

SDG Accord Reporting 2021 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

SDG Accord Reporting 2021 CASE STUDY

Grand Challenges

Grand Challenges has been running since 2012 with undergraduates focussing on some of the most challenging problems faced by humanity. The week-long programme has students select which global issue they want to address, with the wide range of topics mapped to SDGs. 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 reducing its environmental impact. We had 362 undergraduates from 41 nations across 16 time zones in 2019-20. 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 92% said they would recommend the programme to a friend.

The outputs student creates take many forms, ranging from the creation of apps and books to developing new technologies for reducing food waste in SubSaharan Africa. 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].

BENEFITS

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 16 different time zones co-created high quality outputs, resulting in 20 tonnes of carbon saved.
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.

SDG Accord Reporting 2021 CASE STUDY

BARRIERS

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.



Students participating in Challenges Online



Student rep good luck message for final presentations.

SDG Accord Reporting 2021 CASE STUDY

CONCLUSIONS

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.

It is clear that our students are passionate about making a difference, and we 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 make a 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.

Find out more about Challenges Online:

<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/careers/employabilityschemes/challengesonline/>