

Driving change



What is sustainable development?

Sustainable development is an internationally recognised approach that seeks to simultaneously progress economic, social and environmental goals across generations and across the globe.

A sustainable development approach can help tackle the difficult features of our current development – the challenges of with social cohesion, climate change, environmental destruction, over-consumption and economic inequality – and build a secure future that realises a just society and strong economy, and that functions within environmental limits.

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro – now commonly called the Earth Summit – marked the first international

attempt to draw up strategies and action for moving towards this more sustainable pattern of development. Over 100 Heads of State, with representation from 178 national governments, attended the largest gathering of national leaders that the world had seen at that time. The Summit was also attended by representatives from a range of other organisations representing civil society.

In 1994, the UK became the first country to publish a national strategy as recommended at Rio: Sustainable Development, the UK Strategy. This was revised in 1999 and a new strategy, *Securing the Future*, followed in March 2005.

What is the UK Government's policy on Sustainable Development?

The UK Strategy for Sustainable Development, *Securing the Future*,¹ and its accompanying UK Framework agreed across the devolved administrations,² presents a clear goal that the UK public sector is working towards:

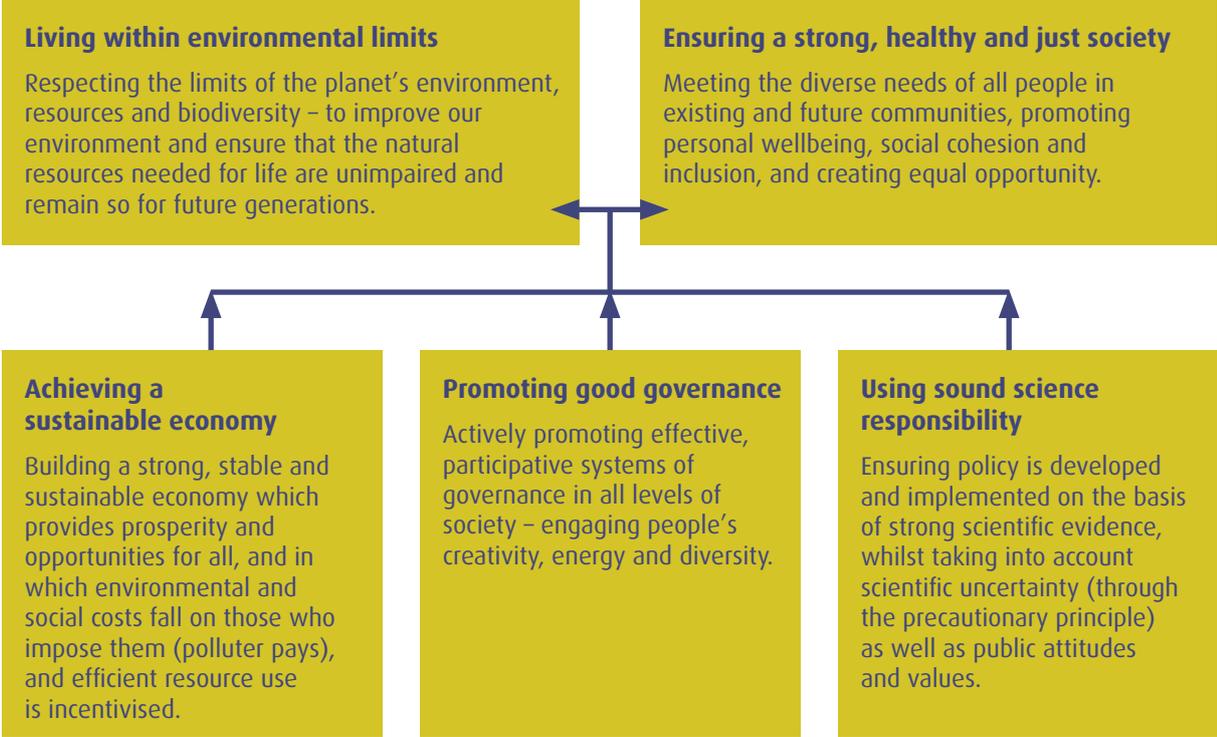
'The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations...'³

The Strategy and the Framework set out what this means in practice and provide five guiding principles of sustainable development (Figure 1), which 'will form the basis for policy in the UK.'⁴

They also set four shared priorities for immediate UK action:

- Sustainable Consumption and Production
- Climate Change and Energy
- Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement
- Sustainable Communities.⁵

Figure 1 The guiding principles of the UK Government Strategy for Sustainable Development



‘For a policy to be sustainable, it must respect all five of these principles, though we recognise that some policies, while underpinned by all five, will place more emphasis on certain principles than others. Any trade-offs should be made in an explicit and transparent way. We want to achieve our goals of living within environmental limits and a just society, and we will do it by means of a sustainable economy, good governance, and sound science.’⁶

Securing the Future, p.17

Contents



- 1 Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs)**
- 2 So what am I required to do?**
- 3 What about other government bodies, such as NDPBs?**
- 4 Is this yet another burden?**
- 5 What support can the SDC offer?**
- 6 Engagement: the golden thread**



- 1 First things first... what is an SDAP?**
Figure 3. What An SDAP is...
- 2 Make the business case for sustainable development**
Figure 4. The business case for sustainable development.
- 3 Link into core business**
- 4 Involve others in your SDAP**
 - 4.1 Ensure cross-cutting input**
- 5 Do you have the right supporting structures?**
- 6 Secure leadership at all levels**
Case study 1: Catalysing leadership and institutional change through SDAPs at DH
Case study 2: Top down and bottom up leadership at BERR
 - 6.1 Secure senior ownership and sign-off**
- 7 Engagement: Top tips for involving stakeholders in SDAP thinking**



- 1 Decide your priorities and themes**
 - 1.1 Policy**
 - 1.2 Operations**
 - 1.3 Procurement**
 - 1.4 People**
Case study 3: Taking an integrated and balanced approach to sustainable development across policy and operations: DFID
- 2 Work out your actions**
 - 2.1 Make actions SMART**
Case study 4: Recognising the broader value of SMART targets for sustainable development: Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA)
 - 2.2 Deliver outcomes not just outputs**
 - 2.3 Relate to your agency/host department**
Case study 5: Involving agencies in the SDAP process: DfT and its Agencies
Case study 6: A small organisation starting out: Appointments Commission
- 3 Engagement: Top tips for involving stakeholders in SDAP planning**



- 1 **Know the elements of a robust SDAP**
- 2 **Engagement: Top tips for involving your stakeholders in SDAP drafting**

Case study 7: Seeking outside opinion at the DWP



- 1 **Release the SDAP and put its actions to work**
- 2 **Does your organisation have the skills and capacity to drive change?**
Case study 8: Defra's Sustainable Development Open Meeting
Case study 9: Building organisational capacity at CLG
- 3 **Engagement: Top tips for involving stakeholders in sharing your SDAP**
Case study 10: SD Fairs at the Cabinet Office



- 1 **Report your progress**
- 2 **Relate the SDAP to other corporate reporting procedures**
- 3 **Ensure robust reporting structures**
- 4 **Move onwards and upwards**
- 5 **Engagement: Top tips for involving stakeholders in SDAP evaluation**

Annex 1: Further resources

Annex 2: Contacts

Who is this guidance for?

The SDC has prepared this guidance to:

- Support those involved in the Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) process (see Section 1.1) – whether developing an SDAP for the first time or updating existing plans. Some departments and agencies have already completed a number of SDAPs, whilst other organisations are only just beginning
- Clearly set out the elements that the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) will consider in making its regular assessments of SDAPs across government.

We hope that you will find the guidance useful if you are in an organisation which is:

- Preparing an SDAP for the first time
- Updating an existing SDAP
- Starting to develop its understanding of, or capacity to contribute towards, sustainable development
- Already excelling, or wishing to excel, in SDAPs and / or particular areas of sustainable development
- A public body, such as an NDPB or regulator, not yet required to develop an SDAP but recognising that it is good practice to do so
- Outside the UK public sector but wanting to compare practice and understand more about how government is looking to strategically embed sustainable development into its policy, processes and operations.

This guidance is a living document that we will regularly review to ensure it remains up-to-date. Please contact us if you have any comments on the guidance, or would like your organisation's experience or comments to inform future updates (see Annex 2 for details).

Why this guidance?

The SDAP process continues to develop, and the SDC's guidance evolves with it. This guidance builds upon the SDC's previous guidance, *Getting Started* (August 2005), which set out the basic elements that the SDC would expect to see in a good SDAP. This guidance is not in conflict with *Getting Started*, but rather is updated to:

- Reflect the ongoing development of SDAPs and organisations' experience with them
- Consolidate any SDAP advice issued by the SDC since August 2005
- Include new sections on communications, engagement and skills – areas where we are regularly now asked for additional advice
- Provide clarification in areas where those preparing plans have suggested it would be helpful, and our own assessments have indicated that it is necessary
- Reflect new priorities emerging from government, for example on sustainable procurement
- Include case studies reflecting the experiences and approaches of organisations who have prepared SDAPs or are just starting out in the process. We hope that these 'real life' experiences will stimulate others to reflect on their current activities and their future potential.

