



Leading learning and skills

Speech by Melanie Hunt, National Director of Learning, to the 11th Annual EAUC Conference – 18 April 2007.

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to update you on the LSC's commitment to sustainable development and the action we are taking to translate our commitment into reality.

First, I am delighted to contribute to EAUC's 11th annual conference. I'd like to start by congratulating you all – the association and members - for flying the flag for sustainable development with such dedication and enthusiasm over these years.

You will know that in 2005, we consulted on and published our strategy for sustainable development – From Here to Sustainability. This set out how we saw both the LSC and the FE system contributing to sustainable development in four key areas –

- the curriculum
- building and estates
- community engagement
- And what we called positioning the sector – awareness raising, building capacity, and working with, influencing and persuading our partners and stakeholders.

Evidence tells us that we are in an excellent position to make a difference – as an LSC and as part of the wider FE system. When we talk about the 'FE system' we include everyone delivering in it now and everyone will do so in the future. We are moving towards a demand-led system; a system in which more and different organisations will be delivering provision using public funds - which increases the potential to make an impact on sustainable development.

The evidence also gives us many examples of excellent and innovative practice that we can learn from and be inspired by.

The Learning and Skills Development agency (now Learning and Skills Network) identified some of these for us in case studies published last summer. Many of you here today will have been involved in or led these exemplars. You will have undoubtedly have built on them since and we welcome news of this - please do let us know about it.

One of the legacies of good practice is the stimulation it provides for ideas to move us further forward. The good practice in FE system certainly does this and we are talking with partners about how we can build on it moment.

I expect more good practice to emerge through our own survey of sustainable development awareness amongst LSC staff, which we are about to initiate. We know we have colleagues who are already changing how they work to support sustainability. We look forward to sharing and learning from that – and using it as inspiration. But the survey won't be just a snap-shot. It will enable us to do at least two things.

- It will be a first step in building the capacity of our staff to make a difference – by changing their own behaviour and by encouraging change through the partnerships they have with others.
- And second, it will give us a benchmark against we can test our progress over the next few years and continually build our awareness and capacity.

So we have an excellent starting point. But it is just that - a starting point.

Our vision for sustainable development is a 10 year one. Across those years we see the learning and skills system committing itself to sustainable development, building its contribution and taking a greater leadership role as it moves towards self-regulation and takes responsibility for its own direction and development. Really focusing on those areas where it can make a difference - such as through the learning opportunities delivered and through engagement with employers, stakeholders and communities.

We want to develop indicators that will objectively measure our collective success but we already have thoughts about where we would like to be as a minimum in ten years' time.

- all providers and learners will know about sustainable development and expect it to be part of normal practice

- organisations in the FE system will have strategies, policies and plans in place to integrate and implement sustainable development, and these will be understood and acted on
- as an LSC we will have become an exemplar organisation by integrating sustainable development in our policies and everyday practice
- the risks and barriers preventing sustainable development will be understood and we will have strategies in place to overcome them
- Continuous improvement in the sustainable development performance of the FE system will be recognised and celebrated.

A key contribution the FE system can make is through education for sustainable development. Research and good practice have already given us examples of how sustainable development can be embedded in the curriculum but this is an area where we can do more. We have started to talk to partners about how to systematically and imaginatively embed sustainable development in the curriculum - in National Occupational Standards, in delivery to learners and all the points in between.

A wealth of opportunities and challenges lie beneath our ambitions for sustainable development - the scale of the challenge is significant but the evidence of the need to change is overwhelming. It is time to start responding to the evidence in a committed and co-ordinated way.

At the moment we are developing an action plan in consultation with national and regional colleagues and we expect to publish this in May this year. There is a long list of potential actions so we will need to prioritise and to continually review and evaluate the plan to ensure its currency.

