January 2005/**01**

Policy development

Consultation

Responses should be made by 11 April 2005

This document seeks views on our vision for, and plans to support, higher education's contribution to sustainable development. The support strategy sets out the vision and in broad terms our approach to pursuing it. The action plan sets out a series of practical actions we propose to take within parameters set by the strategy.

Sustainable development in higher education

Consultation on a support strategy and action plan

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

hefce

Sustainable development in higher education

Consultation on a support strategy and action plan

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions
	Heads of Universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Strategic management, Governance
Reference	2005/**01**
Publication date	January 2005
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Executive summary

Purpose

1.   This is a consultation on our vision for, and plans to support, higher education's contribution to sustainable development.

Key points

2.   We want to make sustainable development a central part of our strategy for the future development of the higher education sector. Our vision is that, within the next 10 years, the higher education sector in England will be recognised as a major contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability – through the skills and knowledge that its graduates learn and put into practice, and through its own strategies and operations.

3.   In September 2003 the Department for Education and Skills published its 'Sustainable development action plan for education and skills'. The plan asked us to develop a sustainable development strategy for ourselves and for the way we interact with the higher education sector. We have chosen to do this by producing two interlinked documents: a support strategy (page 5) and an action plan (page 12). The support strategy sets out our vision for higher education's contribution to sustainable development and, in broad terms, our approach to pursuing this vision. The action plan sets out a series of practical actions we propose to take within parameters set by the strategy.

4.   Institutions responding to this consultation are asked to involve all those responsible for strategic management in both academic and non-academic functions. We strongly believe that collaborating across the institution to develop a holistic response will provide feedback that addresses all aspects of our strategy, as well as helping to embed sustainability issues within the institution.

5.   The action plan sets out a support role for HEFCE in four key areas:

- engaging with stakeholders to bring about policy synergies on sustainable development

- building the capacity of people to manage sustainable development
- sharing good practice, or supporting the development of good practice where none exists
- rewarding more sustainable behaviour.

6.   Implementation of the proposed action plan is intended to support the sector in a way that encourages it to:

- embed the principles of sustainable development in its values, strategies, operations and organisational learning
- develop curricula, pedagogy and extra-curricular activities that enable students to develop the values, skills and knowledge to contribute to sustainable development
- strengthen links to businesses, the community, civil society, government and others in pursuit of sustainable development
- build the new skills, knowledge and tools needed for sustainable development through research
- continuously improve its own impact on the environment, society and the economy.

Action required

7.   Comments are invited on the proposed strategy and action plan, using the response form at Annex B. An electronic version of the form can be found on the web at www.hefce.ac.uk with this document under Publications. Responses should be e-mailed to sustainability@hefce.ac.uk by **11 April 2005**.

8.   As part of the consultation exercise we are holding four seminars. We hope that all institutions will be represented at a senior level at these events. Further details are given in paragraphs 15-16. Please register for these events using our on-line form, on the web at www.hefce.ac.uk with this document under Publications.

Introduction

9.   In September 2003 the Department for Education and Skills published its 'Sustainable development action plan for education and skills'. The plan asked us to develop a sustainable development strategy for ourselves and for the way we interact with the higher education sector. We have chosen to do this by producing two interlinked documents: a support strategy and an action plan.

10.   The support strategy sets out our vision for higher education's contribution to sustainable development and in broad terms our approach to pursuing this vision – what we have termed our principles of engagement. The action plan sets out a series of practical actions we propose to take within the parameters set by the strategy.

11.   We now wish to consult on both documents and invite everyone involved in higher education to respond. Particular sections will be of interest to some readers more than others, but everyone will have something to contribute. Moreover, it is our aspiration to embed the principles of sustainable development in all our activities and funding streams. We hope to publish final versions of the support strategy and action plan by mid 2005.

12.   Much good work in sustainable development is already happening in the higher education sector. Examples of this work form case studies in the action plan. Many of the people involved helped us to develop our thinking, and some were members of an external advisory group convened to guide our work. The membership of this group is at Annex A.

13.   The support strategy and action plan also seek to complement events in other sectors and countries. On the international stage, these include the incorporation of sustainable development in the draft European Union (EU) constitution, and the designation by the United Nations of the period 2005-15 as the decade for education for sustainable development. Nationally, the UK Government is consulting on changes to its own sustainable development strategy, 'A better quality of life', and is preparing to make this a theme of the UK's presidencies of both the EU and the G8 countries in 2005. All the UK regions have brought together their stakeholders to draw up regional sustainable development frameworks; and many local authorities have done the same.

14.   This support strategy is designed to help the higher education sector make a full contribution to local, national and international efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Consultation seminars and responses

15.   As part of the consultation we are holding four seminars as follows:

- 2 February 2005 in Manchester
- 8 February 2005 in London
- 16 February 2005 in London
- 4 March 2005 in Birmingham.

16.   We invite institutions to send several representatives to these events. We would suggest that they include a governor, and two individuals with senior management responsibility for academic and non-academic activity. Please register for these events using our on-line form at

www.hefce.ac.uk with this document under Publications.

17.   Comments are invited on the proposed strategy and action plan, using the response form at Annex B. We would particularly welcome responses on the following:

    a.   Will the proposed action plan help deliver the vision set out in our support strategy for sustainable development?
    b.   Which actions should take priority?
    c.   Do you have any other comments on the strategy or action plan?
    d.   What activities are you already engaged in that support the agenda for sustainable development?

Support strategy for sustainable development in HE

Our biggest challenge in 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.
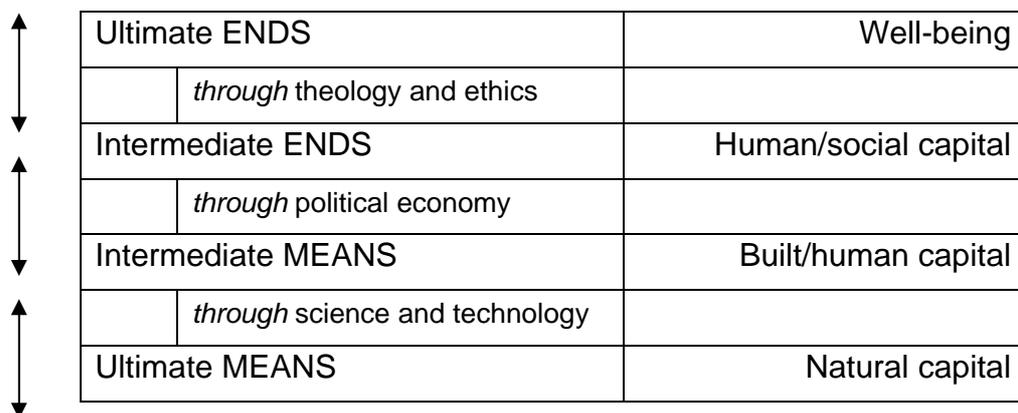Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General

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Our vision

Our vision is that, within the next 10 years, the higher education sector in this country will be recognised as a major contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability – through the skills and knowledge that its graduates learn and put into practice, and through its own strategies and operations.

What is sustainable development?

