

Background

Businesses regularly communicate with a range of stakeholders, especially their customers. Communicating about sustainability shows confidence and understanding about the impacts of business activity. Being transparent and sharing information about how these are addressed builds customer understanding and helps to shift behaviours.

Sustainability is a very broad term but generally includes environmental, social and economic impacts. How your business addresses and communicates sustainability will depend on the type of business you are, as this will determine what impacts you have.

As the importance of sustainability grows across sectors, it makes good business sense to outline exactly what sustainability means to your business. The University of Manchester communicates its sustainability ambitions using the term [Social Responsibility](#), which includes [Environmental Sustainability](#).

What our suppliers do has an impact on our activities. We are keen to communicate our approach, report on progress and encourage more sustainable behaviours with a range of stakeholders, including our suppliers.

This guidance document is designed to help our suppliers think about how they can improve their own sustainability communications, so collectively we can have a greater positive impact.

Good Sustainable Practice Makes Business Sense:

Understanding and communicating what your business is doing around sustainability not only keeps your stakeholders informed but can bring many business benefits too, including:

- Protecting and enhancing your business reputation and brand
- Attracting business as more customers seek out sustainable or responsible brands
- Improving staff retention by engaging them meaningfully
- Increased productivity/reduced costs

Getting Started:

There are several simple things that you can do to demonstrate that you consider sustainability in the context of your own business;

1

Understand what sustainability means for your business

Starting with your core business, consider exactly what sustainability means in your context by exploring your social, environmental and economic impacts. Be transparent with your stakeholders by outlining your findings and your ambitions.

There are guidance and tools available to help you do this, from formal schemes of accreditation to less formal mechanisms. Choose one that suits your business and ambitions (see links in resources).

2

Share your progress (formally and/or informally)

Communicating progress can be done in a variety of ways depending on the audience you are trying to reach and the formality that is required. If you have a website, this is an ideal place to start, or you may have a blog or newsletter to share stories about activity or progress. If you have someone who leads on sustainability you may consider producing a formal Sustainability Report detailing your approach and even provide an annual update.

3

Target your communications to help you drive progress


You may need to target particular stakeholders to help you demonstrate progress in relation to sustainability. If you employ staff involve them to think about what sustainability means to them. You will need to tailor your communications appropriately but your staff are crucial in delivering sustainability goals/objectives. Encouragement and positivity stimulate interest and engagement.

Resources to Help:

There are a wide variety of resources to help develop sustainable practices and many are accessible by searching the internet. However, one of the easiest ways to identify best practice in your own sector is to see what leaders (or competitors) are doing. Even if they are much larger companies or in different sectors there is likely to be much to learn. Below are a few links that may help in getting started.

-  www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs
-  www.sustainablebrands.com/
-  www.think-sustainability.co.uk/resources/uploads/files/Sustainability_Communications_in_a_Nutshell.pdf
-  www.edie.net/downloads/A-guide-to-effective-sustainability-communications/212

We support our suppliers and welcome feedback from them; you can find more details on our webpages

-  www.procurement.manchester.ac.uk/

Here are some good practice ideas that suppliers have told us about communication around sustainability:

- “We hold Seminars and Conferences to facilitate face to face dialogue. We use our website to communicate who we are and what we can offer, as well as blogs and social media for current news.”
- “We have re-designed our website to ensure that our communications are clear and consistent. Also, we use our in-house Wiki to ensure that any communications given internally are available for reference for our staff to ensure messages are consistent and accurate.”
- “We have started to “tag” environmental benefits of our products to help our clients easily identify which products they purchase from us that offer greener benefits and what greener benefits they actually offer.”