How to use this guidance

This guidance is designed to take you step-by-step through the process of creating a successful SDAP – as illustrated by Figure 2. Each section aligns with an element of the diagram, and provides guidance on the areas where the SDC advises that active decision-making will lead to a more effective SDAP.

You'll notice that at the end of each section throughout the guidance there are some top tips for engaging others at each stage to underpin your organisation's SDAP. Engagement with others should be a guiding principle for your SDAP – reflected at all stages of the SDAP process as far as possible in order to build ownership and understanding of the plan.

Figure 2
The SDAP Cycle



Learn

The first step in developing an SDAP is to learn the basics about the requirement for SDAPs, where you can get support, and how you can start to involve others.

1 Sustainable Development Action Plans (SDAPs)

Since March 2005, all central government departments and executive agencies of the UK Government have been required to produce a Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP). This requirement is set out in the UK strategy for sustainable development, *Securing the Future*⁷ (the strategy), as a key means of ensuring that government strategy is 'converted into action'⁸ across the whole of government. The Strategy required that the first SDAPs were produced by December 2005, with progress to be reported in December 2006 and regularly thereafter. The Government has since clarified that Departments/ Executive Agencies are required to report annually on their progress.⁹

SDAPs are a key tool to ensure that the UK public sector meets the government's aim of becoming a leading exponent of sustainable development.

SDAPs set out the actions – and their relative priority – that each organisation will take to implement the cross-government commitments agreed in *Securing the Future*.¹¹ For most organisations, this means outlining the actions that build a sustainable development approach to policies they produce or deliver, people they work with and the operations which they manage.

2 So what am I required to do?

All UK central government departments and their executive agencies are required to produce an SDAP. These organisations are expected to:

- provide focused SDAPs based on the commitments of *Securing the Future*
- be covered by a 'live' and current SDAP at all times
- make their SDAPs publicly available, and to notify the SDC when this happens
- report progress against their SDAP annually.

Your SDAP may be assessed by the SDC Watchdog team and results made publicly available via the SDC website. The nature of this assessment will evolve over time as the SDAP process evolves. See Section 1.5 for more detail about the SDC's scrutiny role.

3 What about other government bodies, such as NDPBs?

The Strategy does not require Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) to prepare SDAPs. However, without properly formulated and supported sustainable development action plans, NDPBs and regulators might find themselves failing in their part in making the UK public sector a leading exponent of sustainable development. It is therefore encouraging that NDPBs and regulators are increasingly taking an interest in the SDAP process and the SDC encourages them to do so as good practice.

Recognising the benefits of an SDAP approach, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department of Health (DH) have already required their NDPBs/ or, in DH's case their Arms Length Bodies to start preparing SDAPs.

It is expected that these early movers will gain future advantages by pre-empting a possible roll-out of the SDAP requirement across the wider public sector.

4 Is this yet another burden?

The SDC's analysis of the first round of SDAPs, *Off the Starting Block*, showed that the actual process of preparing a plan had already started to help organisations to allocate sustainable development actions and responsibilities more evenly across work programmes, and to reassess their priorities and approaches.¹²

Our analysis also found that the requirement to prepare an SDAP had been an effective means of ensuring that each department/ agency actively considered its contribution to *Securing the Future*. The SDC concluded that 'without the SDAP process, it is clear that the UK Strategy would have limited profile across government.'

Many organisations have found it useful to consider their existing work and further work programmes through a 'sustainable development lens'. Overall, organisations have acknowledged that the action plan process has been a constructive exercise which has benefited their work planning.¹³



5 What support can the SDC offer?

The Sustainable Development Commission is the Government's independent advisory body on sustainable development, reporting to the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland. The SDC was established in 2000 and is led by a Chair, 18 Commissioners, and a professional Secretariat of around 50.

There are four key strands to the SDC's work:

- Advocacy
- Advice
- Capability building
- Scrutiny (watchdog)

The SDC can provide SDAP support to government organisations in two main ways:

Capability building (The Whitehall Team)

This support can include:

- Guidance and advice to government departments and executive agencies on the SDAP process
- Critiquing one SDAP draft before official clearance
- Contributing to internal workshops, seminars or staff events
- Highlighting existing tools, case studies and organisations that might be of use
- Initiating networking opportunities with sustainable development officials across government and beyond, to share experiences and promote collaboration
- Capability-building for sustainable development in policy-making and business strategy.

Assessment (The Watchdog Team)

This support can include:

- In-depth assessment of first time SDAPs¹⁴
- Carrying out rolling assessments on selected organisations' approaches to SDAPs
- Carrying out rolling assessments on selected SDAP Progress Reports¹⁵
- Maintaining a public record on the SDC's website of SDAP and Progress Report publication dates to ensure transparency and public accountability.

By combining a watchdog function with long term capability building support, the SDC seeks to provide a constructive role in helping the public sector to develop, implement and continuously improve SDAPs and sustain practical change towards sustainable development.

Further information can be found at

www.sd-commission.org.uk. **Full contact details for the Whitehall and Watchdog teams are provided at Annex 2.**

1.6 Engagement: the golden thread

It can be easy to approach the SDAP as just another document to be written – a tick-box exercise embarked on by only a few in the organisation to get the job done quickly. However, a cross-cutting corporate plan or strategy that has been shaped by a range of staff and stakeholders will always stand more chance of being effectively implemented than one that has been developed in relative isolation by one team. If ownership of the work has been shared and its aims and objectives widely agreed then there is a strong foundation for action.

Sustainable development requires us to address 'whole systems' issues, to acknowledge

scientific complexity, and to recognize the potential check-balances between competing needs. This means bringing together people who may never have needed to co-operate before – i.e. it requires good **engagement**.

In practical terms, 'engagement' can cover a range of methods around participation or involvement, including stakeholder workshops, partnerships, questionnaires, focus groups, training and education, online forums or written consultations and others.

For more information on engagement and sustainable development, visit Engagement¹⁶ on the SDC website.

Think

Having explored the concept of sustainable development and been introduced to 'The SDAP Cycle' (Figure 2), it's time to plan your organisation's approach to sustainable development and begin to formulate your own plan of action. How will you generate input, work out your key actions, and secure necessary leadership?

1 First things first... what is an SDAP?

It is useful to be clear about the purpose of an SDAP from the start. Figure 3 sets out some common misconceptions about SDAPs to help get you off on the right foot.

2 Make the business case for sustainable development

An integrated, sustainable development approach adds value to existing activity by making it more than the sum of its parts. It ensures that organisations reinforce each other's efforts, rather than undermining them and it ensures that they are well run, offering value for money with well-managed and effective use of their staff and natural resources.

'Sustainability is not an obstacle to long term success, it's essential for it.'

Rt. Hon Alistair Darling, Chancellor of the Exchequer, December 2007¹⁸

'We need to make a decisive move toward more sustainable development. Not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is in our own long-term best interests.'

Securing the Future. March 2005¹⁹

Introducing plans for a sustainable development approach across the organisation will involve a degree of procedural and cultural change. This will require buy-in and support from all staff up, down and across the organisation's hierarchy. Figure 4 sets out some useful issues to think about when framing the business case for sustainable development in your organisation.

Figure 3 What an SDAP is...

An SDAP is not...

- ✘ Your existing environmental position statement with a new title.
- ✘ A 'greening' policy for the organisation; the environment is only one element of sustainable development.
- ✘ Your Environmental Management statement and operating plan (although elements of this will inform your SDAP).
- ✘ A list of everything 'sustainable' your organisation has ever done.
- ✘ A challenge to think up twenty new things to do this year on sustainable development.
- ✘ A place to re-state all of your Human Resources (HR) policy to cover the 'people' element of sustainable development.
- ✘ A checkbox against *Securing the Future* bearing little relation to the remit, culture and initiatives of the organisation.
- ✘ Another document for you to produce that will sit on a shelf and collect dust.



As *Securing the Future* pointed out, 'make the wrong choices now and future generations will live with a changed climate, depleted resources and without the green space and biodiversity that contribute both to our standard of living and our quality of life.'²⁰ This might be reason enough to pursue a sustainable development approach across government, but if this global and inter-generational agenda seems too intangible, there are numerous benefits to be reaped closer to home – evidence shows that sustainable development simply makes good business sense.

3 Link into core business

Your SDAP should not be a bolt-on otherwise business as usual will ensue. It should be clear how the SDAP integrates with other corporate plans and strategies, with clear links to your organisation's Public Service Agreements (PSAs) and strategic objectives.

If your organisation is satisfied that the principles and priorities of the Strategy are already mainstreamed, then the action plan needs to clearly state this and demonstrate how this mainstreaming is being monitored and evaluated.