18.   Sustainable development, according to the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development, is 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.[1]

19.   It is based on a systems view of the human condition illustrated by the model in Figure 1.[2] Natural capital – the biosphere, raw materials and solar energy – is transformed through science and technology into built and human capital (tools, machines, processed materials and human skills and know-how); and then through the political economy into consumer goods, education, transport, health and wealth. Then, by means of theology and ethics, we can realise the ends of life, including identity, community, fulfilment and happiness.

Figure 1 Systems view of the human condition

Ultimate ENDS	Well-being
through theology and ethics	
Intermediate ENDS	Human/social capital
through political economy	
Intermediate MEANS	Built/human capital
through science and technology	
Ultimate MEANS	Natural capital

20.   Though it has its critics, this is a powerful systems view of how we depend on the sustainable exploitation of the various forms of capital available to us. It makes a crucial

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[1] World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), 'Our common future: from one earth to one world'.

[2] Adapted from Meadows, D (1999), *Indicators and information systems for sustainable development,* in D Satterthwaite (ed) 'The Earthscan reader in sustainable cities', Earthscan.

distinction between means and ends, and between the intermediate and the ultimate. It reminds us of how dependent we are on natural capital and on our own skills. It shows the role that both science and technology and the political sciences have in helping us to achieve our ultimate goals. It also reminds us that there are human ends beyond the products of industry and other institutions.

Why is sustainable development so important?

21.   The past 20 years have seen a substantial accumulation of evidence that, overall, current human behaviours are undermining the capacity of humans to survive long into the future. Evidence of the degradation of natural capital is particularly strong, and includes rapid climate change, ozone depletion, acidification, toxic pollution and the depletion of non-renewable resources. The precise impacts of these phenomena are difficult to predict, but most scientists now agree that they will generally be harmful to us. Rapid climate change, for example, is expected to cause significant extinction of species, loss of agricultural production, scarcity of fresh water and more frequent extreme weather events.

22.   There is also evidence that human behaviours are failing to protect the social capitals, such as education and health, which support people's well-being. Protection is generally weakest in developing countries and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where in most countries less than half of children finish primary school, and childhood mortality is 10 times higher than in the UK.[3] These phenomena, among many others, are testing the social fabric of these countries, perhaps to the limit. But the effects are not just felt locally: poor education and ill-health restrict economic development, and contribute to political and military instability and the displacement of people.

23.   Accepting the systems view of the human condition outlined above, it is important to stress the links between many of the symptoms of unsustainability, which tend to reinforce their negative effects. For example, deforestation is a major cause of land degradation, leading to lower crop yields, which in turn contribute to malnutrition and poverty.

What is the role of higher education?

24.   Higher education has a pivotal role to play in helping society to develop sustainably. This is because sustainable development is fundamentally a process through which we can learn to build our capacity to live more sustainably. It is a process which everyone needs to participate in, but the involvement of higher education is particularly important because graduates will go on to occupy the vast majority of managerial and leadership positions in this country.[4] Thus the role of higher education far outweighs the size of the sector in terms of its resources.

25.   This role is recognised by many people in the higher education community and reflected by several international agreements between institutions to pursue sustainable development. These include the Copernicus University Charter for Sustainable Development (1993); the Kyoto Declaration on Sustainable Development issued by the International Association of Universities

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[3] Both figures derived from World Bank monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals at www.developmentgoals.org/About_the_goals.htm

[4] Throughout this document 'graduates' refers to all those who study and gain qualifications in higher education, irrespective of level.

(1993); and the UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education (1998). Many English institutions have been involved in drawing up these agreements.

26.   The agreements recognise that the role of higher education is broadly three-fold. First, and in our view most important, higher education has a role in helping students gain a new awareness of the world in which they live; an understanding of how complex economic, social and environmental processes interact with each other (including the contribution individuals make to these processes); and a familiarity with perspectives on these issues from other societies and cultures. These functions or experiences have long characterised good learning and teaching in higher education (and good education more generally); but few students graduate with an understanding of how to make specific contributions to future social and economic development *in a sustainable way*. This points to a need to re-orient what already characterises good learning and teaching in higher education, so that it takes account of the sustainable development agenda.

27.   Second, higher education has a role to play in helping society find social and technical solutions to the challenges presented by sustainable development. An obvious example is the scientific research being undertaken into renewable energy. Just as important is social science research examining the social, economic and political barriers to sustainable development and how these might be overcome.

28.   Third, the higher education sector comprises hundreds of major organisations, each with a growing interest in exchanging knowledge and ideas with local people, businesses, government bodies and the wider world. This offers the sector a role as a catalyst for learning about sustainable development beyond the boundaries of the higher education arena. Institutions are also important players in the community, as employers, consumers and polluters. The 130 universities and colleges of higher education in England employ almost 300,000 staff and educate 2 million students[5]. Together these institutions are responsible for:

- consuming 5.2 billion kWh of energy per annum at a cost of over £200 million[6]
- consuming over 16 million cubic metres per annum of water[7]
- spending £3 billion per year on goods and services
- over 1 million people travelling to work and study almost every day
- producing hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste to landfill and incineration every year.

A vision for HE's contribution to sustainable development

29.   We intend to make sustainable development a central part of our strategy for the future development of higher education. Our vision is that, within the next 10 years, the HE sector in England will be recognised as a major contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability –

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[5] Consolidated data from the HESA aggregate staff records and individualised student records, 2002-03, for staff and students in English higher education institutions.

[6] Energy (all fuels) data from participating institutions in the Estates Management Statistics data report 2002-03 (HEFCE 2003/56).

[7] Water data from participating institutions in the EMS data report 2002-03 (ibid).

through the skills and knowledge that its graduates learn and put into practice, and through its own strategies and operations.

30.   Practically, this means the higher education sector, supported by HEFCE, will be encouraged to:

- embed the principles of sustainable development in its values, strategies, operations and organisational learning
- develop curricula, pedagogy and extra-curricular activities that enable students to develop the values, skills and knowledge to contribute to sustainable development
- strengthen links to businesses, the community, civil society, government and others in pursuit of sustainable development
- build the new skills, knowledge and tools needed for sustainable development through research
- continuously improve its own impact on the environment, society and the economy.

What is the role of HEFCE?

31.   HEFCE is a major funder of English higher education, providing £6 billion per annum, which represents a third of the sector's total income from all sources. Our mission statement is:

'Working in partnership, we promote and fund high-quality, cost-effective teaching and research, meeting the diverse needs of students, the economy and society.'

32.   We believe this mission gives us a responsibility to incorporate the principles of sustainable development into our relationship with institutions, so that our activities meet the diverse needs of students, the economy and society both now and, more importantly, in the future.

33.   In choosing how to incorporate these principles we must balance a number of factors, including the nature of our existing relationship with the sector and the changing characteristics of English higher education at the start of the 21st century. We must also recognise that HEFCE is just one funder among a range of other stakeholders, each with their own responsibilities and interests. Any actions we take must be designed in dialogue with these stakeholders, otherwise we risk working at cross purposes or in the worst case encouraging activities that are explicitly discouraged by other organisations. Finally, we acknowledge that many institutions have already recognised their responsibilities in contributing to sustainable development. For those institutions this document is arriving long after the start of the process.

