

Sustainability Survey 2017-2018

Key Findings

- 36.3% students are aware of SDGs;
- 23.8% are aware that UWE has been involved with SDG agenda;
- Out of 17 SDGs, UWE students prioritise health, education and fighting poverty. However, further goals were treated with similar preference – sustainability crosses many topics and interests, each of unique importance;
- 90% agree that universities should promote and incorporate sustainability;
- 56% agree that all tutors should include sustainability in their teaching;
- 67% agree that sustainability is relevant to their disciplines;
- Sustainability is already part of the curriculum for 41% participants;
- 1 in 4 students did not know if sustainability is a part of their curriculum;
- 77% agree that sustainability is relevant to their personal life;
- 57% agree that sustainability is relevant to their employability;
- 1 in 5 students does not know if sustainability is relevant to their employability;
- 77% would like to learn more about sustainability;
- 22.3% students involved in sustainability at UWE;
- 36.1% students involved in sustainability outside of UWE;
- 92% students potentially interested and keen to get involved in sustainability;
- Many reasons for getting involved: doing something meaningful, desire to learn, develop skills and increase employability.

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a collective vision of the United Nations for a sustainable, fair and prosperous world, achieved by 2030. SDGs outline 17 goals and 169 targets, across the areas like poverty, health, education, gender equality, energy or climate action etc. (Figure 1). Since the adoption of SDGs in 2015, cities, organisations and individuals across the world have pledged to get involved and become a driving force of the sustainability in their respective communities.



Figure 1. Seventeen Sustainable Developments Goals (Wikimedia Commons, 2016).

The education sector is particularly encouraged to sign the [SDG Accord](#), a tool helping to translate goals and targets into tangible actions. As a signatory of SDG Accord, UWE has set out an ambitious vision to become a fully sustainable university – embed the principles of sustainable development across the buildings, services, culture and curriculum. The university has been on a path to the greener future for several years. This involved both strategic, city-wide projects (such as the Green Capital 2015) as well as campus-focused improvements, e.g. solar energy investments or contracts with fair trade suppliers. The cumulative efforts of UWE staff and their partners resulted in recognition during the prestigious Green Gown Awards 2016 and 2017 and NUS Responsible Futures accreditation in 2016.

However, with over 27, 000 students across 5 campuses, it is challenging to gauge how the students themselves are engaging with the sustainability at UWE. ***Are they aware about the SDGs agenda? Is it important to them? Have they learnt about sustainability during their classes or extracurricular activities? Finally, what green improvement would they like to see happening at UWE?*** Therefore, the aim of this report is to present the preliminary results of the online survey, which investigates students' awareness, priorities and recommendations with regards to embedding SDGs at the university.

2. Survey design

The data were collected over two months (December 2017 – February 2018), using online survey tool, Bristol Surveys. The survey comprised of 14 closed questions on awareness, opinions and priorities and 1 open question concerned with recommendations for The Students' Union and UWE. Furthermore, the survey asked to specify student demographics, asking 3 questions about department, campus location and year of study.

3. Results – closed questions

3.1. About survey participants

In total, **546** students responded to a survey [according to Raosoft, we would need a threshold of 379 responses to be statistically significant, with 95% confidence level and 5% error margin.]

The students were evenly spread across the study years, with c. 28% studying on either first, second or third year. The remaining 16% were studying on foundation year or fourth year (and further). Figure 2 illustrates the participants' split according to the year of study.

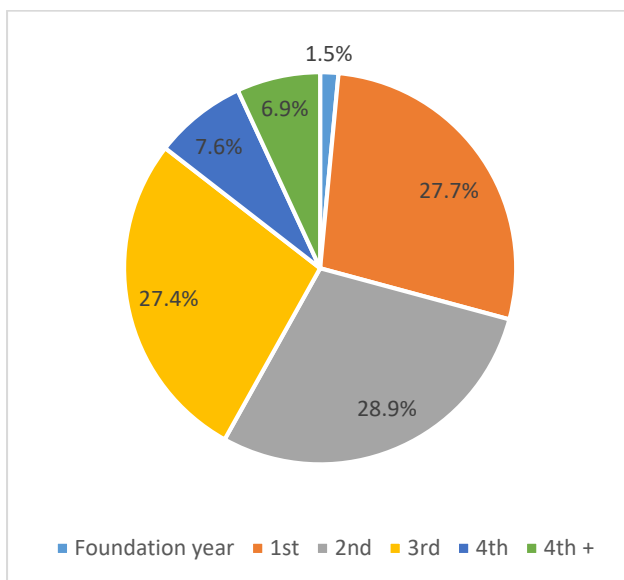


Figure 2. Year of study

In terms of campuses, vast majority of the participants (78.2%) studies on Frenchay campus. This might reflect the fact that Frenchay is by far the most populated campus. Furthermore, Frenchay is home to the majority of the staff and students directly involved in sustainability. Figure 3 shows the campuses of survey participants.

