

# HIGHER EDUCATION PAVING THE WAY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Report of the 2016 IAU Global Survey on  
Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development



## Acknowledgements

*The International Association of Universities (IAU) is grateful to the respondents who dedicated time and effort to share their views on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD). The Association also thanks all those who provided pictures and specific examples related to the Sustainable Development Goals.*



*This publication forms part of IAU's work on the priority theme:  
Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD)*

International Association of Universities (IAU) / International Universities Bureau. IAU provides a forum for building a worldwide higher education community, promotes exchange of information, experience and ideas, contributes, through research, publication and advocacy to higher education policy debate.

### **Higher Education Paving the Way to Sustainable Development: A Global Perspective**

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## Executive Summary

The International Association of Universities (IAU), a membership organization, which brings together about 650 higher education institutions and organizations from some 130 countries, launched its first Global Survey on the Role of Higher Education in Fostering Sustainable Development in 2016. The aim was to contribute to the UNESCO Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), by researching and analyzing IAU Members' approaches to sustainable development.

120 higher education institutions from all continents took part in the survey. The results underline that sustainable development is of strong interest for universities and that it is being integrated at all levels.

Based on the survey, 78% of the respondents are familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 74% are familiar with Education for Sustainable Development. In terms of understanding sustainable development, environmental issues are still the common ground (84%), but respondents also underline the importance of societal (68%) and cultural (60%) dimensions.

Sustainable development is also being integrated at all levels in universities, including in their strategic development plans. Yet, the survey results highlight the fact that there is still a lot to be done: 45% say their higher education institution adopted a whole institution approach, 34% declare their higher education institution adopted a strategic plan related to sustainable development, while 38% are currently developing one. In addition, results show that universities increasingly collaborate on sustainable development issues, engage with sustainability networks, and look for examples on how to integrate the different SDGs into curriculum, research, campus management, etc. Such examples are provided in this publication and on the IAU Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development global portal ([www.iau-hesd.net](http://www.iau-hesd.net)).

Higher education plays a key role in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It underpins all the SDGs and trains the future leaders. With this publication, the International Association of Universities calls for more recognition of the decisive role higher education plays in driving the processes towards a more sustainable present and future. The Association also commits to continue to raise attention on inspiring sustainability initiatives taken by universities around the world in order to help more institutions get involved, and to help its Members develop whole institution approaches to sustainable development.



## Message from the IAU President

Dear Members of the IAU,

Dear Members of the Higher Education Community,

I am pleased to present you with the results of the first IAU Global Survey on the Role of Higher Education in Fostering Sustainable Development. It analyses and showcases the strong role higher education, in all its dimensions and throughout all those who make up its communities, plays to address the challenges translated into ***Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*** and the associated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Since its inception in 1950, the IAU is fully aware of the power of higher education systems and institutions to transform the world for the better, but also, at times, for the worst. Higher education leaders and members of their academic and administrative staff, the educationalists, the researchers and the students can make the difference for the better. Without full involvement and commitment of higher education to these sustainable goals, the *Future We Want*<sup>1</sup> will not be attained.

The IAU Kyoto Declaration (1993) urges universities to establish and disseminate sustainable development principles and values. The universities are also urged to translate these in exemplary practice, emphasizing the ethical obligation of the present generation to overcome those practices which lie at the root of unsustainability.

From 2005 to 2015, IAU was fully involved in the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and, in parallel, in the *Education for All* initiative (HEEFA). Today IAU reconfirms its commitment to higher education and research for sustainable development (HESD). It is taken up as one of the four key thematic priorities in the IAU Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and the associated thematic action plans.

In particular, IAU translates this commitment into the development of the IAU Global HESD Portal and strong support to the UNESCO Global Action Programme on ESD where IAU contributes to the work of the partner networks on policy development and 'whole institutions approaches' to SD.

University and higher education teaching and research need to get fully involved in the issues highlighted in Agenda 2030. Joint action is more than ever required to ensure a future for all before it is too late because "There will be no Plan B because there is no planet B," as was recalled by Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The SDGs are now to lead the way.

However, we all know that documentation of action is not sufficient to reach goals set. Awareness needs to be raised, debate fuelled, dissemination ensured to initiate and scale up action. This is why this IAU Global Survey, aiming at seizing how much people actually know and do about Agenda 2030 and the 17 sustainable development goals, is so important.

I hope that you will be positively surprised, as I was, to read the results. These do give good hope that higher education institutions will take their responsibility to provide the knowledge and understanding required, and foster the competences needed in all sectors of society, including at leadership level to address the challenges we face today.

**Pam Fredman**, IAU President, Former Rector, University of Gothenburg

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<sup>1</sup> Also the title of the [Final Report of Rio + 20 Conference](#)





## IAU Mission, Vision, Values and Membership

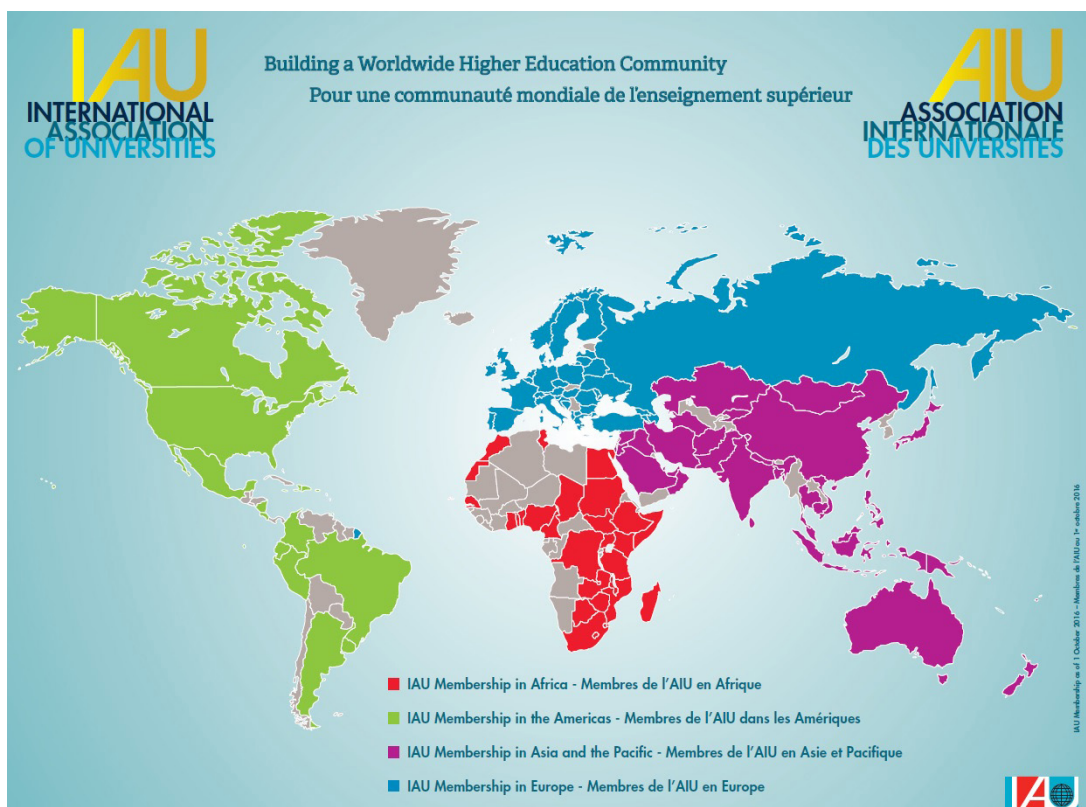
Founded in 1950, the International Association of Universities (IAU) is a global association of higher education institutions (HEIs) and university associations. The IAU mission is to strengthen higher education worldwide by providing a global forum for institutional and association leaders to discuss, examine and take action on issues of common concern.

