



Current reporting of activities supporting the UN SDGs within Scottish Higher and Further Education

Extent, quality and opportunities for development

January 2023

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	
Development of the UN SDGs	4
Scotland and the UN SDGs	
The Further and Higher Education Sector and the UN SDGs	6
FHE FRAMEWORKS FOR REPORTING ACTIVITIES TOWARDS THE UN SD	GS
	7
The SDG Accord	
Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings	9
Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)	
Internal Reporting	
EXTENT AND QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING	. 14
Opportunities for strengthening SDG reporting	14
Challenges for strengthening SDG reporting	
NEXT STEPS	. 18
APPENDIX 1 – MAPPING THE NATIONAL PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK	
AGAINST THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS	. 19
APPENDIX 2 - INSTITUTIONAL REPORTING TABLE	
AFFENDIA 2 - INSTITUTIONAL REFORTING TABLE	. 41

Abbreviations

- FHE Further and Higher Education
- NPF National Performance Framework
- PRME Principles for Responsible Management Education
- SDGs Sustainable Development Goals
- THE Times Higher Education
- UN United Nations

Executive Summary

This report presents an overview of the ways in which Scottish Further and Higher Education (FHE) institutions are reporting their activities against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The information presented was collected through desk-based research and an EAUC-Scotland survey sent to Education for Sustainable Development TSN contacts.

Appendix 1 maps the extent to which Scottish institutions report against the SDGs in 2020 and 2022, with additional comments provided based on survey responses.

EAUC-Scotland's research highlights:

- There are three external reporting frameworks currently utilised by Scottish FHE institutions: The SDG Accord; THE Impact Rankings; and, Principles for Responsible Management Education
- 77% of Scottish universities use one or more of the external reporting frameworks
- 30% of Scottish colleges use The SDG Accord as an external reporting framework (no other external frameworks are used)
- For institutions reporting internally, the average self-score for intensive / extensiveness of internal reporting (proxy for quality) was 2.13 out of 5
- **Reported opportunities for starting / expanding reporting** include through linking reporting into existing activities; external encouraging of reporting; creating shared resources between institutions.
- **Reported barriers for starting / expanding reporting** include lack of staff capacity; need further knowledge / skills for mapping and reporting; and lack of engagement from departments.

Introduction

Development of the UN SDGs

<u>The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</u>, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; Figure 1), which address the interrelated global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.

International agreement on the SDGs originated during the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 as a new global framework to re-direct humanity towards a sustainable pathway, building on the actions and momentum gained through the Millennium Development Goals. There followed a three-year process involving UN Member States, 83 national surveys which engaged over 7 million people, and thousands of actors from the international community, making it the largest consultation exercise in UN history. The goals have thus been heavily negotiated, and have a broad legitimacy among all parties.

The emphasis on different goals are likely to vary across nations depending on national priorities and statutory requirements. Climate change (SDGs 7 and 13) is likely to remain a significant focus given the international and national agreements and legislation in place to support climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies



Figure 1. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Scotland and the UN SDGs

The First Minister endorsed the UN SDGs in 2015 saying "*The UN Global Goals offer a vision* of the world that I believe people in Scotland share. The national and international dimensions to poverty and inequality are interlinked. Scotland cannot act with credibility overseas, if we are blind to inequality here at home. And our ambitions for a fairer Scotland are undermined, without global action to tackle poverty, promote prosperity and to tackle climate change ¹."

The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework (NPF; Figure 2) is the mechanism through which the UN SDGs have been localised to Scotland and are implemented (see Appendix 1 for mapping of the NPF against the SDGs). To support implementation and reporting of progress against the NPF and SDGs, the SDG Network Scotland – an open coalition of over 300 organisations and people across Scotland - was established.

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a core part of the SDG process, which asks UN Member States to review and report on their progress towards the Goals. The Scottish



Figure 2. National Performance Framework

Government, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the SDG Network Scotland have worked together to contribute to the UK Government's VNR. A more detailed account of Scotland's performance, challenges and next steps in relation to the SDGs is published in a <u>Scottish Supplementary Review</u> (latest published July 2020).