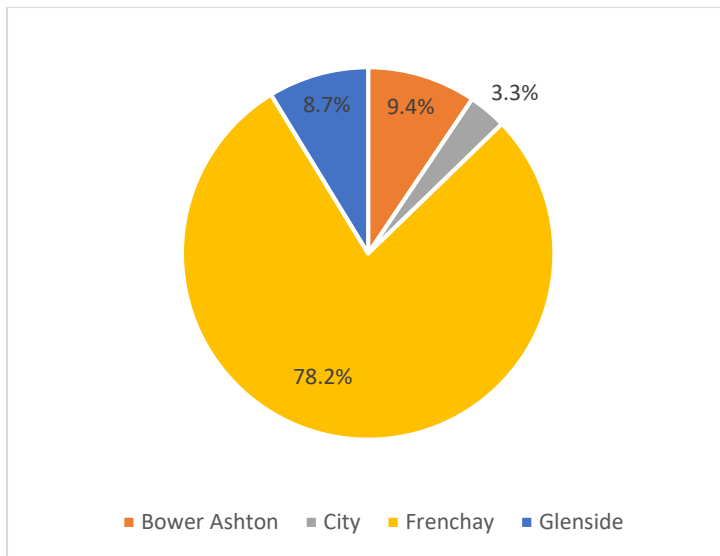


Figure 3. Participants' location

Survey Participants were enrolled on a wide range of courses UWE offers, from Art and Design, Geography to Business. In total, all of the academic departments were represented [15]. There was no single department which would overshadow other respondents, which indicates that **sustainability is relevant to the students regardless of their degree**. Figure 4 details the departments, where participants study.

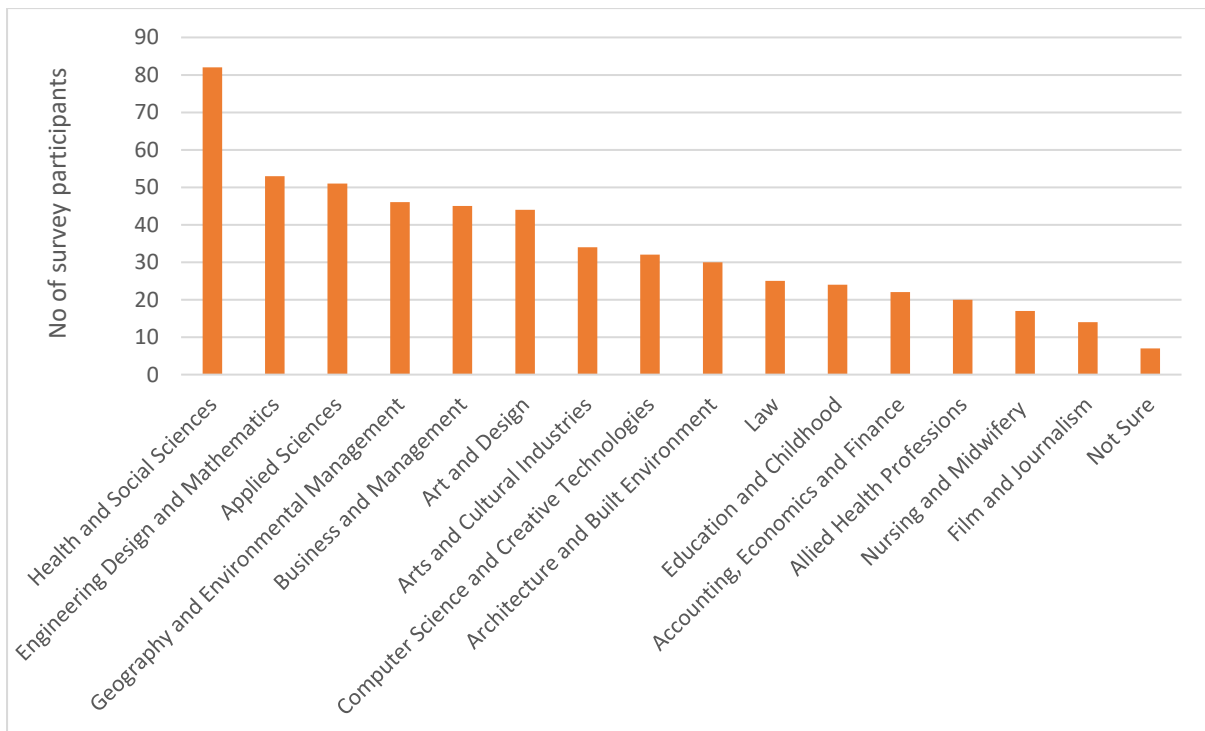


Figure 4. Numbers of survey participants across departments (n=546)

3.2. Awareness of SDGs

Highlights:

- **36.3% students are aware of SDGs;**

- **23.8% are aware that UWE has been involved with SDG agenda;**

According to this year's survey, the majority of UWE students aren't aware of UN SDGs, with 36.3% of respondents being aware of the agenda (Figure 5). This might be explained with the fact that above all, SDGs is a high-level policy agenda for international development, primarily discussed in professional circles.