An SDAP is...

- ✓ A plan which sets out your organisation's contribution to the aims and objectives of the the UK Sustainable Development Strategy, *Securing the Future*.
- ✓ A plan that includes actions to ensure the organisation takes an integrated approach to core business, across economic, environmental and social aspects and guided by the government's five sustainable development principles.
- ✓ A plan which sets out actions for sustainable development with respect to **people**, **policy** (internal policies for delivery/policy-making), **operations**¹⁷ (estates management) and **procurement** (in no particular order).
- ✓ A forward-looking plan, which only uses past progress as context for actions the organisation will take to embed sustainable development during the life of the plan.
- ✓ A plan setting out the key actions that the organisation has agreed will make a real difference to ensure:
 - a) an integrated approach to achieve change in, and contribute to, the government's four priority areas for sustainable development; and
 - b) consistent application of the 5 sustainable development principles.
- ✓ The place to identify any changes in HR policy that could contribute to the priority areas and help the organisation apply the sustainable development principles.
- ✓ A living document that works for the organisation; talking your own language, fashioned in your own style, setting your own priorities.
- ✓ A living document that needs to be embraced and implemented across the department. It should be monitored, evaluated and updated over time.

Figure 4 The business case for sustainable development



a Michael Whitehouse, acting Comptroller & Auditor General of the NAO, explained in a presentation to government departments in October 2007 that the NAO sees three dimensions to 'value for money': economy, efficiency and effectiveness. 'Effectiveness' should take into account the return on investment, including social equity, inclusion and sustainability. The point was reinforced that 'value for money' should be 'long-term value for money', and 'maximum value for money for citizens today and tomorrow'. The NAO are looking to embed this definition across government.

b Securing the Future p155: 'This strategy will be used as a basis for integrating sustainable development into the 2006 Spending Review and future spending rounds which set PSA targets and allocate resources.'

c Off the Starting Block p44: 'The SDC recommends that future SDAPs should include joint commitments where relevant, and seek to ensure that plans are coordinated with other departments/agencies where applicable.'

d The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP, Foreword to the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy – Securing the Future (2005).

e The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP, Speech on Climate Change. 19 November 2007 www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page1371.asp

f The graduate website milkround.com found that 40% of graduates had ruled out at least one potential employer because of the nature of their industry, or because it had a poor reputation for its environmental or employment practices. MORI statistics confirm the potential influence of corporate responsibility in the 'War for Talent', with nine in ten British workers saying that their employer's social and environmental responsibility is important to them (and 58% saying 'very important') (The Public's Views of Corporate Responsibility 2003, 2004:5) www.ipsos-mori.com/publications/jld/public-view-of-corporate-responsibility.pdf



4 Involve others in your SDAP

As explained in Section 1.6, sustainable development is not something that can be done alone. The benefits of engaging staff and stakeholders throughout the SDAP process include:

- Collaborative policy development, which increases the commitment and ownership of the SDAP amongst related stakeholders
- Tapping a wider range of ideas and perspectives which can help fuel innovation
- Taking a first step towards building the capability of staff, stakeholders and citizens. It deepens their understanding beyond traditional 'awareness raising' so that they feel better prepared to take action
- Effective risk management. Actively engaging staff and stakeholders in the SDAP process helps to ensure that all potential risks are surfaced. It can also reduce the likelihood of resistance to the major policy shifts that sustainable development demands
- Preparing stakeholders behaviour change for sustainable development
- Working towards more integrated policies and a whole-systems approach
- A collective assessment of the progress being made.

4.1 Ensure cross-cutting input

The cross-cutting nature of sustainable development means that diverse input is essential. Your SDAP requires input from around the organisation: strategy, estates management, human resources, finance, communications, and policy-making to name a few.

Allocating SDAP responsibility solely within the organisation's 'sustainable development team' or to one identified champion will not give the necessary cross-cutting input. Think about who else you could / should engage when preparing and implementing your sustainable development goals and assigning responsibility for actions (see Section 2.6).

5 Do you have the right supporting structures?

Does your organisation already have established structures that will support such cross-cutting input? If so, think about whether you want to use these in the planning stages of your SDAP. Are there key meetings already arranged that you can tap into? Can these structures be used as the governance structure for the SDAP?

If you lack the institutional structures to secure input from across the organisation, consider how you can create them. Some organisations have found it useful to form cross-cutting SDAP teams. For example the Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health (see Case Study 5) have set up steering groups or panels to generate diverse input for their SDAPs and to keep them under review.

One option might be to form working groups and higher level steering groups between various stakeholder teams, to develop common goals and priority actions. Cross-cutting groups can pursue a 'bigger picture' and a more balanced sustainable development agenda than any single division or team – a great way to avoid biasing your actions in a particular area, and helping to spread ownership of the SDAP.

6 Secure leadership at all levels

Leadership exists at all levels and can present itself in more than just traditional hierarchical forms. Your SDAP can be a vehicle to utilise various types of leadership (such as top-down and bottom-up), or if they don't exist, to stimulate them.

Permanent Secretaries are accountable for their department's sustainable development delivery and will want to be involved at the earliest opportunity and throughout all key thinking and planning.

Senior leadership can certainly catalyse action, but it should not be relied upon in itself. Even if you do have an enthusiastic Permanent Secretary or other senior sustainable development champion, what mechanisms are in place to help other people contribute their ideas and show their own commitment to sustainable development? Building different forms / levels of leadership can also help to ensure that momentum isn't dependent on one individual and ebbs when they move on.

Creating space for new initiatives to flourish – such as through informal networks, enthusiasts' groups or otherwise – can enable leadership to be stimulated at all ranks of the organisation. Some examples appear in case studies 5 and 6, and in the Engagement tips at the end of Section 3.

Catalysing leadership and institutional change through SDAPs at the Department of Health (DH)

The SDAP process has been a key tool for getting things moving on sustainable development in DH. The requirement to produce an SDAP (for 2006-07) enabled some strong institutional changes, which were matched by committed Permanent Secretary leadership: a powerful combination that has seen the SDAP become a strong vehicle for change.

Developing a working forum

The requirement to produce an SDAP spurred the formation of the DH sustainable development Forum, launched by the Permanent Secretary. Under this Forum, three working groups were formed by staff on themes which they felt needed to be incorporated into the SDAP. These were travel and transport, procurement, and social and community.

‘This created excellent local ownership, and although the topics were not necessarily the most material to DH’s sustainable development influence, we had to begin somewhere and this ended up being really valuable for relationship building, getting the work done, and for informing ourselves about SD’

Department of Health

Evaluating progress to define focused areas for action

The department’s approach to sustainable development was developed further throughout the process of producing a progress report on the 2006-07 SDAP and developing an updated SDAP for 2007-08.

‘The 1st year reporting in parallel with the 2nd year planning provided clear, timed opportunities for DH to demonstrate its progress (and plans) on developing its sustainable development vision and activities. These requirements also helped focus the work of the DH Sustainable Development Forum. People on it rose to the challenge! Some noted that they greatly enjoyed their work since it facilitated much wider thinking and encouraged development of new and bigger ideas for DH to address sustainable development and health topics rather than just identifying progress on targets from the original plan.’

Involving senior management to secure leadership

The progress report and updated SDAP provided key agenda items at the first meetings of the new DH Sustainable Development /Sustainable Procurement High Level Group – chaired by the Permanent Secretary. The guidance on SDAPs set a clear and powerful agenda of what further action (such as embedding SD in policy) was still needed in DH. ‘This meant the Permanent Secretary knew what was needed and could forge a path to create it.’

Leadership was key in the continued embedding of sustainable development in DH, and the expectation for the second DH SDAP, also to be signed off by DH’s Sustainable Development Minister, meant that the SDAP 2007-08 crossed the Minister’s desk.

By being a strategic action plan, the SDAP helped DH develop appropriate institutional structures and provided something tangible for leadership to hold onto, in turn driving further sustainable development successes.

6.1 Secure senior ownership and sign-off

The SDAP should be signed off at the level that you would normally expect for a corporate document in your organisation. In government departments this will tend to be at Ministerial level – often the Minister with sustainable development responsibility but in some cases the Secretary of State may wish to provide the final sign-off. The Permanent Secretary should also be

kept abreast of developments. In Executive Agencies, the SDAP is usually signed off by the Chief Executive.

Gaining Ministerial or Chief Executive sign off on your SDAP can take some time, especially if they are contributing a foreword (see Section 3.1). Try to secure senior support for your SDAP early, and keep those who will sign off on your SDAP involved so that they are aware of its key messages.

Top-down and bottom up leadership at the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

‘We found that the SDAP can be used strategically to stimulate leadership for sustainable development. We have tried to capitalise on leadership both top down and bottom up.’

