**Results of student surveys to determine their attitudes towards, expectations on, and awareness of social responsibility and sustainability [SRS] at the university.**

**Introduction**

A number of surveys have been carried out to determine the attitudes towards, expectations on and awareness of social responsibility and sustainability over the past two years at the university. These have included both on-line surveys and face to face interviews (Table 1).

*Table 1 Surveys carried out at the university*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Survey type | Number of respondents |
| June 2022 | On-line | 86 |
| February 2023 | Face to face | 97 |
| December 2023 to March 2024 | On-line | 124 |

The first survey carried out in June 2022 was part of a wider survey sent to all students and staff to determine key priorities for sustainability as part of the process of rewriting the university’s sustainability strategy. The second face to face survey was carried out as part of Fairtrade Fortnight, where seven questions were asked to students visiting the Fairtrade stand in return for Fairtrade chocolate. The third survey started in December 2023 was more comprehensive with the questions based on those in the NUS SOS-UK student skills survey. Questions asked in all surveys can be found in Appendix 1. A full report of the results found from the Fairtrade survey can be found on the university website.

Although generally different questions were asked in the surveys, all covered the same theme of social responsibility and sustainability with specific questions asked about student concerns about climate change. As such, complete comparisons of responses from the different surveys cannot be made, although the different approaches of the surveys have provided a wide range of information.

**Survey results**

*On-line survey June 2022*

The main findings from the on-line survey in June 2022 are summarised below;

* Many students are not aware, or not fully aware of what the university is doing to reduce its environmental impact.
* Only 15.1% of students are fully or very confident that the university is making progress on sustainability issues.
* Most students (67.4%) feel it is very important the university continues to reduce its impact on the environment.
* Most students (66%) are not engaged in the university’s efforts to reduce its environmental impacts.
* Most students would like to become engaged in sustainability through social media, competitions and games.
* Engagement of students in sustainability aspects through inclusion in all courses is of great interest. Provision of a stand-alone module and linking coursework and dissertations is also of interest.
* Engagement of students in sustainability aspects through extra curricula activities and placements is also of interest to students.
* Engagement of students in sustainability aspects through volunteering is of less interest.
* Many students (60%) feel the university should declare a climate emergency.

Due to the timing of the survey (which coincided with the student summer vacation) it is assumed that many students completing the survey were already concerned about sustainability and climate change. This may have influenced some of the results.

*Face to face survey February 2023*

As this survey was carried out as part of our Fairtrade Fortnight activities, many of the questions asked related to Fairtrade awareness and purchasing habits. However, answers to some of these questions also provide insight into student’s attitudes to a broad range of sustainability and social responsibility aspects. Pertinent findings from the survey are provided in Tables 2 and 3.

*Tables 2 and 3 Results from face to face surveys during Fairtrade Fortnight*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes (%) | No (%) |
| Are you aware that we are a Fairtrade University? | 27 | 73 |
| Do not remember seeing any Fairtrade activities, campaigns or events in previous years?  | 18 | 82 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all(%) | Not very(%) | Fairly(%) | Very(%) | No strong views (%) |
| Are you concerned about any other world issues such as poverty, animal welfare?  | 2 | 1 | 13 | 84 | 0 |
| Are you concerned about climate change? | 1 | 0 | 12 | 87 | 0 |

As suggested in the earlier survey, many students are not aware of activities, such as Fairtrade events and therefore are not engaged in the university’s effort to reduce its’ impact on the environment. Concerns about world issues and climate change are however apparent.

*On-line survey December 2023 to March 2024*

The on-line, more comprehensive survey, was carried out over a longer time period to try to canvas more student views. Students were encouraged to complete the survey during Green Week organised by the Students’ Union and by academic staff, as well as the usual communication channels. The breakdown of students responding with year and level of study is shown below;

* Undergraduates year 1 - 29
* Undergraduates year 2 - 60
* Undergraduates year 3 - 21
* Undergraduates year 4 – 4
* Postgraduates - 9

Most students (66.9%) want to learn about sustainability and social responsibility in their studies. This percentage increases from year 1 (Figure 1). The main reason given for the need to learn about the subject is its importance.

