

Eight questions for evaluating resources

ESD Resource or Initiative Review Tool

About the review tool

The review tool is adapted from “Environmental education materials: guidelines for excellence,” 1998, published by the North American Association for Environmental Education, with additional content from “Supporting sustainable development through educational resources: a voluntary code of practice,” 1999, published by Defra.

The review tool’s eight questions are offered to help you and your school select the resources and initiatives that will best meet your Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) teaching and learning goals and objectives, and the needs of your learners and the school community.

A short history of ESD in England

In the mid-1990s, a government panel, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), was convened to describe the role of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the formal education sector. This was a time of intellectual debate and pedagogical innovation. In 1999, the panel produced a report that identified seven key concepts of sustainable development and suggestions for how these could be used to educate for sustainable development. Ultimately, ESD emerged as a new statutory requirement of the revised National Curriculum (2000). The National Curriculum not only identifies ESD as an overarching educational theme; it also articulates subject requirements for science, geography, design technology, and citizenship.

“Education for sustainable development enables pupils to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to participate in decisions about the way we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future. There are opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of sustainable development within the school curriculum, in particular in their work in geography, science, citizenship, and personal, social and health education (PSHE).”

(Source: Department for Education and Skills and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *The National Curriculum*, 2000)



Formal education professionals in England are in the enviable position of having a wide variety of ESD-related resources and initiatives from which to choose. The eight questions are offered as a way to help identify those materials and programmes that best meet schools’ unique needs, and support their aspirations to advance sustainability.

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Not all of the questions will be relevant to all schools or to all situations. Use these questions to the extent that they help you make better sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the ESD resources and initiatives you are investigating.

How you can use the review tool

- 1 Start by identifying the person or the team of people at your school who will review the resource(s) or initiative(s). This may include teachers, non-teaching staff, school managers, pupils, governors, parents, or community members with whom you have partnerships. Arrange a meeting.
- 2 Review the national curriculum or qualifications requirements, learner outcomes or school goals/objectives you are trying to advance. Note that the National Curriculum for England and 'Pathways: a development framework for school sustainability' (WWF-UK, 2004) will help you or your school team do this.
- 3 Gather the resources or the information about the initiatives that you are considering. Take as much time as needed to read and become familiar with these.
- 4 Work through the questions, one at a time.
 - Note each question's underlined focus. Read each element and  indicator. The elements expand the question's focus. The  indicators suggest what the element might look like in practice.
 - Note that not every question may be relevant to what you are trying to achieve. If the element is not applicable, tick the first box.
 - If it is applicable to your work, decide if the resource or initiative addresses it in an inadequate, satisfactory or good manner. Tick the appropriate box.
 - Summarise you or your team's assessment of the resource or initiative's most significant strengths and weaknesses with regard to each question's focus.
- 5 When you have gone through all eight questions, review the group's responses and decide whether or not you are going to:
 - use it as is; or
 - adapt it.
- 6 If appropriate (and especially if you are taking on a new initiative), formulate an action research plan.
 - Identify what you hope to achieve.
 - Describe how you will achieve it (including a work plan).
 - Set dates to meet and review what you are learning as you take the initiative forward. 'Pathways: a development framework for school

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sustainability' (WWF-UK, 2004) includes a "Learning during" tool.









- Commit to setting a date to review your learning once the initiative, or a phase of the initiative, is complete. 'Pathways: a development framework for school sustainability' (WWF-UK, 2004) has a "Learning after" tool.

