



LSN Evidence NIACE inquiry on lifelong learning and sustainable development August 2008

1.0 Background Information to submission and sources of evidence.

1.1 LSN is pleased to submit evidence to the NIACE enquiry for evidence on lifelong learning and sustainable development 2008. LSN is a not-for-profit organisation with unique depth and breadth of experience of working with all types post-16 learning and skills providers as well as with funding and other strategic agencies.

LSN and the organisations from which it has grown - the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) and the Further Education Unit (FEU) – have been at the forefront of post-16 thinking around learning for, through and about sustainable development since the 1990s. Early examples include the publication of *Colleges Going Green* (FEU 1992) and *Towards Sustainability: A Guide for Colleges* (FEDA 1992).

More recent work has included membership of the Government's Sustainable Development Education Panel (SDEP), support for and learning from practical action for sustainable development post-16, and independent and commissioned research activities into sustainable development in the post-16 sector. Key projects in recent years have included:

- **2008** for East of England LSC, 'The East of England Sustainable Development Baseline Survey' (FE; Sixth Form Colleges; ACL and WBL), unpublished.
- **2004** - Management of QIA Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme, including the publication of post-16 materials to stimulate active citizenship through sustainable development learning, and the provision of related training events.ⁱ
- **LSN/LSX (2006)**, *Sustainable Development in London's Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges: Good Practice and recommendations for Further Action* (Blair et al)¹
- **LSN (2006)**, *Sustainable Development in the Learning and Skills Sector National Baseline Survey* (Martin et al)²
- **LSDA (2004)**, *Contributing to Sustainable Development: Centres of Vocational Excellence* (Martin et al)³
- **LSDA (2004)**, *Opportunities for Sustainable Development in the Learning and Skills Sector: a Policy Analysis* (Martin et al)⁴
- **LSDA (2004)**, *Regeneration and All That: Learning and Skills and Sustainability*, (Yarnit)⁵
- **LSDA (2002)**, Learning to Last. Through a series of seminars, conferences and the publication of *Learning to Last: skills, sustainability and strategy* (Cohen et al, 2002),⁶ this initiative 'focused on the need to integrate sustainability principles and practices into all levels of post-16 learning.'

The evidence provided in this submission is drawn chiefly from these sources and from the on-going learning which has arisen from primary and secondary research

and from reflection and debate, both within LSN and between the organisation and its partners.

i See for instance QIA Post-16 Citizenship Support Programme [Happy planet: sustainable development and citizenship](#) 2007

LSN holds sustainable development to be a key strategic imperative for the post-16 sector.

2.0 What are the core generic skills that we need for a sustainable society?

2.1 LSN recognises that the issue of generic skills for a sustainable society is a subject of much debate. We broadly endorse the position taken by Professor William Scott and others that to prescribe a definitive menu of skills would be counter-intuitive in the context of quantum change and an unknowable future, and we agree with the assertion of Scott and Gough that:

‘By learning throughout our lives we equip ourselves to choose most advantageously as the future unfolds. This would not bring about sustainable development. Rather, it would be evidence that sustainable development was happening.’⁷

Nevertheless, our research in this field also suggests that to provide authentic evidence of sustainable development, the appetite for learning described above would almost certainly be characterised by a number of generic skills. Those frequently identified by research conducted by LSN and its forerunners are itemised below:

- **Unlearning and rethinking** - learners, employers and providers would be skilled in the management of multiple perspectives and the conditionality of knowledge. They would be adaptable and accustomed to learning anew as a way of life.
- **Systems thinking and practice** – learners, employers and providers would be able to recognise and work with the interdependence of ecological, physical, cultural, economic, social and political systems. This would include the ability to perceive the links between the local and the global and the confidence and aptitude to look and work beyond traditional boundaries
- **Partnership and participation** - learners, employers and providers would possess networking skills and be equipped to contribute to the development of learning communities.
- **Knowledge management** - learners, employers and providers would be adept at sharing, analysing and building upon their learning.
- **Decision making in an uncertain world** - learners, employers and providers would be able to take the long view and capable of making holistic cost/benefit and risk analyses.
- **Leadership for sustainability** – learners, employers and providers would have the skills to take active responsibility for a more sustainable world and to inspire the active engagement of others.

It cannot be overemphasised that these skills need first and foremost to be promoted by learning agencies and post-16 providers. The ‘teachers’ must be the first learners.