The Further and Higher Education Sector and the UN SDGs

The guide <u>Getting Started with the SDGs in Universities</u> provides insight into how the FHE Sector and the SDGs interact, particularly how they benefit one another and how they exist in tandem.

The guidance highlights that institutions can benefit from the SDGs as:

- The SDGs offer institutions an effective, integrated and uniform way to map and communicate their impact on society and the world;
- Through the SDGs, institutions can develop cross-sectoral partnerships, as the SDGs can act as a common goal and shared interest for public and private organisations. Partnerships are helpful in developing innovative, effective and long-lasting initiatives;
- Through the SGDs, institutions can access new funding streams that are framed around the goals;
- The SDGs contribute to demand for education that the FHE sector provides. As governments and companies rely increasingly on the SDG framework, individuals seek out education that allows them to understand and reflect on these paradigms. Also, the SDGs can instil in individuals the desire to learn more about sustainability, their society and the world;
- The SDGs act as a uniform and globally-accepted framework for a responsible institution. This provides some structure and insight into how an institution can contribute to society and a better future.

In addition, the SDGs benefit from institutions and the FHE sector as:

- Institutions educate future leaders, decision-makers, teachers etc. with skills and expertise to effectively implement the goals;
- Through research and teaching, institutions develop new knowledge and understanding to address the challenges of implementing the SDGs;
- Institutions can advance the principles of the SDGs through their local and global influence and large economic, social and environmental footprints;
- Institutions can lead cross-sectoral, local and national responses to the SDGs due to their role in society and responsibilities.

FHE frameworks for reporting activities towards the UN SDGs

The SDG Accord

Note: The SGD Accord is available for both FE and HE institutions.

<u>The SDG Accord</u> is a high-profile international initiative that the Global Alliance developed to allow the tertiary education sector to demonstrate its commitment in



meeting the SDGs, and sharing best practice. This is a partnership initiative, endorsed by the UN's HESI and other global partners. It was launched in 2017 and in December 2022 has officially been signed by 307 institutions, 59 student unions, 229 support organisations, and 1811 individuals across the globe.

The SDG Accord provides a platform to come together in a movement, to inspire, celebrate and advance the critical role that education has in delivering the SDGs, and presents this in a coherent Annual Report, latest in <u>July 2022</u>, for use by the UN, governments, business and wider society.

Signatories of the SDG Accord commit to embedding the SDGs into their education, research, leadership, operations, administration and engagement activities. The SDG Accord is a public declaration of an institution's commitment to sharing and reporting on their progress towards the SDGs – giving rich insight into the actions undertaken by higher and further education and their outcomes in our communities and the world at large. The 2022 SDG Accord report states that "embedding the SDGs within a range of institutional activities remains a priority to signatories", based on 75% of signatories reporting on the SDGs, compared to 70% in 2021 (although number of countries represented by reporting institutions declined from 31 in 2021 to 28 countries in 2022).

To date, 18 Scottish institutions have adopted the SDG Accord and <u>10 submitted</u> <u>annual reporting for 2022</u>*, including:

- Borders College*
- City of Glasgow College*
- Dundee & Angus College
- Edinburgh College

- Forth Valley College
- Glasgow Caledonian University*
- Glasgow Kelvin College*
- North East Scotland College*

- South Lanarkshire College
- University of Aberdeen*
- University of Edinburgh*
- University of Glasgow
- University of the Highlands and Islands

- University of Stirling
- University of Strathclyde*
- University of St Andrews*
- University of the West of Scotland*
- West Lothian College

Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings

Note: THE Impact Rankings is available for HE institutions only.

