

Contented Ltd – Annual Impact Report

April 2023 to March 2024

Welcome

I'm Gerard Davies, Founder and Director of Contented Ltd, trading as Contented ESG. We're proud to present our 2024 Impact Report which explores how we affect the planet, including societies human and other-than-human.



We are pleased with what we have achieved as a small business, especially the collaborations we are creating, the team of exceptional associates we are developing, and the support to wider communities we are offering. Thank-you to everyone who, in turn, has supported us.

As a milestone, this Impact Report helps us reflect on how we are living up to our aspiration to inspire transformation for a sustainable world. Although we haven't done everything we'd hoped by now, and there's certainly a lot more to do, we hope you enjoy reading about our progress to date, what we are learning along the way, and our plans for the future.

Scene-setting

As we celebrate 25 years since our foundation, the financial year 2023/4 has been an important one for Contented. We've continued to recover gradually from Brexit and the global pandemic of 2019-2021 with a refocus on our core values and capacities around sustainable development, bringing this together with the experience of our team working across six continents. It's important that our market sees that we are trying to understand and manage the wider impact *of* our operations and our services – as well as the impact *upon* those from a world of ever-increasing complexity.

Nearly two decades after our director first tried to reposition the company in this way, the business risks of environment, society and governance (ESG) issues are at last percolating across the value chains of listed companies. Driven by government procurement and investor pressure, these subjects are rapidly climbing up the boardroom agendas of mid-size enterprises already struggling to react to a barrage of short-term crises.

While universities try to fill the skills and knowledge gap, there is an urgent need for experienced practitioners who can help companies take sustainability beyond compliance, see the connections across multiple issues, and transform businesses into enterprises fit for the future. This is the space that Contented occupies.

We have built an extensive network around the world of independent sustainability veterans who truly care about people, planet and their prosperity. These people seek collaborators to help bring about rapid and meaningful change on a far bigger stage.

Combining our values-led training, coaching, consultancy and creative expertise, we can help clients build capacity to change and to generate thought-leadership among their stakeholders. Our purpose: to inspire transformation on a global scale.

The make-up of our responsibility score

Although our director is an accredited auditor, this is NOT an externally audited evaluation.



These scores were generated through the self-assessment of the Organisation for Responsible Business, which analyses 79 operational areas according to the subjective auditing principle of ASTI, Appropriate for the Size, Type and Impact of the business. An overall score of 65% is required to attain the Responsible Business Standard, with a minimum of 45% in each category. Businesses are awarded Exemplar certification with 85% overall score and a minimum of 65% in each category. We plan to submit our results for external evaluation later in 2024.

Evolving Impact Reporting

Initially arising out of the early digital revolution of the 1990s, Contented has worked at the intersection of businesses and communities since 2005. For example, we supported clusters of schools across England to develop durable partnerships with employers, with teenagers making films in response to climate change. In 2009, one of our associate staff published an early handbook on carbon emissions, markets and the consumer.

We first reported on sustainability in our company accounts in 2010, after our director was appointed as an auditor for the Responsible Business Standard and qualified as a SFEDI-approved business and social enterprise coach. Contented began monitoring our carbon footprint in 2017, with support from Aston University's Low Carbon unit, and we produced a detailed community impact analysis and Carbon Reduction Plan in 2022/3. The current report builds on this plan by taking into account wider environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations.

This year, we decided the time was right to certify Contented to the Responsible Business Standard and we appointed a full-time quality coordinator to oversee this. She helped review our existing Sustainability Management Systems, including our policies, and brought everything under our Quality Management System for certification to ISO9001 for the 13th year. Unfortunately, due to illness, this project overran and we plan to complete our submission in the coming financial year.

This impact report is based on her internally-audited data, largely qualitative. An important area for development is to set, monitor and record key performance indicators across the six areas:

- *Workplace*: labour and human rights; health and safety; working conditions; careers; diversity.
- *Environment*: energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions; waste management, biodiversity.
- *Ethics, values and transparency*: behaviours; responsible information management.
- *Marketplace*: law; insurances; customer service; supplier relationships; corruption; testing.
- *Community*: awareness; director leadership; staff engagement; local recruitment; employability.
- *Business processes and continuity*: document control, data / IP protection; finances; reporting.

