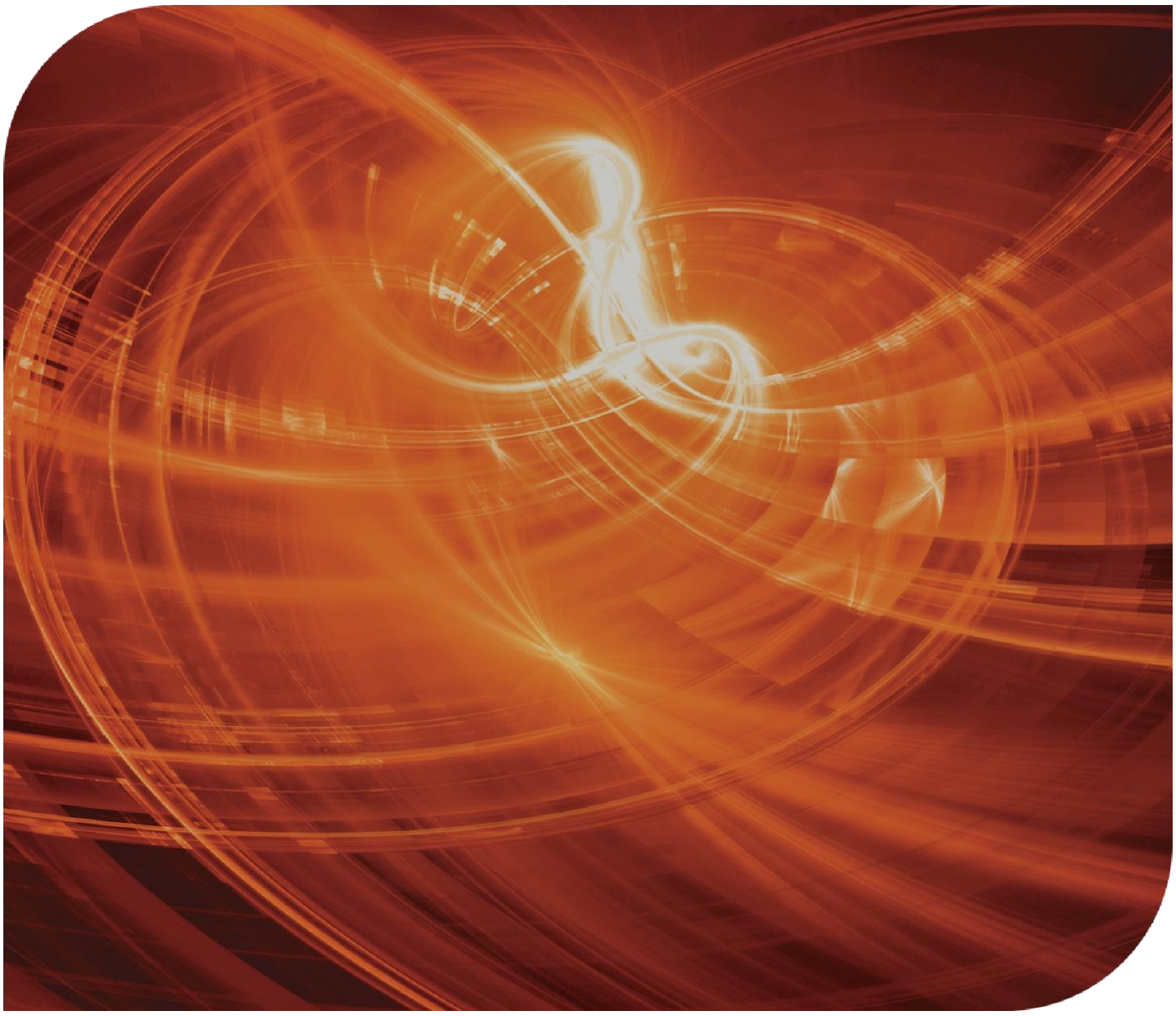
Springboards to Sustainability: A review of the Stepping Up in Sustainability programme 2012-13

LSIS
LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT SERVICE



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Executive Summary

This impact review was conducted for LSIS by Kirsti Norris of Action for Sustainability.

Action for Sustainability

The 2012-13 Stepping Up in Sustainability (SUS) projects completed their commitments at the end of March 2013, with some dissemination events running into April, May and June.

