

# The Need for Education for Sustainable Development

Marta Nowicka

Project Manager at SOS-UK



STUDENTS  
ORGANISING FOR  
SUSTAINABILITY  
UNITED KINGDOM

# Who are SOS-UK

**SOS-UK is an educational charity created by students and staff in the student movement in response to the climate emergency and ecological crisis.**

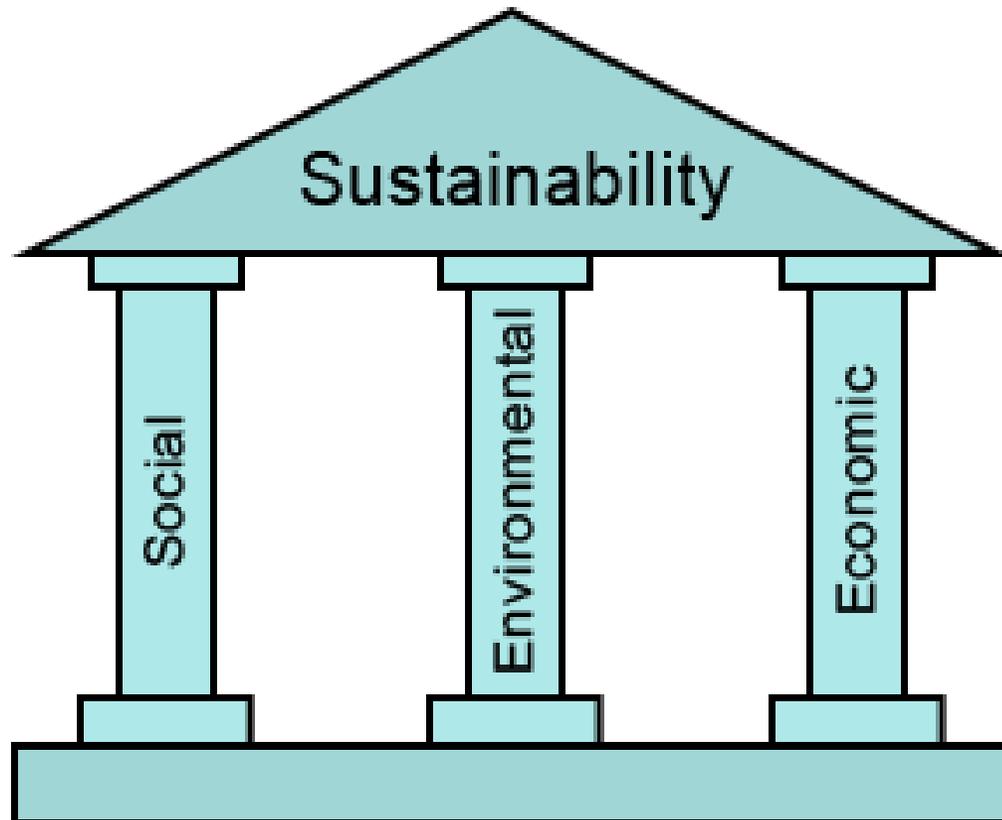
SOS-UK aim to:

- Get more students **leading on, acting, and learning for sustainability**
- Transforming education so sustainability covers all disciplines, **from early years to adult learning**
- Making sustainability **more inclusive**, so it's for everyone



Embedding sustainability across campuses, curriculums and communities is fundamental to representing our students, and strengthening our students' unions.