7 Share your work with other educators.

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Question 1: Does the resource or initiative address key sustainable development concepts?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
<p>1.1 Interdependence</p> <p> The resource or initiative promotes an understanding about the connections and links between all aspects of peoples' lives and places, and between people and other living things at a local and global level.</p>				
<p>1.2 Citizenship and stewardship</p> <p> The resource or initiative addresses individual and collective rights and responsibilities, participation, and cooperation. It also makes connections between personal values, beliefs and behaviour, and school and community sustainability.</p>				
<p>1.3 Needs and rights of future generations</p> <p> The resource or initiative advances learning about the need to lead lives that consider the rights and needs of others and a recognition that what we do now has implications for what life might be like in the future.</p>				
<p>1.4 Diversity</p> <p> The resource or initiative promotes an understanding of the importance and value of diversity in peoples' lives – culturally, socially, economically and ecologically, and a realisation that all our lives are impoverished without such diversity.</p>				
<p>1.5 Quality of life, equity and justice</p> <p> The resource or initiative recognises the differences between quality of life and standard of living, and advocates a good quality of life for all people at local, national and global levels. It builds an understanding of the underlying causes of inequity, and why equity and justice are necessary to a sustainable society.</p>				
<p>1.6 Sustainable development and carrying capacity</p> <p> The resource or initiative recognises that there are limits to the way in which the world can develop, and offers the opportunity to question and address decisions, practices and processes that affect sustainable development issues.</p>				
<p>1.7 Uncertainty and precaution in action</p> <p> The resource or initiative encourages school communities to think critically, systematically and creatively about sustainable development issues, solutions and alternatives, while recognising that there are limits to human knowledge.</p>				
What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard to the key sustainable development concepts ?				
What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to the key sustainable development concepts ?				

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Question 2: Does the resource or initiative fairly and accurately describe the environmental, social and economic conditions, problems and issues that underpin sustainability, and reflect the diversity of perspectives on them?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
2.1 Factual accuracy  Factual information is referenced and presented in language appropriate for education rather than propagandising.				
2.2 Balanced presentation of differing viewpoints  When there are differences of opinion or competing scientific explanations, the range of perspectives is presented in a balanced way; and distinctions are made between opinion, facts supported by scientific evidence, and interpretation of evidence.				
 The resource or initiative encourages learners to explore different perspectives and to form their own opinions.				
2.4 Reflection on diversity  Various races, ethnic groups, genders, social groups, and age groups and their perspectives are included in an equitable and respectful manner.				
2.5 Producers or sponsors  Producers or sponsors bring diverse ESD experiences and approaches to bear and clearly state their interests.				
What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard to fairness and accuracy ?				
What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to fairness and accuracy ?				

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Question 3: Does the resource or initiative build the depth of knowledge that is appropriate for the learners' different developmental levels, and that makes the connections to local and global contexts?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
<p>3.1 Focus on developmentally appropriate experiential learning</p> <p> The resource or initiative encourages developmentally appropriate opportunities for learners to explore the world around them and the sustainable development issues that shape their communities..</p>				
<p>3.2 Focus on concepts</p> <p> Relevant sustainable development concepts from geography, science, citizenship and design technology (and other appropriate subject areas) are presented with explanations of how they relate to one another.</p>				
<p>3.3 Concepts in context</p> <p> Sustainable development concepts are set in a context that addresses their social, economic and ecological connections.</p>				
<p>3.4 Attention to different scales</p> <p> Sustainable development issues are explored in appropriate scales of time (short- and long-term) and space (geopolitical scales like local, regional, national, international, as well as ecological scales like watershed or bio-region).</p>				
<p>What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard to depth?</p>				
<p>What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to depth?</p>				

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Question 4: Does the resource or initiative build skills that prepare learners to take an active role in advancing sustainability?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
<p>4.1 Critical thinking</p> <p> The resource or initiative offers learners opportunities to practise critical thinking processes such as problem definition, forming hypotheses, collecting and organising information, analysing information, identifying bias, synthesising, drawing conclusions, formulating possible solutions, and identifying opportunities for action, among others.</p>				
<p>4.2 Systems thinking</p> <p> The resource or initiative offers learners opportunities to practise systems thinking – thinking about and describing the nature and consequences of complex relationships.</p>				
<p>4.3 Futures thinking</p> <p> The resource or initiative offers learners opportunities to explore the links between their own lives in the present and those of others in the past and future, and to identify probable and preferable futures.</p>				
<p>4.4 Applying skills to issues</p> <p> The resource or initiative prepares learners to arrive at their own conclusions about what needs to be done, based on thoughtful research and careful study, rather than being taught that a certain course of action is best.</p>				
<p>4.5 Action skills</p> <p> The resource or initiative gives learners the age-appropriate opportunity to practise basic skills for advancing sustainability including, but not limited to: working in partnership, issue identification, selecting and applying appropriate action strategies and understanding their consequences, creating an action plan, implementing an action plan, assessing results and reflecting on lessons learned.</p>				
What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard to skill building ?				
What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to skill building ?				

