



Proposal of indicators to embed the Sustainable Development Goals into Institutional Quality Assessment

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The project outcomes arise from the leadership of AQUA and ACPUA, the expertise of an advisory board of experts, and the guidance of stakeholders who participated in a year-long engagement process. This report is written by Prof. Daniella Tilbury, who was the expert advisor of the project, in collaboration with the board of experts.

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List of Shortened Forms

ACPUA	Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education
AQUA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education of Andorra
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ESGs	European Standards and Guidelines
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
QAA	UK Quality Assurance Agency
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Executive Summary

In September 2015 the world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These 17 ambitious goals aim to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all (United Nations 2015). The higher education sector was quick to embrace these responsibilities. Over the last three years, leaders, student bodies and higher education (HE) networks around the globe have committed to practical steps to advance the SDGs (SDSN Australia/Pacific 2017; GUNI 2018; HESI 2019). As higher education institutions respond to this challenge, questions are being raised as to how we recognize value and share experiences of quality education for sustainable development (UNECE 2019).

The initiative presented in this publication is part of an international project, cofunded by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), which aims to connect an institution's quality assurance framework with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The quality agencies of Aragon (ACPUA) and Andorra (AQUA) worked alongside higher education stakeholders seeking to: interpret the SDGs in their higher education context; identify quality concerns relation to embedding the SDGs in higher education; and develop indicators that could be used to improve, as well as assess, an institution's quality performance in this area. The process was collaborative but also provided valuable learning and development experiences for all involved.

A proposal of indicators to embed the SDGs into institutional quality assessment is presented in this document. These indicators view sustainable development and the SDGs as relevant to all aspects of higher education. They seek a whole-institution approach to sustainable development interpreting this agenda as relevant to: leadership and management; teaching and learning; research and knowledge exchange; the staff and student experience; campus management; partnerships and outreach.

Introduction: Understanding Context

1. Introduction: Understanding Context

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015¹. The Agenda provides a universal, integrated and transformative vision for a better world underpinned by SDGs that will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance to the future of the planet and its people. Although the SDGs are not legally binding, the expectation is that governments should develop strategies for advancing these ambitions.

The project centres around questions and responses to the embedding of the SDGs in higher education quality assurance and enhancement processes. It is an area which is attracting increasing attention given the scale of the commitment of the 2030 agenda and that there are issues of quality associated with this ambition.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has a Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) that has agreed to priority actions in this area and to create opportunities for international collaboration (UNECE 2019). It is seeking to inform policy, decisions and systems change in support of the 2030 Agenda and particularly in relation to quality education and standards in higher education (Tilbury 2019). The UNECE Steering Committee sees the importance of working with education quality professionals – quality assessors; quality agencies; accreditation bodies and curriculum reviewers – a group that is yet to engage with ESD or SDGs meaningfully. These stakeholders are rarely present in ESD policy dialogues but have significant responsibilities and are key agents in the system with the ability to change education policy and practice nationally and internationally.

It has been argued that quality professionals in some member states have recently lost what some believe is a vital connection with the public and are often under criticism from the broader education community for lack of purposefulness. This initiative is seeking to build relevance and trust in the quality profession as it engages constructively with a major agenda that brings issues related to quality of life, employment and social engagement

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

to the core of the education establishment (Tilbury 2019).

There are three other initiatives of interest to this project. The first was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in the UK and supported by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The work undertaken by Tilbury and Ryan in 2015 led to the development of an '*Online Guide to Quality and Education for Sustainability in Higher Education*'. The Guide combines lessons from the five institutional pilot projects with a sector-wide view of how ESD connects with quality assurance and enhancement in higher education².

The QAA of England played an important role in the project helping to shape the project outcomes at sector level and taking specific actions to progress the agenda. This level of interest in the initiative has signalled that there is now support at senior level for ESD to move into mainstream education discussion in higher education, and in relation to the increasingly diverse range of higher education providers. Indeed, following the project, the QAA took two significant steps to advance thinking around ESD in relation to its own work, which also provide platforms and legitimization for broader engagement:

- i) Including ESD in the UK Quality Code for higher education, which gives ESD its first point of entry into mainstream quality assurance frameworks at sector level.
- ii) Commissioning the development of a QAA stakeholder-led guidance briefing on ESD, which will support and extend the inclusion of ESD in the UK Quality Code for HE.