# What do we mean by sustainability

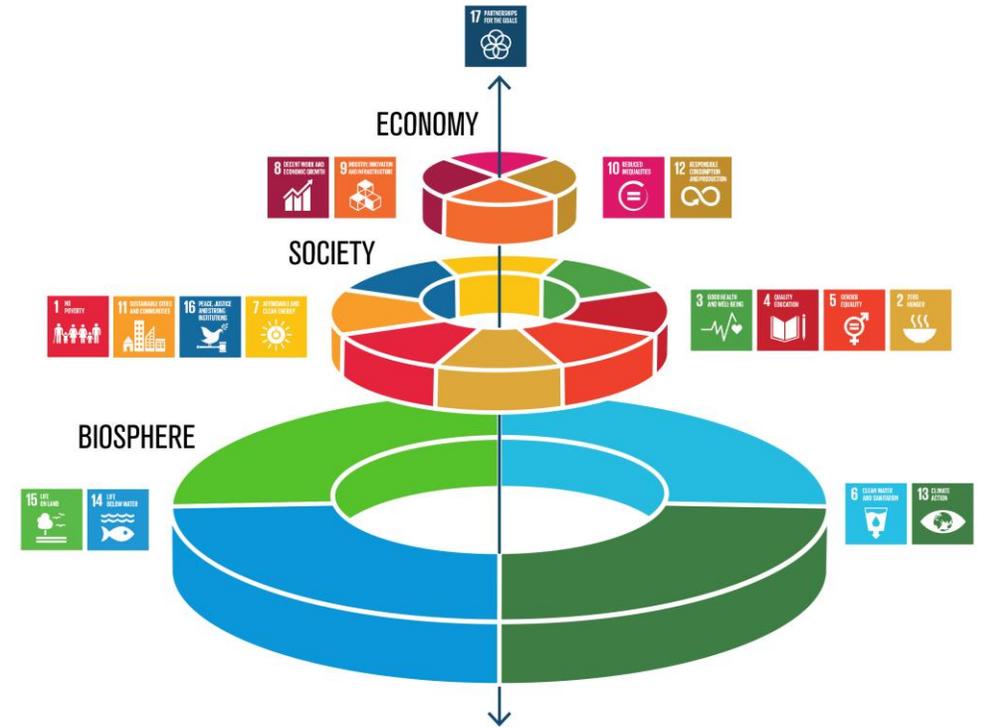


**Sustainable development is  
'development that meets the  
needs of the present without  
compromising the ability of  
future generations to meet  
their own needs.'**

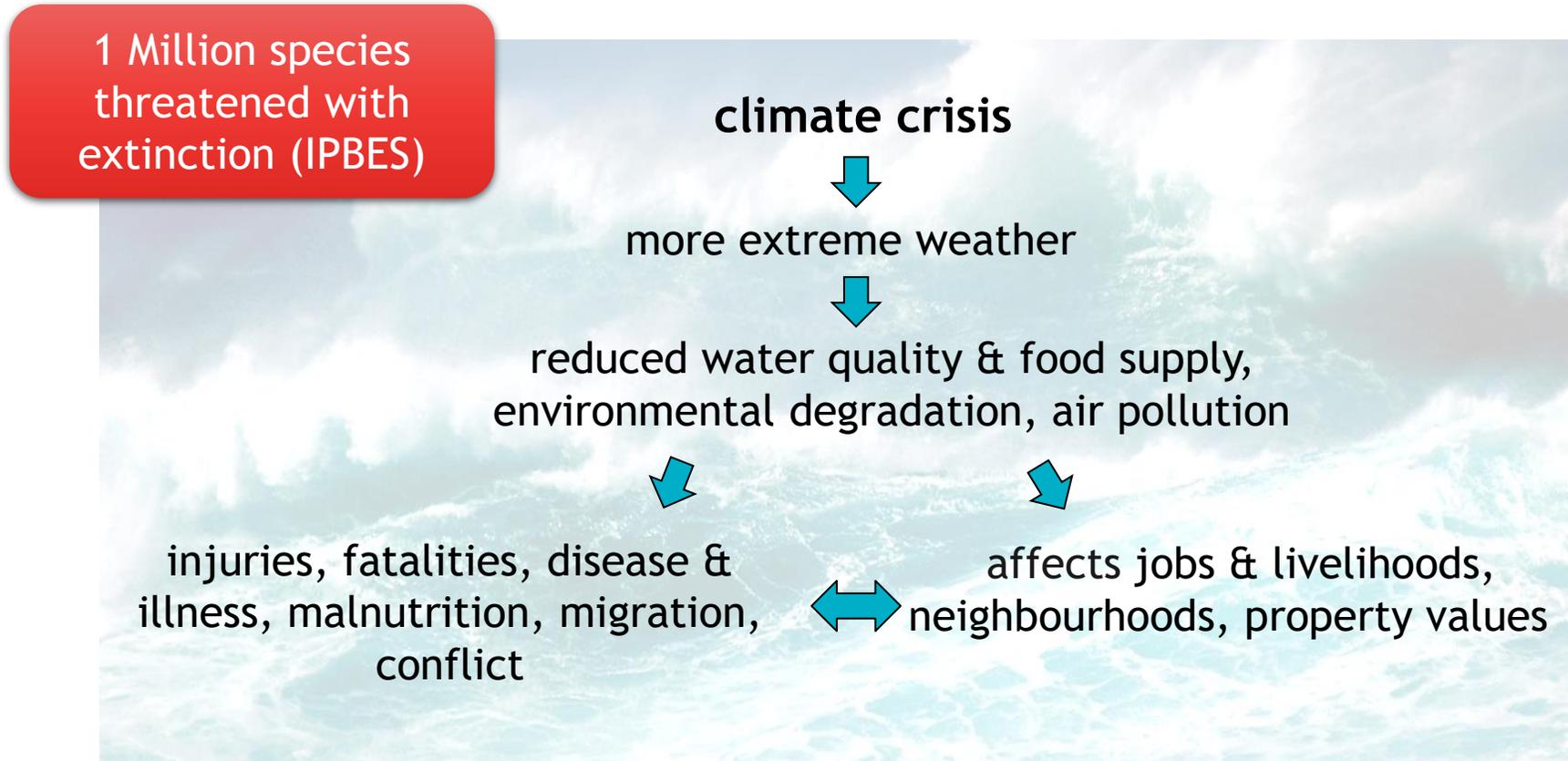
“Our Common Future”, also known as the Brundtland Report, from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987

# What do we mean by sustainability

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



# The problem: the climate and ecological crisis



# The goal: climate justice



“Climate justice is the moral, social and political side of the climate crisis, understanding that certain communities and minorities will face different and more damaging consequences of climate change sooner and harsher than others.”

