

# The SDG Accord

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

## Annual SDG Accord Report 2021 Progress towards the Global Goals in the University and College sector

Led by EAUC - the alliance for sustainability leadership in education

The SDG Accord Report | 2021

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#### Foreword

Whilst we have experienced unimaginable hardship globally caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the stark threat of the global climate emergency is now staring us in the face. 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 this in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a roadmap for humanity, the SDGs must be at the forefront of recovery from the pandemic, given we only have 9 years to meet them.

With COP26 taking place in November in Glasgow, UK now more than ever, we have to lead on net-zero initiatives and build momentum around the shift to a decarbonized economy. Universities and colleges around the world are committing to building a healthy, resilient future that unlocks sustainable growth by pledging to meet the Race to Zero criteria.

Simultaneously, the SDG Accord is a network through which we are bringing these institutions together, providing a platform to share best practice and to empower them to be more aspirational on this agenda. It will not come as a surprise that acting on Climate Action (SDG13) is a core priority across the sector, followed closely by Quality Education (SDG4) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG17).

We look forward to seeing institutions tackle these global challenges with the fierce determination and smart innovation of which they are so capable, with our door wide open to help in any way that we can.

Sam Barratt - Chief, Youth, Education & Advocacy Ecosystems Division - UN Environment, Nairobi, Kenya

> "UNEP are proud partners for the SDG Accord and welcome this Annual Report from the signatories. We hope that you are inspired by the case studies available on the website to help you further embed the SDGs in your institution."

Sam Barratt - Chief, Youth, Education & Advocacy, Ecosystems Division - UN Environment, Nairobi, Kenya

#### SDG Accord Signatories

The <u>SDG Accord</u> is a high-profile international initiative that the Global Alliance through EAUC 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 and many other global partners launched at the end of 2017.

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. It presents this aggregated effort 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.

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'.

### A Global Commitment to the SDGs



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 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 with regard to next steps 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 220 global institutions that had signed the SDG Accord by March 2021 to report on their work with the SDGs. Of those, 123 institutions submitted their reporting – this is an increase of 42 newly reporting institutions, therefore 35% of the total number of respondents. The reporting mechanism happened through an Online Survey and was available 29th March – 7th May 2021.

As the reporting is mandatory, institutions that have not submitted for two consecutive years will be removed from the SDG Accord unless they have provided a valid reason for not submitting the reporting - this is to ensure the system is fair. This year's submissions were spread across 31 countries:

- 63% (78) of the submissions based in Europe with the highest number of submissions coming from the UK (57)
- 25% (31) in Asia and the Pacific
- 8% (10) in North America
- 2% (3) in Latin America and the Caribbean
- 1% (1) in Africa.

As the UN SDGs become better integrated into the wider sector, we have taken the opportunity to update the SDG Accord reporting requirements to include two separate sections. Therefore, the institutional signatories have been required to submit answers to a survey comprising of 16 questions and one or more case studies where signatories were asked to share good practice, celebrate and/ or outline barriers of how institutions are integrating the SDGs. This change was widely welcomed by the respondents with 95% of them highlighting that this year's reporting requirements were much improved.

Each report must have appropriate sign off from senior executive representatives and it includes all higher and further education institutions that vary in size and scope. Those undertaking the reporting were encouraged to collaborate holistically across their institution to capture the relevant information. This is an annual reporting process, now in its fourth year, and the findings have been presented at the <u>UN High Level Political Forum in July 2021</u>.

## Progress report from universities and colleges on the SDGs

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

This section is showcasing some of the key findings resulted from the report analysis. This information will be used to identify resources required to support more institutions embed the SDGs.



In terms of what SDGs will be treated as a priority over the next 12 months, a key change in the reporting criteria was to link the relevant priority SDGs with an institutional area, as per below:



## Progress report from universities and colleges SDGs FOCUS

Following on from last year's observations, this year's reporting has highlighted that embedding the SDGs within a range of institutional activities continues to be a priority for signatories. This is evidenced by the fact that 70% if the signatories now publicly report on SDGs compared to 51% in 2020.

When asked about the impact of integrating the SDGs, 88% of respondents confirmed that doing so "Opened a more relatable and clearer dialogue on sustainability within the institution", with 69% outlining that "Positively influenced the image of the institution by showing its contribution to global and local wellbeing" (69%).

This is best supported by responses to the question that 70% of the respondents now publicly report on activities on SDGs. The SDGs are proving to be a powerful engagement tool, and they are beginning to address barriers that have been felt in the sustainability sector for a long time. 96% aligning with the SDGs was positive or extremely positive

While in previous years, the focus has been on how institutions are integrating the SDGs at an institutional level, the reporting has been slightly adapted this year to gain better insights into how signatories are responding to the SDGs from a strategic point of view and at different institutional stages.