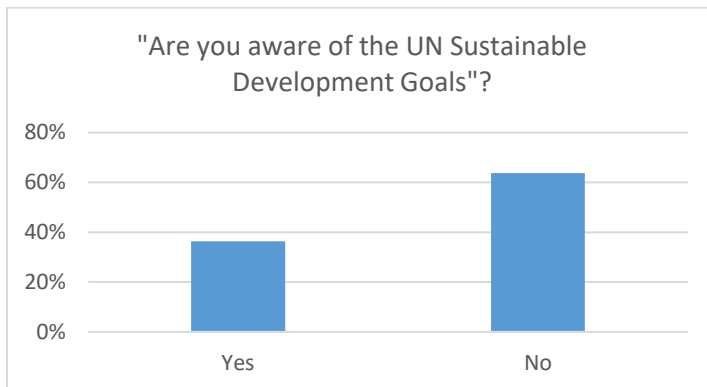


Figure 5. Students' awareness of SDGs

Similarly, the majority of the students' weren't aware that UWE and the Students' Union are already working with SDGs, with 23.8% indicating previous knowledge on the involvement of UWE with SDGs (Figure 6). It is unclear however, whether the students lack awareness about the SDG framework itself or general knowledge on UWE's commitment to sustainability (e.g. presence of solar panels, compostable utensils, fair trade stock etc.). Section 4 provides detailed results of the open ended question regarding "suggestions" for UWE and sustainability; it aims to clarify the current state of student's perceptions on how sustainable UWE is already and what else it needs to do to achieve its long term vision.

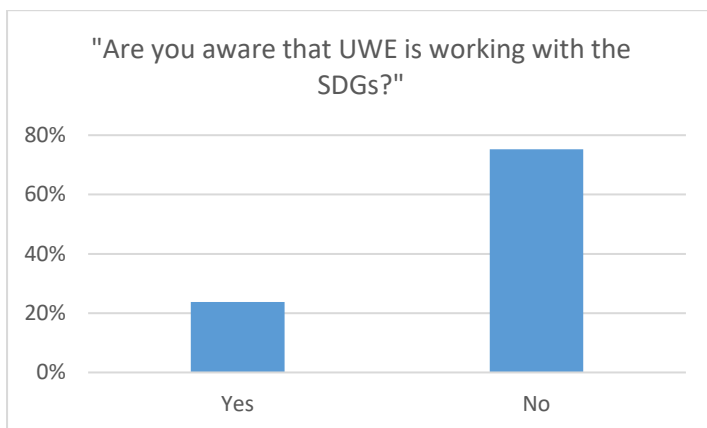


Figure 6. Students' awareness of UWE work on SDGs.

3.3. Students' priorities on SDGs

Highlights:

- **Out of 17 SDGs, UWE students prioritise health, education and fighting poverty. However, further goals were treated with similar preference – sustainability crosses many topics and interests, each of unique importance**

Students were asked to comment which three of the 17 SDGs (Figure 1) require the most urgent action from UWE and the Students' Union. We analysed the priorities using weighting and scoring method. First priority votes were given a weight of 2 (i.e. were multiplied by a factor of 2), second priority – weight of 1.5 and third priority received weight of 1. Figure 7 shows the results of analysis, where each SDG was assigned a final score according to the students' priorities and resulting weighting. The results indicate that **health, education and fighting poverty** ought to be the main priorities for the university. However, the further 8 priorities (no hunger, clean water, climate action, gender equality, reduced inequalities, cities, responsible consumption and production, energy) received comparable number of votes, suggesting that each of the targets carries significant importance.

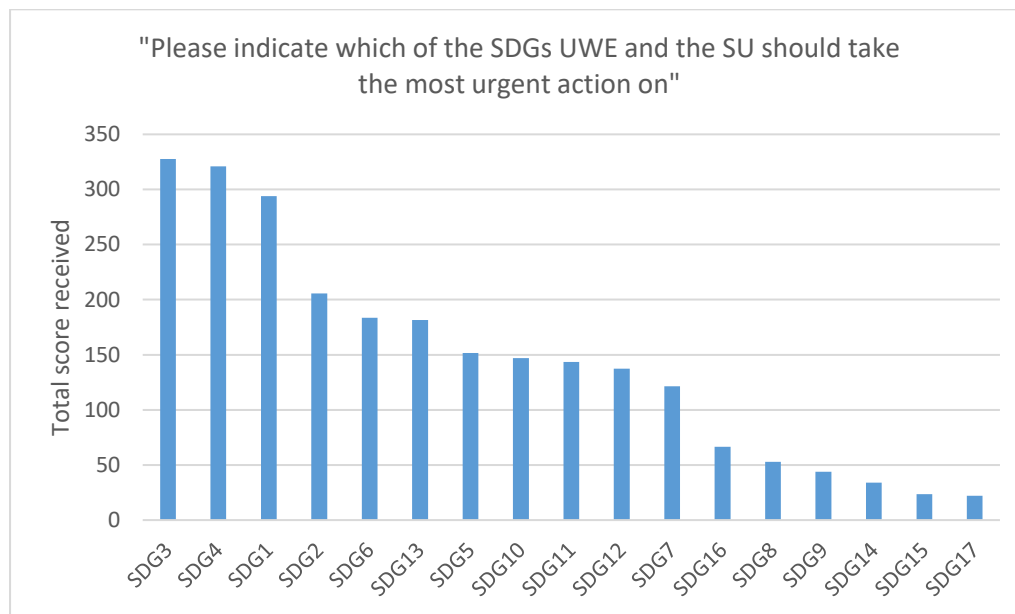


Figure 7. Main SDG priorities for UWE and the SU, according to the students. Numbers indicate scores derived using weighting method.

