

Proposed England-wide Sustainable Tourism Accreditation Scheme: an introduction

Why is the ETC considering a sustainable tourism accreditation scheme?

Surveys illustrate that as many as 81% of domestic tourists think that it is important that their holiday does not damage the local environment. Some 68% of these would be prepared to pay a premium to stay in accommodation and visit attractions that can demonstrate their commitment to the environment. In the same way that ETC diamonds or stars indicate the quality and/or facilities offered by accommodation establishments, the ETC Sustainable Tourism Accreditation logo would offer the consumer a simple way of choosing those businesses that are committed to sustainable development.

What are the benefits of a national scheme?

The Countryside Agency and the ETC are jointly developing a national scheme which would have benefits for the business and for the consumer:

- Business benefits: a single national scheme would credit the environmental activities of tourism businesses, reward them with an ETC rating that they can trust and provide them with commercial opportunities for their businesses.
- Consumer awareness and understanding: a single national scheme would create a much higher level of awareness and understanding of businesses practising environmental improvement than a range of regional/local schemes.

What would the scheme do?

The scheme would be a marketing, audit, certification and advisory rating scheme for tourism businesses. It would help consumers, members of the local community, suppliers, the media and others recognise those businesses that:

- play their part in protecting the environment
- play a constructive role in the local community
- make a positive contribution to the economy of the area.

Who would be able to take part?

Once the piloting process is complete, the scheme would initially be available to accommodation businesses and we anticipate at a later stage to visitor attractions. This is because there is already a wealth of experience in environmental accreditation for these sectors. If there is sufficient demand, the programme may be extended at a later date to meet the needs of other sectors of the industry.

How would businesses benefit from participating in the scheme?

By implementing the actions included in the scheme, businesses would be able to:

- make considerable financial savings
- improve the quality of the product and service offered to customers
- improve their market image
- ensure that they are complying with the increased range of environmental regulations
- support other local businesses
- benefit from the grants and loans that are available to encourage businesses to operate in a more sustainable way
- support the local area and environment that attracts visitors.

Would the ETC help businesses to maximise these benefits?

Yes. While the details still have to be confirmed, ETC and its partner agencies (such as the Regional Tourist Boards) would be promoting accommodation within the scheme. Advisors to the scheme would be able to provide targeted advice that would help in the achievement of the benefits listed above. This would include initiatives that could help businesses to make immediate improvements in profitability and secure the long term prospects of the business.

How would the scheme work with existing sustainable tourism/environmental accreditation programmes?

Some regional tourist boards and consultancies have already launched their own accreditation schemes for sustainable or environmentally responsible tourism. The ETC would be working with as many of these organisations as possible to build partnerships. It is planned that, where possible, the ETC scheme would be similar to existing schemes, to enable those already participating in other green initiatives to convert to the ETC standard more easily.

How would the scheme work with the existing quality and accessibility standards?

We are working to ensure that there would be no conflict between the sustainability and the national quality assurance scheme. We are also exploring the possibility of combining the environmental and quality assessment visits to streamline the process for businesses.

How would a business apply for the programme?

Participation in the scheme would be voluntary and based on an initial application, followed by an assessment visit. Support, help and advice would be available as soon as the scheme is launched.

How can I get involved?

You would be able to get involved by:

- Letting us know your views about the standard and the issues that it should embrace by the end of July by contacting Jane Fletcher at the address below.
- Businesses in the accommodation or visitor attraction sector would have an opportunity to help us test the standard as it is developed. Please contact Jane Fletcher at the address below for further information.

When would the scheme be launched?

We have commissioned a programme of work to examine the implications and preferable format for an England-wide Sustainable Tourism Accreditation Programme. We aim to present the preliminary findings of this work to our working group meeting early in August and to have a complete report describing the proposed implementation plan for the scheme, its components and the likely business take-up by the end of August. A detailed description of the tasks that would be undertaken can be provided by ETC. We anticipate that a pilot scheme would run in February/March 2003 and the scheme could be launched for a national roll-out in November 2003.

Who do I contact for further information?

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