

Response submitted online



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Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
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Dear Environmental Audit Committee,

Please find below our response on the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK inquiry below.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION FOR UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES (EAUC):

Response on behalf of our Members (United Kingdom and Ireland)

About the EAUC

Our passion is to create a world with sustainability at its heart. That's our vision. We exist to lead and empower the post-16 education sector to make sustainability 'just good business'.

The membership of the EAUC comprises higher and further educational institutions, with a combined budget of some £25 billion, responsible for educating over 2 million students supported by half a million staff. We represent 78% of the universities in the UK.

We have regional and country chapters, with member institutions connected deeply with business, industry, health and civic bodies at local levels, with reach internationally via their research, innovation and student mobility.

We believe

- That UK and Irish education should be a global leader in sustainability
- That educational institutions have a responsibility as anchors in their communities to be agents of change
- That education has a unique opportunity to transform lives and communities
- That education is at the heart of global sustainability
- That every student should have access to sustainability education
- That education should reflect best practice in operational sustainability
- In being flexible and adaptable to find solutions for a resilient future
- In the value of international collaboration

Our values

- Pioneering - driving sustainability through innovation
- Independence - our own unique voice
- Collaboration - together we go further
- Role Model - leading by example
- Empowering - supporting and inspiring our members

Response to the Inquiry

Summary:

We will keep response brief to the majority of the questions posed, and expand foremost on the question orientated around young people, which is where our expertise lies. Our main points are:

- The Government as of yet has done relatively little to engage with young people, Higher or Further Education, or civil societies that represent institutions. Research from the NUS in January 2018 found that two thirds of students had not heard of the SDGs. We cannot hope to meet the SDGs by 2030 if we continue to produce graduates that have no idea what they are and the economic, environmental and social challenges and opportunities they represent.
- Education is still being thought of solely in Goal 4, but actually, there is a critical role for education in all of the SDGs that is often overlooked. To quote Malala Yousafzai: “All the SDGs come down to education...”
- The role of Further and Higher Education institutions is overlooked with the SDGs. “Education is a public good, allowing students the opportunity to become change makers in the world. Although only around 3% of people go to university globally, 80% of world leaders went to university, so university education has a disproportionate influence.”¹ There has been little engagement with the tertiary engagement sector or civil society that represents them.
- Embedding Education for Sustainable Development in the curriculum is a key requirement to improve awareness of the SDGs in education; this should not be a choice. Embedding SDGs into educational objectives could be another good route to ensuring students have a better knowledge of sustainable development ready for the world of work.
- Some kind of mandate to report on SDGs in public and higher education would help ensure institutions are delivering sustainable development skills and playing their part in contributing to wider society. We facilitate the [SDG Accord](#), which asks institutions globally to pledge to do more on the SDGs and mandates that they report on them. We have had the most interest from UK institutions – but many report capacity and resource as an issue that stops them doing more. If the SDGs were a priority for senior staff due to either it being mandated, or the returns on embedding the SDGs being made clearer, they would allocate more resources to the SDGs. Smaller institutions would need a level of subsidisation to this end.

Specific answers to the Inquiry questions:

- 1) What steps the Government has taken to achieve the Goals;

As of yet – the steps the Government has taken seem to be limited. The (Single Departmental Plans) SDP was a start, and ONS beginning to track the SDGs and make suggestions is useful, but none of this amounts to tangible achievement. The Government needs to move from an operations and planning stance, to an action stance and begin to deliver the goals. It also needs to recognise that Government is not best placed to deliver some elements of the Goals and need to work more with Strategic Partners to meet the Goals. We, the EAUC, have hundreds of university and college members, many of which are embedding the Goals in their institution, with innovative initiatives and inspirational research, and we ourselves manage a huge project called the SDG Accord. This international initiative sees tertiary education institutions pledging to do more on the SDGs and reporting publicly and to the UN on their progress. We also presented it at the UN’s High Level Political Forum during the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI – run by various UN bodies) event and it has now been made an official HESI tool. Yet when we have tried to engage with the UK Government (specifically the Department for International Development and the APPG for the SDGs) on this – it has been met with silence.

¹ <https://www.stgeorghouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Further-and-Higher-Education-and-the-SDGs-Report.pdf>

- 2) What steps the Government has taken since the Committee's report to better mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals into its programme;
- 3) How this is reflected in Single Department Plans and departmental reporting;

Some steps were taken to better the Government's SDP after the EAC report, but the SDP improvement has not resulted in external action. Given the power and influence of Government Departments, this feels like a huge waste. Government continues to push the sustainability agenda in the form of the 25 year Environment Plan and the Clean Growth Strategy, which we commend, but activities resulting from these rarely include the SDGs. For example, Green GB Week does not mention the SDGs in its current toolkit – and this implies the changes to the SDP to include the SDGs are only superficial.

