

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Sustainable development action plan 2006

Summary

We published our approach to sustainable development last year, which includes actions we will take up to the end of 2007. Below we show which of those actions are being undertaken in 2006, published in response to DfES requirements.

Introduction

In September 2003 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) launched its 'Sustainable Development Action Plan for Education and Skills'¹. The plan asked us to develop a sustainable development strategy for ourselves and for the way we interact with the higher education sector.



We began this process by publishing 'Sustainable development in higher education: Consultation on a support strategy and action plan' (HEFCE 2005/01)² in January 2005. As part of the consultation process we invited written responses to this document and held four consultation seminars.

'Sustainable development in higher education' (HEFCE 2005/28)³, published in July 2005, sets out our approach to promoting the sustainable development agenda following feedback received through consultation. This document includes a strategic statement and action plan, and takes account of the Government's revised strategy for sustainable development, 'Securing the Future', which was published during the consultation period.

In 'Securing the Future'⁴, all UK government departments and their executive agencies made a commitment to produce a sustainable development action plan (SDAP) based on the strategy and to report on the actions by December 2006 and regularly thereafter. The DfES's SDAP⁵ includes an action to 'work with NDPBs to encourage them to produce their own sustainable development action plans by December 2006'. This document is the SDAP for

¹ www.dfes.gov.uk/aboutus/sd/actionplan.shtml

² www.hefce.ac.uk under 2005 Publications

³ www.hefce.ac.uk under 2005 Publications

⁴ HM Government 2005. *Securing the future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*. TSO, London.

⁵ www.dfes.gov.uk/aboutus/sd/actionplan.shtml

HEFCE, a non-departmental public body (NDPB) within the DfES, in fulfillment of this commitment. It is drawn from 'Sustainable development in higher education' (HEFCE 2005/28), and shows which actions we plan to implement in 2006.

Our vision for sustainable development in higher education

Our vision is that, within the next 10 years, the higher education sector in England will be recognised as a major contributor to society's efforts to achieve sustainability – through the skills and knowledge that its graduates learn and put into practice, and through its own strategies and operations.

Higher education's contribution to sustainable development

Universities and colleges already contribute in many ways to sustainable development, but there is potential for the sector to do more. We want to support what institutions are already doing as well as opening the way for them to increase activity in this area. Higher education has a pivotal role to play in helping society to develop sustainably through institutions':

- role as educators
- generation and transfer of knowledge
- leadership of, and influence on, local, national and international networks
- business strategy and operations.

Institutions exist in an increasingly heterogeneous funding and regulatory environment. For every activity there is a range of stakeholder groups, each with their own responsibilities, interests and influence – and their own views on sustainable development. Any moves we or institutions take to pursue sustainable development must be developed through dialogue with these stakeholders. Otherwise we risk working at cross-purposes or failing to harness the forward momentum which already exists.

Our commitments for 2006

Our key commitments for 2006 listed below are drawn from 'Sustainable development in higher education' (HEFCE 2005/28). We recognise that the success of this strategy depends on our continuing engagement with a range of stakeholders, including institutions themselves, to gain their co-operation and support.

Operations

Action 1. Publish our corporate social responsibility policy and demonstrate annual improvement in environmental key performance indicators.

Context for decision

We recognise that we need to continue our own transition to sustainable development. We cannot hope to influence the sector in a significant way, if we are not an exemplar of good practice ourselves. We monitor ourselves against environmental performance indicators which we publish annually. These are available online at www.hefce.ac.uk under About us/Corporate Social Responsibility. We will also work with the charity Business in the

Community (BITC) on a bespoke benchmarking arrangement in order to compare our performance against other similar organisations.

Our environmental policy will be replaced by a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy which will include a holistic action plan for sustainable development. This policy will bring benefits to the environment and to our local community, and will help us to learn first-hand about the financial and social parameters of sustainable development. This should help, in turn, to inform our work with the sector in this area.

Measurement

Success in this activity will be measured by:

- the publication of our CSR policy on our web-site
- improvement in our environmental performance indicators which are monitored and published annually
- benchmarking of our performance through BITC.

Target date: December 2006

Policies

Action 2. Make sustainable development a key theme of the next HEFCE strategic plan to be published in 2006.

Context for decision

In our vision of higher education's contribution to sustainable development, we signalled our commitment to 'make sustainable development a central part of our strategy for the future development of the higher education sector'. We believe that implementing the actions in our sustainable development action plan now will bring lasting benefits. However, making sustainable development a central part of our strategy demands a more co-ordinated and holistic approach than is possible with a single plan. So we will make sustainable development a key theme of the HEFCE strategic plan for 2006-2011.

