



# Leadership for sustainability

Making sustainable development  
a reality for leaders



Final research report



## Publisher

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## Foreword

Towards the end of 2005, I volunteered to lead on developing CEL's thinking on sustainable development, sharing the belief of my chief executive, Lynne Sedgmore, that we should contribute to this agenda through our own sustainable development action plan.

Since then, we have taken time to look at what that contribution should be. What came out most strongly in my early discussions with colleagues in the sector was the need for leaders at all levels to sponsor, drive, endorse and support sustainable development activity. At the same time, those leaders need the knowledge and skills to provide that support.

This was the starting point for the research report you have before you. We commissioned this research to enable us to better understand the relationships between sustainable development and leadership, the catalysts and blocks to embedding sustainable development in organisations, and the leadership styles that support or hinder this. This would give us a clearer understanding of what we in CEL need to do, and offer, to develop 'leadership for sustainability' across the sector.

We shared the draft report of this research at our first *Leadership for Sustainability* conference on 16 May 2007, where colleagues from across the sector explored and discussed the sustainable development challenge for leaders in more depth, and you can find a report of that conference on our website. The research report has been revised and updated to reflect those discussions and is now presented to the sector as a final report.

We are now drawing on the research report in developing our strategy and action plan, and will be launching our strategy on 15 November 2007 at the House of Lords. We want to consult further with colleagues across the sector as we develop the strategy.

I would like to express my thanks to the people who have been on our journey with us so far. The research teams at both Forum for the Future and London South Bank University have shown tremendous enthusiasm and support for the agenda and the project and have worked together in an open, honest and collaborative way. I am deeply indebted to Nigel Rayment for his endless support and wise advice and for responding so well to the challenge of putting together this report and the conference report.

But most of all, my thanks go to everyone in the sector who has given up time for interviews or action research projects or attended and contributed to the conference. You have provided us with a wealth of information, experiences, reflections and ideas. Please keep them coming! If you weren't at the conference, let me know if you would like to be involved in or informed about forthcoming activities and consultations.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Conrad Benefield".

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# 1. Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a joint research project into leadership for sustainability. One research strand was conducted by a team from the Education for Sustainability Programme at London South Bank University (LSBU) and the other by Forum for the Future. The research was carried out between November 2006 and March 2007. The interim findings from these two strands were then critically reviewed by research participants and other interested stakeholders who attended the free *Leadership for Sustainability* conference hosted by CEL and Forum for the Future in London on 16 May 2007. Their responses to the draft report, together with the findings arising from their activities at workshops during the conference, have now been incorporated into this final research report.

The research project aimed:

- to build understanding of catalysts and blocks to leadership for sustainability in the learning and skills sector
- to test the inseparability of good leadership from leadership for sustainability
- to inform CEL's strategy for supporting the development of leadership for sustainability.

Our findings are that most participating leaders understand why a more sustainable way of life is necessary and that the sector has a responsibility to help realise that way of life. Many, however, feel themselves on a steep learning curve.

With reference to CEL's *Leadership Qualities Framework (LQF)*, the research found that effective leaders demonstrated many of the key change management skills necessary for sustainability, including:

- Distributed leadership
- Taking account of the organisational climate and culture
- Employing a wide range of influencing strategies
- Building organisational capability
- Cultural sensitivity
- Commitment to equality and fairness.

Unsurprisingly, however, given the newness of the agenda for many leaders in the sector, there are some skills and knowledge in the *LQF* which need to be strengthened if sustainable development is to be embraced. These include:

- Systems thinking to understand interconnectedness and manage complexity
- Futures thinking to create a compelling vision of a sustainable college of the future
- Demonstrating broad organisational awareness by astutely perceiving political, economic, social trends
- Creating and capitalising on learning opportunities for sustainability
- Incorporating sustainability into core strategies and into college business
- Performance accountability in the absence of exemplars on which to benchmark
- Exhibiting self-belief and confidence to develop learning opportunities in absence of regulatory 'permission'.

The following recommendations for CEL have emerged from the research:

- Recognise itself as a catalyst. CEL is trusted, respected and well placed to give legitimacy to leadership for sustainability.
- Work with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to help consolidate and evaluate information on tools and sources of expertise.
- Work with and use its influence with other key sector agencies to progress sustainable development in the sector.
- Share good practice through generic examples, specific case studies and forums, to learn from not only the learning and skills sector, but also from schools, higher education and local government.
- Review the commitment to and internal strategy for sustainable development at senior leadership level in the light of the outcomes of this report.
- Conduct an internal communication campaign and staff development workshops to raise awareness of sustainable development and CEL's strategy.
- Investigate the possibility of sustainable development mentoring and sustainable development curriculum mentoring schemes as part of CEL's existing mentoring programme.
- Initiate training programmes and support for college governors.
- Explore organising an event on sustainability to bring together other agents for change in the sector such as the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) and the 157 Group.
- Embed sustainable development in all CEL programmes as an integral element of leadership development.

- Review existing programmes to include opportunities for the following:
  - to develop understanding of sustainable development and help the sector to grasp why it is desirable and necessary
  - to develop understanding of the inseparability of good leadership from leadership for sustainability, and to continue to support leadership for organisational and cultural change to enable the transition from talking to doing. This should include guidance on leadership styles and when different styles might be most effective.
  - to reflect on a values-based approach to leadership
  - to use systems thinking as a tool to recognise inter-relationships and to cope with uncertainty and complexity
  - to develop risk taking and risk management readiness, particularly the risks associated with a distributive style of leadership
  - to find ways of promoting a distributive leadership style, which involves CEL working with sustainability leaders at all levels, not just senior people.
  - to develop capability to harness the core values of staff
  - to enhance capacity to take a developmental approach with staff
  - to implement strategies to enable staff to recognise their own learning as a core activity
  - to reflect on the motivation and values of learners
  - to understand the business case for sustainable development
  - to learn about sustainability audits, cost-benefit analysis for long term benefits and payback periods
  - to learn from examples of processes for implementing sustainable development, including effective strategic planning, technical issues and how to enhance leadership through an estates building project
  - to develop skills and techniques for lobbying for change in the sector
  - extend current CEL research projects into leadership for sustainability.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

CEL has a pressing desire to better understand the relationships between sustainable development and leadership, and is committed to supporting the development of 'leadership for sustainability' across the sector. This report presents the findings of some significant early steps on that journey.

In autumn 2006, CEL commissioned a twin research project into leadership for sustainability. This was conducted by teams from the Education for Sustainability Programme at London South Bank University and Forum for the Future. The findings of this research were then critically reviewed by participants in the twin projects described below and by other delegates attending a free conference jointly hosted by CEL and Forum for Future on 16 May 2007. Their responses and the outcomes of activities on the day have been incorporated within this final report.

The team from London South Bank University conducted semi-structured interviews, which were carried out between November 2006 and March 2007. The action research projects managed by Forum for the Future each lasted for three months during the same period.

Sections three and four of this report describe the policy context and background, the purpose, and the methodology of the research.

Section five of the report presents the outcomes from the semi-structured interviews and the action research projects mapped against CEL's leadership framework, along with the evidence from the conference held on 16 May 2007<sup>1</sup>. Sections six and seven highlight the implications of these outcomes for CEL and recommend actions that CEL might take to develop support for leadership for sustainability.

This is a qualitative piece of research based on the exploratory dialogue of the semi-structured interviews and on the five action research projects.

### 2.2 Terminology

2.2.1 **Sustainability and sustainable development.** In its strategy for sustainable development the LSC describes sustainable development as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"<sup>2</sup>.

Commonly referred to as the Brundtland definition, this derives from the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987).

However, sustainability and sustainable development are controversial concepts to define.

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1 CEL, 2007. *Leadership for Sustainability: The sustainable development challenge for leaders in further education. Conference report. 16 May 2007.* Available at to download at [www.centreforexcellence.org.uk](http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk)

2 Learning and Skills Council, 2005. *From Here to Sustainability: The Learning and Skills Council Strategy for Sustainable Development.* p2.



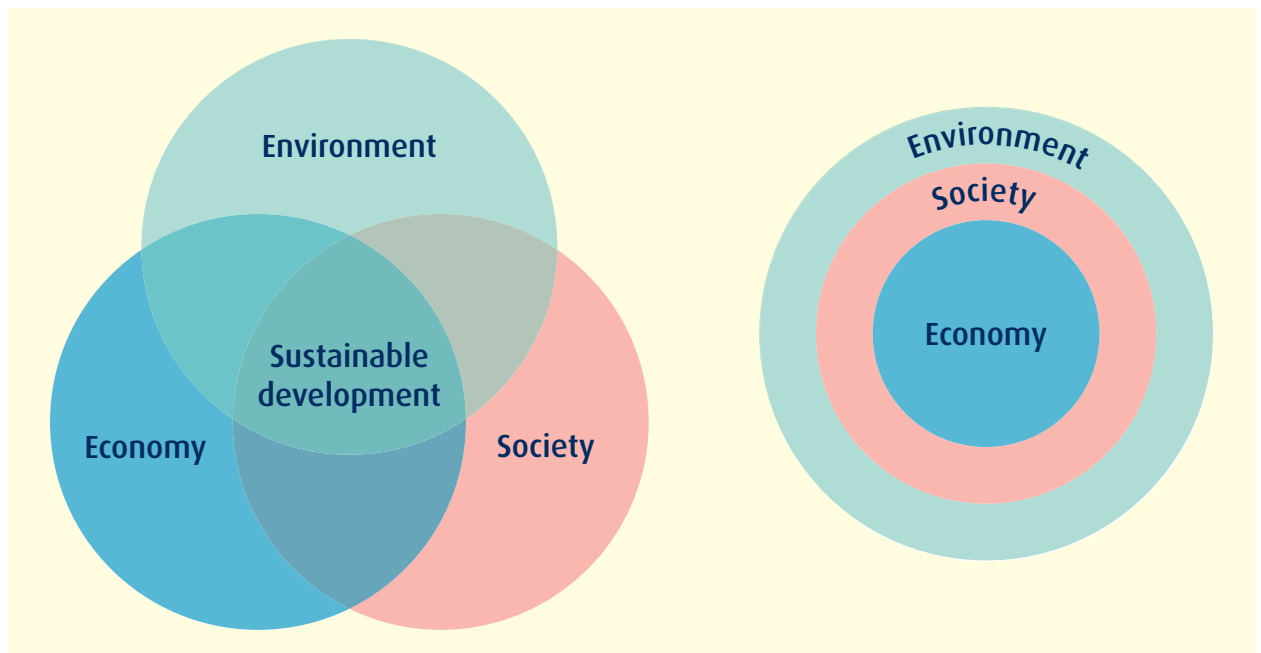
Sustainability as a term has long been used to describe the continuing existence of a condition, a state of being or of an object. In this context and in this research sustainability is taken to mean a state of existence where social well-being and quality of life is maintained without degrading the ecological systems upon which life depends. This for many is an idealistic state of existence which can be moved towards, but may never be fully achieved.

Sustainable development is a more recent term, which is recognised as a process. In the context of this research that process is seen as one which assesses the social, environmental and economic aspects of any action or decision in order to achieve an outcome that is as close to sustainability as possible. The relationship of these three elements can be seen in figures 1 and 2. CEL believes that good leadership must entail providing leadership on the implementation of this process.

In shaping its role and contribution to the sustainable development agenda, CEL has identified a pressing need for leaders in the sector to lead and support sustainable development in their organisations and teams, and, therefore, to be equipped with the knowledge, skills and understanding to provide that leadership. CEL has defined such leadership as 'leadership for sustainability' and as leadership which promotes and supports sustainable development principles in all aspects of the role of the individual leader and the organisation, including:

- Management of estates and resources
- Curriculum content and development
- Learning delivery
- CPD supporting sustainability literacy in all staff
- Strategic planning, organisational development and succession planning.

