

Sustainable Development Education Panel Review Comments from the Learning and Skills Development Agency

1. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) is a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training. Our activities include research, with partners, to inform the development of policy and practice for post-16 education and training. We have a clear brief to work across the sector, providing support for colleges, work-based training, adult and community learning, and schools post-16, with a particular focus on quality.
2. The LSDA sees sustainability as an important strategic issue for lifelong learning, social health and economic well-being. LSDA has published support material aimed at developing the environmental curriculum within further education colleges. With the Association of Colleges (AoC), we were commissioned by the Government's Sustainable Development Education Panel to produce '*Towards Sustainability – a guide to environmental management for FE colleges*'. We have also monitored and evaluated environmental projects in further education colleges in England¹. We hope to continue this work.
3. The LSDA's strategic *Learning to Last* project focuses on the need to integrate sustainability principles and practices into all levels of post-16 education. Through a series of seminars and a related publication LSDA intends to support debates that will continue with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, *the Earth Summit* (Johannesburg) in September 2002. *Learning to Last* is run in collaboration with Forum for the Future and the Sustainable Development Education Panel.

Comments

Achievements

4. The LSDA is pleased to contribute to the review of the role of the Sustainable Development Education Panel. We believe that the work of the Panel has been of a consistently high quality and has served to raise the profile of education for sustainable development (ESD) among education providers at a range of levels. Members of the Panel have been very supportive in helping LSDA to develop a more coherent approach to sustainable development education issues – particularly through *Learning to Last*, a strategic initiative

¹ This work was commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its predecessor, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

to raise awareness of key sustainability issues within the Learning and Skills sector.

5. We also believe the Panel's work has contributed significantly to the development of regional policy work on ESD, for example in Yorkshire and Humber. The insights and recommendations of the Panel have influenced the formulation of some regional sustainable development frameworks adopted by Regional Development Agencies.
6. The annual reports and the commissioned research have highlighted key areas for future development and have provided clear recommendations based on empirical evidence, clear and succinct argument and critical reflection. The Panel membership has included people with a wide spectrum of knowledge and expertise. This has meant government has had access to the best possible advice. As such it has more than fulfilled its terms of reference.

Impact and influence

7. It remains to be seen, however, whether sustainability principles and practices are fully operationalised by the many institutions responsible for their practical implementation. We believe therefore that the Panel needs to develop further still its capacity to influence.
8. This review could therefore consider how to increase and enhance the Panel's impact on policymaking and implementation within government and those organisations with which it works in partnership at national, regional and local level. A particular challenge is to overcome the tendency for Government departments to operate within their particular 'silos'. This compartmentalisation can adversely affect coherent policy development. Sustainable development principles and associated educational work should be fully integrated into all government departments rather than being essentially the responsibility of one department.
9. The Panel is lodged within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), yet its primary purpose is to advise on education developments. Consequently, its work needs to be an integral part of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), which has strong and influential links with education providers, officials, funding bodies, inspectorates and all levels of the formal education system. This could be accomplished by identifying individuals and teams in the DfES with a responsibility for ensuring that EDS informs policy and strategies for implementation. Such an approach would give greater prominence, status and practical application to sustainable development, offering many opportunities for the pursuit of joined up governmental policies and the development of good practice.

10. In addition to ensuring that ESD is fully embedded within learning from cradle to grave, the Panel should influence the nature of industrial and commercial training, and associated targets. Through the Panel's relationship within government, actions could be pursued in relation to regional economic development, e-learning, citizenship education and practice, continuing professional development, neighbourhood renewal and urban and rural regeneration.

Areas for development

11. The work of the Panel and the relatively slow take-up of sustainable development education by organisations engaged in offering formal and informal learning opportunities suggests further work is needed. This could improve awareness and practice in many areas including:

- Research on sustainable skills development
- Project-based activity within industry and commerce
- Curriculum development in all sectors
- Pre and in-service teacher education
- Local government Local Agenda 21 activities
- Development of sustainable communities
- Further work to develop sustainability strategies in the leadership and management of education and training

12. The Panel should seek positively to influence the way formal education is funded so that, for instance, both the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are in a position to support and stimulate new initiatives and innovations over the medium to long term. LSDA welcomes the increasing commitment that both funding bodies are giving to this area of work.

13. We also suggest that the Panel should commission research and development work, increase the number and range of its publications and other forms and methods of communication. This could help raise both professional and public awareness of ESD to a much higher level than presently exists in what is likely to be an increasingly urgent agenda to address.