It is a membership organization, which brings together **650** higher education institutions and national and regional associations from every region in the world. Many specialized organizations have become IAU Affiliates and a growing number of individuals, mainly from past Boards, join as IAU Associates.

Benefits of membership include a global forum for networking; scholarly and reference publications; original research reports; opportunities to get involved in projects, benefit from advisory services at preferential rates. IAU facilitates collective action for advocacy and develops statements on important issues in higher education. The Association upholds the values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, while promoting greater accountability, institutional responsibility and effectiveness, and the ideal of knowledge made accessible to all through collaboration, commitment to solidarity and improved access to higher education.

The IAU pursues a **4-year Strategic Plan** adopted during the 15th IAU General Conference (Bangkok, Thailand, November 2016), focusing on 4 thematic priorities:

-  Values-based leadership in higher education
-  Internationalization of higher education
-  Higher education and research for sustainable development
-  Information and communication technologies



The complete list of IAU Members is available [online](#)

## IAU Work on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development

### IAU Strategy

IAU work in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a framework for university leaders to develop inter institutional collaboration in pursuit of sustainable development. The aim is to help higher education leaders, from IAU Members and Partners, embed sustainable development concepts and principles in strategic planning, academic and organizational work.

In 2016, the Association adopted an «**ABC**» **Strategy** for Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD) focusing on:

- **A**dvising & advocating
- **B**uilding synergies & networking
- **C**ommunicating & convening

For 2016-2020, the strategic objectives of the Association are the following:

- Strengthen IAU work in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- Develop and share expertise on the SDGs;
- Enhance IAU Members' involvement in HESD;
- Encourage peer-to-peer learning using the IAU global network of higher education leaders;
- Foster 'whole institution' approaches at the leadership level to integrate sustainable development priorities, and develop guidelines for embedding sustainable development in the whole institution;
- Monitor trends and issues related to HESD;
- Provide leadership training, capacity building and networking services;
- Map and analyse assessment tools related to HESD.

The [Members of the IAU Working Group on HESD](#) advise the IAU secretariat on how best to implement the strategy. The outcomes of the 2016 HESD survey helped build this strategy.

More details on the IAU's main contributions to HESD throughout the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) and now the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and associated SDGs can be found on the [IAU HESD global portal](#).



**HILLIGJE VAN'T LAND** · IAU Secretary General

*“Higher Education plays a key role in addressing the 17 SDGs identified in Agenda 2030. The academic community, both in its teaching and research functions, the administrative staff, the students and the other stakeholders, inside the institution and in their connections with the communities they serve, are mobilized*

*in many different ways to address the local and global challenges we face. IAU strongly advocates for the higher education leadership to adopt a whole of institution approach to sustainable development in order to maximize the effects of all the good work undertaken inside and outside of their institutions.”*

## IAU Commitment to the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development

The World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development which took place in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, in 2014, marked the end of the [United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development \(UN-DESD - 2005-2014\)](#), and the launch of the [Global Action Programme \(GAP\) on Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#). The main aim of the GAP is to build on the decade's achievements and to generate and scale-up concrete actions in [ESD](#). To support its implementation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established the [GAP Partner Networks](#) of some 90 ESD stakeholders, and invited the International Association of Universities on board.

IAU works with the GAP Key partners on the Priority Action Area 2 «*Transforming learning and training environments*». Partners in this action area work more specifically on understanding and promoting whole institution approaches to ESD. Such an approach implies the active involvement of all stakeholders in a university (students, staff, faculty/educators, local citizens, community organizations and companies) working together, to embed sustainability in curriculum, teaching and learning, governance, facility and operations, human resources, community interaction and in research.

IAU launched a global survey on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development in 2016 in contribution to the GAP.



UNESCO Global Action Programme on  
Education for Sustainable Development



**DZULKIFLI ABDUL RAZAK** · Former President, IAU (2012-2016)

*“Thirty years on, after the 1987 Brundtland report, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has developed strong roots in higher education and beyond. IAU has been a strong promoter of work in this field and in particular at higher education level. In 1993 it adopted a first Declaration for higher education leaders to sign on to. In 2014, the Association decided to also focus more attention on indigenous knowledge and the need to better include such ancestral knowledge in ESD. This resulted in the normative instrument known as the IAU Iquitos Statement on Higher Education for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2014. Indigenous knowledge and wisdom (that well preceded the Brundtland report) have found their way to be firmly anchored in the ESD framework. It broadens and*

*enriches sustainable development as a living educational approach; it actualises sustainable livelihood and calls for greater involvement of the global community in promoting and preserving relevant indigenous norms, values and practices in all that we do. It brought with it the practices of trusteeship and balance beyond that of ownership and growth in constructing a “new” ESD.*

*Another wave of ESD is emerging that we need to ride by ‘co-learning’ to ‘co-exist’ in a balanced way in order to navigate towards an even more sustainable future. IAU invites its Members to send in reports and initiative descriptions that will help raise awareness of the above. These can be published and shared on the IAU global portal on HESD.”*



## Rationale behind the IAU Global Survey on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development

The main objective of the survey was to connect with higher education institutions around the world to research and analyse what approaches to sustainable development they adopted. The aim was also to better understand IAU Members' needs and see how, as an association, IAU could provide specific services and enhance their initiatives for sustainable development. With members in some 130 countries, IAU has access to a great diversity of HEIs.

Since the end of 2016, Hilligje van't Land, IAU Secretary General, has presented the survey results in various conferences (in Barcelona, Paris, Bangkok, Zurich, Berlin). The debates and questions raised during these different events helped inform this publication.

### Survey Design

The IAU HESD team designed the survey in May 2016. It consists of 29 questions organized in five sections:

- 1) **Profiles of the HEIs and the respondents**
- 2) **Knowledge and awareness:** evaluate how much the respondents know about sustainable development in general, and if they are familiar with the concept of whole institution approach.
- 3) **Working areas:** understand on which SDG related research and education themes the HEIs are working, and how the work is organized.
- 4) **Governance and cooperation:** is there a governance on SD and a strategic plan in relation to SD? Are the HEIs collaborating with other networks around the world?
- 5) **IAU's role:** feedbacks on how IAU can help enhance HESD initiatives.

For this first edition of the survey, IAU chose to limit the number of compulsory questions. The objective was to get an overview of how SD is taken into account in the HEI, and to focus on whole institution approaches. Future work will enter much into details as far as curriculum development and content are concerned.



**GOOLAM MOHAMEDBHAI** · Honorary President, IAU

*“With this 2016 survey, the IAU confirms its continuous commitment to encouraging universities to incorporate the concept of Sustainable Development (SD) in all its academic and operational activities. What is perhaps little known is that the IAU has*

*been active in promoting SD since the 1990s, and its 1993 Kyoto Declaration on SD is remarkably comprehensive and outlines all the fundamental issues concerning the role of universities in promoting SD.”*

## Recipients and Respondents

This first edition of the survey was available online in English and French from June 2016 to October 2016. It was sent out to IAU Members and disseminated more widely using IAU various communication channels. Even if the survey targeted IAU Members, it was open to other higher education institutions worldwide.

IAU received **120 responses** in total, from every continent, and distributed as per below. 97% of the responses came from IAU Members, and almost **18% of IAU Members took part**. In terms of type of respondents, 45% hold managerial positions in their respective HEI, 33% leadership positions, and 8% project positions.

