

Creating the Conditions for Embedding Sustainable Development in the Curriculum



Guidance for senior managers in learning institutions on how they can support the embedding of sustainability within the curriculum

This project is funded by:



1.0	Executive summary	3
2.0	Introduction	4
3.0	Background to the project	5
4.0	How to use this document	6
5.0	What is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)?	7
5.1	Definition of ESD from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)	7
5.2	Definition of ESD from Sustainable Development Education Network	7
6.0	The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) research – what was uncovered?	9
6.1	Leadership committed to ESD	9
6.2	A spirit of entrepreneurship	10
6.3	Celebration of the art of networking	11
6.4	Commitment to staff development on sustainable development	12
6.5	The conviction that it is important to make a start	13
7.0	Summary	15
Appendix 1	Project team - contact details	16
Appendix 2	Current practice – management audit tool	18

In the recent months we have seen a financial crisis of such proportions that it has literally shaken the world. Many environmentalists say that we have been facing an ecological crisis for some time but we have failed to act in a concerted or co-ordinated way to try to resolve it. Whether you accept this or not what we do all know is that the world is changing - economically, socially and environmentally - we just don't know how quickly the changes will happen or how severe they will be. We believe these recent events highlight the need for new thinking, new skills and new ways of doing things. The role of leaders within learning organisations is absolutely critical in developing the capacity of society to be able to respond to this array of challenges and to help local communities continue to flourish.

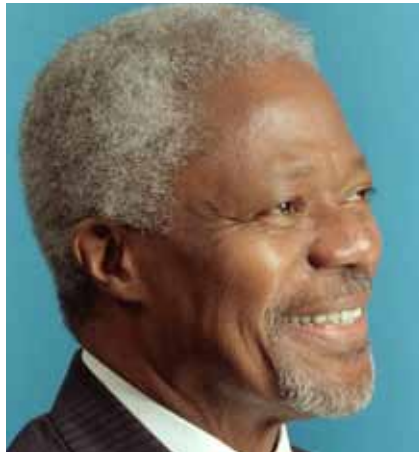
The research on which this document is based showed that leaders within Further Education and other learning organisations were taking action on embedding sustainable development within the curriculum – but often not quickly enough or in a consistent and ambitious manner. It also showed that where sustainable development was being embedded in the curriculum the senior managers within the institution were leading on this as well as creating the conditions for other key staff to also show leadership in a number of ways

This document highlights ways in which you can create the conditions to allow sustainable development to be embedded in the curriculum by supporting your staff to make it happen.

In this document we also share a number of practical examples of how some institutions are demonstrating leadership in sustainable development. These examples are aimed at stimulating thought and questions and coupled with the points we raise throughout the document we hope it will prompt senior managers to ask themselves how they are performing in this area.

One final thought - as you are deciding whether or not to read this document further - ask yourself this:

If you were asked by a student or Ofsted, ***“what are you doing to embed sustainable development in what you teach?”***, how would you respond?



“Our biggest challenge this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract – sustainable development – and turn it into a reality for all the world’s people.”

Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General, 2001.

This must be one of the most over-used quotes in sustainable development circles. It is used by consultants, lecturers, sustainable development champions and of course politicians. It is referenced in hundreds

of documents. You can find it in almost every book on sustainability written since 2001 and it is featured in almost every presentation on sustainable development.

So why have we chosen to use this quote as part of the introduction to this document? Well, that’s because we believe it to be true. The challenge of sustainability is one for us and for the communities we live in. Yet it is a unique challenge because as learning providers we are the issue and the opportunity, the problem and the solution. To make a positive impact, sustainability needs to resonate with people in their daily lives.

Learning providers have a major role to play in supporting societies to develop the skills they need to respond to the sustainable development challenge. Your role is to help to build intellectual capital and motivate future generations. Perhaps most importantly, you have a key role in taking this abstract idea and turning it into reality in a wide range of contexts and disciplines. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) accepts the sector’s key role in this challenge and, through the **Sustainability Online Resource and Toolkit for Education (SORTED)** website (<http://www.eauc.org.uk/sorted/home>) has committed to help support learning providers rise to it.