Launched in 2019, the <u>Times Higher Education Impact Rankings</u> are global performance tables that assess universities contributions to the UN SDGs through research, outreach, stewardship and teaching. The 2022 rankings included submissions from 1,406 universities from 106 countries/regions, with 53 UK institutions (as compared to 768 universities from 85 countries, 34 from the UK, in 2020). **7 Scottish universities submitted the minimum data requirement to be included in the overall ranking table (2 new additions since 2020*) including:**

- University of Glasgow* (19th)
- University of Edinburgh (29th)
- Glasgow Caledonian University (70th)
- University of Aberdeen (101-200th)
- University of Strathclyde (101-200th)
- University of the West of Scotland* (101-200th)
- University of Dundee (201-300th)

A university's final score in the overall table is calculated by combining its score in SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals) with its top three scores out of the remaining 16 SDGs. SDG 17 accounts for 22 per cent of the overall score, while the other SDGs each carry a weight of 26 per cent. This means that different universities are scored based on a different set of SDGs, depending on their institutional focus.

In addition to the overall rankings, THE Impact Rankings also include performance tables for each individual SDG. Particularly high-ranking Scottish institutions for individual SDGs in the 2020 rankings were:

Goal 5 – Gender Equality - Glasgow Caledonian University (4th)

Goal 9 – Industry Innovation and Infrastructure - University of Edinburgh (5th)

Goal 10 – *Reduced Inequalities* - Glasgow Caledonian University (21st)



- Goal 10 *Reduced Inequalities* University of the West of Scotland (23rd)
- Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities University of Glasgow (2nd)
- Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production University of Glasgow (21st)
- Goal 15 Life on Land University of Glasgow (8th)
- Goal 17 Partnership for Goals University of Edinburgh (9th)

Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)

Note: PRME is available for HE institutions only.

<u>The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)</u> is a United Nations-supported initiative founded in 2007. Working through its Six Principles, **PRME engages business and management schools** to ensure they provide future leaders with the skills needed to balance economic and sustainability goals, while drawing attention to the SDGs and aligning academic institutions with the work of the UN Global Compact.

As a voluntary initiative with over 800 signatories worldwide, PRME has become the largest organised relationship between the United Nations and management-related higher education institutions. **96 (up from 87 in 2020) UK Business Management Schools have adopted PRME, including 12 Scottish institutions:**

- Edinburgh Napier University Business School
- Glasgow Caledonian University Business School
- Heriot Watt University Business School
- Robert Gordon University Business School
- The Open University Faculty of Business and Law
- University of Aberdeen Business School
- University of Dundee Business School
- University of Edinburgh Business School
- University of Glasgow Adam Smith Business School
- University of St. Andrews School of Management
- University of Stirling Management School
- University of Strathclyde Business School

PRME encourages signatories to support the UN SDGs through:

- Aligning curricula and research to the SDG commitments and agenda
- Inserting new content, learning methods and transformative approaches (i.e., experiential and interdisciplinary learning and new skills into the curricula)
- Seeking more applied research around the SDGs that can create solutions to help businesses be more effective and sustainable
- Engaging with students to commit to and act in support of the SDGs



- Acting as leaders of public opinion, advisers, suppliers of knowledge and solutions and mediators among businesses, government and civil society in support of the SDGs (contributing, for example, with the SDGs National Plans)
- Contributing through their PRME Chapter to scale-up efforts in your region and identify the local priorities towards building global sustainability

Reporting to PRME is made through Sharing Information on Progress (SIP)

reports. In order to maintain a "communicating" status within the PRME community, a signatory must fulfil the following requirements:

- 1. Signatories are required to communicate their progress at least every 24 months.
- 2. SIPs must include each of the following elements:
 - A letter signed by the highest executive of the organisation expressing continued commitment to PRME
 - A description of practical actions (i.e. disclosure of any relevant policies, procedures, activities) that the institution has taken to implement one or more Principles during the past 24 months.
 - An assessment of outcomes (i.e. the degree to which previously outlined goals were met, or other qualitative or quantitative evaluation of results)
 - Specific objectives for the next 24-month period with regard to the implementation of the Principle(s).
- SIPs are to be submitted online via the <u>PRME website</u>, either by providing a hyperlink to an existing document on the signatory's website or by uploading an electronic document.
- 4. Signatories must complete a brief self-assessment that summarizes the content of the SIP.