Leah Duffy, Teach the Future campaigner

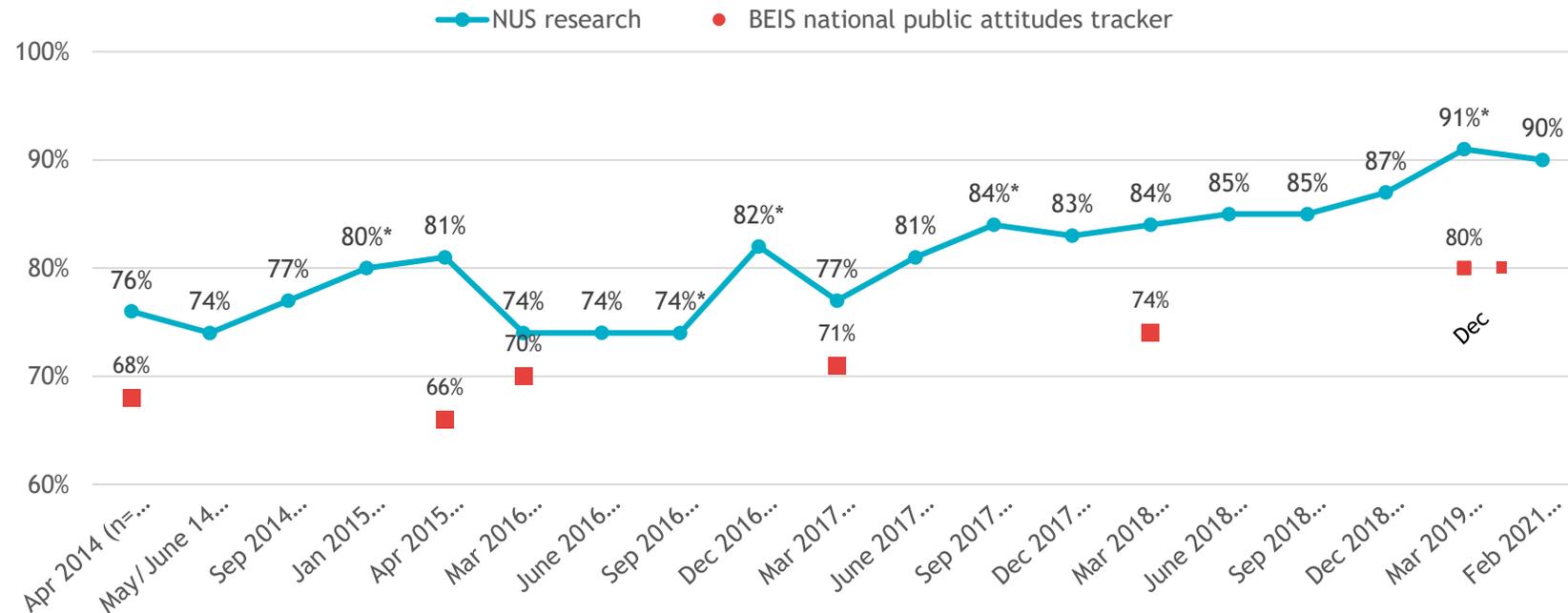
# Student & staff perceptions

# Growing concern about climate change

“The biggest problem/threat we face is climate change and pollution. We are rapidly destroying our planet and its environment. To secure a future for the next generation we must ensure that positive change occurs” - Student respondent, NUS Skills survey 2019.

## “How concerned, if at all, are you about climate change?”

[Responses shown for very or fairly concerned]



Higher & further education students

Source: NUS Student Opinion Climate Change | Respondents in higher and further education across the UK



# We know students want more...



82% would like to see sustainable development actively incorporated and promoted through all courses



67% say sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about

“This can change one's life habits and cultivate one's own professional skills.”

“Because I think everyone should learn more about it to give them a better idea of how they should live their lives and the impact they personally can have on the world. Now we just need world governments and multinational companies to actually do something meaningful...”

To make a difference to our collective future

“I would like to learn more because I would never want to selfishly meet my needs and then end up ruining the world for future generations to come.”

“It is important for everyone to do their bit to help save future generations and our planet.”

