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# The SDG Accord

*The University and College Sector's Collective Response to the Global Goals*

## Annual SDG Accord Report 2020 Progress towards the Global Goals in the University and College sector

Led by the Global Alliance - a united group of university  
and college sustainability networks

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# Global universities and colleges leading delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

## Foreword

This has been a year like no other. While there has been unimaginable hardship globally due to the pandemic, there has also been resilience and adaptation like never before. Our global communities have risen to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Our education sector has been prominent within this movement, working within their communities to provide additional support from PPE to research, mental health support to food parcels.

We now face the ongoing impact of the pandemic, but also the realisation that the climate crisis isn't something to be feared in the future, it is with us today. There has never been a time in which a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet has been more necessary, and we are fortunate to have roadmap to guide us forward this in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are a roadmap for humanity and if we let the SDGs guide recovery from the pandemic, the world will build back better than ever before.

We now have a decade to deliver the SDGs and while ten years can feel like a life time, we have no time to lose. We are what we teach and education institutions will be key to making this cross-roads in success. If they continue to make progress with the SDGs within their institutions then this ripple out in the mindsets of the students and out into their communities.

Phrases such as the 'new normal' or 'build back better' have been commonly used in 2020. But for 2021, we can't go back to the old habits of the past, but to build new behaviours and choices for the future and really use this moment as a chance for renewal. That shift, won't be easy, but if we are to secure a better and more resilient tomorrow, we need to rethink what we are currently doing today.

Sam Barratt  
Chief, Youth, Education & Advocacy, UN Environment



"Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face."

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

# About the SDG Accord

## SDG Signatories

There are four different types of signatory: institution, individual, supporting organisation and students' organisation.

All signatories are encouraged to follow the principles outlined, but only institutions are required to:

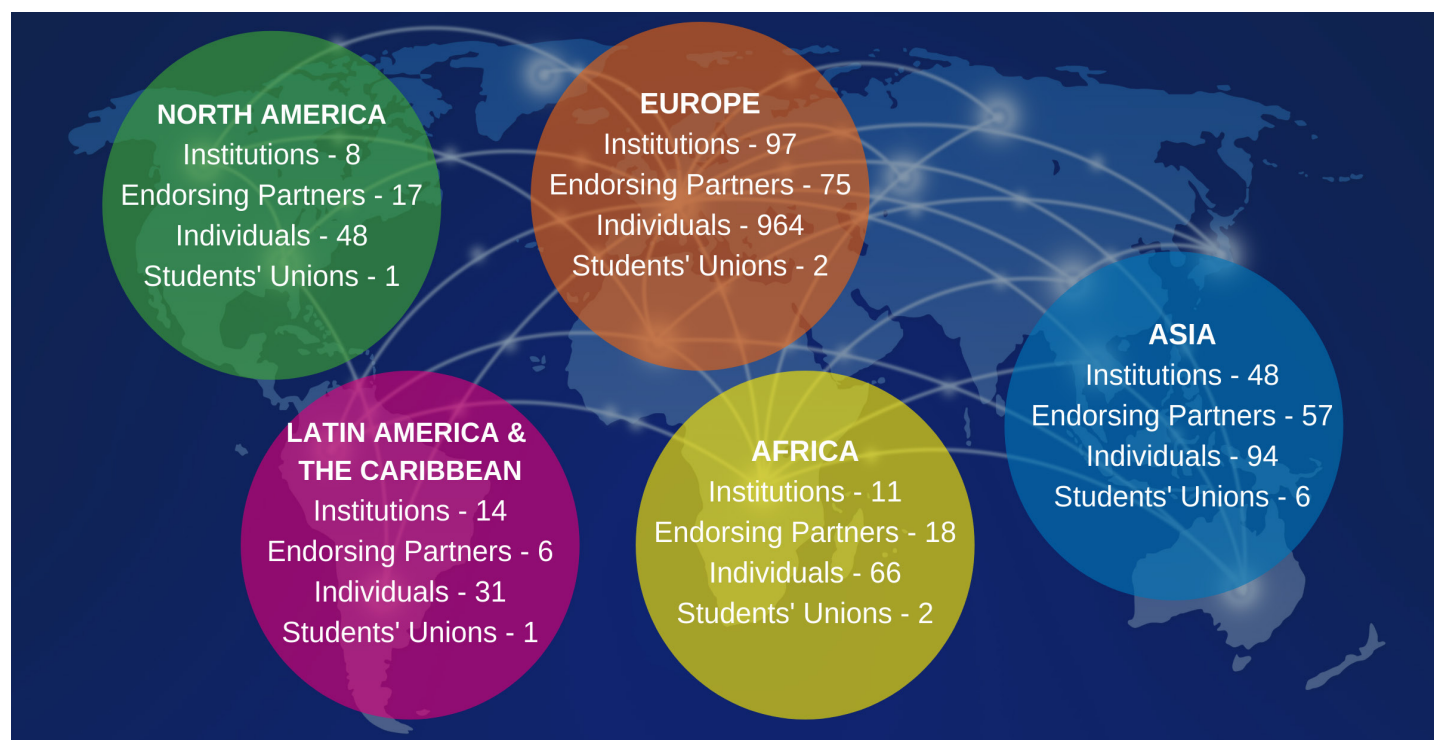
- Align all major efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators, including through our education, research, leadership, operational and engagement activities;
- Aim to involve members from all key stakeholder groups in this endeavour, including students, academics, professional staff, local communities and other external stakeholders;
- Collaborate across cities, regions, countries and continents with other signatory institutions as part of a collective international response;
- Using their own unique ways, inform, share our learning and account to both local and global communities our progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals;
- Annually report to the UN High-level Political Forum 'how does my institution contribute to the Goals and what more can we do'.