### Three elements models

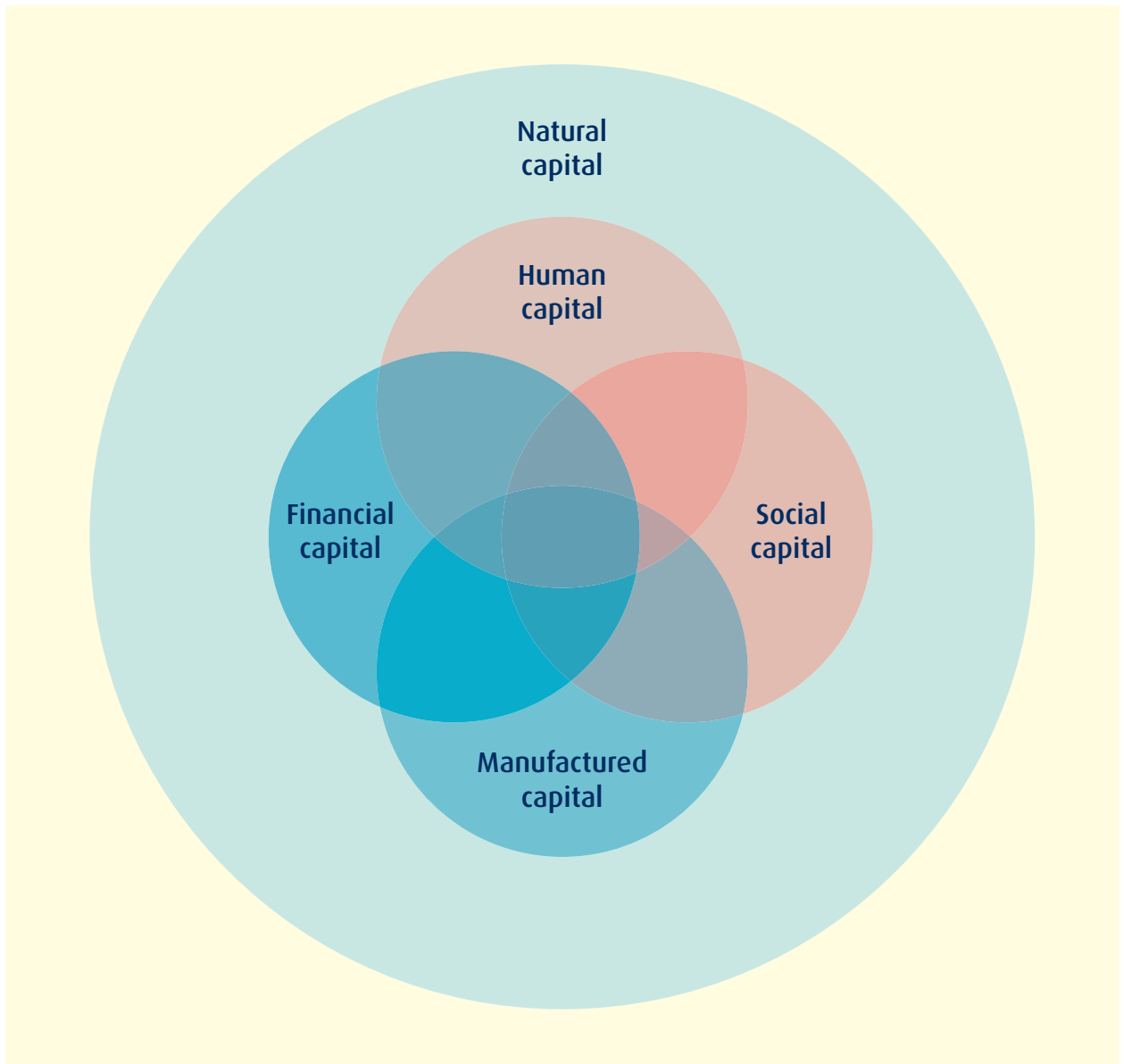


*Figure 1*

*Figure 2*

## Five capitals model

The five identified capitals are natural, human, social, manufactured and financial (see figure 3). This framework, which features in the LSC strategy, is described more fully in appendix 2.



*Figure 3*

- 2.2.2 **Leadership.** The report uses the term 'leaders' to describe leaders at all levels in organisations in the learning and skills sector from principals and chief executive officers to first-line managers. As in all organisations, leaders below CEO level will assume, be assigned or have delegated to them different leadership responsibilities, which may extend to different parts of the organisation. For instance, they may have responsibility for leading on particular issues or strategies, of which sustainable development is just one example. This is recognition of CEL's conviction that "leadership occurs at all levels of the organisation" and its support for distributed models of leadership<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> CEL, 2004. *The Leadership Qualities Framework*. p5.

### 3. Policy context and background to the research

In September 2003, the DfES published its first *Sustainable Development Action Plan*<sup>4</sup>. As part of the implementation process, Forum for the Future was asked to convene a meeting of the organisations that plan, fund and regulate the post-16 and higher education sectors, a move that led to the foundation of the Sustainability Integration Group (SIGnet). A founder and active member of this group, CEL recognised that, as part of its mission to improve the standard of leadership and the diversity of the talent pool of leaders in the learning and skills sector, its must also 'drive and respond to demand for the development of 'leaders for sustainability', through appropriate support, information, discussion and development.'

In policy terms, the case for engagement with sustainable development has been strengthened by a raft of subsequent developments.

In March 2005, the UK government published *Securing the Future* (2005), its strategy and overarching framework for sustainable development<sup>5</sup>. To coincide with the launch of the UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in 2005 the DfES published its updated action plan, *Learning for the Future*<sup>6</sup>. In the same year, the LSC's strategy for sustainable development, *From Here to Sustainability*, appeared.

In 2006-07, as part of its own academic year of action on sustainable development for schools, the DfES published a sustainable development action plan for schools, including a cross-phase curriculum framework and a school self-assessment tool, both of which should be of interest to learning and skills sector leaders in the context of 14-19 partnerships<sup>7</sup>.

December 2006 also saw the publication of Lord Leitch's review of skills, *Prosperity for all in the global economy*<sup>8</sup>, the demand-led focus of which hands providers greater responsibility for adapting to market demands. This will require a significantly different way of doing business. By 2015, the government hopes that 15.4 per cent of the nation's electricity will come from renewable sources. That would be an almost fivefold increase from 2004's figure of 3.4 per cent, and led the DTI to predict that by 2020 renewable electricity alone will require up to 35,000 new technicians<sup>9</sup>.

Speaking in October 2006, James Smith, chair of Shell UK, predicted a domestic business prize of £30 billion over the next decade for those investing in the development of renewables and energy savings<sup>10</sup>.

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4 DfES, 2003. *Sustainable Development Action Plan for Education and Skills*.

5 DEFRA, 2005. *Securing the Future: delivering UK sustainable development strategy*.

6 DfES, 2005. *Learning for the Future: the DfES sustainable development action plan 2005/2006*.

7 DfES, 2007. *Sustainable Schools for Pupils, Schools and the Environment, an action plan for the DfES*; DfES, 2006. *S3 Sustainable School Self-evaluation*, available at [www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainable-schools](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainable-schools)

8 Leitch, S, 2006. *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills*. Treasury.

9 DTI, 2003. *Our Energy Future – Creating a Low Carbon Economy*.

10 Smith, J, 2006. *Radio 4 Today programme interview*. 12 October 2006.

Statistics such as these hint at the employment opportunities allied to sustainable development, but also at the attendant skills gap. Add into the equation the emerging employment opportunities provided by changes to waste management and a realm of other sustainability focused social and commercial enterprises, and to these, the implications of Skills for Sustainable Communities (2004) upon the public sector, and we can see why Sir John Egan is said to be “clear that an urgent first step will be the strengthening of the capacity of education and training providers”<sup>11</sup>.

CEL has already engaged in a small scale exploratory study into existing and potential approaches to sustainable development on its *Senior leadership development programme (SLDP)*. It has established an active internal Sustainable Development Group, to further explore the meaning and implications of sustainability and sustainable development for CEL. And while non-departmental public bodies are not formally required to develop sustainable development action plans, in the context of the above and in its recognition of the key role that the sector’s leaders must play in making sustainable development a reality, CEL is committed to doing so. To inform this process, it commissioned the two-stranded research programme presented here.

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<sup>11</sup> Yarnit, M, 2004, *Regeneration and all that: learning and skills and sustainability*. LSDA.

## 4. Approach and methodology

### 4.1 Modes of operation

Forum for the Future's approach to building capacity for leadership is that leaders need to possess all of the following:

- An understanding of the need for change to a sustainable way of doing things within the context of further education
- Sufficient knowledge and skills to decide to act in a way that favours sustainable development
- The ability to recognise and reward other people's decisions and actions that favour sustainable development, and thus reinforce sustainable behaviour across the institution.

This approach was made explicit and tested through the five action research projects in this study.

The approach of the Education for Sustainability Programme at London South Bank University necessarily differed from Forum for the Future's. In this instance, the methodology was semi-structured interviews in which the researchers deliberately withheld their view of sustainability and sustainable development, in order to develop an open discussion and arrive at an understanding of sustainability and sustainable development from the discussants' perspectives. The process then involved exploring discussants' experiences of what had worked in terms of both leadership and leadership for sustainability, and why this was.

Both strands of research were qualitative. LSBU's strand was designed to probe deeply into blocks and catalysts impacting upon leaders' engagement with and implementation of aspects of sustainable development. Paul Maiteny's article, *Education for sustainable development: psycho-emotional blocks and catalysts*, explains the rationale behind this approach<sup>12</sup>. These researchers gathered data through a series of semi-structured interviews with individuals in the sector. For the remainder of this report, participants in this strand will be referred to as discussants.

The strand managed by Forum for the Future supported the development and evaluation of five capacity building action research projects. The research methodology was participant observation, and used a combination of direct observation and interviewing. A joint project steering group, comprising the CEL project leader, representatives of both research teams and an independent consultant, was established and met regularly to monitor and share the progress of both research projects.

Participants in the research projects were invited to the free conference held on 16 May 2007. The conference was also promoted across the sector and other interested stakeholders encouraged to attend. The conference was designed to enable delegates to reflect upon and discuss the interim research findings.

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<sup>12</sup> Maiteny, P, 2005. Education for sustainability and development: psycho-emotional blocks and catalysts in *The Development Education Journal* vol 11, number 2, pp1-4.

## 4.2 Sample

**Scope of the sample.** CEL issued an open invitation to institutions and leaders in the sector to take part in one or both strands of the research. This attracted responses from people with an interest in this area.

These responses were supplemented from a list of possible targets to produce a sample that was geographically spread, included colleges and providers with a profile of engaging with sustainable development as well as some that did not, and covered a range of organisations that operate at national or regional level across the sector.

A total of 21 colleges and providers took part in the research, with one college and one adult learning provider participating in both strands. Six national and three regional organisations participated in the semi-structured interviews.

The total number of semi-structured interviews conducted by the LSBU team was 35. Of these, 23 discussants worked in colleges or providers and 12 worked for national or regional organisations.

Leaders participating in the five action research projects were chosen by each college or provider and always included the principal or vice-principal. Most were in formal leadership roles, but some were staff who had taken on roles as sustainability champions. Between 6 and 12 leaders took part from each provider, making a total of 46 leaders.

There were 64 people at the conference, including representatives of colleges and other learning and skills sector providers, a learner-led organisation, a secondary school, national funding and curriculum bodies, third sector environmental and sustainable development organisations, government agencies, one higher education institution, a private education consultancy and CEL.

The profiles of participants are presented in tables 1 to 3 below.

<b>Discussants</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Principals	9
Other senior leaders	14
National and regional organisation officers	12
<b>Totals</b>	<b>35</b>

*Table 1*

<b>Action research participants</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Principals	2
Other senior leaders	6
Others	38
<b>Totals</b>	<b>46</b>

*Table 2*

<b>Conference delegates</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Principals, chief executives and heads of service	6
Other senior leaders	17
National and regional organisation officers	41
<b>Totals</b>	<b>64</b>

*Table 3*

**Semi-structured interviews.** The semi-structured interview is a combination of focused dialogue and emergent process, which allows the discussant to fill the gaps around the focus for themselves. It is a communicative art that delivers a disciplined, qualitative methodology, and the order in which topics are discussed is dictated by the discussant as much as the researcher. There is a common starting point, a checklist of topics and a set of prompting questions which can be drawn on to elicit information relating to the various research questions. There is not, however, a fixed set of questions.

To ensure a common approach to this process, the researchers conducted some interviews in pairs to observe each others' style and technique.

The researchers used the interviews to develop explorative dialogues around discussants' conceptual understanding and motivations for engaging with sustainable development. Discussants were encouraged to describe their leadership journeys and their sustainability journeys and to explore possible correlations between sustainable development and leadership. Interviews were conducted on a confidential basis to elicit authentic responses based on experience.

**Action research projects.** Each of the five action research projects shared the following stages:

- facilitated workshop
- project implementation and mapping
- project debrief.

Facilitated workshops were run by Forum for The Future for the leaders of each of the five participating institutions, using an established model of sustainable development called the five capitals model (see appendix 2).

The workshop outcomes for participants were:

- to reach a common understanding of the term sustainable development
- to map out how the college is contributing currently towards sustainability
- to envision a sustainable college of the future
- to identify priority actions for moving towards their vision.

**Project implementation and mapping.** Priorities arising from the five capitals workshops formed the basis for key tasks undertaken by college leaders over a two to three-month period. Participants were encouraged to map their actions against CEL's *LQF*.

**Project debrief.** The debriefing sessions were designed and facilitated by Forum for the Future to enable participants to reflect on their contributions to progressing sustainable development within the scope of their project, specifically the skills and knowledge they had been using or felt they needed. These sessions had a semi-structured format and varied from one-to-one meetings to team workshops, in order to be flexible enough to capture learning and at the same time fit into busy college schedules.

