



Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Chief Executive: Professor Steve Edwards

SDC Assessment



Checklist

Sustainable Development Action Plan

1	Does the plan specify the period of time it will cover?	✗	SDAP does not explain timeframe of plan but most actions are for 2006.
2	Does the plan specify which organisations it covers?	n/a	
3	Has the organisation articulated what SD means for them?	✗	SDAP explains VLA have clearly defined responsibilities for sustainable development but does not explain what they are.
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?	✗	The plan does not refer to any sustainable development goal.
6	Does the plan acknowledge the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✗	SDAP does not acknowledge that there are four priorities, however SDAP refers to sustainable consumption and production.
	Does the plan mention one or more of the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	
7	Does the plan identify links to the priorities of <i>Securing the Future</i> ?	✓	
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> ?	✗	SDAP explains that VLA's approach is consistent with the sustainable development principles but does not explain how.
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?	✗	SDAP covers estates management policy only.
14	Does the action plan cover operations?	✓	
15	Was the plan publicly available by 13th January 2006?	✓	

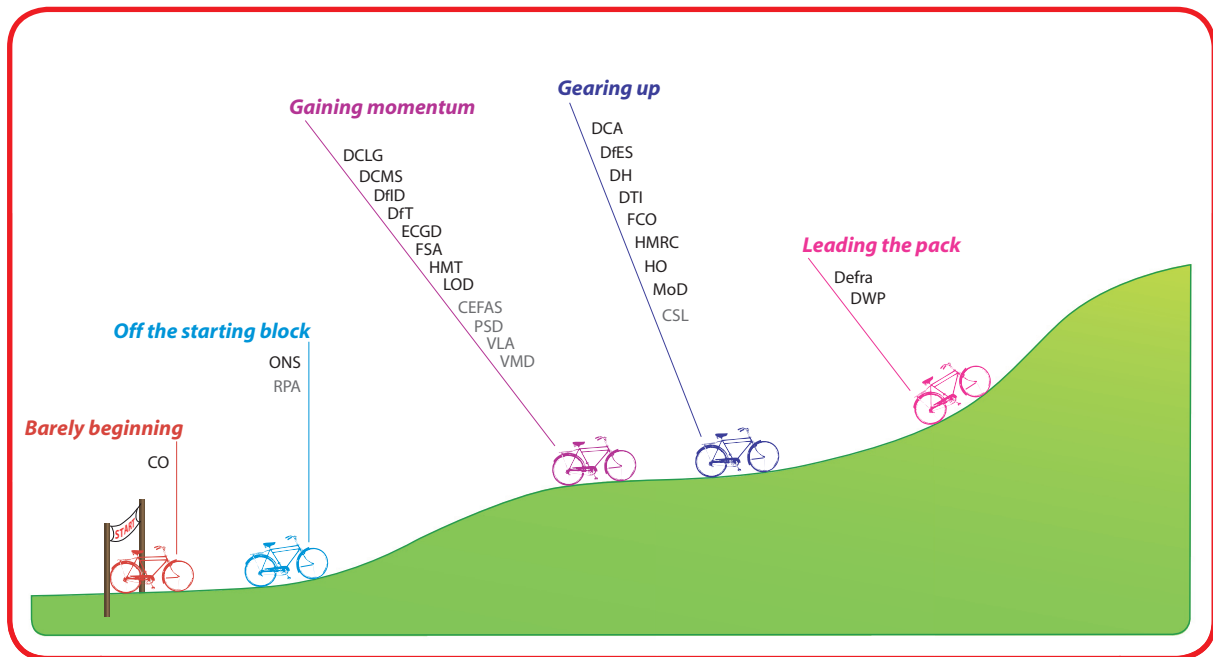
16	Does the plan outline any arrangements for strengthening SD capacity in the organisation?	✓	
17	Does the plan describe the infrastructure in place to deliver the plan?	✓	
18	Does the plan make it clear who signed it off?	✓	
19	Does the plan designate who is accountable for the delivery of the overall 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	✓	Will report on progress in Annual Report and Accounts.
23	Does the plan commit to reporting against the plan on a defined regular basis?	✓	Will report annually.

Senior Accountable Officer: Chris Morrey, *Business Director*

Status of Plan: Published 15.12.05

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 VLA doing?



Background

VLA is one of Defra's Executive Agencies. It provides a wide range of applied research and consultancy, diagnosis and surveillance on livestock diseases to Government and commercial customers.

Context

The VLA SDAP is largely operations focused reflecting the nature of its role and remit. VLA felt that the SDAP process was a constructive exercise to pull together existing work, create structured sustainable development objectives and identify where progress was required. The use of ISO14001 Environmental Management System meant that the site manager was able to prepare the plan without having to draw on a wide range of inputs from other colleagues. The VLA explained in the bilateral that staff were actively engaged in the production of the plan, offering feedback to managers.

Organisational view of Sustainable Development

VLA's SDAP explains that the Agency's aim is to provide high quality science to Government and others. Its mission is to 'safeguard public and animal health through world-class veterinary research and surveillance' and is inextricably linked to Defra's aims and objectives for veterinary public health, sustainable agriculture and food industries.