This review looks at the case studies and impact reports from the SUS projects, to determine the following:

- Key impacts the projects have made due to the funding
- Key learning gained by the sector by running the projects
- Key messages that should be taken by the sector as general learning from this funding scheme.

A significant key area of impact from the projects has been on learners, as well as the engagement and support of senior management. Key learning around what makes a successful project indicates that senior management leadership, or at least support, has been crucial, and where projects have focused on embedding sustainability into teaching and learning, a key success factor is ensuring that teachers and tutors understand the benefits the learners will get from doing this.

The value of the SUS funding to the sector as a catalyst to enable ideas of projects to become reality, whilst not possible to evidence within individual project's impact statements, should be acknowledged, as the learning from the projects goes beyond the project lead's organisation, and has wider benefits to the sector as a whole.

However, it is clear that none of the projects could have gone ahead, or had the impact that is evidenced in this report, without the commitment and vision of the project leaders themselves, and the support of their colleagues, learners and senior leadership teams. As the report shows, LSIS funding and support has been an enabler or helper in this but the real credit is due to those who have made it happen while continuing to fulfil their existing and ongoing commitments.

1. Background / context

The Stepping Up in Sustainability (SUS) Fund supports practitioner-led projects to develop, embed and share effective approaches to sustainable development. LSIS has funded 13 projects under the 2012-13 round of the fund. The 2012-13 round is the third year of LSIS funding SUS projects. Total funding for the SUS projects during 2012-13 amounted to £129,497.75 , attracting match funding from learning providers to the amount of £29,596.

Bidders were invited to submit proposals for projects to address one or more of the following themes:

- Leadership and capacity building
- Teaching, learning and the curriculum
- Sustainability skills for growth - future skills and responding to employer needs
- FE-HE partnership working on any of the three topics above.

Each project lead was assigned a "critical friend", an LSIS Associate with experience of sustainability from within and outside the sector to provide advice and input to the project. The critical friends kept in contact with project leads throughout the projects, with initial meetings to help form robust project plans, and then guidance and support throughout usually by monthly check-in phone calls.

Case studies and resources created by the SUS projects are available on the Excellence Gateway. Each project lead also completed an impact assessment for their project, shared only with LSIS, reporting on achievements within the organisation, with partners, and in disseminating their project work out to the sector. This impact review is to bring together an assessment of the impact of the SUS funding for the 2012-13 round.

The case studies and impact reports from the SUS projects will be reviewed, to determine the following:

- Key impacts the projects have made due to the funding
- Key learning gained by the sector by running the projects
- Key messages that should be taken by the sector as general learning from this funding scheme.

As LSIS will be ceasing delivery of services by the end of July 2013, it is hoped that this impact review will be of use to future funders of projects or sustainability programmes within the learning and skills sector. The report also hopefully helps to illustrate the legacy and benefit of the SUS programme to the sector as providers look to develop and progress their thinking and practice in sustainability.

2. Overview of providers in receipt of funding

Regional distribution:

East Midlands	2
East of England	3
London	2
North East	1
North West	2
South East	0
South West	1
West Midlands	2
Yorkshire and the Humber	0

Type of SFA Funded Organisation:

Adult and Community Learning Provider	2
Art, Design and Performing Arts College	0
General FE College	8
Higher Education Institution	0
Land-based College	1
Sixth Form College	1
Specialist Designated Institution	0
Tertiary College	1
Work-based Learning Provider	0
Other (please specify):	0

3. Overview of projects' distribution across themes

	Leadership & capacity building	Teaching, learning & curriculum	Sustainability skills for growth	FE-HE partnerships
Accrington & Rossendale College				
Bedford College				
Blackpool and the Fylde College				
Colchester Institute				
Gateway College				
Hounslow Adult and Community Education				
New College Stamford				
North Warwickshire and Hinckley College				
Easton and Otley College				
South Thames College				
Stockton Riverside College				
Truro and Penwith College				
Walsall Adult Community College				

4. Key impacts the projects have made with the help of the funding

4.1 Overview

An analysis of the impact assessments from the projects shows that there have been 8 distinct areas of impact from the 2012-13 SUS projects, as follows:

1. Impact on learners
2. Senior management engagement
3. Staff development and engagement
4. Development of replicable programmes
5. Development of approaches, resources and tools
6. Alignment of curriculum to match employer needs
7. General cross-organisational impacts
8. Development of partnerships

4.2 Further detail

Further details of impacts under each of the eight headings are illustrated in more detail below, with examples of projects where this impact was evident (where illustrated as such in the project final impact assessment report).