This document has been developed following research into how learning providers are integrating sustainable development into the curriculum. The research showed that progress was mixed but good examples did exist and could be shared. Further examples of how this is being taken forward can be found in the related document – ***Embedding Sustainable Development in the Curriculum.***

It was also clear that good examples of sustainable development in the curriculum tended to come from institutions which also demonstrated supportive behaviours or had created conditions which would help to embed the subject. Whilst not identical across the institutions, these conditions were strikingly similar – enough to prompt the development of this document.

Some of the conditions we will draw attention to may exist in your institution or are already familiar to you. However, we thought directly linking them to the challenge of sustainable development and the curriculum may stimulate some further thoughts and actions.

We hope this document will play a small part in supporting learning providers on the sustainability agenda. If you have any queries please do contact us. Our details are contained in Appendix 1.

The LSC is committed to supporting sustainable development and promoting good practice throughout the sector. This was clearly set out in its strategy for sustainable development, ***From Here to Sustainability*** (2005). The strategy also set goals for achievement by 2010, reflecting those of the UK Government in its strategy ***Securing the Future***, 2005. As part of those goals the LSC identified the need to promote the integration of sustainable development into teaching and learning.

The LSC commissioned research to identify where colleges and other learning providers had made progress on integrating sustainable development within the curriculum. Once this research was complete it was to be turned into guidance for the SORTED website to support other learning providers who were on the same journey.

The research involved speaking directly to 35 institutions, undertaking telephone and face-to-face interviews as well as web research and document review. This

research was not limited to institutions in England and there are some examples from Wales and Scotland. The project was supported by a range of institutions that have shaped these documents and provided excellent advice and input – for which we are grateful. A full list of these individuals can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Whilst undertaking this research we identified that progress in the sector was mixed. There were some good examples of innovative and practical approaches to the challenge of embedding sustainable development in teaching and learning. But there were also gaps where no progress or interest was demonstrated.

A relatively small number of learning providers have begun to embed sustainable development in the curriculum, addressing it as part of learning across a broad range of curriculum areas. We would like to encourage an acceleration of this trend by sharing practical examples of how it can be done and how a learning provider can create the conditions to make it happen.

We believe that this document can be used in a number of ways; here are some suggestions. Use this document:

- to hold a discussion with your senior management team (the questions in Appendix 2 will help you to shape this discussion);
- as a discussion piece at sustainable development champions meetings or similar steering groups;
- for circulation to your institution's curriculum leads to stimulate discussion about what stage your institution is at and the conditions you face;
- to get opinions from colleagues to assess where the institution is on this issue - maybe at a lunch time meeting or curriculum team meeting (the questions in Appendix 2 can be used to steer this discussion);
- to provide the motivation to contact us to discuss this further!

If you have any further questions or can suggest others ways you have used this document which may be useful for others, please do get in touch.

Definitions of ‘sustainable development’ or ‘sustainability’ are numerous and often confusing. This is no less the case with ‘Education for Sustainable Development’ (ESD).

When we speak about ESD – or ‘learning to last’ as it has been called – we mean finding and using opportunities to include environmental, economic and social content or considerations in the subject you teach.

However, many other definitions exist. **Section 5.1** outlines the definition of ESD developed by UNESCO and the definition in **section 5.2** was developed by the Sustainable Development Education (SDE) Network which is much more detailed and includes information about the key skills, knowledge and attitudes needed. This is the definition you will probably find of most use if you are already familiar with thinking about ESD.

5.1 Definition of ESD from UNESCO

ESD is about learning to:

- respect, value and preserve the achievements of the past;
- appreciate the wonders and the peoples of the Earth;
- live in a world where all people have sufficient food for a healthy and productive life;
- assess, care for and restore the state of our planet;
- create and enjoy a better, safer, more just world;
- be caring citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally.

5.2 Definition of ESD from SDE Network

SD Education is the process of acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to build local and global societies that are just, equitable and living within the environmental limits of our planet, both now and in the future.

A sustainable society is one that at a local and global level is just, equitable and living within the environmental limits of our planet both now and in the future. SD is the term given to the process of developing our society to move from where we are now to a state of sustainability.