The SDG Accord, launched in 2017, is a high profile international initiative that the Global Alliance developed to allow the tertiary education sector to demonstrate its commitment to playing its part in meeting the SDGs, and sharing best practice. This is a partnership initiative, endorsed by the UN's HESI and many other global partners.

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, it is clear that connecting them together through the SDG Accord offers the opportunity for scaling of impact.

## A Global Commitment to the SDGs

There are currently\* 1566 signatories to the SDG Accord – across 102 countries:



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.

\*as of August 2020

“The SDGs can help fill the deep social and economic fissures that the current pandemic has laid bare. They can guide us to a greener and more sustainable recovery path. They will not only help us overcome the devastating impacts of the pandemic – but build a stronger foundation for multilateralism and international cooperation, to address future crises.”

Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General United Nations

# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

## Methodology

SDG Accord reporting aims to demonstrate progress towards the SDGs in the university and college sector, identify gaps and promote knowledge exchange. This is the third year the report has been conducted and the information submitted by a growing number of institutions is increasingly detailed. This information will be used to create recommendations for various sectors with regard next steps, and to identify resources required to support more institutions embed the SDGs.

We asked the 178 global SDG Accord institutional signatories that had signed the SDG Accord by March 2020 to report on their work with the SDGs. From those asked, 83 institutions submitted their reporting – this is an increase of 39 newly reporting institutions (some from the previous year did not report this year) and means 47% of those reporting were first time reporters .

The reporting mechanism was through an on online survey, and was open 2nd March – 3rd July 2020. This was an extended period of reporting due to Covid-19. As reporting is mandatory, institutions that have not submitted for two consecutive years will be removed from the SDG Accord unless they have a valid reason. This is to ensure the system is fair.

This year's submissions were spread across 26 countries, with 80% of the submissions based in Europe. Each report must have appropriate sign off from its institution. Institutions include all higher and further education institutions and vary in size and scope. Those undertaking the reporting were encouraged to consult holistically across their institution to capture all of the data.

This is an annual reporting process, now in its third year, and we have fed in findings directly to the UN High-Level Political Forum. The SDG Accord is a recognised tool of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI).

# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

## OVERVIEW

The findings from the third year of the SDG Accord highlight huge progress in the Higher and Further Education sectors.

### KEY FINDINGS:



OF THOSE REPORTING HAVE STARTED TO OR HAVE SUCCESSFULLY MAPPED THE SDGS WITHIN THEIR INSTITUTION. THAT IS UP 20% ON THOSE REPORTING LAST YEAR.



SIGNATORIES WERE ALMOST UNANIMOUS IN SAYING ALIGNING WITH THE SDGS WAS POSITIVE OR EXTREMELY POSITIVE



OVER TWO THIRDS SAID THE SDGS ARE A STRATEGIC PRIORITY (IT IS INCLUDED, OR WILL IMMINENTLY BE INCLUDED IN THE INSTITUTION'S OVERARCHING STRATEGY).



THE MAJORITY OF INSTITUTIONS REPORTED THEY HAD BEEN EMBEDDING THE SDGS FOR 1-3 YEARS

The main benefit institutions are enjoying from aligning or starting to align with the SDGs is that it has 'Opened a more relatable and clearer dialogue on sustainability within the institution' (90%), other top benefits include 'Encouraged staff and students to initiate innovative projects to support one or more of the SDGs' (68%) and 'positively influenced the image of the institution by showing its contribution to global and local wellbeing' (65%)



LIKELY STARTING PLACES FOR INTEGRATION OF SDGS



CAMPUS ESTATE

LEARNING & TEACHING



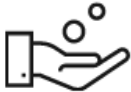
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



JUST UNDER A THIRD OF INSTITUTIONS REPORTED THEY HAD EXPANDED CAPACITY TO WORK TOWARD THE SDGS BECAUSE OF VOLUNTEERS.



