

Sustainable development in learning and skills inspections

Guidance for inspectors

Learning and skills inspectors should read this guidance in conjunction with the Common Inspection Framework, to take account of providers' contributions to a sustainable future.

It:

- highlights aspects of the Common Inspection Framework to show how inspection takes account of sustainability
- determines the impact of providers' efforts to improve aspects of learners' well-being and to prepare learners for their future.

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Background: What does sustainable development mean?

1. While sustainable development is often *thought* to focus on environmental challenges, it actually focuses on maximising social and economic outcomes as well as environmental ones. Sustainable development has a broad focus, including health, well-being and sustainable communities, as well as issues like waste management, energy use and resource management.
2. Sustainable development means that, as a society, we must: live within the means of our natural resources; respect our environment; act on climate change; and work collectively towards an improved quality of life for our communities.
3. Sustainable development also includes considering learners' well-being, which is an important aspect of providers' contributions to a sustainable community and society.
4. Inspection and sustainable development are both improvement processes, working towards the same end goal – improving lives.
5. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is closely linked to sustainable development, particularly in relation to promoting sustainable communities. CSR is about how organisations manage their business processes to produce an overall positive impact on society.
6. In March 2005, the government launched its sustainable development strategy called *Securing the future*, which responded to increasing concerns over: climate change; unsustainable consumption; loss of natural resources; and quality of life in communities. This strategy set out five principles: living within environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy, and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using sound science responsibly.
7. Providers will take action in three main areas:
 - buildings and estate (campus)
 - curriculum
 - community.

8. The key actions for buildings and estate are below.
- **Building and design:** to promote and deliver good sustainable practice in all design, new build and refurbishment activities; the BREEAM¹ standards apply.
 - **Biodiversity:** to implement a locally appropriate biodiversity programme that best manages the site for conservation.
 - **Environmental management system (EMS):** to undertake an audit of the existing consumption and management of energy, water and waste with a view to implementing an effective EMS or adopting a sound sustainability policy. A number of providers are working towards the environmental standard ISO 140001.
 - **Reduce, reuse, recycle:** the provider should be devising strategies and plans to: reduce waste, energy and water consumption; increase the proportion of sustainable energy used, reducing carbon emissions including those produced by car travel; and increase recycling.
 - **travel:** to implement a travel plan that tackles the issues of providing access for all, as well as reducing the environmental impact of travel.
9. Key actions for the curriculum are below.
- **Education for sustainable development:** this is about equipping learners with the skills, knowledge and understanding to be effective citizens in a complex and changing world through the curriculum, including the tutorial/citizenship programme. Through education, people may develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things, individually and collectively, locally and globally, that will improve quality of life now without damaging the planet in the future. Please note that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is not a separate subject; it is a holistic educational approach.²
 - **Learning materials:** to embed sustainable development in the vocational curriculum, develop appropriate sustainable development programmes and modules, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and other methods that reduce our reliance on travel and paper.
 - **Whole-institution approach:** to take account of both informal and formal learning, and to set an example for learners.

¹ Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) is the leading and most widely used environmental assessment method for buildings. It sets the standard for best practice in sustainable design and has become the de facto measure used to describe a building's environmental performance.

² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO's) decade for sustainable development (2004–2014); http://www.unesco.org.uk/decade_of_education_for_sustainable_development.

- Links and partnerships: to develop links between providers and industry and between pre- and post-16 education and learning providers (including higher education), while considering European and international partnerships.
- Healthy college: to promote programmes that raise learners' awareness and understanding of healthy lifestyles, including diet and exercise.

10. Key actions in relation to the community are:

- Community engagement: to communicate well with the local community, including employers, leading to greater community and employer involvement with learners contributing to the community.
- Local and regional networks: to maintain and develop appropriate local and regional partnerships between colleges, schools, learning providers, local authorities, higher education and other key stakeholders.
- Local markets and ethical trade: to support local markets, ethical and fair trade, and socially responsible initiatives within the community.
- Share facilities: to consider sharing facilities with local community agencies and groups to make the best use of resources.
- Local economic strategies: to be aware of, support and connect to, the economic strategies drawn up and developed by local authorities.
- Volunteering: to encourage learners and providers to undertake volunteering activity as part of a community commitment to sustainable development.

11. There is no requirement for providers to have sustainable development policies, but many will have policies and plans setting out their sustainable development objectives and actions. These plans and policies should:

- embed sustainable development skills and knowledge in education and training programmes for all learners to acquire
- produce plans and policies that integrate the principles of sustainable development in all areas of their work, and assess the impact of current and proposed policies and practices on sustainable development
- identify and train appropriate and sufficient staff for sustainable development within organisations
- understand and manage the opportunities and risks of promoting sustainable development
- report on, and monitor, the organisation's contribution to sustainable development, ideally as part of the self-assessment process
- gather and use information on how the organisation's practices affect sustainable development in the workplace and in the delivery of services.

12. Sustainable development is a core value of a number of providers and many others have real commitment. Membership of the Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges (EAUC) is strong and entries to the Green Gown Awards grow annually. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) leads the Sustainable Development and Learning and Skills (SDALS) group, which has representatives from across the sector and has recently appointed regional sustainable development champions.