Undertaking SD and achieving sustainability requires the development of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. The process of acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed is known as ESD.

Key knowledge in ESD

The key knowledge and understanding that sustainability requires and that ESD seeks to cultivate is focused around six principles:

- The interdependent nature of our society and life on our planet.
- The limited carrying capacity of our planet.
- The value of biological, social and cultural diversity in maintaining the wellbeing of our planet and our society.
- The essential role of rights and responsibilities in a sustainable society.
- The essential role of equity and justice in a sustainable society.
- The presence of uncertainty and the need for precaution in making decisions about our planet and our society.

5.0 What is Education for Sustainable Development?

Key skills in ESD

The key skills that sustainability requires and ESD seeks to cultivate are:

- The skills to understand the relationships between different issues, appreciate how they are connected and, as a result, make decisions and solve problems in a joined-up way.
- The skills to enable groups to make collective decisions and work co-operatively together even though all members of the group may not hold the same views and power may not be distributed evenly among the group.
- The skills to think critically about problems, issues and situations to enable individuals and groups to move beyond thinking about how can we make the systems and products we have less unsustainable, to thinking about the kind of systems and products we need to achieve sustainability.

Key attitudes in ESD

The key attitudes that sustainability requires and ESD seeks to cultivate are:

- The confidence to take action and the confidence that these actions will make a positive difference.
- The appreciation that we are all part of society and that our individual behaviours must be balanced by our responsibilities as members of that society.
- The attitude that humanity is part of the natural world, that we depend on it for our wellbeing and that we must respect its limits and live in harmony with it.
- An attitude of respect for the biological, social and cultural differences and diversity that are a fundamental part of our world.
- An attitude for caring for yourself, for other people, for other living things and for our planet.

Of course, it is important that any ESD content you include in your curriculum is relevant both to the subject you are teaching and to your students. And you should also remember that considering SD may need a change in the way the subject is delivered in terms of the teaching approach, style or content.

Questions to consider

- Is the management team familiar with ESD?
- Could the management team explain to Ofsted what the institution is doing in relation to ESD?

The research showed that many of the institutions we visited which had made progress on ESD also had a number of other similarities. The more we spoke to people within an institution, the more we were struck by not only what they said about ESD but also by the general behaviour, tone and conditions that existed within the institution.

For ease of reference we have tried to categorise these similarities. The key question is whether you recognise these as part of your institutional behaviour?

1. Leadership committed to Education for Sustainable Development.
2. A spirit of entrepreneurship.
3. Celebration of the art of networking.
4. Commitment to training staff on sustainable development.
5. The conviction that it is important to make a start.

6.1 Leadership committed to Education for Sustainable Development

When we talk about leadership for sustainable development we are not only talking about leadership from the top. Often progress on embedding sustainable development in the curriculum was made when leadership came from the top and then from those responsible for curriculum management. These leaders were then supported by the rest of the institution.

In institutions already successful at embedding ESD, the leadership we observed from senior staff was about empowering other staff to make the changes. What was also apparent was the vocal nature of the senior management on this agenda. They publicly sent the simple clear message that this was an important thing to do and that curriculum leads could and should make a start.

Examples include:

Further Education Institution: Lancaster and Morecombe College

Approach: The Principal has become a vocal advocate for ESD both within and outside the college. He speaks at LSC events on the subject and ensures that staff feel supported and encouraged. The College has also delivered staff development days for all employees covering issues of sustainable development.

Outcome: The College leaders have made the institutional commitment to sustainable development ambitions very clear to both staff and the outside community.

Further Education Institution: Bedford College

Approach: Sustainability initiatives at Bedford College started with curriculum developments within the Centre for Technology, led by the Centre Director, having achieved ownership and engagement by Centre staff. When the College gained Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in Skills for Energy, CoVE funds were used to continue curriculum developments as well as developing a whole College sustainability focus.

Outcome: Bedford College has a dedicated Director of Sustainability and cross College sustainability initiatives are driven by members of the Bedford College Sustainability Group, made up of representatives from all teaching and non teaching departments as well as student groups across the College.