Environment

Our environmental policies cover energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions (currently, we only calculate carbon) and waste management. We continue to pledge our commitment to local and national carbon reduction targets.



Carbon Data

Contented carbon data for the year: 01/04/2023 – 31/03/2024 is 4.541 tonnes per year.

We have added an approximation of carbon emissions in relation to five of our associate staff. We are calculating as contributing two full days per month (as an average), during this year.

This is calculated for Scopes 1, 2 and 3 as follows:

Scope	Calculation	Methodology	Total (CO ₂ tonnes/per year)	Previous year
1 – energy produced	-	N/A	0	0
2 – energy consumed	0.855	4 staff x 1/3 home energy bills	0.855	0.855
	0.66	5 associates x 2/25 home energy bills*	1.32	0
3 – everything else	1.38 0.807 XXX 0.0092 0.17	Business travel – car mileage Business travel – rail/bus mileage Business travel – air return Prague IT and website Purchased goods/services	2.366	
Total			4.541	

* Taking mean UK household emissions: <https://energyguide.org.uk/average-carbon-footprint-uk/>

This is a relatively low emissions due to the home working nature of our business and our ability to undertake most client work online and via cloud computing. We actively minimise our business travel and where possible, use public transport options. We recognise that better data collection would improve the quality of our calculations.

Carbon intensity

With our plans for growth, we realise that our emissions of Greenhouse Gases are likely to rise along with our activities. For this reason, we are publishing our carbon intensity calculated as grammes of CO₂ per £1 generated. Taking the figure published in these accounts (£xx,xxx):

Carbon intensity for April 2023/4 = xxx gCO₂/£

(Compare with figure for April 2022/3 xxx gCO₂/£)

Improving energy efficiency

We have switched all our lighting to low-energy bulbs and our electricity to a supplier of renewables. Walls and roof are insulated.

Waste management

Contented commits to implementing a structured waste management plan: we promote recycling internally and externally both conversationally and through emails; we separate recyclable materials for roadside collection and transport electrical goods to council sites; we buy refurbished devices where appropriate and extend the life through commercial repair schemes. On rare occasions that documents are printed, we minimise ink and paper such as by printing in draft, both-sides, and using less intensive fonts.

Environmental conservation / biodiversity

Contented has contributed indirectly to several external environmental conservation activities, as also described under Community, below:

- Referrals to ecologists to support clients thinking about developing biodiversity projects.
- Volunteering for Ramble Worldwide to lead groups of holiday walkers in nature. As well as two weeks training and assessment, our director co-led a fortnight of mindfulness in the English Lakes District and around East Anglia. These contributed to raising £10,000 from the holiday company for projects such as Fixing the Fells and Duke of Edinburgh for children living in poverty.
- Volunteering as an eco-therapist for Begat Counselling agency and Shropshire Supports Refugees. As well as supporting business development, our director delivered 15 hours in urban parks and nature reserves, helping clients use nature to support their physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Co-organising activities and the annual retreat of Ecopsychologists UK.
- Volunteering as an Expedition Volunteer with leaders of Arthog Outdoor Education in Telford to facilitate psycho-social adventure activities for children and families in woodlands, underground caves and on the river. He also facilitated after-session reflections with leaders and a half day deep ecology training workshop for them.

What's not gone so well

While we continue to favour public transport, continual industrial action of rail workers forced us to drive 11 out of 12 monthly journeys from the West Midlands to the South West. In these cases, we used lower emission diesel fuel and selected eco-optimised routes.

One short-haul flight was taken to mainland Europe for a funeral. With more notice, we might have chosen the train. It was our first flight since 2019, including the pandemic when air travel was restricted. After some discussion, we agreed this was personal travel and would be excluded.

