

SDC Assessment of Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs): Assessment Process and Scoring Methodology

The assessment process

- Two assessors (separately) will read and assess the SDAP. This will include scoring the SDAP against 20 questions (see published assessments for a list of these questions), and keeping a log of issues which the SDC may decide to investigate further (see “Issues log” section).
- One member of the Watchdog team (“the moderator”) will facilitate a “moderation meeting” with the two assessors, to go through their answers to the questions, and agree the overall score(s)/traffic lights.
- At the moderation meeting, the assessors and moderator will also discuss the policy coverage and potential impacts and risks, and make notes of any issues which may benefit from a more in-depth assessment or review.
- The comments made by each assessor, along with notes from the moderation meeting will be recorded on one table. This will provide an audit trail of the thoughts decisions made in the assessment process. This table will be kept for reference, but not published.
- RAG ratings (Red, Amber, Green) will be allocated to each SDAP, based on the points awarded in the litmus test. A RAG rating will be given for each of five themes, and for the SDAP as a whole.
- The assessment will be made available to Commissioners and wider Secretariat for optional comment. They will also be invited to add any comments to the issues log.
- For some organisations, the SDC may choose to pose some questions or prompts for more information from the organisation. These questions will be derived from the issues log, that has drawn on the expertise of SDC Commissioners and Secretariat. The questions will be published alongside the litmus test assessment.
- The Watchdog team leader will approve the final assessment.
- The final assessment and the record of the assessment process (including assessors notes and the issues log) will be sent to the organisation, and they will be given the opportunity to respond to any questions posed by the SDC, and provide additional commentary to further explain performance etc.

N.B. The results of the assessment are based solely on the information provided in the SDAP document itself.

Issues log

The litmus test questions assess the adequacy of the SDAP, and the mechanisms which the organisation has in place to deliver sustainable development. Alongside the litmus test, a separate log will be kept of issues (as picked up by the assessors, Secretariat colleagues, and Commissioners) which might require further investigation, or that could be used in inside-track negotiations. Intelligence could also be passed to the Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) and the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU), where appropriate.

The issues log could include potential risks to sustainable development posed by the organisation's policies, or general concerns about the organisation's approach to the SDAP process, where this is not covered by the litmus test assessment.

Using the intelligence gathered in this issues log, we may choose to ask the organisation some questions around issues we would like clarified, or that we would like to see evidence that the organisation has thought about. The questions will not be evidence-based, or present the SDC's official view of the organisation.

These questions will be sent to the organisation with their assessment prior to publication. Organisations will be given the opportunity to respond to these questions and the litmus test assessment. The department's response will be published along with the assessment (there will be a 200 word limit to ensure this is concise).

During the initial assessment, and the subsequent moderation meeting, the assessors' were asked to consider the following:

- What key policy areas does the organisation's remit cover?
- Do you have any concerns about the sustainability of any of these policies?
- Is the organisation addressing all the sustainable development issues that it can, through its key policies?
- How do these policy areas overlap with policies of other government organisations? Do they contradict each other, or undermine the sustainability?
- Are you aware of initiatives to ensure the sustainable development impacts of these policies are considered in a holistic way across the different organisations?
- Do you have any concerns about the SDAP itself, and the organisation's approach to the SDAP process, which are not covered by the litmus test assessment?

Scoring methodology for SDAP assessments

The litmus test assessment of SDAPs comprises twenty questions, for which each SDAP will be awarded 0, 1 or 2 points (based on defined assessment criteria). For a list of these questions please refer to one of our published SDAP assessments. The total points will be used to assign a RAG rating (Red, Amber or Green) to each of five themes, and to the SDAP as a whole. These scores are based solely on the information contained within the SDAP.

The same scoring and assessment methodology will be applied to all SDAPs, regardless of the organisation's previous experience at developing an SDAP. The assessment is intended to be a challenging one, and it is understandable that some first-time SDAPs may not score as well as those from organisations that are on their second or third SDAP.

All organisations (regardless of the RAG rating received) should use the feedback they receive to identify ways in which they can strengthen their SDAP in the future. It is important that organisations focus on strengthening their SDAP and using it to deliver sustainable development more effectively, rather than focussing on achieving a higher score in the SDC assessments. The SDC does not intend to publish league tables of departments and agencies, based on the SDAP assessments, but the individual assessments with the RAG ratings will be published on the SDC website.

The SDC reserves the right to change the scoring methodology in the future. Over time, higher scores will be required to achieve Amber or Green ratings. The litmus test questions, and the criteria for scoring them, will also change and become more challenging.

Maximum score

There are 20 questions in all, and each can be awarded up to 2 points. Therefore the maximum score for an SDAP assessment is 40 points.

Question 2 (relating to SDAP coverage of executive agencies) may not be applicable to departments which do not have any executive agencies, although if they have demonstrated initiative at engaging other bodies within their departmental family then this can be recognised by awarding points for this question. If question 2 is deemed not applicable, the maximum number of points attainable is 38.

RAG ratings for SDAP assessments

The questions are split into five themes. A traffic light rating (Red, Amber or Green – RAG) will be applied to each theme.

Theme	Number of questions	Maximum points	RAG rating – total points required		
			Red	Amber	Green
Coverage	2	4	0-2	3	4
Strategic planning	6	12	0-4	5-8	9-12
Actions	6	12	0-5	6-8	9-12
Ownership, engagement & delivery	3	6	0-2	3-4	5-6
Monitoring, review & reporting	3	6	0-2	3-4	5-6
Total	20	40	0-18	19-30	31-40

If Question 2 is not applicable (for departments which have no executive agencies), RAG ratings should be applied using the following table:

Theme	Number of questions	Maximum points	RAG rating – total points required		
			Red	Amber	Green
Coverage	1	2	0	1	2
Strategic planning	6	12	0-4	5-8	9-12
Actions	6	12	0-5	6-8	9-12
Ownership, engagement & delivery	3	6	0-2	3-4	5-6
Monitoring, review & reporting	3	6	0-2	3-4	5-6
Total	19	38	0-17	18-28	29-38

Distribution of points by theme

The overall RAG rating will be derived from the total points scored, and is therefore not directly related to the RAG ratings for the themes. For example, an SDAP that scores at the top end of the Amber scale for four themes, and achieves top marks for the fifth theme, could still achieve an overall Green rating.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the distribution of points across the five themes.

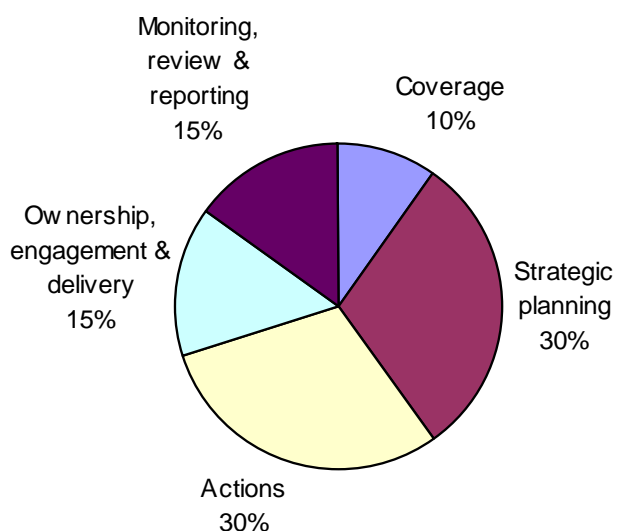


Figure 1: Distribution of points by theme for 20 questions.



Figure 2: Distribution of points by theme for 19 questions (where question 2 is not applicable).