We are starting to see a pattern emerge, with most repondents (59% on average) having an emerging overall strategic approach to the SDGs at the four institutional stages, while 25% (average) stated that are established.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	ESTATES AND OPERATIONS	LEARNING, TEACHING AND RESEARCH	PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT
54% EMERGING	58% EMERGING	61% EMERGING	61% EMERGING
ESTABLISHED 30%	ESTABLISHED 23%	ESTABLISHED 23%	ESTABLISHED 23%

While it is an improvement o see that most respondents stated that their institutional approach to the SDGs is either emerging or established, the findings also reveal that many institutions still have areas in need of improvements.



\*STRUGGLING (institutions just beginning to address the SDGs); EMERGING (institutions with an established approach to SDGs); ESTABLISHED (clear structures in place to embed the SDGs across the institution)

## Progress report from universities and colleges SDGs FOCUS

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 (53%), 2) SDG3 – Health and Wellbeing (39%) and 3) SDG 13 Climate Action (29%). This makes sense and reflects our 2020 findings where 68% of respondents saw SDG13 as a priority over the next year, with 57% citing SDG4 and 39% SDG3.

This makes sense, given that in the 2020 findings, 68% suggested SDG13, 57% of them ranked SDG4 and 39% of respondents said that SDG3 would be the goals they will be prioritising over the course of the next year. This prioritisation of SDG 13 and SDG3 doesn't come as a surprise because it shows that SDG integration and prioritisation is fairly fluid and responsive to institutional and societal needs and overall priorities.

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.

In terms of SDGs to be prioritised over the next 12 months by the signatories, this year we employed a different approach according to which respondents were invited to prioritise the SDGs in line with specific institutional areas.

- LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE Respondents outlined their priority SDGs for the next 12 months as a continuation
  of their work with SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing 13%, SDG4 Quality Education 18% and SDG13 Climate
  Action 13%). SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals (22%) is now at the top of respondents' priorities, highlighting the
  advancement towards embedding the SDGs at a more holistic and community evel post Covid-19 by some of the
  signatories.
- ESTATES AND OPERATIONS SDG13 Climate Action (38%) was revealed as a priority followed by SDG7 Affordable and Clean Energy (17%) and SDG12 Responsible Consumption and Production (13%).
- LEARNING, TEACHING AND RESEARCH Featured SDGs SDG4 Quality Education (51%), SDG13 Climate Action (12%) and SDG3 Good Health and Wellbeing (6%).
- PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT Respondents highlighted SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals (30%), SDG11 Sustainable Cities and Communities (19%) and SDG13 Climate Action (13%) among the key priorities.

CASE STUDIES - the complete selection of case studies submitted by SDG Accord signatories is available here.

#### Sunway University, Malaysia

Sunway University's campus consists of both old and new buildings. In 2016, a study conducted on the usage of electricity showed that approximately 70% of electricity was consumed by the chillers to cool the buildings. The chiller operations in the older buildings whose chillers were more than 25 years old, contributed towards a large proportion of the electricity bill. As such, an initiative was undertaken to consolidate and centralize the chiller operations by using the newer University building chillers (which were more efficient and had extra capacity) to supply to the older buildings on campus. The gains were visible during the year as electricity bills dropped for

both the older buildings by 5%. Further information available here.



## Progress report from universities and colleges **SDGs FOCUS**

#### University of Warwick, United Kingdom

As multiple organisations align with climate urgency, much remains to be done to mobilise sufficient resources and processes to achieve the target in time. The Interdisciplinary Biomedical Research Building at The University of Warwick is evidence that ambitious clients and supply chains can collaborate to accelerate adoption of new and better solutions, challenging established practices. Determination and partnerships at all levels are required to work across silos and bring

new skills within existing business constraints. Further information available here.

#### Sheridan College, Canada

Sheridan has accelerated action on SDGs by using its campuses as Living Labs to educate and engage with students and local communities (SDGs 4 and 11). Physical spaces have been constructed to allow visibility into mechanical rooms and unique green building features. The District Energy Centre at our Brampton, Ontario Campus is glassed-in, allowing passers-by to view the equipment inside. Students can see the combined heat and power engines, condensing chillers, and thermal storage tanks that are housed within the district energy centre, while learning about these systems in class. They can also access operating data from the systems or have a guided tour with a knowledgeable Facilities staff person or their instructor to see how these

systems operate. Further information available here.

#### The University of Winchester, United Kingdom

Winchester Student Union is tackling period poverty on campus and promoting safe sex and student welfare. It introduced the Advice Centre Freebie Bin, providing students with access to free sanitary items, as well as condoms, pregnancy tests, personal alarms and drink spiking test cards to students who need them – all available for free to all students as part of the Advice Centre. The initiative came as a result to embed proactive steps towards making sure students have every chance to be happy and healthy by tackling period

poverty and student financial barriers to safe sex. Further information available here.

