

Science and Sustainability – Consultation on position statement

On 10th October the Science Council Board considered a draft position statement for the Science Council on sustainability and sustainable development. The draft had been produced by the Science and Sustainability Group as a way of setting out how the Science Council might take forward its commitment to encourage the contribution of scientists and technologists to society, a sustainable environment and the economy

The Science Council wishes to promote the principles of sustainability in the practice of science the use of scientific knowledge and methodology in sustainable development. The statement is the start of a process and not an end in itself: it aims to begin the debate between and within member organisations and to identify where science and scientists can make the most valuable contribution to achieving sustainability. An important initial step will be to increase understanding of sustainable development issues within the professions.

The statement identifies some core values and beliefs that are shared by all members and sets out the ways in which the Science Council can lead and promote the contribution of its members within the context of sustainability.

There is a strong national and international government agenda. The UK Government's sustainable development strategy, *Securing the Future*, published in 2005, states:

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

“To maintain a more competitive economy, to compete internationally and build ourselves sustainable communities, we need to improve the knowledge and skills base of everyone, including professionals and others in the workplace. ...but we need to make ‘sustainability literacy’ a core competency for professional graduate.”

There are many different organisations engaged in promoting sustainability and sustainable development and it is important to find a key message that is not so much ‘*me too*’ but truly reflective of the culture and values of the Science Council. Very few organisations champion ‘science’ and the role of science in sustainability and in discussions with individual members, a key ambition was ‘to put the science back into sustainability’.

The Science Council membership is diverse and the current levels of relevance, engagement and interest in sustainable development vary. It is essential that the statement reflects this diversity: but at the same time it states an aim of all Science Council members to reflect on how they can make a contribution to the goal of ensuring that all professionals develop the knowledge and skills that will enable them to think and act critically and effectively about sustainability issues. While this is undoubtedly complex to deliver in practice, and is likely to be so for some, it is important the Science Council takes on board the expectations from Government and society, that the learned and professional bodies in science come together to show their commitment to the goal of sustainability.

The Science Council is consulting with member organisations and other stakeholders on the wording of the statement: the draft set out below is intended as a basis for discussion and has not been finalised. Subject to these discussions it is hoped a position paper will be agreed formally at the February 2007 Board meeting.

Outline draft statement

The Science Council believes that:

- science and scientists can and must play a key role in achieving sustainability
- science and scientific methods of study and evaluation increase our understanding of all aspects of the inter-related challenges facing the world through climate change, declining resources, increasing poverty and social injustice
- the use of sound science will enable us to identify, develop and implement sustainable development

To progress towards sustainability scientists across all disciplines and professions will need to be aware of the principles of sustainable development and their application in their areas of practice.

The Science Council therefore urges member organisations, in the context of their own disciplines, professions and industries, to:

- establish their commitment to the principles of sustainable development and to provide leadership
- encourage, value, support and develop awareness and understanding of the principles of sustainable development at all levels within their professions and disciplines;
- enable scientists within their professions to develop and use their skills, knowledge and experience to integrate the principles of sustainable development into the practice of their science;
- ensure that the principles of sustainable development are integrated into their professional standards and underpin lifelong learning and behaviours;
- identify an organisational champion to pursue the sustainability agenda

The Science Council will:

- encourage and support member organisations through the provision of workshops, seminars and forums to facilitate shared learning and the development of best practice;
- introduce within the requirements for Chartered Scientist and Chartered Science Teacher a benchmark specification related to the commitment to aspire to the understanding and use of sustainable development principles;
- work with and support licensed bodies with regard to implementation of sustainability requirements in their professional specifications and requirements for CPD;
- work with Government to foster cross-disciplinary and cross-professional approaches to sustainability in horizon scanning and policy development
- work to increase awareness of the contribution that scientific method and the science professions can make to addressing sustainability;
- encourage and support interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches to sustainability
- work with member organisations and strategic partners to understand the needs and aspirations of society with regard to sustainability;
- monitor progress of member organisations towards the above goals;
- adopt the principles of sustainable development in its own activities and monitor its performance in order to identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

10th October 2006