- 4) Whether the Government has done more since the Committee's report to raise awareness of the SDGs especially amongst children and young people;

This is an area in which we have significant expertise given our focus on sustainability in the tertiary education sector. From this position, we can categorically say that there is not enough, if any, progress here. There has been some discussion of encouraging schools to embed the SDGs, but little action. There has been virtually no discussion on the role of universities and colleges.

Universities and colleges occupy a unique societal position – they are powerful influencers of the next generation of leaders, professionals, artists and scholars. They also hold significant financial and cultural assets, and are often the bedrock of strong communities. "Education is a public good, allowing students the opportunity to become change makers in the world. Although only around 3% of people go to university globally, 80% of world leaders went to university, so university education has a disproportionate influence."² Relationships with them must be built on to achieve the SDGs by 2030 – they are integral.

In particular, the Government needs to recognise the critical role of Higher and Further Education in acting across all the goals, and not being limited to Goal 4. What universities and colleges do matters to our shared ambition to create a more equitable and inclusive society, and be responsible custodians of our planet. The sector's role in undertaking research and supporting innovation, alongside lifelong learning, underpin a global knowledge-based economy. Today's students are tomorrow's leaders and change-agents – there is not enough understanding of this within Government.

As mentioned in Question 1, the EAUC has created an initiative called the [SDG Accord](#) – it is an international platform for universities and colleges to formally pledge to embed the SDGs within their institution, and they must report on their progress annually. In turn, the EAUC collates this information and presents it to the UN at the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) every July. In July 2018 it was presented to the UN HLPF for the first time, it was received well and one of the key recommendations was immediately agreed upon.

We know that many institutions are trying to raise awareness of the SDGs, but without Government directives and mandates, there is not action on the SDGs across the sector as a whole. This is due to a lack

² <https://www.stgeorghouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Further-and-Higher-Education-and-the-SDGs-Report.pdf>

of awareness, little incentivisation and limited resources and capacity. Two thirds of the institutions that have signed the SDG Accord are UK institutions – you can read the report [here](#).

To get whole-scale institutional contribution to the SDGs, we recommend that there needs to be:

- Mandated (or at least encouraged) inclusion of the SDGs in overarching strategies, policies, objectives and KPIs.
- Mandated incorporation of the SDGs into the curriculum through dedicated Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) courses, and the embedding and tracking of the SDGs in all courses.
- Encouragement for institutions to offer lifelong learning for staff members and the wider community on ESD and the SDGs.
- Clearer linkages between the SDGs and the financial benefits of incorporating them within an institution.
- An increase in funded opportunities for research on the SDGs for academics.

We appreciate that universities and colleges are autonomously run for the most part, but Government needs to play a stronger role in leading and enabling the embedding of the SDGs in Higher and Further Education. The BEIS consultation and resulting guidance ‘An emissions reduction target for the wider public and higher education sectors’ clearly recognises the impact tertiary education can have on sustainability matters – this is a key sector and Government should seriously look at how they can better support institutions to incorporate the SDGs.

We have many examples of pioneering institutions (we are happy to share case studies with Government) – but on the whole there needs to be more support for those with less resource and less capacity to ensure the SDGs are not only worked on by institutions with bigger budgets. The whole ethos behind them is that no one should be left behind, and more needs to be done in the education sector to make sure all institutions have the resource and knowledge to embed them in a way that is of symbiotic benefit to both institution and society as a whole.

- 5) What preparations are underway for the Voluntary National Review process, and how will the outcomes and impacts be measured;

We would be keen to hear about this – as of yet, we are not aware of preparations, mechanisms or a reporting process.

- 6) Whether the Government can be said to have an action plan on the SDGs;

An action plan would not be an accurate description of the Government’s sole SDG planning mechanism at present, which is the SPDs. These are not action plans, more statements of ‘intent’.

- 7) How does the Government take its commitment under the SDGs to address food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms into account when developing policy on food; is there the data to effectively measure progress against these commitments?

We would find this difficult to comment on in detail – but there is 13 targets for SDG2, and of these, the ONS currently only reports on six. Of the remaining seven, three are purportedly in progress and four are being explored. This implies that the data is not being effectively measured as of yet – and we would question a solely quantitative mechanism to capture this kind of information as well.



We hope this has been of use. We wholeheartedly support the SDGs and applaud the UK's bid to embed them by 2030. However, we urge the Government to take heed of the EAC review to ensure that we will meet the SDGs by 2030. At present, as outlined in the excellent report 'Measuring Up' by UKSSD, it looks like we are falling behind, and this needs to be addressed head on.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Iain A Patton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'I'.

Iain Patton, CEO, EAUC