Emissions Reduction Plan

Contented will commit to the following steps to further reduce our carbon emissions and widen the understanding of our impact:

Action (from 2022/3)	Progress	Updated Action
Continue to update our carbon calculations as we improve data collection and information. This will include data on all our associates. We recognise that this will likely increase our carbon footprint for the following year, but it is important to have a clear impact picture of activities.	Ongoing	Improve data collection – consider options for standard calculations vs survey/self-reporting.
Consider options for zero-carbon and low-carbon cloud hosting.	Not started	Limited by team capacity - costings to be researched by April 2025 or in line with hosting renewal.
Encourage the use of green energy suppliers for our home-working team and Associate Network. Monitor the switch to renewable energy by energy suppliers.	Not started	Limited by team capacity – design survey for staff and associates to improve data collection by April 2025.
Implement recommendations of website audit, including hiding non-essential pages from search engines and bots and minimising image sizes.	Complete	Review as necessary when website updates implemented.
Consider opportunities for increasing group conference calls (ie. those with a lower carbon footprint when compared to 1:1 calls). Consider other options for 1:1 calls where possible, eg. WhatsApp – explore carbon footprint of these communication methods.	Ongoing	Team and associate meetings as groups scheduled regularly. Improved used of Teams and WhatsApp has reduced overall individual use.
Develop Carbon Management Strategy to ensure growth of company activities does not increase our carbon footprint.	Not started	Superseded by QMS review as we work towards RBS. Revisit in June 2025 once growth projections established.
Formalise our Travel Policy, applicable to core team and associates during client contracts.	Underway	End 2024
Support Associate Network to commit to net-zero emissions for their own work, including work directly for Contented and separately from us.	Not started	Considered a stretch ambition given current business capacity limitation.
Monitor energy efficiency of home offices through updated building surveys.	New objective	-
Secure shared office certificate and join sustainability committee.	New objective	-

Marketplace

Our core market are mid-size companies who wish to join the supply chain of so-called ‘green’ infrastructure projects around the world. Our core suppliers are coaches, technicians and creative practitioners who wish to collaborate to facilitate this. Focusing on compliance and leadership, we relate with customers and suppliers through:

Attending market events and monitoring our supply chain. Our associates are observed in action through their participation in our community of practice (see above); for other suppliers, we request



copies of their responsibility policies. For example, before renewing our insurance, we invited our existing supplier to send information on its sustainability credentials. We then trawled the web for news, discovering controversy about plans to pull out of fossil fuels. We identified league tables and consulted trusted sources including the Carbon Disclosure Project and Organisation for Responsible Business.

Complaints procedures. We register, monitor and resolve complaints from suppliers, distributors, customers and other business partners as quickly and efficiently as possible. None were received this year.

Feedback consultations. As well as checking satisfaction verbally throughout our contracts, we sent out surveys to customers at the end of each. The results of this fed into the regular meetings of our quality team and actions were added to our Quality Improvement Plan. We have continually assessed the impact of our coaching sessions through surveys and invitations to ongoing conversations. All rated the impact as ‘high’. We are committed to increasing and recording post-contract surveys of clients, alumni, and staff.

Payments policies. We are working with our finance coordinator to ensure that all due invoices are anticipated three months ahead, paying within agreed terms, usually two weeks, and alerting suppliers at the earliest sign of difficulty.

Our Quality Management System. This was certified again to ISO9001:2015 with clear processes in place to ensure efficient day to day operations, that services are fit for purpose, and that we optimise our customer service. This year our new full-time quality coordinator has updated procedures and templates for starting and ending projects, and she has extended our systems to internal projects. We have increased our annual internal quality audits to two.

This year we successfully joined the ESPO procurement framework in partnership with a former client, Saanchi Solutions (see partnerships below).



Chamber of Commerce. Our director was elected for the second year onto the committee of the Transatlantic Chamber of Commerce in Greater Birmingham. This offers a platform for promoting awareness of, and challenging, sustainability issues in international trade.



Community

As we prepare the foundations for business growth, our director continues to offer Contented his model of professional development through community engagement. His philosophy is that this makes volunteering more durable and less likely to drop off due to competing priorities.

He framed his approach through an action research enquiry, sparked by a discussion with one of our associates in 2020 about what it might mean to care for the planet. This resulted in a conversation with NHS practitioners and a place on the think-tank of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council exploring different cultural responses to climate change. He went on to explore good practice of the helping professions – such as therapists and coaches – and qualified as a coaching supervisor with a placement delivering 15 hours for Médecins sans Frontières, supporting coaches working on the front line of humanitarian aid in Syria and Latin America. As a former foreign correspondent, this resonated strongly with him. He then noticed that young people on placement with the company from universities and job centres were themselves children of refugees from Afghanistan and Eritrea and he proposed that we identify as our community the refugees of climate change – who are often also victims of famine and war.