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Question 5: Does the resource or initiative promote informed and active citizenship, encouraging learners to use their knowledge and skills and assessments of sustainable development issues as a basis for community-based problem solving and action?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
<p>5.1 Sense of personal stake and responsibility</p> <p> The resource or initiative encourages learners to examine the possible consequences of their individual behaviour on the social, economic and ecological aspects of community life and to evaluate choices they can make that may advance sustainability.</p>				
<p>5.2 Individual and community empowerment</p> <p> The resource or initiative strengthens learners' perception of their ability to influence the outcome of a situation and the benefits their contributions can make to community problem solving</p>				
<p>What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard to informed and active citizenship?</p>				
<p>What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to informed and active citizenship?</p>				

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Question 6: Does the resource or initiative address values and attitudes?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
6.1 Values  The resource or initiative encourages learners to explore their own values in relation to others and the environment.				
6.2 Attitudes and behaviour  The resource or initiative encourages learners to consider how values affect peoples' perceptions, attitudes, relationship with others and to the environment, and how all these shape behaviour.				
6.3 Appropriateness  The ways the resource or initiative addresses values and attitudes are developmentally appropriate for learners.				
What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard values and attitudes ?				
What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to values and attitudes ?				

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Question 7: Does the resource or initiative employ teaching and learning strategies that meet learners' needs?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
<p>7.1 Learner-centred teaching</p> <p> When appropriate, learning is based on learner interest and on the learner's ability to construct knowledge through research, discussion, application and practical experiences, to gain conceptual understanding.</p>				
<p>7.2 Different ways of learning</p> <p> The resource or initiative offers opportunities for different modes of teaching and learning including research, experimentation, observation, lecture, discussion, creative expression, field studies, role playing, independent work, cooperative learning, cross-age teaching, and others, that recognise learners' diverse learning styles and preferences.</p>				
<p>7.3 Connections to learners' everyday lives</p> <p> The resource or initiative presents information and ideas in ways that relate to learners' everyday experiences in the places where they live.</p>				
<p>7.4 Extended learning environment</p> <p> The resource or initiative encourages learning outside the boundaries of the classroom.</p>				
<p>7.5 Inter-disciplinary</p> <p> The resource or initiative reflects the interdisciplinary nature of learning for sustainability and identifies the links to relevant subject areas.</p>				
<p>7.6 Goals and objectives</p> <p> Goals and objectives are spelled out and the instructional methods are appropriate to achieve the stated goals and objectives.</p>				
<p>7.7 Appropriateness for specific learning settings</p> <p> The content is appropriate and the activities are relevant and can be accomplished as described or easily adapted to meet your needs.</p>				
<p>7.8 Flexibility</p> <p> The resource or initiative allows for flexibility and differentiation.</p>				
<p>7.9 Assessment</p> <p> Activity-appropriate assessment methods are offered, with opportunities for students to assess their own work and other students' work.</p>				
What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard to teaching and learning ?				
What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to teaching and learning ?				

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Question 8: Is the resource or initiative well designed and easy to use?

Elements and  indicators	not applicable	inadequate	satisfactory	good
8.1 Clarity and logic  The overall structure – purpose, directions, and logic of presentation – is clear to the teacher and the learner.				
8.2 Trialling  The intended audience has been involved in the development of the resource or initiative.				
8.3 Easy to use  The associated materials are well-designed and the use of graphic elements makes them inviting and easy to read and use. Masters for handouts are easy to copy and where appropriate electronic or other media are used.				
8.4 Up-to-date  The information is current or can be up-dated easily.				
8.5 Sustainable  The consumable materials and equipment required are easily obtainable and can be recycled or re-used when the activity or initiative is completed or ended.				
8.6 Support and training  When appropriate, teacher training and on-going technical support are available.				
8.7 National curriculum connections  The resource or initiative explains how they support national curriculum or qualifications requirements.				
8.8 Production and distribution  The environmental impacts of the materials used in the production of the resource or initiative and its distribution have been considered and minimised.				
8.9 Evaluation and feedback  The producer encourages users to evaluate the resource or initiative and to submit their evaluations to the producer.				
8.10 Cost  The resource or initiative is reasonably priced and good value for money.				
What are the strengths of this resource or initiative with regard to ease of use ?				
What are the weaknesses of this resource or initiative with regard to ease of use ?				