The SDG priorities selected by students suggest that UWE students understand SDGs primarily as an international development agenda, centred on the improvement of the society. Environmental or green agenda – what is commonly understood as “sustainability” was rated in further places – with climate action in 6th place, life below water – in 14th place and life on land – in 16th place. Framing sustainability as “environmental management”, e.g. sustainable water and energy use resonated slightly better with the participants. Clean water and sanitation was ranked 5th and affordable and clean energy – 11th.

Section 4 will summarise main sustainability recommendations for UWE given by the students, regardless of the SDGs prioritised earlier. Further research could explore which particular actions in the key areas (health and wellbeing, education, no poverty) UWE students would like to see at UWE.

3.4. Importance of sustainability in education

Highlights:

- **90% agree that universities should promote and incorporate sustainability;**
- **56% agree that all tutors should include sustainability in their teaching;**
- **67% agree that sustainability is relevant to their disciplines;**
- **Sustainability is already part of the curriculum for 41% participants;**
- **1 in 4 students does not know if sustainability is a part of their curriculum;**

- **77% agree that sustainability is relevant to their personal life;**
- **57% agree that sustainability is relevant to their employability;**
- **1 in 5 students does not know if sustainability is relevant to their employability;**
- **77% would like to learn more about sustainability**

Participants were asked whether they agree that universities should promote and work on sustainable developments and whether sustainability is relevant and important to their personal life and employability. Each of the 8 questions asked featured a 7-point scale, where 7 means “strongly agree” and 1 – “strongly disagree”. Figures 8a-h (below) illustrate the results (n=546).

“Sustainable development/Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is something which...”

1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Tend to disagree
4	I don't know/Not Applicable
5	Tend to agree
6	Agree
7	Strongly Agree

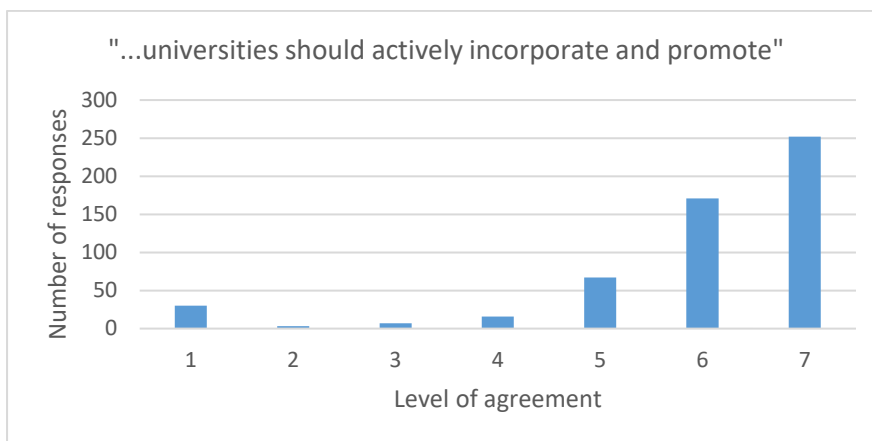


Figure 8a. Students' support for universities promoting sustainability

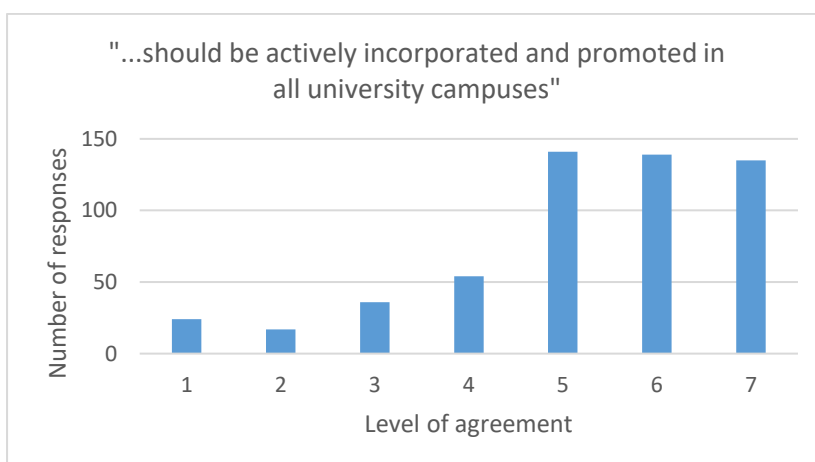


Figure 8b. Students' support for universities incorporating sustainability across campuses

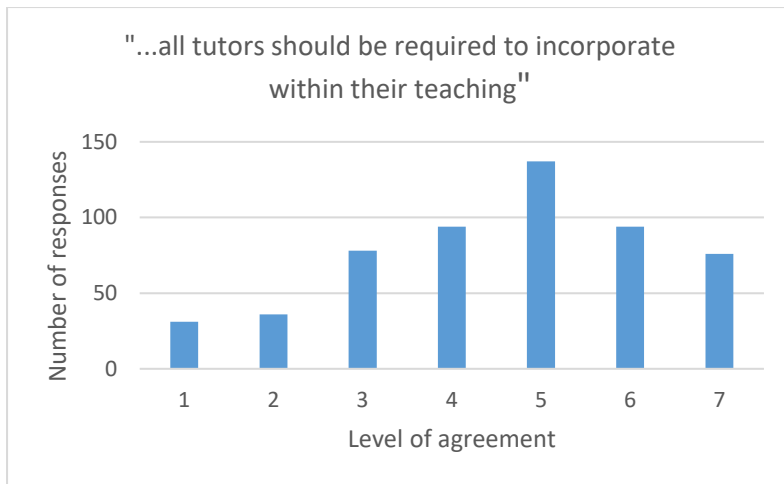


Figure 8c. Students' support for the requirement of incorporating sustainability into teaching