As there were few compulsory questions, the level of detail in each survey received varies a lot. In the results section, the number of respondents for each question is visible (answered vs skipped). It is also important to stress that one individual from each participating higher education institution took the survey, which necessarily implies a part of subjectivity. Nevertheless, the results give a good overview of IAU Members' involvement in sustainable development and highlight interesting trends, which IAU will keep monitoring in next editions of the survey.

### Respondents

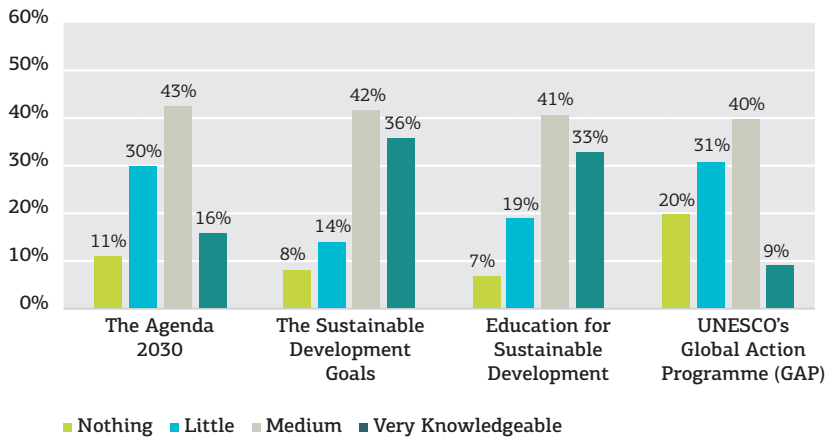


## Results

### Knowledge and Understanding

#### How much do you know about?

Answered: 88 Skipped: 32

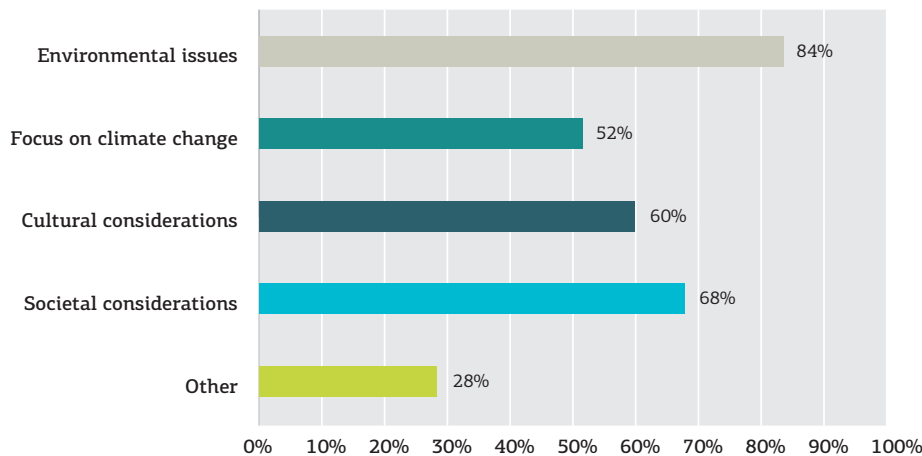


This question was to learn how much respondents know about Agenda 2030, the SDGs, ESD and 'GAP'. The survey results highlight the fact that a majority of HEIs around the world are aware<sup>1</sup> of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (89%), the Sustainable Development Goals (92%) and Education for Sustainable Development (93%). If individuals within higher education institutions may not know as much about the UNESCO Global Action Programme on ESD launched in 2014, the higher education networks do.

<sup>1</sup> The respondents are aware if they answered «little», «medium» or «very knowledgeable»; they are familiar if they indicated «medium» or «very knowledgeable».

#### What is Sustainable Development for your institution?

Answered: 81 Skipped: 39



#### Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals go further than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim at ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all. The SDGs, which came

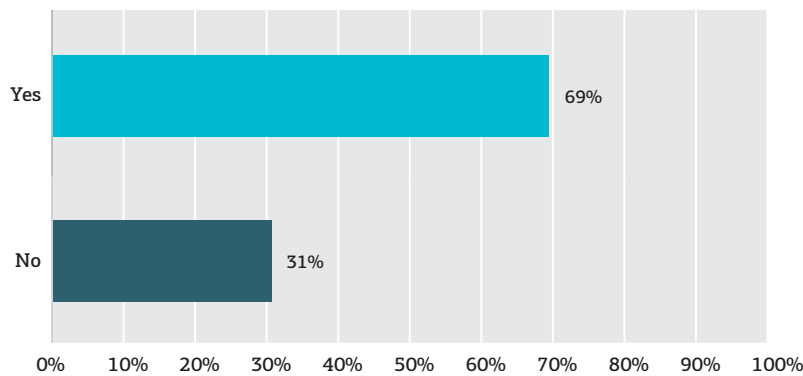
into force on 1 January 2016, are not legally binding but Governments are expected to establish national frameworks in order to achieve the Goals. For more information: [The Sustainable Development Agenda](#); [Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform](#)

Environmental education (EE), environmental studies or environmental sciences precede the development of the concept of Education for sustainable development (ESD). Over the years, the concept of EE evolved to embrace, little by little, the notion of ‘development’ and tends to become more holistic. ESD goes one step further to focus on issues specifically studied under ‘environmental studies’ but also to include other dimensions, such as economy, society and culture.

Even though the survey results highlight the fact that the majority of the respondents consider sustainable development still to be linked to environmental issues (84%), many also stress the importance of societal (68%) and cultural considerations (60%). Several respondents stress the importance of social innovation, highlight specific interdisciplinary research projects, and mention the importance of institutional governance, economic progress, or educational considerations.

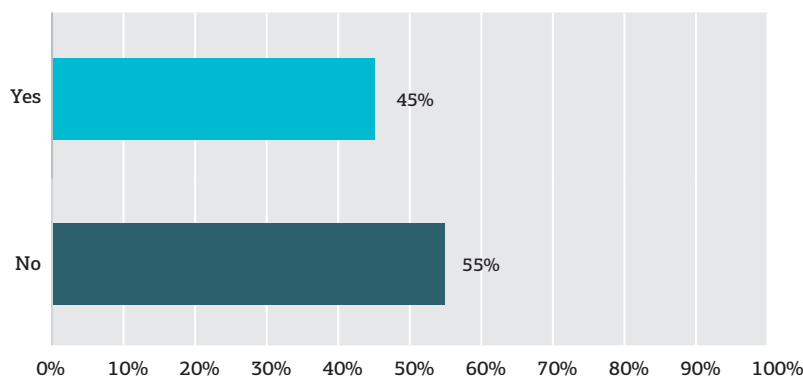
### Are you familiar with the concept of ‘Whole Institution Approach’?

Answered: 88 Skipped: 32



### Has your institution adopted a ‘Whole Institution Approach’?

Answered: 88 Skipped: 32



Action Area 2 of the UNESCO Global Action Programme invited the partner networks to focus specifically on whole institution approaches to ESD (see page 8). IAU asked its members if they know about such an approach and if they have adopted one at the institutional level. 69% of the HEIs surveyed indicate being familiar with the concept. More interesting is the fact that 45% say that their institution adopted a whole institution approach.

## Working Areas

The survey also tried to understand how HEIs approach the themes related to different sustainable development goals in terms of disciplinary approaches (the how: disciplinary, transdisciplinary or both?), structure (who: an individual professor, a faculty or department, the institution as a whole or a combination?) and dimensions (type of approach: teaching, research, operations, campus initiatives, or several).

