



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

Extent, quality and opportunities for development

January 2021

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## Abbreviations

NPF – National Performance Framework

PRME – Principles for Responsible Management Education

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

## Executive Summary

This report presents an overview of the ways in which Scottish Further and Higher Education (FHE) institutions are currently able to report their activities against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and creates a baseline through which EAUC-Scotland can develop this area of work. 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 current extent to which Scottish institutions report against the SDGs 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
- **44% of Scottish universities use one or more of the external reporting frameworks**
- **16% 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 out of 5**
- **Reported opportunities for starting / expanding reporting include through Sustainability Committee activities; SFC encouraging reporting; linking reporting to wider sustainability reporting e.g. Sustainability Leadership Scorecard**
- **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.**

EAUC-Scotland is committed to supporting the embedding of sustainability throughout universities and colleges, including supporting institutions to recognise, map and champion their commitment to supporting the UN SDGs. Appendix 2 provides an EAUC-Scotland action plan of activities to further this area of work with the aim of improving the extent and quality of SDG reporting by the Scottish FHE sector.

# Introduction

## Development of the UN SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 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 <sup>1</sup>."*

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 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 [Scottish Supplementary Review](#) (latest published July 2020).



Figure 2. National Performance Framework

<sup>1</sup> First Minister Nicola Sturgeon speaking at NIDOS Conference November 2015

## The Further and Higher Education Sector and the UN SDGs

The guide [\*Getting Started with the SDGs in Universities\*](#)<sup>2</sup> 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 SDGs, 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.

<sup>2</sup> SDSN Australia/Pacific (2017): *Getting started with the SDGs in universities: A guide for universities, higher education institutions, and the academic sector*. Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Edition. Sustainable Development Solutions Network – Australia/Pacific, Melbourne.

# FHE frameworks for reporting activities towards the UN SDGs

## The SDG Accord

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

[The SDG Accord](#) 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 it currently has official commitment to its tenets from 110 institutions, 103 support organisations and 817 individuals – all spread across 85 countries.



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 for use by the UN, governments, business and wider society. While the sustainability journey of each institution will reflect its unique context, connecting them together through the SDG Accord offers the opportunity for scaling of impact.

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.

**To date, 11 Scottish institutions have adopted the SDG Accord and [10 submitted annual reporting for 2019/2020\\*](#), including:**

- Edinburgh College\*
- Glasgow Caledonian University\*
- Glasgow Kelvin College\*
- North East Scotland College\*
- Scottish Borders College
- South Lanarkshire College\*
- University of Aberdeen\*
- University of Edinburgh\*
- University of Glasgow\*
- University of Strathclyde\*
- University of St Andrews\*

## Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings

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

Launched in 2019, the [Times Higher Education Impact Rankings](#) are global performance tables that assess universities contributions to the UN SDGs through research, outreach, stewardship and teaching. The 2020 rankings included submissions from 768 universities from 85 countries, including 34 from the UK. **5 Scottish universities submitted the minimum data requirement to be included in the overall ranking table, including:**

- University of Edinburgh (30<sup>th</sup> overall)
- Glasgow Caledonian University (43<sup>rd</sup>)
- University of Dundee (44<sup>th</sup>)
- University of Strathclyde (70<sup>th</sup>)
- University of Aberdeen (73<sup>rd</sup>)



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 3 – *Good Health and Wellbeing* - University of Dundee (9<sup>th</sup>)

Goal 6 – *Clean Water and Sanitation* - University of Strathclyde (10<sup>th</sup>)

Goal 8 – *Decent Work and Economic Growth* - Glasgow Caledonian University (13<sup>th</sup>)

Goal 13 – *Climate Action* - University of Dundee (26<sup>th</sup>)

Goal 17 – *Partnership for Goals* - University of Edinburgh (4<sup>th</sup>)



# Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME)

**Note: PRME is available for HE institutions only.**

[The Principles for Responsible Management Education \(PRME\)](#) 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. **87 UK Business Management Schools have adopted PRME, including 7 Scottish institutions:**

- University of Aberdeen Business School
- University of Stirling Management School
- University of St. Andrews School of Management
- Edinburgh Napier University Business School
- University of Edinburgh Business School
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- 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 (since signing up to PRME or since last submission of SIP)
  - 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).
3. SIPs are to be submitted online via the [PRME website](#), 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.