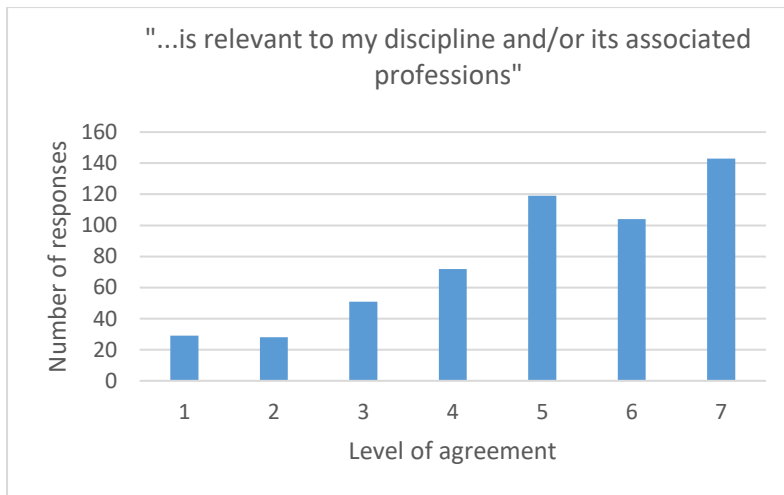


Figure 8d. Students' agreeing that sustainability is relevant to their discipline

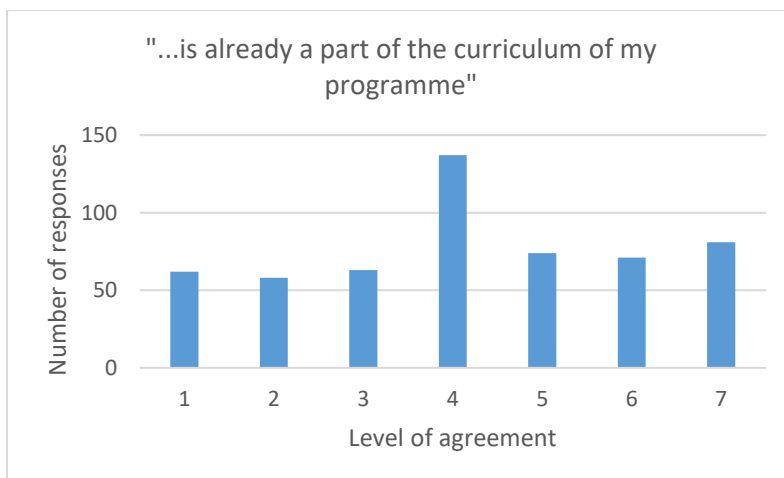


Figure 8e. Students agreeing that sustainability is already a part of their curriculum

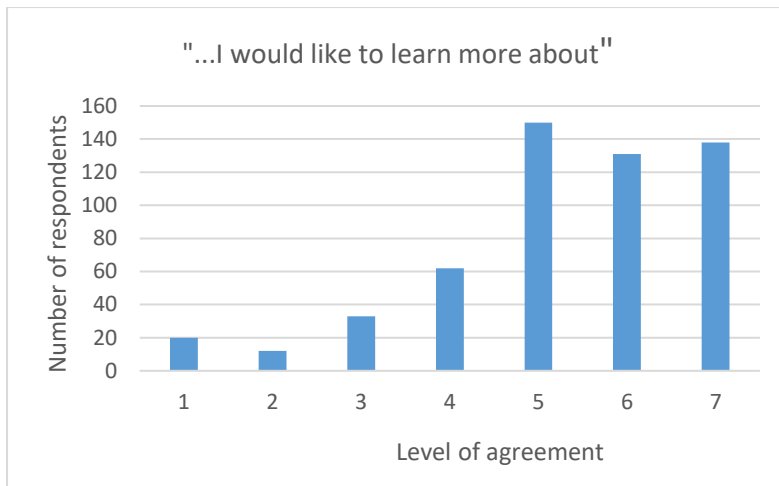


Figure 8f. Students agreeing that they would like to learn more about sustainability

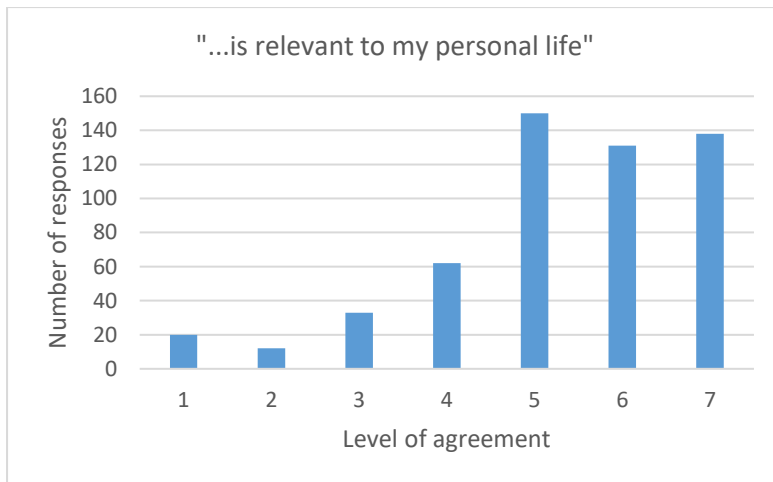


Figure 8g. Students agreeing that sustainability is relevant to their personal life