## 4.3 Analysis

4.3.1 **Semi-structured interviews.** The majority of the 35 interviews were digitally recorded by the five researchers. This enabled the researchers to review the interviews and report their interpretation of the discussants' responses under agreed headings that corresponded to the research questions and the purposes of the research. Once this stage of the research was complete, one researcher analysed the 35 interview reports by tabulating the responses to bring together all the responses from all the discussants to each area of questioning. This enabled an initial report to be drafted which was critically reviewed by all the researchers and allowed them to bring their first-hand experience of their interviews to bear on the outcomes of the analysis.



- 4.3.2 **Action research projects.** Some individuals recorded the skills, attributes and knowledge they had used against the CEL *Leadership Qualities Framework (LQF* – see section 5.1). The responses from all participants were then compiled on a master copy of the *LQF*. Patterns emerged with gaps noted. The researchers noted which qualities mentioned by participants correlated with the successful progression of sustainable development. The evidence was critically reviewed by all the researchers and conclusions drawn out as to the key qualities of a successful leader for sustainability.
- 4.3.3 **Combined analysis of twin research projects.** Reports written by both research teams were submitted to CEL in April 2007. Findings from both strands of research were analysed and a common structure decided upon for the interim report. Aggregated findings were presented in a narrative format mapped against the definitions of qualities identified in CEL's *LQF*.
- 4.3.4. **16 May 2007 conference.** The draft report was electronically distributed to all conference delegates prior to the conference on 16 May 2007. The findings of the report were presented at the conference and commented on by delegates. Those who had been involved in the research project confirmed that they thought the findings painted an accurate picture.

Delegates were then invited to critically consider presentations by four colleges that had participated in the research and to attend a variety of workshops to explore the interim research findings. Notes and records of the day's activities were kept throughout and a full conference report was produced. It was explicit to delegates that the output of the day would contribute to this final report and to the subsequent formulation of CEL's sustainable development strategy and action plan.

Subsequent sections of this report will refer to the workshops that were run at the conference on 16 May, which were as follows (and will later be referred to as 'workshop 1', 'workshop 2' etc):

- Workshop 1: Strategies for implementing sustainable development
- Workshop 2: Catalysts, challenges and opportunities
- Workshop 3: Leadership styles for sustainability
- Workshop 4: what I need to do to take sustainable development forward in my organisation
- Workshop 5: what CEL needs to do and/or offer to move the sustainable development agenda forward.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Findings mapped against the CEL Leadership Qualities Framework

One of the findings of this research was that some participants found it hard to define what makes a good leader, although all those questioned about this were able to offer a series of characteristics and skills that they felt contributed to good leadership. A number of discussants expressed the belief that engaging with sustainable development could support and enhance leadership.

Another important finding from the LSBU strand of research was that although many discussants were aware of how sustainable development could be effectively used as an organising framework for leadership, they saw that the skills for and knowledge of sustainable development are not generally recognised as components of leadership. In light of this, one leader recommended: “Show how good leaders are being sustainable anyway, that it is an integral part of good leadership.”

The *CEL Leadership Qualities Framework (LQF)* is an ideal tool for this purpose. Published in 2004, it is a process-focused tool designed to support leadership development at both organisational level (where it can facilitate talent management) and individual level (in career planning, development planning, self-assessment, job review etc). It can therefore support individual development and review both in current roles and into potential future roles.

The *LQF* maps effective leadership in the sector across sixteen qualities, grouped into four clusters:

- Focus to achieve
- Mobilise to impact
- Sustain momentum
- Passion for excellence.

The framework provides between two and four descriptors of each quality.

In the earliest stages of CEL’s thinking on sustainable development, Forum for the Future was commissioned to conduct a review of the *LQF* and recommend changes to ensure that it reflected the centrality of sustainable development thinking as a feature of effective leadership in the sector.

In this section, building on the mapping exercise against the revised *LQF* carried out by the action research participants, we map the findings from both research projects against the *LQF* to demonstrate how such leadership qualities are being played out in the sector in relation to sustainable development themes and priorities. The mapping that follows now includes evidence from both strands of research and the conference, and includes quotations from participants. Our aim in this section is therefore to better illustrate how sustainable development is part of effective leadership and to offer examples of current practice from individuals and organisations in the sector.

## 5.1.1 FOCUS TO ACHIEVE 1: Shaping the future

### A. Stays close to customer perspectives and learner interests to ensure service improvement

Evidence exists of colleges and providers designing and refining sustainable development learning opportunities in response to customer perspectives. One provider answered local demand by offering a 'Neighbourhood Action on Climate Change' project in partnership with the School of Environment at a local university. This engaged residents not traditionally involved in formal learning, who had expressed their desire for better understanding of climate change issues. The course team has used learner feedback and involved previous learners in course delivery to ensure responsiveness to local need and continuous course improvement.

### B. Builds and shares inspirational vision; helping others understand and feel how things will be different when the future vision is achieved. Champions appropriate change initiatives and motivates others to support them

Discussants identified futures orientation as one of the identifying characteristics of sustainable development, while delegates at the conference who attended workshop 1 explicitly identified vision and clarity as critical success factors, and the ability to answer the question, "where does it lead to?" as crucial. However, some discussants belonging to national organisations did not think the sector's leadership well equipped to build and share inspirational visions for sustainability. One commented that "...it isn't the case that sustainability is really grasped yet by FE," and another observed, "I don't see a lot of what we call leadership as leadership. It is very competent for 'business as usual' but it is not leadership."

This impression was corroborated by the action research projects, where one workshop outcome was to envision a sustainable college of the future. Here participants found it challenging to look to the future and arrive at a vision of a sustainable college. The consultation conference ice-breaker session facilitated by Forum for the Future, gave delegates an opportunity to demonstrate and practise their futures thinking skills. Such an activity is valuable only when people are conscious of the key imperatives, and delegates attending workshop 5 echoed the observations of the national organisation discussants above, in urging more sector-specific guidance on why sustainable development is necessary and desirable.

Discussants themselves recognised sustainable development as a useful context for addressing the organisational culture of the institution and implementing the vision for the future. In one reported instance this had emerged as a happy surprise: "The college started on the journey without realising the full potential of sustainable development as a change agent. It helped to deliver the vision."

The evidence suggests that where leaders have grasped the importance of sustainable development, most have championed change initiatives and motivated individuals to act as drivers for significant change. One teacher commented, "I am a working example of how things can move forward when individuals are empowered to develop and promote sustainable development in colleges. This has been possible only with the support of three key people – quality manager, director of curriculum and the principal."

Other discussants described staging events such as 'world cafés' to provide a context for staff and learners to explore future visions for their institution.

### C. Embeds corporate and ethical and social responsibility at strategic and operational levels

The theme of values and concern for ethical and social responsibility emerged as a common thread in both research projects. The core values of discussants showed significant commonality in the areas of justice, equality of opportunity, concern for the wider community, concern for the future and concern for the environment. Most discussants also assumed that the majority of people drawn to working in the sector would have similar core values. A number suggested that 'tapping' into the core values of staff and learners and creating the time and space for both groups to explore these further, could provide a catalyst for progress on sustainable development. Conference delegates restated this belief. Evidence of how this approach can work in practice was provided by an action research college, which resourced a learner-led 'Sustain Our World' conference, described as 'inspirational' and responsible for creating 'loads of interest and enthusiasm.'

The same college has also tapped into its learners' concern for the environment and local community by implementing a number of 'quick wins' through a competition for best ideas around 'reduce, reuse, and recycle' and sustainable transport. However, while leaders recognised the importance of demonstrating that sustainability was an achievable goal, and that visible quick wins were important, they also recognised the need to make progress at the strategic level. So during the action research project this college used a corporation residential on the changing business climate to think about sustainable development targets for its 2005-10 strategic plans, and to consider a strategic vision for an exemplar college in sustainability. Similarly, another college provided 'the space for bottom-up leadership,' while at the same time making sure that their governing body and finance department fully integrated sustainable development. This involved governors and senior leaders working on college missions and strategies.

In most participating action research centres, a key catalyst had been one member of staff initiating sustainability through a bottom-up, operational approach. In the three action research colleges where this bottom-up approach had occurred, it had generated senior leadership backing. In contrast, one discussant suggested getting the full backing of the governing body and senior leadership team prior to setting up a sustainability committee, so that staff feel they have 'permission' to take the agenda forward.

### D. Uses networks and insights to help shape the organisation

Leaders recognise the importance of networks and systems thinking. Among the qualities for leadership identified by discussants was the ability to understand relationships at all levels, including interconnections between people, within organisations, and between organisations and the outside world. With specific reference to sustainable development, one national officer observed, "We are looking for a quality of integrated thinking that might slow our acceleration into the brick wall." Conference delegates spoke of tapping into existing networks, for instance AoC governance networks, and of the desirability of forums where the sector could share and learn from colleagues in higher education and local government.

In practice, the action research projects found sustainability champions within colleges who had developed effective, systematic ways of keeping in touch with developments through wider networks such as the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges. Given the complexity and pace of developments in this field, skilled networking is essential.

### 5.1.2 FOCUS TO ACHIEVE 2: Business acumen

#### A. Demonstrates broad organisational awareness by astutely perceiving political, economic and social trends

Perceiving external trends allows leaders to use sustainability as a business strength and driver, and enables their organisations to capitalise on potential synergies. Recognising these opportunities presents a demanding challenge in our complex and rapidly shifting world. The evidence suggests that this is not an area of strength, and that generally leaders require support in defining these trends. One regional officer remarked, "There is a lack of clarity of message about sustainability and this deters leaders from making it a priority."

Conference delegates were attuned to the need for partnership and collaborative activity to keep abreast of developments and capitalise on policy initiatives, for instance the 14-19 agenda, information on EMS and technical standards and solutions. They were also aware of the importance of being able to make a compelling business case.

The research projects revealed that some leaders are quick to spot business opportunities. The economic and legislative awareness of the director of a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) enabled him to plan and deliver sustainability training for large manufacturers seeking up-to-date efficiency gains.

Other participants in both strands referred to the connections between initiatives such as Every Child Matters, Healthy Living, citizenship and sustainable development, and were clearly able to see opportunities for synergy here.

#### B. Manages uncertainty in complex environments, balancing differing national, regional and local objectives

Sustainable development has been described as a process that "creates the need for an indefinite programme of monitoring and adjustment, with every successful adaptation only a temporary 'solution'"<sup>13</sup>. The importance of leaders developing the skills to enable them to manage the processes of sustainable development, including the issues of uncertainty and complexity, was recognised by discussants. One college vice-principal suggested that "CEL leadership programmes need to address the process of sustainable development." Workshop 5 at the conference also identified the need to build leadership capacity to recognise inter-relationships and manage complex relationships. A suggestion from the same workshop was that CEL might usefully provide a critical review of the debate and tension between economic growth and sustainability and how some colleges are responding to this challenge.

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13 Newman, L, 2005. Available at <http://ejournal.nbii.org/archives/vol1iss2/0501-001.newman.html>

Awareness of the need to balance local, regional, national and global objectives did not come out strongly in this research. One action research college committed to the use of cost-benefit analysis, with an emphasis on assessing costs which have been traditionally externalised. These will include costs to the environment, but could also include social costs to producers in the developing world. Similarly, discussants suggested using college procurement and new build projects to explore links to the wider community. Delegates in one conference workshop identified need for support in “linking experience in other countries”. Awareness of the global dimension needs to be understood as intrinsic to sustainable development.

### C. **Uses economic, financial and sector data to diagnose key issues and future challenges**

A conclusion drawn from the action research was that participants found it challenging to recognise the broader political, economic, social, technical and environmental factors relating to sustainable development. One national organisation discussant stated that “whatever style of leadership is used, there is a need for leaders to know the issues and to know how to make a difference”.

Leaders recognise the need to conduct objective research and analysis of different options, and to comprehend and communicate positive benefits of change, particularly in financial terms. However, the identification and prioritisation of important sustainable development issues, eg energy consumption versus procurement versus recycling, were perceived as difficult and some felt they lacked the expertise to fully argue the business case for change, for example through cost-benefit analyses. The ability to do this can be a useful lever to action, as one action research participant observed: “It is important to check opportunities in both the short and long term. Bringing forward the sustainable development agenda brought more opportunities than expected.”

### D. **Adds value through collaboration, partnerships and group synergy**

The concept of synergy is closely associated with sustainable development and allied to the respect for emergence, which holds that not all outcomes can be predetermined. The focus on the interconnection between environment, society and economics requires leaders to have the ability see beyond boundaries.

Discussants identified the importance of relationships and interdependence to sustainable development, and both strands of research provided strong examples of this understanding being put into practice in support of sustainable development. These took the form of both internal and external partnership work.

Three out of the five colleges participating in the action research had a sustainable development forum comprising key staff with a range of expertise to work together and progress the sustainable development agenda. These groups typically capitalised on members’ complementary and diverse skills to ensure a joined-up, holistic approach.

