

Learning to last

Business and Sustainable Development

– a Learning Guide for
Sector Skills Councils



Sustainable
Development
Education Panel

DEFRA
Department for
Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

skills
FOR BUSINESS



**ENVIRONMENT
AGENCY**

This guide encourages Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) to help business meet the great challenge for the 21st century – sustainable development.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Sustainable development meets our needs without jeopardising the opportunities for others – now or in the future. Can business meet this new challenge, with new social, environmental, and financial expectations and still win? This ‘triple bottom line’ helps focus attention on what needs to be done.

Sustainable development is central to the UK Government’s vision of the future and impacts on every area of policy and practice. It is based on four key objectives:

- **social progress which recognises the needs of everyone** – corporate and social responsibility demands all organisations to consider the impact they make on people locally and abroad and how they deal with the world outside;
- **effective protection of the environment** – every organisation needs to review its impact on the environment, such as through the use of materials, equipment and power;
- **prudent use of natural resources** – greater energy efficiency and reduced use of resources can deliver financial benefits, as well as help to avoid future costs in fines, charges and increased taxation;
- **maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment** – with SSCs defining the skills and productivity requirements for business in this sector.

Sustainable development – the key to a better quality of life for everyone now and for generations to come, requires that these four objectives should be kept in balance.

Sustainable development is everybody's business. Some large organisations are moving towards sustainability – the state of existence that can be maintained indefinitely. For most small companies the challenge is even more daunting. They have a crucial part to play in the global response, which recognises and encourages partnership to promote sustainable development. Everywhere, boards of companies, executives of professional bodies, trade unions and educational institutions, trustees of charities and directors of public amenities are working together to commit to sustainable development and develop their organisation's ability to deliver it.

SSCs have a vital role in helping business to meet this challenge. New skills will be required to promote sustainable development at every level in every organisation. Once organisations become aware of sustainable development, they will want to know what they should **do**. Skills will be needed at management level (4), supervisory/union representative level (3) and for all employees working

under supervision (level 2). SSCs can also provide support for smaller companies who may not have the longer-term perspectives driving larger companies.

Sustainable development impacts upon:

- skills development at all levels for 21st century business needs;
- employment and employability in many businesses;
- quality standards increasingly requiring social and environmental aspects;
- productivity where the government wants a "step change";
- learning to incorporate environmental and social, as well as economic skills;
- competencies in sustainable development and good environmental practice.

This document proposes a framework for developing the principles, policies and practices of sustainability within your organisation. SSCs can develop, then disseminate, these new sustainable development procedures.

HOW DO YOU PUT A PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTO ACTION?

There are seven steps to becoming a more sustainable organisation. These are based on quality systems and new environmental reporting, that reflect the needs of small companies. It is crucial to involve people, which means allocating some of these tasks to different people – particularly ensuring somebody can “champion” the cause. It doesn’t have to be you!

- **plan** – write a simple statement of your policy for sustainable development and a plan setting out the changes you intend to achieve;
- **target** – set a realistic target, with timetable and deadlines, for achieving the changes you have planned;
- **champion** – appoint somebody to put policies into practice, promote to other employees and report to the executive;

- **educate** – equip everybody with the underpinning knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development;
- **implement** – deliver the changes through education, empowerment and existing procedural arrangements;
- **review** – audit your achievements regularly and review your policy, plan and delivery accordingly;
- **publicise** – let everyone know what has been achieved, recognise the contribution they have made and where further improvements might be made.



WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

4 Education for sustainable development enables people to build the knowledge, values and skills to take part in decisions and do things, locally and globally, to improve the quality of life and, simultaneously, the prospects for the planet. SSCs have a key role to play in developing learning methods, materials and occupational standards that can make a difference to business in your sector. Many organisations will be looking to integrate sustainability learning into their staff development, appraisal, and training. You can set the standards for them.

SSCs could be a link between vocational education institutions and government by promoting sustainable development and the practical requirements of business. SSCs, faced also with the challenge to build skills capacity and increase productivity dramatically, may find that this new area of sustainable development learning could contribute to achieving these other two goals. SSCs could set standards for sustainable development and provide access to relevant training and development.

Sustainable development education will help business to improve their sustainability in two ways. Firstly, it will help business gain a better understanding of what sustainable development means and how it is relevant to them. Sustainable development education will:

- promote economic growth with fewer resources;
- build skills and hence the capacity of people to achieve more;
- extend environmental management and practice;
- encourage long term business responsibility.

Secondly, it can help to bring about the changes in your own organisation to make it more sustainable. That may sound challenging. But that is what every organisation has to face. Increasingly this is what will determine an organisation's success and survival. If you implement sustainable development education within your own organisation you are in a better position to advise and help others.