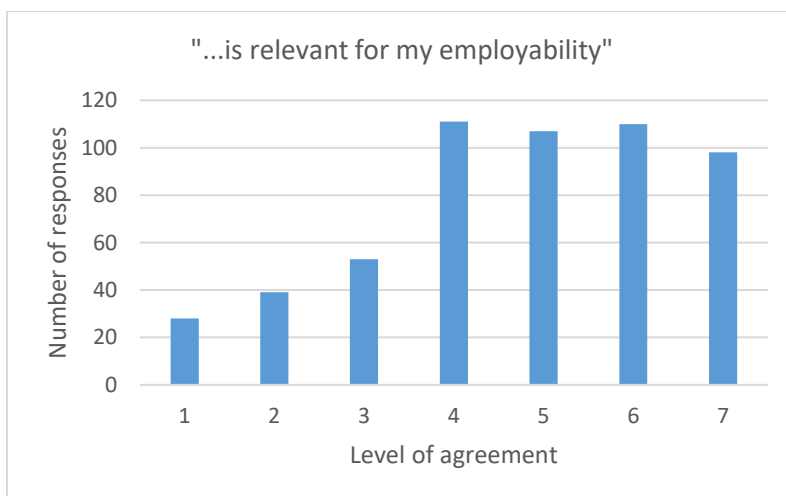


Figure 8h. Students agreeing that sustainability is relevant to their employability

The results indicate that 3/4 students already approve of universities promoting sustainability on campuses and beyond. The support for incorporation of ESD across the disciplines is not as

widespread, as currently 56% agree that all tutors should teach sustainability during their classes. Nevertheless, the level of approval could increase with raising awareness, as currently 1 in 5 students does not know whether sustainability is relevant to their employability. 41% of participants agreed that sustainability is already a part of their curriculum. However, while a third of students disagrees with this statement, 1 in 4 students does not know whether sustainability is a part of their university curriculum. Similarly, this indicates a gap in awareness and a potential area for improvement. The timing of UWE involvement in sustainability and ESD is particularly crucial as over ¾ of student agree that sustainability is relevant to their personal life, while 57% agree it's relevant to their employability.

3.5. Students' engagement with sustainability

Highlights:

- **22.3% students involved in sustainability at UWE;**
- **36.1% students involved in sustainability outside of UWE;**
- **UWE needs to address this gap, so more students get involve in sustainability while studying;**
- **92% students potentially interested and keen to get involved in sustainability;**
- **Many reasons for getting involved: doing something meaningful, desire to learn, develop skills and increase employability;**

Nearly one fifth of students have been involved in a sustainability-related activity at UWE (coursework, volunteering, event etc.). This figure closely reflects the proportion of students, who are aware of the UWE's work on sustainability, suggesting that awareness is correlated with participation (Figure 9).

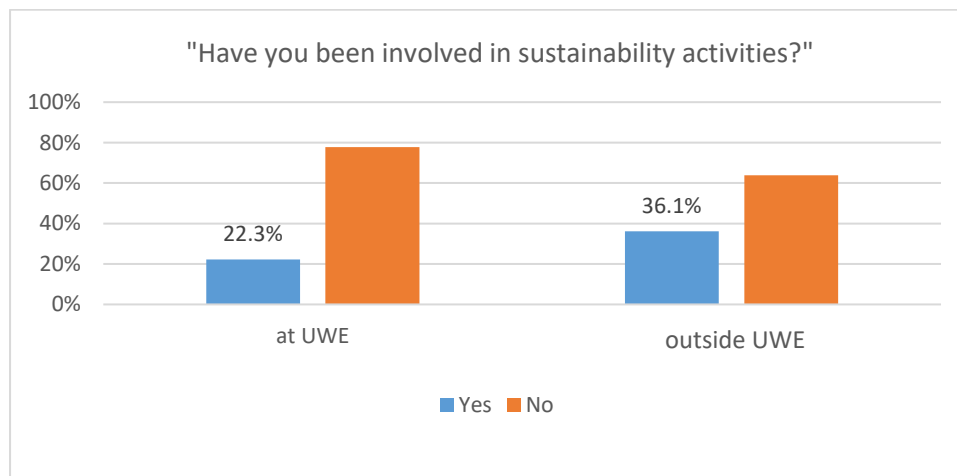


Figure 9. Students' involvement with sustainability

Over a third of students have been involved with a sustainability project outside of UWE. The gap between a higher number of people involved in sustainability outside UWE and lower number of involvement within UWE could inspire discussions on how to increase sustainability and SDGs awareness and maintain students' interest throughout their degrees. This conversation seems particularly timely, especially as over 90% of survey participants would like to get involved in sustainability initiatives – only 41 out of 546 respondents were not interested in sustainability. Figure 9 specifies the reasons why students would like to get involved in sustainability. While organising events and coursework, UWE and SU staff members could take into the account these reasons as well as students' priorities indicated in the section 3.3. Tailoring event management to students' need and values could increase participation and students' satisfaction with the university offer.

