



Professional Practice for Sustainable Development

Book 1: Building support within the profession

The first in a series of publications designed to encourage and support the integration of sustainable development principles into professional practice.



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About the booklet

This booklet *Building support within the profession* is the first in a series aiming to encourage and support the integration of sustainable development principles into professional practice. Participants in the inter-professional project *Professional Practice for Sustainable Development* have developed this booklet, which is aimed at policy makers within professional institutions. The booklet makes a case for:

- integrating sustainable development principles into professional practice,
- working and learning jointly with other professions to develop professional training that will help members further integrate social, economic and environmental concerns into their daily practice.

The booklet does not necessarily represent the views of individual organisations, but they are all happy to be associated with it.

Introduction

“We attach great importance to initial training and continuing professional development – we will explore with professional bodies the routes by which sustainable development could be incorporated into their syllabuses and continuing professional development programmes.”
Government Sustainable Development Education Panel, 1999.

Professional institutions constitute a range of individuals whose beliefs and values towards sustainable development are mainly derived from their long education, training and experience in their basic discipline. These are reinforced through their professional networks. If there is to be a common framework for sustainable practice amongst professionals, then the training for this needs to come through their professional bodies. *Professional Practice for Sustainable Development*, sometimes referred to as PP4SD, is aimed at professionals from a range of backgrounds including business, academia and consultancy. Working with 14 professional institutions the project aims to help members improve their capacity to plan and carry out their professional duties in ways that support the achievement of sustainable development.

The project started in March 1999 and its specific objectives are:

- To engage the participating professions in a learning process to develop a common curriculum framework for sustainable development.
- To develop, test and publish training materials derived from the framework appropriate to the needs of the professional institutions. These might be in the form of courses, seminars, distance learning projects, printed or electronic manuals, guidelines or information packs.

Background to the project

The project originated at an invitation seminar held by the Council for Environmental Education and the Environment Agency in March 1999. The seminar was designed to gauge the extent of support within professional institutions for the development of learning opportunities for their members that would enhance their ability to apply the principles of sustainable development within their professional practice. Sixteen people representing nine institutions attended and committed themselves to working and learning together with a view to developing a common framework and training materials.

The *Professional Practice for Sustainable Development Project* arose out of this seminar. It is facilitated by the Council for Environmental Education, the Environment Agency, the Institution of Environmental Sciences, the Natural Step and WWF-UK (World Wide Fund For Nature). The DETR Environmental Action Fund and WWF-UK are supporting the project with further contributions in kind from the staff and members of the participating institutions. The project is now in its second year.

Progress

Since the March 1999 seminar:

1. The number of participating institutions has expanded to 14. All are committed to the learning process and to contributing to the project's outputs.
2. A series of learning and development workshops has taken place at regular intervals. Outputs will eventually comprise: a curriculum framework; critical success factors for effective professional training; a promotional document; a support and guidance document and a foundation course in sustainable development.
3. The curriculum framework has been developed. This is a working document and will be revised regularly to reflect the continuous learning process in which the participants are involved.
4. The publication of this document which is designed to generate support for sustainable development training within professional institutions.
5. The support and guidance document content has been agreed and distribution is scheduled for June 2000.
6. The foundation course is being developed ready for testing at workshops over the summer of 2000.
7. Materials using the framework and the foundation course are being developed with individual professional institutions.

Participants

The project is facilitated by:

The Council for Environmental Education
The Environment Agency
The Institution of Environmental Sciences
The Natural Step
WWF-UK

Professional institutions involved in this phase of the project are:

Building Services and Research Information Association
Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers
Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management
Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply
Institute of Energy
Institute of Wastes Management
Institution of Chemical Engineers
Institution of Civil Engineers
Institution of Environmental Sciences
Institution of Mechanical Engineers
Royal Institute of British Architects
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
Royal Society of Chemistry
Royal Town Planning Institute

Other institutions are encouraged to take part, and can do so by contacting the project co-ordinator. There is no financial commitment required but an input of staff and some members' time is needed.

