

## **SDC Communications Review**

### **BACKGROUND**

This report is based on interviews with 15 people, over a one-week period, using a brief questionnaire. The research aims to find out people's general perceptions of the SDC and how well it communicates information about what it does.

### **THE INTERVIEWEES**

- The persons interviewed were chosen from a partial contact list held in the SDC's database.
- The group does not include current SDC staff members, and is biased towards people resident in the United Kingdom.
- The people contacted are currently, or were in the recent past, engaged in work related to sustainable development.

### **SUMMARY**

- The SDC is seen as providing a valuable service in criticizing the impact of Government policy in terms of sustainable development and as a vehicle for helping to communicate the meaning of sustainable development to both the Government and the general public. The SDC is seen as both an advocate and advisor in monitoring higher standards of sustainable development best practice across the UK.
- Despite having a strong sense of what the SDC does, most of the interviewees were unaware of any of the SDC's current or ongoing projects. Most had a vague idea, using general terms such as "global warming", "food" and "health".
- The general feeling among those interviewed was that the SDC "is the best in what it does". It is clear to most that the SDC's main work is to advise the Government. However, there is a greater need for the SDC to promote its activities to interested groups and perhaps to a wider audience.
- Information technology is viewed as the best means for the SDC to improve how it communicates. Increased use of e-bulletins, regular updates on your website and online forums were all recurrent suggestions in achieving this goal. It was also suggested that more face to face contact between SDC staff members (on a regional level) and social partners could be an alternative, or perhaps complimentary means, for having a significant impact on the way people are informed of your activities.

## **COMMUNICATION STRENGTHS**

### E-bulletins

In terms of content, more than half the people felt that the information was useful and engaging. They were happy with the number of e-bulletins that they received, but felt that once a month would be more adequate.

In terms of layout, the consensus was positive. However it was noted that a text-only format was far better than a page with images. Having too many images gave the impression that it was just a webpage with links; though having links to specific topics worked very well.

In terms of accessibility, everyone felt that the e-bulletins worked very well and were easy to navigate. The most common phrase used was "very user-friendly".

### Website

In terms of content, most people felt that the information was very useful and relevant.

In terms of layout, the general consensus was that the website was very attractive and far better than the old layout.

In terms of accessibility, over half the people interviewed, felt that the website was "very user-friendly".

### Annual critique "Progress"

In terms of content, the information presented was seen as very useful as reference material and a good source of critical analysis.

### General comments

More than half the interviewees believed that the quality of work the SDC produces is excellent. They also felt that the organisation's work was both valuable and necessary, and felt that this was well-communicated. The SDC is seen as a champion for promoting sustainable development "best practice" and clearly plays an important role in advising the Government about the same. Some of the key words used to describe the SDC were "reputable", "concerned", "innovative", "pragmatic", "thorough" and "challenging".

## **COMMUNICATION WEAKNESSES**

### E-bulletins

In terms of content, many felt that they were lacking. They were considered to be too short and too similar. There is a need for greater diversification of topics and features.

In terms of layout, too many images gave the impression that it was just a webpage with links. The images distract from the content.

### Website

In terms of content, some felt that the website needs a section on evidence-based research. There is also a request for links to think-tanks, national counterparts and perhaps some EU counterparts. There was also a minor request for more frequent updates with regards to recent reports and/or developments.

### Annual critique "Progress"

In terms of layout, the general consensus was that the document was too big and cumbersome. The size limited the reader from keeping the document as reference material because it wouldn't fit on a shelf.

### General comments

Some of the interviewees felt that the SDC didn't do enough to promote its activities to its social partners and other interested parties. They felt that more face to face contact with other organisations that were more community-based would help to highlight the SDC's work to a greater audience. Some felt that the SDC was "invisible", "weak" and "potentially misguided". And though they felt that it was important to have an organisation like the SDC, they felt it was "overwhelmed" and "under-resourced".

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Better use of e-bulletins, regular website updates and other IT media can help to improve how the SDC communicates.
- More face to face contact with regional partners and community-based organisations can help to highlight the SDC's work.
- More consultation with social partners and the general public is needed on matters that will inevitably concern them all.