



**Sustainable Development Research Network Annual
Report: 2004 – 2005**

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1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Research Network (SDRN) is a UK wide initiative, coordinated by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in London. The SDRN was established in April 2001 with funding from the DETR and subsequently from Defra. In October 2003, PSI's contract to coordinate the Network was renewed for a further three years.

This report describes the SDRN's activities over the past year (to October 2005) and the contribution that the Network has made to '*Securing the Future*', the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy published in March 2005.

2. Aims and Objectives

The SDRN aims to facilitate and strengthen the links between providers of research and policymakers across government, in order to improve evidence-based policymaking to deliver the UK government's objectives for sustainable development.

Its specific objectives are to:

- Facilitate the provision of research and evidence to policymakers;
- Engage government policymakers, scientists and members of the research community;
- Promote sustainable development in the research and academic communities;
- Work with funding bodies to encourage relevant research; and
- Advise the Defra Sustainable Development Unit on sustainable development research issues.

3. Network Activities

a. Research and Evidence Reviews

The Network organises a rolling series of short projects (two per year) based around rapid research and evidence reviews. These projects are intended to function as a clearly structured, rapid, and cost-effective way of improving the transfer of evidence, and facilitating links between researchers and policymakers.

The projects are chosen, in consultation with the Network's Advisory Committee. SDRN has completed two projects to date, entitled *Motivating Sustainable Consumption* and *Environment and Social Justice*, and is at present completing a review of the subject of Well-being. The second project undertaken this year has been rather different, in that rather than a review of a particular area of research has comprised a review of research priorities and policy issues for the funding of cross-cutting and strategic SD research. Details of each of these, including how the two completed projects have contributed to UK policy, are given below.

i. Well-being Bibliography and Briefing

The new UK Sustainable Development Strategy (2005) includes a commitment to '*sponsor cross-disciplinary work to bring together existing research and international experience*' on well-being and to '*explore how policies might change with an explicit well-being focus*', as well as committing the Government to developing wellbeing indicators '*as supported by the evidence*'. To aid this task, the SDRN has commissioned a short introductory briefing and annotated bibliography on the subject of well-being. These are being prepared by Fiona McAlister, an independent social policy researcher with a background in family policy, employment and health research.

• SDRN Wellbeing Concepts and Challenges Briefing

This introductory briefing will include an accessible introduction to the different definitions and conceptualisations of well-being (objective, subjective, psychological, social, hedonic, eudaimonic, etc), the types of research approaches employed and their main strengths and weaknesses. Our intention is that this will provide a background document for policymakers and others new to the field.

• Annotated bibliography

The annotated bibliography will identify and briefly review key selected texts on well being against a standard template. In so doing, it will contribute to the wider task of bringing together and making accessible the evidence base for policy in this area. Our intention is that the bibliography will eventually be made available as web-based resource (hosted on the SDRN website), that can be updated and developed on a rolling basis. Given the limited resources we have available and the enormous potential breadth of the subject matter, the focus of the bibliography will be:

- Secondary sources - such as reviews, synthesis, books
- Policy reports - Commissioned by or produced within government, and produced by NGOs and think tanks, and
- Seminal journal articles

Most will be published in the last 3-5 years, although earlier sources will be included where appropriate.

• Experts List

In addition to the above materials the SDRN is also compiling a list of experts – both UK and non-UK, on wellbeing. Again this will eventually be made available via our website, and should help policymakers more easily access relevant expertise in the academic and wider research community (and vice versa).

ii. SDRN report to the Environmental Research Funders Forum (ERFF) - *Sustainable Development: Needs and Priorities for Crosscutting, Interdisciplinary and Strategic Research*

Following the publication in March this year of the UK Government's new Strategic Framework for sustainable development, *One future - different paths*,¹ and the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), *Securing the Future*,² it was agreed that the SDRN should prepare a rapid review of emerging research needs and priorities, and SD research policy issues, for consideration by the Environment Research Funders' Forum (ERFF) Board. This SDRN research 'prospectus' is intended to provide an input into the ERFF's research coordination and planning processes, and those of its member organisations, in the run up to the next Spending Review.