Figure 3. Excerpt from <u>Glasgow Caledonian University's 2021 PRME SIP report</u> showing voluntary mapping of research to the SDGs.

Internal Reporting

In addition to the external reporting frameworks above, institutions are able to map and report their contributions to the SDGs internally. This can take a number of forms, including 'lighter-touch' approaches such as mapping case studies of institutional activities across departments as part of annual sustainability reports (for example the <u>University of St</u> <u>Andrews Annual Sustainability Report 2020/21</u>; bottom left), or more intensive mapping and reporting of activities such as mapping the embedding of sustainability in learning, teaching and research (for example the <u>University of Edinburgh's 2019/20 mapping within its</u> <u>Business School</u>; bottom right).



Figure 4. Examples of internal reporting of institutional activities against the SDGs from the University of St Andrews (left) and University of Edinburgh (right).

It is difficult to accurately determine the extent to which Scottish FHE institutions are mapping and reporting intuitional activities against the SDGs internally and the quality of reporting. For example – and as shown by the examples above - internal mapping is currently happening at varying scales including from within a specific Department or Faculty, through to a whole-institution approach. Depending on internal communication channels as well as who is leading the exercise, it is likely that in some instances Sustainability Managers may not be aware of all mapping exercises happening in parts of the institution.

Extent and quality of institutional reporting

Appendix 1 provides a summary of current known reporting routes for Scottish universities and colleges with data from 2020 and 2022. This table is based on publicly available data and responses to EAUC-Scotland surveys sent to contacts of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) TSN to further establish which Scottish institutions are internally reporting, perceptions of reporting quality, and opportunities and challenges for starting or expanding this area of work.

Key highlights:

- 30% (9 out of 30) up from 16% in 2020 of colleges use The SDG Accord as an external reporting framework (only external framework used) and 3 out of 4 colleges who responded to the survey report internally to some degree (meaning at least 10% of all colleges report internally)
- 77% (14 out of 18) up from 44% in 2020 of universities use one or more external reporting frameworks, and 6 universities who responded to the 2022 survey indicated that they report internally to some degree (meaning at least 33% of all universities report internally)
- For institutions reporting internally, the average score for intensiveness / extensiveness (proxy for quality) was 2.13 out of 5 – compared to 2 in 2020 – with a range from 1 to 4.

Opportunities for strengthening SDG reporting

Respondents to the EAUC-Scotland survey highlighted several opportunities for starting or expanding current institutional reporting against the SDGs, including:

- Harnessing staff motivation, existing activities, and connections:
 - Giving staff who are passionate and motivated the opportunity to get involved in SDG reporting
 - \circ $\;$ Self-evaluation activities could make reference to mapping activity
 - Combining SDG reporting with team lunches and meetings
- Building on external pressures and motivators:
 - Highlighting the potential of reporting to support funding applications and link to partnerships

- Building on external pressure and motivators to report, such as THE impact rankings
- Learning from and building on examples:
 - Sharing practice between institutions
 - Building on existing case studies that are currently not used for SDG mapping but could be harnessed
- Creating resource library with guidance on SDG mapping

More widely, as part of reporting for The SDG Accord, signatories report on factors that they perceive would or do already support the embedding of the SDGs (Figure 5; note: this is an aggregate of responses from all signatories, not only Scottish signatories).





These results show that, specifically internally, budgets and training are an important driver of SDG reporting as is reflected in Scottish participant's observations of the benefits of a resource library. While senior management support only takes third place as a support area, senior management teams are still influential and may pass external pressures mentioned by Scottish survey participants, such as the THE rankings, on to wider staff.

The perception of government support as an important external support area by the SDG Accord signatories is also mirrored in the Scottish survey participants' perception that SDG reporting can be used to support funding applications, as well as the driving factor of external motivators, which can be provided by the government.