The aim was to understand better how individual teachers, researchers, administrators work (using a disciplinary or transdisciplinary approach, or a combination of both). The question on 'structural approach' aims to capture if the way in which ESD is being implemented is more of an individual endeavour, a faculty project, or taken up holistically by the institutions as a whole. The question on the 'dimensions' is to reveal if ESD work translates into teaching, research, operations, campus or other initiatives.

All the answers presented on pages 14 to 16 are expressed in absolute terms, whereas percentages are used in the rest of this publication.



**ANGELO RICCABONI** · Former Rector, University of Siena, Former IAU Board Member, Chair IAU Working Group HESD (2012-2016)

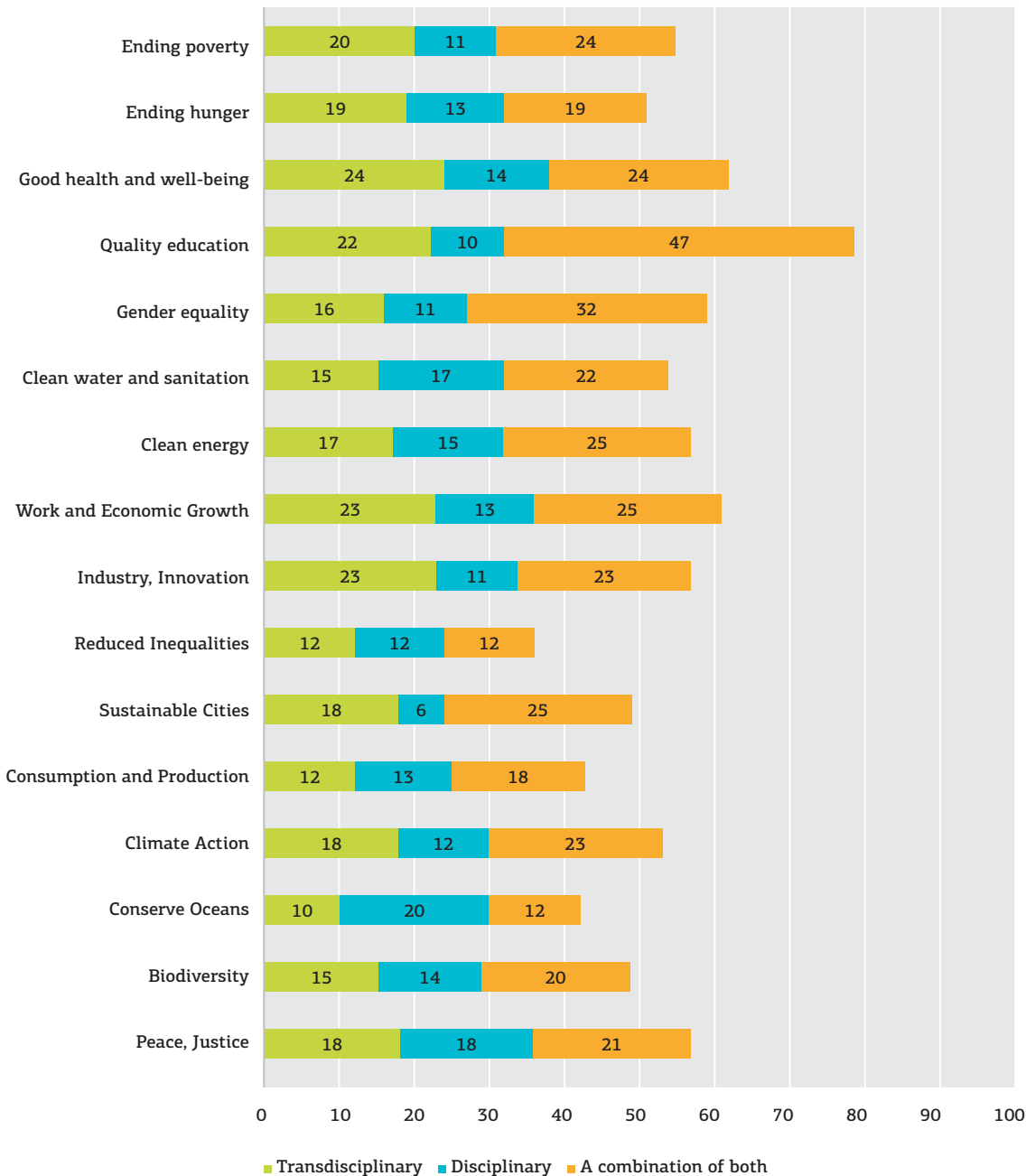
*“Higher Education for Sustainable Development has a pivotal role in the achievement of sustainable development goals. It plays a central role in changing the lifestyle and minds of people and it’s also an essential tool for contrasting negative phenomena such as poverty, child mortality,*

*unemployment and low education levels. HESD is also essential to shape common values and to improve social inclusion, with the commitment to “leave no one behind” (H4All), especially vulnerable groups, such as women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, refugees, etc.”*