Key aims of the prospectus are to:

- Review emerging research needs and priorities flowing from the UK Framework and SDS
- Identify key research gaps and strategic opportunities
- Promote coordination between research funders, policymakers and the research community in order to better contribute to achieving the UK's goal, priorities and commitments for sustainable development
- Identify specific issues with respect to support for cross-cutting and strategic research SD research under SR07
- Make recommendations to the ERFF (and where appropriate to other bodies) regarding interdisciplinary, cross-cutting and strategic research needs and priorities to support the implementation of the UK strategic framework and sustainable development strategy.

In order to assist with the process of compiling the report, a joint SDRN/ERFF Sustainable Development Research Priorities and Coordination Workshop, involving some twenty eight leading researchers, policymakers and representatives from research funding bodies was convened in London on the 9 September 2005. The report also draws upon a number of *ad-hoc* consultations and the outcomes from the SDRN's November 2004 Environment and Social Justice: Research Priorities Workshop.

Publication of the SDRN's report to the ERFF is expected in early 2006. Consultation copies of the draft report are currently available from the SDRN Coordinating Team.

¹ HM Government (2005) *One future - different paths*, Defra: <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/documents/publications/SD%20Framework.pdf>

² HM Government (2005) *Securing the Future*, Defra: http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/documents/publications/strategy/SecFut_complete.pdf

iii. Motivating Sustainable Consumption

The SDRN's Motivating Sustainable Consumption review was undertaken by Professor Tim Jackson, of the Centre for Environmental Strategy at the University of Surrey and drew extensively on Professor Jackson's research fellowship on the 'social psychology of sustainable consumption', funded by the ESRC's Sustainable Technologies Programme. The review's broad aims were to provide a bibliographic resource providing access to the extensive academic literature on consumer behaviour, pro-environmental consumer behaviour and behavioural change, and to draw out from this literature some of the possible policy avenues for influencing consumer behaviour towards sustainable consumption.

The review has made a significant policy contribution to the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy published in March 2005, inputting directly to both Chapter 2 of the report (*'Helping People make Better Choices'*) and Chapter 3 (*"One Planet Economy": Sustainable Consumption and Production*). In addition, the report has helped to underpin the work of the newly established SDC/NCC Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption.

Copies of the review are available at: <http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/sustainableconsumption.php>

A policy briefing summarising key points and lessons from the review, has also been produced, and is available at:

<http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/documents/SDRNbriefing1MotivatingSustainableConsumption.pdf>

iv. Environment and Social Justice

The second project undertaken by the Network was a rapid review of research and evidence on environment and social justice, commissioned as part of the background work to underpin the development of the new UK Framework and Strategy for Sustainable Development. The Review summarises the evidence for environmental inequalities and injustice in the UK in relation to 21 topic areas identified as relevant by Defra. For each topic, evidence was summarised on patterns of social distribution, impacts on social or economic outcomes, externalised costs, the causation of inequalities and policy interventions to address these. The 21 topics were divided into four groups:

- Immediate locality front door issues
- Wider service issues
- Planning infrastructure and development issues
- Multiple environmental deprivation

The review was undertaken by small team, led by the SDRN Coordinator Dr Malcolm Eames together with Professor Gordon Walker of the IESR at Staffordshire University and Dr Karen Lucas of CfSD at the University of Westminster, and was completed between June and September 2004. Additional support was provided by an expert working group established by the Network to assist with this task.

The review fed directly into the work of the interdepartmental working group responsible for the environment and social justice theme of the *Taking it on* consultation and strategy review, in turn contributing to Chapter 6 (*'From Local to Global: Creating Sustainable Communities and a Fairer World'*) of *'Securing the Future'*. In addition, on the 8th November 2004, the Network convened a workshop on 'Environment and Social Justice: Research Priorities' for approximately twenty key stakeholders and representatives from the research community. The output from this workshop will feed into longer-term discussions with a range of research funders regarding research needs, opportunities and priorities in this area.

