



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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

SDG Accord Reporting 2021 CASE STUDY

The Leeds Sustainable Curriculum

The University of Leeds is committed to being a world-leading institution for learning and teaching when it comes to sustainability and climate change – one that provides students with the knowledge, skills and attributes to contribute solutions to global challenges in an equitable and just way. Our programmes are co-designed with our students and provide them with an exciting range of learning opportunities, all informed by world-leading research, including the work of the Priestly International Centre for Climate.

Our commitment to developing sustainable global solutions, in partnership with our students, is a core element of the University's new ten year strategy ([Universal Values, Global Change](#)) and is being realised through our well-established Sustainable Curriculum Working Group. The group's key aim is to embed sustainability within all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and it includes representatives from the University's faculties and services, as well as students. Reflecting our wider approach to the curriculum, the group takes a co-creative and inclusive approach. The Leeds Sustainable Curriculum won the 2019 International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) 'Whole Systems Approach' Award.

Building on baseline mapping of our curriculum, we have developed a three-tiered approach:

1. A foundation layer provides baseline material and co-curricular opportunities for all students, alongside training and tools for staff;
2. A second tier facilitates student-led learning through, for example, final year team-based capstone projects and the Leeds Living Lab – a University facility for students that allows them to develop and test sustainable solutions;
3. A final layer of specialist programmes and modules, including University-wide Creating Sustainable Futures electives – for example, Creating Alternative Futures (Year 3) – as well as core programmes such as the BSc and MSc Sustainability & Business.

All students are given the opportunity to present at the annual city-wide Student Sustainability Conference, the reach of which expands year on year.

This year we have piloted fully embedding this approach within Leeds University Business School, where staff completed SDG baselining, developed new content and trialled different delivery options. Using existing teaching networks, the lessons from this are now being shared across the institution.

BENEFITS

1. It ensures that all Leeds students, irrespective of their discipline, can co-create their curriculum and study, research and participate in sustainability as part of their degree. In short, our students are provided with the knowledge, skills and attributes required to succeed and make a positive impact in the world. This includes but is not limited to increased employability and entrepreneurship.
2. We have found that long-lasting change occurs when sustainability is part of core curriculum design and decision making. This is reflected in our Curriculum Redefine project, which has sustainability as a fundamental element. In addition, our integrative approach across the full Leeds Curriculum allows sustainability and the SDGs to act as a vehicle for other key education priorities such as active and inclusive teaching, student success, widening participation and fostering an engaged and lifelong community.
3. Increased opportunities for interdisciplinary, student-centred active learning through the Leeds Living Labs programme have enabled students to develop and trial sustainability solutions using the University as a test bed. These projects have not only increased students' sustainability knowledge and skills, but also led to an increased sense of belonging, and the development of new collaborative relationships – both within and across the student and staff bodies.

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BARRIERS

1. A programme of this scale requires input and action from a wide and diverse group of people across the institution. Bringing together a representative group of people with the influence to drive change has been fundamental, along with ensuring the objectives and actions are integrated with the University strategy, so that it is core to what we are all striving towards, not merely a bolt-on exercise.
2. Knowledge of sustainability is varied among the staff who are required to make changes and adapt their teaching content and methods. To improve this situation we have collated good practice, external and internal guidance, and begun to develop training to ensure a sound understanding of the SDGs and why they are relevant and important to all disciplines. This includes more sustainable teaching methods, such as virtual field courses. Through pilot projects at faculty and school level, we are also exploring ways to ensure staff have sufficient time to dedicate to this, and are supported and encouragement by senior leadership teams.
3. Understanding the full baseline of sustainability in our curriculum has been challenging. The difficulty arises when sustainability is not a headline identifier in module descriptions and fuller understanding of the detail of the teaching is needed. To try and overcome this, we developed a simple tool using keyword searches of programmes and/or module titles and descriptions. This provided limited success, as descriptions are often poor, keywords do not feature and the investigator's lack of topic-specific knowledge can mean things are missed. We have sought to overcome this by making the tool available for teaching staff to use themselves in their own programmes/modules. It is more question-based and reflective, allowing them to make their own assessment of how the SDGs are (or could be) integrated. We are developing a more collaborative, team-based approach with specialist staff working in partnership with academic teaching staff.



PhD research student, Ruaa Hariri, being awarded 'Most Original Concept' by Dr Louise Ellis at the 2019 Student Sustainability Research Conference. The Research conference is an annual event allowing students at all levels and across all disciplines to showcase their sustainability-themed research, projects, performances and installations.

CONCLUSIONS

Integrating sustainability into the curriculum is challenging, but the SDGs provide a valuable context and framework in which to do so. HE institutions are complex, with a variety of processes, approaches and policies to consider. We have found that a co-creative and inclusive approach, alongside a firm University strategy commitment, is vital to secure understanding, engagement and commitment.

The activities required can be resource-intensive at times, needing at least a basic understanding of sustainability and the SDGs. So it is important to factor in training and development for staff, as well as providing the time and resources they need to enact the required changes. Students should be supported with training to be active participants in the development of the programme, to ensure their voices are incorporated and their expectations met. While an institution-wide approach gives clarity of expectations, more localised action drives progress and helps to build a library of good practice and content.

Ultimately the integration of sustainability into the curriculum, grounded in finding solutions to the SDGs is vital to meet student expectations, and to provide graduates with the knowledge and skills they need to make a positive impact in the world.