1. **Impact on learners:**
    a. Enabled learners to develop an understanding and deeper awareness of sustainability within their course (*Blackpool and The Fylde College, Stockton Riverside College*);
    b. Raised awareness of learner's personal responsibility regarding sustainability, and developed their understanding of their role in the world now and in the future (*Accrington and Rossendale College*);
    c. Gave an understanding of sustainability in the workplace (*Stockton Riverside College*);
    d. Learners gained experience and confidence:
        i. From going out and visiting employers (*Stockton Riverside College*);
        ii. From accelerated learning techniques (*Walsall Adult and Community College*);
    e. Improved retention, recall of information, happiness, social interactions, and classroom interaction (*Walsall Adult and Community College*).
2. **Senior management engagement:**
    a. A greater awareness of the relevance of sustainable development (SD) to the curriculum among senior management (*South Thames College, Truro and Penwith College*);

b. Raising awareness of sustainability with the senior leadership team / corporation (governors) (*Colchester Institute, Easton and Otley College*);

c. Roles and responsibilities of Directorates clearly defined (*Bedford College*);

d. Established ESD working group (*Truro and Penwith College*);

e. Senior leadership team / Director to chair Sustainability Champion / Group meetings (*Colchester Institute, Truro and Penwith College*);

f. Profile of sustainability boosted within the organisation as a result of the SUS programme (*Stockton Riverside College*).

3. **Staff development and engagement:**

a. Staff and tutors received SD training to ensure they understood the importance of SD and were confident embedding SD into their curriculum areas (*Blackpool and The Fylde College*);

b. Motivated tutors as a result of accelerated learning sessions being well received by learners (*Walsall Adult and Community College*);

c. Creating staff and learner inductions that will continue, and agreeing on a statement of commitment to sustainability, and on the importance of sustainable practices within the College (*Colchester Institute*);

d. Using SUS programmes as learning opportunities for project leaders and all departments involved (*all projects*);

e. Greater discussion and generation of projects around sustainability in the curriculum (*Hounslow Adult and Community Education*).

4. **Development of replicable programmes:**

a. Staff in various departments participated in a project that can be replicated on a larger scale in 2013-14 (*South Thames College*);

b. Using a model for learners to think about their careers and progress in issues to do with sustainability (*New College Stamford*).

5. **Development of approaches, resources and tools:**

a. Online resource bank of teaching materials allows SD to be embedded across further areas of the College (*Blackpool and The Fylde College*);

b. Community of Enquiry used across subject areas to develop learners' sense of a 'global citizen' (*New College Stamford*);

c. Developing new methods of giving feedback so learners are clearer about the relevance to their work of reflecting on the wider world (*New College Stamford*);

d. Establishing a framework for delivery of sustainability awareness as part of the Learning and Development programme (*Accrington and Rossendale College*);

e. Increased use of e-learning (*Hounslow Adult and Community Education, North Warwickshire and Hinckley College*).

6. **Alignment of curriculum to match employer needs:**
    a. Refocus of curriculum on "green" technologies to match skills gaps and career development opportunities (*Accrington and Rossendale College*).
7. **General cross-organisational impacts:**
    a. Awareness of sustainability increased due to activities, promotions, events and the SUS projects themselves (*Bedford College, New College Stamford*);
    b. Supported delivery of College Carbon Management Plan and sustainability strategy (*Accrington and Rossendale College, North Warwickshire and Hinckley College*).
8. **Development of partnerships:**
    a. Various SUS projects provided the opportunity for multilateral partnerships to be formed around the projects - these partnerships have been varied, and include community groups, businesses, other sustainability projects, Council departments, other learning providers and schools, charities, not-for-profit organisations and employers (*Gateway College, Hounslow Adult and Community Education, Easton and Otley College, South Thames College*).

The key impact evident throughout the majority of the SUS projects is the impact in learners, as a result of the theme of "teaching, learning and the curriculum" within the project application process.

Impacts 1-7 of the list in 4.1 above are within organisations, with impact 8 representing impacts outside of the particular learning organisation leading the SUS project.