#### IPB University, Indonesia

IPB continues to innovate the education & curriculum by developing the K-2020 IPB Curriculum to reorient learning process by integrating hard skills and soft skills. The implementation of K-2020 promoted a digital transformation in the learning system by implementing virtual learning methods, online attendance, and online learning materials. It also supports digital academic services, including graduation ceremony and student recruitment. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the field work program called Kuliah Kerja Nyata, which is part of the curriculum, has been implemented on a remote basis and

Thematic Packages replaced face to face teaching Further information is available here.







## SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



OUALITY

EDUCATION







## Progress report from universities and colleges FUNDING AND CAPACITY

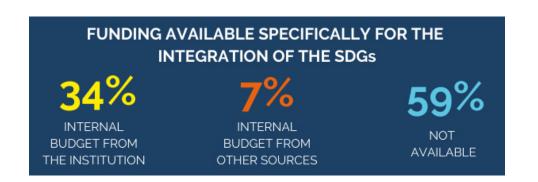
As once again, funding and capacity have been identified as the main barriers to embedding the SDGs, we have examined these areas in a little more detail this year.

Unlike in 2020, when 60% of institutions reported that funding for embedding the SDGs is available, this year has seen a worrying decrease, with only 41% of the respondents having access to specific financial resources for the SDGs, mostly from internal sources (34%). Looking at the 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. However, this year has also seen an increase in new SDG Accord respondents with the mandatory reporting - 35% of the total number of respondents. Looking at the institutional areas benefiting from funding, these include dedicated staff, consultancy work, dedicated curriculum-related projectsreporting activities.

The SDG Accord report in 2020 orientated a recommendation around funding and capacity – which seems to be paying dividends. The recommendation was to "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."

Examples of this include:

- Groups to implement the SDG's and make sure these are considered in different activities.
- Some institutions approved budget for an academic role, dedicated to supporting the commitment to embed SDGs in the curriculum.
- The development of a framework for SDG activities and institution-wide events to raise awareness.
- Establishment of a Centre for Sustainable Development
- Design and deliver more activities for the general public that have a sustainable impact
- Development of an institutional Sustainability Strategy aligned to the SDGs
- Enabling PhD programmes aligned with one or more of the UN SDG's.
- Human Resources and capital investment for a Living Lab to showcase SDG implementation
- Carbon footprint reduction, water conservation, waste recovery
- Supports a full-time Sustainability Manager who embeds and supports the SDGs through education, research and operational activity



## Progress report from universities and colleges BARRIERS AND NEXT STEPS

Funding and capacity remain the primary barriers, particularly with the financial pressures that Covid-19 has put on all institutions. Other barriers 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 <u>Sustainability Exchange</u> for the SDGs, hopefully this will help to reduce this barrier over the course of the next year.

There are new barriers this year, perhaps 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, 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 – find out more about the <u>Sustainability Leadership Scorecard</u>.



We have asked signatories to outline what type of support will be particularly useful to them in order to help them advance their work on the SDGs

It came as no surprise that at an internal level (institutional), respondents highlighted budget (77%) as the core need, followed by senior management support (58%) and training opportunities (55%). Advocating for budget to embed the SDGs at an institutional level has long been an ongoing issue in determining the extent to which SDGs become a priority for senior management.

This can be explained by the needs outlined at an external level, with governmental support (61%) being considered fundamental in securing further support to advance the SDGs, followed by budget (59%) and guidance i.e. case studies, reports (51%).



## Progress report from universities and colleges BENEFITS FROM ALIGNING WITH THE SDGs

We have asked signatories to outline what have been the benefits of aligning their departmental and overall institutional activity to that of the SDGs and following on previous years' results, we noticed a pattern in signatories outlining that by embedding the SDGs, their activities, projects and overall sustainability aims have seen a positive uptake.

<b>107 (88%)</b> Opened a more relatable and clearer dialogue on sustainability within the institution.	<b>85 (70%)</b> Opened a more relatable and clearer dialogue on sustainability with external stakeholders.	84 (69%) Positively influenced the image of the institution by showing its contribution to global and local wellbeing.	<b>36 (30%)</b> Encouraged more students to choose the institution on the basis of their commitment to sustainable development.	
<b>52 (43%)</b> Caused a behaviour change such as removing single-use plastics or reducing air travel.	<b>44 (36%)</b> Received praise from students for their commitment to the SDGs.	<b>45 (37%)</b> Captured the demand for SDG-related education and gained positive engagement from students for responding to this.	<b>81 (66%)</b> Built new external partnerships based on the SDGs	
58 (48%) Created cohesion between institutional departments as they work together on one or more SDG.	<b>32 (26%)</b> Fostered a stronger sense of social justice in students - which has seen an increase in staff and student volunteering activity.	<b>76 (62%)</b> Encouraged staff and students to initiate innovative projects to support one or more of the SDGs.	<b>41 (34%)</b> Produced more employable graduates that have a good understanding of sustainable development and can apply this to their career.	
<ul> <li>28 Enabled academics to access new funding streams to deliver on the SDGs</li> <li>64 It provided a framework for evaluation and delivery of activities</li> <li>(53%)</li> </ul>				