Since then, he has sought out opportunities to supervise, coach and counsel refugees. This is a very challenging group to support: with the exception of the Chinese and Ukrainian groups, most speak little or no English so there is an additional cost in translators, as well as less effective communications. Secondly, refugees are difficult to access because they are hidden away by society for their own protection, which means communications are frequently via individual representatives of the group. Thirdly, many are more focused on their more immediate need for somewhere to live rather than their higher needs for emotional wellbeing and self-actualisation, and many refugees come from cultures where it is shameful to share emotions. Furthermore, many refugees suffered torture and watching loved ones die, perhaps violently. This deep trauma needs a high level of psychotherapeutic skill to support. More frequently, they only need a lift to a medical appointment.

We now say that we consider our community to be the people where we work and who are impacted by our operations, as well as those around the world affected by climate change and social injustice. Contented is involved through:

Sourcing and employing locally. We not only feel a sense of responsibility to the geographic communities around our operations but it makes sense, to reduce travel time. Our nearest city, Birmingham, is one of the most diverse in Europe and allows us to employ children of refugees from the climate emergency and its effects, including famine and war.

Volunteering. Our director sets an example and we encourage all staff, including employees, associates and volunteers to play an active role in their own communities. All employees are offered a day off for activism around a cause they personally support. We focus on supporting climate refugees and other people distressed through the climate emergency. We plan to survey all our subcontractors on their efforts and impact and will publish this work in future impact reports.

Adventure therapy

After months of intense training and assessment, supported by the business, this year the director was certified fit-to-practice to lead and counsel groups outdoors. Since April 2023, he has delivered more than 12 hours training and practice supervision with leaders, 40 hours 1:1 with clients, and 60 hours with groups. He worked through a local counselling agency and developed partnerships with an outdoors learning provider and a refugee charity. The Contented team also helped write proposals for some £50,000 to support refugees through our sister organisation Contented the Charity, established in 2017 to fill the gaps in our community work. Both bids were unsuccessful but the quest goes on. Here are some photos illustrating the journey so far.



Using nature to explore relationships. Walking landscapes, working below.



Two-days training to improvise outdoor first aid: rescue can be many hours' away.

Seeking waterproof sustainability.



Supervising outdoor leaders. "There's no such thing as bad weather; only bad clothes."



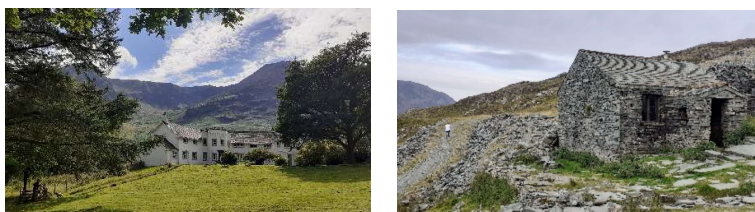
Important skills include navigating the impact of nature and reinforcing conservation messages.



Ecopsychology training develops non-verbal ways of knowing and the capacity to relate through all senses.



Six days' assessment with Mountain Rescue under an amber weather warning.



5-star guests funded the repair of a thank-the-stars mountain refuge.

Back home. Performing with the RAF Voluntary Band for a VIP dinner to mark D-Day 80th anniversary.



Partnerships with local organisations



Where appropriate, we actively seek to develop partnerships with other organisations within our localities, to address issues of concern such as the environment, social disadvantage, crime and disorder, and those working with refugees. For example, Contented has had a partnership with DWP Birmingham since 2012.

Contented has a safeguarding policy and is registered with Due Diligence Ltd for checking criminal records and right to work. The director is a lead signatory and has attended extensive training on safeguarding for vulnerable adults and children.



Over the years we have developed partnerships with most universities, local to our director, which offer sustainability courses or modules. He is an industrial fellow of Aston and we have also welcomed approaches for placements this year from Warwick and Birmingham.

This year we successfully joined the ESPO procurement framework in partnership with a former client, Saanchi Solutions, specialising in a full range of decarbonisation services. In this ‘off-the-shelf’ offer, we have committed to spend on creating additional social value, at least 1% of revenues earned through this channel and to report these through the Social Value Portal using the national Themes, Objectives and Measures (TOMs) framework.