Discussants stated that sustainable development activity had enhanced the sense of community and had promoted links with their organisations' wider communities. A few colleges and deliverers had partnered with external organisations, and in some instances secured additional funding as a result. The appetite for collaboration was also strong among conference delegates, who called for further partnership activity with local and national stakeholders, including the LSC, AoC, local government and higher education.

Some discussants spoke critically of the sector for fostering a competitive ethos that hampered the sharing of good practice.

### 5.1.3 FOCUS TO ACHIEVE 3: Action orientation

#### A. Understands change may need to be radical to achieve learning improvement

Many discussants wanted to see a more holistic education that was less preoccupied with skills and knowledge. One college principal stated that "Teaching isn't about communicating information, but about helping learners make meaning for themselves." Both strands of research provided evidence of participants' belief in modelling the change they wanted others to follow. For instance, many participants spoke of the need for agreement between leadership styles and the transformative teaching and learning approaches they advocated.

#### B. Demonstrates strong judgment and discernment of self, others and situations

Participants in both strands of research held strong convictions about the need for action, and, in the words of one national officer, the "need to challenge assumptions". This was appropriately balanced, however, by evidence from the action research and from discussants that leaders were willing to delegate and trust others, and understood that they did not hold the monopoly on good decisions. One leader explained, "Sustainability is a learning process in itself, the concept and meaning is constantly being challenged" and openness to unlearning and adaptive processes are very important to leadership for sustainability.

#### C. Establishes robust action planning to accomplish goals and vision after analysing information, resources, constraints, organisational values and assumptions

Discussants defined sustainable development as futures oriented and requiring a whole institution approach. They also recognised the need for leaders to have clear strategic objectives. Leaders in both strands of research recognised the importance of relating action planning to the overall vision and aims of the organisation. One action research participant stated, "I started by identifying where the sustainable development elements are in the college strategy and designed an action plan around them. Having an operational plan helps get everyone on board."

As part of their project outcomes, one action research project chose to establish a clearer understanding of the college baseline to enable subsequent measurement and future target setting. Conference workshop 4 also listed baseline audits as an aspiration.

**D. Sets ambitious targets to deliver added value to the service, overcomes obstacles, accepts responsibility, focuses energy on what really makes a difference, rather than being constrained by previous methods**

Both strands of research and the conference revealed that leaders feel constrained by external barriers, including those relating to funding and to curriculum, and while participants agreed that formal target setting and reporting are desirable, in the absence of knowledge, experience and reliable frameworks, this has not been widely implemented. In some participating colleges, the response to this position has been to engage people in an ad hoc way in the hope that this will lead to sustainable development becoming embedded in college culture.

**5.1.4 FOCUS TO ACHIEVE 4: Cultural sensitivity**

**A. Understands organisational climate and knows and involves key influencers**

The principal of an action research college was said to have been “very good at harnessing the capabilities and enthusiasm of staff”. Another college principal had skilfully involved key individuals in a sustainable development forum. This included appointing an initially sceptical deputy principal responsible for finance to chair the forum. As a result, he developed an understanding of and a commitment to the business opportunities of sustainable development. Conference workshop 1 produced the observation that “organisations must be able to set sustainable development into meaningful contexts, enabling people to answer the question, ‘why do it?’” One answer, issuing from workshop 2 at the conference was “to capitalise on the 14-19 agenda.” The same group also suggested that organisations would benefit from producing ‘the business case,’ presumably in recognition of the fact that this will have added significance for leaders in an increasingly demand-led climate.

**B. Understands and adapts to insights and perspectives from diverse sources and acts to capitalise on cultural diversity**

In keeping with the observation of one principal that “the best leaders in FE just worry about what the learners need”, a college involved in the action research has actively listened to its learners about their thoughts on sustainable development. This included formally inviting learners onto the sustainable development steering group. Discussants confirmed the value of seeking and hearing diverse perspectives in relation to leadership for sustainability, and provided examples of how their institutions had benefited from visiting speakers from different sectors or cultures. One of these hosted a talk by a lecturer who has been driving through a ‘greening’ programme at her university.

The future vision of one action research college was to mine its diverse learner population to capitalise on its many global links and build on its existing fair trade initiatives. However, this was a rare reference to the global dimension and the specific potential for learning from the experiences of culturally diverse learner bodies and their communities. Two other colleges made reference to fair trade.



### C. **Creates and maintains an environment that enables all to contribute their full potential in pursuit of organisational objectives**

A common theme of both strands of research was the need for leaders for sustainability to adjust their register to engage with different groups and individuals. A number of discussants talked about a 'penny dropping moment' or 'getting it' when referring to grasping an understanding of sustainable development. This point is like crossing a threshold and includes seeing things in an interconnected or systems way. One discussant specifically described the risk of alienating staff who have not grasped, or had the opportunity to grasp, the level of understanding to take them across this threshold. As a leader it is important to have the skills to move back and forward across the threshold to communicate with staff at the correct level. A solution proposed by one of the conference workshops was to integrate sustainable development so that vocabulary is no longer an issue.

### D. **Demonstrates commitment to equality and fairness**

There was strong evidence of leaders' commitment to a set of core values around justice and equality in both strands of research. One discussant described how 'the values of sustainability hinge on treating people with respect,' while others identified sustainable development as values based and, more specifically, a dialogue with the socially excluded.

The action research strand suggests that sustainable development groups established by the colleges tend to be inclusive, seek to encourage new membership and have open agendas. In one action research college, this membership formally included learners.

## 5.1.5 MOBILISE TO IMPACT 1: Organisational expertise

### A. **Defines the organisation and processes to enable innovative thinking and effective partnership**

The DfES *Sustainable Development Action Plan 2005/06* describes sustainable development as "an innovation agenda, inviting us to rethink how we organise our lives and work so that we don't destroy our most precious resources", and for one discussant national officer "sustainability is unarguably a leap in thinking that we need to make"<sup>14</sup>. The process of redefinition is being enacted at one action research site, where 'respect for the environment' has been incorporated in the core values of the college.

However, participants revealed some concern about the vision and definition of the sector as a whole, and there was quite a strong view among discussants that a fundamental rethink is required. As one senior manager put it, "FE would benefit enormously from a cultural change."

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14 DfES, 2005. p4

Some leaders in both research strands felt that this cultural change was being frustrated by a lack of strategic partnership for sustainable development. For instance, one discussant employed by a national organisation stated, “We need LSC to be addressing the funding issue.” Yet the evidence also suggests that effective leaders for sustainability are commonly adept at locating and accessing alternative sources of funding and support, with many recognising both the requirement and opportunities to initiate this change process through innovative partnership activity at an institutional level. One CoVE leader, for example, has successfully identified and capitalised upon emerging local market opportunities linked to energy efficiency, which have involved delivering energy training to major private sector clients. Participating providers also demonstrated the ability to develop cost-neutral or inexpensive partnerships with agencies to promote the sustainable development agenda. This included working with EAUC, the learner-led campaigning body People and Planet (<http://peopleandplanet.org>), as well as, of course, engaging with Forum for the Future and the Education for Sustainable Development Programme at London South Bank University as part of this research project.

## **B. Defines key issues, secures information, overcomes barriers, focuses on achievable solutions**

It was an aim of the initial action research project workshops that participants should feel that they had sufficient understanding about sustainability in an applied sense, and were able to communicate it more easily to others. This was well-judged because both strands of research found strong evidence that sector leaders felt they lacked sufficient knowledge of key issues, and that this was impacting negatively on the management of change. The action research strand found that while most participants had an understanding of the sector’s need for change to a sustainable way of doing things, none had yet acquired the ability to recognise and reward other people’s decisions and actions that favoured sustainable development and reinforced sustainable development across the organisation.

However, the fact that formal rewards are not yet in place often proves less of a problem for leaders themselves, because they demonstrate a determination to surmount barriers. According to one, “My motivation can overcome barriers. The reality is for me to simply go around them.”

## **C. Commits to action after considering alternative courses of action that take into account resources, constraints and organisational values**

One land-based action research college was already actively researching its best options for sustainable standards, and discussants pointed to the fact that where implementation of sustainable development has been successful, this has improved procurement. However, many leaders felt constrained by a perceived absence of guidance on sustainable development for the sector. One discussant national officer suggested that “people out there are thinking, yes, we appreciate the agenda, but how do we do it?” One answer lies in discussants’ understanding of sustainable development as a learning process. This strand of research yielded the suggestion that colleges use new build projects or procurement as a way into greater organisational understanding of the broader contexts in which we operate and the way in which organisational values influence the choices and decisions made. This suggestion was reiterated at the conference. As part of their future envisioning and their strategic commitment to the local community, one action research college proposed sourcing local food for the college canteen, and for learners to grow some of this themselves in the college garden.

There was evidence that some providers were able to deliver classroom learning around decision making for improved performance on waste, water, transport, natural environmental protection and food production.

**D. Prioritises time and resource management; proactively negotiates and accesses resources outside of one's immediate domain**

Leaders at participating colleges display a varying ability to manage time and resources effectively. Sustainable development activities are often treated as additional to everyday duties and therefore dependent on individual time and resource management skills: "I have to drive myself to identify time and resource management opportunities. I have allowed one day a week to be dedicated to sustainable development."

Individuals championing sustainable development have almost always sought additional resources, funding or ideas from outside their immediate domain. Where the skills and capacity required to do this in-house have been lacking, external expertise has been sought.

**5.1.6 MOBILISE TO IMPACT 2: Distributed leadership**

**A. Delegates to create a sense of ownership of higher-level organisational issues and encourages leaders to stretch their capabilities for organisational success**

One of the recommendations for CEL arising from the conference was that it should "promote a distributive leadership style" and a discussant college principal stated, "Good leadership is about devolved accountability." This was a widely held view, with a marked preference among participants for a consultative and inclusive form of leadership and a widespread belief that this style was suited to leadership for sustainability. There is evidence that senior leaders are putting this espoused belief into practice to create a sense of ownership and leadership for sustainability amongst their staff. Three of the action research colleges had established a sustainable development forum comprising key staff with a range of expertise to work together and progress the sustainable development agenda. There was a common feeling among participants that, "mainstreaming sustainable development into the college can happen only when all areas of the college are engaged," a challenge described by a conference delegate to the need to develop "appropriate strategies to get from 'canteen to boardroom'".

The breadth of membership of sustainable development forums has varied. Members of one expressed a desire for more lateral participation to include estates, human resources, curriculum development and even local business representatives.

At one action research college, staff are identified and made responsible for implementing and embedding five sustainable development activities into their area of responsibility and are held to account for delivering this. The result is that staff feel "space has been created for bottom-up leadership" and that they "have an opportunity to make a difference". There were examples from both strands of research which highlighted the value given to involving learners in both the shaping of future visions and the immediate implementation of sustainable development.

## **B. Uses appropriate methods and interpersonal styles to motivate towards successful outcomes and attainment objectives**

Leaders recognise that sustainable development can inspire, motivate and challenge staff and learners, and benefits from people working together towards a common goal. As one participant in the action research put it, “The sustainable development agenda is a fantastic opportunity for principals to hook into everyone at the college. It is an issue that can inspire, motivate and incorporate some fun into college life ... it enables people at all levels in the college to embrace their resources and work together.” One of the discussants, a college principal, recognised similar benefits: “Sustainable development has given the college an edge and got more commitment from staff.” However, participants in both strands of research cited the language associated with sustainable development as a barrier to engagement, and both strands revealed that leaders understood the need for adjustment of personal styles to overcome this: “I have to be open and flexible and I try to see other people’s perspectives. I have to be a good communicator appealing to where people are at.” One national officer described the “need to find a point that resonates”. Conference delegates discussed how best to make sustainable development ‘cool’ for learners.

## **C. Knows when and how to attract, develop, reward and utilise teams**

Attracting and developing teams was an element of each of the five action research projects, and reflects leaders’ readiness in respect of this quality. There is additional evidence from both strands of research of leaders recognising the need – and possessing the ability – to build teams from across their organisations. There was no evidence from the action research projects of any colleges or providers requiring compulsory involvement in sustainable development groups, and there was a suggestion from one that further steps were needed to ensure fuller representation of all areas of the organisation, including estates, human resources, curriculum development and even local business representatives.

Despite the fact that conference delegates attending workshop 1 went so far as to identify the implementation of ‘reward and recognition’ as a critical success factor, in many instance rewards for teams are currently ad hoc. This perhaps arises in part from the lack of benchmarks. Action research participants commented on the lack of proven exemplars for sustainability in further education to which they could benchmark themselves. Many felt they would benefit from being able to measure their progress at organisation and individual level (particularly in terms of energy and waste), and from benchmarking against a widely recognised exemplar. The ability to demonstrate improvements, show progress and identify savings is considered critical to winning ‘hearts and minds.’ It would also provide the basis for formal recognition and reward.