Also of relevance is an initiative led by the University of Newcastle Australia and Association of Deans of Business Schools in Australia. The '*National Learning and Teaching Standards for Environment and Sustainability*' (2015) project was funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Commission and led to the identification of standards for the environment and sustainability field and defined what students need to know and be able to do upon graduation, often referred to as student sustainability competencies. The project team consulted with a wide range of stakeholders including tertiary educators and researchers, employers and practitioners, students, other environmental educators and indigenous

² <http://efsandquality.glos.ac.uk/>

people. The key recommendations resulting from the consultation included the inclusion of sustainability in base disciplinary knowledge and subject benchmarks; ensuring institutions offered students opportunities to gain practical experience and skills and the embedding or alignment of sustainability with the Australian Qualification Framework. The initiative was led by Dr Bonnie McBain and Liam Phelan (2015) and was backed by a board of experts³.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (AQUA) commissioned the Complex Research Group of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona to develop guidelines on how to embed sustainability into the Andorran higher education quality assurance frameworks (Mulà and Junyent 2017)⁴. AQUA's study made a key recommendation that an initiative be taken forward underpinned by a participatory process that set specific indicators to apply in institutional assessment. This desktop research, completed in December 2017, laid the foundations for the collaborative work outlined in this presentation.

³ <https://environmenttas.gradschool.edu.au/about/about-the-project/>

⁴ https://www.aqua.ad/system/files/sites/private/files/7_17-016_estudi_q_ods_maquetat_paper_ang_2_compressed.pdf

Making connections: an international project

2. Making Connections: An International Project

The indicators proposed are part of the project “*Making connections between the institutional evaluation and the sustainable development goals: Empowering stakeholders for quality enhancement (2018-2019)*”⁵, co-funded by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and led by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education of Andorra (AQUA) and the Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA).

This project primarily seeks to connect an institution’s quality assurance framework with the SDGs. The quality assurance agencies of Aragon and Andorra worked alongside higher education stakeholders seeking to:

- i) interpret the SDGs in their higher education context;
- ii) identify quality concerns in relation to embedding the SDGs in higher education; and,
- iii) develop indicators that could be used to improve, as well as assess, an institution’s quality performance in this area.

AQUA and ACPUA have worked together on quality enhancement initiatives since 2015. The agencies share a common understanding of the role quality agencies play in small higher education systems and the need to engage stakeholders actively in quality processes. This alignment resulted in a collaborative partnership which supported dialogue and learning across their areas of responsibilities.

In Andorra and Spain there are moves to focus quality enhancement and assurance work at an institutional level to complement the finely-tuned academic programme accreditation processes and academic staff progression levels that have served the higher education sector well over the last two decades. The 2030 Agenda, and accompanying SDGs, provide a test ground for developing institutional indicators of quality and assessing institutional performance for the first time in Andorra and Spain.

⁵ <https://www.aqua.ad/en/content/making-connections-between-institutional-evaluation-and-sustainable-development-goals>

Table 1: Quality assurance agencies of Andorra and Aragón

<p>The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education of Andorra (AQUA) is the official higher education quality assessment agency in the country.</p> <p>AQUA assesses, accredits and certifies the quality of HE in Andorra in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs). In 2019 its focus is on two universities: a public one (Universitat d'Andorra) and a private one (Universitat Oberta La Salle).</p> <p>AQUA aims to be a streamlined, approachable, and inclusive agency that acts as a platform for transformation in higher education. It recognises that institutional quality can support efforts to address social and employment needs. (www.aqua.ad)</p>	<p>Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) is the official regional Agency for quality in higher education in Aragon. ACPUA started operating in 2006 with the specific intention of promoting a culture of quality and guiding strategic decision-making in higher education.</p> <p>ACPUA serves the Aragon university system by promoting quality enhancement as well as assurance. Its focus is on two universities: a public one (the University of Zaragoza) and a private one (San Jorge University).</p> <p>ACPUA is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). (https://acpua.aragon.es/)</p>
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The **stakeholders** engaged in the project were very diverse (see Figure 1). This was intentional as the process sought to be inclusive and participatory. The project brought together two groups of professionals, the quality specialists and the sustainability experts, each group rooted in different discourses and distinct ways of working. The project sought to create a platform that linked their concerns, journeys and language relating to sustainability. It created a meeting space for these two groups to find overlapping interests, challenge each other's worldviews and consider ways in which they could work together.