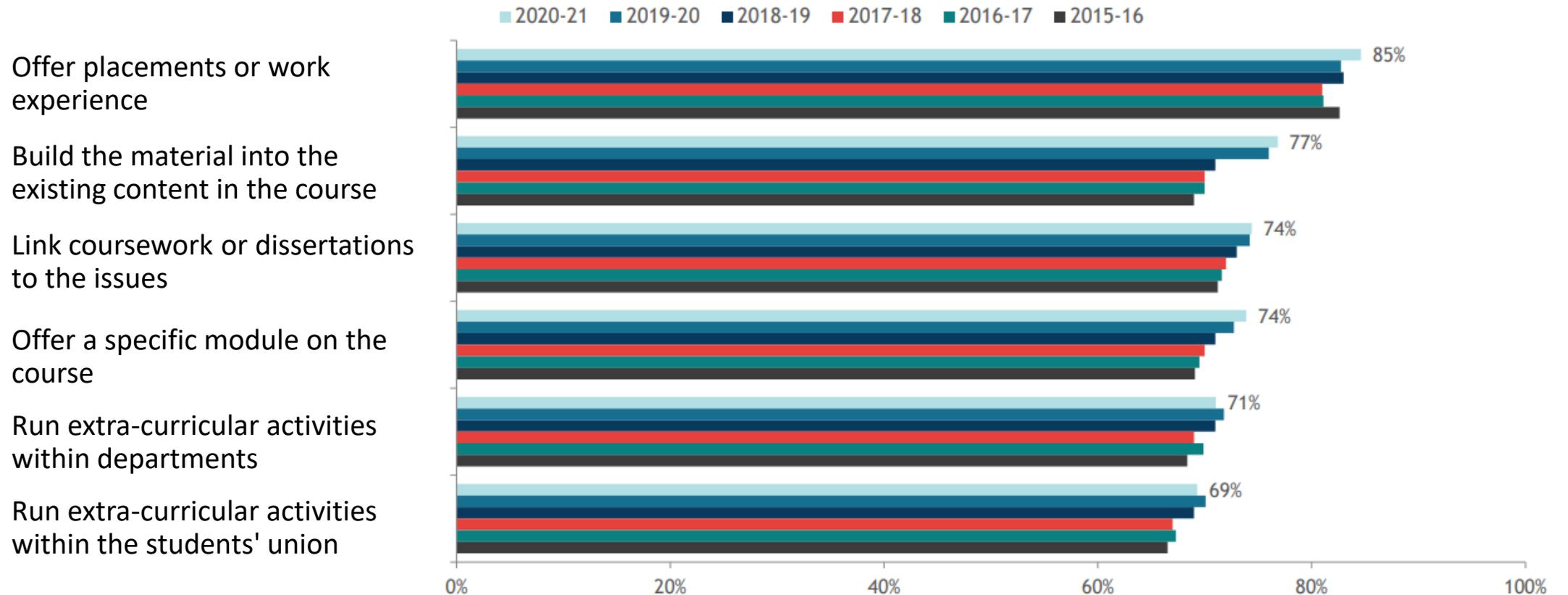
“It is one of the potential career paths for me once I graduate as I would like to be in a role that relates to implementing or educating others about sustainable development.”

Career aspirations / relevance

“To gain better understanding of the actions I could take within future employment to help protect the environment for future generations”

Source: NUS Sustainability Skills Survey 2022-23 | Base: c.10300 respondents in higher education across the UK

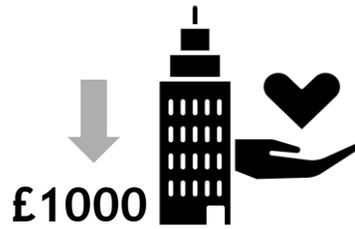
# How students want to learn



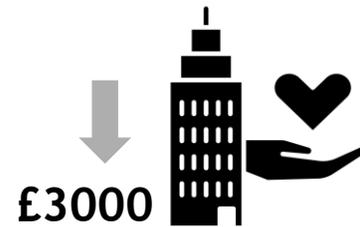
Source: NUS Sustainability Skills Survey 2021-22 | Base: c.8300 respondents in higher education across the UK

# Students want more beyond their formal education

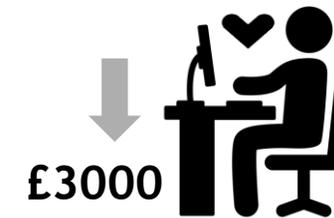
Students show a desire to work for companies that perform strongly in relation to sustainable development, and in roles that contribute positively to this area.