## **D. Ensures teams aware of their contribution to organisation as a whole**

Participating leaders are committed to ensuring sustainability teams understand how their activity relates to the whole. This is not surprising given sustainable development’s commitment to both the local and the global, or as discussants defined it, to deal with specifics while maintaining the holistic view. One national officer said, “Leadership is helping things make sense [and] making connections.”

A range of strategies was employed to ensure that this was the case. Discussants described several interesting approaches using groups and subgroups. For example, a core group of 'champions' was developed over an academic year before each member of this group formed their own sub-group using the same research and development techniques they had acquired in the core group. The ultimate aim of this strategy is to engage the whole staff in groups. Others described institutions with subgroups which look at different areas of sustainability such as community, curriculum and estates, while making sure that the interconnections between these areas, and the relevance to the organisation as a whole, are maintained.

Two action research colleges developed communication strategies for sustainable development activities to raise the profile of objectives and the progress of sustainable development across their organisations, and there were instances of teams having SMART targets linked to overall college strategy.

### 5.1.7 MOBILISE TO IMPACT 3: Influencing relationships

#### A. Builds cohesive and effective partnerships

The leaders of all five action research projects understand the practical need to build and maintain effective partnerships in order to progress sustainable development. Evidence ranged from working to create cross-college steering groups to involving former learners in the delivery of sustainable development provision.

As noted earlier, discussants expressed a preference for a consultative and inclusive form of leadership and recognised that sustainable development calls for a whole institution approach. Many share core personal values, which include concern for the wider community. The research suggests that those leaders who seem to be most successful at engaging with sustainable development are those who see it as something which crosses over between their personal and professional lives. This is significant because it relates to a tendency to see the interconnectedness of the world, a tendency which is closely linked to a systems understanding of sustainable development. This world view, which supports discussants' understanding of sustainable development as a process involving the environment, economy and community, is also likely to incline leaders towards partnership activity. A corresponding commitment to partnership activity was evident in all conference sessions.

#### B. Expresses thoughts, feelings, ideas in a clear, succinct and compelling manner; adjusting language to capture attention and engagement

Both strands of research and delegates at the conference identified the language of sustainable development as a difficult area. There was, though, significant evidence that effective leaders are adept at modulating register and adjusting language to capture attention and engagement and provide inspiration. This skill seems to be as or more important in the theatre of sustainable development as anywhere else, where engagement, motivation and, above all, inspiration of others is about touching personal as well as professional values. Making an implicit reference to the importance of expressing feelings as well as thoughts and ideas, one national officer stated that "To make the transition [to sustainable development], we have to light people's divine fire. That's what leadership is all about."

### C. Employs a range of influencing strategies to bring about change in the learning and skills sector

Discussants thought that all good leadership is characterised by flexibility of management style and the ability to choose an appropriate style to suit the situation. One national officer thought that the sector would benefit from support for FE leaders to develop their 'lobbying and political skills' to advocate changes on behalf of their organisation and the sector.

Within their own institutions, many participants have found the use of positive imagery and positive messages about sustainable development the best way to build support and encourage behaviour change, for example selling the cost-savings of energy efficiency. One action research leader found that most successful strategies did not appeal to staff to address threats to the planet but rather were about how sustainability can improve the bottom line; how it can improve what the college has to offer; and how it relates to the LSC strategy. Other leaders appealed to people's core values and intrinsic motivation rather than to external imperatives. Clearly different approaches will work in different organisational cultures and circumstances, and the key was described by one discussant as the "need to find a point that resonates".

### D. Acts to build trust to inspire sensitive and clear vision to resolve conflicts and build consensus

The theme of values, including justice and equality of opportunity, regularly emerged with discussants when exploring the links between people's personal and professional lives, and many were adopting a transformative and consultative leadership style. Both strands of research provided strong evidence of leaders' sensitivity to the different starting points of various individuals and groups, and the need to make adjustments to tone, language and style to suit the circumstances. Naturally these are common sense principles of good management and leadership, but crucial to moving the sustainable development agenda forward within a diverse organisation. Conference delegates attending workshop 3 listed the ability to accommodate a diversity of views as fundamental to leadership for sustainability.

Discussants suggested the need to be transparent and take staff with you, but warned against consulting unnecessarily.

## 5.1.8 MOBILISE TO IMPACT 4: Performance accountability

### A. Builds climate of support and accountability, rather than control

Discussants suggested that one characteristic contributing to good leadership is the tendency to set expectations rather than rules. This was in keeping with the evidence from both strands of research that participants generally favoured a consultative rather than an authoritarian style of leadership, and thought it more predisposed to leadership for sustainability. There was strong evidence of leaders practising what they preached. The principal of one action research college was said to have "shown faith and confidence in us – she has given us support, not just paid lip service".

Interestingly, some participants in both strands of research argued quite strongly for the imposition of more external levers and measures of accountability. One national officer stated, "Inspection rates do drive colleges ... until sustainable development is built into the inspection framework ... sustainable development is going to have to take second place." Conference delegates also argued for the inclusion of sustainable development in Ofsted inspections.

Both strands of research revealed a marked preference for inclusive and consultative leadership styles and two discussants referred to wanting a leadership style that was transformative and not mechanistic. This echoes the distinction made by Stephen Sterling in his book *Sustainable Education*, between the mechanistic paradigm and the ecological paradigm of education, educational management and pedagogy. The mechanistic paradigm is goal-oriented, product-oriented, controls change and has a power-based hierarchy. The ecological paradigm is direction-oriented, process-oriented, facilitates change, has leadership and self-management at all levels and is transformative. It was broadly felt that there was a strong correlation between this style of leadership and successful leadership for sustainability.

## **B. Holds people to account on agreements**

Some participants recognised that their ability to influence and build support within the organisation was a critical precursor to establishing targets and outcomes. As one action research leader explained, "Only once I had their support would I challenge them on their performance." Again, the absence of benchmarks may be responsible for the reticence of most organisations to set agreed targets and hold staff to account. Alternatively, reticence, may be fuelled by a feeling that this is something that providers in general are not doing, or prioritising. Or leaders may, knowing the regulatory and funding pressures and regimes that do exist, feel uncomfortable making non-regulated issues such as sustainable development a priority. That agreeing targets is possible, however, is demonstrated by one action research college, where identified staff are made responsible for implementing and embedding five sustainable development activities into their areas and are held to account for delivering agreed outcomes.

## **C. Sets performance and behaviour standards, ensuring support processes are in place**

Participants in both strands of this research recognise sustainable development as a change process. However, following on from, and perhaps reflecting, the comments above on holding people to account, few leaders felt they had the resources, knowledge or skills to sufficiently measure the impact of individual behaviour change, and felt that this was a barrier to setting high goals for individuals and teams and benchmarking their progress against others.

## **D. Manages performance difficulties objectively and constructively**

Participants in both strands of research, as well as conference delegates, expressed frustration at the lack of benchmarks to enable objective judgements about individual and organisational progress towards sustainability.

### 5.1.9 SUSTAIN MOMENTUM 1: Driving for results

#### A. Sets high goals using measure methods to benchmark growth

Participating colleges demonstrated various approaches to ensuring accountability. These included identifying actions at meetings of sustainability groups, to auditing performance on the ground through use of external tools, such as the Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF) audit.

Leaders expressed a desire to be able to benchmark themselves against other colleges, and an interest in more effective measurement systems to allow them to demonstrate and monitor behaviour change: "If we had an audit system, we could measure our progress."

#### B. Tenaciously works towards exceeding goals and holding people accountable for service performance improvements

One action research college felt it would be useful to incorporate sustainable development into staff self-assessments and related development plans.

Conference delegates suggested that a sustainable development appraisal toolkit would be helpful.

#### C. Enhances organisational achievements through networking and partnerships

In some participating institutions, individual leaders have enhanced their achievements through using networks. This has been particularly important in one action research provider where provision has been recently impacted by a national restructuring of funding priorities. Here, they have successfully used their networks to secure sponsorship from local businesses.

Another of the action research colleges intends to promote the establishment of a People and Planet group.

### 5.1.10 SUSTAIN MOMENTUM 2: Change management

#### A. Creates and manages challenging environments and sector challenges

One college principal observed that "the sector needs a shift in political will". Several discussants described working in organisations where there was an appetite and capacity for addressing the challenges of sustainable development. However, participants in both strands of research detected a sector-wide hesitancy to take the agenda forward, and some attributed this to an unwillingness to act without 'permission' from above. For instance, one senior college leader claimed that "people need to be really committed to go against the present structures". Another stated that "most people would become involved in sustainable development, but the main block is parameters, especially financial costs, short-termism and policy" and yet another felt that "there is a lack of clarity about sustainability and this deters leaders from making it priority". This suggests that leaders would benefit from further support in understanding the business case for sustainable development and the means of capitalising on it. It might also be taken to indicate that some leaders could further develop their capacity for proactivity and independence.



## **B. Continuously seeks different and innovative approaches to organisational problems and opportunities**

Each one of the leaders in this research demonstrated that they were open to seeking different approaches, whether through the development of their action research projects, or through participation in the personal and professional journeys and dialogues with researchers from LSBU.

One participant commented, "I feel confident in pushing ... and don't accept 'we have always done it this way'... I'm bolshy!"

## **C. Motivates the team to deliver shared capacity and energetically leads change agenda**

The action research projects revealed that individuals in the position of managing change did so openly and honestly and took into account the views of others and gave everyone an opportunity to participate. These leaders had previously earned credibility by investing time and effort in the communication of the how and why, and by demonstrating and proving concrete benefits of change. One of these leaders made a persuasive case for the contribution of sustainable development to the bottom line and to the college offer.

Conference delegates attending workshop 3 described "creating culture(s) where risk is acceptable" and talked of the value of "liberating energy".

## **D. Values adaptability and develops new systems that challenge status quo**

One college vice-principal defined sustainable development as being "about change and changing people." And openness to change and adaptability came across as strengths of leaders in both strands of the research. Discussants identified a key characteristic of successful leadership as the ability to act as an agent for change and to manage it successfully at both an organisational and an institutional level. For one discussant this meant recognising that "leadership qualities are not fixed".

One principal expressed their belief in the added value brought by an adaptive leadership approach when they stated, "Creative management also fulfils policy. Management structures only fulfil policy."

### **5.1.11 SUSTAIN MOMENTUM 3: Building Organisational Capability**

#### **A. Builds a learning organisation and models lifelong learning, through encouraging staff to become enablers, facilitators and lifelong learners themselves**

In *Sustainable Education*, Stephen Sterling describes an 'integrative view' of teaching and learning where "teachers are also learners (and) learners also teachers"<sup>15</sup>. Conference delegates participating in workshop 3 highlighted the requirement for the 'leader as learner.' The use of learner activity motivators at one of the action research colleges provides a good example of an integrative approach in practice. And, of course, the leaders in this research demonstrated their commitment to lifelong learning by volunteering to participate.

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15 Sterling, S, 2001. *Sustainable Education: revisioning learning and change*. Totnes: Schumacher Briefing 6 Green Books, p59.

Almost all participating colleges have added to their capability through supporting sustainable development forums and meeting staff development needs. One action research college has provided staff and learners with training for sustainability. From September 2007, all learners will complete an induction activity on sustainable development and their commitment gained on college entry. And there was a strong message from both strands of research and from the conference, that the sector would benefit from strategic development. For instance, one senior leader suggested that “CEL leadership programmes need to address the process of sustainable development”.

Participants in both strands of research pointed to the lack of time as a potential barrier to driving the agenda forward. Colleges and other providers need to think carefully about resource priorities and the central importance of CPD to their core business.

#### **B. Motivates, empowers, collaborates and encourages others to feel ownership**

One motivational strategy emerging from the LSBU strand of research was to hold staff development events on sustainable development at inspirational venues. In one instance, a college had used Schumacher College ([www.schumachercollege.org.uk](http://www.schumachercollege.org.uk)). Conference delegates identified reward and recognition strategies and celebrating “measures of success along the way” as critical success factors in raising and maintaining motivation.

#### **C. Uses distributed leadership to re-energise and regenerate**

One action research college has been successful in engaging learners in sustainable development and encouraging them to champion the issues for themselves. This has included, for example, supporting learners to promote recycling to the public.

### **5.1.12 SUSTAIN MOMENTUM 4: Growing future talent**

#### **A. Systematically plans and develops organisational succession**

The importance of values regularly emerged with discussants when exploring the links between people’s personal and professional lives and this has important implications for organisational succession. Among some discussants, there was frustration at not being able to meet their personal goals and act on their values within the sector, which was leading some to think in terms of moving to other sectors in the long term.

This disconnect is recognised by some leaders. The principal of one college has sought explicitly to link sustainable development to existing mindsets and philosophies, for example, interest in human needs, looking after future generations, being outstanding, morality etc. This has enabled a more targeted approach to building organisational capability and ensuring motivation.