## Goals Institutions are working on

### Disciplinary approach

Answered: 88 Skipped: 32

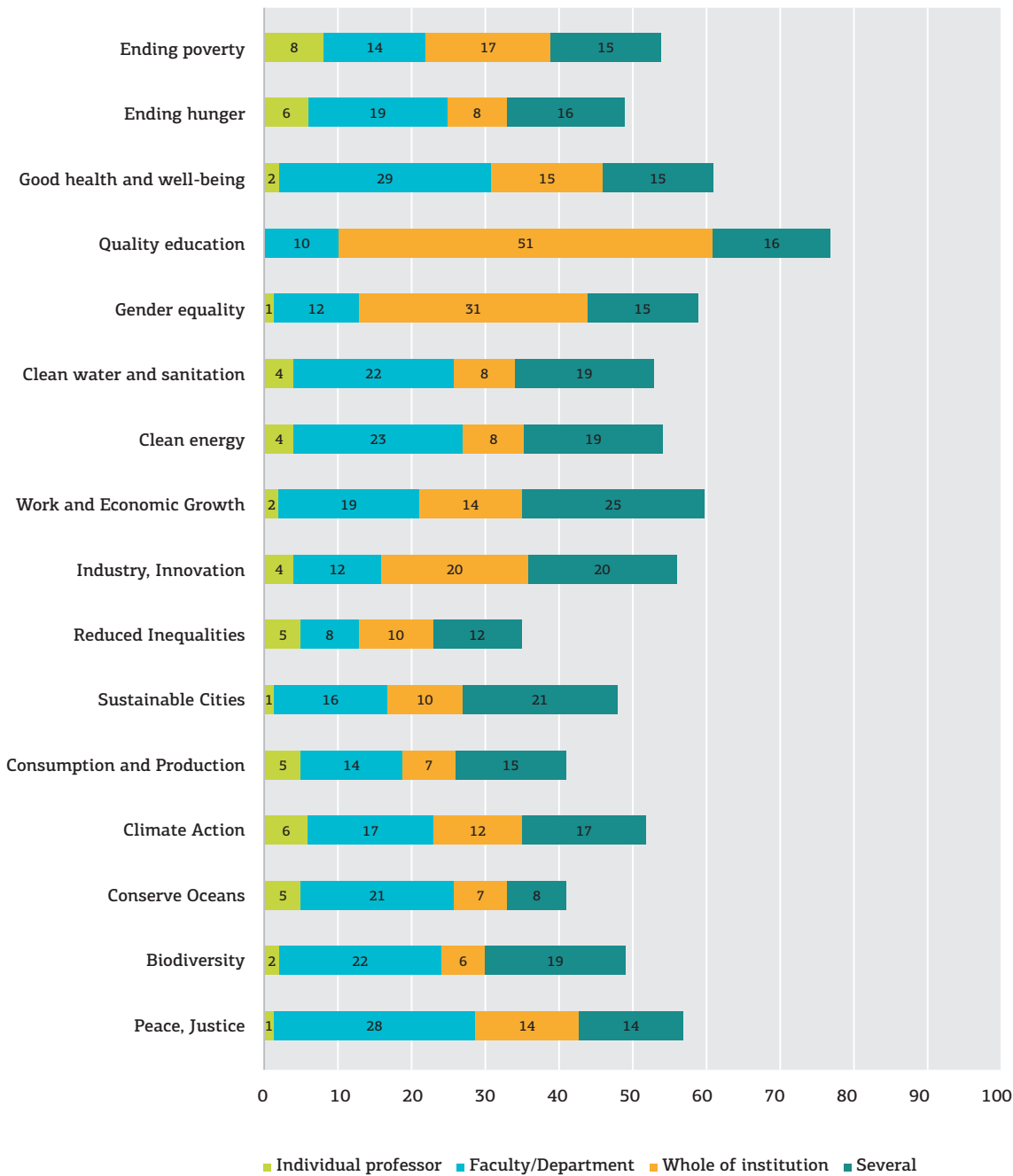


In terms of disciplines, we notice that for almost all the SDG related areas of work, most of the respondents indicate that their HEI adopted both transdisciplinary and disciplinary approaches. This is particularly true for *Quality education* (SDG 4) (by definition, this goal is transdisciplinary and concerns all those involved in education from kindergarten to lifelong learning); the same applies to *Gender Equality* (SDG 5).

As for the *Conserve Oceans* ('Life under Water' -SDG 14), it is mostly a disciplinary approach that is adopted even if it has become evident that it should be studied and researched in a great variety of disciplines considering the many actors impacting on 'Life under water' (cities, business, individuals and communities, law, etc.).

### Structural approach

Answered: 88 Skipped: 32

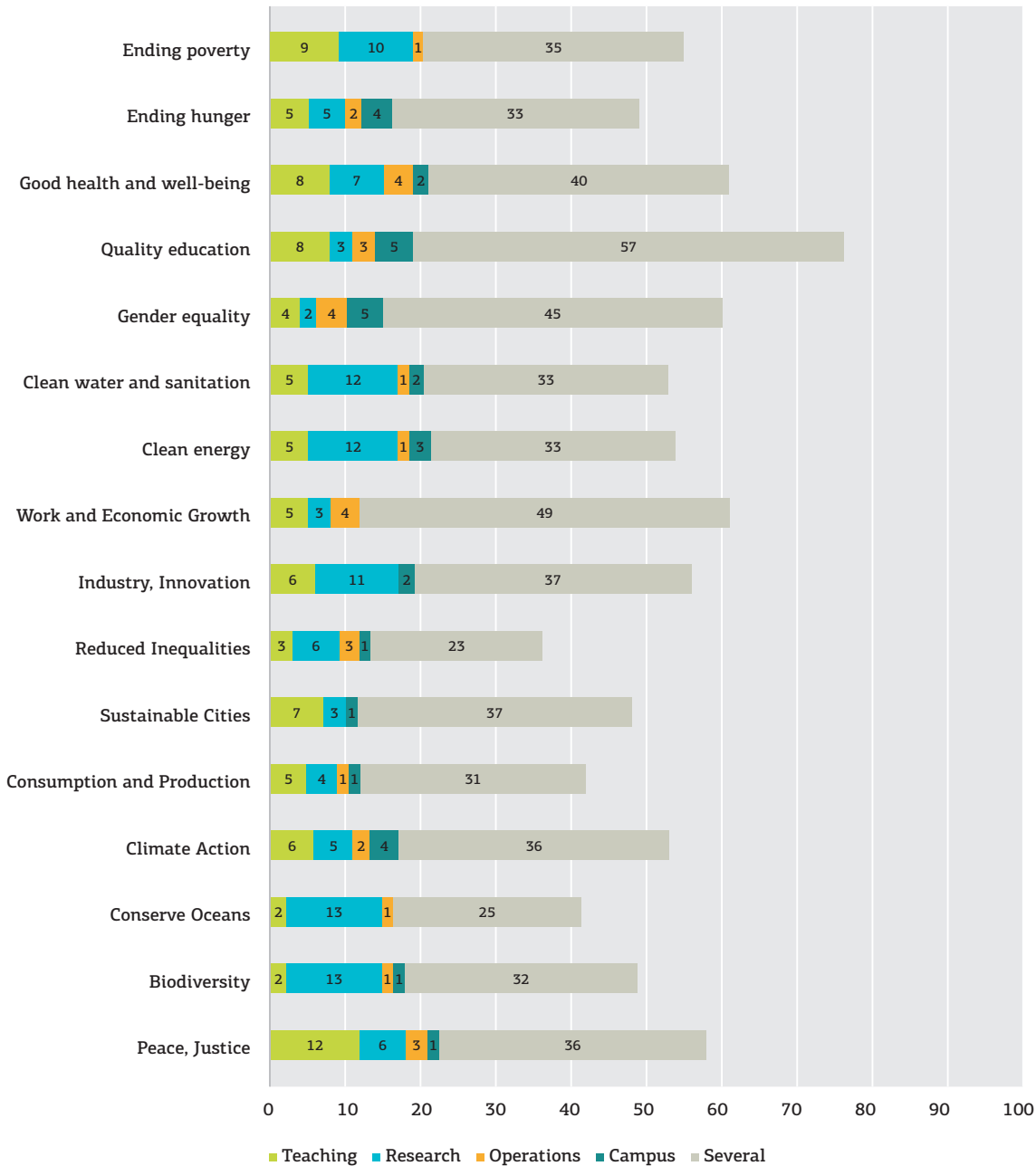


According to the table, whole institution approaches are indeed being implemented. With no surprise, quality education and gender equality are goals for which most HEIs adopted a whole institution approach.

Yet the table also brings to the fore that, at times, individual professors ensure teaching on particular topics and undertake individual research projects that do not necessarily involve colleagues from a same institution; faculties as entities have adopted projects and initiatives involving various players, focus on a specific field but have not per se scaled it up to become an institutional project and/or priority; the category ‘several’, implying a combination of types of approaches, may add value to work undertaken on specific issues. Discussions at conferences confirmed that people benefit from multiple approaches to inform their work.

### Dimensions

Answered: 88 Skipped: 32



Most SDG related topics are approached in education, research, operations and through campus activities. Again, quality education is indicated as being worked on at all levels.



## How do HEIs work on different SDGs? Examples from IAU Members worldwide

### GHENT UNIVERSITY



#### TRANSITION UGENT

The think-tank ‘Transition UGent’ engaged over 250 academics, students and people from the university management in suggesting objectives and actions for the Sustainability Policy of Ghent University (Belgium). Founded in 2012, this bottom-up initiative succeeded to place sustainability high on the policy agenda of the university. Through discussions within 9 working groups and using the transition management method, Transition UGent developed systems analysis, sustainability visions and transition paths on 9 fields of Ghent University: mobility, energy, food, waste, nature and green, water, art, education and research. At the moment, many visions and ideas find their way into concrete actions and policies.