**75%** would accept a salary £1000 lower than average to work in a company with a good social and environmental record



**54%** would accept a salary £3000 lower than average to work in a company with a good social and environmental record



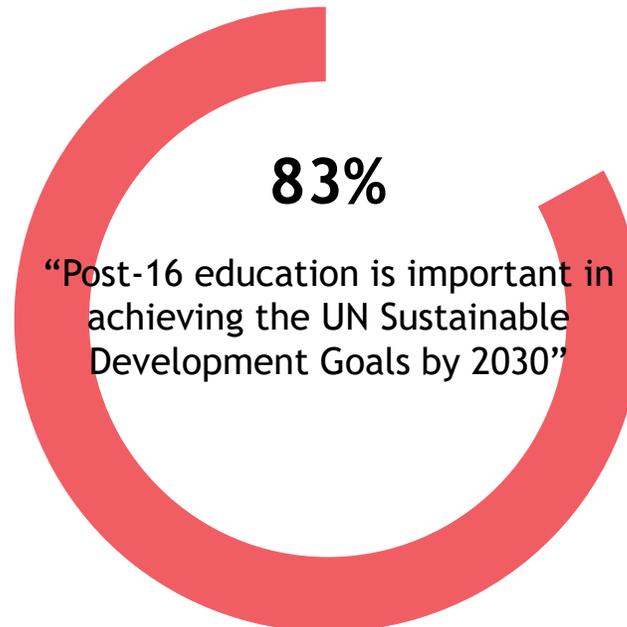
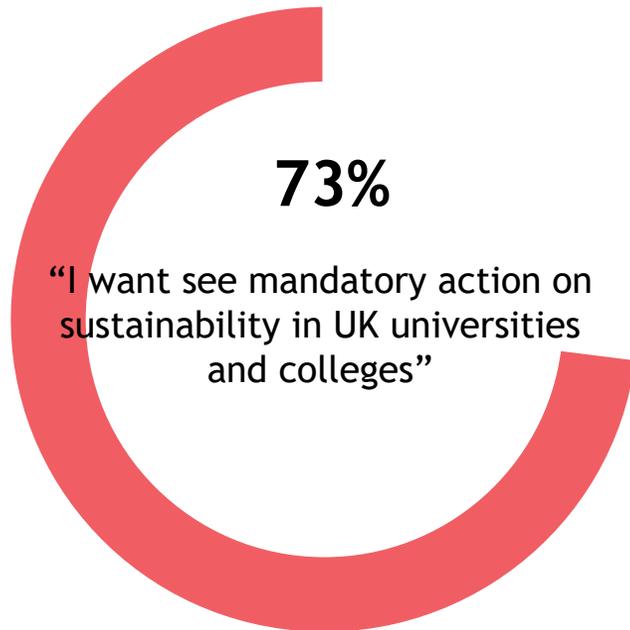
**51%** would accept a salary £3000 lower than average to work in a job that contributes to positive social and environmental change

Source: NUS Sustainability Skills Survey 2022-23 | Base: c.10300 respondents in higher education across the UK

# Sector staff support for sustainability is also high

“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”

[Responses shown for strongly agree or agree]



Source: NUS EAUC AOC CDN Sustainability in Education 2018 | Base: c. 566 staff working in higher and further education across the UK

Higher &  
further  
education  
staff

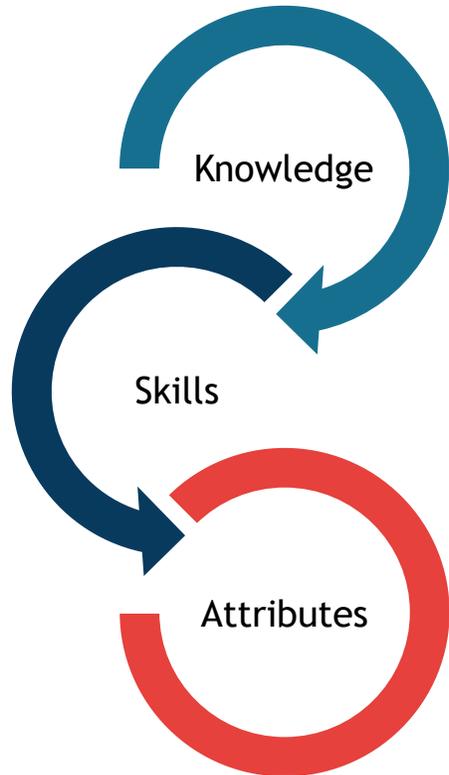
# Why education is a vital tool for sustainability

“3% of people attend university but  
the take up 80% of the leadership  
positions”

Chuck Hopkins, UNESCO Chair



# Education about sustainable development vs Education for Sustainable development (ESD)



“**Education for sustainable development** is the process of equipping students with the **knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes** needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations.”