34.   All this points towards a support role for HEFCE in four key areas:

- engaging with stakeholders to bring about policy synergies on sustainable development
- building the capacity of people to manage sustainable development
- sharing good practice, or supporting the development of good practice where none exists
- rewarding more sustainable behaviour.

35.   Below we lay out our principles for engaging with the sector, which illustrate in more detail our approach to pursuing the vision and tackling these four roles. The four roles also set the framework for the first action plan.

Benefits of sustainable development

36.   Managing sustainable development properly, whether in higher education or elsewhere, means accepting that it is often impossible to reconcile economic, social, environmental and ethical objectives in a mutually beneficial way. Rather, hard choices must be made between conflicting priorities. These choices will inevitably carry costs for some people and resources.

37.   However, there may also be some short-term benefits for institutions in beginning the transition to sustainable development. These include: enhanced reputation among stakeholders (including prospective students); aligning curricula with a growing market for sustainable development skills; new sources of research funding from business and the public sector; and reduced energy and maintenance costs. While it is important not to overstate these potential benefits, we believe their value is likely to increase as we enter a period of heightened competition.

Principles of engagement

38.   Underlying our vision and the support role we have identified above are five principles for engaging with the sector. These seek to reconcile the urgency of sustainable development with the current characteristics of English higher education. Their purpose is to guide our approach to pursuing sustainable development (beginning with the first action plan); and to provide some qualitative measures to help us evaluate the strategy itself. They apply equally to what HEFCE will do (as an organisation) and what we will help the sector to do (as a funder).

39.   These principles are:

- questioning 'business as usual'
- building on existing activity
- taking the long-term view
- being open about success and failure
- involving everyone.

40.   In addition, we will apply the principles of our mission statement and strategic plan. These are common to all our interactions with the sector. Particularly relevant here are:

- building on institutions' strengths
- excellence in delivery
- working in partnership (as discussed above).

Questioning 'business as usual'

41.   Our vision is based on a belief that higher education has a pivotal role to play in sustainable development *by virtue of its core activities*. Indeed these core activities – teaching and research – already make a big contribution, respectively, by training graduates to analyse information, identify options, and solve complex problems; and by pushing forward the

boundaries of human knowledge. Hence the challenge is not to transform these activities, but to make sure they take account of the urgency of the challenges we face as a society. In other words, the vision demands that higher education questions in a thoroughgoing way the continuation of 'business as usual'. This also applies to the way institutions are managed.

Building on existing activity

42.   Much good work in sustainable development is already happening across the higher education sector and it is not our intention to try to displace it. However, much of this work is being done in isolation within individual institutions or small groups of institutions, so some initiatives have to reinvent what has already been successfully implemented elsewhere.

43.   This points to a need for more sharing of good and emerging practice within and among institutions, and we see this as an important role for HEFCE. We begin with the case studies set out in the action plan.

Taking the long-term view

44.   A weakness shared by many previous attempts to encourage higher education to begin the transition to sustainable development is the unsustainability of the change process itself. All too often these attempts have relied on the support of individual enthusiasts or on special funding initiatives with a short lifespan. The result is that some of the excellent work done (including the groundbreaking report, 'Environmental responsibility: an agenda for further and higher education' led by Peter Toyne and published in 1993) has made little lasting impression on the sector as a whole.

45.   This strategy aims to break the cycle of unsustainability by taking a long-term view of the transition to sustainable development. In particular, it is imperative that any work we support learns the lessons of the past, is targeted at embedding change, and is consistent with our long-term aspiration to drive the principles of sustainable development through our core funding activities.

Being open about success and failure

46.   We do not intend to pursue a one-size-fits-all approach to sustainable development, prescribed by a set of targets. We believe that the transition to sustainable development depends on having an open debate about the tensions inherent in trying to manage economic, social, ethical and environmental objectives. While it is important to have a set of metrics which can demonstrate performance and improvement in sustainable development to our stakeholders, attaching a set of targets to these metrics is not conducive to a climate of open debate.

47.   The innovation so crucial to the success of sustainable development will also work much better in a climate of openness, where success is shared and failure learned from.

Involving everyone

48.   Our vision makes clear the opportunities for higher education to contribute to sustainable development across a range of different functions. Sustainable development should not be regarded as the responsibility of a sub-set of people, such as environmental officers, but rather

as something to which everyone can contribute. This holistic view of participation also extends beyond the sector – to the relationships institutions have with their stakeholders.

Building on institutions' strengths

49.   Building on institutions' strengths is one of the three cross-cutting aims in the HEFCE strategic plan. It has important implications for our approach to sustainable development, particularly in terms of encouraging institutions to pursue sustainable development through the things they already do well, and in respecting the diversity in the sector.

50.   Research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on governmental sustainable development strategies has concluded that the most successful strategies are those that build on existing policies and processes, rather than adding new ones. The vision we set out above reflects this conclusion by deliberately focusing on what higher education does best. The implication for our action plan is that it should focus on encouraging institutions to pursue sustainable development in areas where they already exhibit excellence, rather than treating sustainable development as an add-on. Mainstreaming activity in this way will also help to avoid any substantial new accountability burdens.

51.   Diversity is a defining characteristic of higher education in this country. This is reflected in the contribution which many institutions are already making to sustainable development. Some examples of this activity are shown in the accompanying action plan. Our approach to sustainable development will mirror this diversity through a multi-track approach – enabling institutions to follow activities which are consistent with their individual circumstances (although we expect this to be underpinned by a genuine commitment to question 'business as usual').

52.   Diversity is also reflected in our view of what constitutes sustainable development. We have not developed an elaborate and inflexible definition of sustainable development against which to measure performance and progress. Given how little we all know about what sustainable development will eventually entail, such a definition seems premature. Rather we view it as institutions' responsibility to define what sustainable development means for them through dialogue with their students, staff and other stakeholders.

Excellence in delivery

53.   Finally, we recognise that we must improve our own performance in sustainable development. This implies two activities: improving the impact of the Council as a business, particularly on the natural environment; and beginning to reflect on our core relationships with institutions, to identify where we are unwittingly encouraging unsustainable actions, or discouraging sustainable ones.

54.   The accompanying action plan outlines how we will continue to improve our performance. It also identifies a number of areas where our activities currently promote unsustainable activity. We are committed to continuing this process of reflecting on our key business processes, identifying and correcting areas where sustainable development may be impeded. A key milestone here will be the publication of the next HEFCE strategic plan in 2006.

Action plan for sustainable development in HE

55.   This action plan sets out concisely and comprehensively a series of practical actions we propose to take within the parameters outlined in our support strategy. In most cases these actions are just the first steps on a long journey and not an end in themselves. Nevertheless we believe that implementing these commitments now will bring lasting benefits. We plan to accomplish all of actions proposed before the publication of the next HEFCE strategic plan in 2006.

