

Sustainable Design Abacus

PURPOSE OF DESIGN: _____								
PRODUCT(S): _____								
	POSITIVE CRITERIA:							
2+								
1+								
0								
1-								
2-	NEGATIVE CRITERIA:							
CONFIDENCE IN ASSESSMENT OF CRITERIA								
High confidence								
Low confidence								

Adapted with kind permission from a design abacus by Practical Action, UK.

Using the sustainable design abacus:

The design abacus allows the user to create a graphical representation of the sustainability of a product, design or business.

Select **seven criteria** that will be used to assess sustainability. Criteria may be environmental (e.g. energy use), economic (e.g. manufacturing costs) or social (e.g. affordability), or a combination of the three. Criteria may assess all stages of the product life cycle, or focus on one aspect such as manufacture, use, transport or disposal.

For each of the criteria, decide which would constitute a positive and negative feature and record these on opposite ends of the abacus. For example, with regards to product disposal, positive criteria might be 'easy to disassemble and recycle', and a negative criteria might be 'difficult to disassemble and components cannot be recycled easily'.

On the **criteria grid** of the abacus, plot where you think the product lies with a cross on the corresponding line. Once all points have been plotted, connect them with a smooth line to show the overall picture of the sustainability of the design.

On the **confidence grid**, plot how confident you are in your assessment. This can help identify aspects of the design that may need further research.

Two or more products/designs which meet the same consumer need can be plotted in different colours for comparison (don't forget to include a key).

A sample of a completed sustainable design abacus can be found on the next page.