Further Education Institution: Somerset College

Approach: From a modest beginning, as an assignment by HNC construction students which resulted in a major college development culminating in the nationally recognised Genesis Centre, ESD has become a high priority on the agenda of the College.

Outcome: The Genesis Project at the college has served as an inspiration to many within the College community and has led to a wide range of developments across the curriculum, campus and community.

Questions to consider

- Have the senior managers and governors in your institution made a clear commitment to ESD?
- Are your curriculum leads empowered to make the necessary changes to embed sustainability?

6.2 A spirit of entrepreneurship

Bob Reiss, a successful entrepreneur, defined entrepreneurship as:

“... the recognition and pursuit of opportunity without regard to the resources you currently control, with confidence that you can succeed, with the flexibility to change course as necessary, and with the will to rebound from setbacks.”

What we observed was that individuals were trying new approaches to bringing sustainability issues to life within the curriculum. It was also clear that this was being actively encouraged and supported by colleagues and senior management. In many cases this led to the acquisition of new resources for the institution as a whole, such as project funds or new equipment.

When we asked people how successful they were at embedding sustainability within the curriculum, many felt they were partially successful or that only a limited number of their ideas had worked. We feel this is another important element in an entrepreneurial approach – not everything you will try will work first time!

Examples include:

Further Education Institution: Bedford College

Approach Bedford College is firmly connected to its local community and has developed strong links with councils and governing bodies. Sustainability and climate change committees have enabled the development of networks with local councils at a regional, national and international level. For Bedford College this includes the East of England Energy Group, Renewables East, Bedfordshire Climate Change Forum, Bedford Borough Council Sustainability Committee, Green Business Network, AOC Sustainability Group and World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics Sustainability Group.

Outcome: The College is in a strong position to both drive and react to local sustainability needs. The College was instrumental in the development of the Eastern Renewable Energy Academy (EREA), now called New ERA (Environmental Resource Academy), which is made up of a group of colleges and other key players in the sustainability arena. New ERA's aim is to stimulate the renewable energy industry across the Eastern Region.

Further Education Institution: Somerset College

Approach: An entrepreneurial member of staff at Somerset College applied for funding for a research fellowship and, along with college funding, developed a co-operative inquiry process with her team to provide the necessary development to decide how SD could be developed within the curriculum.

Outcome: This has led to SD being embedded within the PGCE/Cert Ed DTLLS and PTLLS programmes for teacher training. All student teachers now meet a SD outcome in one module which enables them to develop sustainability within their own teaching practice across a wide range of subject areas.

Further Education Institution: Hull College

Approach: Hull College has encouraged the entrepreneurial nature of its students by running competitions combining enterprise and sustainability skills.

Outcome: In the first year a competition was run in conjunction with a child studies tutorial. The group examined the way toys are made and related that back to sustainability. The competition was won by construction students who made a car-based 'Top Trumps' game which listed environmental aspects such as combustion outputs.

Questions to consider

- Do the leaders in your institution encourage an entrepreneurial spirit?
- Are curriculum leads actively engaged with new thinking and innovation in the subject areas they manage?
- Does the institution learn from other approaches and innovation from elsewhere?

6.3 Celebration of the art of networking

Although networking can be challenging, the development of relationships to explore areas of mutual interest or sustainability-themed projects of mutual benefit is becoming more common place, especially between education institutions and business. Networking can also have a powerful role in bringing in new ideas and approaches to an organisation which can often have a financial benefit. When seeking to embed sustainability in the curriculum, networks and relationships both within and outside the institution are crucial as they provide a useful diversity of input and ideas.

Examples include:**Further Education Institution: Southwark College**

Approach: Southwark College has taken a cross-disciplinary approach to setting up sustainability groups. This has enabled the College to network a range of areas such as IT practitioners, software design and networking, electronics and electronic engineering.

Outcome: The teams have worked together to develop novel teaching approaches combining computer simulation with control systems to physically manipulate real world environments such as greenhouses. The greenhouses themselves form part of a green project for the Preparation for Life and Work students.

Further Education Institution: Lancaster and Morecambe College

Approach: Lancaster and Morecambe College has engaged directly with international and local partners to bring in sustainability issues via interesting and engaging projects and collaborations.