### Actions and outcomes Principle #4 Research



Figure 3. Exert from [Glasgow Caledonian University's 2018 SIP report](#) 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 [University of the West of Scotland's 2018/19 report](#); 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 [University of Edinburgh's recent mapping within its Business School](#); bottom right).

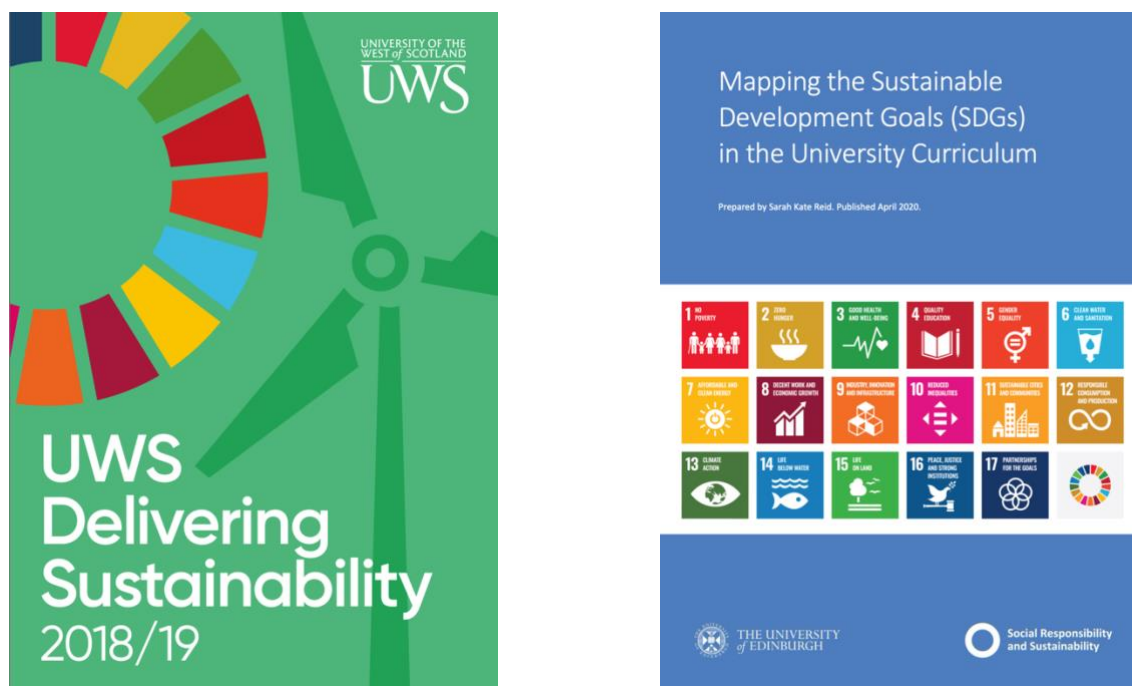


Figure 4. Examples of internal reporting of institutional activities against the SDGs from the University of the West of Scotland (left) and University of Edinburgh (right).

It is difficult to accurately determine the extent to which Scottish FHE institutions are mapping and reporting institutional 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. This table is based on publicly available data and responses to an EAUC-Scotland survey 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:

- 16% of colleges use The SDG Accord as an external reporting framework (only external framework used) and at least 3% report internally to some degree
- 44% of universities use one or more external reporting frameworks and at least 11% report internally to some degree
- For institutions reporting internally, the average score for intensiveness / extensiveness (proxy for quality) was 2 out of 5.