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

#### Conclusions

The findings from the SDG Accord progress report this year show that awareness of the SDGs in universities and colleges across the world is steadily increasing, but so too are the challenges, namely in the form of resources and access to consistent executive and governmental support. 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. We were particularly delighted to see a considerable increase in the number of new institutions (42) reporting this year, compared to only 15 new institutions in 2020. 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 in the form of <u>case studies submitted</u>. 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.

More than a year into the global pandemic, millions of lives have been lost, the human and economic toll has been unprecedented, and recovery efforts so far have been uneven, inequitable and insufficiently geared towards achieving sustainable development. The current crisis is threatening decades of development gains, further delaying the urgent transition to greener, more inclusive economies, and throwing progress on the SDGs even further off track. Institutions have been under huge pressure over the course of the last year and have rightly prioritised the fight against COVID, while facing immense financial pressures with student numbers and budgetary constraints.

The experience of the pandemic highlights the need to find opportunities but also to acknowledge limitations. As one SDG Accord signatory commented: "The SDGs are useful for framing sustainability and beginning the conversation, but they are also problematic on many levels. Integrating the SDGs across the intitution's operations, leadership, education and research is an unrealistic objective within the context of a marketized sector."

We must be better prepared for the next crisis – and the SDGs are the answer. They must be central to all recovery plans. If the pandemic teaches us anything, it is that we must be better prepared for the next crisis. In sustainability and climate terms, the SDGs provide as clear a template for global action as we will ever have. They can and must be central to all recovery plans. This is especially the case in the education sector!

#### In the words of António Guterres Secretary-General, United Nations:

"The Sustainable Development Goals are more important now than ever. Now is the time to secure the well-being of people, economies, societies and our planet."

Aalto University\* Abdullaziz University Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State Afe Babalola University Afe Babalola University African Network for Sustainable Development Education - ANSDE Agrocampus Quest AgroParisTech, Paris Institute of technology for life, food and environmental sciences Al Igra Teachers Training Collefe Al-Ahliyya Amman University\* Applied science private university\* Arab Conference Network ASEAN Academy of Finance and Management (AAFM) Asean University International Audencia Authentica **Bangor University\*** Bard College\* Bath Spa University\* **Bournemouth University\* Bridgend College\*** Buckinghamshire New University\* Burgundy School of Business (BSB)\* **Business School Lausanne Cegep Beauce-Appalaches** Cegep du Vieux Montreal Canterbury Christ Church University\* Cardiff University\* Centre de Development de a Region de Tensift Centre de Developpement de la Region de Tensift CHRIST (Deemed to be University) **CIFE Centre\*** City of Glasgow College City, University of London\* **Confederation College** Coventry University\* Cranfield University\* **Craven College Crescent International University** Daffodil International University\* Dawson College De La Salle Lipa\* De La Salle University - Dasmarinas\* De Montfort University\* **Durham University\*** Ecole de Management de Normandie **EDC Paris Business School** Edinburgh College\* **EM Normandie Business School\*** 

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Tampere University of Applied Sciences\* Tarlac Agricultural University\* TERI School of Advanced Studies The Applied Research Institute Jerusalem Society (ARIJ) The College of West Anglia The Forum of Education Abroad\* The Rivers CofE MAT The University for Sustainability The University of Hong Kong The University of Manchester The Women University Multan **Toulouse INP-ENSAT** Trakya University Turan University, Almaty Turan University, Almaty UAD\* UCSI Group\* Unicaf University\* Universal Institute of Professional Management India Universidad Biblica de las Ibericas Universidad CEU Cardenal Herrera Universidad Cristiana Kairos Universidad Francisco Gavidia Universidad Politecnica Cristiana Universidad Politecnica de las Americas **Universidad Santo Tomas\*** Universidad Tecnologica de El Salvador Universidad Tecnologica de Pereira Universidad Tecnologica Fidel VelÃ;zguez **Uiversidad UTE** Universidade Federal de Sao Paolo Universidade Federal do Espirito Santo\* Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II\* Universitat Innsbruck\*Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC)\* Universitat Rovira i Virgili University College Cork University College of Estate Management\* University for Development Studies University of Aberdeen\* University of Applied Sciences Nordhausen University of Bharain University of Bharain University of Bradford University of Bristol University of Copenhagen\* University of East Anglia\* University of Edinburgh

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\*Institutions that have submitted the information for the SDG Accord Report 2021

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\*A complete list of Supporters and Endorsng Partners is available here.

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