



Sustainable
Development Commission

Department for Education and Skills

Sustainable Development Minister:
Parmjit Dhanda MP

SDC Assessment



Checklist

Sustainable Development Action Plan

1	Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✓	
2	Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	n/a	
3	Has the organisation articulated what SD means for them?	✓	
4	Does the plan describe the benefits of having an SD approach to the organisation?	✓	
5	Does the plan acknowledge the Government's sustainable development goal?	✓	
6	Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan does not acknowledge that <i>Securing the Future</i> sets out four priority areas for immediate action.
	Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan does not refer to any of the priority areas.
7	Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan does not specifically link in with the priorities despite the fact that many of the actions can contribute to Climate change and Energy, and much of the plan supports the sustainable communities strand – sustainable schools at the heart of sustainable communities.
8	Does the plan acknowledge the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	
	Does the plan mention one or more of the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	
9	Does the plan identify links to the principles of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	The plan acknowledges the principles but does not explain how they relate to DfES's work.
10	Have the organisation's relevant executive agencies produced their own plan?	n/a	
11	Does the action plan contain a work programme?	✓	
12	Does the plan include actions relating to commitments from the SD strategy?	✓	
13	Does the action plan cover government policy?	✓	
14	Does the action plan cover operations?	✓	
15	Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✗	

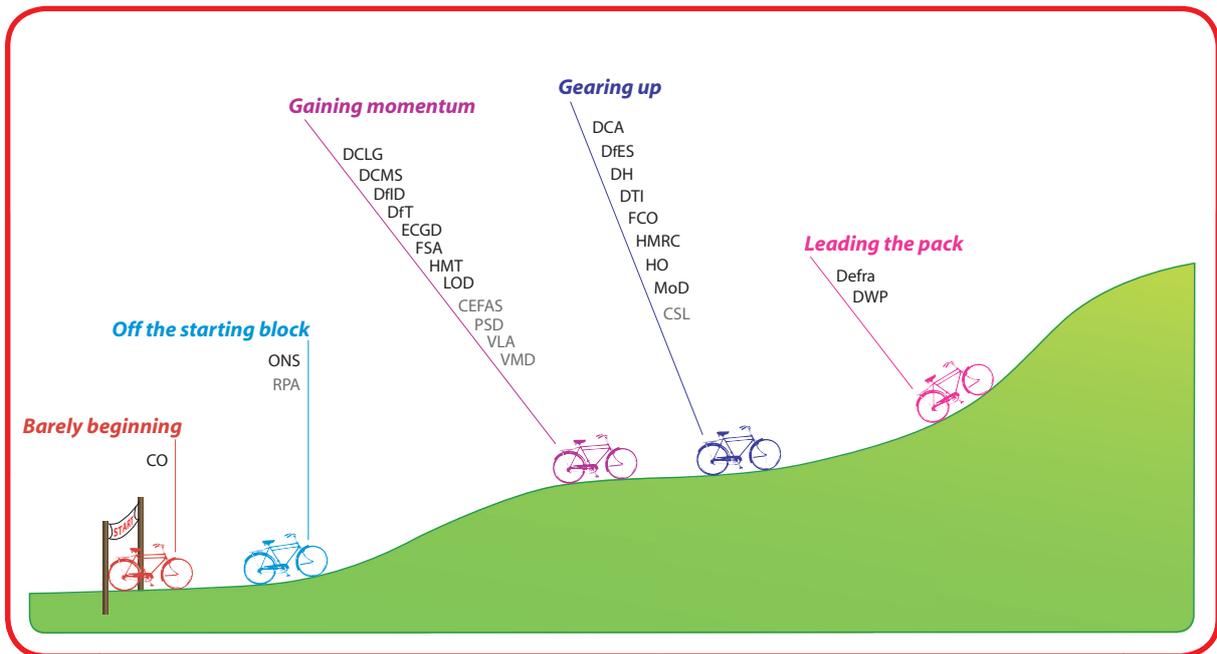
16	Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✓	
17	Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	✓	
18	Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?	✓	
19	Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall plan?	✓	
20	Does the plan explain how the organisation will monitor progress against the plan?	✓	
21	Does the plan describe how the organisation will report against the plan?	✓	
22	Does the plan describe how it links in to other reporting mechanisms within the organisation? E.g. the annual report	✓	
23	Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✓	

Senior Accountable Officer: David Bell, *Permanent Secretary*

Status of Plan: Published 27.03.06

Please note that the SDC rating is based on a competency framework and not straight addition of the scores in the table above. Please see main report for full explanation of the methodology.

How is DfES doing?



Background

The Department for Education and Skills was established with the purpose of creating opportunity, releasing potential and achieving excellence for all.

Context

The Department for Education and Skills has taken an active approach to reviewing how its existing work programme contributes to sustainable development and what gaps remain to be tackled. The department used its Green Net – a virtual network of stakeholders working on green issues in education – to gain contributions from across the department.