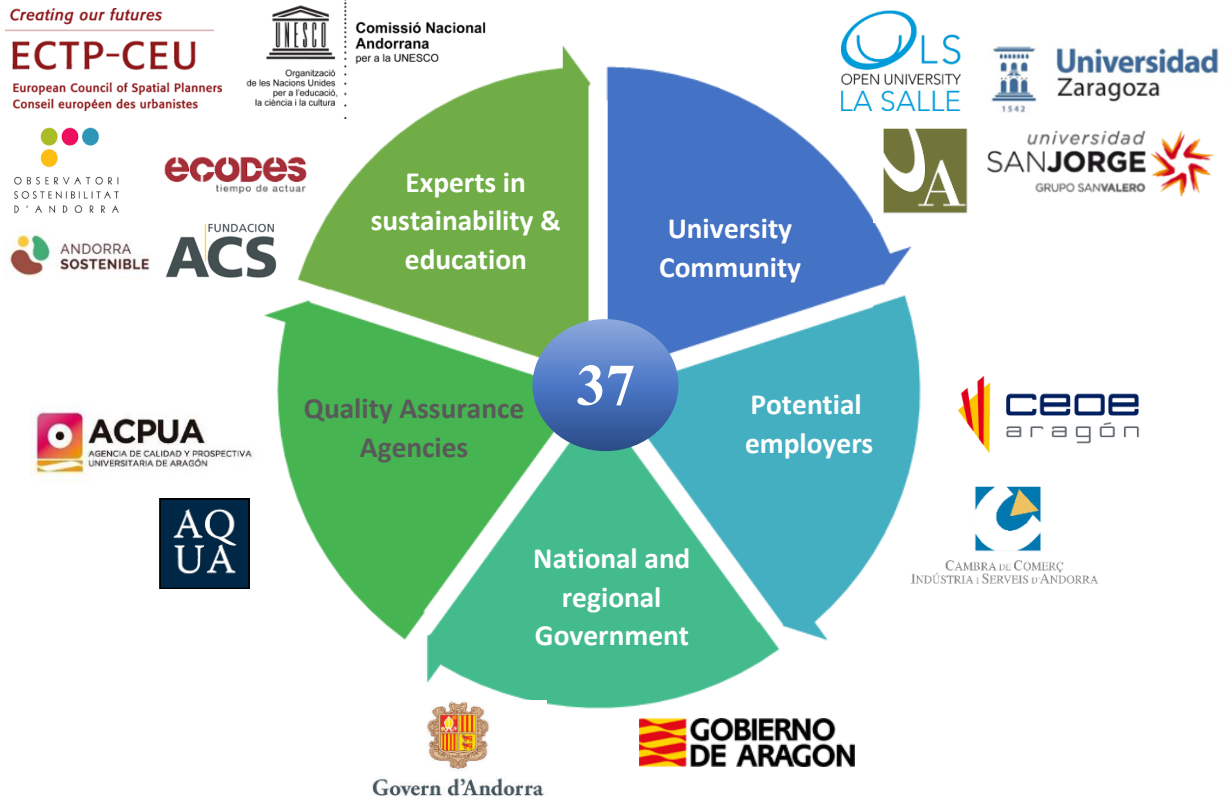


Figure 1. Project participants

The project was coordinated by the directors of AQUA and ACPUA; and was conducted and advised by a **board of international experts** on sustainability and quality in higher education:

Dr David Alba Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Dr Mercè Junyent Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Prof Dr Pepe Gutiérrez Universidad de Granada

Dr Íngrid Mulà Universitat de Girona

Expert advisor:

Prof Dr Daniella Tilbury, Commissioner for Sustainable Development - HM Government of Gibraltar; Honorary Fellow - St Catharine's College University of Cambridge

The project evolved through multiple **stages** presented in figure 2.