BERR

Securing greater influence for sustainable development through organisational restructure

The Department for Trade and Industry’s transition to BERR was rapid and started on day one of Gordon Brown’s premiership, with the sustainable development team moving into Enterprise and Business Group (EBG). EBG covers policy on small businesses, regional strategy and key industry sector teams, so the move has put sustainable development at the centre of a group with a vital role to play in BERR’s remit as the voice of business across government.

Harnessing top-level enthusiasm to drive large-scale change

‘We have deliberately and visibly involved the Permanent Secretary and appointed a Board level sustainable development champion.’

BERR’s Permanent Secretary, Sir Brian Bender (at February 08), is a keen advocate of sustainability and wrote to all Directorates-General requesting that all group-level business plans be ‘SD-proofed’, and at the same time emphasised the importance of sustainable development across BERR’s remit.

The sustainable development team’s strengthened

position within EBG has allowed it to pilot an approach locally in this important area before rolling out across BERR to ensure that the guiding principles of the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy are fully embedded across the department.

‘Sustainable development-proofing of business plans is a major project that will run over several months. The business planning process in BERR is very much bottom-up and therefore, even within our own group, involves discussions with many colleagues. This will help to push sustainable development into the mainstream.’

Enabling action for sustainable development at all levels

BERR’s involvement of senior leaders to drive change is being complemented by recognition of the need to develop staff capability. Research at BERR had indicated that, whilst awareness of sustainable development was high amongst staff, many people’s understanding was still low. The sustainable development team response was to organise BERR Sustainable Development Month in November 2007, which sought to raise staff understanding of sustainability, its relevance to BERR and crucially, what actions staff should be taking to play their part. A number of events were organised with a line up of speakers that included ministers and senior representatives from the NGO and business community. An interactive foyer display gave staff the opportunity to contribute towards a vision for a sustainable BERR

This combination of top-down leadership and enabling bottom-up actions is helping BERR mainstream sustainable development across the department.

‘We expect our next SDAP will look increasingly cross-cutting and balanced on the department’s contribution to sustainability.’

7 Engagement: Top tips for involving stakeholders in SDAP thinking

Sustainable Development Working/Steering Groups

Working and steering groups can be relatively formal structures, uniting staff working towards sustainable development in different business areas of the organisation.

Working groups operate on a ‘doing’ level, comprising those tasked with putting sustainable development actions into practice. Steering groups, on the other hand, are likely to operate at a more strategic level, with a Board level member to carry discussion up to senior management.

BERR’s ‘SD Champions’, for instance, include a high-ranking figure from each Directorate-General, led by a member of the Board. Champions’ new responsibilities have been included in their personal Performance and Development Plans (PDPs).

Both working and steering groups will have knowledge and ideas to offer to SDAP planning and implementation, which can be brought together through key sustainable development contacts sitting on both groups. This wide-ranging input should achieve a good spread of sustainable development actions across the organisation.

Plan

1 Decide your priorities and themes

The SDC suggests that SDAP actions should tackle the challenges for sustainable development in four organisational areas:

- Policy
- Operations
- Procurement
- People.

You do not have to use these titles in your SDAP – use whatever works best for you – but we need to see that your organisation has considered how it can most effectively embed the principles of sustainable development in these areas and into the organisation overall, as well as the impact of its contributions to the priorities for immediate action set out in *Securing the Future*.

Some organisations have struggled to prioritise actions according to the most significant sustainable development impact areas.²¹ For example, many organisations have tended to focus on their estates management (particularly ‘green office’ programmes) in their SDAP actions at the expense of identifying broader strategic and policy contributions, such as how the organisation makes decisions or sets strategy and the effect of this for sustainable development.

It may be that your organisation believes that its main contribution to sustainable development is to lead by example in the running of its estate. Therefore your SDAP will be focussed on estates management (‘greening’) targets. However, it is important to show that you have also considered whether the organisation’s approach to core business supports sustainable development.

1.1 Policy

We are aware that ‘Policy’ and ‘Operations’ may have different meanings depending on the nature of your organisation.

By ‘Policy’, the SDC is referring to the core remit of your organisation – its reason for being – and the actions which can be taken to ensure that all responsibilities are fulfilled with the principles of sustainable development in mind.

For any organisation, this might include activities around:

- a) ‘SD-proofing’ the processes by which you conduct your work, for example, by strategically reviewing the way decisions are made or impacts are assessed to ensure that they are underpinned by the principles of sustainable development
- b) collaborating with other government organisations to achieve mutually supportive policy outcomes
- c) maximising your influence when working with other stakeholders or participating in wider negotiations, to ensure a sustainable development approach is adopted across the board

For central government departments and for executive agencies with a role in influencing policy formation, policy actions might also include activities to maximise the positive impacts arising from the policies your organisation creates or influences, to help pursue sustainable development objectives

For executive agencies tasked with delivering or implementing policies set by other government bodies, ‘policy’ actions refer to the decision-making and strategy that the organisation employs to deliver those objectives. This might include activities around taking a joined-up approach to policy implementation, to ensure that the strategy you employ to deliver your objectives, or perhaps commission your research, does not undermine the objectives of *Securing the Future* or of other government organisations.

Securing the Future identified a number of particular policy contributions for each central government department individually, as well as cross-cutting government initiatives.²² These may already have been completed, in which case SDAPs should signal that they existed and explain how the department is now seeking to build on those contributions.

If there are still actions outstanding which relate to the organisation’s original commitments, or if the organisation is now taking a different approach to that outlined in the Strategy, this should be highlighted in the SDAP.

1.2 Operations

For the purposes of SDAP guidance, the SDC refers to ‘operations’ as the management of your organisation’s estate and other activities supporting your work such as travel and procurement. The Government’s framework for Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate (SOGE)²³ sets out a number of performance related targets (covering carbon emissions, waste, water, biodiversity etc) and requirements on the mechanisms that departments should adopt to help deliver the SOGE targets.

Progress towards the targets is assessed and reported publicly for each central government department (including their executive agencies) on an annual basis by the Sustainable Development Commission, in its Sustainable Development in Government Report (SDiG). Please refer to the SDC’s Watchdog webpages for details of the most recent assessment.²⁴

Figure 5 explains how you might use the SOGE targets in your SDAP.

1.3 Procurement

Securing the Future sets a goal for the UK Government to become a leader in sustainable procurement across the EU by 2009. This goal was subsequently reinforced by the *Sustainable Procurement Action Plan*²⁵ (SPAP), as a way of achieving a low carbon, more resource efficient public sector. The SPAP also placed a number of requirements on departments to bring about the shift towards sustainable procurement and support delivery of the SOGE operational targets.

One specific requirement is for ‘Departments to set out the actions they are taking to ensure procurement practice helps to achieve their sustainable operations targets in their departmental Sustainable Development Action Plans.’²⁶ As such, it is important that the SDAP sets out your organisation’s approach to sustainable procurement, and that you consider what actions you are taking to ensure that the goods and services you buy are those with the most positive – or least negative – impact on the environments, societies and economies from which they are sourced.

The SPAP also encourages organisations to make full use of the Sustainable Procurement Task Force’s Flexible Framework.²⁷ This is a straight-forward way to get organisations started and help them progress on sustainable procurement.

1.4 People

These actions should describe how your organisation will seek to promote and support a sustainable development approach in terms of your staff and the communities in which you operate. Developing capability for sustainability is fundamental to this section, as it enables people to take a sustainable development approach in all that they do both inside and outside of work. This may be in terms of the volunteering opportunities that you offer, approaches to encouraging personal well-being or staff development that supports the goals of the SDAP. See Section 4 for further guidance regarding the development of staff capability for sustainable development.

Figure 5 Top tips for using SOGE targets in an SDAP

- **Do** use the SOGE targets to set the context for your estates-focused actions
- **Do** acknowledge that you work to the cross government SOGE targets
- **Do** refer back to the last SDC SDiG/SOGE report. Seek to include actions in the SDAP which address the organisation’s weak areas and build on the strengths
- **Don’t** just list all of the SOGE targets and frame them as your SDAP targets. Instead, define your own priority actions to take during the coming year which will contribute to the long-term goals. Establish milestones that you will aim to reach during the year
- **Don’t** assume that by covering all the SOGE bases you’ve ticked all the boxes for an SDAP. Estates-based actions are just a small part of your Plan
- **Don’t** limit your estate and other operations management to SOGE targets. How can you surpass them? How can your organisation become a true champion of sustainability in everything it does?

Taking an integrated and balanced approach to sustainable development across policy and operations: Department for International Development

‘As a department, we feel that our maximum contribution to sustainable development – and poverty reduction – is made when our shared priorities for sustainable development, such as climate change, are integrated across our policies, programmes and operations. The SDAP process has helped us do this.’

DFID

Managing the carbon emissions from staff travel
The nature of DFID’s work means that managing the carbon emissions from staff travel emerged as a priority for sustainable operations in its SDAP. With around 2,500 staff working from two UK headquarters and over 60 offices overseas, DFID’s work generates significant demand for staff travel and communication between its offices and with development partners such as the World Bank. As a result, DFID’s SDAP included actions on reducing total air miles flown on official business and upgrading and expanding video-conferencing facilities.