Other examples of building organisational capacity include continuing professional development (CPD) and the recruitment of new staff with sustainable development expertise. The latter has happened at one action research site, where the person specification for the new director of estates includes knowledge of sustainable development and water management.

**B. Provides timely coaching, mentoring, feedback and credit recognition to help others excel, meet accountability and create leadership mindset**

There was a strong message from both strands about the need for supportive leadership to progress the sustainable development agenda. One discussant senior college leader spoke of “putting people at the centre and striving for excellence”.

There were, however, few examples of holding people to account over sustainable development, and this was largely explained as a lack of integration into college strategy and individual job roles, resulting from the absence of benchmarks and an unwillingness to act without clear guidance.

**5.1.13 PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE 1: Common purpose**

**A. Ensures high morale, through inspiring a common sense of purpose, belonging and action**

The importance of action to build and sustain motivation was well understood. One participant stated: “Keep it action-orientated. Raise awareness through practical things like recycling. Learners want to do and see the difference they can make.”

Some discussants made connections between various initiatives, such as citizenship, healthy living, Every Child Matters and the Green Gown Awards. The ability to articulate these links and to celebrate their successes in relation to sustainable development is one way to help promote a common sense of purpose across an organisation.

These approaches were echoed by a participant in conference workshop 3 stated, “Keep it real and embed.”

**B. Shows passion and conviction to achieve excellence and impact upon organisation and sector**

Several discussants talked about the need for a cultural shift in the sector as a whole, in order for it to move closer to the core values it was assumed were held by the majority of people drawn to work in the sector, and which could be said to share significant complementarity with the aims of sustainable development.

Evidence from both strands of research is that the passion to achieve sustainability tends at present to be driven by, and dependent upon, individual champions who take it upon themselves to drive the sustainable development agenda forward.

**C. Sets and models clear values and challenging performance standards**

In a statement which resonated for most participants, one leader stated that, “Setting a good example is an essential part of leadership for sustainability”. Modelling the desired behaviour, or the need for leaders to ‘walk the talk,’ was a message communicated by participants in both strands of research as well as by conference delegates. The principal of one college provided a good example of how to do this by putting herself forward to have her carbon footprint calculated and analysed in front of an audience of learners at her own institution.

#### D. **Engenders trust and respect through high integrity, ethical and social responsibility, transparency of decision making, clarity of communication and accountability**

Participants made explicit reference to the need for transparency in leadership and delegates attending conference workshop 3 spoke of the need to 'walk the talk.' Many shared a core value that power should be utilised to effect positive change. Discussants were able to identify emotional experiences and influences in their personal lives which had shaped their core values. These core values, which included a high regard for integrity and ethical and social responsibility, had contributed to them adopting a transformative leadership style and engaging on an authentic level with sustainable development. There was a high degree of agreement about the need for colleges, providers, regulatory, funding and inspectorial bodies to provide clear and appropriate communication of the sustainable development agenda.

Related to accountability, one participant made reference to the need for non-delivery organisations to be clear about their own commitment to the agenda. One stated that "CEL should mainstream sustainability in their own organisation. If they don't know themselves, they can't really advise others," and a significant number thought there was a risk that sustainable development might be perceived as just another policy imperative, unsupported in practice by funding and inspection frameworks.

#### 5.1.14 **PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE 2: Learning orientation**

##### A. **Demonstrates and encourages zest for knowledge, experiences and challenges**

Discussants described sustainable development as a learning process, with many demonstrating their own zest for knowledge, experiences and challenges. Similarly, the majority of action research participants recognised they were on a learning journey. Speaking of his experiences in the estates department, one noted, "There is so much information out there ... I have to read a lot of (sometimes technical) environmental magazines to try and gain knowledge." Many action research participants cited the external meetings and networks that supported their learning: "I continuously advance my knowledge by wide reading and learning from others." One of the conference presentations given by a research participant, concluded with the memorable observation: "I'm learning as fast as I'm leading!"

Participants in both strands recognised that they were on a steep learning curve. One action research participant stated, "I am aware that I am not as knowledgeable as others on this subject." And evidence from both strands of research suggests that leaders desire access to more sector-related resources from which to learn. One regional officer asserted that "Everyone is obliged to engage with the sustainability agenda. CEL has an urgent task to educate people and there must be debate at the highest level," and, indeed, there was very broad agreement that CEL has a critical role in achieving progress in sustainable development in the sector by raising its profile and importance through its leadership programmes. This responsibility was endorsed by conference delegates, who viewed CEL as well-placed and qualified to articulate sustainable development and its implications for the sector and to drive the agenda forward.

All discussants believed that sustainable development should be embedded into leadership programmes and that there should not be a separate leadership for sustainability programme. This built on the findings of *From Here to Sustainable Leadership Development*, a report prepared in 2005 for CEL by LSDA, which found that 50 per cent of interviewees on CEL's *Senior leadership development programme (SLDP)* thought the programme would benefit from sustainable development focused activities, and that sustainable development could profitably be explored by making explicit the links between existing leadership development processes and sustainable development processes (see appendix 3).

This preference for integration reflects the view that sustainable development should be woven into all aspects of the sector's activity rather than being stitched on as an additional feature. It is also entirely in keeping with the interdisciplinary spirit of sustainable development.

## B. Regularly creates and capitalises on learning opportunities

According to Stephen Gough of the Centre for Research in Education, University of Bath, "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?"<sup>16</sup> This relationship was understood by many participants, including discussants, who described sustainable development as a learning process, and the leader at an action research college who observed that "Sustainability is a learning process in itself, the concept and meaning is constantly being changed."

Unsurprisingly, both strands of research and the conference revealed that leaders wanted to provide more opportunities for learning about sustainable development. This ranged from informal, enrichment-based learning, through to accredited qualifications, including NCFE's Certificate in Sustainable Development. Both strands also identified a need for QCA to better integrate sustainable development into the curriculum. It was suggested that there is currently insufficient 'slack' in the system to teach additional material that is not assessed. Yet, as the effective enrichment activities at two of the action research sites demonstrate, learning does not have to be accredited in order to be effective. Moreover, in making the link between consultative and transformative leadership styles and the type of teaching and learning for sustainability they would like to see in the classroom, discussants demonstrated that education for sustainable development is not just about curriculum content, but, essentially, also about how it is facilitated.

However, the research did provide a striking example of the way in which external agencies can impact negatively on learning. During the three months allotted to the action research, one college underwent a change of chief executive and an Ofsted inspection, which meant that they had to concentrate on LSC priorities and were not able to progress the sustainability agenda as fast as planned.

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<sup>16</sup> Gough, S, 2003. In *Learning the Sustainability Lesson, tenth report of session 2002-03*, Volume 2, House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, EV 20.

### C. **Recognises the imaginative and creative ideas of others**

Discussants confirmed that the setting of parameters within which to allow people to be creative is a key characteristic of good leadership. Several action research leaders commented that they deliberately sought to recognise good ideas in order to encourage individuals to get engaged in sustainable development. The scenario planning activity carried out as part of the action research process is one tool to help leaders in this process. It may also be helpful to bear in mind the DfES' description of sustainable development as 'an innovation agenda.'

### D. **Adapts leadership style to situations**

One discussant observed that "There are community, environment and economic elements and people see these differently." Professionals working in these different yet interwoven domains have their own cultures, which include language and mindsets. Leaders engaging in sustainable development need to be sensitive to the challenges this can throw up and equipped to adapt their leadership styles to suit the situation.

## 5.1.15 PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE 3: Drive and direction

### A. **Demonstrates emotional, mental and physical stamina to meet challenges of developing and improving service**

Both strands of evidence identified time as a major barrier to progressing sustainable development. However, the agenda is being progressed in many cases by champions of sustainability who are working on sustainable development activities in addition to their formal duties. And, of course, all participants in this project had done just that. One of the key findings of the action research projects was that participants displayed high levels of energy, drive, direction and confidence.

### B. **Relishes challenge, takes calculated risks and encourages innovation**

It has been suggested that to influence environmental and social change, educators will need to develop learners' ability "to make sound choices in the face of the inherent complexity and uncertainty of the future"<sup>17</sup>. This applies to all learners, not only those enrolled on courses, but those working alongside us in our organisations. And uncertainty of the future means that the ability and willingness to take calculated risks has to be culturally embedded across the sector. This was well understood by participants in both strands of research. For instance, one action research participant stated that, "An open, can do, progressive, future thinking, holistic approach is invaluable," before adding, "We mustn't be risk averse," and a discussant claimed, "You have to take risks or you are not doing your job properly." Among the qualities identified in conference workshop 3 were courage and risk taking. Yet, in spite of this and the evident ability of participants and their organisations to progress sustainable development without significant dedicated funding or curriculum imperatives, participants in both strands of research still identified the general absence of these external factors as barriers to progress.

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<sup>17</sup> Scott, B, 2006. *Report of the UK Launch Conference for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*. p8. Available at [www.unesco.org.uk/UserFiles/File/DESD/ConferenceReport\\_BillScott4.pdf](http://www.unesco.org.uk/UserFiles/File/DESD/ConferenceReport_BillScott4.pdf)

### **C. Tenaciously drives for high performance**

One participant's comment that "I am tenacious about driving sustainable development in this college" was representative of the energy and commitment exhibited by participants across the two strands of research.

### **D. Is future-orientated and exhibits high energy, self-belief, confidence and optimism**

Discussants understood that sustainable development is fundamentally futures oriented. In the words of one, "Sustainable development has a strong idea of moving forward." Participants in the action research projects took part in a scenario-building activity to envision a sustainable college of the future, and conference delegates participated in an icebreaker activity to envisage their sustainable organisations of the future and the journeys they would have to take to get there.

Some participants did not demonstrate the confidence to take the agenda forward without further 'permission' from regulatory, qualifications or inspectorial bodies.

## **5.1.16 PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE 4: Self-awareness and growth**

### **A. Is aware of own strengths and weaknesses, willing to reveal vulnerability and learn from others, and aware of impact of own behaviour on others**

Leaders involved in the action research projects demonstrated a willingness to learn from others. Conference delegates participating in workshop 3 listed humility as a key quality. Many leaders were at a stage of 'conscious incompetence', recognising how much they had to learn about sustainable development. One stated, "I am clearly aware of my own strengths and development needs."

Discussants understood that, as part of the research, they were to engage with a process that would involve discussing the emotional triggers to their engagement with sustainable development. For some, this required a willingness to disclose personal details and potentially reveal vulnerability.

Some were critical of the authoritarian style of leadership which they sometimes encountered, and which two discussants thought was the dominant style of the sector. This style of leadership does not encourage the disclosure of vulnerability.

### **B. Is prepared to be held to account and actively seeks personal growth and improved awareness to deliver high performance**

The action research strand identified self awareness and the active pursuit of personal growth as one the key management skills evidenced by participants.

## C. Advances own insight regarding sector issues and actively uses that to create best value services and opportunities

Discussants said good leadership sees people as emotional as well as economic units, and empowers them by developing their wholeness. This strand of research clearly established that some people are disposed towards adopting leadership for sustainability as a result of incidents and influences outside their professional lives, which contribute to shared core values and include a commitment to justice, equality, concern for the wider community and the environment. The principal of one action research college clearly had the insight to recognise this and deliberately appealed to a similar set of core values in her staff to engage them in the project.

### 5.2 Catalysts and blocks identified

Discussants were asked to identify personal and professional issues or events that triggered progress or presented barriers to them as leaders trying to implement and utilise sustainability or sustainable development in their institutions and organisations.

Action research participants were asked whether the resources and expertise already existed in their colleges to achieve the desired results, and if there were additional skills, knowledge and support they felt they needed. They were asked what they wanted to make things easier and more efficient and to create a higher impact. They were also asked for their key messages to others embarking on leadership for sustainability.

Conference delegates were invited to participate in a workshop to identify catalysts, challenges and opportunities.

The outcomes from these activities are presented below and divided into those originating external to the organisation and those internal to the organisation. Personal catalysts are presented in the external catalyst category. No personal barriers to engagement were discussed.

#### 5.2.1 External catalysts identified

- The higher profile of sustainability-related issues in the media, stronger public awareness and support.
- The strong business case.
- *From Here to Sustainability*, the Learning and Skills Council's strategy for sustainable development.
- The 10 per cent uplift from the LSC for sustainable buildings, providing the sustainability of the building is addressed properly and the connections made to other sustainable development issues across the institution.
- Consonant initiatives, such as the citizenship agenda, healthy living, Green Gown Awards, the 14-19 agenda and *Every Child Matters*.
- The sustainable development skills gap and the need to address it.



- Networks and contacts in the sector, ensuring a support network for learning and developing leadership for sustainability.
- Case studies highlighting effective practice.
- Incidents and influences in personal lives, which have shaped the values underpinning commitment sustainable development, eg involvement with environmental organisations.