## Opportunities and challenges for strengthening SDG reporting

### **Opportunities:**

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

- Utilising a new or established Sustainability Committee as a vehicle for reporting
- For the Scottish Funding Council to encourage reporting through Outcome Agreements.

More widely, as part of reporting for The SDG Accord, signatories must rank opportunities for improving embedding of the SDGs throughout institutions (Figure 5; note: this is an aggregate of responses from all signatories, not only Scottish signatories). The most prevalent reported opportunities were based around awareness raising through a) the curriculum; b) senior management; and c) general campus community activities.



Figure 5. 2019 ranking of opportunities for further embedding and strengthening SDG reporting by [The SDG Accord signatories](#).

Engagement and awareness-raising can either be undertaken as stand-alone activities or combined with other activities such as campus Sustainability Weeks, [SOS-UK's Global Goals Teach-in](#), or through a SDG Award within student-led teaching awards. Given the most prevalent challenge for starting or extending SDG reporting given by survey participants was a lack of staff capacity, combining awareness raising of the SDGs as part of a wider event is most likely to have good impact whilst also reducing resource needs. This can also be useful in highlighting staff and students who wish to engage further in promoting and supporting the institution's work on the SDGs, creating a network of "SDG Champions".

Additional opportunities and impact can be realised through the development and sharing of open-source tools and resources. Institutions including the University of St Andrews, University of Edinburgh and Manchester Metropolitan University have developed tools to support the mapping of the SDGs against the curriculum through keyword searches of module and course descriptions. Through open-sourcing of these tools, staff in other institutions can forego the time-intensive tool development stage and proceed to the data collection and analysis stage. Again, this would help reduce the barrier of lack of staff capacity.

## Challenges:

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 6 summarises the key challenges highlighted by respondents through the EAUC-Scotland survey. These factors and their prevalence generally reflect feedback of challenges as reported through The SDG Accord (Figure 7; note: this is an aggregate of responses from all signatories, not only Scottish signatories).

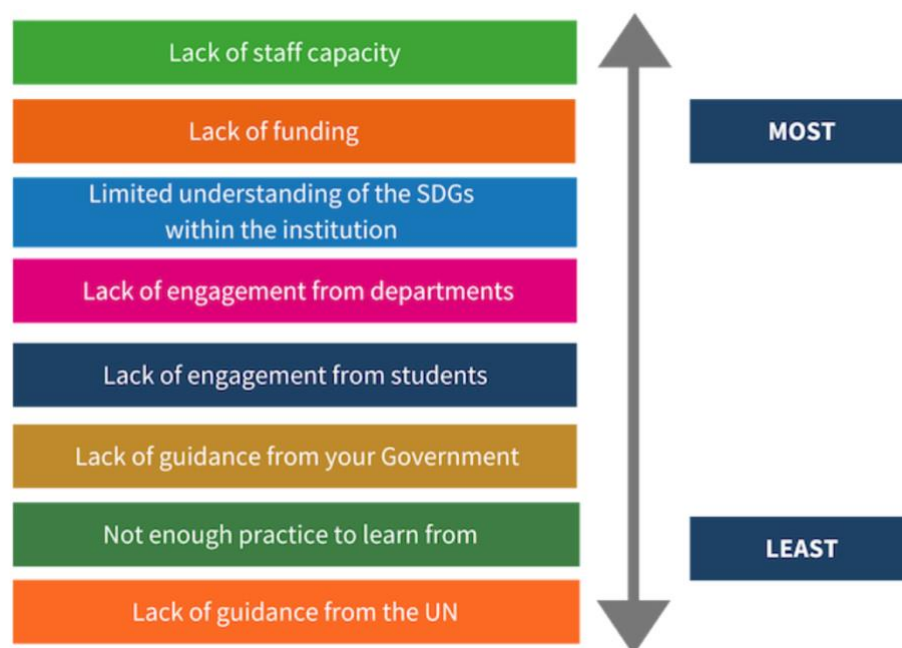
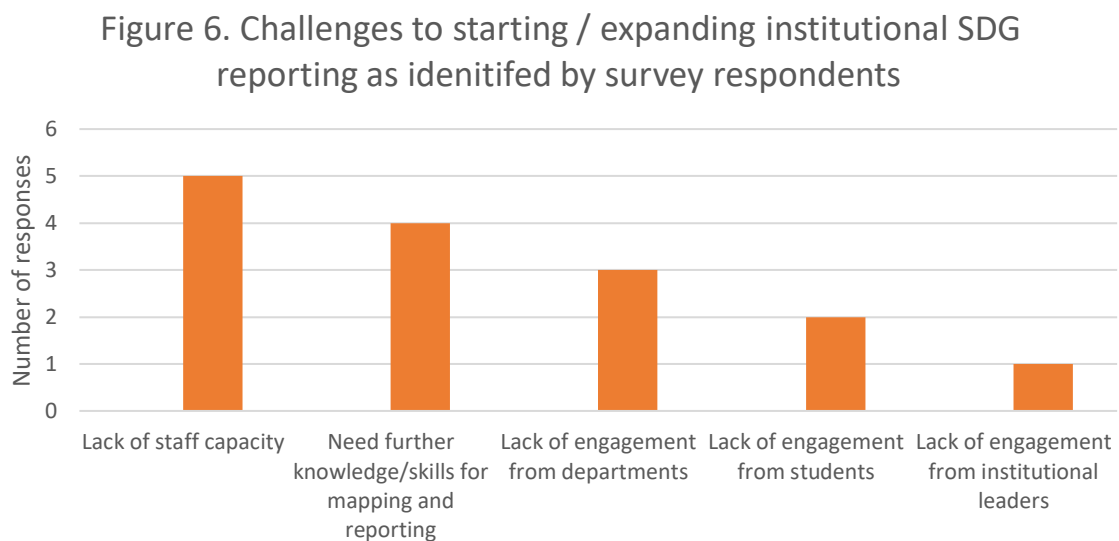