3.0 What are the most effective forms of education for achieving sustainable development?

Writing in 2004 Martin Yarnit observed, 'a 1993 report characterised the FE sector's response at that stage as "considerable indifference". RDAs, under a duty to integrate sustainable development guidelines in their education and training, have fared no better. (Yarnit, 2004) ⁸

Baseline research subsequently conducted by LSN suggests that the FE system has made a significant effort to incorporate sustainable development into teaching and learning. 67% of respondents to the National Baseline Survey (2006) indicated that they were embedding sustainable development concepts into their courses.⁹ LSN is able to identify four distinct approaches taken to achieve this response. These are as follows:

- 3.1** A large proportion of sustainable development learning relates to specific vocations, with particularly strong provision in agriculture, horticulture, construction and engineering. In some cases this takes the form of a primary learning goal, such as BPEC's Certificate in solar domestic hot water heating. Aspects of sustainable development may also be studied as an integral element of a specialist unit. One example is the Farm diversification unit of the BTEC National in agriculture. Learning of this kind is generally specific to the learner's vocational area. Skills developed relate to particular jobs or roles to be undertaken, and knowledge tends to be restricted to 'hard' technical facts. This is often regarded as specialist learning and taught by one individual or a small team within the provider.
- 3.2** There is also evidence of learning about sustainable development which occurs as additional learning, with some providers offering this as a route to further accreditation, through for example, NCFE's Certificate in sustainable development, ABC's Certificate in sustainable energy, and OCNW's Certificate in developing environmental awareness. This approach typically combines learning about 'hard' technical facts with equipping learners to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' personal and organisational behaviour. Responsibility for the delivery of this learning normally resides with one individual or a small team within the provider
- 3.3** There is some evidence, though much less, of providers which have integrated sustainable development through some or all of their existing curricula. There is one particularly effective example of this having been implemented by an ACL provider. This has provided opportunities to integrate learning about relevant 'hard' technical facts as well to explore the skills, values and possible behaviours linked to sustainable development. Such an approach requires all course team members to reflect upon and learn about the implications of sustainable development for their subject and for their learners.
- 3.4** In addition, there is also evidence that increasing numbers of providers are encouraging learners to participate in active learning enrichment and citizenship programmes which explicitly explore sustainable development. This approach allows learners to practise the 'soft' skills essential to sustainable development and in some instances has led to learners exploring links between the local and the global. Staff responsible for this category of learning are often adept at perceiving and capitalising upon cross-organisational opportunities, for instance, linking new build or travel planning initiatives to learner activity.

Each of the above approaches has its merits and these are enhanced when used in combination, as LSN believes they currently are by a small number of providers.

In LSN's opinion the active learning approach described in 3.4 appears to be the one currently enabling most learners to develop a selection of the generic skills described in 2.1, though even here further thinking will be required if the whole suite of these skills is to be addressed.

LSN believes that the development of these generic skills should be viewed as a key component of anything which purports to be education for sustainable development. This is not to undervalue the technical skills for new technologies or knowledge about sustainability issues which may be studied, for instance, by learners on a BTEC Travel and tourism programme. However unless this learning is accompanied by the development of generic skills which equip the learner to perceive and interact with the world in a new way and to develop the appetite and aptitude for continual learning and unlearning, it is unlikely they will make a lasting contribution to a sustainable global society.

To achieve this, providers will need to look not only at the structure of their programmes and the content of their curricula, but at their teaching and learning methodologies too. This will require providers to become models of learning organisations and for their staff to become exemplars of the generic skills described in 2.1.

Providers of effective education for sustainable development capitalise upon whole-organisational learning opportunities and use their buildings and estates as tools for learning. They involve both teaching and non-teaching staff in these opportunities, and look outwards beyond their organisation to forge learning opportunities with communities from the local to the global.

4.0 What the evidence says about the relationship between lifelong learning and sustainable development.

LSN's work in this field suggests that one of the generic skills for sustainable development is unlearning and rethinking. We agree with Stephen Gough that, 'if you wanted to test for a sustainable society, one of the questions you would ask would be: are people learning all the time in this society?'¹⁰

Lifelong learning is both a prerequisite for and an indicator of sustainable development.

The evidence does not suggest that this link is fully appreciated by the FE system. LSN has found considerable evidence that teaching staff remain confused and alienated by the terminology of sustainable development, often assuming that it is something which is delivered by specialists. This is not helped by the way in which many organisations manage their knowledge. Blaire *et al* (2006) found that, 'valuable information about SD curriculum initiatives often rests exclusively within discrete departments.'¹¹ Work needs to be undertaken within the sector to develop understanding of the relationship between lifelong learning and sustainable development, so that all teachers regard themselves as catalysts to lifelong learning and, by that function, as specialists in sustainable development.

5.0 How can we ensure that there is a strong global dimension in lifelong learning, linked visibly to local concerns?

There is confusion in parts of the Post-16 landscape about what constitutes the global dimension and/or global learning. For instance, some providers conflate the global dimension with international work, sometimes mistaking provision for overseas learners with global learning.

There is also a tendency for some providers to encourage learners to take part in fund-raising activities for the developing world. While there may be compelling arguments for activities such as these, they do not of themselves constitute global learning, and, if not carefully managed, tend to encourage paternalism rather than provide authentic global learning opportunities.