‘The SDAP process has helped us prioritise areas of our operations where the department is most able to achieve the greatest impact on sustainable development’

Video-conferencing plays an important role in helping to reduce the need for some travel, and is a vital business communication tool for DFID. Although such facilities have been used by DFID staff for about 10 years, their use is steadily increasing. In response, DFID’s Information Systems Department commissioned an independent study in 2006 to assess the impacts of conferencing on DFID’s business and environmental objectives. The benefits included:

- annual cost savings of at least £735,000 in travel, associated costs and productive time
- avoided travel mileage of over 2,022,000 miles per year (3,254,370 km)
- avoided carbon emissions of at least 303 tonnes of CO₂ per year – equivalent to 258 return flights between London and New York
- improved internal communication and staff development via exposure to meetings

Aligning with policy commitments on sustainable development

By clearly prioritising sustainable operations actions in its SDAP, DFID is helping to ensure these are aligned with and enhance the department’s existing commitments on international sustainable development in its policies and programmes. For example, DFID uses mandatory environmental screening procedures for all programmes over £1million, helping to maximise environmental opportunities to improve development outcomes, whilst minimising potential environmental risks. In 2007, DFID’s Policy and Research Division improved screening procedures to incorporate interactive guidance.

‘Environmental screening is an important tool for embedding SD, enabling us to take an integrated approach to sustainable development by balancing the economic, social and environmental aspects of what we do in developing countries according to our partner countries’ own priorities.’

DFID’s SDAP also includes specific actions to develop climate risk screening procedures for its development programmes. Linked to DFID’s G8 commitments, and based on pilot studies in those countries most at risk such as Bangladesh, India and Kenya, this work is helping to climate-proof development investments. For example, in Bangladesh, DFID-supported work in riverine areas has already included raising 32,000 homesteads above the 1998 flood level.

‘Taking a balanced and integrated approach helps us align our policies, programmes and operations with the high-level commitments and shared priorities in *Securing the Future* – and most importantly behind DFID’s poverty reduction and Millennium Development Goal objectives too.’



2 Work out your actions

This section provides guidance on how your actions should be presented in your SDAP. For every action, you will need to know...

- how to make actions **SMART**
- how to deliver outcomes not just outputs
- how to relate to your agency / host department

Guidance on each of these areas is provided below.

2.1 Make actions SMART

Every action you commit to in your SDAP should be 'SMART' (Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Realistic, Time-Related). This is basic good practice for all target-setting. It is an effective discipline to ensure that it is clear what is to be achieved, and by when, and how progress might be assessed by the organisation and by external stakeholders.

It is easier to assess and report on progress (see Section 5) if your SDAP targets are SMART. The SDC's first year review of organisations' SDAPs found that many were lacking SMART targets,²⁸ and this hindered effective reporting the following year. In the SDC's assessment of first year progress report, it was noted that many organisations failed to set SMART targets and consequently struggled to report on their actions.²⁹

By establishing SMART targets your organisation is clearly setting out its intentions and expected outcomes on its own terms. If these are not clear you may find stakeholders 'filling in the gaps' for themselves and judging you against outcomes or parameters which you did not intend.

SMART targets are:

Specific

What is the particular outcome that you are hoping to achieve, what *specific* actions will get you there, and how? The more accurate you are, the easier it will be for everybody – inside your organisation and outside – to understand your targets, and to understand if you've met your targets.

Measurable

Is there a procedure for tracking progress on each of your actions? How will you know and communicate that you are achieving your targets? How you will

measure progress should be clearly explained in the SDAP. Again, the more transparent and structured you make the procedures, the easier they will be to monitor and report. Your measures can be quantitative or qualitative. Targets need to describe a desired outcome or indicator of success even if these cannot be numerically measured.

Accountable

For your actions to succeed, someone should be accountable for them. Your SDAP should assign an appropriate division or team as responsible for delivering each action. This also helps spread accountability across the organisation. The framework should lay the foundation for a transparent accountability structure throughout the organisation, with a management board (or equivalent) ultimately overseeing delivery of the plan as a whole.

Realistic

Is it feasible to meet the targets you have set in your SDAP given the timescales and context of other organisational targets? What sort of resources do you need to meet these targets? Also remember that it is perfectly acceptable to include actions relating to exploratory and developmental work, which will enable you to better understand the course of action you need to take for sustainable development and to set a clear trajectory in an area. For example, you may wish to set an action to review the way that sustainable development is incorporated in your impact assessment procedures before setting actions on how to improve this if necessary.

Time-related

Have you identified a clear timescale to achieve your goals, and set appropriate milestones if the ultimate goal is beyond the span of the SDAP? Having a definite goal in mind is invaluable for keeping up momentum, as well as monitoring progress. The targets you identify in your current SDAP should be achieved within the lifetime of that SDAP, but may be set in the longer term context of other corporate plans and plans for your next SDAP.

Recognising the broader value of SMART targets for sustainable development: Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA)

‘VOSA has developed and implemented an initiative to install wind turbines for energy generation at our modernised sites. This has subsequently been brought into the SDAP process to help us realise the full potential of the project, as it is seen as contributing to broader government imperatives.

Using the project as a SMART target in our SDAP has acted to raise its profile and bring more attention to the sustainability issues and activities which VOSA is engaging with.’

VOSA

Example 1

An output: ‘Build a swimming pool’

An outcome: ‘Build a swimming pool to encourage activity amongst children and achieve a reduction in childhood obesity by X%’

Example 2

An output: ‘Develop a carbon tool’

An outcome: ‘Develop a carbon tool to enable more effective and accurate management of departmental emissions data, to support our objective of reducing emissions by X%’

Example 3

An output: ‘Deliver evaluation report on staff training module’

An outcome: ‘Evaluate the learning impact of the organisation’s sustainable development training module in the induction programme by year XX in order to assess how far it is supporting new staff in understanding what sustainable development means for their role in the organisation.’

Taking an outcome-focus will help to keep you efficient, accountable, and focused towards sustainable development. When you know what you’re working towards, you’ll know when you’ve reached it. And if you don’t get there, you’ll know that you need to refine your action.

2.2 Deliver outcomes not just outputs

Every action in your SDAP should clearly state the outcomes which you are seeking to achieve.

Outcomes can be thought of as the end-point: what is the actual change that you are trying to effect? Certain **outputs** will be achieved along the way, e.g. a workshop or a report, but it needs to be clear what outcome you are expecting these to contribute to / affect, and how you will assess this.

For example, if you are trying to decrease overall carbon emissions (an **outcome**) developing a carbon tool (**output**) does not necessarily lead to change. It’s a feasible action to develop the tool, but it is much more meaningful to frame it in the context of the outcome.

2.3 Relate to your agency / host department

All Executive Agencies are required to have their own SDAP. When SDAPs were first introduced, it was difficult for departments to prepare their own plans and support their agencies in preparing stand-alone plans within the initial timescales required. The SDC therefore allowed agencies to be covered by their parent department’s SDAP, provided that it included a forward plan for independent reporting in the future.

However, it is now expected that agencies should be producing their own individual SDAP unless they have made an alternative arrangement with the SDC. It is the expectation that host departments will seek to ensure a coherent approach across the family of organisations as appropriate.

Agency SDAPs should demonstrate clear links and a coherent story with their host department’s SDAP and across the departmental ‘family’.

Involving agencies in the SDAP process: Department for Transport and its Agencies

‘We wanted sustainable development to be integrated into business planning right through the DfT family, so we lent a ‘guiding hand’ to our Agencies and supported the creation of their first SDAPs. The results were impressive and a handful of Agencies produced SDAPs that definitely exceeded expectations’

Department for Transport

Introducing sustainable development to agencies Bringing all agencies into the SDAP process initially seemed complex for DfT. Whilst agencies were comfortable dealing with sustainable development issues as part of their work, the practice of responding to sustainable development at an integrated strategic level was a new concept for some. Similarly, many did not have a working relationship towards *Securing the Future*, nor know how best to get started on developing their SDAP.

‘Having already produced an SDAP we at DfT felt our experiences could provide some useful signposts to getting our Agencies along the way. We also felt that close guidance would maintain some consistency between the plans and keep timings on track, whilst also building agency capacity and getting buy-in from staff.’

To engage their agencies, practical starting tips were employed:

- DfT convened all agencies with a warm-up workshop to introduce SD and bring together SD staff from each organisation
- A further brainstorming session followed, enabling

DfT and its agencies to explore not only the topics to include in an SDAP but also to elicit the unique contribution the DfT family has towards SD. The diversity of staff participating meant many new ideas were shared. This helped lead the group to think strategically about the approaches that could be taken.