Copies of the review are available at:

http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/documents/ESJ_final_report.pdf

A policy briefing, summarising the reports main findings, is also now available:

http://www.sd-research.org.uk/documents/SDRNbriefingTwo_Final.pdf

A guide listing research and policy experts working on environment and social justice in the UK was also compiled as part of this project. See

<http://www.sd-research.org.uk/researchreviews/documents/ESJExpertsList.doc>

b. 2005 SDRN Annual Sustainable Development Research Conference

The 2005 SDRN Annual Sustainable Development Research Conference returned to the Institution of Electrical Engineers, in London, on September 22nd 2005. The conference was extremely successful, attracting a maximum attendance of nearly 140 delegates. The conference sought to:

- Provide a platform for the dissemination policy relevant research
- Review research needs and priorities in light of the new UK Framework and Strategy for Sustainable Development
- Identify key challenges for cross-cutting and interdisciplinary research
- Contribute to the development of a new prospectus for UK SD research

Details of the conference programme are briefly outlined below. Further details and copies of the conference presentations are available at: <http://www.sd-research.org.uk/events/>

Additional funding for the conference was provided by the DTI, the Sustainable Technologies Programme, the Tyndall Centre, C4S consultants, RELU and Earthscan Publications, many of whom had stalls at the conference.

Plenary sessions

Transitions management for sustainable development – insights from Dutch research and practice

In the Netherlands transition management has been an active area of sustainable development research for several years. More recently it has been adopted as guiding principle of public policy. Transition management potentially provides a framework for drawing together several important themes of UK SD policy and research: such as the importance of respecting environmental limits, harnessing innovation and changing behaviour to promote sustainable consumption and production. This session explored the development of the transitions management approach in the Dutch context and its possible relevance to the UK, with Dr Rene Kemp of MERIT, Maastricht University, presenting his experiences and Professor Fred Steward, of the EPSRC Sustainable Technologies Programme, responding.

Wellbeing and sustainable development

The 2005 UK SDS states that '*The issue of wellbeing lies at the heart of sustainable development*'. Recent work by Professor Richard Layard and others has brought research on happiness to a broader audience. What does this emerging interdisciplinary agenda mean for sustainable development and is a happy society and sustainable one? This session featured Professor Tim Jackson of the Centre for Environmental Strategy (CES), University of Surrey discussing the UK's wellbeing agenda, and John Custance, Defra's Chief Statistician, responding by outlining how Defra is developing indicators.

UK SD Research – Developing the Prospectus

Presentation and Panel Discussion

In the final afternoon session of the conference, Dr Malcolm Eames presented the SDRN's current work developing the 'research prospectus' to support the implementation of the new UK SDS. After outlining the extent of the work so far, a panel discussion with Bronwen Jones (SDU, Defra), James Curran (SEPA) and Fred Steward (ESRC STP) followed.

Themes for parallel sessions

Alternatives for environmental valuation

Valuing environmental goods and services is widely recognised as a key challenge by policymakers. A range of techniques (such as travel cost, hedonic pricing, contingent valuation, etc) are used by environmental economists to attribute monetary values to the

'environment' in cost-benefit analysis and similar decision making processes. Ecological economists have challenged this approach on both philosophical and practical grounds, seeking to develop an alternative toolbox employing multi-criteria, participatory and deliberative methods. This session explore the policy relevance, utility and limitations of such approaches.

Speakers:

- *Professor Arild Vatn, Agricultural University of Norway*
- *Dr Sigrid Stagl, SPRU, University of Sussex*

Respondent: Prashant Vaze, Defra

Addressing environmental inequalities

The need to address environmental inequalities is recognised as a crosscutting theme in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy. This session will provide an opportunity to build on the SDRN's previous work in this area and explore key findings from a number of recent projects.

Speakers:

- *Professor Gordon Walker, Lancaster University*
- *Professor Mark Poustie, University of Strathclyde*
- *Dr Kate Burningham, CEs, University of Surrey*

Respondent: Emily Postan, Scottish Executive

Understanding Environmental limits

For many people the concept of living within environmental limits lies at the heart of sustainable development. The new UK Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the future* includes a commitment to "*collate existing research and identify shortfalls in understanding about where environmental limits exist, and where they are being exceeded.*" This session addressed the implications of environmental limits, in the context of both fisheries and water management, and the problems associated with such an approach.

Speakers:

- *Professor Louise Heathwaite CSWM, Lancaster University*
- *Dr David Agnew, Imperial College*

Respondent: Jonathan Burney, English Nature

Tools for Evidence-Based Policymaking

The promotion of evidence-based approaches to policymaking for sustainable development is a central concern of the SDRN. Systematic reviews and synthesis of existing research and evidence have played a key role in evidence-based policymaking in a range of sectors, from medicine to education and social policy. This session explored emerging experience from two recent initiatives which seek to facilitate the development of evidence-based approaches in

the SD field: the UK Energy Research Centre's (UKERC) Technology and Policy Assessment function and the Centre for Evidence-Based Conservation (CEBC) at the University of Birmingham.