“We have failed to see how our economy, our environment and our society are one, and that delivering the best possible quality of life for all of us means more than concentrating solely on economic growth” Tony Blair, 1999

What is meant by ‘sustainable development’?

Everyone seems to have their favourite definition – there were at least 250 published by the end of 1999! However, most are a refinement of the sentiment expressed in the original definition offered by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. It is still generally accepted:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The UK Government has identified four main goals for sustainable development¹:

1. Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.
2. Effective protection of the environment.
3. Prudent use of natural resources.
4. Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

How these broad goals are to be achieved is elaborated on in *A better quality of life*². In this Government document, sustainable development is presented as the continued improvement of the quality of life. Achieving this, it states, requires the optimisation of three interdependent components: environmental, economic and social policies and practice.

Stated Government priorities include:

- A transport system that minimises environmental harm and reduces congestion.
- Towns and cities that are better places to live and work.
- Development and agriculture that protect wildlife and the countryside.
- A reduction of social exclusion.
- Improvement in energy efficiency and a reduction of waste.

The challenges that need to be addressed

The concept of sustainable development has a good pedigree. It was implicit in the *World Conservation Strategy*³ (1980), became explicit in *Our Common Future*⁴ (1987) and was accepted by all national leaders at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992). Since then the implications of acting sustainably have been recognised and policies are beginning to give substance to what was previously rhetoric. This is happening at all levels, from international organisations such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation to local councils and community groups and from multi-national companies to small and medium sized enterprises. The consequence of these decisions is an increasing demand for sustainable practices in the work-place in Britain and overseas.

Speaking in 1999, Tony Blair said,

“The last hundred years have seen a massive increase in the wealth of this country and the well-being of its people. But focusing solely on economic growth risks ignoring the impact – both good and bad – on people and the environment. Had we taken account of these links in our decision making, we might have reduced or avoided costs such as contaminated land or social exclusion. We have failed to see how our economy, our environment and our society are one – and that delivering the best possible quality of life for all of us means more than concentrating solely on economic growth. The whole of government is committed to making sustainable development a reality, as are many businesses, groups and individuals up and down the country. Together we can ensure that our economy, our society and our environment grow and develop in harmony.”

¹ UK Sustainable Development Strategy: Opportunities for Change Consultation paper revised UK strategy 1998

² *A better quality of life: A strategy for sustainable development for the United Kingdom* HMSO 1999

³ *The World Conservation Strategy* International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, World Wildlife Fund, United Nations Environmental Programme, 1980

⁴ *Our Common Future* The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

The challenge now is to integrate environmental, social and economic thinking into their members' practice so that they can continue to act not only professionally but sustainably as well.

The goal is to ensure a better quality of life for all now and for generations to come. This goal cannot be achieved if future development follows the model of the past. The scale of the challenge is succinctly shown in this table taken from *Europe's Environment: the second assessment*⁵. It shows positive progress in policy development in 3 out of the 12 key environmental problem areas and only one positive improvement to the state of the environment.

Key environmental problem	Progress: policies	Progress: state of the environment
Climate change	2	3
Stratospheric ozone depletion	1	3
Acidification	1	2
Tropospheric ozone	2	3
Chemicals	2	2
Waste	3	3
Biodiversity	2	3
Inland waters	2	2
Marine and coastal environment	2	3
Soil degradation	3	3
Urban environment	2	2
Technological and natural hazards	1	1
1 = Positive development 2 = Some policy development but insufficient to deal with the full problem and little or no change in the state of the environment 3 = Little development of policies or unfavourable development of the state of the environment		

There are many new and exciting techniques and technologies becoming available to help us solve environmental problems. As Amory Lovins said in the Harvard Business Review, "...we are poised on the threshold of an historic moment in which many of the world's industries may be transformed – most companies are failing to recognise opportunities of potentially staggering proportions."