Measurement

Success in this activity will be measured by the embedding of sustainable development in the activities outlined in the HEFCE strategic plan for 2006-2011. This plan will include a sustainable development key performance target (KPT) against which future progress will be measured. This KPT is 'by 2008, to develop a baseline assessment of how the HE sector contributes to the sustainable development of society, and to demonstrate progress in this area by 2011' (see action 4).

Target date: April 2006

Action 3. Embed sustainable development in our policy process by developing a method which will allow us to routinely appraise the social, economic and environmental impact of our new policies.

Context for decision

We recognise that we need to consider the sustainable development impacts of the policies we make. To identify sustainability issues and to raise their profile within HEFCE, we will develop a method which will allow us to routinely appraise the social, economic and environmental impacts of any new policies we make. Applying this process in itself does not imply that there is a 'right' answer: the sustainability agenda will not automatically take priority over other concerns, in the same way that evaluating the accountability burden of any new policy does not automatically dictate the final decision reached. Both, however, are key factors to consider when arriving at policy decisions. We will try to make these concerns explicit in consultation exercises, and will also ask the sector to identify potential negative sustainable development impacts of proposals.

Measurement

This activity will be completed when a method has been developed to routinely appraise the social, economic and environmental impact of our new policies. This will include good practice guidance and briefings for staff.

Target date: December 2006

Action 4. Undertake a strategic review of sustainable development activity within the sector to provide a baseline to promote sector performance to stakeholders and against which future progress can be measured.

Context for decision

The aims of the strategic review will be to:

- determine a baseline
- learn from institutions' experiences
- identify any barriers
- help refine our approach and determine priorities.

This will help inform us about what is already happening in the sector and allow us to take effective action to build on this. It will provide a baseline against which future progress can be measured.

Measurement

This activity will be measured by the successful completion of the strategic review and the publication of the sustainable development research programme findings.

Target date: June 2007

Action 5. Facilitate the sharing of good practice within the sector and support the development of good practice where none exists. This will be through the development of a good practice web-site and funding projects to develop good practice through our Leadership, Governance and Management (LGM) Fund.

Context for decision

A substantial body of good practice guidance exists which can help institutions embed sustainable development in various ways. However, many people in the sector feel that this lacks coherence, visibility or credibility. The good practice web-site will bring relevant information together and raise the visibility of existing good practice. We will support the development of good practice in areas where little or none exists to assist the sector in adopting a holistic approach. This activity was identified by consultation respondents as a high priority area for action.

Measurement

The success of this activity will be measured by:

- the completion of a good practice web-site along with a mechanism for regular updating
- the number of sustainable development projects funded through our LGM fund.

Target date: December 2006

Action 6. Implement priority actions within our action plan, HEFCE 2005/28. Monitor and review progress and take appropriate action to work towards implementing all actions by the end of 2007 when we will review our approach.

Context for decision

Our action plan (HEFCE 2005/28) contains 25 actions which we intend to complete by the end of 2007 when we will review our approach. In 2006 we will implement a number of these actions, beginning with the high priority ones. The outcomes of the strategic review (action 4) will help us to prioritise actions, and we will monitor and review progress internally at least every six months.

Measurement

In 2006 the success of this activity will be measured by the number of actions implemented. The number of actions that need to be completed by the end of 2006 will be revised as we monitor progress but our programme of implementation will ensure that all actions are completed by the end of 2007.

Target date: December 2007

Staff

HEFCE staff

We recognise that staff development and well-being are extremely important. Therefore, our CSR policy (see action 1) incorporates several actions relating to our staff and the local community.

Supporting staff in the sector

Leaders have a crucial practical role in supporting the transition to sustainable development, by guiding institutions' strategic planning, managing major capital programmes, and leading institutions' interactions with external stakeholders. Leaders also have a symbolic role in

influencing the views of staff and students about sustainable development. Thus it is important that leaders have the skills to take decisions which are compatible with this agenda.

We believe that only those institutions that give staff the opportunity to develop and use new skills will be able to manage sustainable development successfully. We regard our investment in people management – primarily through the Rewarding and Developing Staff in HE (R&DS) initiative – as a catalyst in the transition towards sustainable development. Managing sustainable development will also require people to learn new skills and knowledge and to combine these with a range of different perspectives. Key here are human resource (HR) processes that prioritise skills and competencies regardless of age, sex, ethnic background, religion or sexual orientation; and the maintenance of a diverse workforce which represents society and the student population.

Our action plan (HEFCE 2005/28) contains actions supporting leadership development, promoting sustainable HR management, and equality and diversity.

Ensuring it happens

All HEFCE staff are responsible for helping deliver our action plan by recognising and promoting sustainable development in our work and our working practices. The action plan (HEFCE 2005/28) was approved by our Board in June 2005. This SDAP highlights the key activities from that document which we plan to undertake in 2006. It has been approved by our chief executive and directors. The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources has overall accountability for the delivery of this plan.