The two key questions to ask yourself are:

- how can sustainability be built into Sector Skills Council standards?
- how should skills development be adapted to promote sustainable development?

WHAT CAN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DELIVER?

6

Sustainable development education will increase awareness and understanding of all aspects of sustainability – policy, principles and practice, that is needed to inform the development of sustainable development skills at work.

Policy

- the relevance of sustainable development to a Sector Skills Council – its sectoral business organisation and responsibility to disseminate to industry;
- the value of sustainability and quality of life indicators – and the skills needed to provide them;
- the value of education for sustainable development to a SSC – that it contributes to innovation and creativity in skills development.

Principles

- social responsibility and global citizenship;
- equity, justice and inclusiveness;
- needs and rights of future generations;
- value of diversity;
- environmental limits to human activity;
- fair trade.



Practice

- sustainability in skills terms;
- developing individuals to enable them to make suggestions to deliver sustainable development;
- ways in which sustainable development can contribute to organisational goals;
- best practice – the wide range of sustainable development solutions, tools and techniques currently available;
- action – within a flexible policy framework and appropriate control mechanisms;
- an approach that is balanced in terms of whole systems and integrated (social, environmental and economic) practice;
- the development of materials to support sustainable development education and training.



SO WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?


– AN ACTION CHECKLIST

8

If you feel ready to engage in education for sustainable development, think about the following.

Why you want to engage in education for sustainable development. What is the driver? Is it a commercial objective (e.g. to save on operational costs), a legal requirement, wanting to be ahead of the game, altruistic interest or some other reason? Be clear about what is motivating you, as this will help to maintain the momentum, should difficulties occur.

What you want to achieve. **What** will be the benefits to your organisation, staff and other stakeholders? **What** will the changed position look like? Painting a picture will help to create a more tangible and achievable outcome. Calling it 'education for sustainable development' may not generate interest. Relating it to something close to the sector's interest may do the trick.



Who needs to be involved in the process – both internally and externally. Engaging your members and employees is an essential part of achieving the outcome. Who do you need to help you? **Who** would be the most effective partners with the expertise to advise, guide and assist you through the process? **Who** has done this before and where are there examples of best practice? **Who** may want to develop the necessary skills to become a champion? Other organisations, such as Forum for the Future and the World Business Council have experience and can help. Have a clear idea of **whose** support is essential to planning, development and delivery – and at what level. **What** skills will they need?

Where to start. Understanding where you are now and where you want to be is important. It will help to identify **where** you need to focus your attention to bridge the gap. It will make change easier to understand and achieve. Start from people's own experience and use active, student-centred learning methods. Find out **where** you can get help – whether financial, technical or practical. Others may help to develop standards for training materials.

How all this will fit with your core activities and aims. Integrating sustainable development principles into your core objectives will be a learning process in itself. Make connections between specific local circumstances and the wider global picture. Enable your staff and stakeholders to convert their global concerns into appropriate action. Figure out **how** to support the learning process. Access to sources of information, including web references, together with other tools, techniques, practices and guidance from a variety of sources will support the wider learning process that will deliver more sustainable practices – whatever the field. Decide **how** you will track change and measure your movement forward, and the techniques you need to do so. Decide, too, **how** the benefits that emerge can be fed back into further learning.

When each step should begin. The whole process is cyclical – the learning process to support a sustainable future evolves, as knowledge, skills and best practice are enhanced through experience. It should also be continuous, integrated into existing practice and reviewed periodically. Each step will provide fresh intelligence to share with others and add to the growing understanding of how we can all live and work more sustainably.

KEEPING TRACK

– MAKING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

10 To reach everyone, education for sustainable development must be **relevant**, suit its **audience** and be delivered in **language** everyone can understand and act upon. One appropriate **engagement point** might be Continuing Professional Development, where the social, economic and environmental messages can be **reinforced** through appraisal systems. The organisation of health and safety already includes a number of the key sustainable development elements, such as balance between economic, environmental and social concerns, and may also be a relevant point to start.

The most relevant point of engagement is invariably the best. Employers need to become as aware of the facts about sustainable living – sometimes called the triple bottom line, as they are about the single bottom line. Providing information and advice about how to act more sustainably is relatively easy. More difficult is making sure that it is understood and acted upon. Motivation is the key – wanting to learn. Interest needs to be gained and built

on, until each learner is fully engaged. Engagement delivers changed attitudes, fresh ideas, and different patterns, all leading to action and the development of best practice.