Many of the key issues such as transport, energy and planning cross the functional boundaries of various professions. Different professions need to be working together to solve these problems to a far greater extent than they are at the moment. *The Professional Practice for Sustainable Development Project* is doing its bit to make that easier.

The role of the professions in sustainable development

Government, business and academia are generating interest and activity in sustainable development, but its achievement will come about through a range of professionals integrating sustainable development into their daily professional practice. The professional institutions to which they belong have a growing responsibility to prepare their members for working in a world in which sustainable development is demanded.

Sustainable development is a challenge for the professions. The long tradition of well-focused professional bodies has worked successfully. Within their areas of qualifications and experience, members enjoy high levels of respect and trust from employers and the public. These have been earned by the institutions setting and insisting on high standards of professional practice. The challenge now is to integrate environmental, social and economic thinking into their members' practice so that they can continue to act not only professionally but sustainably as well.

The professional institutions have a variety of successful mechanisms that encourage learning and the adoption of new thinking and techniques into professional practice. These can be used to support the adoption of sustainable development principles. For example professions might be able to:

1. Include sustainable development on the agenda of internal committees that monitor technical, social, legislative and other changes; assess their implications for the profession and recommend how to respond.

2. Integrate sustainable development thinking into internal examinations, accredited courses in further and higher education institutions and professional training for existing members.
3. Amend codes of practice/professional standards.
4. Set minimum sustainable development qualifications and experience for new entrants to the profession.
5. Include sustainable development practice in continuing dialogues with stakeholders including Government, employers, other related professions, non-government organisations and the public.

Sustainability is not a fad. It will not go away. Professional institutions will increasingly need to show employers that their members are competent to deliver sustainable development solutions. Finding solutions that are technically, socially, economically and environmentally acceptable will require a degree of inter-professional learning and co-operation that we have not had before. *The Professional Practice for Sustainable Development Project* is providing a means for doing this.

What is coming next

During 2000 the project will continue learning and working to produce the following outputs.

Support and guidance document

This will provide practical support for institutions and training providers and is likely to cover: indicative content for sustainable development courses; learning outcomes; appropriate teaching and learning methods; course specifications and case studies.

The foundation course

This is designed for use with inter-professional groups and will be tested with members of the participating professional institutions. This course will provide the building blocks for the future continuing professional development of sustainable development.

Support for training within individual professional institutions

During the trial period of summer 2000 the project organisers will work with a few individual professional institutions to help develop training for their members. A feature of the training will be learning from the expertise of other institutions.

A forum

There is already a core of participating institutions that are meeting regularly to exchange ideas and information. It is intended that the forum will continue beyond the existing project and that it will expand its membership and activities substantially.

What you can do now

While it is possible to find examples of professional institutions taking sustainable development on board, it is probably safe to say no institution is yet able to assure employers that their members can successfully integrate the principles of sustainable development into their professional practice. There is much to learn about sustainable development and how to include it in professional training.

Institutions vary in their size, organisation and the amount of resources available to them. Calls to respond to the sustainable development challenge may be overlooked when there are other pressing priorities. They might be dismissed as a passing fad

that detracts from upholding traditional professional standards. However, doing nothing is a decision to ignore the challenge. Such a decision could consign those institutions to extinction or at best the periphery of professional, commercial and political debate in the 21st century. Deciding to engage even in a small way to start with, is a decision to be part of a growing movement that will be of great importance to all professionals.

A number of suggestions for making progress have been made by participants at the workshops. They include:

- expanding the remit of the environment committee to cover sustainable development,
- holding awareness sessions for key staff and members,
- encouraging articles, case studies, correspondence, etc in the professions' journal,
- developing a dialogue with other professions on sustainable development and its implications,
- arranging interprofessional training,
- developing a suitably-resourced professional development plan,
- consulting the membership on how to respond to the challenge,
- examining the role of standards and codes in ensuring best practice and amending them to include sustainable development as necessary,
- examining the syllabuses of accredited courses and negotiating the inclusion of sustainable development as appropriate.

