

The Role of Universities in achieving SDGs

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their associated 169 targets were agreed by all countries at the United Nations in September 2015 and constitute a shared global framework of development priorities to 2030. They aim to bring an end to extreme poverty, promote prosperity and well-being for all, protect the environment and address climate change, and encourage good governance and peace and security.

Universities will have a vital role to play in addressing these critical global challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Universities have a responsibility through their teaching to equip the next generation of leaders, innovators and thinkers to understand the global challenges facing the world and the role they can play in rising to meet these challenges. Through their research and training of research leaders, universities are at the forefront of finding sustainable social, economic, environmental and technical solutions to global problems. Finally through their own operations universities can pioneer innovation and can set an example to other sectors and businesses.

It is important for the future of the world that all universities play their part in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. (<https://ap-unsdsn.org/regional-initiatives/universities-sdgs/university-commitment/>)

The SDGs cover a wide range of complex social, economic, and environmental challenges and addressing them will require transformations in how societies and economies function and how we interact with our planet. Education, research, innovation and leadership will be essential in helping society address these challenges.

Universities, with their broad remit around the creation and dissemination of knowledge and their unique position within society, have a critical role to play in the achievement of the SDGs. Arguably none of the SDGs will be achieved without this sector. Engaging with the SDGs will also greatly benefit universities by helping them demonstrate university impact, capture demand for SDG-related education, build new partnerships, access new funding streams, and define a university that is responsible and globally aware.

Education and research are explicitly recognised in a number of the SDGs and universities have a direct role in addressing these. However the contribution of universities to the SDGs is much broader, as they can support the implementation of every one of the SDGs as well as the implementation of the SDG framework itself.

Some of these main areas of contribution are:

- Learning and teaching: Providing students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to understand and address the SDGs (broadly 'education for sustainable development'); providing in-depth academic or vocational expertise to implement SDG solutions; providing accessible, affordable and inclusive education to all; providing capacity building for students and professionals from developing countries; and empowering and mobilising young people.
- Research: Providing the necessary knowledge, evidence-base, solutions, technologies, pathways and innovations to underpin and support the implementation of the SDGs by the global community – through both traditional disciplinary approaches and newer interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and

sustainability science approaches; providing capacity building for developing countries in undertaking and using research; collaborating with and supporting innovative companies to implement SDG solutions; improving diversity in research; and student training for sustainable development research.

- Organisational governance, culture and operations of the university: Implementing the principles of the SDGs through governance structures and operational policies and decisions, such as those relating to employment, finance, campus services, support services, facilities, procurement, human resources, and student administration.

- External leadership: Strengthening public engagement and participation in addressing the SDGs; initiating and facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue and action; ensuring higher education sector representation in national implementation; helping to design SDG based policies; and demonstrating sector commitment to the SDGs. Through their current actions in these areas, universities already make important contributions to the achievement of the SDGs. However, for the SDGs to be truly successful at a global scale, universities need to become champions of sustainable development and play a leading role in the implementation of the SDGs.

(https://ap-unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/University-SDG-Guide_web.pdf)