*Figure 1 Interest in learning about sustainability increases with year of study.*

Most students feel sustainability and social responsibility material should be built into existing courses (Figure 2). This confirms the findings of the June 2022 survey.

*Figure 2 Most students would like sustainability and social responsibility material to be built into existing courses*

Most students agree (53.2%) or strongly agree (30.6%) that the University should develop their social and environmental skills. This becomes more important as students progress through University (Figure 3).

*Figure 3 The university should develop students’ social and environmental skills*

Most students agree (58.9%) or strongly agree (10.5%) that the university takes action to limit the impact it has on the environment. This somewhat contradicts the data produced in the June 2022 survey where many students declared they are not aware, or not fully aware of what the university is doing to reduce its environmental impact. In addition, in this earlier survey, only 15.1% of students were fully or very confident that the university is making progress on sustainability issues. Hopefully the rewriting of the university’s Sustainability Strategy in 2023 and the inclusion of the SU in this, has helped alleviate some of these concerns. More opportunities for curriculum activities may also have had a positive effect.

In contrast, most students feel neutral (47.6%) about what actions the Students’ Union is taking to limit its’ impact on the environment (Figure 4). This may be due to students not appreciating that many initiatives are now collaborative ventures between the SU and the university.

*Figure 4 Most students are unsure about actions taken by the SU to reduce environmental impact*

Many students agree (42.7%) that being a student at the university encourages them to think and act to help the environment and other people. Results suggest this effect increases with year of study Figure 5).

*Figure 5 Many students agree that being a student at the university encourages them to think and act to help the environment and other people*

Improvements could however be made in this area, as few students from any year strongly agree with this statement.

A number of skills, attributes and knowledge, which could be obtained through education on sustainability and social responsibility, were listed in the survey as below;

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|

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| --- |
| * Communicating complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people
 |
| * Considering ethical issues linked to your subject
 |  |  |  |
| * Planning for the long term, as well as the short term
 |  |  |  |
| * Understanding how to create change
 |  |  |  |
| * Challenging the way we do things now (like business, politics, education)
 |  |
| * Using resources efficiently to limit the impact on the environment and other people
 |
| * The causes of inequality in the world
 |  |  |  |
| * Understanding how human activity is affecting nature;
 |  |  |  |
| * Solving problems by thinking about whole systems – including different connections and interactions
 |
| * Looking at global problems from the perspective of people from around the world
 |
| * Looking at a problem using information from different subjects or disciplines
 |  |

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|  |

All these skills, attributes and knowledge highlighted in the survey were shown to be personally important to students (Figure 6). Planning for the long term as well as the short term was ranked highly as a desired attribute for all years and was the leading attribute when the data for all years was collated.

*Figure 6 All skills, attributes and knowledge are important to students*

This survey also showed that students are worried about climate change. This had been previously highlighted in the survey in June 2022 with 60% of students responding that the university should declare a climate emergency. This was apparent again in February 2023, with 87% of students stating they were very worried about climate change and only 1 student claiming they were not concerned at all. Reasons for the concerns were mostly related to future generations, the effect on animals and world disasters.

**Conclusions and further work**

Sustainability and social awareness knowledge is important to our students. Comparison of the data from the three surveys suggests awareness of initiatives taken by the university and Students’ union to increase sustainability credentials and engagement of students is increasing. However, more work is needed in this area.

Over the last year more opportunities have been given to students to engage in sustainability and social responsibility aspects through the formal, informal and subliminal curriculum and this work will continue. A five year Sustainability Strategy has been produced by the University and Students’ Union in partnership and a Sustainability Statement has been created signed by both bodies.

Through the Sustainability Forum, academic staff will continue to pursue the inclusion of sustainability material in all courses, as this was indicated as the preferable choice by most students in two of the recent surveys. Many of the suggestions made in the last survey as to how the university and Students’ Union could improve their environmental performance, relate to increased communication of university and SU achievements. One new initiative which would help with this is the recruitment of student sustainability ambassadors who would organise and run events and create social content. The recruitment of student ambassadors is planned for the start of the next academic year.

A further survey to establish progress in these areas will be undertaken in 2025.