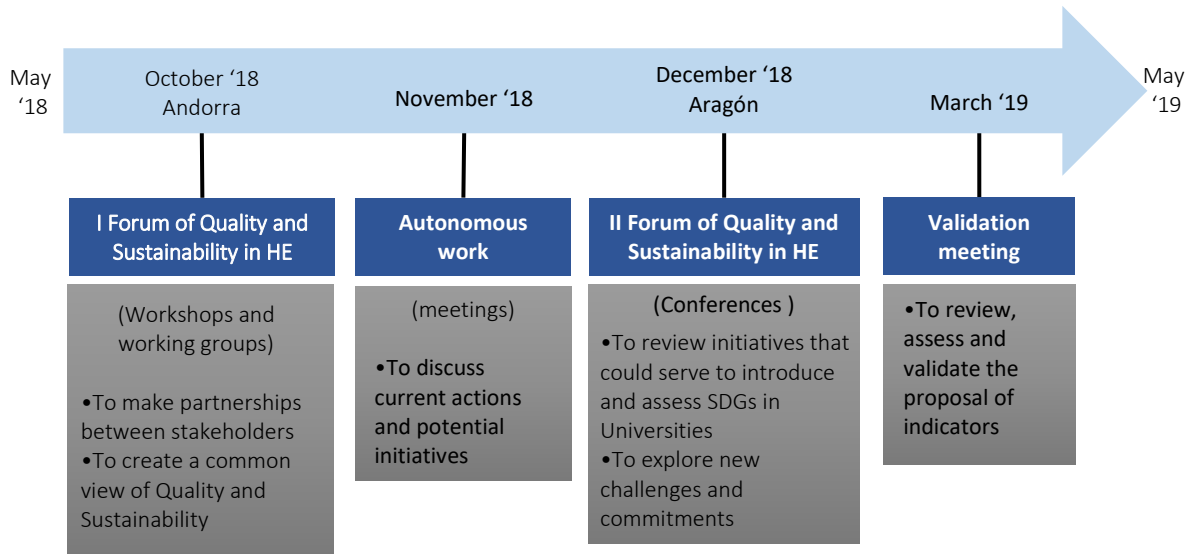


Figure 2: Outline of the project

In summary, the process was collaborative but also provided a valuable learning and development experience for all involved. The Project Leadership Team engaged stakeholders in mapping relevant and existing initiatives in Aragon and Andorra and facilitated a learning journey that deepened their own, and the stakeholders', understanding of the SDGs. The project provided a reflective space and action learning process for stakeholders to define how the SDGs align with quality agendas and their own responsibilities. The Board, which participated in meetings and provided advice at different project stages, constructed quality indicators for sustainable development which were then reviewed and adapted to meet stakeholders' needs.

More information about the project: <https://www.aqua.ad/en/content/making-connections-between-institutional-evaluation-and-sustainable-development-goals>

The Indicators

3. The Indicators

3.1 Why, What, How and Who?

Table 2: Quality Indicators for Sustainable Development in Higher Education

Why? Indicators can provide a valuable basis for advancing as well as assessing an institution's contribution to the SDGs. Quality frameworks and processes have the potential to promote and support deep as well as wide approaches to sustainability in higher education.

What? The proposed indicators identify the degree of embeddedness of SDGs in an institution. They present a state of play or snapshot of how the institution is performing across its different areas of responsibility in regards with the SDGs.

How? Performance is usually ascertained based on an audit of policies, plans and activities. This can take the form of a questionnaire, focus group or series of interviews. Guidance notes will be provided to assist with collecting data and making judgments against the indicators and generating an institutional score.

Who? The indicator framework has been developed for use by the institution primarily for self-assessment purposes. The framework is also relevant to agencies that will need to validate and externally verify the performance as identified by institutional review.