[More information](#)

### UNIVERSITAT OBERTA DE CATALUNYA (UOC)



#### 2016 RIGHT TO FOOD WEEK

Each year, at the end of November, many towns in Catalonia (Spain) organize a charitable campaign to collect food for those in need. The UOC wants to use this initiative to highlight the famine in the world and to provide information on food security, nutrition and sustainability. Right to Food Week lets the academic experts from the UNESCO Chair in Food, Culture and Development and the Faculty of Health Sciences at the UOC raise awareness among the university community on how to contribute to the planet’s sustainability and ensure that everyone has enough food without using up all the natural resources or destroying the biodiversity. The UOC works alongside charitable bodies, such as the Nutrition Without Borders NGO or Nuttrapp, to raise awareness of the causes of inequality in terms of access to food, to foster university research into these issues and to increase students’ social skills so that they can face up to these global challenges.

[More information](#)

## HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY



### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Hokkaido University (Japan) established the Graduate School of Infectious Diseases. The aim of this PhD program is to develop next-generation leaders who possess the advanced knowledge and broad vision required to make decisions for the control of infectious diseases. The graduates are expected to work as experts in the realm of infectious diseases in humans and animals. Potential career paths include employment at international organizations, governmental research institutions, and domestic and foreign universities.

[More information](#)

## ALL NATIONS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE



### THE WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (WDC)

Without basic education women often face economic challenges, experience more health problems and are less likely to have children that do well in school. The Women's Development Centre (Ghana) empowers marginalized women, building their confidence and equips them with the education and skills they need to achieve success. The WDC offers both academic and vocational programs for women, regardless of their previous level of education. The center has been the stepping stone for uneducated women to reach their potential and gain employment, begin careers and sustain successful businesses.

[More information](#)

## UNIVERSITY OF OSLO



### 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



#### UIO:ENERGY

UiO:Energy has been established as one of three strategic multidisciplinary and interfaculty priority areas at the University of Oslo (Norway). The mission is to promote the development of sustainable energy systems focused on advancing new ways of using energy to reduce global climate change and environmental challenges. UiO:Energy is a coordinating hub for energy research, education and outreach at the university. The aim is to accelerate the research process in four areas (materials for energy, energy systems, carbon capture and storage, energy transition and sustainable societies), by fostering collaboration across disciplines at the university, other research institutions and with non-academic partners.

[More information](#)

## ASSAM DON BOSCO UNIVERSITY



### 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



#### TEACHING INITIATIVES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

«Swastyayan...A Commitment» is an initiative launched in 2013 by Assam Don Bosco University (India) undertaken by over 150 student volunteers and faculty members. The project focuses on conducting tutorial classes for underprivileged children based on their scholastic needs. In these classes, different subjects, such as, Mathematics, General Sciences, Social Sciences and English are taught, besides providing inputs on soft skills, career guidance and personality development. Currently, over 200 children from the neighborhood of the University benefit from the activities of Swastyayan. «Swabalamban», another initiative launched in 2014, aims at providing technical skills to youth of the areas surrounding the university campus to increase their employability as well as to make them self-employable.

[More information](#)

## UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG



Photo: Johan Wingborg

**13** CLIMATE ACTION



### CLIMATE FUND

The purpose of the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) internal climate fund launched in 2015 is to help compensate for the carbon dioxide emissions caused by work-related staff travel. The fund lets staff and students apply for money to pay for projects designed to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases from the University's operations. The projects must be climate oriented, innovative and feasible. Sustainable food consumption, electrically assisted cargo bicycles and climate-friendly ways to arrange international conferences are some of the topics addressed by the 15 projects that have been granted money in 2017.

[More information](#)

## THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES



**13** CLIMATE ACTION



### RESEARCH AND TEACHING FOR CLIMATE ACTION

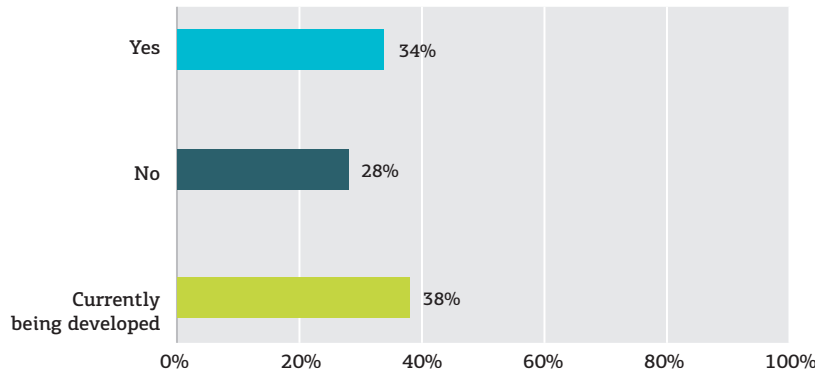
Several departments of the University of the West Indies (Jamaica) work on climate; research varies from downscaling models to improve regional predictions to estimating disaster risk due to meteorological hazards and providing advice to the agricultural sector on adaptation to climate change. Activities take place on all campuses and several faculty members are authors for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Advice is provided to regional and national governments and climate is a major part of research and teaching.

[More information](#)

## Institution

### Did your university adopt an institutional strategic plan in relation to sustainable development?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 44



The responses stress that 34% of the institutions taking part in the survey adopted a strategic plan in relation to sustainable development, while 38% say their institution is currently developing one. This is very encouraging data. Many universities surveyed also indicate that they have put in place reporting mechanisms (reports, meetings & conferences, surveys...) to monitor progress as far as ESD is concerned. An example of reporting framework is presented below (other assessment tools are listed on the IAU HESD global portal). IAU will next analyse the strategic plans and provide feedback in its next publication (see page 26).

In terms of financial support for higher education and research for sustainable development, the information collected in the survey was not substantial enough to allow drawing specific conclusions. We can stress nevertheless that the situation differs a lot from one institution to the other and that funding is often project based.



#### The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS)

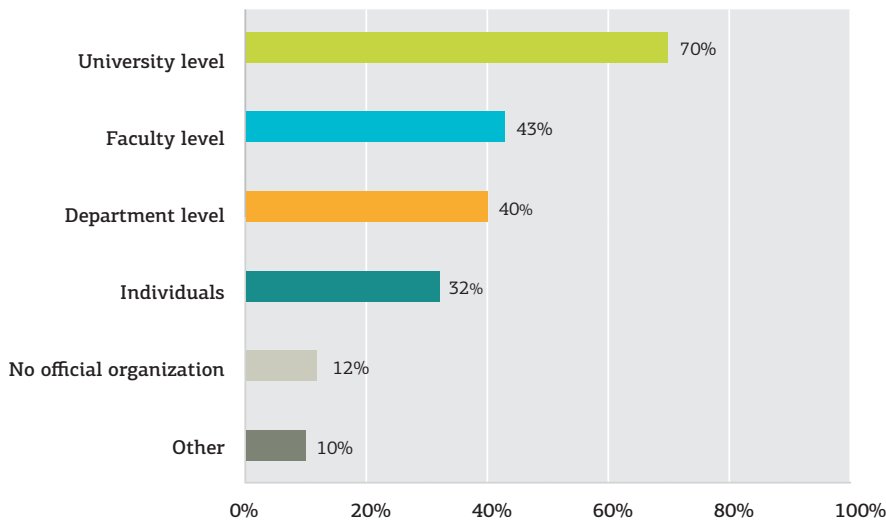
STARS is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. Developed with broad participation from the higher education community, it is intended to engage and recognize the full spectrum of higher education - from vocational colleges to research universities, and from institutions just starting their sustainability programs to long-time leaders. STARS participants periodically submit a

series of quantitative and qualitative data intended to provide a comprehensive, whole-campus accounting of their sustainability performance. Based on this data, participants can receive a rating that they use to communicate their sustainability leadership. STARS submissions are posted publicly online to help participants learn from one another and ensure accountability.