Outcome: Lancaster and Morecambe College is one of the European partners helping to develop a new on-line sustainability game. BTEC Games Development students are helping to develop the game that will ultimately be available to students throughout the campus. The College has also established links with suppliers to provide it with services that would otherwise be unavailable. It has linked up with a national company which recycles mobile phones and held a Dragon's Den-style event for 140 students which introduced enterprise and encouraged them to think about environmental concepts. This is also a great example of presenting difficult, intangible topics in a dynamic way

6.0 The LSC's Research - What was Uncovered?

Further Education Institution: Hadlow College

Approach: Hadlow College has taken networking to an international level by engaging with other European colleges.

Outcome: Working with colleges in Belgium, Finland & France in an EU funded programme - COMENIUS. Hadlow College has participated and helped to build an educational sharing and learning experience for land-based students to understand land and environmental issues in a wider context with a focus on forestry biomass.

Questions to consider

- Does your institution actively engage in cross-disciplinary discussion and projects?
- Do curriculum leads actively engage with the local community? If they do already, is sustainability included in that engagement?
- Does the institution actively engage with the business community? If it does already, is sustainability included in that engagement?

6.4 A commitment to training staff on sustainable development

We all know the importance of building the intellectual capital of an institution's core asset – its people. But does it always happen? When money is tight and budgets need to be cut, is training still a priority?

It can be straightforward for people to build on their skills and knowledge in their chosen subject areas but sustainability can be a little different. Many individuals will not know what it is and may be wary of getting engaged, so will not be able to consider it in the courses they deliver. Or they may consider sustainability irrelevant and just ignore it.

During the research we found that the institutions where sustainable development was being embedded in the curriculum often had a very explicit and practical approach to staff training on sustainability. They provided space to explore sustainability, encouraged cross professional learning and were not afraid to let staff explore subjects and content which was once perceived as being outside their current role. This commitment to exploration, which is so important to the understanding of sustainability, was also true of staff development.

Examples include:

Organisation: Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service

Approach: Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service has introduced an extensive programme of education for its staff after recognising that many people felt ill-equipped to deal with the issue of sustainability, often feeling they were not experts in the field.

Outcome: The Service has developed its own sustainability training session. It focuses on developing the confidence of the teaching community to use everyday examples from the students' lives and looks at how they can make a difference at a very local level. A short session includes tutors taking time in groups to assess a range of websites and examine how they might be used to assist their own teaching methods and approaches to SD. Quizzes are used to assist students' understanding of the topics and themes of SD.

Further Education Institution: Hull College

Approach: A development day for all members of staff was themed around sustainability, including an external key note speaker.

Outcome: Workshops from sustainability champions were offered to the staff. Qualifications (NCFE Level 1 Certificate in SD) were taken by non-teaching sports staff who decided they would like to increase their own awareness and skills. An NVQ in aspects of recycling was devised for local businesses and has also been pursued in-house by staff. Sustainability is a theme which annually runs through a series of staff development days and covers a wide range of topics and activities and includes visiting speakers from other institutions.

Further Education Institution: Somerset College

Approach: Somerset College saw a need for and developed tailored training programmes for its staff, bringing in expertise to help facilitate the training.

Outcome: The College arranged training days for all staff and specific training for the sustainability champions. Over the last two years a group of staff has visited Schumacher College for three days. This involved a journey around systems thinking, deep ecology and storytelling and included exercises examining how to improve the environment at college. The training was experiential and staff lived together, were responsible for cleaning and cooking and creating a functioning community. Everyone was responsible for making the whole community work. This experience was supported by films and talks. Using the community model as a starting point the staff were immersed in a different way of thinking which could be applied when they returned to their roles at the College.

Questions to consider

- Do you encourage staff to include sustainability in personal and professional development plans?
- Do you provide sustainability training for staff, including curriculum leads?
- Do you encourage less formal learning opportunities such as opportunities to share ideas and resources?

6.5 The conviction that it is important to make a start

This section highlights some of the key underlying principles which were apparent in the institutions we visited. It is difficult to give you specific examples of these in action, but the fact they are intangible makes them no less important.