Following the participatory and action learning process outlined above, a list of quality indicators was generated. The indicators seek to assess and support the embedding of the SDGs at an institutional level within a higher education institution. They are meant to inform quality enhancement as well as institutional development and assessment processes.

Nine different components underpin the indicator framework, which adopts a whole-institution approach to the adoption of the SDGs at the University. The components, which are presented in no particular order, include: governance and strategy; leadership and partnerships; quality strategy and processes; training and guidance; resources and funding; programmes; campus; students and employees; external quality assurance.

It is important to note that the framework recognises variations in terminology and will accept 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development' to mean the SDGs. Only partial points will be awarded when sustainability or the SDGs are interpreted as solely environmental or ecological. Equally, efforts that are limited to the solely social or economic dimension of the SDGs will be subject to the same assessment.

The intention is that this framework of indicators fosters **learning and innovation** rather than solely **compliance**. Those engaged in generating these indicators understand that change is not necessarily a linear process and that discussions and debates are required to embed SDGs within quality frameworks and processes. There is also recognition that the proposed indicator framework will need ongoing critique and evaluation as well as revision to keep it relevant and ambitious.

It is recommended that the indicator framework is translated into the local language and that terminology is adopted to be relevant to national or regional circumstances (e.g. *University Council, Senate or Board of Governors*). Equally, the framework would benefit from concrete local examples to illustrate what type of evidence or documentation is needed for the assessment criteria to be met. Stakeholder engagement also highlighted the importance of the quality assurance agencies providing guidance or training support alongside the framework to assist with the transition towards institutional review processes, and aligned with the proposed framework.

3.2 The Indicators

EMBEDDING SDGs AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL			
Components	Indicators	Assessment criteria	Points
1. Governance and Strategy	1.1 The SDGs form part of the institution's governance framework and implementation is reported in a transparent manner.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The University Council or Senate⁶ has explicitly committed to sustainability and the SDGs (4 points) - The Executive⁷ has explicitly committed to Sustainability and the SDGs (4 points) 	8 points
	1.2 The SDGs are included in university strategic documents as well as the University's four-year planning cycle.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the strategic framework or plan of the university recognizes the SDGs (1 point) b) SDGs are embedded in the planning cycle (1 point) c) SDGs are embedded in the targets of the strategic framework or plan (1 point) 	3 points
	1.3 The implementation of SDGs is monitored and evaluated in line with targets and outcomes identified in the strategic documents.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) There is monitoring and evaluation in place (1 point) b) The outcomes of the evaluation informs the strategic work of the university (1 point) 	2 points
	1.4 Leading practice in implementing SDGs is recognized through internal and external awards.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Staff have been recognized internally with a certificate/ prize/seed funding, promotion (1 point) b) Leading practice examples have been recognized by an external award schemes and similar (1 point) 	2 points

⁶ In Aragon, "cláustro". In Andorra, "Junta académica"

⁷ In Aragon, "Consejo de Gobierno". In Andorra, "Consejo universitario"

Components	Indicators	Assessment criteria	Points
2. Leadership and Partnerships	2.1 The institution makes an explicit and visible commitment to embracing SDGs.	Evidence is submitted to confirm two of the following: a) commitment to SDGs present in university webpage b) commitment to SDGs visible in email footers c) commitment to SDGs visible in international profiling d) commitment to SDGs visible in promotional material e) other (left at the discretion of the assessor)	2 points
	2.2 The institution works with other higher education stakeholders to improve the embedding of SDGs in the quality frameworks and processes.	Evidence is submitted to confirm two of the following: a) institution participates in a joint project b) institution participates in a working or expert group c) institution convenes an international meeting on quality and SDGs d) other (left at the discretion of the assessor)	2 points
	2.3 The institution reaches out to work with external partners to implement the SDGs through staff and students volunteering and other non-formal curriculum opportunities.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: a) opportunities exist for staff across the institution (0.5 points) b) opportunities for students across the institution (0.5 points) c) all staff and students have opportunities to participate (1)	2 points
3. Quality Strategy and Processes	3.1 The quality strategy or policy has SDGs as a core commitment.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: a) SDGs appear as a key heading in the quality policy or strategy (2 points) b) the quality policy or strategy identifies what it understands by quality in relation to the SDGs (2 points) c) the institution identifies what and how it is seeking to assess through the quality process in relation to the SDGs (2 points)	6 points

