

The Academy for Sustainable Communities

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Making sustainable communities a reality depends on people with the right skills working in close partnership.

Most people working in the historic environment sector would agree that it has an important role to play in establishing and maintaining sustainable communities. We have a clear idea of how the historic environment can help create places where people want to be. The challenge is to make sure that we, and a wide range of other professionals as well as local communities, have the right skills and are able to work together to make sustainable communities a reality.

In 2004 Sir John Egan (Former Chair and Chief Executive of Jaguar plc and former President of the CBI) published a report on the skills needed to build sustainable communities (www.communities.gov.uk). He identified a wide range of professionals involved in creating sustainable communities and highlighted the need for them to work together and to develop generic skills in areas such as communications and engaging local communities. He also recommended the creation of a National Centre for Sustainable Community Skills. This has now been renamed the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) and was launched earlier this year. The ASC has developed John Egan's vision and is focusing its work for the next two years on three target audiences:

- young people
- professionals, and
- communities.

Young people

The ASC aims to get young people thinking about sustainable communities and encourage them into careers where they can make a difference to the places where people live and work. An important initiative is working with the Geographical Association and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment to commission and develop curriculum content and careers materials for pupils at secondary schools. There will also be

high-profile national and regional marketing campaigns, one of which will be aimed at careers advisers, and comprehensive web materials that will provide up-to-date information on a range of sustainable communities careers.

Professionals

A key part of the ASC's work is to improve the skills of professionals, with a strong focus on providing opportunities for people from different professions to work together more effectively and to develop generic skills such as communications and community engagement. This will be done by working with professional institutions and higher education bodies to commission ground-breaking cross-occupational learning and generic skills materials. The ASC will work with other organisations to encourage them to include sustainable communities elements in their learning programmes, conferences and workshops. The ASC will also work with private sector developers, consultants and investors to address skills and knowledge shortfalls between the public and private sectors and to encourage shared understanding, learning and awareness of opportunities to improve.

A good example of how the ASC will work to promote sustainable communities among professionals came in June when Ruth Kelly MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, launched a new partnership initiative between the ASC and the Chartered Institute of Housing. The two organisations are committed to working together towards the delivery of inter-disciplinary training and development to housing professionals to help them deliver sustainable communities. The ASC is now working to forge similar partnerships with other professional bodies, such as the Royal Town Planning Institute.

Communities

Right: A sustainable community provides housing, open spaces and opportunities for all.

If communities are to be sustainable in the long term local people and their leaders must have the skills to understand and influence developments in their areas. This is the third main area of the ASC's programme for the next two years. The ASC will work with others to develop learning programmes for community leaders, local government members and officers and Local Strategic Partnerships to raise sustainable communities skills and awareness. Particular emphasis will be given to the generic skills involved in establishing a clear vision and gaining consensus for that vision; and the project delivery skills to ensure that the vision actually happens.

Underpinning the ASC's work will be a wide range of research and good practice activities, which aim to provide a solid, practical, accessible information base for all those striving to achieve sustainable communities. The ASC's website (www.ascskills.org.uk) is an important resource for anyone working to improve the places where we live and work. Another rich and varied resource will be the ASC's programme of regional learning laboratories and national exemplar projects. These are live sustainable communities projects across the country which will test out new ways of working and examine what is successful and what isn't and why. These projects will help identify skills gaps, develop a detailed understanding of what changes behaviour and increases effectiveness and capture lessons that can be transferred elsewhere. The projects are being run by the regional centres of excellence. More information about the regional centres of excellence is



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available through the ASC website (www.ascskills.org.uk/pages/regional-centres-of-excellence).

Finally, as well as contributing to national policies to achieve sustainable communities the ASC is also becoming increasingly active in international ideas about improving the quality of local places. In November 2006 the ASC will host a European Skills Symposium where experts from across Europe can explore common skills issues, promote good practice and share ideas.

Professor Peter Roberts, the chair of the ASC, is a strong advocate of the role of the historic environment in building and maintaining sustainable communities. The ASC provides an opportunity to ensure that the historic environment is more closely integrated into thinking about sustainable communities. It also offers the chance for those of us in the sector to work more closely with other professionals, to learn new skills and to excite young people about what we do.



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Holbeck in Leeds, home of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, is undergoing a multi-million pound regeneration programme.