Maintaining momentum through project management

To keep up momentum DfT facilitated some aspects of SDAP project management, for example setting deadlines for submission of drafts. Each draft was peer-reviewed by the other agencies as well as by DfT sustainable development team. This helped establish a ‘safe’ environment for learning and mentoring.

‘One tool that proved to be really worth its weight was a mini league table of performance that DfT drew up, based on how agencies’ SDAPs were progressing. Senior management got involved to give a nudge in the right direction and we gave some extra support to those who were struggling.’

SDAPs for the entire DfT family were published simultaneously. The concurrent release helped to reflect the coherent nature of DfT and agency efforts.

Achieving positive results and pursuing further progress

Feedback showed that Agencies were much more comfortable with what they had to do and how to do it as a result of support from their host department.

‘We’re going to follow a similar programme for the next SDAPs. A seminar is lined up and we’ve been asking agencies for input on useful themes for discussion. One area that keeps coming up is the linking of corporate remit to sustainable development, so this could be a key topic to work on. We’ve also got last year’s SDAPs to work with this time, which is great – there were lots of new ideas there.’

Compared to their core departments, agencies and other public bodies are frequently small and resource-constrained, and their policy role may be more focused on implementation or delivery, rather than formulation. For agencies and other public bodies, as with all organisations, the key to a successful SDAP is to identify a few focus areas where real differences can

be made. To date, several agencies, for example, the Central Science Laboratory (CSL – an agency of Defra)³⁰ have produced particularly comprehensive SDAPs which rival those of some departments. CSL was rated above many central government departments in the SDC’s first year SDAP assessments.³¹

A small organisation starting out: Appointments Commission*

‘As a small organisation, we had to be really clear that doing an SDAP would be of value. Starting the SDAP process helped us to work out our contribution to sustainable development, which we feel is through our core remit rather than our operational impact. Whilst we were initially unsure about how the SDAP would work given our size, being small has actually helped our sustainable development approach as we are able to collaborate across the organisation relatively easily, and new ideas can develop quickly.’

*The Appointments Commission is an Arms Length Body of the Department of Health. In 2007 DH’s Permanent Secretary stated that all DH ALBs were to complete their own SDAPs. The Appointments Commission is a small organisation of approximately 45 staff, who specialise in the recruitment, training and appraisal of people for board level public appointments to NHS bodies, ministerial advisory bodies and other arm’s length bodies in England.

3 Engagement: Top tips for involving staff and stakeholders in SDAP planning

Sustainable Development Enthusiasts

It has become growing practice for departments to establish bodies of sustainable development enthusiasts, involving staff with an interest in sustainable development on a voluntary basis. Enthusiasts can provide a central communications hub for discussion or dissemination of messages, and an army of practitioners to help plan and drive forward sustainable development goals. For example, Communities and Local Government ‘built on the enthusiasm of staff via an Environmental Champions network,’³² and Department for Culture, Media and Sport ‘develop leadership among staff with our volunteer Environmental Champions.’³³

Networks

Engaging with colleagues from other departments through practitioner networks might contribute

valuable new insight to your SDAP development.

Defra has already launched the Sustainable Procurement Operations Board (SPOB) ‘Practitioners’ Forum’ to create space for exploring operations themes. The SDC is also looking to facilitate a cross-government learning and knowledge-sharing network for officials whose work links to sustainable development.

But there’s nothing to stop you identifying specific colleagues inside and outside your department who you can work with to get the show on the road! In particular, you may wish to discuss your SDAP with your counterparts in other departments/agencies, for example through cross-departmental working groups, such as the Sustainable Development Policy Working Group (SDPWG).³⁴

Draft



Having worked out your actions in Section 3, it's time to pull it all together and draft your SDAP.

1 Know the elements of a robust SDAP

SDC recommends that the following elements are included in your SDAP. These elements are by no means exhaustive – just a few of the essentials to throw into the mix. Variations are possible and encouraged. The key thing that the SDC is looking for is to see that the organisation has taken active decisions about its SDAP and has set out the rationale for its chosen approach.

- » **A word or two from the top:** Show high level support with a Foreword from the Minister and/or Permanent Secretary or CEO
- » **Some strategic context :**
 - Reference *Securing the Future* and the shared UK Government sustainable development goal, the shared priorities and the five guiding principles. You do not need to repeat vast chunks of the Strategy, but it needs to be clear that you understand this context, and how your organisation is contributing to or working with the aims of the Strategy
 - Articulate **your sustainable development vision**. How does sustainable development fit with your organisation's core business, activities and objectives? What are the benefits of taking a sustainable development approach to your core business, and the risks of not taking action?
 - Clarify how the SDAP links with other organisations in your 'family' (including the parent department, agencies and NDPBs)
 - Outline the structures and processes that you have, or are putting, in place to support the development of the SDAP.
- » **Your priorities:** Highlight the areas where you can make the biggest contribution to sustainable development this year. Explain why these have been

chosen. For example they may address particular weaknesses, areas where the organisation could take a more integrated approach across its work, or even particular strengths or areas where your organisation would really like to shine

- » **Your SDAP commitments:** Try to include four varieties (in no particular order):

- **Policy**
- **Operations**
- **Procurement**
- **People.**

Explain who is responsible – i.e. which division or team – for ensuring delivery of each commitment at each level in the organisation, as well as who is responsible overall for the plan.

Show how your commitments contribute to the cross-government priorities, and how you are embedding the principles into the way you work.

(See Section 2 for more guidance about differentiating policy and operational commitments and things to consider under these four headings.)

- » **An indication of your plans for ongoing engagement to support the SDAP:** Including how the SDAP will be communicated to staff and stakeholders, how staff will be empowered with the skills and know-how to put the SDAP's messages into action, and how they will each be given opportunities to input to the process.
- » **Monitoring, reporting and evaluation:** Explain how the SDAP is a living and evolving document, the timescales over which it will operate, and the governance and reporting mechanisms you will implement to underpin it.

2 Engagement: Top tips for involving your peers and stakeholders in SDAP drafting

So now you're drafting the SDAP, who might you need to engage?

Peer and Stakeholder Review

Several departments have sought the opinion of other organisations whilst defining their SDAP actions. This is really good practice to help stimulate

cross-government working and to test whether your SDAP is clear to others. You may like your draft SDAP to be reviewed by another government department, perhaps one that you work closely with or one which has interests that complement your own (see Case Study 7).

Seeking outside opinion at DWP

‘We agreed with CLG and Defra that it would be helpful to exchange draft SDAPs for peer review. These two departments offered a good second opinion: CLG, due to our shared ambition for sustainable communities and a just society; and Defra because they offered an environmental perspective which would complement our natural leaning towards society and the economy. Defra also produced a strong SDAP in the first year, so it was useful to share their intelligence! The process enabled us to cross-check our targets and make sure that we weren’t undermining each other.’

Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)

Alternatively, external stakeholders might be asked for their opinion on the SDAP. The Food Standards Agency posted its first draft plan on its website and notified stakeholders, actively seeking feedback from organisations such as the Soil Association.³⁵ Defra likewise has consulted stakeholders such as Marks and Spencer and the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants to garner external opinion and advice.³⁶

You could also use a range of stakeholders to help you assess progress and review next steps. In 2007 the FCO convened a stakeholder group to track the development and progress of its Sustainable Development Strategy and their Action Plan.

SDAPs have to be publicly available. This can also be a chance to show the broader public how the organisation is approaching sustainable development. This helps stimulate interest in the public sector’s role in sustainable development, and in turn potentially stimulating enthusiasm in the organisation for delivering the plan. This also helps to reinforce accountability.

Deliver



You've passed the major milestone of completing and publishing your SDAP. Now is the time to publish and share it with your staff and stakeholders. What are you going to do next so that your SDAP actions 'come to life' and are embedded throughout the organisation?

1 Release the SDAP and put its actions to work

It's a good start for staff to know that the SDAP exists. But do they understand its key messages and how they can contribute to it through their everyday work?

Two-way communication strategies are essential. Engaging staff – for example, by open Q&A sessions – will build both staff awareness and understanding of key messages. (See Case Study 8 for a practical example from Defra). Cultivating a feeling of ownership over this cross-cutting document will help staff feel they have the responsibility to achieve the SDAP goals – thereby leading to a sustainable development approach becoming embedded across the organisation.

2 Does your organisation have the skills and capacity to drive change?

Do staff in the organisation have the capability to turn SDAP actions into on-the-ground change? Consider what skills are required for sustainable development to become fundamental to the way business is conducted – does the organisation have these? How is your SDAP reinforced by the induction that new staff receive, performance assessments, and the on-going development opportunities available to existing staff? Is sustainable development being considered in any capability reviews or restructuring that your organisation is undertaking?

A new core skills set is not required to improve sustainable development capability. The current skills and competencies emphasised for civil servants such as leadership, strategic thinking and delivery are complementary and align with a sustainable development approach. However, sustainable development does require a new focus on the context for their application to ensure that learning and development frameworks reinforce sustainable development approaches to their full potential. The scope of underlying knowledge required may also need to be broader in order to develop fully integrated solutions, such as basic understanding of key scientific concepts, feedback mechanisms and systems thinking.