Institutions are also invited to join the work of the 14 institutions on the *Professional Practice for Sustainable Development Project*. For further information please contact:

The Project Co-ordinator
Professional Practice for Sustainable Development, The Institution of Environmental Sciences
PO Box 16, Bourne PE10 9FB

Tel/fax 01778 394846

Appendices

The framework for sustainability

The participants in the project have co-operated in the development of this framework. It will continue to evolve as everyone learns from working together. It is being used as a tool to test materials against, ensuring that they are consistent with the overall objectives of sustainability.

This framework is derived from a number of key sources, including documents from: The Rio Declaration, World Business Council on Sustainable Development, DETR, The Natural Step, The International Institute for Sustainable Development, the World Commission on Environment and Development, Forum for the Future and Natural Capitalism.

As of March 2000 the text was as follows.

In a sustainable society:

1. Any materials mined from the earth should not exceed the environment's capacity to disperse, absorb, recycle or otherwise neutralise their harmful effects to humans and the environment.
2. Synthetic substances in their manufacture and use should not exceed the environment's capacity to disperse, absorb, recycle or otherwise neutralise their harmful effects to humans or the environment.
3. The biological diversity and productivity of ecosystems should not be endangered.
4. A healthy economy should be maintained, which accurately represents the value of natural, human, social and manufactured capital.
5. Individual human skills, knowledge and health should be developed and deployed to optimum effect.
6. Social progress and justice should recognise the needs of everyone.

7. There must be equity for future generations.
8. Structures and institutions should promote stewardship of natural resources and the development of people.

About the partners

The Council for Environmental Education (CEE) provides a national focus for environmental education and education for sustainable development. CEE represents and works with over 80 national organisations which constitute its membership. Its mission is to ensure that the principles of sustainable development are at the heart of education policy and practice.

The Environment Agency is the statutory body charged with responsibility for developing a comprehensive approach to protecting the air, land and water environments of England and Wales. Its principal aim is to further sustainable development and it is, therefore, keen to promote sustainable business practice.

The Institution of Environmental Sciences is the professional body for environmental scientists. Its membership comprises professionals from higher education institutions, voluntary organisations and the public and private sectors. It promotes the environmental sciences and provides balanced, scientific information on the environment to members and public alike. It is a registered charity.

The Natural Step (TNS) is operated under licence by The Forum for the Future, a UK charity established by leading UK environmentalists and takes a positive solution oriented approach to the challenge of sustainable development. The aim of TNS UK is to deepen the commitment to genuinely sustainable development through the use of its framework for sustainability and other educational and training approaches.

The WWF-UK Business Education Unit works with business innovators to create an understanding of sustainability and to develop ground breaking and effective tools to put the theory into practice.

Producer statement

This booklet has been developed in accordance with the principles set out in *Supporting sustainable development through educational resources: a voluntary code of practice*⁶.

Target audience and intended usage

Aimed at senior staff of professional institutions to encourage the integration of the principles of sustainable development into professional practice.

Identification of need

The booklet was identified by the participating professional institutions as an essential step to gain support for sustainable development within professional institutions.

Materials/processes used in production

Drafts have been circulated by email to reduce printing and postage costs. 500 copies have been printed for circulation within professional institutions. The booklet has been printed by Repro Workshop, Alton on Cyclus 100% recycled paper. It will also be published on the project website.

Promotion and distribution

Available free of charge from the Project Office at the Institution of Environmental Sciences, PO Box 16, Bourne PE10 9FB.

Publication details

Published by WWF-UK for the *Professional Practice for Sustainable Development* Project Management Group, May 2000.

Are you doing your bit?

⁶ *Supporting sustainable development through educational resources: a voluntary code of practice* CEE/DETR/DfEE, 1999.



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A Framework for Sustainability

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