Dissemination events were held by all but one of the projects, with the thirteenth planning a series of dissemination activities over the summer term. Approximately 300 people attended these events. The full impacts of the funding programme are not yet known, and unlikely to ever be known. Project leads have disseminated their work, and continue to do so. Resources generated from the projects are also available on the Excellence Gateway for other organisations to access. The impact of the projects will continue to grow, as the resources are shared, and more organisations access them, use them, or learn from them.

5. Success factors

Reviewing individual project impact assessments, it is interesting to note the rating given by project leads to the question:

> *"To what extent would you say that the project's objectives have been achieved?"*

Whilst two project leads considered their projects had "exceeded" objectives, four felt that they had "fully achieved" objectives, and seven considered their project objectives "largely achieved" - see breakdown below.

	Accrington & Rossendale College	Bedford College	Blackpool and the Fylde College	Colchester Institute	Gateway College	Hounslow Adult and Community Education	New College Stamford	North Warwickshire and Hinckley College	Easton and Otley College	South Thames College	Stockton Riverside College	Truro and Penwith College	Walsall Adult Community College
Exceeded													
Fully achieved													
Largely achieved													
Partially achieved													

Those considering their projects as "largely achieved" did not mark themselves higher due to:

- Not having yet run the dissemination event (2 projects);
- Difficulty liaising with a partner (1 project);
- Not having the KPI results from the project or yet to prove an impact (1 project);
- A change in timetabling resulted in slots where work with learners was going to happen being lost (1 project);
- Not having time to complete all elements of ambitious projects (2 projects).

It is important to bear in mind that in making this assessment, project leads were reviewing the original aims of the projects and the original, anticipated outcomes and outputs. Therefore, their assessments generally might not reflect additional, unforeseen outputs and outcomes from the projects. Moreover, it may be that some project leads, given human nature, had a tendency to underplay their achievements.

The ambitious nature of the projects was a key factor where projects were not achieved as well as initially hoped, as well as underestimating the time needed to deliver the projects. These can be seen from the quotes below from project leads indicating what they would do differently if they were running the project again:

> *"agree less ambitious impact measures and timescales for implementation"*

> *"create a more robust action plan with leaders to ensure that staff time is available"*

Project leads identified the following as making their projects a success:

- Senior leadership (*Accrington and Rossendale College, Bedford College, Colchester Institute, Walsall Adult and Community College*);
- Senior management support (*South Thames College, Hounslow Adult and Community Education*);
- Senior management support as a result of having LSIS funding (*Blackpool and the Fylde, Truro and Penwith College*);
- Good working relationships with college staff (*Blackpool and the Fylde, Gateway College, South Thames College*);
- Having a clear understanding of how the project would benefit learners helped to get tutors on board (*Blackpool and the Fylde, Truro and Penwith College, Walsall Adult and Community College*);
- Working closely with tutors on a one-to-one basis / training key staff (*Blackpool and the Fylde, Colchester Institute, Walsall Adult and Community College, Hounslow Adult and Community Education*);
- Project lead having a good understanding of sustainability (*Blackpool and the Fylde, Truro and Penwith College*);
- Tailoring communications and resources to individual areas of the institution / curriculum areas (*Blackpool and the Fylde, Truro and Penwith College*);

- Partnership working - working with / bringing in other skills and expertise when required (*Blackpool and the Fylde, South Thames College*)
- Time to reflect on the project created through receiving funding (*New College Stamford*)
- Keen / committed staff (*New College Stamford, Truro and Penwith College, Colchester Institute, South Thames College, North Warwickshire and Hinckley College*)
- Good project management skills (*Gateway College, North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, Hounslow Adult and Community Education*)
- Having the support of the LSIS critical friend (*Colchester Institute, Hounslow Adult and Community Education*)
- Use of LSIS Reaching Forward Index (*Colchester Institute*)
- Using examples of real projects with learners (*Easton and Otley College*)
- Learner enthusiasm (*Stockton Riverside College*)

6. Key learning gained by the sector by running the projects

The data below on key learning from the sector has been gathered from the impact assessments completed by each project lead. The main learning achieved that re-emerged throughout many projects is as follows:

- Senior support is essential for sustainability projects to make headway (*Bedford College, Colchester Institute, Hounslow Adult and Community Education*);
- The importance of SD training for staff and tutors, so they understand what SD is, and how to embed it into their curriculum area (*Blackpool and The Fylde, Hounslow Adult and Community Education*);
- It is important to define what sustainability means for your organisation (*Colchester Institute*);
- It is important to inspire and support stakeholders by providing support and committing resources (*Colchester Institute*);
- Successes, failures, and learning must be shared (*Colchester Institute, Gateway College*);
- Link SD to real issues and opportunities in the community (*South Thames College*);
- It is important to keep momentum going in championing ESD (Truro *and Penwith College, Walsall Adult and Community College*).

