

Learning to last

Sustainable Development through Education

– a Learning Guide for
Trade Unions



Sustainable
Development
Education Panel



ENVIRONMENT
AGENCY

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Sustainable development is central to the Government's vision of the future and impacts on every area of policy and practice. It is about meeting four key objectives in the UK and the world as a whole:



- **social progress which recognises the needs of everyone** – corporate and social responsibility are increasingly demanded of a range of organisations, not just large companies, all of which need to consider the impact they make at home and abroad, the way that different groups and individuals within them take part in decision-making, 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 present 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** – important to all organisations, but to trade unions in particular.

Keeping all four objectives in balance is a defining characteristic of sustainable development – the key to a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come.

Many decision-makers, however, are not yet fully aware of what sustainable development entails or how it will affect them. Nevertheless, organisations of all kinds are recognising the need to move, and be seen to move, towards sustainability. The pressures come from many quarters: within businesses from customers and shareholders; within trade unions and the professions from members and employers; within voluntary bodies from government and other funding sources; within schools, colleges and universities from students; within public amenities from visitors and sponsors.

Everywhere, boards of companies, executives of professional bodies, trade unions and educational institutions, trustees of charities and directors of public amenities are recognising the need to commit to sustainable development – to develop their organisation's understanding of and ability to deliver it. You are one of many.

Sustainable development impacts upon:

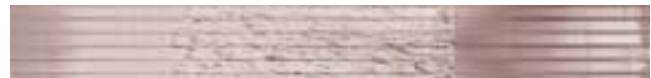
- the global and local vision and aspirations of trade unionism;
- the trade union bargaining agenda;
- our safety, health and environmental concerns as workers and citizens;
- the effectiveness of unions as partners within and campaigning influences beyond the workplace;
- the visibility of trade unions and the value placed on union membership;
- the organisational efficiency of trade unions, their management of resources and associated running costs.

The principles, policies and practices of sustainability for trade unions need to be developed from within. In offering guidance on developing education for sustainable development in your union, this document proposes a framework for that process.

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

There are seven steps to becoming a more sustainable organisation and education is central to the process:

- **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 timetable and deadlines for achieving the changes you have planned and targeted;
- **champion** – appoint a lead official or team to oversee the work and report to the executive;
- **educate and inform** – make sure that everyone is aware of what sustainable development is and how it is important to your organisation, and equip them with the knowledge and the tools to bring about change;
- **implement** – deliver the planned changes through education and empowerment;
- **check and review** – check your achievements regularly and review your policy, plan and delivery accordingly – learning from experience and continuous improvement are key components of sustainable development;
- **publicise** – let everyone know what has been achieved, 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 about the way we do things, locally and globally, to improve the quality of life now, without damaging the planet for the future. Trade unions are one of society's key stakeholders and leading influences, with a real role to play in shaping a more sustainable society. Integrating sustainability learning needs into your education and training now will ensure that your union acts along sustainable lines – now and in future.

Education can help trade unions to improve their sustainability in two ways. Firstly, it will help your union to gain a better understanding of what sustainable development means and how it is relevant to you. Some of the key elements of sustainable development from a trade union point of view are:

- responsible global citizenship;
- improved living and working conditions through economic growth;
- social inclusion and cohesion, democracy and justice for all;
- respect for diversity;
- concern for and stewardship of our environment.

Secondly, it can help to bring about the changes needed to make yours a more sustainable organisation – once you have identified what your goals are.

The two key questions to ask yourself are:

- how can acting sustainably be made a defining characteristic of trade unionism?
- how can trade union education be adapted to deliver learning to promote sustainability?

WHAT CAN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DELIVER?

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An awareness and understanding of all aspects of sustainability – policy, principles and practice.

Policy

- the relevance of sustainable development to a trade union – its members and employees, personally and collectively;
- the value of sustainability and quality of life indicators – how they relate to a trade union and a sustainable development plan;
- the potential impact of education for sustainable development on a trade union – the value it can add and the contribution it can make to innovation and creativity.

Principles

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



Practice

- sustainability – in trade union terms;
- the contribution individuals can make to sustainable development solutions;
- ways in which sustainable development can contribute to organisational goals, as well as the skills to recognise and act on them;
- best practice – the wide range of sustainable development solutions, tools and techniques currently available;
- action – within a flexible policy framework and appropriate control mechanisms;
- a balanced approach to sustainable development – in terms of whole systems and integrated (social, environmental and economic) practice.



SO WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?


– AN ACTION CHECKLIST

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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, members, employees and other affected parties? **What** will the changed position look like? Painting a picture will help to create a more tangible and achievable outcome. Referring to the outcome as 'education for sustainable development' may not generate interest. Relating it to something close to the end users' experience and aspirations, such as healthier and safer working or reacting to globalisation, might.