Components	Indicators	Assessment criteria	Points
	3.2 There is a strategy or policy that commits staff responsible for quality to professional development specifically on the SDGs.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that the strategy and policy has: a) targets in relation to professional development (2 points) b) timelines in relation to professional development (2 points)	2 points
	3.3 The quality process assesses progress and makes a quality judgment on the degree of embeddedness of a whole institution approach to the SDGs.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: a) progress towards whole-institution adoption of SDGs is assessed by the quality process against specified timelines and targets (2 points) b) there is a quality judgment on the degree of embeddedness of the whole-institutional approach (2 points) c) recommendations are made to extend the impact of efforts at a whole-institutional level (2 points)	6 points
4. Training and Guidance	4.1 The institution has developed guidance documents and/or frameworks for developing good practice in relation to the SDGs	Evidence is submitted to confirm that there is written guidance in relation to the SDGs for: a) teaching and learning (1 point) b) research and knowledge transfer (1 point) c) management and administration (1 point) d) outreach (1 point) e) the guidance has been developed via participatory approaches and are revised regularly (1 point)	5 points
	4.2 Colleagues with responsibilities for quality at the institutional level have participated in a professional development offering or in a development and change programme related to	Evidence is submitted to confirm the following training has taken place: • above 25% of quality related staff have participated (1 point) • above 50% of quality related staff have participated (2 points)	4 points

Components	Indicators	Assessment criteria	Points
	<i>the SDGs (expressed as %).</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 75% of quality related staff have participated (3 points) • 100% of quality related staff have participated (4 points) 	
	4.3 Colleagues who have a formal responsibility for teaching and learning have participated in a professional development offering or in a development and change programme related to the SDGs.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of staff have participated (1 point) • above 50% of staff have participated (2 points) • above 75% of staff have participated (3 points) • 100% of staff have participated (4 points) 	4 points
	4.4 Colleagues who have responsibility for management and administration have participated in a professional development offering or in a development and change programme related to the SDGs.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of staff have participated (1 point) • above 50% of staff have participated (2 points) • above 75% of staff have participated (3 points) • 100% of staff have participated (4 points) 	4 points
	4.5 Colleagues responsible for research and knowledge transfer activity have participated in a professional development offering or in a development and change programme related to the SDGs (expressed as %).	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of staff have participated (1 point) • above 50% of staff have participated (2 points) • above 75% of staff have participated (3 points) • 100% of staff have participated (4 points) 	4 points
5. Resources & Funding	5.1 External and internal funding is found and allocated to SDG initiatives.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) there has been internal funding incl. letter from awarding body (1 point) b) there has been external funding incl. letter from awarding body (1 point) 	2 points

Components	Indicators	Assessment criteria	Points
	5.2 A team is established that is capable and qualified to plan, implement and evaluate SDG initiatives internally. The team is responsible for facilitating engagement and supporting stakeholders in this agenda.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that there is a team in place dedicated to this task. Evidence of the following is required: a) terms of reference of the team that clarifies responsibilities and qualifications (1 point) b) role definitions or responsibilities of individuals that confirm capacity and qualifications (1 point) c) evidence of opportunities being facilitated/encouraged for connected planning (1 point) d) evidence that joint SDGs projects across the departments are taking place (1 point) e) evidence that challenges and lessons learnt are taken into account (1 point)	5 points
6. Programmes	6.1 Degree programmes (UG and PG) provide opportunities to learn about the SDGs (expressed as %).	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of programmes meet these criteria (1 point) • above 50% of programmes meet these criteria (2 points) • above 75% of programmes meet these criteria (3 points) • 100% of programmes meet these criteria (4 points) 	4 points
	6.2 Degree Programmes (PG and UG) have practical experience for students to learn how to address the SDGs in practice (work placements, community projects, campus projects, etc.) (expressed as %).	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of programmes meet these criteria (1 point) • above 50% of programmes meet these criteria (2 points) • above 75% of programmes meet these criteria (3 points) • 100% of programmes meet these criteria (4 points) 	4 points
	6.3 Programmes offer opportunities for	Evidence is submitted to confirm that:	4 points

