

# Theme 8: Learning & Skills

A Sustainable Future  
for the South West



The Regional Sustainable Development Framework  
for the South West of England



# Theme 8: Learning & Skills

**Headline Indicator:**  
*Adult literacy levels*

Many people do not engage with sustainability because they:

- do not understand what it means - they interpret it too narrowly
- fear it is a woolly, eccentric concern of 'eco-warriors'
- think it is a hindrance to serious financial considerations
- think it is outside their influence - and for someone else to deal with

## Setting the Scene

The South West is a relatively prosperous region, with a higher than average proportion of very well educated people. There are hundreds of schools, 15 local education authorities, 38 colleges, 11 high education institutions and many private training providers. Additionally many businesses provide learning opportunities for their employees.

However there are areas of the South West where:

- skills shortages discourage new business investment and perpetuate poor employment prospects
- many people never engage in learning once they leave compulsory education
- in the winter there is virtually no work
- high levels of illiteracy and poor skills are common
- the closure of old industries, such as mining and problems in the land-based industries, have left many adults unemployed (and locally unemployable) and businesses unviable
- older people and young families experience severe isolation
- most young people leave their communities as soon as they can because there is no work and the housing is unaffordable
- there is an ageing population, which imminently will stretch the capacity of support services and threaten the survival of small communities
- modern technological advances are having little impact
- too many of its trained and educated graduates are 'exported'
- access to learning is very difficult for people in rural areas

And yet there are a number of developments which have recently raised concerns and awareness and there are some encouraging signs that a latent commitment to sustainability exists which could be informed and harnessed, e.g. anxieties about climate change, protests against road-building and housing developments, interest in organic food production, countryside interest groups lobbying, protection of special sites, fuel protests.

Because of its very special environment this region attracts to it relatively large numbers of people who embrace alternative lifestyles, or have come here to escape features of other environments - the 'rat race'. Many of these different groups have serious concerns about the future of the planet.

## What are the opportunities for improving sustainability through learning and skills?

There are broadly three ways in which learning and skills development supports sustainability and addresses the extreme differentials there are in the South West between rich and poor, employed and unemployed, rural and urban:

1. Learning supports the development of healthy, sustainable communities
2. Learning organisations are significant businesses, which can set an example in adopting sustainable policies and practice
3. Learning is a way of widening understanding of and engaging commitment to sustainability

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The three areas of opportunity are expanded below:

Learning supports the development of healthy, sustainable communities by enable people to:

- fulfil their own social, creative, economic and spiritual potential, as individuals, as workers, as parents, or as members of communities
- develop the skills to earn a living and contribute to society
- play an active part as citizens in democratic and active communities
- develop the skills to protect and enhance the natural and built environment

The many learning and skills initiatives which the government has instigated and which the statutory and voluntary agencies have taken up, in the world of learning and skills development, will all contribute to this process. Widening participation, raising achievement, combatting social exclusion, improving standards of teaching and learning, improving access - all these are urgent, government imperatives which support sustainability. (See Theme 6: Sustainable Communities.)

Learning organisations (schools, colleges, universities, training providers, local education authorities) are significant businesses in the South West region; Education is one of the biggest employment sectors. It is very important that learning organisations publicly adopt Sustainable policies and practices because this would influence both learners and organisations. (See Theme 11: Business and Work.) Businesses can contribute to regional prosperity and also develop their social and economic responsibilities looking to the long term implications of their polices and practices.

Learning is a way of widening understanding of and engaging commitment to sustainability; Education and training providers have an important contribution to make in:

- raising awareness of the whole sustainability agenda
- creating universal understanding of sustainability issues
- engaging universal commitment to addressing the challenges
- developing creative solutions to difficult sustainability dilemmas

For the long term survival and prosperity of this region, sustainability must permeate both the academic and the vocational curriculum. Understanding what sustainability is and how to support it, must become part of everybody's education. In geography, construction, history, business studies, the social sciences, applied science, engineering, town planning, architecture, and many other fields, it is essential that the sustainability dimension is taken into account.

Unless a mainstream position is found for sustainability it will, for the majority of people, be seen as something which need not engage them. It is an educational process to find ways of raising the understanding of sustainability in its widest sense, of aligning it with things which the majority of people know and accept as important, of moving the issue from perceived eccentricity to centre-ground common sense. Though this is an educational process, facilitating it is not the sole prerogative of formal educational institutions. Many informal groups and non-specialist organisations will contribute.



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# What are the objectives for improving sustainability in the South West?

Objective	Examples of how it might be achieved	Links to potential partners and processes
Lifelong learning will support sustainable communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to sources of information, advice, and learning opportunities, is inclusive. Full use of learning technology is made.</li> <li>2. Young people gain the skills and education to get work so they are able to stay in their community of choice</li> <li>3. Adults who have literacy and/or employment problems have access to effective basic education, relevant work skills for their area and access to retraining and new employment</li> <li>4. Older people are engaged in learning and have their skills and experience recognised</li> <li>5. People are encouraged to develop their full potential and to develop ideas which lead to finding solutions</li> </ol>	<p>Local Authorities, schools and all post-16 providers</p> <p>Focused support for Basic Skills and Key Skills</p> <p>The 6 South West Local Learning and Skills Councils are tasked with widening participation, raising levels of achievement, meeting local skills needs and raising the demand for education</p> <p>The processes being led by the University for Industry/Learn Direct and the National Grid for Learning are harnessing the power of new technology to enhance guidance and access to learning.</p> <p>The ConneXions Service will co-ordinate support services for young people in their passage from school to work and adulthood.</p>
Learning organisations will set an example in establishing Sustainability policies and practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A steadily increasing number of schools, colleges, high education institutions, community education providers and other training providers have stated sustainability policies and resources dedicated to putting policy into practice.</li> </ol>	<p>An audit of all major learning organisations is needed to establish current levels of commitment and to plan action to increase the active support for sustainability.</p> <p>Funding bodies (FEFC, LSC, DfEE, RDA) have a duty to support sustainability</p>
Learning gains commitment to sustainability and trains sustainability skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge of sustainability amongst key players in education and training in the region is raised.</li> <li>2. Centres of excellence in skills for sustainability are established</li> <li>3. Sustainability is a central goal for the 6 new Local Learning and Skills Councils in the South West</li> <li>4. There is a sustainability dimension in all relevant areas of the academic and vocational curriculum.</li> </ol>	<p>Learning organisations will need to adopt sustainability as part of the ethical base of their operation</p> <p>Learning providers, particularly land-based colleges and further and higher education programmes relating to the built environment, need to address the shortage in skills for sustainable practice</p> <p>Local Learning and Skills Councils</p> <p>'Citizenship Education' will become compulsory in schools from 2002 and later in Post-16 education. Sustainability is a significant aspect of citizenship and vice-versa.</p> <p>Across the existing curriculum a mapping process is needed to identify where sustainability could be better supported</p>



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