Coverage

DfES has no executive agencies. However, the department is encouraging its NDPBs to produce SDAPs in the future.

Departmental view of Sustainable Development

DfES' plan explains that education is "recognised by governments the world over as a key part of sustainable development." The plan describes how schools can be places where sustainable living and working is demonstrated to young people and the local community. In addition, as places of teaching and learning, schools can help pupils understand human impacts on the planet. Thus, DfES articulates a clear vision of its role in sustainable development but

concentrates on how this relates to schools, not the wider learning environment (see further discussion of policy priorities below).

Benefits and risks

DfES' plan articulates the benefits of sustainable development in terms of developing key skills for the future, cutting costs and engaging young people in learning.

Link to *Securing the Future*

Guiding Principles

DfES' plan acknowledges the five guiding principles of sustainable development and has actions to ensure their integration into departmental policy making. However, this is not supported by a clear explanation of where the department feels its work links to the principles or which of the principles are particularly relevant to the department.

Shared priorities for UK action

The plan does not acknowledge or refer to the four priorities for immediate action as identified by *Securing the Future*, despite the fact that much of the commitments the department has included in the plan contribute to them. For example, the department's commitment to reduce the carbon footprint of schools will make a significant contribution to the Climate Change and Energy priority. In addition, much of the plan supports the Sustainable Communities strand – sustainable schools at the heart of Sustainable Communities.

It should be noted however that the department's recent Sustainable Schools consultation document does list the four priorities for immediate action, explaining that these are the priorities that the UK must achieve by 2020.¹

The bilateral revealed that DfES had deliberately avoided making *Securing the Future* the main focus of the plan in order to have more resonance with staff and stakeholders who perceive DfES and its work to be about education not climate change. The SDC is concerned that DfES is reluctant to "own" *Securing the Future* despite clearly seeking to pursue its aims. Whilst it is key that the department relates its SDAP to its core business and uses its own style, this could be better balanced with sufficient acknowledgement of *Securing the Future* and the department's contribution to it. SDAPs are actually required to be focused on *Securing the Future* and the SDC believes it to be important that staff and stakeholders are aware of the root and purpose of the plan.

Policy priorities

DfES' plan clearly states that its focus is schools. However, DfES' responsibilities range beyond schools and the plan does not make clear where other education related areas identified by *Securing the Future*, such as professional skills in the workplace and lifelong learning, will be addressed. The bilateral revealed that as both the Learning and Skills Council (LSE) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have produced their own strategies focusing on further and higher education. The department therefore felt the need to focus on the schools sector. The SDAP explains that "it is in schools that there is most to be done and where it is right to focus over the two years ahead." The department felt that it would be helpful for schools if DfES drew all the sustainable development activity in schools together to provide a 'common language' which would enable further change. This prioritisation is sensible. However, the plan should have made this reasoning clear and acknowledged that DfES had commitments beyond schools in *Securing the Future*.

The SDAP makes several commitments relating to the school estate. For example:

introducing monitoring procedures for major new build, delivering six BREEAM training events for LAs, carrying out a scoping study into the carbon footprint of the schools estate and developing and publishing a Sustainable Design of Schools guide. These make a useful set of commitments. The SDC would expect future plans to address the recommendations made in its submission to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee Inquiry on Sustainable Schools in June 2006.

The department has also included actions to fund school travel advisers so that 10,000 schools have sustainable travel plans by March 2006, to provide guidance to caterers on procuring school meals and to develop a Sustainable Schools Self-Evaluation tool for schools to assess their current level of progress.

It is worth noting that the department acknowledges the fact that education is one of the key ways by which the Government expects to realise the cross-cutting goal of sustainable development, *Securing the Future's* cross cutting theme of 'changing behaviour', although is not explored any further in the plan.

Leading by example

The SDAP commits DfES to achieving the targets set out in the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (SDiG) and the department has made a commitment to develop and implement strategies and activities to improve performance against all Framework targets. However, the plan does not indicate if there are any particular areas it will concentrate on in 2006.

The department is also working with the

Carbon Trust to reduce carbon emissions in the short and long term and is planning to implement a standard waste management programme and an Environmental Management System in each of its HQ buildings. The plan explains that the department is initiating a project which aims to mainstream sustainable development within all its operational activity. However, no further explanation is offered on the scope of the project.

Securing the Future commitments

Departmental commitments

The plan does not acknowledge and address specific commitments from *Securing the Future* for which DfES has lead responsibility in Government. The department explained that it felt it had progressed on the sustainable development agenda since *Securing the Future* was published and was now addressing issues beyond the original scope and remit that was outlined. Its SDAP therefore reflected the new thinking of the department which was more aspirational than its contribution to *Securing the Future*. The SDC accepts that DfES' agenda may have progressed. However, the department should still have acknowledged its published commitments in some way and explained where they were still relevant or how thinking had moved on.