56.   This plan is organised around the four support roles identified in the accompanying support strategy. These are:

- engaging with stakeholders to bring about policy synergies on sustainable development
- building the capacity of people to manage sustainable development
- sharing good practice, or supporting the development of good practice where none exists
- rewarding more sustainable behaviour.

57.   Under each role, the plan identifies a number of issues we think ought to be addressed and then describes the specific action to be taken. Although actions are listed separately under each objective, we intend that work in any area will inform work in others. A good example would be the work on curricula and pedagogy led by the Higher Education Academy, which we hope will encourage other stakeholders to introduce the principles of sustainable development into their various requirements.

58.   Below we have included case studies of work already under way in the sector. These demonstrate both the breadth of opportunities available, and that it is realistic and beneficial within current resource constraints to begin the transition to sustainable development. We hope these case studies will inspire much more activity.

59.   The plan concludes with a section on what we will be doing to improve our own performance as a medium-sized business employing about 250 people.

Support role 1
Engaging with stakeholders to bring about policy synergies on sustainable development

60.   Institutions exist in an increasingly heterogeneous funding and regulatory environment. For every activity there is a range of stakeholder groups, each with their own responsibilities, interests and influence – and their own views on sustainable development. Any moves we or institutions take to pursue sustainable development must be developed through dialogue with these stakeholders. Otherwise we risk working at cross purposes or failing to harness the forward momentum which already exists.

61.   This section sets out what we will do to engage with stakeholders to make sure that does not happen. We view this as our most important role in supporting sustainable development.

Developing curricula and pedagogy

62.   In our view the greatest contribution higher education has to make to sustainable development is by enabling students to develop new values, skills and knowledge. The main (though not the only) way to make this happen is through developments in curricula and pedagogy.

63.   Below (paragraphs 88-89) we set out our proposals for supporting the Higher Education Academy to identify, share and augment good practice in curricular and pedagogical developments. We recognise, however, that other groups – including employers, professional bodies, quality assurance agencies and students – must also be engaged with this work, since these groups exercise such a great influence on what is taught and how. Equally important are teaching staff, who must be convinced of the benefits of new approaches, in a teaching and learning environment which has already seen great changes in recent years.

64.   This points to a key role for HEFCE in engaging with a range of groups around the issues of curricula and pedagogy, and particularly in raising the demand among all parties for courses which develop the values, skills and knowledge to contribute to sustainable development. It will also be important for us to engage with people from other parts of the education system, including schools and further education, to identify how we can help each other promote teaching and learning about sustainable development at all stages.

Action: Building on the work of the Higher Education Academy in identifying, sharing and augmenting good practice in curricular and pedagogical developments, we will:
- **build links to employers, professional bodies and students – all aimed at encouraging these groups to view sustainable development as a desirable component of higher education courses**
- **explore with the Quality Assurance Agency, Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) how a contribution to sustainable development could be used as an indicator of high quality taught provision**
- **continue to work with the Learning and Skills Council to ensure this activity meets the needs of institutions providing higher and further education.**

Case study: Sustainability in the curriculum

Kingston University has responded to the challenge of delivering sustainable education by undertaking an audit of sustainability in the curriculum.

Further information:
e-mail J.Tang@kingston.ac.uk
web-site www.kingston.ac.uk/sustainability

Priorities and objectives

- An audit to determine where and how sustainability is delivered in the curriculum, as a springboard for new curriculum developments and delivery.

- Cross-subject links between curriculum developments and the sustainability agenda.

- Identify opportunities for related research and consultancy.

- Contribute to the development of a university-wide response to government initiatives and benchmarks, and maintain awareness of developing legislation and policy initiatives.

- Promote sustainability awareness throughout Kingston University and engage all staff and students with that philosophy.

Method

A first step was an audit and university-wide survey. This sought to evaluate the following: personal knowledge of the concept of sustainability; perceptions of Kingston's performance in terms of sustainable environmental management; the role of subject-related professional associations and institutions in driving or inhibiting change towards sustainable development; and perceived barriers to extending the volume and content of sustainability teaching within curricula.

Outcomes

The audit identified some key constraints:

- existing curriculum overload

- perceived irrelevance of sustainability issues to the curriculum

- benchmark requirements of accreditation bodies

- lack of immediate staff expertise

- expectations that students would regard issues as irrelevant, or be unable to grasp them.

Solutions

Notwithstanding the barriers identified, the audit revealed that 93 per cent of respondents were keen to establish seminars, internet exchanges, a newsletter, and further development of the sustainability intranet and web-site to raise awareness and support. Three key recommendations for action call for:

- wider dissemination of the audit findings

- practical initiatives to demonstrate commitment

- a university-wide management system to drive the sustainable development agenda.

The audit also identified specific solutions to enable the development of sustainability-focused curricula, as follows:

- empowerment of course teams and the encouragement of cross-faculty, cross-school and cross-disciplinary initiatives in module and course design

- deeper engagement of tutors and students in the design and delivery of sustainability-focused modules, building on student interest and commitment

- promoting an inclusive approach to staff development in sustainability education

- improved and directed communication

- resolving issues of course structure, including the resource base and course review and validation processes.

Progress to date

Key milestones have been achieved, driven by the establishment of a sustainability steering group and the commissioning of the university-wide audit. A cross-university post of 'sustainability facilitator' and a postgraduate assistant post have been funded to manage the process. Progress has been significant and holistic in approach:

- a section of the web-site collating sustainability activities at Kingston University and external information pertinent to sustainability

- ongoing mapping of sustainability activities at Kingston

- a national conference

- curriculum developments that now begin to link student work with practical and 'real' learning objectives

- embedding of sustainability through a five-year programme for concerted action in five key areas

- outline approach for an environmental management system

- development of promotional 'joining pack' materials for new students for 2004

- successful bid for HEFCE funding under the second round of the Higher Education Innovation Fund.

Financial sustainability

65. Until now, 'sustainability' has often been given a rather narrow financial meaning in higher education. We now regard it as a much broader issue. Yet financial sustainability remains important, because we cannot expect institutions to embrace the long-term view on which a commitment to sustainable development is founded without some confidence in their own survival. A good example is the whole-life approach to building and refurbishment, which takes

account of the costs of maintenance, refurbishment, renovation and demolition. The pay back on whole-life costing is proven, but takes place over decades.

Action: We will continue to work with partners, including HM Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, and through initiatives including the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC), to pursue financial sustainability for English institutions.

Capital funding

66.   In 2004-05 the Government allocated about £670 million in capital to higher education institutions in England. Capital funding has specific criteria governing how it is spent, and to this extent it is a useful tool for encouraging institutions to behave more sustainably in areas such as construction, which can exact a heavy environmental toll. (Our proposals for action on construction are laid out in the following sections.) However, we also recognise that capital funding may also hinder sustainable development because the associated deadlines for expenditure can militate against institutions taking new and innovative approaches. Again a good example is construction, where some institutions have argued that the strict deadlines associated with funding for the Science Research Investment Fund have made the risks of experimenting with more sustainable building too great.