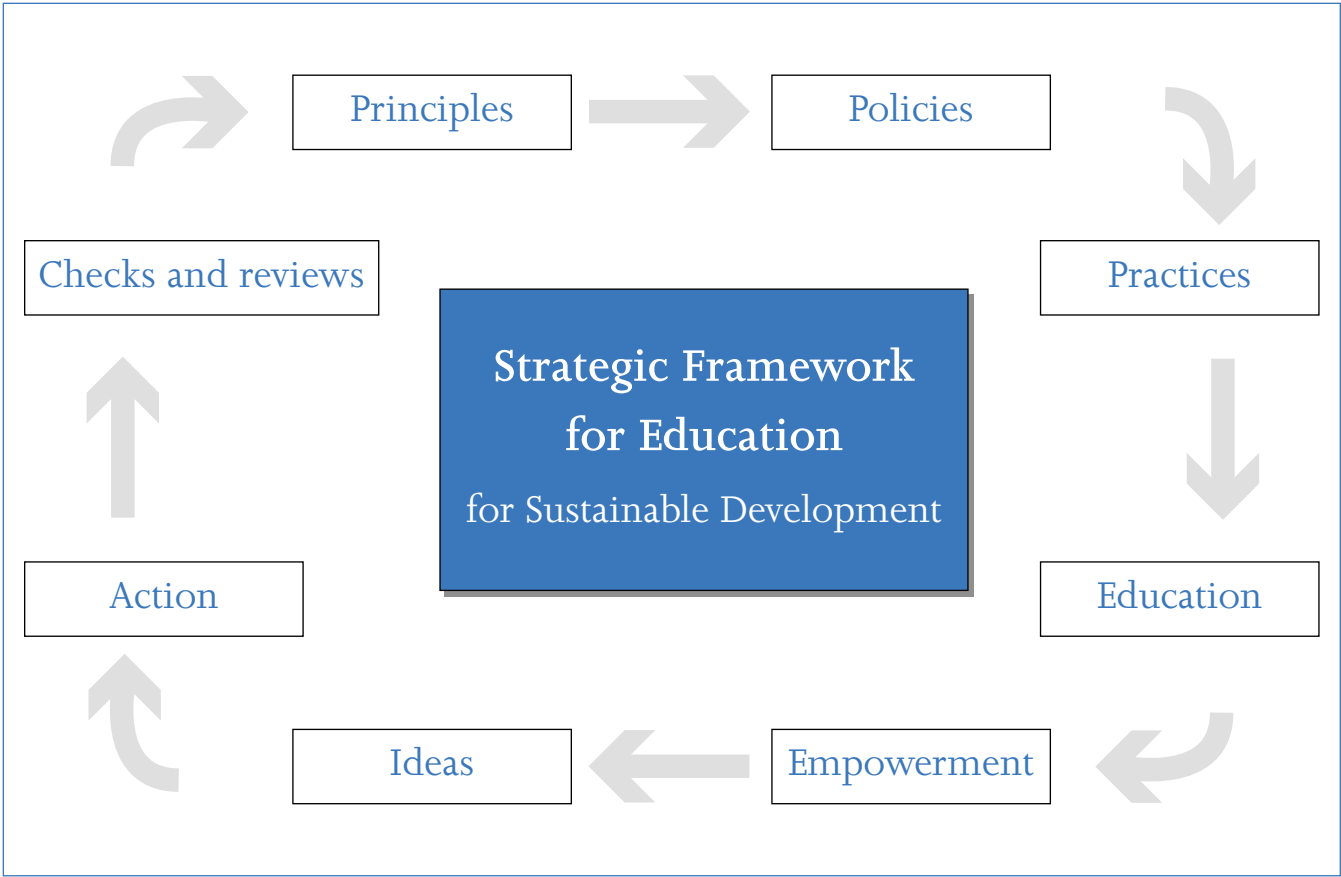
As education and action proceed hand-in-hand, measuring your progress and evaluating how successful you are will be essential. Clear goals and the means to assess their achievement are vital. Evaluation is a crucial part of the development process. Without it, you will be unable to track improvement and change.

Sector Skills Councils will be at the forefront of developing the skills needed to improve both productivity and sustainability. There is a clear need to develop occupational standards for good environmental practice leading to sustainable development for all levels of employees. These standards should become part of all occupational standards among businesses in your sector. We hope that you will take this opportunity to be in the vanguard of change.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are a variety of organisations you can turn to for help and advice – NGOs, Government departments and agencies, sectoral champions in the manufacturing, service and financial industries, regional and local government and the professions. See the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/sustainable/educpanel/index.htm for information on the key players and how they can help you.







©Crown Copyright 2002

Copyright in the typographical arrangement and design rests with the Crown. The publication (excluding the logo) may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright with the title and source of the publication specified.

The Sustainable Development Education Panel acknowledges the help and support of the Environment Agency and Lantra, the Sector Skills Council for the Environmental and Land-based Sector in the publication of this guide.

Printed using water based inks on 150 gsm Revive matt. A recycled paper combining at least 75% de-inked post consumer waste and 25% mill broke.