FUNDING



OF INSTITUTIONS HAVE FUNDING FOR SDGS, MOSTLY INTERNAL (44%) AND THIS IS USED TO FUND STAFF TIME



### BARRIERS

- FUNDING & CAPACITY
- LACK OF AWARENESS FROM BOTH STAFF AND STUDENTS; GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE & BEST PRACTICE TO LEARN FROM

# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

## OVERVIEW cont.

### GREATEST IMPACT



55%



45%



42%

### LEAST IMPACT



50%



34%



27%

### PRIORITIES JULY 2020 - 2021



68%



57%



39%

### FUTURE



Over the course of the next 12 months, institutions reported the most likely steps they would take towards the SDGs, are to 'Create new activities to raise awareness of the SDGs across the whole institution', 'Engage students on the SDGs through teaching and learning' and 'Incorporate the SDGs at a strategic level'.

We also asked for updates on progress with the recommendations made last year:

Just under half (43%) of submissions said their institution requires researchers to outline which of the SDGs their work contributes towards in the research application process.



Two thirds (67%) of institutions this year reported that when updating new processes over the last year, the SDGs had been incorporated

Over half of reporting institutions (57%) said they ran funded extra-curricular opportunities for students to get involved with sustainability initiatives linked to the SDGs.



Almost three quarters (75%) of signatories reported they had found innovative ways to increase student and staff capacity to address the SDGs.

# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

## Trends and change of focus

This year, the reporting has shown that integrating the SDGs has really started to come to fruition, with a huge amount of SDG activities reported per signatory. This makes sense, given the majority (50%) have been embedding the SDGs for 1-3 years and almost 90% of those reporting have started to or have successfully mapped the SDGs within their institution. That is up 20% on those reporting last year.

### Integration and benefits of the SDGs

Q18 - If you have started to integrate the SDGs at all, what impact has this had?

**96%**  
POSITIVE  
OR  
EXTREMELY  
POSITIVE

One Signatory wrote: The positive impact has been simply that the SDGs have been the most successful engagement tool I've known." This is supported by responses to a question that looks at the benefits of aligning with the SDGs within an institution; the biggest benefit, reported by just under 90% of signatories was that it 'opened a more relatable and clearer dialogue on sustainability within the institution.' The SDGs are a powerful engagement tool, and they are beginning to address the language and disengagement barrier that has been felt in the sustainability sector for a long time.

### Impact of integrating the SDGs:



#### CAMPUS

- biodiversity strategies
- GHG emissions reduction plans
- improving recycling practices



#### LEARNING & TEACHING

- lessons
- lectures
- curriculum



#### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Collaboration with a Students' Union in extra-curricular activities, campaigns, marketing

## Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

### Trends and change of focus cont.

We are starting to see a pattern on how institutions start to integrate the SDGs as well. It looks like the most common starting place to integrate SDGs is across the campus (68% reported the most success in the area), through aspects like biodiversity strategies, GHG emissions reduction plans and activities, improving these recycling practices. After that, the most likely area for SDGs to be integrated is into learning and teaching (61%) – including content of lessons, lectures and curriculum. Then it is most likely institutions will integrate into student engagement activities (58%) – which could reference collaboration with a Students' Union, in extra-curricular activities, campaigns, marketing. Signatories were able to select more than one to reflect if they had integrated in several areas already. This is interesting, because it can act as a map for other institutions to follow in terms of a starting point for SDG integration. It also highlights areas in need of improvements; only a quarter (27%) reported successful integration of the SDGs into staff training.

### Bournemouth University, UK

The UN SDGs have provided an excellent framework for addressing sustainability, making it much clearer and sometimes more relevant to staff and students across and beyond the university. As a result of having conversations with academic staff about the UN SDGs, we have set up an ESD Community of Practice with staff from every Faculty. With both research and teaching, it has uncovered excellent practice and promoted greater collaboration. Our staff engagement has increased in our JUMP 'Green Rewards' programme with our monthly themes framed around UN SDGs receiving high praise. The integration of SDG3 has also instigated greater collaboration between our wellbeing and sustainability programmes.

Looking in more detail at the SDGs themselves – The SDGs institutions have had the biggest impact on over the last year were: 1) SDG 4 - Quality Education (55%), 2) SDG 13 – Climate Action (45%) and 3) SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being (42%). While SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 4 (Quality Education) were reported as the SDGs institutions had the most impact on in the previous year as well, SDG 13 (Climate Action) has moved up the list, replacing SDG 5 (Gender Equality). This makes sense, given that in the 2019 findings 72% of signatories suggested SDG 13 would be the goal they are prioritising over the course of the next year. This prioritisation of SDG 13 is interesting because it shows that SDG integration and prioritisation is fairly fluid and responsive to institutional and societal needs – there is no strict way to work towards the SDGs.



# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

## SDG focus

Much of last year for the education sector was dominated by student climate strikes, extinction rebellion and discussion on the need to tackle the climate crisis, and this is reflective in how they prioritised the SDGs. While institutions this year have outlined their priority SDGs for the next 12 months as a continuation of these SDGs (Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education and Climate Action) – it will be interesting to see if they move toward SDGs 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) post Covid-19 as they start to become more community-orientated.

### Ndejje University, Uganda

A student-based club (Rotaract Club of Ndejje University) has started a program to engage primary and high schools in the local area in the production and distribution of reusable sanitary towels for female students.



### University of Exeter, UK

The University of Exeter runs a day of online activities and experiential learning called 'Create Your Future' that aims to help first years think early on in their academic careers about the skills and attributes they will need to develop to enter the graduate recruitment market and how these may be assessed in the recruitment and selection process. It also encourages students to think about work experience and volunteer work at the beginning of their university experience.



### Abdullah Gül University (AGU), Turkey

AGU has a set of mandatory academic courses called 'Global Courses' educating students about the SDGs and current global challenges including the Climate Crisis. The institution also organises and hosts events about the climate crisis and other sustainability matters, to make sure the general public can access this important educational information.



### The Applied Science Private University, Jordan

The university undertakes many partnership initiatives on topics relating to the SDGs. In particular, the university has joined a UKRI project, led by the University of East Anglia (UK) called 'Meeting the SDGs: creating innovative infrastructures and policy solutions to support sustainable development in Global South communities (GS-DEV)'.



# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

## Funding & Capacity

As funding and capacity have consistently been identified as barriers to embedding the SDGs, we looked at these areas a little closer this year.

It was reported that just under two thirds (60%) of institutions do have funding for the SDGs, mostly internal (44%). Though looking at qualitative information supplied alongside this, it seems that the funding is allocated to sustainability more broadly and they use some of this to focus on SDGs – predominantly in the form of staff time. A third (34%) reported they received no funding at all. There is very little external funding, only 14% receive any.

Looking at the capacity this funding provides, the highest proportion of respondents (34%) said they have paid staff working a collective total of 41 hours or more a week responsible for embedding the SDGs. Again, this seems to be more generally for sustainability, with the SDGs being incorporated into it. Just under a third (31%) reported unpaid volunteering working towards the SDGs – which is almost as large a proportion as paid staff and indicates real engagement on this topic.

The SDG Accord report in 2019 orientated a recommendation around funding and capacity – which seems to be paying dividends. The recommendation was: 'Look for innovative ways to increase staff and student capacity to address the SDGs'.

Just under three quarters (72%) of signatories reported they had. This is up from 69% last year, with the number of institutions reporting 'no' going down from 22% last year, to 13% this year.

Examples of this include:



Increase study time on SDGs, or fully integrating the SDGs into the curriculum so that it is not an additional capacity requirement.



Work with Students' Unions and groups, who then organise SDG events. Some institutions even reported shared Students' Union/Institutional Officers that are joint funded and focus on SDG delivery which ensures everything is joined up.



Create 'sustainability champions', both staff and students, that volunteer their time to work on SDG initiatives. One institution referred to them as 'Goalkeepers' – which is a brilliant concept.



Provide information about the SDGs on staff and student portals that both can access in their own time.



Create SDG Communities of Practice and forums designed for students to better engage on these topics.



Incorporate ESD (with SDGs integrated) into staff training.



Create internship positions for students that focus on the SDGs to gain experience of a work place as well as useful knowledge on sustainability.



Run 'living lab' programmes, either as part of cross disciplinary projects, or as an extra-curricular activity.

# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

## Next steps

Signatories have outlined their next steps towards embedding the SDGs are likely to be:



Create new activities to raise awareness of the SDGs across the whole institution



Engage students on the SDGs through teaching and learning



Incorporate the SDGs at a strategic level

These are similar to last year, and this shows the continued recognition that ‘bottom up’ combined with ‘top down’ change is the most effective way to push integration throughout an institution, but the activities focus shows more tangible outputs are a key requirement.

We have also seen some real steps forward in institutions with some of our recommendations from the 2019 report, and these continue to be good next steps for those looking at where to go next.

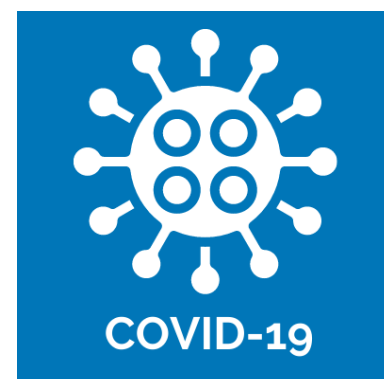
Based on the 2019 recommendations, two thirds (66%) of institutions this year reported that when updating new processes over the last year, the SDGs had been incorporated. Just under half (43%) of submissions said their institution requires researchers to outline which of the SDGs their work contributes towards in their research application. This is an increase of 10% on last year.