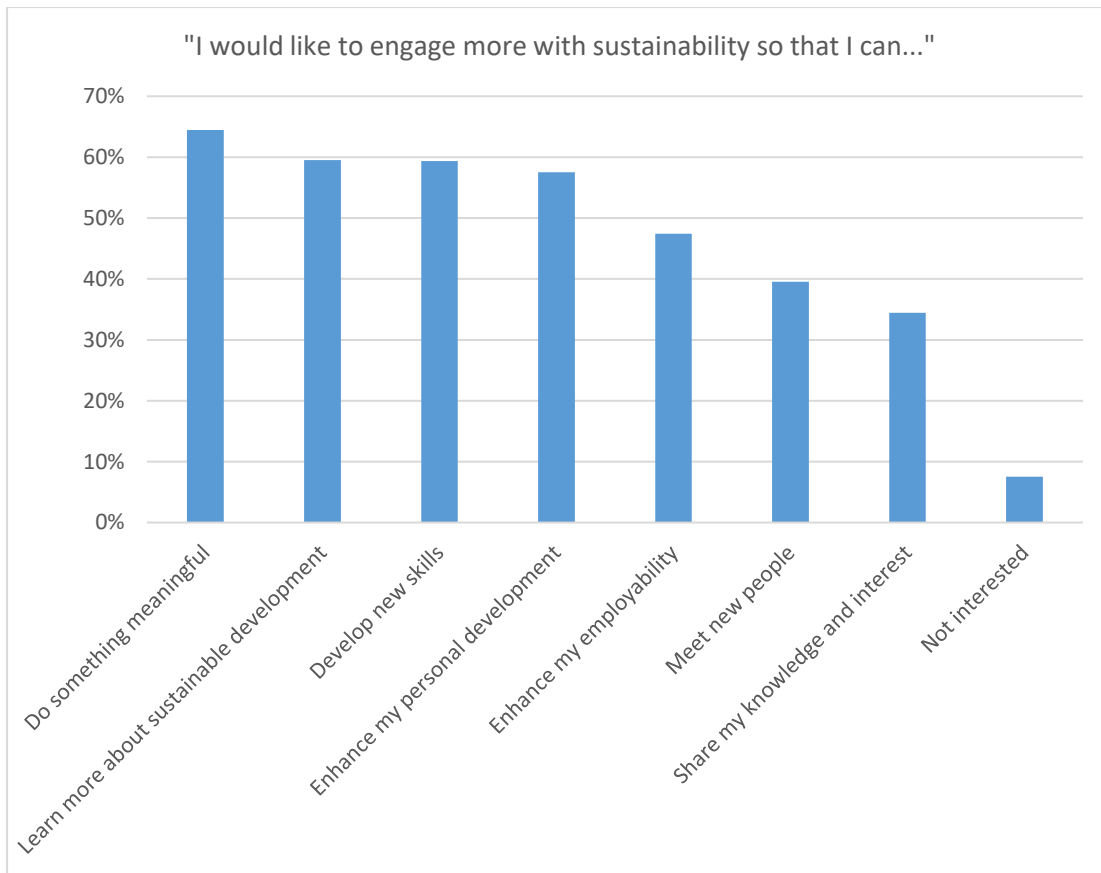


Figure 10. Main reasons UWE students would like to involve in sustainability (please note percentage doesn't add up to 100% as the question allowed multiple choice)

4. Results – open question

Highlights:

- Most commonly suggested recommendations are in the areas of teaching, promotion, recycling and plastic use
- Students would like to learn more about UWE involvement in sustainability, including: sourcing energy, destination of food waste, day-to-day actions for students

In the final question students had the option to provide suggestions for improvement and ask any questions about sustainability at UWE. In total, 87 students provided comments which ranged from a few words to a few sentences. Answers were grouped into the most commonly occurring themes, summarised in the Figure 11.