Putting your SDAP actions to work will help build your organisation's capacity for sustainable development. How will you mainstream sustainable development so that its responsibilities and actions are shared outside of the 'sustainable development team' and mainstreamed across the organisation? Its cross-cutting, strategic nature, combined with its profile with senior leadership means that your SDAP might be a useful vehicle to initiate organisational change towards increased capability for sustainable development.

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs' Sustainable Development Open Meeting

'For the SDAP to be a success, it's so important to get the ground work right with staff – encouraging everybody to understand the agenda and how they can contribute, making them 'positive recipients' of the message. Board-level leadership is a valuable driver. As a key action in our SDAP, we held a sustainable development Open Meeting to provide an opportunity for staff to see the Board taking this seriously, and to hold them to account for what's going on in the Department.'

Defra

Bringing together stakeholders, staff and management

Defra's SD Open Meeting was attended by nearly 100 people, from core Defra, Executive Agencies and NDPBs, other government departments, and external stakeholders including the SDC and members of Defra's SDAP Stakeholder Panel. Running the event had been identified as an action in Defra's SDAP, and it proved to be worth the effort.

'The idea of the SD Open Meeting was a first for Defra, and building momentum was quite a challenge. To achieve buy-in the SD in Defra team (now the Defra as Sustainability Leader – DaSL – team) met with every Defra Director individually to discuss the existing SDAP

and look forward to the next. Gradually they realised the influence they could have in engaging staff and in leading them towards ongoing progress.'

Creating an open and honest event

The event took an informal approach. Short introductions to key areas, including sustainable development in Defra's Strategy Refresh, sustainable operations, and championing SD across government, set the scene for the event's agenda. Attendees were invited to challenge the Management Board on Defra's approach to Sustainable Development, and to help shape the way forward.

The Board were very open, recognising any failings and what could be done better, as well as celebrating recent successes. The discussions helped staff to develop a better understanding of sustainable development and Defra's role.

'The response from staff was incredibly positive – it's not often they have a chance to quiz the Management Board like that. They really seemed to realise how SD was taking hold in Defra's work, more so than any number of trickled-down communications could have achieved. And when it came to the crunch, the Management Board actually enjoyed it too – they even asked if they could do another one next year!'

Building on success

Several challenges were highlighted for Defra during the event and Defra's Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) have taken these forward.

'We've set an action in the new SDAP for a repeat event, which we're scheduling for next financial year – about 12 months after the previous one – and look forward to continuing the benefits of open engagement.'

Building organisational capacity at Communities and Local Government

‘Our Permanent Secretary set out that SD should be embedded throughout the organisation. To support this, we have engaged in a capacity building programme with SDC to explore how we can develop a consistent narrative on what SD means for the department and to uncover how the department can support and develop the right skill set for SD. We hope this will help embed SD into the DNA of the department.’

Building organisational buy-in for SD has been really important throughout the programme – staff want to know what they’re working towards and want to be reassured that SD is not the latest management fad. Some new skills are required for SD – including more ‘joined up’ working, and balancing the challenges of a long-term vision with immediate political realities. By building organisational capacity for SD, we hope that staff will be better poised to capitalise on the opportunities offered through SD.

Organisational change can take time but already results are emerging. Our latest SDAP highlights our commitment to a continued capacity building programme.’

CLG

3 Engagement: Top tips for involving stakeholders in sharing your SDAP:

This stage – Share – is *all* about engagement. Some options might be:

Events

All-staff events and lunchtime seminars have proven effective ways to familiarise staff with the sustainable development agenda, providing them with opportunities to ask questions of ‘expert’ organisations, challenge the Board, volunteer ideas and explore what they can do to help.

Secondments

Several departments have benefited from the expertise of SD specialists seconded from within government or from external organisations. This can be a helpful way to increase capability and gain extra momentum to embed sustainable development in working practices.

Sustainable Development Fairs at the Cabinet Office

‘Our SDAP identified the need to achieve behaviour change amongst staff. Our overarching action towards this outcome was the Culture Change Programme, formally launched at an all-staff event by the Permanent Secretary. We built on this by creating informal staff SD networks and upping the scale of our SD communications. One particular success was the half-day ‘SD fair’ we held in our main atrium, where we invited staff to meet key departmental SD leads and external stakeholders to explore the Cabinet Office’s SD agenda and how it influences their work area. The SD Fair built real momentum and understanding of SD throughout the department.’

Cabinet Office

Report

You published your SDAP in Section 4 and worked out how to put its key messages to work in Section 5. Importantly, now is not a time to sit back and forget about sustainable development until the next SDAP cycle! Continual monitoring of progress against sustainable development actions will be the crucial link to keep the organisation on track to meet its goals, and to feed learning from one SDAP into the next.

1 Report your progress

Progress towards SDAP objectives is to be reported annually.³⁷ This report should be made publicly available.

In 2007, the SDC provided departments and agencies with a reporting guidance tool and asked them to submit a progress report on their 2006 SDAP by the end of May, for review by the Watchdog team.³⁸

In future, scrutiny of reports is likely to be conducted via a spot check of organisations throughout the year, so it is important to ensure that a robust internal system of monitoring and reporting is maintained. Completed progress reports should be sent to the SDC. These will be placed on the SDC website for transparency and accountability.

2 Relate the SDAP to other corporate reporting procedures

At present, the timing and frequency of organisations' annual SDAP cycles is not mandated, and so there is much diversity across government. The SDC recommends that you follow a cycle that supports your needs. Some departments align planning and reporting with their annual report. This allows actions to be considered during the business/financial planning process, which can help embed sustainable development into broader corporate processes. Other organisations have their own sustainable development reporting mechanisms. If this is the case it is recommended that the SDAP feeds into these existing structures. Whatever your chosen approach, your reporting cycle should be clearly stated in the SDAP.

It should be clear how your SDAP fits with your other core reporting and planning procedures. There is unlikely to be sufficient room in your organisation's annual report to use it as the vehicle for reporting on your SDAP. However, you should seek to ensure that the Annual Report cross-refers to the SDAP and any relevant progress reports.

Over time it is expected that sustainable development planning, monitoring and evaluation processes will become more and more engrained into core business planning. For now, the majority of organisations are still in the early stages of defining and embedding their sustainable development approach, and the SDC would recommend maintaining a separate procedure until you feel comfortable in taking the next steps.

3 Ensure robust reporting structures

Some elements to consider to ensure accountable monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:

- **Outline what time period your plan will cover.**
There should always be a live SDAP in operation. However, your plan can cover more than one year if you wish
- **Incorporate an annual review and update of the SDAP.**
Even if you choose to produce an overarching three-year plan, you should review your progress and refresh your SDAP actions accordingly each year, and ensure you always have a relevant delivery plan.

This not only maintains transparency of government performance, but also gives you a chance to take stock and assess what direction to take in your next SDAP, or amendments to make to your existing plan if it covers a longer time period. Even SDAPs covering more than one year should have an annual review of progress
- **It should be clear from the SDAP how you will monitor progress on each action.**
If your actions are SMART and focused on outcomes, monitoring how far you have come towards achieving your goals should be relatively straightforward
- **Every action should have a designated 'owner'.**
The owner will be the person or team responsible for delivering, monitoring progress and reporting on that action throughout the course of the SDAP

- **There should be a structured hierarchy of accountability throughout the organisation.**
This should escalate from working level ownership of particular actions, up through middle management, to the Management Board. It is good practice to appoint a Board level sustainable development Champion tasked with overseeing delivery of the SDAP as a whole. Many central government departments also have a Minister with sustainable development responsibility
- **Progress on SDAP actions should be reported regularly to the Board.**
Regular review of progress ensures the SDAP stays on track, and allows actions to be reorientated where necessary – this is a living document and should be given space to evolve during its lifetime
- **Maintain a clear audit trail from one SDAP to the next.**
If you have revised actions or changed your approach for embedding sustainable development since your last SDAP, it is important to highlight this and explain the reasons. Stakeholders and staff should not be left scratching their head as to how to reconcile last year’s plan with the latest.

4 Move onwards and upwards

As with any action plan, evaluation that feeds into future planning will help the organisation learn from previous years’ experience and help to move things forward. Sound organisational evaluation will add value to the SDAP process irrespective of any assessment by an external party, or by the SDC.

Continual monitoring and evaluation of progress on sustainable development actions will inform your priorities for subsequent SDAPs and lead organisations onwards to embed sustainable development more thoroughly throughout the organisation. As such, SDAPs can engender long-term positive change across government.

5 Engagement: Top tips for involving stakeholders in SDAP evaluation

You have already laid the foundations for this earlier on. If you’ve followed sound engagement throughout the SDAP process, you will find you can call upon the same resources when engaging for evaluation. For implementing, monitoring and evaluating your SDAP, your internal support will come from the sustainable development Enthusiasts, Working and Steering Groups which have been on hand throughout the planning and drafting phases. These groups can help keep the whole process on track.