### 5.2.2 Internal catalysts identified

- Manager and governor support: at all levels of seniority support from management was considered key to progressing sustainability. A high-level mandate is required to embed sustainability across the whole institution.
- Consultative and inclusive leadership.
- Staff events in an inspirational setting; one example given was Schumacher College.
- External speakers and inspirational presentations had triggered developments in some colleges. Examples included a presentation from a lecturer driving through a 'greening' programme at Harvard University. Others mentioned a screening of Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*.
- Individual sustainable development champions, preferably with a clear remit and responsibilities, dedicated and accountable with the capacity to monitor progress over time.
- Cross-college engagement. Engaging a wide range of faculties, departments and representatives (eg learners, estates, curriculum, human resources, employer representation) was seen as key to mainstreaming sustainability.
- Provision of training to ensure that leaders for sustainability have the knowledge, skills and confidence to progress sustainable development effectively.
- Demonstration of positive change, where the organisation is keeping activities practical and focusing on the positive impact of change.
- Economic savings, through procurement review can provide opportunities to explore the wider links to sustainability issues.
- Inspection and the changes resulting from it.
- New buildings creating an interest in sustainability issues.
- Increasing awareness of sustainability issues among staff and learners.
- Provision of teaching and learning guidance, eg ten tips to be a greener tutor.
- Appealing to the core values of staff and learners.

- Creating time and space to explore the values of staff and learners.
- Enrichment events, for example holding 'World Cafés' to explore the future vision for the organisation with staff and learners.

### 5.2.3 External blocks identified

- Funding frameworks and short-term accounting cycles, for example the norm is a maximum of seven years' payback for capital expenditure, which is too short for return on investment in wind power.
- Absence of additional funding. Despite the evidence from both strands of research and from the conference case studies that much can be achieved without additional funding, a significant proportion of research participants advocated the allocation of special pump-priming funds to provide, for example, external expertise to undertake cost-benefit analyses or consultants to offer technical advice.
- Changing government agenda for FE and the difficulty of predicting student types and numbers more than a year or two ahead.
- Inspection requirements, including Ofsted; also the capital uplift needs to be incorporated into reporting procedures and the inspection regime.
- Absence of benchmarks: participants commented on the lack of proven exemplars for sustainability in further education to which they could benchmark themselves.
- Lack of coherent leadership across national bodies and government on the sustainable development agenda.
- Insufficient leadership modelling. The Learning and Skills Council is in a position to promote more sustainable practices itself, and in doing so lead by example (eg electronic audit instead of paper-based).
- Unsupportive assessment frameworks, specifically the need to better integrate sustainable development into the curriculum.
- Insufficient input from the sector skills councils (SSCs).
- Red tape. Participants reported that innovation and progress is stifled by unnecessary red tape from authorities such as the Environment Agency, those involved in health and safety, and district councils.

### 5.2.4 Internal blocks identified

- Leaders not yet convinced that sustainability is an important issue not a passing phase.
- Unhelpful leadership styles and behaviour, including senior leaders getting the balance wrong between support and imposition.

- Lack of knowledge of funding opportunities. While some actively look for and pursue external funding, awareness and knowledge of these funding sources is highly variable.
- Risk aversion and the fear of moving away from the funding, assessment and inspection priorities, and of being seen as 'off message'.
- Informal arrangements. Many champions are working on sustainable development in their spare time, driven by personal passion rather than formal requirement or reward systems.
- A crowded curriculum. Finding time to progress sustainability in the curriculum is perceived to be a major barrier.
- Lack of curriculum creativity. Perception that sustainable development needs to be taught as an additional subject rather than integrated.
- Off-putting terminology. The meaning of sustainable development and its consonance with much existing sector activity is not widely understood.
- Frustration resulting from a growing awareness of the issues, but a lack of knowing what to do – a skills gap.
- Inefficient buildings.
- Cynicism among staff.
- Concern about trusting learners to take the agenda forward.

### 5.2.5 Internal opportunities identified

- Develop partnerships and communication.
- Open resources to the community.
- Work on sustainable development in communities.
- Integrate sustainable development to overcome the vocabulary.
- Capitalise on opportunities arising from new technologies.

### 5.2.6 External opportunities identified

- In relation to new-build, there should be a move from 10 per cent uplift to expectation.
- Changes to VAT should be used as a driver.
- The government needs to take a lead on making this a carbon-neutral sector.
- CEL should embed sustainable development in its programmes.
- Requirement for sustainable development to be incorporated into development plans.

## 6. Conclusions

The two research projects each used a different methodology, providing useful triangulation. The findings were further validated by the conference on 16 May 2007. The combined evidence supports the view that there is very close alignment between leadership for sustainability and good leadership per se, and adds weight to the view of several participants that engaging with sustainable development can support and enhance leadership.

What follows is a summary of the key qualities for leadership for sustainability demonstrated by participants and the key areas where further development of leadership for sustainability is needed. Also included is a section on the perceived need for changes in the sector. This latter section is not mapped against the *LQF*.

### 6.1 Key qualities for leadership for sustainability in evidence

- Distributed leadership
- Self-awareness and growth
- Zest for knowledge, experiences and challenges
- Adaptation of leadership style to situations
- Commitment to equality and fairness
- Understanding of and ability to adapt to insights and perspectives from diverse sources and acts to capitalise on cultural diversity
- Embedding corporate and ethical and social responsibility at strategic and operational levels
- Adding value through collaboration, partnerships and group synergy
- Using networks and insights to help shape the organisation
- Influencing relationships
- Understanding organisational climate and knowing and involving key influencers
- Prioritisation of time and resource management; proactive negotiation for and access of resources outside immediate domain.

### 6.2 Key areas for leadership for sustainability development

- Systems thinking to understand interconnectedness, manage complexity and balance differing national, regional, and local objectives. Also, to exhibit greater awareness of the global dimension in all spheres of activity.
- Management of uncertainty in complex environments.
- Futures thinking to create a compelling vision of a sustainable college of the future.
- Staying close to customer perspectives and learner interests to ensure service.
- Demonstrating broad organisational awareness by astutely perceiving political, economic, social trends.
- Use of economic, financial and sector data to diagnose key issues and future challenges.

- Creating and capitalising on learning opportunities for sustainability, ie development of courses which meet emerging customer demand for sustainability skills, knowledge and attitudes.
- Understanding that change may need to be radical to achieve learning improvement, ie in terms of CPD and recognition of the learning organisation as a whole; in terms of curriculum content and development and in terms of learning delivery.
- Taking calculated risks and encouraging innovation around sustainable development, in the recognition that progress is achievable without extra funding or changes to qualification content.
- Self-belief, confidence and optimism, ie the readiness to move forward without waiting for executive 'permission.'
- Defining the organisation and processes to enable innovative thinking and effective partnership.
- Incorporating sustainability into core strategies and organisational business.
- Target setting and performance accountability (given the lack of exemplars against which to benchmark).

### 6.3 Perceived need for changes in the sector

- Removal of perverse incentives; funding could be used to encourage action for sustainable development, eg to provide money for sustainable development champions in the way it was provided for ICT champions and in support of DDA.
- Support for innovation and the taking of calculated risks.
- QCA to work with SSCs and awarding bodies to embed sustainable development in all qualifications.
- Include sustainable development in common inspection framework.

## 7. Recommendations for CEL

The following recommendations for CEL have emerged from the research:

- Recognise itself as a catalyst. CEL is trusted, respected and well placed to give legitimacy to leadership for sustainability.
- Work with the LSC to help consolidate and evaluate information on tools and sources of expertise.
- Work with and use its influence with other key sector agencies to progress sustainable development in the sector.
- Share good practice through generic examples, specific case studies and forums, to learn from not only the learning and skill sector, but also from schools, higher education and local government.
- Review the commitment to and internal strategy for sustainable development at senior leadership level in the light of the outcomes of this report.
- Conduct an internal communication campaign and staff development workshops to raise awareness of sustainable development and CEL's strategy.
- Investigate the possibility of sustainable development mentoring and sustainable development curriculum mentoring schemes as part of CEL's existing mentoring programme.
- Initiate training programmes and support for college governors.
- Explore organising an event on sustainability to bring together other agents for change in the sector such as the Association of Colleges (AoC), the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) and the 157 Group.
- Embed sustainable development in all CEL programmes as an integral element of leadership development.
- Review existing programmes to include opportunities for the following:
  - to develop understanding of sustainable development and help the sector to grasp why it is desirable and necessary
  - to develop understanding of the business case for sustainable development
  - to develop understanding of the inseparability of good leadership from leadership for sustainability, and to continue to support leadership for organisational and cultural change to enable the transition from talking to doing. This should include guidance on leadership styles and when different styles might be most effective
  - to reflect on a values-based approach to leadership

- to develop capability to harness the core values of staff
- to reflect on the motivation and values of learners
- to use systems thinking as a tool to recognise inter-relationships and to cope with uncertainty and complexity
- to develop risk taking and risk management readiness, particularly the risks associated with a distributive style of leadership
- to find ways of promoting a distributive leadership style, which involves CEL working with sustainability leaders at all levels, not just senior people.
- to enhance capacity to take a developmental approach with staff
- to implement strategies to enable staff to recognise their own learning as a core activity
- to learn about sustainability audits, cost-benefit analysis for long term benefits and payback periods
- to learn from examples of processes for implementing sustainable development, including effective strategic planning, technical issues and how to enhance leadership through an estates building project
- to develop skills and techniques for lobbying for change in the sector
- to extend current CEL research projects into leadership for sustainability.

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# Appendix 1: Action research projects

## 1. Bishop Burton College, North Yorkshire

### 1.1 Key facts

- 767 learners
- Associate college of the University of Hull
- One campus

### 1.2 Background

Bishop Burton College is a further and higher education college specialising in land-based studies. It has the UK's only Centre of Vocational Excellence for Agriculture, and is the lead college in a tripartite Centre of Vocational Excellence in Equine Studies.

The college has a clear policy of minimising its impact on the environment, and has successfully incorporated 'respect for the environment' into the core values of the college.

There are eight members of the sustainability group whose remit is to review and update the sustainable development policy and to monitor progress against the following performance indicators:

- Agree sustainability strategies and targets
- Establish current baselines
- Review options
- Develop sustainability projects and timelines

All members participated in the action research project including the deputy principal, deputy director of teaching and learning and the college's sustainability officer.

The college has progressed sustainable development on a number of fronts, with a particular focus on staff training. The sustainability officer has been a dedicated resource within the college to deliver this training, which has ensured its success.

The college has a £23 million new build programme and is actively trying to incorporate sustainability into the new design. The college is committed to long-term sustainability and is taking steps to mainstream sustainable development and encourage behaviour change in both learners and staff.

A number of priority sustainable development tasks were identified to as part of the action research. These included:

- Strategic level – adding environment into existing values of the college, spelling out the culture they would like to create, publicising the sustainable development policy and embedding staff training in sustainable development
- Estate management – sustainable procurement in campus new build, refurbishing existing campus with sustainability feature.

## 2. Brighton and Hove City Council, Community Skills and Learning Unit

### 2.1 Key facts

- Neighbourhood Action on Climate Change course was developed by the Community Skills and Learning Team
- Courses are developed where there is local demand
- Courses are delivered by Council Outreach Officers.

### 2.2 Background

The Brighton and Hove Community Skills and Learning programme is designed to encourage adults to get a taste for learning and to get them started on the learning and skills pathway. It focuses on engaging residents that have not traditionally participated in learning, developing new learning opportunities in community settings and working with other providers of adult learning to create courses that are relevant to the needs of the residents.

The 'Neighbourhood Action on Climate Change' project was established in January 2006 and run in partnership with the School of the Environment at the University Brighton. The aim was to raise awareness of climate change issues within the community through the development of taster courses on climate change mitigation and adaptation. Courses are generally demand-led and developed in response to requests from residents. The experiences of the project staff and tutors in setting up and running this course became the focus of the action research. The project has come to the end of the pilot phase, and sustainable development tasks identified by the six participants included:

- Geographical scope – clarify which new areas/focus/strategy
- Preparing publicity material to achieve wider coverage
- Engaging local business and the community to gain their financial support
- Completing a robust prioritisation exercise including risk assessment.

## 3. Leicester College

### 3.1 Key facts

- 1,557 staff
- 27,600 learners
- £45 million budget
- Provides education and training to 43 per cent of the city's 16 to 18-year-olds
- Four main campus sites
- CoVE status for Print Skills, Retail and Construction.

### 3.2 Background

Leicester College is one of the largest further education colleges in the UK, teaching from four city campuses and over 200 community venues.

Eleven individuals from across the college took part in the action research, including the principal, director of planning and resources, the head of the sustainability forum, curriculum manager, and other staff members. Cross-college engagement was a particular strength of Leicester in progressing sustainable development. There was also a strong commitment from all participants to action and to demonstrating positive change through measurable success.