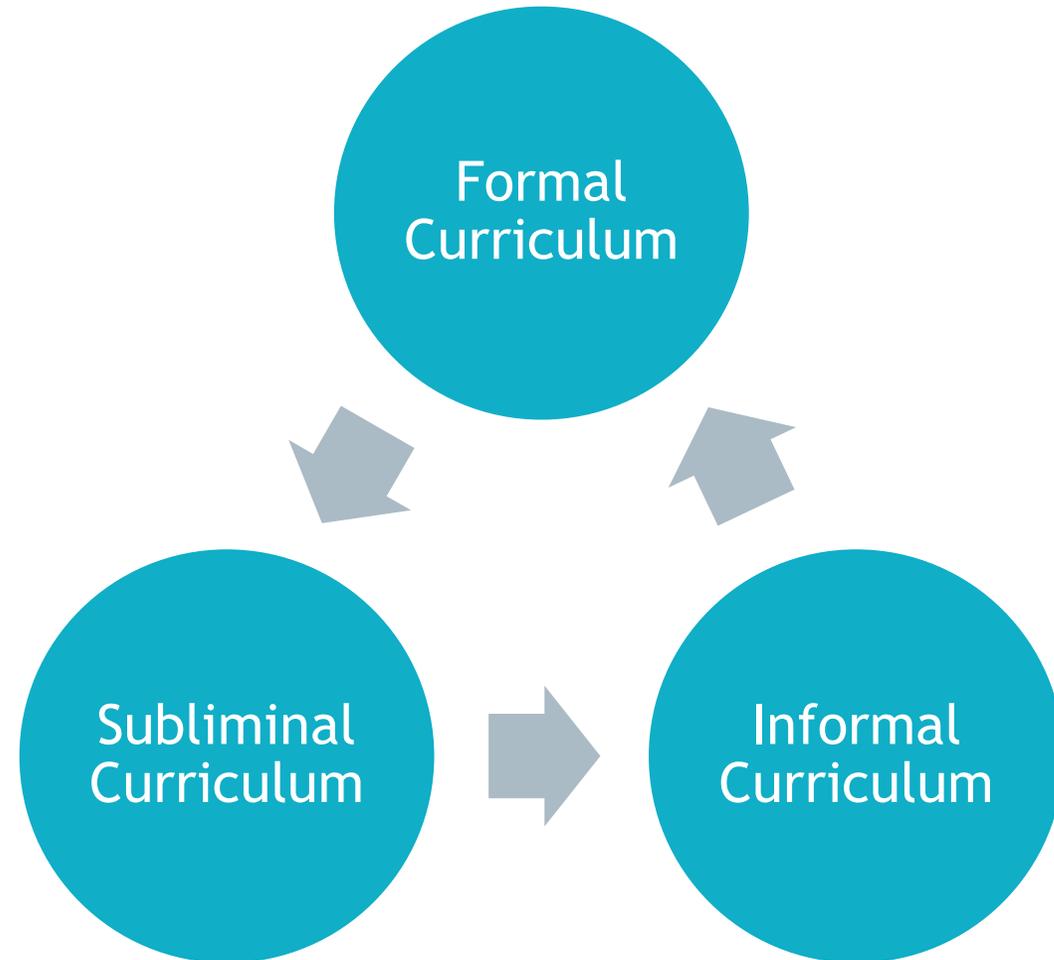
*Higher Education Academy & Quality Assurance Agency guidance on ESD (2014)*

“Education for Sustainable Development **helps the citizens of the world to learn their way to a more sustainable future.**”

*UN Decade of ESD 2005-2014*

# Formal, informal and subliminal curriculum

Our vision is to see **all students** leave formal education with the knowledge, skills, attributes, and values needed to create a **more just and sustainable future** for all.



# Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) aims to encourage...

Key competency area	Example of outcomes	
<b>Systems thinking</b>	recognise and understand relationships; analyse complex systems; consider how systems are embedded within different domains and scales; deal with uncertainty	<b>Ways of thinking</b>
<b>Anticipatory/Future thinking</b>	understand and evaluate multiple outcomes; create their own visions for the future; apply the precautionary principle; assess the consequences of actions; deal with risks and changes	
<b>Critical thinking</b>	question norms, practices and opinions; reflect on own one's values, perceptions and actions; take a position in the sustainability discourse	
<b>Strategic thinking</b>	develop and implement innovative actions that further sustainability at the local level and further afield	<b>Ways of practicing</b>
<b>Collaborative working</b>	learn from others (including peers, professionals...); understand and respect the needs, perspectives and actions of others; deal with conflicts in a group; facilitate collaborative and participatory problem solving	
<b>Integrated problem solving</b>	apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainability problems; develop viable, inclusive and equitable solutions; utilise appropriate competencies to solve problems	<b>Ways of practicing</b>
<b>Self awareness</b>	reflect on their own values, perceptions and actions; reflect on their own role in the local community and (global) society; continually evaluate and further motivate their actions; deal with their feelings and desires	<b>Ways of being</b>
<b>Normative/Values thinking</b>	understand and reflect on the norms and values that underlie one's actions; negotiate sustainability values, principles, goals, and targets, in a context of conflicts of interests and trade-offs, uncertain knowledge and contradictions	

# Sustainability 'Skills'

Using resources efficiently to limit the impact on the environment and other people

Looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world

Considering ethical issues linked to your subject

The causes of inequality in the world

Thinking critically about information presented

Understanding how human activity is affecting nature

Challenging the way we do things now (like business, politics, education)

Solving problems by thinking about whole systems - including different connections and interactions

Communicating complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people

Understanding how to create change

Looking at a problem using information from different subjects or disciplines

Planning for the long term, as well as the short term

# The task of the educator is to provide an environment in which:

- Divergent views **can be shared and explored in a safe environment,**
- There are opportunities for deep and critical reflection on **students' own perspectives and what has influenced their thinking and practices in this area,**
- Democratic and participatory learning **approaches are modelled,**
- Interdisciplinary approaches, **systems thinking and holistic thinking are encouraged,**
- **Teaching, learning and assessment activities** are linked to real-life concerns.

