar approaches to that pursued by DfE and DFID in the Global Learning Strategy.** For example, you might include in your strategy provision to promote critical and creative thinking about climate change, the environment and sustainability amongst young people in school, employees in key businesses and members of the general public in order to ensure that businesses, employees and members of the public are fluent in the adaptive skills needed for a low carbon transition.

This 'adaptive skills' element of your strategy might be developed jointly with DfE and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). DEA would be very pleased to support DECC in taking such a strategy forward.

**Evidence suggests that this will have strongly positive effects.** Ipsos MORI's research highlights that learning about climate change either in school or after school cuts in half the proportion of people who feel it is pointless to take action on environmental issues (from around 35% to around 17%).<sup>5</sup> Thinking critically and creatively about these issues helps to ensure that people can make sense of their own efficacy and motivates them to act, even in a situation of high uncertainty.

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<sup>3</sup> Hogg, Shah, 2010, *The impact of global learning* [online]. Available at: <http://www.dea.org.uk/resources/item.asp?d=2076> [cited 9th April 2010]

<sup>4</sup> DFID, 2009, *Attitudinal tracking study - March 2009* [online]. Available at: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Finance-and-performance/Public-opinion-research/> [cited 9th April 2010]

<sup>5</sup> Hogg, Shah, 2010, *The impact of global learning* [online]. Available at: <http://www.dea.org.uk/resources/item.asp?d=2076> [cited 9th April 2010]

**Question 24. What will the key skills needed be, to build adaptive capacity for climate change, enabling organisations to minimise risks, and capitalise on the opportunities that climate change will bring?**

As the evidence and analysis set out above indicates, adaptive skills are invaluable in responding to the threat and maximising the opportunities associated with climate change. However, we suggest that adaptive skills should not be seen simply as the skills needed to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Instead, **the key skills needed are also those that will give us the ability to adapt quickly and effectively to rapidly changing challenges and opportunities.**

These key skills, as set out above, are: thinking critically about the nature of the challenge, the opportunities arising from it, and the most appropriate individual and societal response; weighing up conflicting evidence; making decisions and taking effective action under conditions of uncertainty; and viewing particular issues within a wider systemic context of a shift to a low carbon society.

These key skills will ensure that the unexpected challenges of making a transition to a low carbon society and economy do not derail that transition; instead we will be able to adapt successfully to these unexpected challenges, and quickly find new opportunities in rapidly changing circumstances.

**Next steps**

We recognise that the concept of adaptive skills as we have defined them in this consultation response is not yet fully developed within DECC. DEA would be happy to use our experience in the field to advise the Low Carbon Skills Team in more detail how you can encourage members of the public, employees, businesses and communities to develop these skills. The arguments and evidence in this response have widespread support, as signified by the diversity of co-signatories to this response. On this basis DEA would welcome the opportunity to come into the Department to meet representatives of the Low Carbon Skills Team and discuss these opportunities further.

Yours faithfully,

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