Components	Indicators	Assessment criteria	Points
	students to understand the global significance and context of the SDGs (expressed as %).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of programmes meet these criteria (1 point) • above 50% of programmes meet these criteria (2 points) • above 75% of programmes meet these criteria (3 points) • 100% of programmes meet these criteria (4 points) 	
	6.4 Degree Programmes (UG and PG) have explicit competences on sustainable development (expressed as %).	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of programmes meet these criteria (1 point) • above 50% of programmes meet these criteria (2 points) • above 75% of programmes meet these criteria (3 points) • 100% of programmes meet these criteria (4 points) 	4 points
	6.5 Programmes commit to learner-centred and active learning strategies associated with education for sustainable development (expressed as %).	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of programmes meet these criteria (1 point) • above 50% of programmes meet these criteria (2 points) • above 75% of programmes meet these criteria (3 points) • 100% of programmes meet these criteria (4 points) 	4 points
	6.6 Programmes have an assessed component in relation to learning and change for sustainable development (expressed as %).	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above 25% of programmes meet these criteria (1 point) • above 50% of programmes meet these criteria (2 points) • above 75% of programmes meet these criteria (3 points) • 100% of programmes meet these criteria (4 points) 	4 points
7. Campus	7.1 There are volunteer opportunities for engagement with implementing SDGs on campus (expressed as ratio of students).	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are opportunities for 1:4 students to participate (1 point) • there are opportunities for 2:4 students to participate (2 points) • there are opportunities for 3:4 students to participate (3 points) 	4 points

Components	Indicators	Assessment criteria	Points
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there are opportunities for 4:4 students to participate (4 points) 	
	7.2 There is a campus wide quality system to progressively improve facilities performance considering the SDGs.	Evidence is submitted to confirm that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the institution can show annual improvement (2 points) there is a system of improvement in place that may be accredited (1 point) 	3 points
8. Students and Employers	8.1 There are feedback mechanisms where students provide (incl. anonymous) suggestions for improving the learning experience in relation to the SDGs.	There is evidence that feedback is requested that meets this criteria.	1 point
	8.2 Employers and student alumni provide feedback on the institution's contribution to SDGs.	There is evidence that feedback is received.	1 point
9. External Quality Assurance	9.1 The quality assurance agency, following a verification of evidence of the above, provides a positive report on the institution's performance in relation to the SDGs.	There is evidence that the quality assurance agency: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> has reviewed and validated the evidence that is requested by this framework (2 points) has provided a positive report (2 points) 	4 points

3.3 The Scoring System

To attain a score against this framework of indicators, institutions would provide evidence to demonstrate how the requirements of the indicator framework have been met. The evidence is assessed according to the criteria and a score out of 100 potential points would be generated. This score can easily be converted into a percentage figure and then classified under the performance levels described below.

LEVEL 1	BRONZE	Score: 0-25%	Reflects commitment to the SDGs
LEVEL 2	SILVER	Score: 25-50%	Making progress towards embedding the SDGs
LEVEL 3	GOLD	Score 50-75%	Leading Practice Nationally
LEVEL 4	PLATINIUM	Score 75-100%	Leading Practice Internationally

It is anticipated that the indicators and point system allocated will be refined each year. The Board determined that it should not make the indicators too ambitious or detailed from the start. As higher education institutions improve their performance, indicators will evolve to more accurately capture progress and improvements.

Challenges and Next Steps

4. Challenges and Next Steps

Quality assurance agencies are combining a traditional assurance or compliance role with a more facilitative and enhancement one. These processes promote the stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of initiatives.

