



The SDG Accord

The University and College Sector's Collective Response to the Global Goals

Integration of SDGs in

- Institutional governance/strategic level
- SDGs in research
- SDGs in campus operations
- SDGs in curriculum development
- SDGs in student engagement activities
- SDGs into community activities
- SDGs at a whole-institution level

Focus on

- Goal 1 - No poverty
- Goal 2 - Zero hunger
- Goal 3 - Good health and wellbeing
- Goal 4 - Quality education**
- Goal 5 - Gender equality
- Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation
- Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 8 - Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Goal 10 - Reduced inequalities
- Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities
- Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production
- Goal 13 - Climate action
- Goal 14 - Life below water
- Goal 15 - Life on land
- Goal 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals

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Describe briefly how the theme selected was implemented within your institution.

Grand Challenges has been running since 2012 with undergraduates focussing on some of the most challenging problems faced by humanity. The week-long programme normally takes about 500 students who select which global issue they want to address, with the wide range of topics mapped to the UN SDGs (e.g. social inequality, climate and environment emergency, future food, and planetary health). **Challenges Online** is an innovation of the programme, developed in response to the Covid-19 global lockdown. It exceeded the energy and outputs of **Grand Challenges**, broadening its reach and positively reducing its environmental impact. We had 337 undergraduates participating from 10 time zones in 2021-22. **Challenges Online** enabled undergraduates to work on wicked 21st Century problems in small interdisciplinary groups exposing students to different ways of thinking and working. Innovation has enabled us to engage with a more diverse range of students, academics and externals, working more flexibly without the usual constraints of time and geography. There was a 94% student satisfaction rate and 89% said they would recommend the programme to a friend. The outputs student create take many forms, ranging from the creation of apps, social media campaigns, videos, blogs, books and games. The true impact may not be felt for years. Students commented on how their behaviour will change as a result of increased sustainability awareness and how they'll take this learning with them into whichever sector they end up working in. Our student-centred approach focussing on global issues is scalable and applicable to different contexts and relevant anywhere in the world. We have created a safe environment for playful experimentation. Students take risks and learn from co-creation. They are motivated to make a difference and apply their knowledge, passion and creativity.

Quote: *"We are future scientists, researchers, politicians, engineers, writers, CEOs and our opinions on these topics will largely influence the future world"* [student].

Outline the benefits of integrating this theme.

- 1.** Global reach combined with CO2 reduction. Online delivery allowed us to have students from different campuses and other universities working together. Participants located in 10 different time zones co-created high quality outputs, resulting in 20 tonnes of carbon saved compared with face to face delivery.
- 2.** Development of digital skills and competencies. Students had an excellent opportunity to develop digital skills while creating innovative solutions to their selected Challenges.
- 3.** Employability-related skills development. By working in interdisciplinary groups to tackle complex problems, students had an opportunity to engage in creative problem solving, organising their own work, setting up their group goals and taking responsibility for delivering outputs within the set deadlines. As a result, they developed a wide range of generic collaboration, communication and presentation skills, which improve their employability.

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Outline the barriers (*if any*) encountered in integrating this theme and how you overcame these.

- 1.** How to create and sustain online engagement. The online model opened up new and exciting opportunities: students, guest speakers and other contributors could join the programme from their homes. We extended our training programme: online facilitation skills for the delivery team, online collaboration skills for our students and MS Teams training for all participants.
- 2.** Online co-creation of group outputs. We built the architecture for the programme in MS Teams to allow for direct interaction, synchronous and asynchronous working, and online space for each group to share their material, store resources and co-create outputs.
- 3.** How to deliver the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) online. The aspiration of Challenges Online was to achieve enhanced employability and learning benefits to students without compromising on quality of outputs and experience. Rather than looking for ways to transfer the existing model online, the team looked at how remote delivery could achieve the same objectives by identifying new opportunities and overcoming barriers to online working. For example, remote working allowed for more students based on different campuses to work together and increased diversity by admitting participants from other universities across the globe.

Please outline your conclusions and recommendations to others

- Working entirely online has enabled us to be more creative, have wider reach and actually be more sustainable than we could be via face to face delivery – getting this balance right so as not to detract from the energy and vibe of face to face delivery in the future is of paramount importance.
- Our students are passionate about making a difference, and can see that they have the potential to make a huge impact on the world as they progress through their careers – they are hungry for knowledge and understanding and want to have the tools to be that difference.
- Students come back year after year to participate in Challenges, progressing from Undergraduate, to postgraduate facilitator to academic lead in some cases. This demonstrates how deeply embedded this programme is at our Institution and the passion with which it is held.
- Students are empowered by the way they steer their learning. They feel more equal with the academics and their voice is strong, giving them power and motivation.

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Challenges Online was a Finalist in the Green Gown Awards 2021 in the 'Tomorrow's Employees Category



Challenges Online was shortlisted for the QS Reimagine Education Award in the Sustainability Category