



PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMA IN
SUSTAINABILITY
(ProDipSust)

Syllabus and study guide

JANUARY TO JUNE 2025

Designed to help with planning study and to
provide detailed information on what could be
assessed in any examination session



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1. Aims

To provide an integrated understanding of sustainability across strategic planning, decision-making and measurement; reporting; and assurance. It will develop an overarching perspective and equip candidates with practical skills in this dynamic and emerging area.

2. Objectives

On completion of this syllabus, candidates should be able to:

- Explain the concept of sustainability, its importance, and the need for regulatory frameworks
- Explain the importance of ethical principles and apply ethical guidance as a sustainability professional
- Explain the need for alignment of an organisation's sustainability strategy and evaluate sustainability related opportunities and challenges
- Analyse business decisions, key risks, and performance from a sustainability perspective
- Assess the role of information systems in the provision of sustainability related data and reporting
- Prepare and analyse sustainability reports, explain the interactions between sustainability reporting frameworks and the impact of sustainability on the financial statements
- Explain frameworks, current issues, and developments in relation to sustainability assurance and the challenges encountered at each stage of a sustainability assurance engagement

3. Position of the course within the overall portfolio of ACCA's qualification framework

The Professional Diploma in Sustainability (ProDipSust) builds on the technical and/or practical knowledge acquired from recognised country specific accountancy qualifications or relevant work experience. The syllabus integrates a candidate's understanding of sustainability and the impact that it may have on an organisation's internal planning and management, external reporting, and assurance engagement. The ProDipSust concentrates on the application of conceptual and technical sustainability knowledge, and it provides essential insight and understanding that will equip candidates to operate in an increasingly global marketplace.

The ProDipSust is aimed at professional accountants and auditors who work in practice or business and are keen to expand their sustainability knowledge.

There are no specific entry requirements for ProDipSust, but a level of accounting knowledge is assumed. This assumed knowledge can either come from a country specific professional qualification, from possessing a relevant degree (giving exemptions from

Business and Technology (BT); Management Accounting (MA) and Financial Accounting (FA) and Corporate and Business Law (LW) of the ACCA Qualification and two years' accounting experience, or by having three years' full-time accounting experience.

Learning to support ProDipSust is available through the completion of four certificates and exam preparation material. These will be ACCA created materials and more information will be released shortly.

4. Approach to examining the syllabus

The examination is a three-hour fifteen minute computer-based examination. ACCA encourages students to take time to read questions carefully and to plan answers. Time should be taken to ensure that all the information and exam requirements are properly read and understood.

The ProDipSust examination is an integrated case study. Each examination will comprise of a series of exhibits of information and three tasks each containing several requirements.

Task 1 will consist of requirements related to Syllabus Area B,
Task 2 will be focused on Syllabus Area C, and
Task 3 will be based on Syllabus Area D.

The frameworks and regulations covered in Syllabus area A are underpinning knowledge for the whole exam, but the ethics covered in Syllabus Area A will be specifically examined. Ten marks of the exam will be focused on ethics, and these will be split across any two of the three tasks. Therefore, the three tasks within the diploma assessment will be worth 30-35 marks each.

The requirements within each of the three tasks will be a mix of computational and discursive activities. All requirements and tasks are compulsory.

The overall pass mark for the Professional Diploma in Sustainability is 50%.

5. Intellectual levels

The syllabus is designed to broaden and deepen the knowledge, skills and professional values demonstrated by the sustainability professional as they complete the diploma.

The specific capabilities within this detailed syllabus and study guide are assessed at one of three intellectual or cognitive levels:

Level 1: Knowledge and comprehension
Level 2: Application and analysis
Level 3: Synthesis and evaluation

Each subject area in this detailed study guide included in this document is given a 1, 2, or 3 superscript, denoting intellectual level, marked at the end of each relevant learning outcome. This gives an indication of the intellectual depth at which an area could be assessed within the examination.

6. The syllabus

A Sustainability, regulatory frameworks and ethics

1. Sustainability overview
2. Frameworks and global differences
3. Roles and responsibilities in relation to sustainability matters
4. Ethical behaviour for organisations
5. Ethical behaviours for professionals

B Sustainable strategic planning, decision-making and measurement

1. Strategic planning and alignment
2. Governance, risk and control
3. Decision-making and measurement
4. The role of technology and information systems

C Sustainability reporting

1. Preparing sustainability reports
2. IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards
3. Interactions between sustainability reporting frameworks
4. Analysis of sustainability reports
5. Sustainability and the financial statements

D Sustainability assurance

1. Frameworks for sustainability assurance
2. Sustainability assurance cycle
3. Current issues and developments in sustainability assurance

