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His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales
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Sir

It is now nearly 14 years since Your Royal Highness's A4S team contacted me as the then Secretary of the Financial Reporting Advisory Board at HM Treasury to ask for my support in introducing sustainability reporting into central government annual financial reports. Once I had met the team, it was evident to me that central government departments should be part of Your Royal Highness's A4S project partly to ensure that, for once, we were ahead of the curve and not just blindly following private sector practice. I recall that, as always, there was some resistance to yet another 'Treasury requirement', but there were some keen supporters even in those early days who offered to trial the reporting requirements that my team developed with the help of Your Royal Highness's A4S team.

Although it was exciting to be part of the initial introduction of sustainability reporting, the more rewarding aspects came when I moved into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – where I was able to work with the department's sustainability team. I am pleased to report that there were definite and welcome changes in outlook and behaviour that were a direct result of applying the A4S reporting requirements.

Any requirement to report enhances accountability – and reporting on the use of electricity, gas and water, and on the recycling and waste sent to landfill, suddenly gave a prominence to such matters that perhaps hadn't been seen before. In the FCO, working with the IT section, we persuaded project managers to calculate the whole-life costs of IT systems when considering options for replacement or development of new systems. They started to take decisions based not only on the immediate hardware/software costs and routine maintenance and upgrades, but also on the expected electricity consumption and on eventual decommissioning costs, which would include disposal requirements. And we also made good use of the cardboard packaging by sending it off to a worm farm in Kent.

As a means of highlighting environmental sustainability, we held awareness days perhaps twice yearly. These were 'fun days' and were not so much to inculcate changes of behaviour in the work place (although we preached that message, too) but to make officials aware of what they could do at home to improve their own carbon footprint. That certainly made a difference personally and I can sometimes be found half-in the recycling paladin here at home removing the non-recyclables (fervently hoping that there has been no contamination of the rest of the contents).

I know it has often been said that Your Royal Highness was ahead of the game in raising concerns about the sustainability of the environment. It is a great pity that more attention wasn't paid 40 years' ago. However, I am convinced Your Royal Highness's A4S project has started to make a difference in the public sector and I am proud to have been able to play a small role in it.

Yours faithfully



David Watkins