Figure 7. Ranking of challenges for further embedding and strengthening SDG reporting by [The SDG Accord signatories](#).

## 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:**

- 1) 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;
- 3) 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 February 2021;
- 2) 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;
- 4) 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 in to the curriculum;
- 6) Reviewing institutional reporting extent and quality of SDG activities against report baseline in 2021 and 2022.



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



Poverty



Education



Children



Children



Communities



Environment



Health



Economy



Poverty



Education



Environment



Fair Work and Business



Poverty



Children



Health



Education



Children



Environment



Fair Work and Business



Economy



Fair Work and Business



Economy



Education



Children



Environment



Fair Work and Business



Economy



International



Human Rights



Environment



Poverty



Fair Work and Business



International



Human Rights



Fair Work and Business



Economy



International



Culture



Health



Economy



Education



Children



Culture



Health



Education



Children



Communities



Poverty



Communities





The mapping exercise above summarises findings from the [Scottish Supplementary Review](#) (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) [The SDGs and Scotland: A Discussion Paper and Initial Analysis](#). 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

<a href="#">1.1.1</a>	<a href="#">1.2.1</a>	<a href="#">1.2.2</a>	<a href="#">1.3.1</a>	<a href="#">1.4.1</a>	<a href="#">1.4.2</a>	<a href="#">1.5.1</a>	<a href="#">1.5.2</a>	<a href="#">1.5.3</a>	<a href="#">1.5.4</a>	<a href="#">1.b.1</a>

## Appendix 2 - Institutional Reporting Table

HE Institution	SDG Accord	THE Impact Rankings	PRME	Internal – 'lighter touch'	Internal – 'intensive/extensive'
Abertay University					
Edinburgh Napier University					
Glasgow Caledonian University					
Glasgow School of Art					
Heriot-Watt University					
Queen Margaret University*				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	
Robert Gordon University					
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland					
The Open University					
The University of Edinburgh					
University of Aberdeen*					
University of Dundee					
University of Glasgow					
University of St Andrews*				Produce an annual Sustainability Report where activity is mapped to SDGS	
University of Stirling					
University of Strathclyde*					
University of the Highlands and Islands					
University of the West of Scotland				Produce an annual Sustainability Report where activity is mapped to SDGS	