Our key aim however, is to integrate sustainable development with our policy and practice. Although there are specific actions and changes we will need to make, at heart this is about a change of culture or mindset. Sustainable development must become part of our automatic everyday thinking. It must be something that is delivered through the LSC's mainstream activity and not separately. It must become something that we all - Chief Executives, project managers, specialists, administrators think about

automatically - much as we think now about costing a project accurately or writing a letter clearly.

As an LSC Director I am heartened by how our work, and the work of our partners in the FE system, already contributes to sustainable development. So I think if we can successfully change our culture, we can really make a difference.

- Our work to support young learners - such as through Educational Maintenance Allowances and engaging in learning those who are not in education, employment or training - is equipping them to engage fully in society and giving them the platform of skills they need for sustained employment.
- Likewise our work with adults. We are reforming and improving provision for offender learners; providing personal, community and development learning and family learning opportunities; and using our funding for demand led provision – provision that employers have endorsed as giving learners the knowledge and up to date skills they need for productive and sustained employment.
- Since 2001 the LSC has allocated over £1.8 billion in capital developments in the FE system. Evidence shows this investment impacts positively on the participation and achievement of young people and adults. We have said in our recent Building for Skills prospectus that we will do more to support sustainable design and construction in these capital projects.

I am also heartened by the many potential opportunities open to us.

- There are opportunities we may have missed or failed to take maximum benefit from. Could we do more for instance do more to achieve our sustainability goals through the work we already do in e-learning?
- There are opportunities in new policy areas – such as the new Adult Careers Service and the Framework for Excellence. We need to make sure that sustainable development is at the heart of the approach in these areas.
- In response to the Stern Review and the Leitch Review, we need a coordinated approach across the system to make the link between the economy and climate change. In learning and skills policy, climate change makes a powerful case for

an appropriate focus on the skills we will need to plan for and respond to a low carbon economy.

- The development of a demand-led system opens up new opportunities. We will have a wider network of providers in future – some of them perhaps using public funding for only a small proportion of their overall work. It may be a more dynamic system with changes in the provider network year on year. Perhaps by 2012 sustainable development will be something that could be written into all LSC contracts? These are the sort of potential approaches we need to work through as the new demand-led, post-Leitch context for our work emerges.
- I would like us to explore with our Government and NDPB partners whether we could develop a process of sustainable development impact assessments – using the model we have at present for Race Impact Assessments.
- We can do more to use the intelligence we gather through programmes like Train to Gain where we have contact with tens of thousands of small businesses to drive our strategy and inform and influence the work of our partners.
- And there are other opportunities that will become apparent through our action plan and our work with partners like EAUC. We welcome your ideas and challenges.

I would also highlight the need to demonstrate that sustainable development can contribute to the key programmes that drive us – the FE Reform Programme, agenda for change, the Leitch Review of Skills and the drivers that may come from the Treasury's Sub-National Review. If sustainable development can make a contribution to meeting the objectives of these programmes, it will be on everyone's list of answers, not the list of questions.

So, as an LSC I think we have taken a few steps down the road to sustainable development. Now we need to start taking strides and start demonstrating advancement towards meeting the challenges of climate change, energy and sustainable consumption, reducing the use of natural resources, enhancing social justice and helping communities to help themselves. We know what a few of them will be because they are embedded in our strategy and priorities for the next year.

- In partnership with ECOTEC, EAUC and Professor Stephen and Maureen Martin, we are developing a set of on-line resources to support the FE system on sustainable development. These will be ready in the summer.
- We are undertaking the baseline survey of LSC staff I mentioned earlier.
- We will develop a set of indicators to enable us to demonstrate progress in moving towards being an exemplar for sustainable development.
- We will prioritise how we can work in partnership with local authorities and regional development agencies to align strategic plans and actions

This is just a start - we need to gradually accelerate our rate of progress through a mix of short, medium and long-term action and change. And we need to start looking further ahead because sustainable development is an area where we must continually look to do more. I hope that I will be at future EAUC conferences sharing the journey and celebrating progress with you.