Furthermore, the possibility of integrating SDG mapping with existing activities may present another opportunity to overcome challenges such as lack of staff capacity/time that participants perceived, as we highlight below.

Challenges for strengthening SDG reporting

A range of perceived factors have been identified by sector staff as challenges for institutions wishing to start reporting activities against the SDGs, or wishing to extend the scope of current reporting if already engaged with reporting to some degree. Figure 6a summarises the key challenges highlighted by respondents through the EAUC-Scotland survey in 2022, indicating very similar results to the 2020 survey (Figure 6b), with Lack of staff capacity being the most mentioned problem, while the need for further skills on mapping and reporting ranking second. The 2022 survey also shows "lack of student engagement" is rarely a barrier.

These factors and their prevalence generally reflect feedback of challenges as reported through The SDG Accord on a global level: for 2022, staff capacity, budget and training were reported as the top limiting factors among signatories submitting a report (Figure 7; note: this is an aggregate of responses from all signatories, not only Scottish signatories).



Figure 6a. Challenges to starting / expanding institutional SDG reporting as idenitifed by survey respondents - 2022



Figure 6b. Challenges to starting / expanding institutional SDG reporting as idenitifed by survey respondents - **2020**





This shows that overall, SDG integration and reporting continue to not be prioritised enough in most institutions to allow for sufficient staff capacity, training, and budgets. As the opportunities section above indicates, external frameworks and motivators can help to align these priorities, which is specifically evident in the example of the University of Aberdeen, which now has a working group specifically dedicated to the SDGs and THE Impact Rankings (see Appendix 1). Such external motivators can be combined with internal strengths, such as harnessing students and motivated staff, to improve SDG integration and reporting.

Next Steps

Scottish FHE institutions are increasingly reporting activities against the SDGs through both external and internal reporting frameworks; however, at present, this remains a minority. EAUC-Scotland is committed to supporting the embedding of sustainability throughout universities and colleges and supporting institutions to recognise and champion their commitments to the UN SDGs.

Based on the evidence compiled in this report, EAUC-Scotland aims to:

- Increase the use of external reporting frameworks for the mapping of activities against the SDGs. This route of reporting promotes transparency and supports sharing of best practice between institutions;
- 2) Increase the quality of reporting, with a particular focus on internal reporting;
- Provide the sector with the opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to undertake SDG mapping and reporting.

EAUC-Scotland will achieve this through:

- 1) Increasing the prominence of the SDGs through EAUC-S communication channels, including the Global Goals Teach-In campaign in March 2023;
- Developing resources to support sector staff skills and knowledge development, including case studies of reporting experiences for each external framework included in this report and seek for developed mapping tools to be open-sourced e.g. Manchester Metropolitan University mapping tool;
- 3) Using the ESD TSN as a vehicle for sharing best practice;
- Engaging with senior leaders on external reporting frameworks, in particular The SDG Accord (colleges) and PRME (universities);
- 5) Supporting sector teaching staff embed sustainability and the SDGs into the curriculum.

Appendix 1 – Mapping the National Performance Framework against the Sustainable Development Goals.



Communities

Poverty

Communities



The mapping exercise above summarises findings from the <u>Scottish Supplementary Review</u> (published July 2020).

For further details on alignment and data collection for the National Performance Framework against the targets set within each specific SDG, see Newcastle University paper (2019) <u>The SDGs and Scotland: A Discussion Paper and Initial Analysis</u>. An example for targets within SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere is shown below:

NPF reporting scope and quality against SDG 1 targets

Data Availability



Appendix 2 - Institutional Reporting Table

University	SDG Accord	THE Impact Rankings 2022	PRME	Internal – `lighter touch'		Internal – `intensive/extensive'
	Blue: signed before 2021 Purple: new signatories since 2021					
Abertay University	N	N	Ν			
Edinburgh Napier University	N	N	Y (since 2020, no SIPs yet)			
Glasgow Caledonian University	Y	Y	Y (since 2012, SIP '21)			
Glasgow School of Art*	N	N	N	2022: They monitor SDG use but no not formally report		
Heriot Watt University	N	N	Y (since 2021, no SIPs yet)			
Queen Margaret University*	N	Ν	N	2020: Yes – against institution's Sustainability Strategy. Though the procedure is in a state of flux at present because of the Lockdown – a new system was pending before this	2022: Survey response indicated no current internal reporting	
Robert Gordon University*	N	N	Y (since 2011, SIP `15)	2022: A report with case studies will be available on institution's website shortly. Their Annual Report references sustainability on many occasions but does not map to SDGs.		
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	N	N				
The Open University	N		Y (since 2011, SIP '20)			
The University of Edinburgh	Y	Y	Y (since 2015, SIP '22)			

	Y	Y	Y (since 2020, SIP '22)			2022: Have established an SDG Reporting Group which co- ordinates THE Impact and thrit
University of Aberdeen*						own Annual SDG Report.
University of Dundee*	N	Y	Y (since 2020, SIP '22)	2022: Have recently set up a new website for all case studies etc that link to SDG's.		
University of Glasgow	Y	Y	Y (since 2020, SIP `22)			
University of St Andrews	Y	N	Y (since 2008, SIP `22)	2020: Produce an annual Sustainability Report where activity is mapped to SDGS		
University of Stirling	Y	N	Y, since 2017 SIP `21			
University of Strathclyde	Y	Y	Y since 2011, SIP `21			
University of the Highlands and Islands	Y	Ν	Ν			
	Y	Y	Ν	2020: Produce an annual Sustainability Report where activity is mapped to SDGS	2022: Continue to produce annual sustainability report where	
University of the West of Scotland*					activity is mapped to SDGs	
TOTAL	9	7	12			
Developments 2020 vs 2022:	3 new HE signatories	2 new HE participants	1 new HE signatories			

College	SDG Accord	Internal – `lighter touch'	
	Blue: signed	Blue: 2020 survey response	
	before 2021	Purple: 2022 survey response	Internal – 'intensive /
	Purple: new		extensive'
	signatories		
	since 2021		
Ayrshire College	Ν		
Borders College	Υ		
City of Glasgow College	Υ		
Dumfries and Galloway College	Ν		
Dundee and Angus College	Y		
Edinburgh College*	Y	2020: Via our 2022: Yes, but	not
		Sustainability Education systematically,	some attempt but
		Group to SMT then Board lack of resource	e/capacity to do it
		level. extensively.	
Fife College	Ν		
Forth Valley College	Y		
Glasgow Clyde College*	Ν		
Glasgow Kelvin College*	Υ	2022: Currently no formal mapping of activ	ities. Activities and
		courses that support the UN SDGs are high	lighted and noted
		informally. There is an initiative to begin m	apping the
		curriculum more formally, and this work loo	oks to be
		completed within the academic year.	
Highland Theological College UHI	Ν		
NAFC Marine Centre UHI	Ν		
New College Lanarkshire	Ν		
Newbattle Abbey College	Ν		
	Υ	2022: Research projects are mapped again	nst the SDG's,
		curriculum review is underway which will in	clude mapping
North East Scotland College		courses to the SDG's.	
Sabhal Mor Ostaig	N		
Scotland's Rural College	N		
Scottish Association for Marine	N		
Science			
South Lanarkshire College	Y		
UHI Argyll	N		
UHI Inverness	Ν		

UHI Moray	Ν	
UHI North Highland	Ν	
UHI Orkney	Ν	
UHI Outer Hebrides	Ν	
UHI Perth	Ν	
UHI Shetland	Ν	
UHI West Highland	Ν	
West College Scotland	Ν	
West Lothian College	Υ	
TOTAL	9	
Developments 2020 vs 2022:	4 new FE	
	signatories	

*Educational contact returned survey

Prepared and delivered by