7. Detailed study guide

A Sustainability, regulatory frameworks and ethics

1. Sustainability overview

- a) Define sustainability and sustainable development.¹
- b) Explain the importance of sustainability to society and organisations.¹
- c) Describe the global challenges of sustainable development and how businesses can respond to these challenges.¹
- d) Explain the concept of a sustainable business model and its links to strategy, governance and risk management.¹
- e) Define the terms E, S and G; and
 - (i) discuss their interdependency; and
 - (ii) discuss how the information is relevant to stakeholders.¹

2. Frameworks and global differences

- a) Outline and explain the need for sustainability reporting frameworks.¹
- b) Explain the UNSDGs, as an example of a sustainability reporting framework and its significance for organisations.¹
- c) Explain the various frameworks, guidance and regulatory bodies and appreciate the interaction between them:
 - (i) Global Reporting Initiative (GRI);
 - (ii) Integrated Reporting (IR);
 - (iii) International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB);
 - (iv) Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD);
 - (v) Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD);
 - (vi) European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS);

- (vii) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR);
- (viii) Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB);
- (ix) UK regulations.²

- d) Explain the concept and application of materiality and double materiality in a sustainability context.²

3. Roles and responsibilities in relation to sustainability matters

- a) Explain the crucial role of those charged with governance and the finance professional in supporting sustainable development.²
- b) Explain how the competencies of finance professionals are critical to their role in sustainability.²
- c) Explain the rapid pace of change of sustainability and regulatory frameworks and the need for adaptability.²

4. Ethical behaviour for organisations

- a) Identify and explain the importance of ethics and ethical behaviour for the organisation, considering different approaches to ethics.²
- b) Evaluate threats to ethical principles in relation to sustainability.³
- c) Recommend relevant actions and safeguards to mitigate threats to ethical principles.³
- d) Evaluate examples of unethical company behaviour, for example 'greenwashing' and 'greenhushing'.³

5. Ethical behaviours for professionals

- a) Explain the importance of following ethical principles for a sustainability professional.²
- b) Apply ethical guidance for the sustainability professional.³

- c) Evaluate threats to the ethical principles of a sustainability professional.³
- d) Recommend relevant actions and safeguards sustainability professionals should take to mitigate threats to ethical principles.³

B Sustainable strategic planning, decision-making and measurement

1. Strategic planning and alignment

- a) Explain why an organisation's goals and plans should clearly define its commitments to sustainability and align organisational and stakeholder requirements.²
- b) Identify and explain the relevant resources and relationships which should be considered by organisations in its goals and plans, including financial resources, business operations, its people, customers, supply chains and the economy.²
- c) Evaluate sustainability-related opportunities, risks, and challenges.³
- d) Analyse strategic ESG goals and measures recognising the importance of them being achievable, realistic, and timely.²
- e) Explain how strategic goals for sustainability translate into business objectives, policies and activities, including the use of green budgeting.²
- f) Assess the use of sustainable finance as an element of capital structure (financial strategy).²
- g) Assess issues related to prioritising short-term profitability over sustainability.²

2. Governance, risk and control

- a) Explain the importance of appropriate governance and strong leadership in

sustainable business strategy and operations.²

- b) Explain the importance of controls and risk management to enable effective and efficient operations and reliable disclosures.²
- c) Explain why there may be a need to utilise the services of internal and/or external specialist experts.²
- d) Identify key risks, including environmental and climate related risks, and their impact on organisations and projects.²
- e) Evaluate key risks, including environmental and climate related risks, and their impact on organisations and projects.³
- f) Recognise the importance of monitoring internal controls and recommend new internal control systems or changes to the components of existing systems to help manage sustainability-related risks, including the role of internal audit.³

3. Decision-making and measurement

- a) Assess an organisation's commitment to sustainability when undertaking business, financial and investment decisions, and discuss and recommend how conflicts between the criteria may be resolved.³
- b) Assess the development of a sustainable business model by reviewing existing activities and operations, highlight performance gaps and recommend actions.³
- c) Analyse performance of activities across the whole value chain and recommend value adding strategies to achieve both profit and positive sustainability outcomes.²
- d) Assess the importance of embedding best practice in sustainable activities, for

example improving energy efficiency and waste management.³

- e) Evaluate different investment options using relevant investment appraisal techniques, including accounting for carbon pricing.³
- f) Assess the selection and setting of targets for factors deemed to be material to the organisation.³
- g) Apply targets, metrics and KPIs to enable continuous performance assessment and monitoring of an organisation's environmental and social impact.³
- h) Explain the principles of the Science Based Targets initiative.¹
- i) Evaluate the performance of an organisation in relation to targets, metrics and KPIs.³
- j) Apply environmental management accounting techniques and methods, for example lifecycle costing, input-output analysis and activity-based management.³
- k) Assess the impact of sustainable finance on the organisation (investment level decision).²