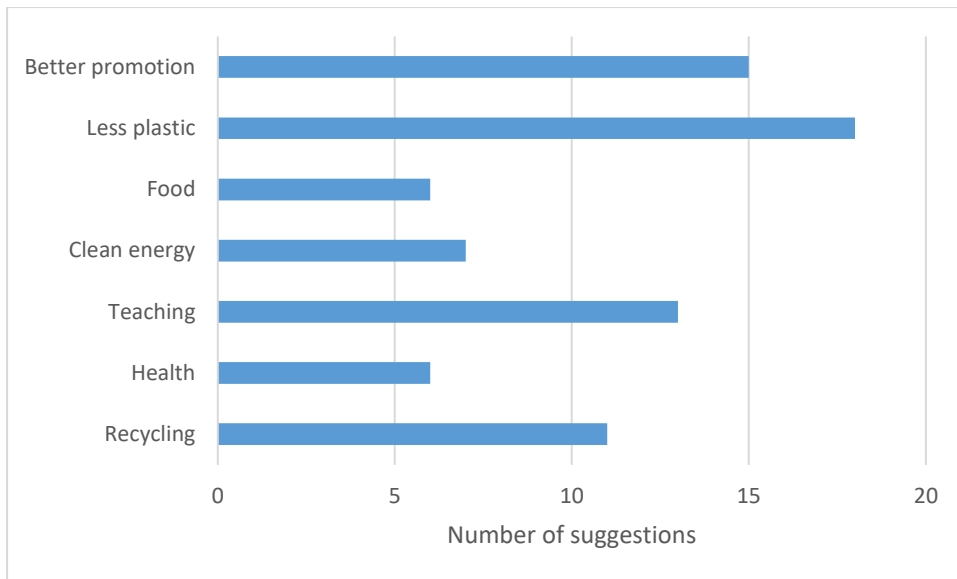


Figure 11. Areas in the need for improvement most frequently suggested by the UWE students. (n=87)

Some notable examples of suggestions in the frequently occurring themes include:

On promotion:

“Sustainability should be incorporated into student lifestyle more, as well as more visible promotions on campus. The more areas of student life tackled, the better. This includes accommodation, societies, the SU building, academic buildings and courses. These are all channels where sustainable living can be promoted in different ways”

“I feel the university should have more visual prompts around the campuses celebrating the sustainability measures they are already taking and encouraging further sustainability actions.”

“Additional advertisement of events for sustainability would improve the knowledge of it. The new FBL building and both Student's Union buildings can do this. Free-standing extendable posters in the foyers could help to achieve this”

On plastic:

“I think the reusable glasses are a great idea at Frenchay SU, but maybe incorporate a small deposit scheme to encourage students to reuse (could save on washing resources) and not discard everywhere as each plastic glass returned would potentially return the deposit being held :)”

“It's quite difficult to identify who to approach and then progress my suggestions for sustainability. E.g. ALL catering outlets should only use wood/bamboo type or metal/china utensils and containers i.e. NO PLASTIC at all, recycling is an expensive activity... huge disincentives for using plastic in terms of pricing e.g. coffee cups.”

“To forbid straws and everything that is disposable (especially plastic) from One Zone, coffee shops, and the SU. Or at least charge a considerable amount for it. At the top of the water dispenser on One Zone, are plastic cups available. That should not continue.”

On teaching:

"As an ABE student, I strongly believe that sustainability should be promoted and incorporated into teaching and in order to enhance my employability and engage in something different, I would like to get involved in project ideas around this topic"

"I would like to attend lectures/ conferences on sustainability and issues surrounding this. The bee week that was run in fresher's week was a great idea and I think this could tie in with wellbeing and promote the importance of this species and others. Speakers such as Bruce Parry, George Monbiot and Ray Mears would be fascinating to see and perhaps more showings of sustainability/ nature films; such as Tawai: A Voice from the Forest"

"I'm currently studying business and management. I chose to study Good Business Bad Business and Sustainability in my second year. I wonder why these kind of modules aren't compulsory at university. How are we meant to see a positive change in the World if we aren't educating students properly about it. University is an excellent time in people's life to raise the issues associated with unethical business."

"I think all students need to be educated on waste and sustainable living (at the beginning of university, when students move into halls and accommodation). This could be done by giving a talk at the beginning of the year - one like the fire safety talk."

"Art and design courses can be used to promote sustainable lifestyle. Designers especially influence the way people live, so if designers were conscious to sustainable design the positive result would affect everyone else's living habits."

On recycling:

"More bins around campus for food waste"

"To implement bins for battery recycle"

"Highlight how Bristol does recycling for those moving into university accommodation especially when keys are given out, rather than in the accommodation information."

"My flatmates don't recycle properly, probably they don't know what to recycle or not, if to clean the thing (e.g. a yogurt container) or not. It would be nice to have a manual/flier explaining how to recycle, with all the symbols explained"

Although participants prioritised global, development goals when faced with the choice of 17 SDGs (section 3.3.), they opted for campus-level solutions when prompted for particular recommendations. **Improved promotion** of sustainability agenda, formal and informal **teaching** and finally – **reduction of waste** through sustainable procurement and widespread recycling featured frequently in the answers. Nevertheless, as sustainability is a broad subject, so were the recommendations. Students provided illuminating comments on areas such as sustainable housing, pollution, ethical partnerships etc.

Although these topics did not appear frequently in the survey results, each of the recommendations below was deemed worth inclusion to the report due to the level of detail and critical reflection:

“Keeping the issue of inequality central to sustainability initiatives is crucial to their being successful and indeed sustainable themselves as initiatives. All voices are needed those who speak loudest need help to learn to listen and those who speak least need help to speak out and be heard.”

“UWE should be actively planning to building more university managed accommodation (rather than a stadium!) as to reduce property rental prices in the local area, to ensure housing as a resource is available for people in the future as well as students today”

“Get rid of Starbucks for a more local and more ethical business”

“We need to reconsider who we make partnerships with e.g. Hewlett Packard known to have business connections in the Occupied Territories in Palestine and UWE also has links with the Defence Industry - let's create better, more humane and sustainable partnerships.”

Finally, the answers highlighted what aspects of sustainability the participants would like to receive more information. The questions students asked included:

- What has UWE done so far?
- How can we make a difference day to day?
- Where does UWE food waste go?
- Do we use renewable energy to power our buildings?