Cross-government commitments

The department has made an attempt to address some of the cross-government commitments in *Securing the Future* such as ensuring policies are assessed against the five principles and capacity building within the department as well as actions relating to the procurement of school meals. The plan however, does not set these actions in the context of contributing to the cross-government commitments. For example, the plan does not explain whether the actions on procurement are the department's attempt to ensure that the UK Government is an EU leader on sustainable procurement by 2009.

Target setting

DfES has made a better attempt than most departments at setting SMART targets. Most actions appear to be measurable, have the accountable Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) defined, and indicate clear timescales for completion.

Policy making

Sustainable development "proofing"

The plan does not explain the current mechanisms in place to ensure policies are appraised against sustainable development. However, the plan does acknowledge the need to ensure that all policies are appraised in this way. It also includes an action for all Directors to ensure that sustainable development is assessed as early as possible and that policies are fed through Partial, Full and Final RIA in accordance with Cabinet Office guidance.

The bilateral revealed that DfES' current consideration of sustainable development in RIAs is poorly developed. The department intends to develop a policy maker's toolbox comprising details of the sustainable development principles and a simple-to-use policy appraisal method. The plan however does not address what systems are, or will be, in place to ensure this happens.

Sustainable development skills

The department has recognised the need to increase capacity and understanding of sustainable development within the organisation and the plan acknowledges that 'for many people sustainable development remains a difficult concept and that it is not clear how sustainable development principles weigh on practical considerations.'

To address this, the department has set itself a target to implement the integration of sustainable development into DfES Learning & Development opportunities, including staff induction, by June 2006. The department has also made a commitment to ensure Ministers, Board and Non-Executive members will be given training on sustainable development and have allocated responsibility to the Permanent Secretary to ensure this happens.

The bilateral revealed that to further address sustainable development skills and knowledge, the HR and Corporate Services team are currently looking at training for sustainable development

skills in policy making and are holding discussions with the Learning Academy to explore possible training programmes. No specific plans were confirmed at the time of the bilateral.

Achieving Sustainable Development outcomes

Infrastructure

In order to ensure the delivery of their action plan, the department intends to set up a Sustainable Development Steering Group of senior level champions responsible for embedding sustainable development within their Directorates. A Board-level sustainable development champion – now identified – will chair the Group. The Sustainable Development Champion will also support the Sustainable Development Minister, the Secretary of State and the Permanent Secretary, who hold overall accountability for delivery of the action plan.

The department explained that as the Steering Group was not in place whilst the plan was being developed, the department relied on the Green Net – a virtual network of contacts working on green issues in education – to ensure contributions from across the department.

Engagement

The plan explains that ‘all staff are responsible for helping to deliver this action plan by recognising and promoting sustainable development in our work and our working practices.’ It is not clear how the department will ensure that staff at every level own the plan and understand how they can support it.

The SDAP commits DfES to implementing an internal sustainable development campaign ‘that will catch people’s imagination, deepen their understanding and involve staff in projects.’ This was explored further in the bilateral and it was explained that a communications strategy would be drawn up which will aim to identify the key messages and the target audiences.

Monitoring and reporting

The plan covers 2006-08. The plan explains that by the end of 2006 DfES will summarise what it has done so far and indicate how it will move forward. The plan sets out the internal arrangements which will be used to monitor the plan.

In order to ensure the delivery of actions set out in the plan, DfES has committed to putting in place a ‘robust mechanism for monitoring, reporting and evaluating’ the plan. The Sustainable Development Steering Group will present an internal progress report to the Sustainable Development Minister and Permanent Secretary on a quarterly basis. It was explained in the bilateral that the sustainable development team will lead on

monitoring progress against the plan, but that each Director General will provide information on progress within their Directorate.

DfES’ plan commits the department to publicly report on progress. DfES explained that they will do so in their Annual Report. The SDAP also states that DfES will be independently ensuring the accuracy of their progress report.

The SDC welcomes this comprehensive approach. It will be important to ensure that progress against the SDAP is reported comprehensively. Space in the Annual Report is often at a premium and the department may wish to consider having a more detailed progress update on-line cross referenced in the Annual Report.

1 Sustainable Schools: For pupils, communities and the environment, DfES, page 6

Strengths to build upon	
	Ensure all targets are SMART.
	Current work to integrate sustainable development into policy appraisals.
Challenges for 2007	
	Ensure all relevant areas of education, as set out in <i>Securing the Future</i> , are addressed by DfES and its associated bodies or provide active explanations of DfES' current approach if these are no longer relevant.
	Specify priority SDiG areas that the department is seeking to improve.
	Ensure ownership of the plan across the organisation to help achieve results.
	Monitor impact of SDAP communications work to ensure its effectiveness.
	Set out specific actions around key messages aimed at raising staff awareness and understanding of sustainable development and how it relates to their work (linking to PSAs where applicable).
	Ensure DfES's contribution to Behaviour Change (a <i>Securing the Future</i> priority) is acknowledged, even if it is not a priority area for the SDAP year.



Sustainable
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