67.   This points to a need for greater flexibility in allocating capital funding. We already plan to increase flexibility by co-ordinating the allocation of learning and teaching, research and infrastructure capital and by reducing reporting requirements at project level. We are also exploring with our partners how we can improve our capital monitoring systems to provide institutions with greater flexibility and encourage longer-term planning

Action: We will work with HM Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Education and Skills to improve capital monitoring systems, providing institutions with greater flexibility and encouragement for longer-term planning.

Minimising the accountability burden

68.   For us, and many other funders of higher education, sustainable development is a new responsibility. As such it will inevitably lead to changes in our information requirements, so that we can gain a sense of how the sector is performing. However, we recognise the risk that new information requirements may either add to what is already in some areas an overly-burdensome accountability framework; or may skew priorities by imposing a set of indicators that are regarded as ends in themselves and not as indicating progress towards sustainable development. Thus it is vital for us to work with other interested bodies to devise a co-ordinated approach.

Action: We will work with other stakeholders committed to sustainable development to co-ordinate any associated reporting requirements.

69.   More broadly, disproportionate accountability requirements in all areas could impede the transition to sustainable development if they consume resources which could best be applied elsewhere. We have worked hard over recent years to make sure our accountability requirements are consistent with the five principles of good regulation set out by the

Government's Better Regulation Task Force.[8] This work has included a reduction in both the value and number of different special funding streams; changes to the assessment of teaching quality; and reforms to the audit code of practice. A recent report by PA Consulting showed that these changes and others have resulted in a 25 per cent decrease in real terms over the period 2000-04 in the total funds spent by institutions on accounting for HEFCE funds.[9]

70.   However, we are mindful that there is always room to improve and we are committed to working with a range of stakeholders, including the new Higher Education Regulation Review Group.

Action: We will work with stakeholders, in particular the Higher Education Regulation Review Group, to ensure our reporting requirements continue to be consistent with the five principles of good regulation.

The regional level

71.   The ties between institutions and their regions are strengthening, helped by the creation of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Regional issues are also becoming important for HEFCE, particularly in widening participation where we see regional lifelong learning networks as a key part of helping non-traditional students to participate in higher education.

72.   The RDAs have been asked by Government to draw up sustainable development strategies for their regions. These strategies will affect their relationships with institutions. There is an obvious opportunity here to bring about synergies between the RDAs and HEFCE in regional higher education policy.

Action: We will work with the RDAs to bring about policy synergies around sustainable development.

Research

73.   Our role in supporting research in higher education can broadly be described as providing funds for the underpinning research infrastructure, which includes the salaries of permanent academic staff, premises, libraries and central computing costs. These funds are the basis for the pursuit of basic 'blues skies' research and project work. They are spent at institutions' discretion: it does not normally fall within our remit actively to encourage particular forms of research.

74.   However, as is clear from our vision, we firmly believe that the higher education sector has an important contribution to make to sustainable development through its research activities across the subject spectrum. Hence we now wish to explore with the Research Councils and other research funders whether these research efforts could be strengthened.
Action: We will explore with the Research Councils and other research funders whether research could be strengthened to build the new skills, knowledge and tools needed for sustainable development in all subject areas.

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[8] www.brtf.gov.uk/

[9] PA Consulting (2004), 'Better accountability revisited: review of accountability costs 2004', on the web at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications/R&D reports.

Support role 2
Building the capacity of people to manage sustainable development

75.   In the previous section we set out the first round of actions we will take to bring about policy synergies on sustainable development among major funders of higher education and other stakeholders. We believe these actions are crucial, but they are not enough by themselves. Institutions are equally important players in developing policy. They need to demonstrate a willingness to pursue sustainable development so that other bodies, including funders, see it as a high priority for the sector.

76.   The next three sections set out our first-round actions for helping the higher education sector to do this, with a particular emphasis on areas where we have an established strategic and/or financial interest. This section deals with our approach to supporting the development of skills required to manage sustainable development.

Leadership

77.   Leaders have a crucial practical role to play in supporting the transition to sustainable development, by guiding institutions' strategic planning, managing major capital programmes and leading the institutions' interactions with external stakeholders. Leaders also have a symbolic role in influencing the views of staff and students about sustainable development. Thus it is extremely important that leaders have the skills to take decisions which are compatible with this agenda.

78.   In developing this action plan we have talked with many leaders, including members of our own external advisory group and the Universities UK/SCOP group on sustainability, and those attending the 2004 HEFCE Conference. These discussions have demonstrated a broad consensus about the need for sustainable development and about the contribution higher education has to make. Against this commitment, however, lies a range of apparently competing responsibilities, not least institutions' financial performance.

79.   This points to a need for more support for leaders in integrating the principles of sustainable development into other established processes. We are pleased to see that the Leadership Foundation has identified sustainability as one of its 15 key strategic challenges for higher education, and is designing elements of its Top Management Programme around this agenda.

Action: We will continue to support the Leadership Foundation in embedding sustainable development in its courses and programmes.

Management

80.   Sustainable development is a process of learning new skills and knowledge. This process is as applicable to staff as to students. Only institutions that give staff the opportunity to develop new skills, and build these skills into staff development, will be able to manage sustainable development successfully.

81.   We regard our investment in people management – primarily through the Rewarding and Developing Staff in HE (R&DS) initiative – as a catalyst in the transition towards sustainable development. We assume that institutions are committed to continuous improvement in their people management, which carries with it a reasonable requirement to review and assess current activity and progress. To this end, the sector's own professional HR bodies (the Universities Personnel Association and the SCOP Personnel Network) have developed a self-assessment tool, which enables HEIs to measure practice and performance in people management in a systematic and evidence-based way. (We are currently consulting on the use of this tool for mainstreaming R&DS funds, see HEFCE 2004/43. The tool itself can be viewed on the web with the consultation document at www.hefce.ac.uk, under Publications.)

82.   Managing sustainable development will also require people to learn new skills and knowledge and to combine these with a range of different perspectives. Key here are HR processes that prioritise skills and competencies regardless of age, sex, ethnic background, religion or sexual orientation; and the maintenance of a diverse workforce which represents society and the student population. The work of the Equality Challenge Unit, jointly funded by HEFCE to encourage institutions to promote diversity and equality of opportunity, will continue to be important in this regard.

Action: As catalysts in the transition to sustainable development, we will continue to:
- **allocate funds through the Rewarding and Developing Staff initiative**
- **support the implementation of the self-assessment tool for people management**
- **support the Equality Challenge Unit.**

Construction and refurbishment

83.   The total estate of the English higher education sector has been measured at 24.6 million m^2. The buildings that make up this vast estate have a heavy impact on the sustainability of the natural environment. Construction in general accounts for 40 per cent, or 3 billion tons, of the total flow of raw materials into the global economy every year. Then there are impacts associated with the use and maintenance of buildings, particularly the energy needed to heat and light them, and finally the waste produced by demolition.

84.   Modern construction and refurbishment methods make it possible to significantly improve the impact of buildings while also reducing lifetime costs and improving the experiences of occupants. These methods are becoming increasingly popular, which is evident from new standards in the construction of schools and hospitals. There are also examples of leading-edge construction in the higher education sector, including the two case studies below.