7. Key messages for the sector in learning from this funding scheme

7.1 The benefits of a funded programme

The SUS funding has given the opportunity for many projects and initiatives to develop that would not otherwise have had the time, resources or support given to them. As North Warwickshire and Hinckley College state "the SUS grant has allowed the College to develop a project that otherwise wouldn't have been possible".

The value of the funding, over and above simply financing activity, has been apparent in two key ways:

- as an opportunity to create some time, dedication and focus to a project;
- as a way of raising the profile of sustainability and the specific project chosen. A number of project leads state that by having the LSIS funding, senior leadership took note, and gave support.

Should a similar scheme be run again, the timing of the funding scheme should be reconsidered. Projects, particularly those focused on teaching and learning, would have benefitted from the funding starting in June, with dissemination the following June. This would allow planning time before the summer break, and thus allow projects to start implementation in the Autumn term, with time for implementation, measuring and monitoring prior to the dissemination event. Many projects had difficulties getting enough implementation achieved to measure results before needing to wrap up for the dissemination event, hence a number of projects holding the dissemination events later than planned.

7.2 Developing programmes without funding

Whilst learning of success through a funded project is valuable, in light that there are no similar funding programmes planned, there is some learning to be gained from the experience of running the SUS project funding scheme, along with the broader experience gained by LSIS of working with the sector on sustainability projects over the last few years.

When looking at successful projects, key success factors can often be seen within the strength of one or more of the following:

- Senior leadership engagement and support
- Ability of the project lead (key person)
- Development of partnerships

Where senior leadership understand the reasons, ideas, and the benefits of a project, they are likely to get behind it and make sure it happens. This is not about getting authorisation or permission to run a project, but real support and belief in the purpose of the project.

The ability of the project lead is paramount to ensuring that the benefits of the project to core delivery are demonstrated, not just to the senior leadership team for their support, but for everyone that will be involved - how does the project benefit them, and help them to achieve their daily aims? Relating the project to the organisation's vision is a good way to do this.

Using language that different stakeholders respond to is vital, and doing some background research into what drives different stakeholders can help here. A useful tool in doing this is The Sustainability Leaders' Toolkit (available on the LSIS Learning Environment), with advice on pitching to different stakeholders in a learning organisation.

The ability of the project lead to project manage effectively has also been a common factor in successful projects. Again, this too will help to get full support from senior management, with project leads presenting various aspects of a project such as:

- What impacts the project will have (above and beyond the sustainability impacts);
- How the project will enhance other areas (for example, see the Walsall Adult and Community College 2011/12 SUS project on using Skype for regular meetings with apprentice employers, to not only reduce travel for staff, but with the additional benefits of saving travel time, thereby enabling staff to have more productive work time, increasing well-being of staff through less time on the road, and additional benefits of teaching staff and employers how to use Skype which impacts on other areas of professional and social lives);
- Risks to the projects' success, and how these will be overcome if they arise;
- Costings of the project, including staff time required;
- Research on the necessity of the project / response from those that it will impact;
- Use of the Reaching Forward Index can help here to benchmark where an organisation is before, and after the project;
- A longer term plan of where the project will lead to once it is complete.

Developing partnerships is another route to success. Working with others in the sector, or in the local or business community can really help to drive a project along, share the workload and open opportunities that would not exist alone. Good examples of this can be found in the SUS 2012/13 projects by South Thames College, and also Gateway College.