These principles include:

- An understanding that embedding sustainability into the curriculum is a significant undertaking and, even though some institutions have made a good start, it is only a start and continuous commitment is needed.
- A willingness to recognise mistakes they have made.
- A willingness to share with others what they have done.
- A willingness to celebrate what they have achieved and look for the next challenge.

Quotes from participating institutions:

“ At Bedford College the start-up costs of renewable energy courses were high, with no guarantee of success, and it took a while for these courses to establish and grow. All new developments have a risk factor associated with them and without such entrepreneurial approach we would not be where we are now. ”

“ We are very happy to have achieved CoVE status in Skills for Energy and more recently the Green Gown Award for our sustainability courses. The whole college focus on sustainability has created many new opportunities and through the Bedford College Sustainability Group members, many new developments are now under way.... A very exciting time to be working at Bedford College and within the Further Education sector! ”

“ Wigan and Leigh College has used the opportunity provided by this LSC initiative to raise the profile of sustainable development with senior management, to develop an action plan to implement the sustainable development policy and convene a working group. The first meeting of the working group was encouraging with the participants enthused to spread good practice across the whole college. ”

“ Somerset College started its sustainability journey through passionate leadership developing the award winning Genesis Centre for Sustainable Construction. This won a Green Gown Award last year. The parallel journey, predominantly through a strong staff champion scheme, has led to many excellent developments including a comprehensive estates environmental works schedule, some outstanding curriculum practice and good staff and student campaigns. The Principal chairs the Sustainability Strategy group and the College shares good practice widely with others in the sector. ”

“ Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service has benefitted immensely from taking a service wide approach to sustainable development. By encouraging all 700 plus staff and tutors to get involved we have begun to harness the interest and expertise of a wide range of people. Staff confidence is the key and it's up to management to ensure that sustainable development permeates the work of the Service. Without this it is unlikely that we would have secured LSC funding for the Derbyshire Eco Centre. ”

Questions to consider

- Does your institution communicate to all staff its vision on embedding sustainable development into the curriculum?
- Do you encourage suggestions and ideas for ESD and see them as an opportunity, rather than a challenge?
- Do you celebrate success on embedding sustainable development in the curriculum?
- Do staff feel that their contributions to ESD are valued?

The role of management in creating the conditions to embed sustainable development in the curriculum is crucial. Finding the time to do this may be challenging, however this is an area which is and will continue to be an important issue for learning providers to address.

One final question to finish;

If you were asked by a student or Ofsted, ***“what you are doing to embed sustainable development in what you teach?”***, how would you respond?

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Current Practice – Management Audit Tool

Please tick the most appropriate response for your institution, the more open and honest you are in your assessment the more useful this exercise will be!

1 – Always 2 – Often 3 – Sometimes 4 – Rarely 5 – Never

		1	2	3	4	5
1	Have the senior managers and governors in your institution made a clear commitment to ESD?					
2	Do the curriculum leads have a mandate to 'get on with it and have a go'? (ESD)					
3	Do the leaders in your institution encourage an entrepreneurial spirit?					
4	Are curriculum leads actively engaged with new thinking and innovation in the subject areas they manage?					
5	Does the institution learn from other approaches and innovation outside the institution?					
6	Does your institution actively engage in cross disciplinary discussion and projects?					
7	Are curriculum leads actively engaged with the local community? If they do already, are sustainability issues included in that engagement?					
8	Does the institution actively engage with the business community? If it does already, are sustainability issues included in that engagement?					

		1	2	3	4	5
9	Do you encourage staff to build sustainability into personal and professional development plans?					
10	Do you provide sustainability training for staff including curriculum leads?					
11	Do you encourage less formal learning opportunities such as opportunities to share ideas and resources?					
12	Does your institution communicate to all staff its vision on embedding sustainable development into the curriculum?					
13	Do you encourage suggestions and ideas for ESD and see them as an opportunity, rather than a challenge?					
14	Do you celebrate success on embedding sustainable development in the curriculum?					
15	Do staff feel that their contributions to ESD are valued?					

If you would like to discuss any of this further please contact –
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