Just over half (57%) reported they ran funded extracurricular opportunities for students to get involved with sustainability initiatives linked explicitly to the SDGs. This was a new question for 2019, following up on a new recommendation from the previous year.

### Newcastle University, UK

The University has established an SDG Committee that reports directly to the University Executive Board, to bring coherence and structure to our response to the SDG agenda. It seeks to harness the considerable interest in the Goals that already exists across the university and to identify and create new opportunities and enhance our ability to pursue them. For learning and teaching, we have set ourselves the challenge of “embedding awareness and understanding of the SDGs in the student experience by developing a curricular and extracurricular offer that addresses the SDGs and explores the agenda’s underlying principles of indivisibility, universality and of leaving no one behind.”

## Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs Challenges



Funding and capacity remain the forefront challenges particularly with the financial squeeze that Covid-19 has put on all institutions. Other challenges commonly reported were around a lack of awareness from both staff and students, lack of government guidance, and a lack of best practice to learn from. There is a growing bank of best practice on the Sustainability Exchange for the SDGs, hopefully this will help to reduce this barrier over the course of the next year.

They also reported that it was difficult as they couldn't impact all SDGs equally. It is a common misconception that this needs to occur. Most institutions will be able to impact some SDGs more than others – this is perfectly acceptable. The targets from the SDGs are predominantly aimed at National and Local Government – therefore it is fair that institutions look at targets they may be able to feed into directly, but to otherwise interpret the SDGs in a broader sense. There is a resource on the Sustainability Exchange that goes some way to help institutions work out how to do this.

There are new challenges this year, probably being experienced as institutions are now further along in their bid to integrate and align with the SDGs. Signatories reported a lack of guidance on how to deal with the complexity of action needed to authentically integrate in a cross-cutting interdisciplinary way across an often-decentralised structures. They also reported issues around trying to measure impact – an infamously difficult area – as well as a lack of communication and co-ordination in their institution. There is support to measure impact available to institutions.

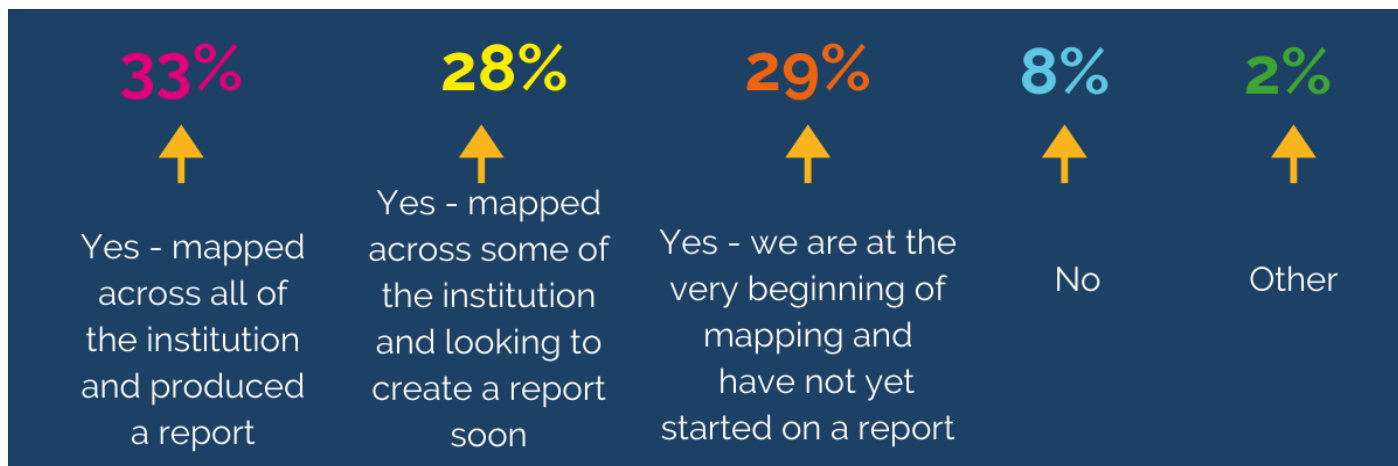
### A Signatory noted:

“We would like to move further and faster, and make sustainability a centrepiece of the university's strategy to 2030, however the biggest challenge is funding. This would have been a problem had COVID-19 not appeared, but it is exacerbated by the need to focus on core teaching and research functions. So the challenge will be to use the opportunity provided by the COVID-19 emergency, which has changed our approaches to online education and international travel amongst other things, to restate the university's commitment to the SDGs in the new financial climate and to build back better.”

## Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

### Further analysis

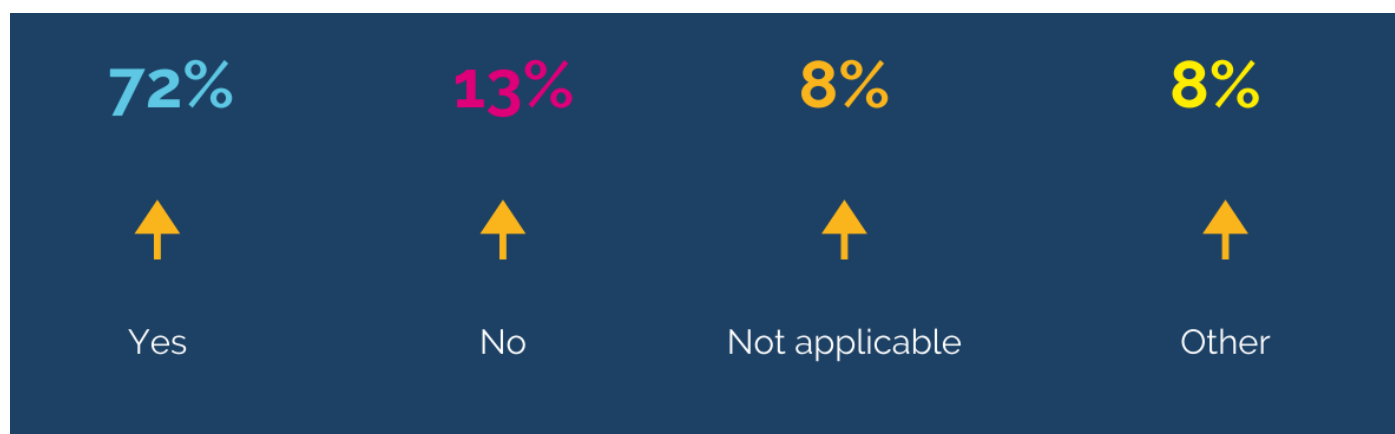
Q12 - Does your institution currently map or chart its activities to the SDGs and produce a report?



Q15 - How long would you estimate that your institution has been actively embedding the SDGs?



Q46 - In the last 12 months, has your institution found any innovative ways to increase staff and student capacity to address the SDGs?



# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

Q19 - Please tick the benefits your institution has seen from aligning (or starting to align) with the SDGs.

**70 (89%)**

Opened a more  
relatable and clearer  
dialogue on  
sustainability within  
the institution.

**50 (63%)**

Opened a more  
relatable and clearer  
dialogue on  
sustainability with  
external stakeholders.

**49 (62%)**

Built new external  
partnerships based on  
the SDGs

**31 (39%)**

Captured the demand  
for SDG-related  
education and gained  
positive engagement  
from students for  
responding to this.

**37 (47%)**

Received praise from  
students for their  
commitment to the  
SDGs.

**21 (27%)**

Encouraged more  
students to choose the  
institution on the basis  
of their commitment  
to sustainable  
development.

**52 (66%)**

Positively influenced  
the image of the  
institution by showing  
its contribution to  
global and local  
wellbeing.

**27 (34%)**

Produced more  
employable graduates  
that have a good  
understanding  
of sustainable  
development and can  
apply this to their career.