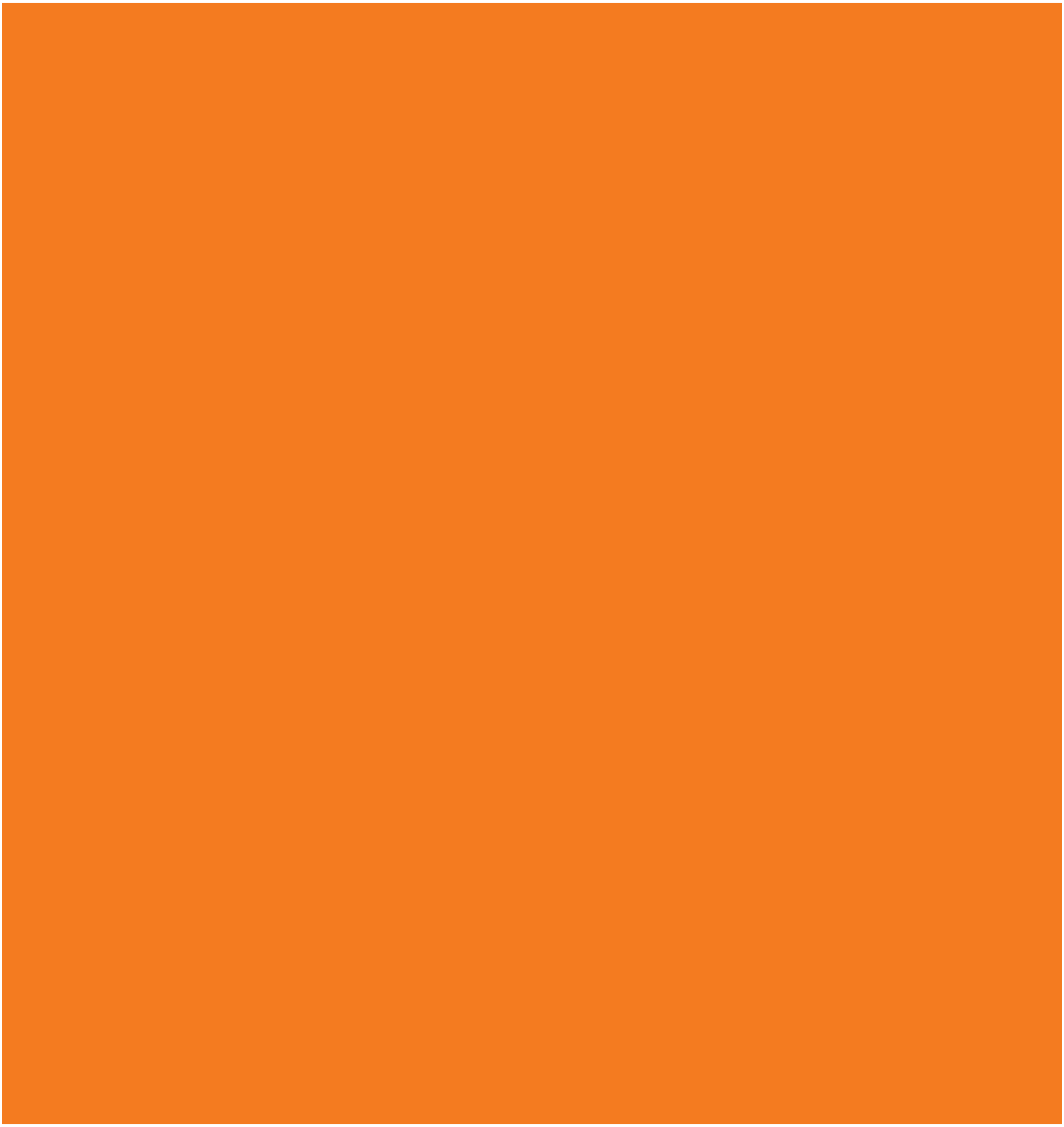
Whilst the funding has been an important enabler, those who have made the projects happen (the project leads, supportive senior leadership, partnerships and colleagues) have been the essential elements in the projects, without these people the projects would not have been successful.

8. Conclusions

The impact of the Stepping Up in Sustainability project far exceeds the impacts within the project lead's organisation. Not only do other providers hear about the projects through dissemination events, and by reading the case studies on the Excellence Gateway, but the impact of 13 organisations within the sector undertaking projects simultaneously has the potential to raise the cultural norm of what it means to embrace sustainability as a learning and skills provider. The Stepping Up in Sustainability projects have given project leads the opportunity to try out ideas and approaches to further develop their organisation's response to sustainability, and, in some cases, the impacts of these projects have exceeded initial expectation, and acted as a springboard for other activities.

These quotes from Truro and Penwith College show the additional impact potential that their project created:

> *"The feedback from staff and participants at workshops has been incredibly positive, with the majority feeding back that they feel that the workshop should be disseminated more widely."*

> *"The attendees fully grasped the aims of the project and the approach being taken. Many wanted copies of the materials and activities to use in their teaching."*

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