Guidance

The following sections provide inspectors with guidance for before, during and after the inspection.

Before the inspection

The Common Inspection Framework makes explicit reference to sustainable development in all three aspects: Outcomes for learners; Quality of provision; and Leadership and management.

The Common Inspection Framework

A. Outcomes for learners	
A5	Do learners develop skills, knowledge and understanding relevant to community cohesion and sustainable development?
A1	How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?
A2	How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?
A4	Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?
B. Quality of provision	
B3	Is provision well coordinated and relevant to local communities, and does it promote social inclusion and sustainable development?
B1	How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?
B2	How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?
B4	How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to attain their learning goals?
C. Leadership and management	
C7	Is the provider committed to managing its resources in a sustainable way?
C1	How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?
C4	How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and

	diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?
C5	How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?

13. These questions prompt inspectors through the inspection process, and providers through their self-assessment processes, to consider what approach is being taken to sustainable development and to determine the impact on learners, business practices and the environment.
14. With careful analysis of the self-assessment report (SAR), the lead inspector can identify key issues and indicate the provider's commitment to, and impact of, its sustainable development initiatives.
15. A useful starting point will be to consider the provider's context. What has the provider done to widen participation? Is there a travel plan that encourages sustainable travel? Does the provider work closely with employers and partners to promote sustainable development? Many providers successfully engage with employers through short courses, for example in photovoltaics,³ which then guide the curriculum for full-time learners.
16. Sustainable development should be included in sector subject areas, for example construction, engineering, land-based subjects, sport, geography and science. Where the provider's approach is more advanced, sustainable development will be integrated across the whole curriculum and all learners will have an entitlement. Many providers make creative use of the tutorial or citizenship programme to promote education for sustainable development. For learners on AS- and A2-level courses, the approach through citizenship is crucial.
17. Providers may well present evidence of how they promote the skills needed for sustainable development through teaching and learning. These could include team work, flexibility, analysis of evidence, critical thinking, making informed choices and participating in decisions, all of which will empower learners to voice their opinions and make a difference.
18. Information presented in the SAR about how well the provider's leadership promotes and evaluates the impact of its sustainable development initiatives will exemplify the progress being made. For example, use of the VLE and information and communication technology may reduce the amount of paper used. Some providers will replace learner handbooks with memory sticks to reduce paper use. Environmental policies may be referred to and activities involving learners, at home or abroad, may be evaluated.

³ Photovoltaics is a method of generating electrical power by converting solar radiation into direct current electricity.

During the inspection

19. There is no separate grade for sustainable development. Inspectors' findings contribute to the evidence used when grading the aspects and, where appropriate, the sector subject areas (SSAs).
20. Inspection provides a significant opportunity to influence behaviours and attitudes and promote sustainable development. Inspectors will evaluate the impact of the provider's sustainability strategy as part of their overall efficiency and effectiveness, and value for money. Inspectors will discuss the provider's contribution to developing a sustainable future with the senior managers, governors, staff, learners, employers and other partners. These discussions could be integrated within other meetings. Inspectors will be able to examine documents such as the *Sustainable development action plan (SDAP)*, travel plan, and plans to promote health and well-being, and the providers' progress with these plans.
21. Inspectors consider evidence about the provider's approach to sustainable development when they are evaluating relevant aspects of the provision and outcomes for learners. Do learners improve their knowledge of healthy eating, lifestyle choices and environmental issues? Are there opportunities for learners to gain additional qualifications in sustainable development or environmental awareness? Within the vocational curriculum, is there enough explicit environmental content? Is there evidence of sustainable development in action, such as bicycle sheds, car sharing schemes, energy display certificates, health promotion activities and recycling?
22. When judging the quality of the curriculum, inspectors will take into account the provider's efforts to promote and include sustainable development. There may be opportunities for inspectors to gather first-hand evidence of impact by observing:
 - learners engaged in activities or discussions that are contributing to developing their knowledge and understanding of how to lead a sustainable life
 - the way teachers plan learning to minimise use of resources, for example by promoting e-learning and reducing unnecessary paper handouts, and promoting teaching methods that develop learners' problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
23. When seeking evidence of the provider's efforts to promote well-being outcomes, such as learners' contribution to the wider community, there may be some examples that will demonstrate learners' engagement with sustainable development projects. For example, raising funds for local or national organisations or charitable events, or those in developing countries, for example to improve water supplies or to start agricultural projects, or working with local communities to improve the environment or with school pupils through sporting events. The provider should be able to quantify these

contributions, such as the number of learners involved in fundraising, or sport or the number of healthy option meals provided in college food outlets.

24. Learners in area 14 are often active in producing and using vegetable crops, recycling or reusing materials to support the provider.

After the inspection

25. The report should, where relevant, contain text and/or judgements related to sustainable development where most appropriate and where inspectors have evidence to support the judgement. Where the practice is judged to be a particular strength or an area for improvement, this will be reported in the overall effectiveness section and, where relevant, may be identified as a specific recommendation.

Useful links and further reading

26. Further resources for inspectors are on the sustainable development SharePoint pages. The good practice database also contains some recent examples.

Education for sustainable development (090004), Ofsted, 2009;
www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/090004.

Raising standards, improving lives: The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills Strategic Plan, 2011–2015 (110001), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/110001.