<b>FE Institution</b>	<b>SDG Accord</b>	<b>Internal – 'lighter touch'</b>	<b>Internal – 'intensive / extensive'</b>
Argyll College UHI			
Ayrshire College			
Borders College			
City of Glasgow College*			
Dumfries and Galloway College			
Dundee and Angus College			
Edinburgh College*		Via our Sustainability Education Group to SMT then Board level.	
Fife College			
Forth Valley College			
Glasgow Clyde College			
Glasgow Kelvin College			
Highland Theological College UHI			
Inverness College UHI			
Lewis Castle College UHI			
Moray College UHI			
NAFC Marine Centre UHI			
New College Lanarkshire			
Newbattle Abbey College			
North East Scotland College			
North Highland College UHI			
Orkney College UHI			
Perth College UHI			
Sabhal Mor Ostaig UHI			
SAMS UHI			
Scottish Borders College			
South Lanarkshire College*			
Scotland's Rural College			
Shetland College UHI			
West College Scotland			
West Highland College UHI			
West Lothian College			

\*Educational contact returned survey

## Appendix 3 – EAUC-Scotland Action Plan

Action	Specific Actions	Timeline	Staff Lead
<p>Increase the prominence of the SDGs through EAUC-S communication channels, including the Global Goals Teach-In campaign in February 2021 and wider support for SOS-UK's Teach The Future campaign</p>	<p>Develop bespoke communications plan on SDGs and the FHE sector;</p> <p>Develop blogs from teaching staff engaged with LfS Champions Course and Global Goals Teach-In campaign;</p> <p>Plan comms activity around key reporting dates</p>	<p>January/February - Promote Global Goal Teach-In Campaign alongside report launch.</p> <p>On-going - comms on Teach the Future Scotland and new framework signatories.</p>	<p>Networks and Communications Coordinator</p>
<p>Develop 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;</p> <p>Facilitate the sharing and strengthening of professional standards in order to highlight sustainability</p>	<p>Engage with St Andrews, University of Edinburgh and Manchester Metropolitan University regarding open-sourcing mapping tools;</p> <p>Develop case studies of institutional experiences mapping the SDGs against institutional activities;</p> <p>Use the ESD TSN as a vehicle for sharing best practice and dialogue with QAA</p>	<p>March – engage with institutions on potential of open-sourcing curriculum mapping tools</p> <p>April – produce case studies on institutional experiences</p> <p>On-going – ESD TSN best practice sharing</p>	<p>Scotland Programme Manager</p> <p>+</p> <p>Networks and Communications Coordinator</p>
<p>Engage with senior leaders on external reporting frameworks, in particular The SDG Accord (colleges) and PRME (universities)</p>	<p>Promote frameworks through Universities Scotland, College Development Network and ESD TSN networks – supported by resource case studies and tools above.</p>	<p>April/May – engage with CDN and US to promote reporting frameworks and created resources through their networks</p>	<p>Scotland Programme Manager</p>
<p>Support sector teaching staff embed sustainability and the SDGs in to the curriculum</p>	<p>Deliver Learning for Sustainability Champions Course for FE sector staff (subject to external funding)</p> <p>Promote sustainability guides for teaching subjects e.g. Sustainability in Economics</p>	<p>On-going</p>	<p>Scotland Programme Manager</p> <p>+</p>

			Networks and Communications Coordinator
Review institutional reporting extent and quality of SDG activities against report baseline	Conduct follow-up sector engagement and desk-based research to determine key trends in reporting, opportunities and challenges.	November 2021 November 2022	Scotland Programme Manager  +  Curriculum Projects Officer

Prepared and delivered by