85.   We believe there is a strong case for higher education to adopt these new methods of construction and refurbishment, so that more sustainable buildings become commonplace. To help achieve this, alongside our actions on capital funding set out in paragraphs 66-67, and in partnership with the sector's representative bodies, we propose to fund a programme aimed specifically at boosting the sector's own capacity to manage more sustainable buildings. This programme will include enhancements to the Estates Management Statistics service, and support for the development of building assessment methods.

Action: In partnership with representative bodies, we will fund activity aimed at building the sector's capacity to manage more sustainable buildings.

Case study: Sustainable construction

The Devonshire Building at the University of Newcastle houses its Environmental and Sustainability Research Institute and the North-East Regional e-Science Research Centre. Its design reflects the major cultural changes in the academic structure of the university, breaking down traditional departmental boundaries and encouraging interaction between building users. It also promotes stronger links with business and the private sector. At the same time it delivers high internal quality and low energy consumption, exceeding current UK best practice targets by about 30 per cent.

Further information:
e-mail Estates-Customer-Services@ncl.ac.uk
web-site http://estates.ncl.ac.uk

The building capitalises on the local climate and natural light and ventilation. The massing of the building will optimise natural ventilation. Facades respond to the weather to optimise daylight levels and solar penetration according to the time of day and season. Efficient 'active' services such as displacement ventilation and geothermal cooling help meet the cooling loads associated with some of the laboratories.

The structure of the building allows for movable partitions, giving a high degree of flexibility in future space planning. In fact it is largely open plan and laboratories are large and multi-user. The use of materials that require less energy to manufacture, construct and dispose of, and recycled materials, and prefabrication of primary structural elements, have maintained quality but speeded up construction.

The building fabric provides for collection of solar energy and grey water recycling to reduce waste and manage water resources.

The building is the first university laboratory in the country to achieve an award of excellence under the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM). This is considered to be a 'gold standard' for the UK construction sector. It also won the Sustainability Award and the Building of the Year Award for the North East 2004 (RICS North East Renaissance Awards).

Support role 3
Sharing good practice, or supporting the development of good practice where none exists

86. In developing these documents, we have met a large number of people working in higher education who are sympathetic to sustainable development but apparently lack the means and support to put it into practice. In fact, there is a wide range of advice available, as well as case studies of how this advice can be implemented, but the response of many of the people we talked to indicates that this advice lacks visibility or credibility. There are also other areas, for example curricula and pedagogy, where guidance is sparse and needs to be built up.

87. In this section we address the challenge of building, sharing, and testing the applicability of good practice through a number of different actions. All these actions will be signposted centrally from the section of our web-site devoted to sustainability. Over time the site will be developed to provide further guidance and tools to help people deliver on the commitments in this plan.

Developing curricula and pedagogy

88. Our view is that the greatest contribution higher education has to make to sustainable development is through the skills and knowledge that its graduates learn and put into practice. Ironically this is the one area where good practice seems to be weakest. This points to an urgent need for HEFCE to support the development of curricula and pedagogy.

89. We are providing £1.1 million to the Higher Education Academy to address a number of specific priorities, one of which is developing a programme for identifying, sharing and augmenting good practice in learning about sustainable development. We will be asking the Higher Education Academy to ensure that its programme can be applied to HE delivered in further education colleges. More information is available on the academy's web-site, www.heacademy.ac.uk under Thematic work/Curriculum.

90. We have also received bids for a Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning on sustainable development (see HEFCE 2004/05). A circular letter detailing the outcomes of this exercise will be published in January 2005.

Action: We will provide dedicated funds to the Higher Education Academy for a programme of identifying, sharing and augmenting good practice in learning about sustainable development.

Sharing existing good practice

91. We are not aware of a higher education institution anywhere in the world that has managed to adopt in a holistic way the principles of sustainable development. But there is a substantial body of good practice guidance on improving particular functions which can help institutions to begin the transition. This guidance tends to be strongest in areas such as energy efficiency and waste management, where challenges are common to other sectors and where there is a financial incentive to improve. More recently we have seen the emergence of guidance dedicated to the HE sector, including through the Higher Education Partnerships for Sustainability, in areas such as purchasing and financial management where good practice has been relatively weak.

92.   To make this good practice more visible, and to encourage its uptake, we are developing the sustainability section of our web-site to provide signposts to a wide range of information on, for example:

- curricula and pedagogy
- construction and refurbishment
- environmental management systems
- purchasing and procurement
- travel, transport and accessibility
- resource and asset management
- communications.

93.   We will work with representative bodies to ensure this guidance is consistent with their needs and with professional good practice.

Action: We will build and maintain a section of our web-site dedicated to raising the visibility of existing good practice on sustainable development, in partnership with other bodies.

Case study: Environmental purchasing policy

Leeds Metropolitan University has had an environmental purchasing policy since 1995, aimed at embedding environmental issues into all parts of its supply chain. The success and public profile of individual projects has helped increase awareness and commitment from an increasing number of staff, students and suppliers.

Further information:
e-mail M.Briggs@leedsmet.ac.uk
web-site www.leedsmet.ac.uk/services_to_business/environment_info.htm

Aim

To prompt staff involved in the procurement of goods and services to use environmental responsibility as a factor in their purchasing decisions, including by:

- considering goods and services which can be manufactured, used and disposed of in an environmentally responsible way

- giving preference, where items are of a similar cost, to those that are manufactured with a high recycled content

- specifying items that can be recycled or re-used

- considering the energy usage/cost of operating equipment prior to purchase

- favouring suppliers that are committed to environmental improvement

- considering whole-life costs and impacts when assessing equipment for purchase.

Outcomes

- **Green electricity.** Green electricity generated from renewable sources purchased since 1999 at no additional cost.

- **Waste disposal.** A pay-by-weight waste disposal contract allows monitoring of the waste sent to landfill and the waste recycled, enabling an increase in recycling to 28 per cent with a corresponding decrease in disposal costs.

- **Paper.** Paper with a 100 per cent recycled content represents 45 per cent of all purchases.

- **Stationery.** Moved from a daily to a weekly stationery delivery. This has helped reduce van deliveries to all sites, reduced packaging, increased processing efficiencies and attracted an extra 1 per cent discount.

- **Building projects.** Examples include using road aggregate manufactured from waste materials to resurface an internal road and car park on the Headingley campus, and the use of natural wool Thermafleece as insulation in roof voids.

- **Photocopiers.** All copiers can perform double sided copying and can be networked.

- **Two-way dialogue with suppliers.** Environmental performance of main suppliers is monitored and reported back with suggestions for improvement.

- **Certification to ISO14001.** The purchasing and environment office gained certification to the international environmental standard ISO14001 in 2003.

Building new practice

94.   While a substantial amount of good practice exists, there are areas where it is either considered incompatible with higher education or absent altogether. There is also the challenge of taking a range of isolated functions and cross-fertilising them with other functions, leading to a more holistic approach to sustainable development.