You might also think of appointing external assurance to provide external analysis of your progress and to point you towards areas for further improvement. For example DfT recently commissioned an external review of its sustainable development approach centred around its SDAP. The SDC can also be commissioned to carry out a more detailed evaluation on your department’s approach to SDAPs.

We hope you find these six steps useful and please contact us if you require further support.

Annex 1: Further resources

General Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) **www.sd-commission.org.uk**

The SDC website contains further information about our role and policy areas, as well as PDF copies of the reports we have produced to date. You'll also find the latest round of SDAP assessments, progress reports and the SOGE report, as well as this SDAP guidance document.

Sustainable Development in Government **www.sustainable-development.gov.uk**

The Government's sustainable development website. Here you can access the 2005 UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy (*Securing the Future*) and its accompanying UK Strategic Framework, as well as the Framework for Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate and the Sustainable Procurement Action Plan (including the Flexible Framework).

Sustainability at Work **www.sustainabilityatwork.org.uk**

Sustainability at Work offers practical tools and advice on how organisations can embed sustainability throughout their activities. The site is a product of The Prince of Wales' Accounting for Sustainability project. See: www.accountingforsustainability.org.uk

Sustainability Reporting

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) **www.globalreporting.org**

The GRI is the world's de facto standard in sustainability reporting. GRI is an independent, multi-stakeholder institution that develops and disseminates a globally applicable Sustainability Reporting Framework. The framework sets out the principles and indicators that organisations can use to report on the economic, environmental, and social performance. The GRI framework is intended for all types of organisation, including public sector bodies; the Ministry of Defence and NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency already use GRI. The Guidelines may be useful when considering reporting and monitoring processes for your SDAP.

Association of Certified and Chartered Accountants (ACCA) **www.accaglobal.com/sustainability**

A generic information resource on disclosure of sustainability. ACCA has developed criteria for excellence with respect to environmental, social and/or sustainability reporting. These criteria may be helpful when considering how appropriate your existing processes and systems are in relation to the delivery of sustainable development commitments and subsequent reporting.

Communications, Engagement & Skills

Compass Network **www.compassnetwork.org**

The Compass Network is run jointly by the Sustainable Development Commission and the communications consultancy Futerra. Compass aims to improve the quality of sustainability communications worldwide. The website includes information resources and examples of creative work to inspire innovation, as well as an events diary and an online forum.

National School of Government (NSG) **www.nationalschool.gov.uk**

NSG provides an increasing array of skills-based courses incorporating sustainable development themes. The NSG can provide tailored training to suit your organisation or division's needs.

People and Participation Online **www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Involve/Home**

People and Participation is a joint venture by the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Ministry of Justice and the Sustainable Development Commission. The site aims to be a central portal for information about participation to practitioners across the world, in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Other organisations' SDAPs

All current SDAPs are published on departments' and agencies' websites, so please go ahead and explore some examples of what others are doing.

Annex 2: SDC Contacts

For further information about the SDC's work www.sd-commission.org.uk, or contact us at the addresses signposted below.

Whitehall

Debbie Dickinson

(For all enquiries on starting and drafting an SDAP)
Whitehall Policy Analyst
Debbie.Dickinson@sd-commission.org.uk
0207 270 8674

Emma Downing

Whitehall Team Leader
Emma.Downing@sd-commission.org.uk
0207 270 8715

Watchdog

Claire Monkhouse

(For Watchdog related SDAP enquiries and all procurement issues)
Watchdog Senior Policy Analyst
Claire.Monkhouse@sd-commission.org.uk
0207 270 8791

Rachel Hurlle

(For Watchdog related SDAP enquiries)
Watchdog Policy Analyst
Rachel.Hurle@sd-commission.org.uk
0207 270 8852

Farooq Ullah

(For SOGE/SDiG related enquiries and operations issues)
Watchdog Policy Analyst
Farroq.Ullah@sd-commission.org.uk
0207 270 8725

Minas Jacob

Watchdog Team Leader
Minas.Jacob@sd-commission.org.uk
0207 270 8717

Endnotes

- ¹ *Securing the Future*. The UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy. HM Government. March 2005
- ² *One future – different paths*. The UK’s shared framework for sustainable development. HM Government. 2005.
- ³ *Securing the Future* p16
- ⁴ *ibid* p17
- ⁵ *ibid* p17
- ⁶ *ibid* p17
- ⁷ *ibid* p153
- ⁸ *ibid* p10
- ⁹ *Securing the Future* (p153) stated that: ‘All central Government departments and their executive agencies will produce focused sustainable development action plans based on this strategy by December 2005 and will report on their actions by December 2006, for example in their departmental annual reports and regularly thereafter.’ Clarification of this commitment was sought by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee in its June 2006 report, *Sustainable Development Reporting by Government Departments*, which recommended that the ‘Government should remove the ambiguity inherent in this formulation by requiring departments to update SDAPs and monitor progress against them on an **annual** basis’. (para. 12) The Government response confirmed that it ‘expected Departments to report annually on their progress against the Plan and its key deliverables and outcomes’ (para. 4.3). (see <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmenvaud/cmenvaud.htm> for both reports).
- ¹⁰ *Securing the Future* p10
- ¹¹ *ibid* p165
- ¹² *Off the Starting Block* SDC Assessment of Sustainable Development Action Plans. Sustainable Development Commission. 2006, p5
- ¹³ *ibid* p10
- ¹⁴ The SDC’s specific assessment criteria and the assessment process itself are constantly evolving to reflect continued progress, and help maintain momentum for ongoing improvement. The SDC’s first assessment of SDAPs, *Off the Starting Block* (2006) is available at www.sd-commission.org.uk.
- ¹⁵ Other Watchdog work includes scrutiny and assessment of the cross-government *Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate* (SOGE) targets, and *In-depth Reports*
- ¹⁶ See www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/engagement.html
- ¹⁷ See Section 3.1 for further detail.
- ¹⁸ Speech 143/07 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Rt Hon Alistair Darling MP, at HRH Prince of Wales’s Accounting for Sustainability Conference at St James’s Palace, 12 December 2007. Full speech available at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/newsroom_and_speeches/press/2007/press_143_07.cfm
- ¹⁹ *Securing the Future* p12
- ²⁰ *ibid* p3
- ²¹ *Off the Starting Block*, p22
- ²² *Securing the Future*, p146
- ²³ Further information about the SOGE targets can be found at <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/government/estates/index.htm>.
- ²⁴ www.sd-commission.org.uk/page/watchdog.html
- ²⁵ See <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/SustainableProcurementActionPlan.pdf>
- ²⁶ See <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/pdf/SustainableProcurementActionPlan.pdf> p42 (Annex B)
- ²⁷ See <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/government/task-forces/procurement/documents/flexible-framework.pdf>
- ²⁸ *Off the Starting Block*, p11
- ²⁹ *2006 Sustainable Development Action Plan Progress Reports* (available on the SDC Watchdog web pages: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/watchdog.html>)
- ³⁰ *Off the Starting Block* p7
- ³¹ *ibid* p13
- ³² *2006 Sustainable Development Action Plan Progress Report – Department for Communities and Local Government*, p37. (see SDC Watchdog web pages for further information: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/watchdog.html>)
- ³³ *2006 Sustainable Development Action Plan Progress Report – Department for Culture, Media & Sport*, p8 (see SDC Watchdog web pages for more information: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/watchdog.html>)
- ³⁴ SDPWG is a cross-governmental working group comprising of officials leading on sustainable development within their organisations. This working group supports the cross-government Sustainable Development Strategy Programme Board.
- ³⁵ *Off the Starting Block*, p42
- ³⁶ *2006 Sustainable Development Action Plan SDC Assessment – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*, p9 (available at: <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/watchdog.html>)
- ³⁷ See footnote 9
- ³⁸ All 2007 SDAP Progress Reports, including SDC commentary, can be found on the Watchdog pages of the SDC website, at <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/watchdog.html>. The SDC’s reporting guidance tool is available on request from the Watchdog team (see Annex 2 for contact details).



Sustainable
Development Commission

www.sd-commission.org.uk

England

(Main office)

55 Whitehall

London SW1A 2HH

020 7270 8498

enquiries@sd-commission.org.uk

Scotland

Osborne House

1 Osbourne Terrace, Haymarket

Edinburgh EH12 5HG

0131 625 1880

Scotland@sd-commission.org.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk/scotland

Wales

c/o Welsh Assembly Government,

Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ

029 2082 6382

Wales@sd-commission.org.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk/wales

Northern Ireland

Room E5 11, OFMDFM

Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate,

Belfast BT4 3SR

028 9052 0196

N.Ireland@sd-commission.org.uk

www.sd-commission.org.uk/northern_ireland