Speakers:

- *Robert Gross, UKERC*
- *Dr Andrew Pullin, Centre for Evidence-Based Conservation (CEBC), University of Birmingham*

Respondent: Dr. John Holmes, Dept. of Earth Sciences, Oxford University

c. SDRN/RICS Sustainable Development and Quality of Life Lecture Series

2005 marked the launch of a series of high profile lectures, organised by SDRN and co-sponsored by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). The lectures, which are held at RICS' Great George Street venue in London, are intended to introduce innovative and challenging thinking from current research to a wider policy audience. Lectures are open to the public but are principally aimed at senior policy makers across government together with leading figures from the academic, business and NGO community concerned with sustainable development. Three successful lectures have so far taken place, each attracting large audiences and receiving very positive feedback:

15th February 2005: *Citizenship and the Environment: Towards Sustainable Development*

Professor Andrew Dobson, Open University

Summary: If we are really to make progress towards achieving objectives of sustainable development, it is not enough just to change our behaviours, as these can revert. We need to change our underlying attitudes as well. We need to become 'environmental citizens' and one way in which we can do this is through the formal education system. Now that citizenship is part of the UK national curriculum, concepts of sustainable development could be used to illustrate this.

10 May 2005: *Deliberate Futures: Precaution and Progress in Technology Choice*

Dr Andrew Stirling, SPRU; University of Sussex

Summary: Concepts of 'sound science' and 'good science' are now being used to support what are essentially political choices that are being made on future options. This can give the impression that the options available to us are pre-determined and that the outcomes are simply the result of the application of 'sound science'. However, there is a real need for a greater use of the precautionary principle in technology choice. This can be a positive process, and can enrich the debate on the options open to us and enable us to arrive at better decisions than simply relying on an appeal to sound 'science'.

26 July 2005: **Sustainability Science**

Professor William Clark, Harvard University

Summary: *What is the contribution that science and technology can make to achieving society's goal of sustainable development? Experience over the last decade on this has revealed that it is important to clearly identify the right type of research to be carried out. There should be clear understanding of the purpose of the research, who benefits from it and what the appropriate knowledge sources are. Secondly, we need to think about the most appropriate forms of institutions to promote this. Institutions should have clear project goals, as opposed to more general aims. They should aim to foster integration across the whole spectrum of research to application and they should also encourage innovative risk taking.*

Forthcoming lectures in the RICS/SDRN Sustainable Development and Quality of Life lecture series:

8 November 2005: **How can Corporate Social Responsibility Better Contribute to Sustainable Development?**

Professor Jeremy Moon, International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility, Nottingham University Business School

7 February 2006: **The Role of Cities and Regions in Delivering Sustainable Development**

Professor Simon Marvin, SURF, Salford University

16 May 2006: **Sustainable Rural Economy**

Professor Philip Lowe, Director, Rural Economy and Land Use Programme (RELU)

Summer 2006: **Achieving Sustainable Development: challenges for Europe**

Professor Jacqueline McGlade, Executive Director, European Environment Agency (EEA)

Each lecture is accompanied by a four page summary policy brief, produced by RICS. Briefs from previous lectures are available online at:

www.sd-research.org.uk/events/SustainableDevelopmentandQualityofLifeLectureSeries.php

d. ESRC/NERC Addressing Environmental Inequalities Seminar Series

In the summer of 2005, funding was secured from the ESRC/NERC Transdisciplinary Seminars Competition to run a series of seminars under the title 'Addressing Environmental Inequalities'. The overall aim of the seminar series is to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity building to better equip the researchers, policymakers and

practitioners to address the challenges of addressing environmental inequalities in the context of the UK SD strategy. In particular, the series will:

- Establish a network of interdisciplinary scientists, policymakers and practitioners concerned with addressing environmental inequalities
- Map and review the current state-of-the-art of environmental inequalities research in the UK
- Promote the exchange of information about current research both within the UK and with selected international colleges
- Improve the conceptual, theoretical and methodological basis for future basic, applied and policy research
- Identify opportunities for strengthening the research base through future interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity building

A total of six seminars will be held through 2006-07, at institutions around the country. The seminars will address the five topics outlined below, with a final seminar to be held at Defra, to synthesis and disseminate the results of the series.