It was explained in bilateral discussions that much of the Agency's approach to sustainable development to date has been focused on the environmental protection component of sustainable development. Its work as an Agency has been orientated around environmental concerns rather than the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

The Agency's sphere of influence is limited to technical advice and the Agency views its key mechanism for contributing to the objectives of *Securing the Future* to be through minimising VLA's own ecological footprint in the operation of its energy intensive laboratories.

Benefits of taking a sustainable development approach

The SDAP states that taking a sustainable development approach will help the organisation operate more efficiently and increase its competitive edge through cutting costs and enhancing its reputation.

Link to *Securing the Future*

Guiding Principles

Overall, the VLA SDAP does not make explicit links back to *Securing the Future*. VLA explained that it tended to avoid an overtly 'corporate' approach relating to a range of other Government strategies etc. It had found it difficult to engage staff with this approach. Instead, it tended to focus on the VLA locus to an issue. The SDC acknowledges this approach but *Securing the Future* commitment requires SDAPs to be based on the strategy. Therefore signposts back to the content of *Securing the Future*, however brief, are helpful for staff and stakeholders to understand the link to cross-cutting government policy.

The plan explains that VLA's approach is consistent with the five guiding principles as set

out in *Securing the Future*. The plan however does not elaborate on the links between the principles and the Agency's work.

The SDC would expect to see future plans indicating how the Agency is accounting for and using the five guiding principles in its work.

Shared priorities for UK action

The plan includes actions aimed at contributing to Sustainable Consumption and Production – one of the shared priorities for immediate action. The SDAP includes an action 'to publish an environmental purchasing policy' and commits also to publishing policies on resource efficiency, energy and green travel plans. However, the SDAP does not specify what the desired outcomes of the commitments are.

Policy priorities

VLA's plan and its actions/targets are completely focused on the department's operational activity.

It was explained in bilateral discussions that around 70% of the Agency's work involves the monitoring of farms for suspicious or particular trends and diseases such as avian influenza,

whilst the other 30% looks to establish the causes for particular outbreaks. All data collected is collated and fed back to Defra and as such, VLA does not formulate policy, but provides highly technical information. Its sustainable development focus is therefore operations-based.

Leading by example

The SDAP sets out the operational priority areas for action. These are: purchasing, buildings, travel and waste management. Bilateral discussions revealed that the Agency has prioritised these areas for action because they are areas where the Agency believes it can make realistic progress, building on past achievement. The Agency's sustainable procurement plans are already in place and progress has been

made in regard to specifications for standard products.

The Agency is investigating the possibility of installing wind turbines on its estate as part of a carbon offsetting scheme and a manure digester for the HQ in Weybridge. The Agency will need to secure funding for this either from Defra or from bidding to HMT under *Invest To Save*.

Securing the Future commitments

Departmental commitment

There are no specific commitments from *Securing the Future* for which VLA has the lead across government.

procurement and purchasing plan in place. The Agency commits to ensuring all contracts include clauses relating to sustainability considerations in all contracts for goods, works and services.

Cross-government commitments

The plan refers to some of the relevant areas but does not acknowledge that the actions are set in the context of contributing to the cross-government commitments of *Securing the Future*. The SDAP includes actions aimed at ensuring the Agency has a sustainable

Target setting

The plan sets out the timescales for completion of targets as well as who is responsible for delivery. However, it does not include any milestones and the outcome of some of the actions is not always clear.

Policy making

Sustainable development “proofing”

The plan does not refer to policy making or policy advice. It was explained in the bilateral that VLA does not have any “hooks” into Government policy making.

Sustainable development skills

The plan includes an action point to include sustainable development in staff induction training. It was explained in the bilateral that currently staff are made aware of the ISO 14001 system as part of the standard’s requirement. This is included in VLA’s induction process. A regular seminar is also run for staff on waste management.

Achieving Sustainable Development outcomes

Infrastructure

The plan sets out the basic infrastructure in place but does not describe specific SDAP delivery roles. It was explained in the bilateral that the Business Director reports to the Strategic Management Group (SMG) which has collective responsibility for the delivery of the plan. The Chief Executive expects the SMG to take day to day responsibility for the SDAP and report progress to him.

The plan was signed off by the Chief Executive.

Engagement

The plan explains that VLA will communicate the SDAP to employees via the VLA intranet and via team briefings and notice boards (a well-used method of communication in VLA). The plan will be communicated to stakeholders and the public through the VLA web site.

The Agency’s SDAP makes a commitment to discuss with Defra how it can improve awareness of sustainable development issues.

Monitoring and reporting

The plan does not set out how the organisation will monitor progress. However, in the bilateral VLA confirmed that this will mostly be achieved through the existing EMS mechanism. VLA also intends to use questions in the staff survey to

assess the levels of awareness regarding the SDAP and its content.

The Agency will report on progress against the plan in their Annual Report and Accounts annually.

Strengths to build upon



Set out a clear programme of action on staff capacity building in relation to sustainable development. This might require the re-orientation of existing seminars, information etc rather than new training.

Challenges for 2007



Ensure that the SDAP makes sufficient links back to *Securing the Future*. In particular, indicate in future plans how the Agency is accounting for and using the five guiding principles in its work.



Work with Defra to explore how to improve sustainable development awareness amongst staff.



Set out how progress will be monitored against all actions, and outline monitoring and reviewing mechanisms.



Ensure all targets are SMART and are outcome focused.



Specify how and why priority areas have been chosen.



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