

Mr Paul Rainey
Sustainable Development Unit
Defra
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Dear Mr Rainey

Taking it on – Response from Professional Practice for Sustainable Development

I am pleased to respond to the consultation on behalf of Professional Practice for Sustainable Development, a project managed by the Institution of Environmental Sciences and funded by the Environmental Action Fund in partnership with the Environment Agency, The Natural Step and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Further information is available on our website at www.pp4sd.org.uk. Please note that we have also made contributions through the Council for Environmental Education, the Institution of Environmental Sciences and the on-line response. This additional information is based on our experience of developing inter-professional learning with professional bodies and with professionals in the workplace.

1. Early on in the process of engaging with professionals we find that they want an explicit model of sustainable development linked to a tick list of things to be done so they can 'be sustainable'. However, this changes during the dialogue with the professional bodies. The preference becomes for dialogue with experts and other professionals to see how best the expertise and experience of the professionals can be integrated with the expertise and experience of the sustainable development advocates. There is then a shared ownership of the dialogue, the development process and the training programme that results from it. In practice, the development process is part of the learning process so we should avoid prescribing actions because that can remove an essential part of the learning process.
2. There are many references to changing behaviour and changing attitudes. This assumes there is one pattern of behaviour and a set of values that are required for sustainable development to take place. It also assumes that none of the population has appropriate ethical values or patterns of behaviour. We would suggest that people need the skills to identify appropriate values and forms of behaviour that are compatible with sustainable development principles as currently understood. There should be a supportive environment when they seek to follow up on their conclusions. There also needs to be an element of life-long learning so that values and behaviour patterns can be continually assessed in light of developing understanding. Professional bodies provide a vehicle for life-long learning.
3. Fundamental to the learning process are knowledge and understanding of the issues involved. Both are constantly evolving, and so learning needs to be continuous too. Professional associations already provide life long learning through their CPD programmes. We would ask that sustainable development issues are integrated with these programmes in order that the impact of professional practice on sustainable development can be continually assessed, evaluated and appropriate changes made to practice.
4. Institutions that provide education and training can help learners develop the knowledge and skills needed to participate in learning processes for sustainable development. At the moment the emphasis on imparting knowledge and technical skills is inadequate to encourage more participatory learning processes. Further and Higher Education provide in-service and pre-service education and training for professionals and we recommend further dialogue between the parties on this subject.
5. In encouraging sustainable development there is a belief that sustainable development is a good thing. Just like democracy is considered to be a good thing. Sustainable development is as much about a view of the world in which there is security, equity and justice as it is about the techniques of implementing that vision. We should not avoid the ethical dimension. A professional association already has a professional ethos of high standards and good service into which it is relatively easy to integrate sustainable development. It would then become obligatory for all members to use practices that meet these professional standards. We hope the strategy can encourage this development.
6. As regards indicators for professional development, we would point out that all indicators indicate the success or otherwise of the learning process. Most indicators are designed to show short term, measurable changes and as such are not really appropriate to education that is a long-term process. So many factors have an influence that developing meaningful indicators is impracticable. However, we would support indicators that measure changes to professional codes of practice, initial training and CPD requirements.

Yours sincerely

John D Baines
Chairman PP4SD
Vice President, Institution of Environmental Sciences