1. Point source pollution (IPPC and waste sites) and ambient environmental quality (air, water and noise)
2. Flooding and climate change impacts
3. Green space and the natural environment
4. Contaminated land and urban environmental quality
5. Equity and sustainable consumption
6. Synthesis and dissemination meeting (hosted by Defra)

Host institutions will include Lancaster University, University of Edinburgh, University of Surrey and University of East Anglia.

e. Membership and Information Services

Membership of the Sustainable Development Research Network is free and open to all those with a professional interest in sustainable development research. Members receive a free fortnightly email newsletter, the *SDR-Network Mailing*, which provides a current awareness and information service on SD research and policy developments.

The number of subscribers to the list continues to grow steadily and now stands at 1532, compared to 1208 members in October 2004 and 844 in October 2003.

4. Website

The SDRN's website (www.sd-research.org.uk) was redesigned and re-launched in February 2004 and visits to the site have continued to increase substantially. Sessions on the site have grown from around 4000 - 4500 per month during the summer of 2004, to between 7500-8000 in autumn 2005.

5. Guide to UK Sustainable Development Research Centres and Evidence Providers

In October 2004, the Network published its online *Guide to UK Sustainable Development Research Centres and Evidence Providers* (www.sd-research.org.uk/sdrguide/). This is intended to assist policymakers identify key 'knowledge hubs' outside of government upon which they can draw to assist them in the development of an integrated approach to sustainable development in the UK. It identifies the main UK academic departments, institutes and research groups undertaking cross-cutting sustainable development research and their relevant areas of expertise. Details of key organisations from outside of the academic sector (such as voluntary sector organisations and consultancies) are also included where appropriate. The Guide is organised under fifteen diverse themes, including Environmental Justice, Citizenship and Participation; Sustainability Appraisal and Assessment; Globalisation, Trade and Environment; and, Sustainable Cities, the Urban Environment and Regeneration, and can be searched by either theme or institution. The Guide is maintained regularly, on an ad hoc basis.

Work is currently underway on a new theme 'Wellbeing and Quality of Life', building on SDRN's current research on the subject. This will be added to the Research Guide in the near future.

6. SDRN Advisory Committee

The SDRN coordinating team at PSI is supported by the broadly-based Advisory Committee comprising leading academics, research funders, government policymakers and other stakeholders. The SDRN Advisory Committee meets twice a year and is chaired by Professor Richard Munton of UCL. The past year has seen a number of changes to the Advisory Committee. The full committee, as of October 2005, is:

Name	Affiliation
Chair: Professor Richard Munton	UCL
Bronwen Jones	Defra, SDU
Michael Harrison / Louise Shaxson	Defra, Science Directorate
Philip Davies	Government Chief Social Researcher's Office, Cabinet Office
Jane Leavens / Aphrodite Korou	DTI
David Calpin	Defra
Scott Ghagan	SDC
Terence Ilott	Defra
Patricia Mandeville	DCMS
Lesley Smith	ODPM
Helen Doran	English Nature
Dr Gary Kass	OST
James Curran	SEPA
Hazel Jeffery / Helen Clayton	NERC
Gary Grubb	ESRC
Phil Burnell	EPSRC
Paul Burrows	BBSRC
Katharine Knox	JRF
Professor Jim Skea	UKERC
Professor Roland Clift / Tim Jackson	CES Surrey
Professor Andrew Dobson	Open University
Dr Tanja Pless-Mulloli	Newcastle University
Dr Andrew Flynn	BRASS, University of Cardiff
Dr Karen Lucas	CfSD, University of Westminster
Professor Gordon Walker	Lancaster Environment Centre, University of University
Dr Andy McLeod	CECS, University of Edinburgh
Professor Keith Goulding	Rothamsted research
Carol Somper	Forum for Future

Details of the Committee's terms of reference and membership are available via the SDRN website, together with the agendas and papers for its meetings (see: <http://www.sd-research.org.uk/about/advisorycommittee.php>).

7. *SDRN Coordinating Team*

The SDRN is coordinated by Dr Malcolm Eames, with support provided by Kate McGeevor and the administrative and communications staff at PSI.

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