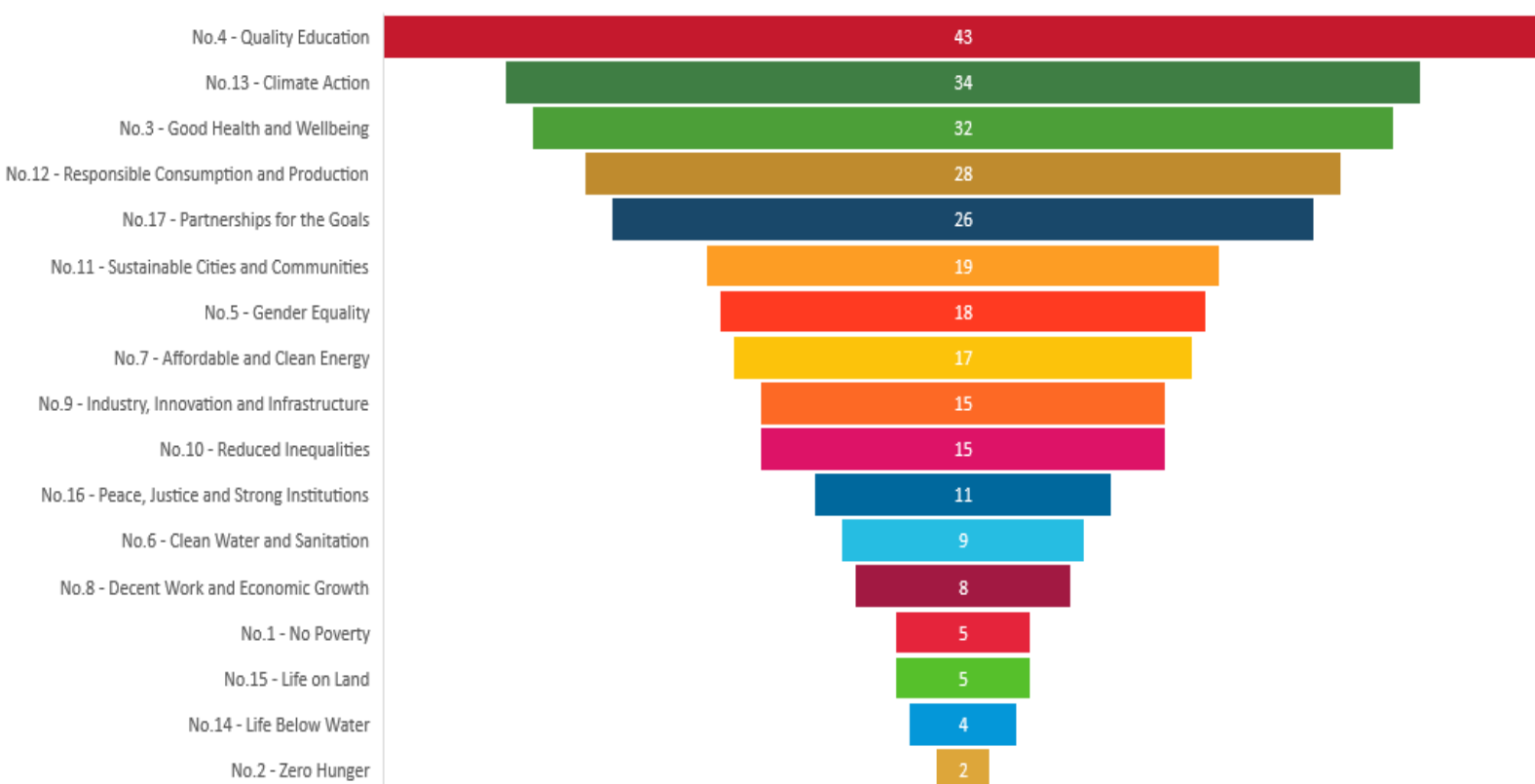
**21 (27%)**

Enabled academics to  
access new funding  
streams to deliver  
on the SDGs

Signatories were able to select multiple benefits, hence the high percentages

# Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

Q39 - Which three SDGs would you say, in the last 12 months, has your institution had the most impact on?



# Recommendations

## SDG Accord Endorsing Partners

1. Provide funding for Higher and Further Education institutions to implement SDG engagement opportunities with students and training sessions for staff, and for relevant SDG research.
2. Better co-ordinate UN department collaboration on SDG orientated activity – UNESCO's ESD roadmap should be better linked with HESI.
3. Offer subsidised or free online international SDG courses and workshops for Higher and Further Education students and staff.
4. Facilitate more opportunities for student SDG ambassadors to be involved in UN activities and look to create SDG scholarships or placements which are funded opportunities for students to work in the UN or in Government on the SDGs.
5. Call on country members to mandate the embedding of Education for Sustainable Development and whole-institution university and college sustainability assessment and formally report on it.
6. Support and facilitate north-south collaboration between universities and colleges on the SDGs.

## Governments

1. When conducting Voluntary National Reviews as part of your commitment to the UN SDGs, ensure better engagement with Higher and Further Education institutions and representative bodies. This must be pro-active and year-round, rather than only in the run up to presentation of a Voluntary National Review to the UN High-level Political Forum.
2. Require all public bodies (to include universities and colleges) to make explicit their plan of action to support the SDGs. It should also be compulsory for all levels of education to integrate the SDGs as part of learning and teaching, and inspections of education institutions should require evidence.
3. ESD must be integrated into national policies related to education and sustainable development (this should include the curriculum, teacher training, funding bids from institutions, reporting)  
This is a clear requirement of SDG 4.7, and requires Governments to mandate this to reach the Goal.
4. Make funding available to universities and colleges to enhance delivery of the SDGs, and an additional funding pot for research on relevant and required SDG areas.
5. Governments should lead by example and better incorporate the SDGs into their departmental plans. There should be clear strategies to work towards the SDGs, with reporting and evaluative processes.
6. Ensure the SDGs are the basis of a green and just recovery from the pandemic, and encourage public bodies to do the same.

# Recommendations

## Students

1. Lobby your university or college to embed the SDGs holistically, support them if they have started to do this, and hold them to account if they miss opportunities to further embed the SDGs.
2. Mobilise student bodies to celebrate the SDGs and engage with other students about them to raise awareness.
3. Be proactive and take up the opportunities your institutions offer you on the SDGs, such as free courses and volunteering opportunities. Demand more opportunities where they are lacking.
4. Demand inclusion of the SDGs in your curriculum. The SDGs relate to everything, and if you are not being taught about them, you are missing out on a core graduate attribute as outlined in a new report: Future Graduate Skills Study.

