



**Sustainable
Development
Education
Panel**



Towards sustainability

***a briefing note
for colleges***

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Sustainable development definition

Sustainable development is a process that enables all people to realise their potential and improve their quality of life in ways that protect and enhance the earth's life support systems.

Sustainable development: a mainstream issue for further education

In 1992 around 180 governments met at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro to discuss how to achieve sustainable development. They all agreed a forward-looking, comprehensive global action plan, Agenda 21, and were called to produce more specific national sustainable development strategies. The UK Government was one of the first to produce a national strategy, in early 1994.

Since then, our understanding of the connections between the environmental, economic and social

dimensions of sustainable development have deepened. To reflect this new understanding the UK Government has recently produced a new sustainable development strategy, *A better quality of life* (HMSO, 1999), which includes a series of 14 headline indicators against which progress will be measured and the Government will be judged.

The Government's headline indicators are intended to focus public attention on what sustainable development means. To help focus the FE sector's attention on what sustainability means, a set of headline sustainability indicators for further education has been developed which uses the Government's headline indicator set as a point of reference. The FE indicator set may be regarded as the first word in a conversation about sustainability performance which needs to take place between major FE stakeholders.

Our emphasis is on continual improvement as opposed to institutional comparison.

	Government sustainability indicators	Further education sustainability indicators
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Total output of the economy (GDP)● Investment in public, business and private assets● Proportion of people of working age who are in work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Percentage of full-time students who, by the end of their learning programmes, have been taught key sustainability concepts● Compliance to a nationally or internationally recognised sustainable development standard● Percentage of students achieving qualifications who find full-time employment, or embark on further study, within six months of completing their programmes
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Emissions of greenhouse gases● Days when air pollution is moderate or high● Road traffic● Rivers of good or fair quality● Populations of wild birds● New homes built on previously developed land● Waste arisings and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Carbon dioxide emissions per FTE per annum● Percentage of FTEs' daily journeys to the college routinely made by car● Volume of water (litres) used per FTE per annum● Key regional habitats/species actively stewarded● Kilograms of waste per FTE per annum
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Qualifications at 19 years● Expected years of healthy life● Homes judged unfit to live in● Level of crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Percentage of full-time students gaining qualifications at 19 years● Percentage of FTEs participating in local community activity relating to sustainable development (e.g. local learning partnerships, volunteering, national, regional and local committees)● Percentage of full-time students from disadvantaged groups

FTE = full-time equivalent members of staff and students unless otherwise stated
e.g. full-time students, indicating students only

Sustainable development is now recognised as a mainstream issue for further education and the response called for from the sector is not simply one of damage limitation. The FE sector has a major role to play in building the capacity of its staff, students and local communities to fully and effectively participate in translating the rhetoric of sustainable development into reality. Of particular significance is the sector's role in facilitating social inclusion, sustainable regional development and responsible global citizenship.

The UK's prosperity in the long term depends on our capacity to learn about sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Education Panel's first annual report

Government Sustainable Development Education Panel's goals for further education

In 1998 the Government established a Sustainable Development Education Panel to consider issues on education for sustainable development, in its broadest sense, in schools, further and higher education, at work, during recreation and at home; and to make practical recommendations for action in England. The idea is that sustainable development education should be a seamless process which is systematically progressed through the formal education system and reinforced in society. The panel reports directly to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and is chaired by Sir Geoffrey Holland, the Vice-Chancellor of Exeter University.

The panel has set FE colleges the following challenging goals in its first annual report. By 2010 all colleges should:

- Be accredited to an internationally or nationally recognised sustainable development systems standard
- Have staff fully trained and competent in sustainable development
- Be providing all students with relevant sustainable development learning opportunities.

These goals are consistent with the recommendations of the 1996 environmental responsibility report (Toyne) review.

To encourage and help colleges to move towards these goals the panel commissioned FEDA and the Association of Colleges (AoC) to develop a practical sustainability management guide. A copy of this guide, *Towards sustainability: a guide for colleges* (FEDA, 1999) will be sent to all FE colleges.

Education for sustainable development: definition

Education for sustainable development is about the learning needed to maintain and improve our quality of life and the quality of life for generations to come. It is about equipping individuals, communities, groups, businesses and government to live and act sustainably; as well as giving them an understanding of the environmental, social and economic issues involved. It is about preparing for the world in which we will live in the next century, and making sure that we are not found wanting.

The benefits of proactivity

There are numerous benefits associated with proactivity relating to sustainability. Equally there are costs associated with ignoring what is now a mainstream issue.

Quality gains

The most significant, positive contribution a college can make towards shaping a more sustainable future is through its students. The challenge is to develop in all students the ability to make choices and decisions which take account of sustainability principles. It is part of providing quality education and is in keeping with the repeated call of employers for sustainability literate employees. College programmes which do not make the appropriate sustainability connections may be regarded as dated and of inferior quality.

Any attempt to communicate sustainability principles through FE programmes will be negated if, for example, the way a college chooses and uses resources and manages waste contravenes these principles. Colleges must simply practice what they teach if they wish to claim that they are taking their sustainability responsibilities seriously.

Cost savings through improved resource efficiency

Resource efficiency is about using resources in ways which improve quality of life, pollute and deplete less and save money. Doing more with less also reduces waste disposal costs which have risen substantially following the Duty of Care Provisions in the 1990 Environmental Protection Act. Incineration costs tend to be even higher than landfill.

Positive image

People expect their colleges to be managed in a way that is exemplary and colleges, in turn, want to be viewed as responsible neighbours, employers and service providers. Active involvement in the pursuit of sustainability solutions communicates the kind of institutional values, including a care for others and a

sense of fair play, which people want their public institutions to have. Colleges' involvement in sustainability issues provide an excellent vehicle for building purposeful and respectful relationships with local and regional communities – the spin off from this being a good local image.

Compliance with Government and EU legislation and policies

Breaking the law can result in prosecution and

liabilities. Such actions can leave a question mark over an institution's credibility. The benefit of having a system for managing sustainability responsibilities is that compliance with all legal and policy requirements is routinely addressed. Recent developments in environmental legislation reflect a move to viewing the sustainability impact of a product or service in a holistic way and to making product and service providers responsible for their wastes.

Sustainable communities

Building sustainable communities involves:

- Strengthening regional and local economies
- Meeting people's social needs: promoting better health, housing and access to services and recreation
- Improving local surroundings: revitalising town centres, tackling degraded urban environments, and ensuring that development respects the character of the countryside
- Reducing crime and fear of crime
- Addressing problems of poverty and social exclusion in the most deprived communities
- Making it easier for people to get involved in their communities
- Coordinating policies to bring these objectives together