LSN accepts the DFID definition of the Global Dimension available on the Global Dimension website. Although targeted at schools, much of the content of this site is transferable to post-16 providers. The site defines the global dimension as learning that enables people to:

- critically examine their own values and attitudes
- appreciate the similarities between peoples everywhere, and learn to value diversity
- understand the global context of their local lives
- develop skills that will enable them to combat injustice, prejudice and discrimination.¹²

Responses to the challenges set by this definition will rightly vary from provider to provider and will often grow from learners identifying themes common to their community and to people living elsewhere in the world.

In the context of active citizenship, for example, this might mean giving learners the space to identify a local concern and then exposing them to case studies which demonstrate how activists in the developing world have effectively countered similar challenges.

6.0 Where are the gaps in evidence in relation to this theme?

LSN is aware of the work in several LSC regions to audit sustainable development activity. Together with the national baseline survey of 2006, this is building up useful baseline information about the numbers of providers which are offering sustainable development as part of their provision.

Less is known about the impact of this learning and how effective it is in making a meaningful contribution to sustainable development. LSN would support any proposal for a longitudinal survey to explore links between various approaches to learning for, through and about sustainable development and the stimulus to lifelong learning.

Further data relating to the take-up and effectiveness of CPD for education for sustainable development is also required.

7.0 What kinds of infrastructural developments are needed to strengthen the part lifelong learning plays in promoting sustainable development?

Research conducted by LSN and others including the Centre for Excellence in Leadership¹³, indicates that providers would very broadly be in favour of greater external drivers. These include:

- prominence given to sustainable development in LLUK standards;
- incorporation of sustainable development within the new inspection framework;
- integration of sustainable development by awarding bodies;
- more emphasis on sustainable development outcomes in funding and approval submissions.

LSN fully endorses this list.

LSN is also conscious that many providers favour additional funding for sustainable development. While funding is always welcomed, LSN is generally of the opinion that significant progress towards sustainable development can be achieved at a relatively low financial cost, and that the true impact will be felt through changes in teaching and learning. The FE system needs to hold on to the fact that sustainable development is not about increasing consumption, but about the conservation and effective use of existing resources.

8.0 Key messages for the Inquiry

LSN proposes the following key messages for the inquiry:

- Lifelong learning and sustainable development are indivisible – the sector needs to understand that everyone involved in the facilitation of learning is a sustainable development specialist.
- While the future may not be open to prediction, a set of generic skills is, nevertheless, desirable. These will include:
 - unlearning and rethinking.
 - systems thinking and practice
 - partnership and participation
 - knowledge management
 - decision making in an uncertain world
 - leadership for sustainability
- Active learning appears to offer an effective approach to education for sustainable development. However, research is required to establish the relative effectiveness of different approaches to learning for, through and about sustainable development, and how these impact upon learners' appetite for lifelong learning and the development of the generic skills.
- Greater clarity is required about the global dimension, what it means and how it should be taught.
- Better understanding of the take-up and impact of CPD for education for sustainable development is required.

- External drivers are broadly welcomed, for instance by:
 - LLUK
 - awarding bodies
 - Inspectorates
 - funding bodies

Notes and References

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- 1 Blaire, Rayment and Scott (2006) *Sustainable Development in London's Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges*. At <http://www.lsx.org>
 - 2 Martin, Martin, Cohen and Correa (2006) *Sustainable Development in the learning and Skills Sector, National Baseline Survey*. At <http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/sustainability/resources/index.aspx>
 - 3 Martin, Martin, Cohen and Aitkin ((2004), *Contributing to Sustainable Development: Centres of Vocational Excellence*. At <http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/sustainability/resources/index.aspx>
 - 4 Martin, Cohen and Martin (2004) *Opportunities for Sustainable Development in the Learning and Skills Sector: a Policy Analysis*. At <http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/sustainability/resources/index.aspx>
 - 5 Yarnit (2004) *Regeneration and All That: Learning and Skills and Sustainability*. At <http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/sustainability/resources/index.aspx>
 - 6 Cohen, James and Blewitt (2002) *Learning to Last: Skills, Sustainability and Strategy*, LSDA, London.
 - 7 Scott and Gough (2003). *Sustainable Development and Learning: Framing the issues*. Routledge, London, p147
 - 8 Yarnit, p.13
 - 9 Martin, Martin, Cohen and Correa, p.9
 - 10 Gough, S., 2003. in *Learning the Sustainability Lesson, tenth report of session 2002-03*, Volume 2, House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, EV 20. At <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmenvaud/472/472.pdf>
 - 11 Blaire *et al*, p.18
 - 12 The Global Dimension <http://www.globaldimension.org.uk/aboutus/?id=98>
 - 13 CEL (September 2007) *Leadership for Sustainability: Making Sustainable Development a Reality for Leaders*. At: <http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/SustainabilityResearch.pdf>