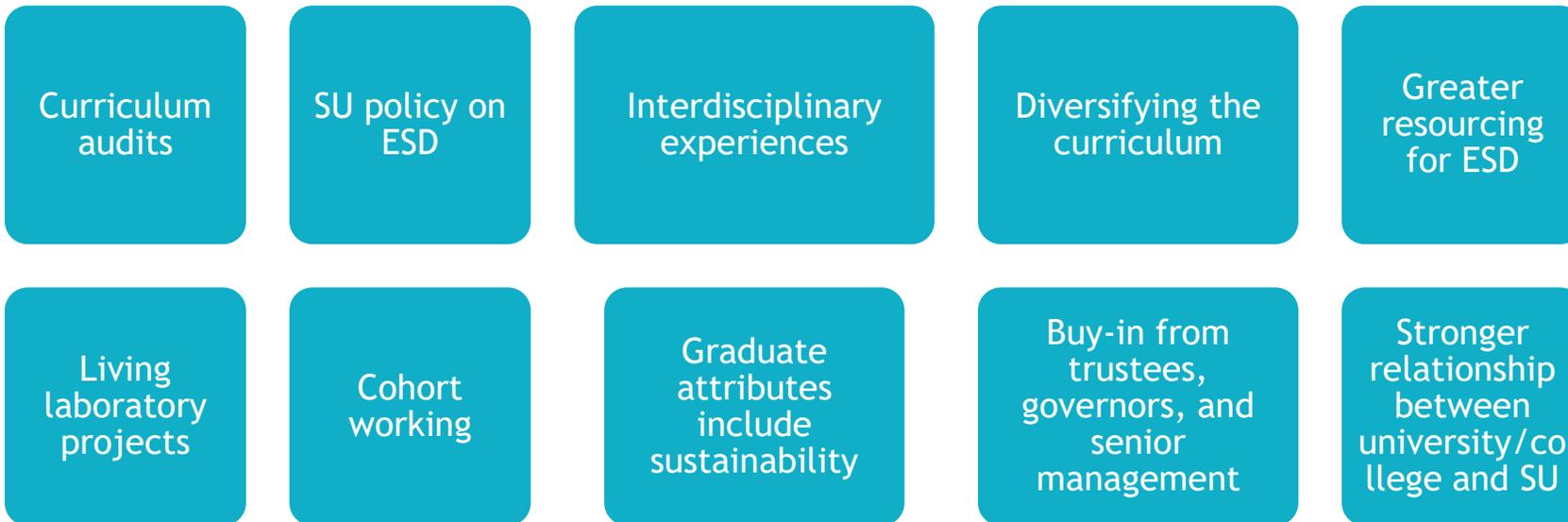
*HEA QAA ESD guidance 2014*

And how do we make it  
happen at our institutions?

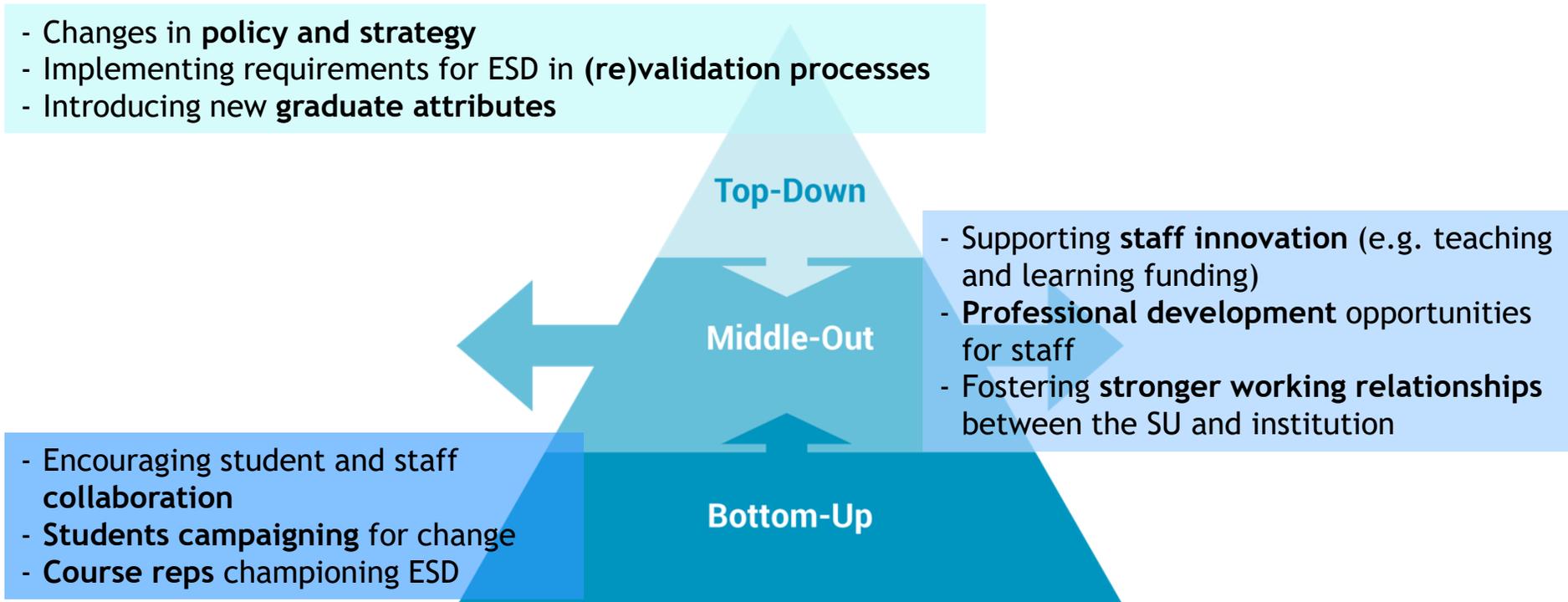
# Responsible Futures

... is a **whole-institution supported change programme and accreditation mark (audited by students)** to embed sustainability across all aspects of student learning. It spans the formal, informal and subliminal curriculum and is applicable to both further and higher education.