The project *'Making connections between the institutional evaluation and the sustainable development goals: Empowering stakeholders for quality enhancement'* benefitted from a process that was exploratory and inclusive. The workshop components of the initial forums engaged the participants actively in constructing a shared meaning of terms, such as sustainable development or quality, and in ways that gave them confidence to learn more about these agendas, tools, processes and outcomes.

Stakeholders need support to consolidate emergent understanding of sustainable development and strengthen their confidence with regard to quality agendas. Professional development, when combined with their situated knowledge, institutional responsibilities and experience of quality agendas, would make for a powerful and meaningful change in the institutions.

'Making connections' was not the first project to seek to embed sustainability into higher education institutions; such efforts have been gaining momentum since the early 1990s. However, this project is innovative because of its focus on quality processes and outcomes and its focus on indicators, as well as the timely adoption of the SDGs as a working principle. The latter has brought a degree of tangibility and avoided lengthy definitional discussions (and often stalemates) amongst stakeholders. Those leading the project were on occasions concerned that the SDGs could result in compartmentalization of sustainability and superficial exploration, as many would be tempted to limit their engagement to an audit or tick-box exercise. However, the project experience has shown how the SDGs have acted as doorways eliciting interest in sustainability, originally via thematic pathways that look familiar and interesting to participants, giving value and recognition to existing efforts, but which then join up with other thematic concerns (or objectives) to construct an integrated or holistic framework for sustainability.

In the stakeholders' own words, the project had 'shone a light on new pathways' and ignited 'a flame of interest' amongst stakeholders. It is

anticipated, therefore, that further development work is required to support this new energy as well as assist stakeholders to attain the performance levels sought by the indicators.

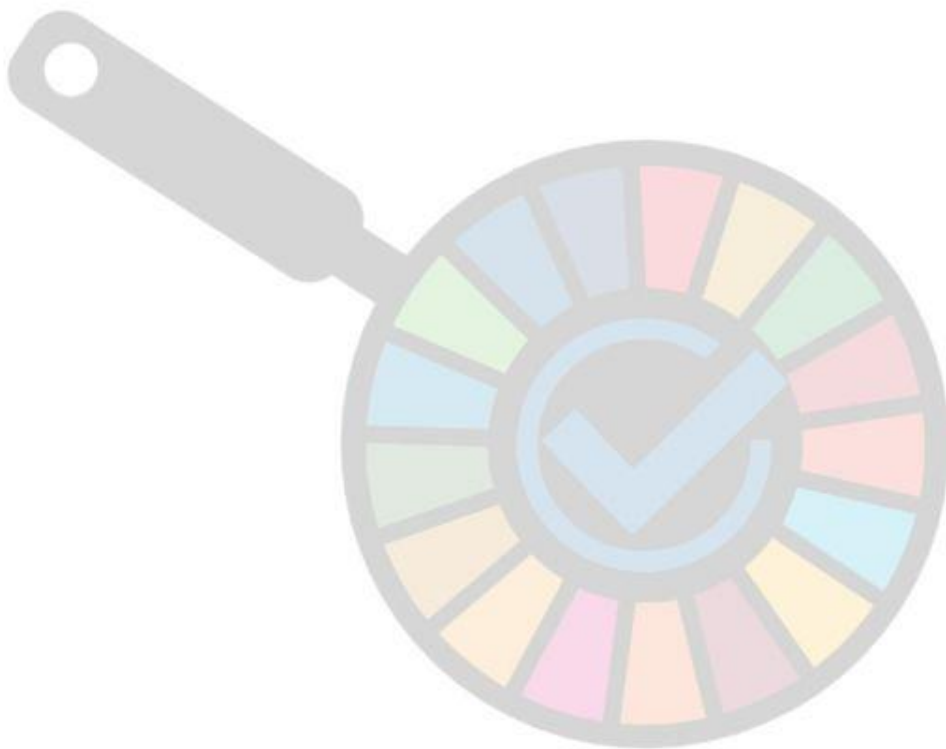
The proposal of indicators presented, as well as the lessons learned during this project, could be shared to serve as a starting point for dialogue on quality and sustainability agendas in higher education.

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