SDG Accord Case Study

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

Summary:

To embed climate action at the University of Essex we have developed the Sustainable Essex Awards, a staff scheme that supports teams to incorporate sustainable thinking into their work and to develop their own ideas and action plans that are bespoke to their departments.

Once signed up to the scheme, each department works through actions within bronze, silver and gold categories, typically one year at a time. It is designed to build understanding of sustainability through the categories, starting with the basics for bronze, with silver focusing on the development of an action plan, and gold is about demonstrating delivery. We provide teams with resources and training to support their work, and encourage them to identify ways that their operations can include sustainability, without it feeling like an add-on. We then host an awards ceremony in the summer to recognise teams' efforts. By focusing activities on departments' own work, it ensures that their projects fit with what they do and allows them to embed sustainability in a way that feels relatable. Each department is different and teams know their work better than anyone else, and we don't want to dictate what projects they should be doing.

Over the four years Sustainable Essex has been running, it has led to a range of projects being undertaken. Academic departments have developed their own impact reports and action plans, with the Edge Hotel School mapping their objectives against the SDGs, particularly in relation to Quality Education and Responsible Consumption and Production. This year our in-house Soft Facilities Management worked with the Maintenance team to identify alternatives for paper hand towels that caused blockages if flushed down toilets – this resulted in fewer problems and led to cost savings too.

Outline the 3 key benefits of integrating this theme:

1. Expanding the reach of sustainability action beyond the sustainability team.

2. Helping to increase knowledge among staff and empowering them to embed change

3. Supports integration of sustainable action to make it part of business as usual

Outline the barriers or challenges encountered in integrating this theme and how you overcame these:

1. When the scheme started it only used checklists at each level, which meant over time it was hard for teams to progress when they had reached gold and fulfilled all the criteria. By changing it so that teams developed their own plans it meant they had more freedom to expand their ideas and think outside the box. This led to improved engagement as people didn't just see it as a 'tick box' exercise.

2. We have refined the scheme over the years to provide online resources and guidance that simplifies the process for teams. We have provided templates etc. that creates a clear brand and means people don't have to start their plans from scratch.

Please outline your conclusions and recommendations to others (Max 200 words):

We have found it really beneficial to tailor our engagement programmes to our community; more generic schemes can work, but by making Sustainable Essex about the difference that our teams can make in their own work has made it far more successful. Our next priority is to promote each teams' successes as case studies to showcase the work that is going on at Essex that might often be hidden, but happens beyond the Sustainability team. It's important to recognise and celebrate these projects, as it helps to generate momentum to do more, and for other teams to participate. We recommend starting small and building up a scheme like this, finding key allies in departments who are keen to take sustainability projects forward – this helps to build a movement that becomes stronger and more visible.