4. The role of technology and information systems

- a) Evaluate the need for appropriate information systems, methods and tools to capture quantitative and qualitative data to support scenario analysis, impact assessment, monitoring and sustainability reporting.³
- b) Describe the main features of internal management systems for reporting sustainability related information.²
- c) Assess developments in technology and how it can contribute to sustainable operations and reporting.²

C Sustainability reporting

1. Preparing sustainability reports

- a) Explain the following areas of the sustainability reporting cycle:
 - (i) allocating responsibility;
 - (ii) establishing the reporting landscape;
 - (iii) determining material information to be reported;
 - (iv) determining data requirements;
 - (v) collecting the data; and
 - (vi) reporting on the collected data.²

2. IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards

- a) Outline and apply the following areas of IFRS S1 General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial Information:
 - (i) objective;
 - (ii) scope;
 - (iii) conceptual foundations;
 - (iv) core content;
 - (v) general requirements; and
 - (vi) judgements, uncertainties, and errors.³
- b) In accordance with IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures, explain the meaning of the following:
 - (i) climate-related transition risks
 - (ii) climate-related physical risks
 - (iii) climate-related opportunities.²
- c) Identify and explain an entity's exposure to climate-related risks and opportunities.³
- d) Evaluate the disclosure of sustainability related risks and opportunities prepared in accordance with ISSB Standards for an organisation.³
- e) Explain issues from the measurement of Scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with IFRS S2, and the benefits and costs associated with the disclosure of this information.²

- f) Evaluate the benefits and costs for preparers of applying sustainability reporting standards, including those facing small and medium entities.³

3. Interactions between sustainability reporting frameworks

- a) Identify and explain key interactions between the IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards and European Sustainability Reporting Standards.²

4. Analysis of sustainability reports

- a) Explain the benefits and costs to investors of an organisation applying sustainability standards.²
- b) Explain the factors that make sustainability reporting useful for investors, including the qualitative characteristics of useful sustainability-related financial information.²
- c) Analyse sustainability reports, including quantitative and qualitative information, from the perspective of a current or potential investor.³
- d) Assess the impact of divergences in sustainability reporting both nationally, and internationally on investors.³
- e) Identify and explain the benefits of sustainability reporting to stakeholders other than current and potential investors.³

5. Sustainability and the financial statements

- a) Determine and explain the impact of climate change in the following issues in financial statements produced in accordance with IFRS Accounting Standards:
- (i) inventories;
 - (ii) property, plant and equipment;
 - (iii) intangible assets;
 - (iv) impairment of assets;
 - (v) provisions and contingent liabilities;

- (vi) the disclosure of judgements, estimates and uncertainties; and
- (vii) the disclosure of going concern uncertainties.²

- b) Assess the interconnectedness between the financial statements and the sustainability report.³

D Sustainability Assurance

1. Frameworks for sustainability assurance

- a) Explain the need for laws, regulations, standards and other guidance relating to sustainability assurance.²
- b) Explain the need for quality, professional and ethical frameworks in the area of sustainability assurance.²
- c) Explain the benefits and challenges of sustainability assurance.²

2. Sustainability assurance cycle

- a) Evaluate the level of assurance that the auditor may provide in reporting on sustainability information as part of:
- (i) 'other information' within the financial statements²; and
 - (ii) a separate sustainability report.³
- b) Evaluate the quality, ethical and professional matters to be considered before accepting social, environmental and sustainability assurance engagements where:
- (i) the engagement is part of the financial statements audit; and
 - (ii) the engagement is separate from the financial statements audit.³
- c) Plan an engagement to provide assurance on a report on social, environmental or governance matters, including determination of materiality.³

- d) Describe the challenges in providing assurance on economic, environmental, social and sustainability information, including those relating to:
- (i) the control system and control environment of the organisation;
 - (ii) the information supplied by management and those charged with governance (TCWG);
 - (iii) the need to rely on the work of both internal and/or external specialist experts; and
 - (iv) the need to rely on the work of internal audit.²
- e) Describe and recommend procedures to detect potential material misstatements in respect of socio-environmental and sustainability matters for the following:
- (i) disclosures, including IFRS S1 and S2; and
 - (ii) consistency of disclosures with the financial statements.³
- f) Assess the form and content of an independent verification statement of an

integrated report or sustainability information.³

3. Current issues and developments in sustainability assurance

- a) Explain current developments in sustainability assurance standards relating to:
- (i) International Standards on Sustainability Assurance, and
 - (ii) European regulations.²

8. Summary of changes to Professional Diploma in Sustainability (ProDipSust)

ACCA periodically reviews its qualification syllabuses so that they meet the needs of stakeholders such as employers, students, regulatory and advisory bodies, and learning providers.