## SDG Accord Endorsing Partners

1. Look at how you can work on a more regional level with local Government on the SDGs and connect them with Higher and Further Education institutions.
2. Integrate the SDGs into the tools, standards and accreditations you control.
3. Create more opportunities for national and international SDG collaborations through online platforms, workshops and events. Training, mentoring and support would be valuable.
4. Highlight examples of good practice in your membership on the SDGs.
5. Offer placement opportunities for students to learn about sustainability and the SDGs.

## Universities and Colleges

1. Map and report formally on your contribution to the SDGs. Create benchmarks and targets. This ensures you are being transparent and aspirational.
2. Increase your knowledge exchange on sustainability, both interdepartmentally and with other institutions.
3. If your institution undertakes research, change the research application to necessitate researchers outlining which of the SDGs the work contributes towards.
4. If your institution looks to update or begin new processes, incorporate the SDGs, particularly in strategies, policies and updates to the curriculum or course review process.
5. Look for innovative ways to increase staff and student capacity to address the SDGs. Creating staff and student SDG champions is one idea.
6. Explicitly incorporate the SDGs across the whole curriculum and make the SDGs a key learning outcome in all degree/apprenticeship programmes. It has relevance to every single course and module offered, and knowledge of sustainable development and its applicability to every day scenarios is a much coveted graduate attribute for employers.
7. Offer more funded extracurricular opportunities for students to get involved with sustainability initiatives.

## Conclusions and focus on Covid19

The findings from the SDG Accord progress report this year shows that awareness of the SDGs in universities and colleges across the world is steadily increasing. The number of institutions committing to the SDG Accord continues to rise and so too does the ambition to embed the SDGs within education institutions. Those that start to embed the SDGs do so at a very rapid pace, and we have been so excited to see the breadth and depth of initiatives institutions a few years into embedding the SDGs are undertaking the world over. These are proving to be truly inspirational Global Goals, and those that embrace them are reaping the rewards as they report how powerful an engagement tool the SDGs are proving to be.

Covid-19 is the elephant in the room this year. Many signatories did not manage to submit an update this year as they lacked capacity due to Covid-19. Institutions have been under huge pressure over the course of the last year due to the pandemic, as they have rightly prioritised supporting the fight against the pandemic, and the health and well-being of staff and students. They now face an uphill battle to stay afloat among student number drops and budgetary constraints. This has meant that staff have not been able to deliver all of the SDG projects, engagement opportunities, campaigns, and teaching and learning on SDG orientated topics that they had planned. This is an ongoing issue, and institutions are rapidly evolving and looking for new ways to deliver this in a Covid safe way, but they have less resource and capacity than ever. However, we are inspired by the actions institutions have taken towards the pandemic, and we continue to be inspired by their ability to adapt and evolve. We know institutions will find ways to deliver SDG learning across the 2020-2021 academic year, and we look forward to finding out more about these in reporting next year.

Covid-19 has exacerbated deprivations and injustices, and this means the SDGs have never been more important. Institutions must use the SDGs to help tackle these injustices, within their institution and wider society. The pandemic has brought other challenges, financial, as well as behavioural as we see some people slip backwards when it comes to a reduction in public transport usage and an increased amount of single-use plastic in the form of PPE. But institutions across the globe have risen to the Covid-19 challenge so admirably, and we urge them to lock-in the environmental improvements felt over lockdown periods, continue to climb, and push sustainable development forwards through the SDGs.

As one signatory says, you need to find the opportunities; "The coronavirus pandemic has presented the biggest challenge but also the greatest opportunity to use [our] delivery model to educate the ... professionals of the future safely to become future ambassadors for sustainability." We must be better prepared for the next crisis – and the SDGs are the answer. They must be central to all recovery plans. This is especially the case in the education sector!

In the words of David Attenborough:

"There can be no greater legacy than giving young people the tools they need to save our planet"

## List of Reporting Signatories

Abdullah Gül University  
African Network for Sustainable Development Education ))ANSDE  
AgroParisTech  
Applied Science Private University  
Bangor University  
Bard College  
Bath Spa University  
Bournemouth University  
Bridgend College  
Buckinghamshire New University  
Canterbury Christ Church University  
Cardiff University  
City, University of London  
Coventry University  
Daffodil International University  
De Montfort University  
Durham University  
EDC Paris Business School  
Edinburgh College  
Faculty of Economics, University of West Bohemia  
Fircroft College of adult education  
Glasgow Caledonian University  
Glasgow Kelvin College  
Grenoble Ecole de Management  
International Institute of Chartered Humanitarians  
Keele University  
Kuwait University  
Leeds Arts University  
London South Bank University  
Loughborough University  
National Institute of Technology, Fukushima College  
National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad  
Ndejje University  
Newcastle University  
North East Scotland College  
Nottingham Trent University  
Petroc  
RCSI, University of Medicine & Health Sciences  
SBS Swiss Business School  
SGH Warsaw School of Economics  
Shipley College  
South Devon College  
South Lanarkshire College  
Swansea University  
The Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ).  
The University of East Anglia  
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