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 mentors or partners (organisations or individuals) 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? Other organisations, such as employers like Interface Flooring and the Co-operative Bank, have experience in the environmental aspects of sustainable development. Have a clear idea of **whose** support is essential to planning, development and delivery – and at what level.

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.

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 members 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. An appropriate **engagement point** might be health and safety training, where, in the context of sustainable development, the social, economic and environmental messages can be **reinforced**. The most relevant point of engagement is invariably the best. Trade unionists need to be as aware of the facts about sustainable living as they are about factors influencing their health and safety at work.

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, different patterns of

behaviour. The greater the engagement, the more instinctive the learning, leading to action and the development of best practice.



WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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

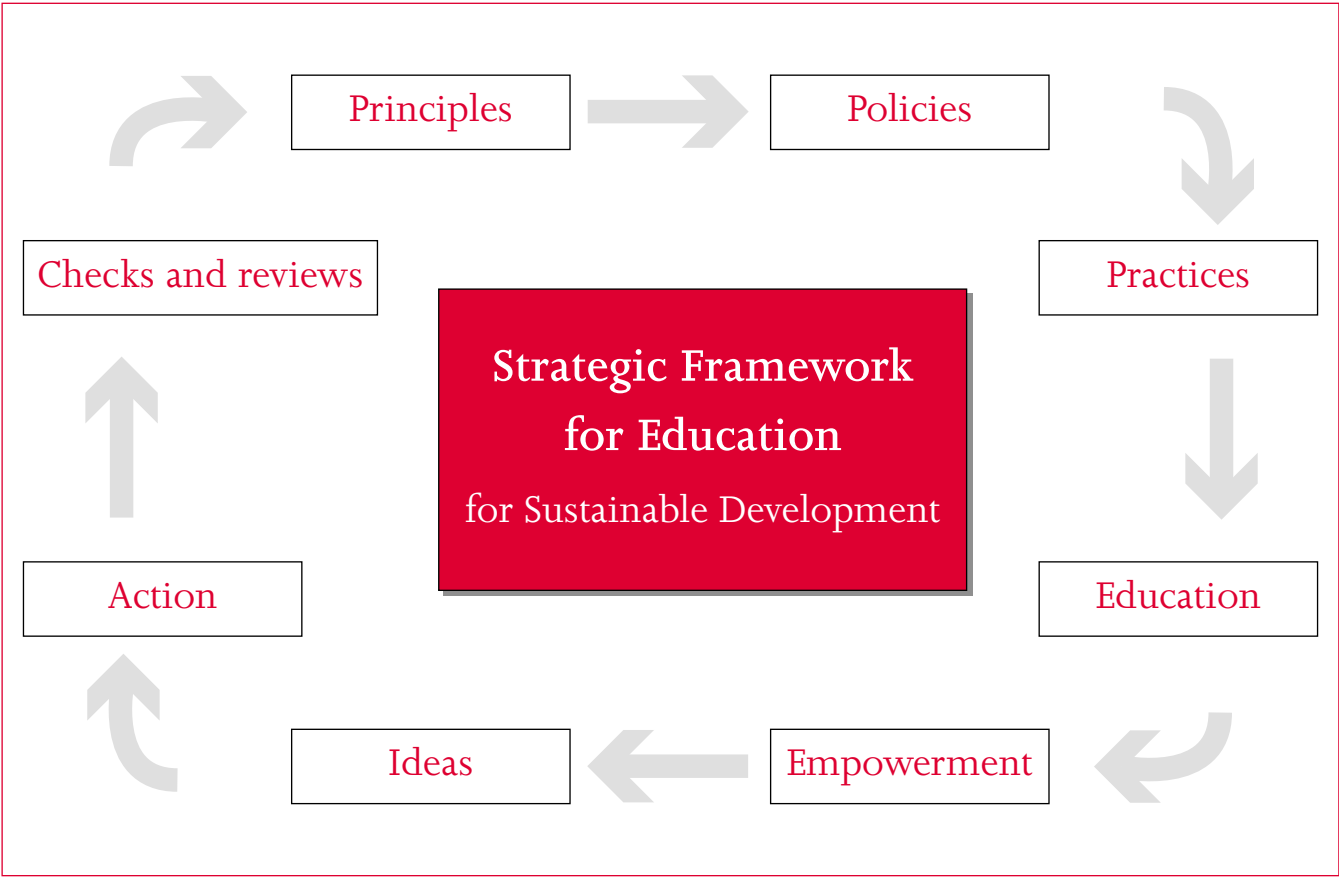
Trade unions are natural champions and advocates of development, sustainability and education. We hope that you will take this opportunity to be in the vanguard of change.

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 for information on the key players and how they can help you.

Case Study

With the assistance of the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme and funding from the Carbon Trust, the Trade Unions for Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC) is already working on a three-day course for trade unionists focusing on the environmental aspects of sustainable development. The course is due to be piloted in May 2002 and will be ready for all trade unions to use from the summer onwards, with further work on sustainability in the pipeline.





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