**500+ actions** taken by RF partnerships, including...



# Responsible Futures: Multi-faceted change and intervention framework at all levels



[sos-uk.org/responsible-futures](https://sos-uk.org/responsible-futures)

# Global Goals Teach-In: March 2023

***“It is important that in a world of increasing consumption, students are aware of the impact this can have, particularly in relation to day-to-day business operations. Thinking more about the impact of our business decisions can help them be more sustainable.”***

Lecturer in Operations Management, Ulster University



**772** educators pledging to incorporate the SDG's into their teaching and learning



**141,369** students & learners reached through lessons, workshops and tutorials



**134** educational institutions taking part, including schools, colleges, universities, students' unions and training providers



[sos-uk.org/project/global-goals-teach-in](https://sos-uk.org/project/global-goals-teach-in)

## SDG Teach In Leaderboard - Educators Pledged\*

March 2023 - Week 3

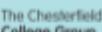


- #1  Barnsley College
- #2  Heart of Worcestershire College
- #3  University of Exeter
- #4  De Montfort University
- #5  Ulster University
- #6  University of Derby
- #7  University of Worcester
- #8  University of the West of England
- #9  Oxford Brookes University
- #10  Falmouth University

## SDG Teach In Leaderboard - Students Reached\*

March 2023 - Week 3



- #1  Barnsley College
- #2  Hankham Primary School
- #3  Heart of Worcestershire College
- #4  Sunnyside Primary Academy
- #5  Lawrence House School
- #6  Hereford College of Arts
- #7  The Chesterfield College Group
- #7  University of Exeter
- #9  University of Bedfordshire
- #10  The Magna Carta School

# For Good partnerships platform: turning education into a force for Good



☛ Select a Platform



## Dissertations for Good

Find impactful research partnerships



## Placements for Good

Find impactful placements (students/organisations)



## Projects for Good

Find innovative and creative projects (students/organisations)

Giving students the opportunity to apply their academic learning to make a positive impact on the world around them

- Applied - 'living lab' style
- Real-world
- Impactful

<https://forgood.nus.org.uk>

## For Good partnerships - get involved

1. **Tell your students** about it. It's totally free for all students to use the website.
2. **Find out** what it offers your [students](#).
3. **Tell academics** about it. As a member institution, academics can register a project or area of interest, to start setting up a partnership before handing it over to their students.
4. Find out about the **additional benefits** that come with [membership](#). These include making it supporting your students to find partnerships, as well as promoting Living Labs/internal opportunities for academic and non-academic departments of your institution.

# Co-creation: Engage your students

## Course reps & sustainability: an introduction to ESD - SOS-UK Learning Academy session

An introduction to sustainability and education for sustainable development for course representatives. The training explores how course reps can use their roles to contribute towards progressing sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development in the curriculum.

## SDG Mapping support package

Provides a baseline understanding of where sustainability and ESD are in the curriculum. This is done via a student-led audit by students trained and supported by SOS-UK staff. Students map curricula against the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and Education for Sustainable Development methods and pedagogies. Can also include additional criteria, such as institutional values/ideals.

## Next steps

- **Identify colleagues and interested students to collaborate with** - thinking of the multi-faced approaches to organisational change
- **Explore the resources** from this session - there is a huge amount of information out there!
- Pledge to participate in the **SOS-UK Global goals Teach In**
- Get in touch with SOS-UK for additional support on this



# Any questions?

# Further resources

- [Responsible Futures Accreditation programme](#)
- [Global Goals mapping with SOS-UK](#)
- [Get involved with the Global Goals Teach-in 2023](#)
- [From Art to Zoo Management: Embedding sustainability in UK higher and further education](#)
- SOS-UK/NUS research reports
  - [COVID-19 and learning for sustainability in HE](#)
  - [Sustainability in HE and FE - State of the sector research](#)
  - [Sustainability Skills Survey](#)
- [UCU Green New Deal for Universities and Colleges](#)
  - ['The future we choose' wallchart](#)
- [UNECE ESD Competencies for ESD \[for educators\] - Learning For Future](#)
- [Better Student Outcomes through sustainability: Living Lab guide](#)
- [QAA ESD Guidance](#)

**Thank you - stay in touch!**

**e. [hello@sos-uk.org](mailto:hello@sos-uk.org)  
w. <https://www.sos-uk.org/>  
[@sosuk\\_charity](https://www.sos-uk.org/)**