Case study

We try to track long-term progress of people we support. In 2018, Birmingham’s job centre rang Contented directly, seeking a placement for a former TV news editor from east Africa who had been tipped off that he had just hours to leave the country before arrest and possible torture. The employment officer said that Contented was the only partner offering support for unemployed graduates. On arrival, our new colleague spoke little English but we encouraged him to join our drop-in sessions online and at our shared office, loaned him a laptop and gave him simple tasks, mentoring and job references from the director. Fast forward five years and he has just earned a masters degree, with distinction.

Business processes and continuity

Contented is pleased to have retained its ISO9001 quality standard for the 13th year. Internal audits are carried out twice a year. Our Quality Management System (QMS) ensures, for example, that all documents used in the business are legible, identifiable, current, and retrievable, with an issue status.



Our director serves as Quality Manager and this year we recruited a new quality coordinator who shadowed the entire internal audit and supported the external audit. She has undertaken an internal audit of our sustainability management system, using the framework of the Responsible Business Standard, and brought these systems under the QMS. She set up a Quality Team which met fortnightly to review progress against a master improvement plan. She reorganised the Sharepoint into business, finance, staff and project root folders, assigning codes to each external and internal project, recording them in a project registry. This allows us to more easily retrieve documents through searches or by navigating directly to the appropriate folder.

This year, the company developed its first continuity plan, which is also developed and reviewed under the QMS, ensuring that we have in place adequate data back-up and retrieval processes, and that it is tested annually, with copies held separately and securely.

As a very small team, we have tended to share out responsibilities according to immediate and longer-term priorities. As we prepare to grow next year, we will need to ensure that each staff member has a contract identifying core roles and responsibilities, and that we have a company organigram setting these out for other members of our team. It is our intention to invest in a full-time quality manager to oversee all our systems, certificates and accreditations.

Protecting data and intellectual property (IP). We protect our IP through the international symbols © and ™ on all documents that are shared, in PDF. Each new member of the team requires training in our business processes, including our obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation, and this is included in induction plans.



Financial reporting. We believe financial sustainability is critical to our longevity and this is supported by a coordinator now able to liaise independently with our accountant on VAT reporting. We are reviewing processes for regular reporting on cashflow and other financial issues. We are registered with the pensions regulator and our workplace pension scheme is with the National Employment Savings Trust.



Ethics, values and transparency

Codes of Ethics and Conduct. Our Code of Ethics states that *Contented strives to be an ethical organisation that lives, and is accountable to, the values it espouses.* This document sets out company values, including Care, Responsibility, Freedom and Fairness, and key behaviours (based on the five dimensions of Inner Development Goals and the Institute of Leadership). These are expected of all our staff and the codes are published on our website (About Us page) and included on our intranet (Sharepoint) and in our staff handbook and General Staff Agreement.

By embedding these behaviours into our daily work, we aspire to create an environment where both individuals and the organisation can flourish, driving positive change for everyone around us.

Promoting responsible business and sharing business development. We frequently attend fora such as the Chamber of Commerce’s Good Business Forum and have offered pro bono Masterclasses on responsibility, sustainability and ESG. We promote collaboration within our community of practice and with external partners, sharing the risks and rewards of business development.

Responsible information management. This year we hired a full-time project coordinator to help develop our Quality Management System, which included a substantial review of our controlled documents and our secure Microsoft Sharepoint intranet containing all our company files and backed up to OneDrive. These systems remain certified to ISO9001:2015.

Our company is registered with our accountant in Greater London and our operations are run from our shared office in Birmingham. These locations are identified clearly on our company website.

Future Ambitions

In addition to implementing our carbon reduction plan (see Environment, above) we have identified key actions for this year across Workplace; Community; Marketplace; Business processes and continuity; Ethics, values and transparency.

Ambition	Target date
Submit this impact report to external RBS audit.	November 2024
Review all policies, devise and record objectives and Key Performance Indicators.	November 2024
Complete inductions with all staff (paid employees and associates, and volunteers.)	January 2025
Extend individual development plans to all staff and improve induction process with links to videos that focus attention of staff on how they can modify their own behaviours.	January 2025
Certify Sustainability Management System under ISO9001 scope for external audit.	February 2025
Map impacts to national TOMs	March 2025

Report agreed by: Gerard Davies, CEO, Contented Ltd
30 April 2024