**More information**

## How is sustainable development being governed at your institution?

Answered: 81 Skipped: 39



In terms of governance, the results highlight that in most of the HEIs surveyed, sustainable development is governed mainly at the university (70%) and faculty (43%) levels. Sustainable development initiatives are then mostly developed and registered in faculty departments, sustainability centres and student organizations. Individuals in charge are often leaders of grant projects and initiatives.

## Are there any professional development programmes related to sustainable development offered at your institution?

As mentioned in the introduction, the survey did not enter into too much detail concerning curriculum or trainings. Nevertheless, the respondents were invited to indicate if professional development for sustainable development existed in their HEIs, and many responded positively. It will be interesting to look at the kind of training programmes offered to staff in the next iteration of the survey.

Other tools exist to assist teaching and learning, focusing on student development. One such tool is presented below.



### The Sustainability Literacy Test (Sulitest.org)

The Sulitest

Created after Rio + 20, Sulitest is designed to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals by “integrating sustainability principles into education and training settings”. A pilot version of the Sustainability Literacy Test was launched in 2013. The need for this tool has been confirmed by its adoption in the academic community: as of March 2017, more than 580 HEIs have registered online to use the Sulitest and 60 000 students

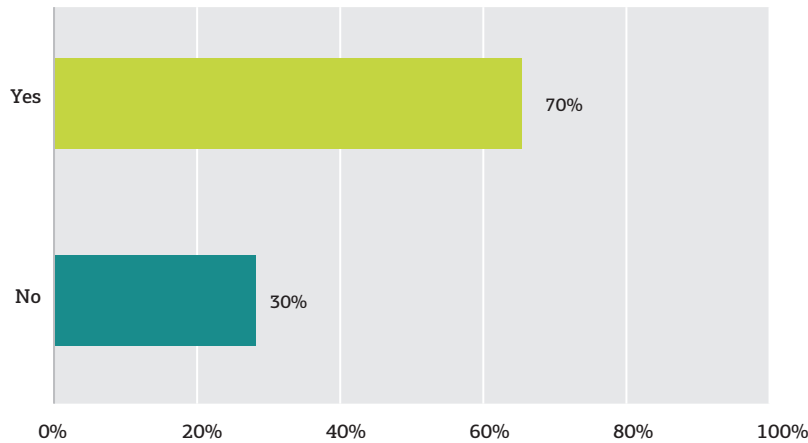
have taken the test worldwide. The rapid success of the pilot version has shown the demand for the development of the tool and for the upgrade of the collaborative platform supporting the community’s work to improve the Sulitest with a Version 2 (launched during the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi in June 2016).

**More information**

## Cooperation

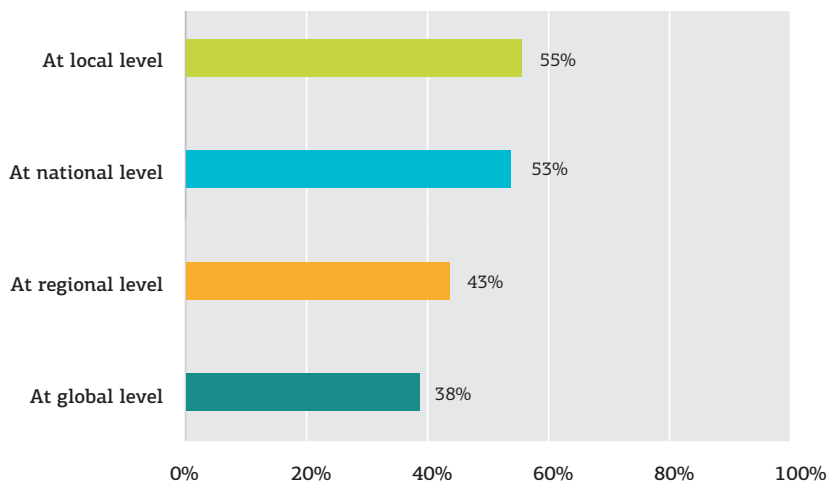
### Is your institution engaged with other HEIs in sustainable development?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 44



### At what levels does your institution collaborate with other HEIs on sustainable development?

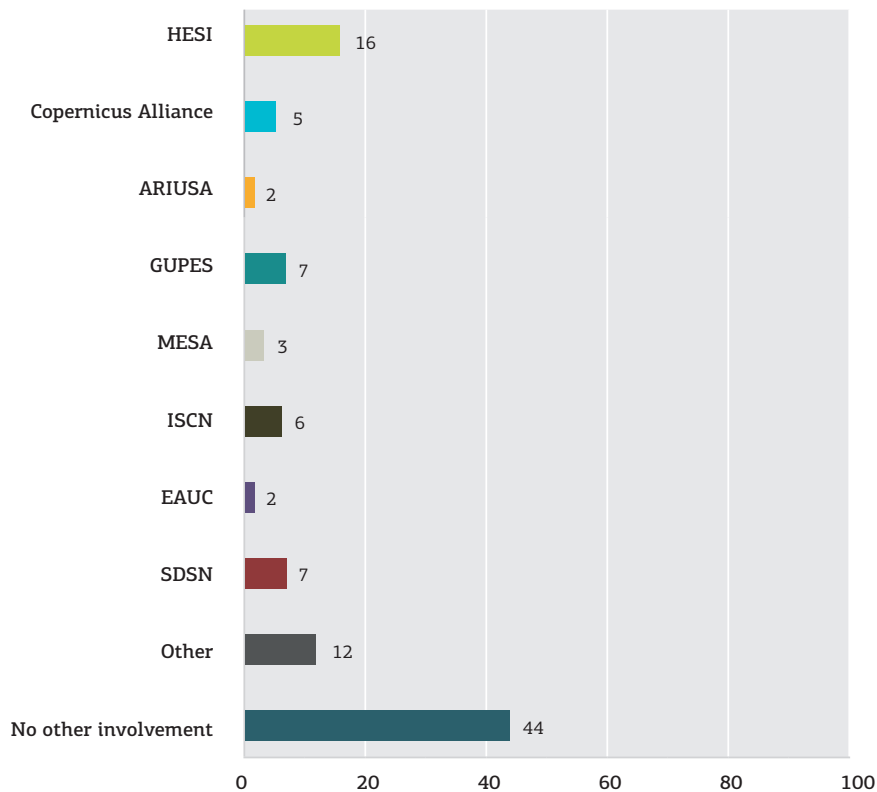
Answered: 76 Skipped: 44



The survey focused on cooperation for sustainable development between institutions and with other stakeholders outside the institution. 70% of the respondents say their institution is engaged with other HEIs on sustainable development issues; cooperation happens especially at local level (55%), between institutions and other stakeholders locally, and at national level (53%), especially when national ESD plans are developed and supported by the government. The fact that cooperation is much practiced at such levels is not surprising considering how much sustainable development is linked to local contexts.

## Is your institution involved in other Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development networks?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 44



The question came with a random short list of network options. The aim was to understand cross links between networks and to invite the respondents to identify all other networks they are involved in.

Several HEIs surveyed mention that they are involved in the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), the Global Universities Partnership on Environment and Sustainability (GUPES), the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN-SDSN), or COPERNICUS Alliance. Among the other networks mentioned, respondents listed: the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), the Observatory for Social Responsibility in Latin America & the Caribbean (ORSALC), the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI), or Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME).

More networks exist and are listed on the [IAU HESD global portal](#).