In participating in the action research project, Leicester College committed to the following sustainable development tasks:

- Involving the governors in the vision for an exemplar college in sustainability
- Developing a communications strategy for sustainable development activities
- Student involvement
- Implementing a number of 'quick wins' through a competition for best ideas around 'reduce, reuse, and recycle' as well as sustainable transport.

## 4. North Nottinghamshire College

### 4.1 Key facts

- 1,150 full-time and over 10,000 part-time learners
- 600 staff
- £13 million turnover.

### 4.2 Background

As the leading provider of education and training in the North Nottinghamshire area and beyond, the college provides education and training opportunities for learners from the age of 14 upwards, many being adult learners. They have a wide variety of courses leading to nearly 350 different qualifications in almost 40 major subject areas.

The college has Centre of Vocational Excellence status in Fluid Power, Food Technology and Logistics, and Aviation and has recently invested millions of pounds on facilities and resources expanding and modernising the college to meet customers' demands.

Ten leaders volunteered to take part in the action research. This included the principal (chief executive), the chief executive designate, the college's sustainability champion and governor, director of the fluid power CoVE and other programme managers.

The college have installed sustainable technologies in the new buildings (geothermal heating and green energy), and have plans for mainstreaming sustainable development throughout the curriculum and college estate.

The sustainable development task agreed for the purposes of the action research was to embed sustainability into the college mission statement and get a clearer understanding of the college baseline for subsequent measurement against. Sustainability accounting to enable the setting of sustainability targets for the future.

During the three months allotted to the action research the college underwent a change of chief executive and an Ofsted inspection, which meant that they had to concentrate on LSC priorities and were not able to progress the sustainability agenda as fast as planned. However, the director of the CoVE Centre for Fluid Power did have success in mainstreaming sustainability into their work.

## 5. Southwark College, London

### 5.1 Key facts

- Approximately 8,500 learners, nearly half of who are of an ethnic minority group
- 530 full-time staff
- Four campus sites
- Strong links to Birkbeck University and South Bank University.

### 5.2 Background

Southwark College is a thriving and popular College, which aims to 'Put Learners First'. It operates from three inner-city campuses (Waterloo, Bermondsey and Camberwell).

The college's approach to sustainability is student-driven, but with the full support of senior management and governors. There is a concerted team effort to embed sustainability into all campus activities and into the curriculum.

'Sustainability Working Group' has been successfully established to drive the sustainable development agenda forward. This is chaired by the deputy principal and consists of enthusiastic individuals with a range of expertise. The committee has created very strong momentum for change within the college and has successfully engaged the right people to make it happen.

The college uses 'activity motivators' to engage learners in activities and this has proved useful for recycling programmes and other sustainability activities.

Twelve participants attended the workshop and the sustainable development tasks that were agreed as part of the action research were:

- Sustainability incorporated into the strategic plan (developing an energy policy given first priority)
- An audit of waste and recycling
- Sustainable development steering group to be cross-college with student representation (and to be a motivational group)
- An overall plan for sustainable development with SMART targets, policy and guidelines
- Examine curriculum and incorporate sustainability
- Paper less office
- Community links – examine feasibility of growing food for college restaurants.

## Appendix 2: Models of sustainable development

### 1. The five capitals model of sustainable development<sup>18</sup>

The five capitals framework offers a way of unpacking the potentially complex linkages between the environment economy and society so that they can be operationalised into an action plan or strategy. The framework considers the resources available for human progress as different sorts of capital – natural, human, social, manufactured and financial<sup>19</sup>. These five capitals are an accurate representation of all of the resources available to a society and help to shift the focus away from just financial resources. It also helps to put the social dimension of sustainability on an equal footing with the economy and environment: something which is often lacking in sustainable development activities.

The framework is based on conventional economic theory that we can derive an ‘income’ or flow of benefits from the stock of each capital, provided there is proper investment (or, protection/enhancement). If we then deplete our stock of capital then the flow of benefits from them will slow down, or grind to a halt. This sort of thinking is familiar when discussing investment in manufactured capital (eg a railway system) but it is only recently that it has been applied to the environment or people. Sustainable development is the process by which we will succeed in managing these different capital flows in a way that is able to continue with benefits for future generations.

**Manufactured capital** comprises all human fabricated infrastructure that is already in existence. The tools, machines, roads, buildings etc. Where we live and work. It does not include the goods and services that are produced however. In some cases manufactured capital may be viewed as source of materials (eg building waste used as aggregate for road building or repair). In others, great efforts have to be put in to prevent things like bridges, railways from rusting or decaying.

**Social capital** is all the different cooperative systems and organisational frameworks people use to live and work together, such as families, communities, governments, businesses, schools, trade unions, voluntary groups. Although they involve different types of relationships and organisation they are all structures or institutions that add value to human capital, and tend to be successful in doing so if based on mutual trust and shared purpose (Putnam, 2000). The importance of social capital has only recently being recognised, unfortunately though the increasingly visible negative effects when it is eroded. Success in social groups is an important contributory factor to human well-being.

**Human capital** consists of the health, knowledge, skills, motivation and spiritual ease of people. All the things that enable people to feel good about themselves, each other, and to participate in society and contribute productively towards its well being (health, wealth and happiness). Recently recognised as providing a high return on investment, especially in developing societies where investment in human resources is viewed as possibly the most essential ingredient of development strategies (UNDP, 1999) but also in the highly industrialised world (Edvinson and Malone, 1997). See too the recent literature about the economics of happiness (eg Layard 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Based on Parkin, S, 2000. Sustainable Development: the concept and the practical challenge, *Civil Engineering* 138 November, 12398: pp3-8. Jonathon Porritt’s book (2006) *Capitalism as if the world mattered*, Earthscan, considers the five capitals in more detail.

<sup>19</sup> The four capital model was developed by economists at the World Bank; the fifth capital (financial) was added by Forum for the Future to complete the concept.

**Natural capital** (also referred to as environmental or ecological capital) represents the stock of environmentally provided assets and falls into two categories:

- Resources: some of which are renewable (trees, vegetation, fish, water), some non-renewable (fossil fuels, minerals). In some places, ostensibly renewable resources (like fertile soil) have become non-renewable (desert).
- Services: such as climate regulation; the powerful waste processing cycles that breakdown, absorb, and recycle emissions and waste from all species; hydrological cycles etc.

**Financial capital** is viewed by many as different from the other four capitals in that it has, strictly speaking, no intrinsic value; whether in shares, bonds or banknotes, its value is purely representative of natural, human, social or manufactured capital. Financial capital is nevertheless very important, as it reflects the productive power of the other types of capital, and enables them to be owned or traded.

### The five capitals and their flows of benefits

Dimension	Capital	Flow of benefits
Environment	<b>Natural capital:</b> The resources and services provided by the natural world. For example: land, sea, water, livestock, energy, timber, ecological systems	energy, food, water, climate, waste disposal
Society	<b>Human capital:</b> The energy, motivation and capacity for relationships, and the intelligence of individuals. For example: people's health, knowledge, skills, motivation	energy, work, creativity, innovation, love, happiness
	<b>Social capital:</b> The social groupings that add value to individuals. For example: families, governance systems, voluntary organisation, faith groups, communities, universities	security, shared culture, education, inclusion
Economy	<b>Manufactured capital:</b> The material goods that exist already. For example: buildings, railways, tools and machines	living/work/leisure places, access to other resources
	<b>Financial capital:</b> The money, stocks etc that enable us to put a value on, and buy and sell the above resources.	means of valuing, owning and exchanging the other four capitals

## 2. The 12 features of a sustainable society

If we invest appropriately in all capital stocks, and achieve the flow of benefits, the statements below would all be true. They represent the outcomes of a sustainable society.

<b>Natural capital</b>	1.	In their extraction and use, substances taken from the earth do not exceed the environment's capacity to disperse, absorb, recycle or otherwise neutralise their harmful effects (to humans and/or the environment).
	2.	In their manufacture and use, artificial substances do not exceed the environment's capacity to disperse, absorb, recycle or otherwise neutralise their harmful effects (to humans and/or the environment).
	3.	The capacity of the environment to provide ecological system integrity, biological diversity and productivity is protected or enhanced.
<b>Human capital</b>	4.	At all ages, individuals enjoy a high standard of health.
	5.	Individuals are adept at relationships and social participation, and throughout life set and achieve high personal standards of their development and learning.
	6.	There is access to varied and satisfying opportunities for work, personal creativity, and recreation.
<b>Social capital</b>	7.	There are trusted and accessible systems of governance and justice.
	8.	Communities and society at large share key positive values and a sense of purpose.
	9.	The structures and institutions of society promote stewardship of natural resources and development of people.
	10.	Homes, communities and society at large provide safe, supportive living and working environments.
<b>Manufactured capital</b>	11.	All infrastructure, technologies and processes make minimum use of natural resources and maximum use of human innovation and skills.
<b>Financial capital</b>	12.	Financial capital accurately represents the value of natural, human, social and manufactured capital.

### 3. The five capitals framework in practice

The table below shows how the five capitals framework can be used to map out the contribution of a college to sustainable development:

Capital stocks	Three ways in which a college can contribute		
	Running the business	In what it does: teaching etc	Where it has influence
Natural			
Human			
Social			
Manufactured			
Financial			



## Appendix 3: From Here to Sustainable Leadership Development – summary

In October 2005, the LSC commissioned the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) to work with CEL to research existing and potential approaches to sustainable development on CEL's *Senior leadership development programme (SLDP)*. The report focuses on the process-orientation shared by the *SLDP* and sustainable development. The research offered an opportunity to develop a model for exploring consonance between existing provision which might be considered as a means of further embedding sustainable development in senior leadership development. The project was explorative and necessarily small scale, involving a single *SLDP* cohort.

### The research process

The report was based upon findings elicited from a range of activities, which focused on the following:

- Meetings with CEL staff to explore existing levels of sustainable development literacy – this entailed meeting one-to-one with the *SLDP* director and collectively with the *SLDP* team.
- *SLDP* learning aims, to consider how readily these relate to the sustainable development agenda.
- Programme stimulus material, paying particular attention to content of reading lists, to assess opportunities to exploit existing stimuli to promote further engagement with sustainable development.
- Attendance at *SLDP Building the Future* residential to assess, through participant observation and questioning, how existing processes and content might lend themselves to sustainable development related learning.
- One-to-one interviews with self-selecting *SLDP* participants to explore more fully their thoughts about the relevance of sustainable development to senior leadership development, and the current articulation of this relationship on the programme.

### Conclusions

- One hundred per cent of *SLDP* participants interviewed thought sustainable development sufficiently important to warrant some consideration on the *SLDP*, and supported this view by identifying a range of significant sustainable development challenges for senior leaders within the learning and skills sector.
- *SLDP* participants were asked to compare their awareness of sustainable development at the beginning of the programme with their awareness at the end of the *Building the Future* residential attended by the sustainable development researcher. Two claimed to have developed increased awareness; two claimed that, as a result of improving their comprehension of the complexity of sustainable development, they now recognised their awareness was less than they had thought, and four discerned no difference.

- 50 per cent of interviewees suggested that the programme would benefit from the introduction of additional sustainable development focused activities.
- 50 per cent felt that sustainable development could more profitably be explored by exploring the links between *SLDP* processes and sustainable development processes.
- Overall conclusion: the *SLDP* currently provides a good basis for participants to explore the implications of sustainable development for the learning and skills sector and for senior leadership. It does this through:
  - referencing appropriate resources, namely Winterton et al (2000), *Future Skills Needs of Managers*, DfEE and Bottery, M (2004), *The Challenges of Educational Leadership: values in a globalised age PCP*.
  - providing appropriate activities, such as the scenario-building exercise and subsequent case study activity.
  - employing techniques designed to develop participants' management of paradox, ambiguity, unpredictability and emergence, and through its promotion of unlearning and interdisciplinarity.
  - This foundation could be further exploited by drawing attention to the parallels between the processes applied on the *SLDP* and those of sustainable development.

## Recommendations

- Re-emphasise the value to scenario-building of readings by Bottery and Winterton et al.
- Include pre-scenario-building readings which raise debate about the ethical and theoretical aspects of sustainable development.
- CEL and *SLDP* to clarify distinction between achievement of institutional sustainability and engagement with the adaptive processes contributing to environmental, social and economic sustainability.
- *SLDP VLE* to be developed to provide resource efficiencies and development of a sustainable leadership learning network.
- This report to contribute to CEL's development of its sustainable development strategy and to the *SLDP's* routine review process.

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## Centre for Excellence in Leadership

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) was launched in October 2003 to develop organisational leadership in the learning and skills system. CEL's remit is to foster and support leadership improvement, reform, transformation, sustainability and quality improvement.

It serves the existing and future leaders of all providers within the further education system, including FE colleges, training and work-based learning providers, adult and community providers, offender learning, specialist colleges and voluntary organisations.

CEL is a learner-driven organisation – learners and their improved learning are the focus and purpose of everything that CEL does.

CEL now operates through a charitable trust formed by its operating company on 1 April 2006.