95.   In these areas we recognise a role for HEFCE: in testing the applicability of good practice drawn from other sectors; building good practice where none exists; and helping institutions to explore how sustainable development can be embedded holistically within management systems. To undertake this role in the first instance we will invite applications to our Leadership, Governance and Management Fund (LGM), which is aimed at encouraging the development of good practice and providing measurable change in the quality of management and organisational performance. We hope that this consultation process will achieve greater consensus on the key barriers to embedding sustainability, and thus will stimulate genuinely collaborative proposals to the LGM fund to address these barriers.

96.   Proposals can be made to the LGM fund at any time until July 2007 (see HEFCE 2004/26 for details). Successful applications will be publicised through our web-site.

Action: We will invite applications to the Leadership, Governance and Management Fund aimed at developing good practice in sustainable development.

Carbon management

97.   There is now international scientific consensus that the climate is changing, and that people have a role in accelerating it. Most scientists agree, however, that the worst effects of climate change might be minimised if emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide are dramatically reduced. The UK Government has responded by committing to a 60 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

98.   One of the Government's delivery agents for this emissions target is the Carbon Trust. The role of the trust is to help UK business and the public sector meet ongoing targets for carbon dioxide emissions, to support the development of UK based low carbon technologies, and to increase business competitiveness through resource efficiency. Through its carbon management programme the trust works in partnership with organisations to develop robust carbon management strategies and implementation plans. Through a number of pilot projects, it has identified higher education as a fertile sector for the introduction of carbon management, because of the sector's huge total consumption of energy and its interactions with students. The trust is now working on the development of a carbon management programme for higher education.

99.   We view the adoption of carbon management as one way in which institutions can begin the transition to sustainable development. It is also an ideal way of demonstrating this transition to external stakeholders, including funders and students. Thus we are supporting the Carbon Trust's work to test its carbon management programme among a pilot group of institutions in 2005-06.

100.   We would like to invite you to consider the opportunity to collaborate with the Carbon Trust by participating in its new pilot programme to promote better carbon management in the sector. You can find out more about the programme and the support available at www.thecarbontrust.co.uk or by e-mailing Richard.Rugg@thecarbontrust.co.uk.

Action: We will work with the Carbon Trust in supporting a pilot group of institutions to develop, test and refine a carbon management programme for HE.

Research and evaluation

101.   The actions set out in this plan constitute the first round of our activities in sustainable development, which we aim to accomplish before the publication of the next HEFCE strategic plan in 2006. The success of subsequent activities will depend on a much greater understanding of the parameters of sustainable development in higher education and how it connects to other agendas. In some senses these connections are unknowable before the implementation of this plan and other events, including the introduction of top-up fees in 2006. But it is important that we begin to commission research now aimed at broadening our knowledge and identifying priority areas for future work.

Action: We will commission research and evaluation projects exploring the barriers to sustainable development in higher education and how these might be overcome.

Case study: New facilities and student accommodation

The Oxstalls campus at the University of Gloucestershire was commissioned in October 2000 and completed by September 2002. It is a new sports science campus on a 15 acre brownfield site in Gloucester, and includes a new learning resource centre, a sports science building and student accommodation.

Further information:

e-mail mjesnick@glos.ac.uk

web-site www.glos.ac.uk

Objectives

Key objectives included:

- environmental control

- low energy consumption

- use of a brownfield site

- reduced movement of students, and integration with the green transport policy.

The 175 student bedrooms are arranged in five linked villas, with a laundrette, support services and a common room. The whole is landscaped with terraces and pools. The development is well liked by the students. Housing the students on-site cuts down on movement, and a free bus service linking the various campuses and student residential areas to the city is part of Oxstalls' green transport policy.

Oxstalls was awarded the Civic Trust's Sustainability Award 2003 and an RIBA award in 2003.

Support role 4
Rewarding more sustainable behaviour

102.   In keeping with the principles of engagement set out in the support strategy, it is our aspiration to reward more sustainable behaviour mainly through core funding and not through special funding initiatives which, by definition, are short-lived. We view this as an aspiration because it is a long-term, incremental process which depends on a number of variables, in particular:

- the co-operation and support of a range of other stakeholders, including institutions themselves
- the development of transparent, robust and efficient measures with which institutions can give a sense of performance and improvement.

103.   We will begin this process through three actions: forging stronger links with the community, taking a more sustainable approach to managing the higher education estate, and reporting on sustainable development.

Stronger links to the community

104.   Many institutions have long-established ties to their surrounding communities, founded on what they regard as a responsibility to strengthen the social fabric which surrounds and supports them. A good example of this is staff and students doing voluntary work for local community groups. We recognise the importance of this role and support it through our 'third stream' funding to encourage links between HE and business and the community.

105.   Although rarely described in these terms, implicit in much of this community work are some of the principles of sustainable development, and particularly the objective of maintaining local social capital. As such we believe this work ought to become a permanent part of all institutions' strategy and operations, formally recognised and funded by HEFCE and other bodies. As part of preparing for the third round of the Higher Education Innovation Fund, we intend to develop a set of metrics for community activities. If suitable metrics can be identified, they will be used to drive funding allocations.

Action: We will develop a set of metrics for institutions' community activities. If suitable metrics can be identified, they will be used to drive funding allocations under the Higher Education Innovation Fund.

A more sustainable approach to managing the estate

106.   In the first and second sections of this plan we proposed, respectively, changes to capital funding and a programme to build capacity in managing more sustainable construction. In the medium term, changes to the way capital funding is allocated could also mean introducing a self-assessment methodology, with a strand focusing on the sustainability of infrastructure. We plan to consult government and sector bodies on this new approach during 2005.

107.   The self-assessment methodology will be a balanced view across all the management functions undertaken by those with a remit for estates, infrastructure and facilities. As each

institution is structured differently this will, by necessity, look at high level strategic issues relating to sustainability of the physical environment. It will take into account the identification of risks, the levels of investment, and the links to the corporate plan.

108.   The incentive for reaching the highest levels of attainment in the self-assessment will be access to unfettered capital funding from HEFCE. There would then be no requirement to apply for approvals at individual project level, no notifications of contractual commitments, and reduced requirements for audits at project level on completion. To reach and maintain this lower level of scrutiny by HEFCE, institutions will need to demonstrate the delivery of their overall estates strategy.

Action: We will develop good practice for estates, from which the self-assessment methodology will derive. The methodology will be developed to enable institutions to give the necessary assurance to stakeholders, and will incorporate suitable arrangements for verification.

Reporting on sustainable development

109.   One of the barriers we face to rewarding more sustainable behaviour is the apparent lack of a suitable reporting mechanism for higher education. This is in contrast to the private sector, where a number of independent reporting mechanisms exist to help companies disclose their social, environmental and ethical performance; to compare it with the performance of their competitors; and to identify areas for improvement. These mechanisms are seen as key to the progress made by many companies over recent years.

110.   Developing an appropriate reporting mechanism for HE is a high priority. Our aspirations are that it must be transparent and generate consistent and auditable results, but at the same time be consistent with our principles of engagement. In particular it should respect institutional diversity, complement institutions' existing systems and structures, and facilitate a process of genuine reflection and improvement – not one of secrecy and competition.

111.   With these criteria in mind, we intend to support several institutions in testing different review and reporting methodologies, which will help us identify a mechanism or mechanisms to recommend to the wider sector.