## Key Findings and Recommendations

### Higher education institutions around the world are increasingly aware of sustainable development issues and of the role they play

The results of the survey highlight that the respondents are familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals (78%) and Education for Sustainable Development (74%). They are also familiar with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (59%) and the concept of whole institution approach (69%). This is a positive feedback knowing that such approach, involving all the institution's players (students, educators, leaders etc.), is a key to embedding sustainable development in all the institution's activities. Most of the respondents consider that sustainable development is linked to environmental issues (84%). At the same time, many also underline the importance of societal (68%) and cultural (60%) dimensions to be considered when working in ESD.

**Recommendation:** *The key role higher education plays in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be recognized and supported. Higher education institutions themselves should systematically report on their sustainability initiatives and call for more engagement within their institution to make sure everyone gets involved.*

### Sustainable development is being integrated within higher education institutions, including at strategic level. However, there is room for improvement

Many respondents know the concept of whole institution approach; in the survey, 45% declare that their HEI adopted such an approach. In terms of strategy, which is to be interpreted as provision of leadership support, 34% declare having already developed and adopted a strategic plan related to sustainable development in their HEI. 38% mention their HEI is currently developing one, which is a very encouraging data even if there is still room for improvement.

The results underline that sustainability initiatives are mainly developed in faculties, departments, sustainability centres but also student organizations. The data collected concerning financial support for HESD is not substantial enough to draw real conclusions; yet some respondents mention the existence of financial support and underline that it is often project based. Generally speaking what can be assumed from the data presented and from debates at conferences where the survey results were presented is that financial support for further development of ESD is a real issue. Core funding is being sought so that projects and individual, faculty, time bound initiatives can develop into fully supported work at all levels and for longer term.

**Recommendation:** *University leaders should support the integration of sustainable development throughout their institution. They should involve all the institutional stakeholders in the development of SD related strategies and include reporting and monitoring mechanisms to keep track of and foster progress.*

## Higher education institutions are collaborating on sustainable development issues, especially at local and national levels

The results highlight that **70%** of the HEIs are collaborating with other institutions on sustainable development issues, especially at local (**55%**), national (**53%**) and regional (**43%**) levels. Many are also involved in HESD networks. This is true to the very vision and mission of ESD: working together to identify new solutions for the challenges we face today. Yet what also appears is that there is a multiplication of networks and that all these do compete for same human and financial resources. This is at times puzzling for those involved and who find it difficult to understand to which network they should belong and in which one(s) they should get involved fully.

**Recommendation:** *To avoid working in silos and to be more efficient, the many existing sustainability networks in higher education should cooperate more closely.*

## The Way Forward

During the various workshops, seminars and international events in which IAU presented the survey, two main interests emerged:

- How to build, implement and monitor a strategic plan for sustainable development in a higher education institution?
- How to fully integrate sustainable development into the curricula?

Taking into account these feedbacks, IAU will work on these topics in 2017 and 2018, mobilizing its partners and Members to foster and share expertise on the subject.

IAU will launch a second edition of its Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development survey in 2018. This new edition will allow to see the progress made in various areas of sustainable development, enter more into details on certain aspects of sustainable development and whole institution approaches, and to keep advocating for HESD worldwide. To expand the survey and get even more higher education institutions from around the world to participate, the survey will be available in English, French and Spanish. If you want to collaborate with IAU and be associated with the next edition and help develop and disseminate the survey, please contact the Association. In the meantime, IAU invites you to use the IAU HESD portal ([www.iau-hesd.net](http://www.iau-hesd.net)) to network with peers, share good practices and knowledge, and get inspired!

## Annex 1 - IAU Policy Statements on Sustainable Development

IAU Iquitos Statement on Higher Education for Sustainable Development (2014)

Kyoto Declaration on Sustainable Development (1993)

## Annex 2 - IAU Main Contributions to the UN-DESD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Timeline

## Annex 3 - IAU Horizons with a Special Focus on Sustainable Development

*IAU Horizons* is the Association's magazine published twice a year. It offers an overview of IAU main activities. Each issue also provides an *In Focus* section in which a selection of original papers analyse various aspects of topics of interest to the higher education community worldwide. Each issue reports on IAU HESD work. Various volumes published have dedicated the *In Focus* section to Higher Education and Research for sustainable development:

- IAU Horizons, vol. 21, no.1 - [The Role of Higher Education in Developing and Fostering Social Innovation](#)
- IAU Horizons, vol. 20, no.3 - [Where in the World is Higher Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda?](#)
- IAU Horizons, vol. 18, no.2 - [The Contribution of Higher Education to Sustainable Development](#)
- IAU Horizons, vol. 18, no.3 & Vol.19, no.1 - [IAU 14th General Conference on: Higher Education and the Global Agenda - Alternative Paths to the Future](#)

## Annex 4 - List of Acronyms

**2030 Agenda:** Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

**ESD:** Education for Sustainable Development

**GAP:** Global Action Programme

**HE:** Higher Education

**HEI(s):** Higher Education Institution(s)

**HESD:** Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development

**IAU:** International Association of Universities

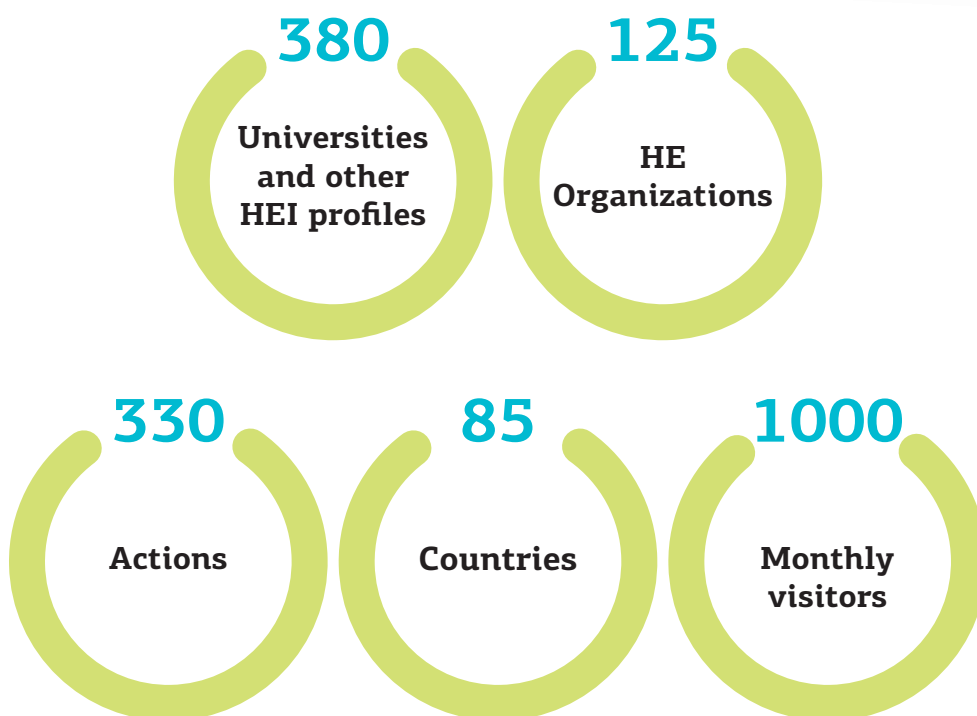
**SD:** Sustainable Development


**SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals

[www.iau-hesd.net](http://www.iau-hesd.net)

The IAU Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD) Global Portal is a tool accessible to all, for increased engagement in sustainable development, spotlighting IAU Members' and Partners' commitment to sustainable development, generating synergies and networking around the world.

**Make sure you are part of it!**



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