Action: We will support the testing of different sustainable development review and reporting methodologies to help us identify a mechanism or mechanisms to recommend to the wider sector.

112.   In time we will wish to consider how these mechanisms can be embedded within our formal relationships with institutions. We could, for example, ask institutions to publish an annual statement on their performance, rather like the corporate social responsibility statements published by many listed companies as part of their annual accounts. Alternatively we could ask institutions to use their corporate plans to set sustainable development priorities and then monitor performance against these priorities through the annual monitoring statement submitted to us. A third and perhaps more attractive possibility is for institutions to demonstrate their work on sustainable development as part of institutional risk management, building on our approach to estates good practice.

The next HEFCE strategic plan

113.   Finally we turn to the issue of what will happen once the actions in this plan have been achieved. In our vision of higher education's contribution to sustainable development, we signalled our commitment to 'make sustainable development a central part of our strategy for the future development of the higher education sector'. We believe that implementing the actions in this plan now will bring lasting benefits. However, making sustainable development a central part of our strategy demands a more co-ordinated and holistic approach than is possible with a single plan. So we intend to make sustainable development a key theme of the next HEFCE strategic plan, published in 2006. This means that the next strategic plan will act in part as the next sustainable development action plan, which is why the actions in this plan have been designed around a two-year timetable.

Case study: Benchmarking for business in the environment

Eight universities in Yorkshire and the Humber have participated in the annual Regional Index of Corporate Environmental Engagement since 1999. These universities have compared well with regional, national and international businesses operating in the region. They have also realised steady improvements in performance scores year-on-year.

Further information:
e-mail m.warner@leedsmet.ac.uk
web-site www.leedsmet.ac.uk/services_to_business/environment_info.htm

The eight participating institutions are the Universities of York, Sheffield, Bradford, Huddersfield, Leeds and Hull, Leeds Metropolitan University and Sheffield Hallam University. The table below shows the average scores achieved by these eight institutions.

Outcomes

The increase in average scores from 1999 to 2004 shows how participating universities in Yorkshire and the Humber have improved their commitment to environmental management.

Although many had policies and a board member responsible for environmental issues in 1999, major improvements have been seen in the development of environmental supplier programmes, employee engagement and stakeholder dialogue.

Targets and objectives are now in place for the majority of participants – making clear commitments to improvements in environmental performance.

Key learning points

By publicly reporting their commitment to environmental management, these universities have taken an important step in acknowledging the impacts they have on the local and global environment.

Participants in the index receive detailed feedback which gives them a better understanding of how they can continually improve their performance over time, tracking progress each year.

Issue	1999 (%)	2004 (%)	Improvement (%)
Leadership	86	100	+14
Policy	93	100	+7
Objectives	50	90	+40
Targets	71	79	+8
Audit	21	71	+50
Supplier programme	29	42	+13
Employee programme	0	73	+73
Stakeholder dialogue	39	84	+45

Actions for HEFCE

114. We recognise that we need to begin our own transition to sustainable development. This will bring benefits to the environment and to our local society and will also help us to learn first-hand about the financial and social parameters of sustainable development. This should help, in turn, to inform our outward-facing activity in this area.

115. HEFCE is a medium-sized organisation employing about 250 people and based on two separate sites: a headquarters in north Bristol and a small office in central London. Our performance as an organisation has a major impact on how £6 billion of public money is spent each year, how well it is accounted for, what outcomes the spending delivers, and how far value for money is secured. To discharge these responsibilities we must be a learning organisation with a culture of continuous improvement, and we attach a high priority to supporting and developing our people. This is evident in our re-recognition as an Investor in People; our achievement of EFQM level 1 'committed to excellence' (by 2008 we aim to have achieved level 2 'recognised for excellence'); and our proactive stance on equality and diversity.

Environmental management

116. Our culture of continuous improvement is echoed in our environmental policy. This aims to meet the highest standards of environmental management, including in recycling, transport, procurement and contract management. Our Green Transport Plan – including car sharing and cycling to work, and the use of video-conferencing to avoid travelling to meetings – recently won an award from the local authority. We also have a voluntary staff Environmental Action Group and we are a corporate member of the Woodland Trust.

117. We believe the actions outlined above represent a genuine commitment to minimising our impact on the natural environment, but until now we have not had a set of environmental performance indicators to give us a holistic idea of progress, or a comparison with similar organisations. In keeping with our principles of engagement on sustainable development, and in particular our commitment to be open about success and failure, we have recently developed such indicators. These will be available on the sustainable development section of the HEFCE web-site. Furthermore, we have committed to benchmark these indicators against similar organisations and to pursue year-on-year improvements in all categories. We will also publish the indicators in our annual review. Our aspiration is to become recognised as a leader in environmental management among organisations of our size and function.

Action: We will benchmark key performance indicators on environmental management against similar organisations and pursue year-on-year improvements in all categories. Our aspiration is to become recognised as a leader in environmental management among organisations of this size and function.

Other elements of sustainable development

118. Our contribution to some of the other elements of sustainable development, such as the social cohesion of our local community, is perhaps not as well articulated as our contribution to environmental management. In fact our staff undertake a range of activities, including recycling computers to local charities, using team awaydays to help the local community, and charity

fundraising. Some activities are undertaken voluntarily and some under the auspices of the Council.

119.   We do not wish to devalue individuals' initiative by taking a centralist approach to sustainable development in all areas, but we recognise that there is much more we could be contributing as an organisation beyond environmental management. We therefore commit ourselves to developing a holistic action plan for internal sustainable development which includes, but is not confined to, environmental management. The prosecution of this plan will be an important part of our commitment to excellence in delivery in the next HEFCE strategic plan.

Action: We will publish a holistic action plan for internal sustainable development.

Annex A

Sustainability Strategy External Advisory Group

Steve Egan (Chair)	Director of Finance and Corporate Services, HEFCE
Patricia Ambrose	Executive Secretary, Standing Conference of Principals
Mike Barrett	Sustainable Development Co-ordinator, Learning and Skills Council
Roger Bond	Director of Estates and Buildings Division, University of East Anglia
Mike Briggs	Purchasing and Environment Manager (Services to Business), Leeds Metropolitan University
Professor Jacquie Burgess	Professor of Human Geography, University College London
Professor Brian Chalkley	Centre Director, National Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Plymouth
Dick Coldwell	HEFCE Board member
Professor Michael Driscoll	Vice-Chancellor, Middlesex University
Denise Everitt	Head of Finance, University of Kent
Dan Green	Sustainability Co-ordinator, Wessex Water
Andy Johnston	Head of Education and Learning, Forum for the Future
Caroline Neville	Director of Learning, Learning & Skills Council
Julian Nicholds	National Union of Students
Andy Nolan	Environmental Manager, University of Sheffield
Sara Parkin	Programme Director, Forum for the Future
Professor Elaine Thomas	Director, Surrey Institute of Art and Design
Mark Timms	Department for Education and Skills

In the course of its work the group also received presentations from an institutional perspective (John Hirst, University of Durham and Professor Peter Hopkinson, University of Bradford) and we are very grateful for this input.