Course UN Sustainability Development Goals and Fairtrade in the curricula Report 24-25

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Context

In 2021, Kingston University launched its Sustainability Plan, marking a major milestone in our commitment to a more sustainable future. As part of the Town House Strategy and as a proud signatory of the UN SDG Accord, sustainability is now embedded in our core mission. This is a shared responsibility, and every member of our university community plays a vital role.

In June 2023, the Education Committee approved a key decision: all courses must address at least two UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), alongside SDG 4 – Quality Education, which applies to all teaching at KU. To support this commitment, course teams are expected to report annually on SDG integration until the end of the Sustainability Plan in 2026.

Data Collection and analysis

Both the data collection instrument (online questionnaire) and data analysis were developed and conducted by the Strategic Academic Lead. Data analysis involved reviewing course submissions to assess how the UN SDGs are being addressed.

To improve engagement and streamline the process, this year's questionnaire was simplified—transforming some open-ended questions into closed formats with selectable options. This made it easier and quicker for course leaders to complete.

New items were also introduced to strengthen the analysis and align with institutional priorities. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) competencies were made a mandatory part of the report, while a question on Fairtrade, just and ethical trade was added as optional. This helped reduce survey fatigue while supporting Kingston University's Fairtrade two-star award and broader sustainability goals. The reporting period was initially set between 13 May and late July.

Findings

The report begins with an overview of the institution-wide findings, offering a comprehensive snapshot of the current state of SDG integration. This is followed by faculty-level data and links to individual submissions, providing deeper insight into each faculty's specific approaches and use of resources.

Level of report completion:

A total of 188 courses were reported, which represents an increase from the previous academic year out of an expected 256 submissions. This is a significant improvement on the sustainability mapping exercise carried out in January 2023, where only 38 course leaders responded and 177 in 2024, i.e., an increase from 67.05% in 2023-24 to 73.44% in 24-25.

Per faculty:

Table 1 – Course reports per faculty

	HSSCE	FBSS	FECE	KSA*
Expected to submit	73	58	50	75
Submitted	55	43	43	47

*In KSA, 10 courses were expected to submit, as they participated in 2024–25. However, they did not submit, possibly due to the restructuring of the faculty offer and the suspension of those courses in 2025–26.

An analysis of Table 1 in the UN SDG Reporting document reveals varying levels of engagement across faculties in submitting course reports on SDG integration. Submission rates show that FECE had the highest engagement at 86%, followed by HSSCE (75.3%), FBSS (74.1%), and KSA (62.7%). However, when adjusting for the 10 KSA courses that were not expected to run in 2025–26 due to restructuring, KSA's adjusted submission rate improves to 72.3%.

Despite an overall increase in submissions from 177 in 2023–24 to 188 in 2024–25, 67 courses still failed to report, raising concerns about underreporting and its implications. These include risks of greenwashing, failure to meet KU's Sustainability Plan targets, and missed opportunities to embed green skills and sustainable development competencies. The data suggests a need for targeted support for faculties with lower engagement, clearer communication of expectations, and mandatory annual reporting until 2026. This will help ensure accountability, foster meaningful integration of SDGs, and support Kingston University's commitment to sustainability and the UN SDG Accord.

SDGs integration

Table 2 - SDGs addressed in courses whole institution.

	2023-2024 N=177	2023-2024	2024-2025 N=188	2024-2025
	%	Frequency	%	Frequency
None	7.3	13	6.9	13
At least one SDG	92.7	164	94.1	177
At least two SDGs	78.5	139	71.8	135
More than two SDGs	20.3	36	59.6	112

Compared to 2023–24, a significantly higher proportion of courses in 2024–25 are now addressing more than two UN SDGs beyond SDG 4, reflecting progress in embedding sustainability across curricula; however, a small percentage still report not addressing any SDGs, despite their inclusion in the Academic Framework.

Table 3 - SDGs addressed in courses per level of study, whole institution.

N=188	**Undergraduate**	**Postgraduate**	**Apprenticeship degrees**	**Foundation**
None	7 (3.7%)	5(2.7%)	1 (0.5%)	0 (0%)
At least one SDG	87 (46.3%)	82 (43.6%)	1 (0.5%)	5 (2.7%)
At least two SDG	24 (12.8%)	27 (14.4%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.1%)
More than two SDG	58(30.9%)	50 (26.6%)	1 (0.5%)	3 (1.6%))

In 2024–25, postgraduate courses showed a slightly higher proportion of engagement with more than two UN SDGs compared to undergraduate courses, indicating stronger integration at the postgraduate level. This could be that postgraduate programmes often have more flexibility in curriculum design, a stronger emphasis on real-world application and development of employability skills (e.g., green skills), and a higher likelihood of interdisciplinary or research-led teaching.

Table 4 – SDGs addressed in courses by faculty.

	HSSCE		**FBSS**		**FECE**		**KSA**	
Academic year	**23-24**	**24-25**	**23-24**	**24-25**	**23-24**	**24-25**	**23-24**	**24-25**
	n=64	n=55	n=35	n=43	n=25	n=43	n=53	n=47
None	5	5	1	1	4	7	3	0
At least one SDG	59	50	34	42	21	36	50	47
At least two SDGs	50	45	29	38	19	35	41	46
More than two SDGs	6	31	5	19	10	23	15	39

Table 4 shows a marked improvement from 2023–24 to 2024–25 in the number of courses addressing more than two UN SDGs across all faculties, with the most significant progress observed in KSA.

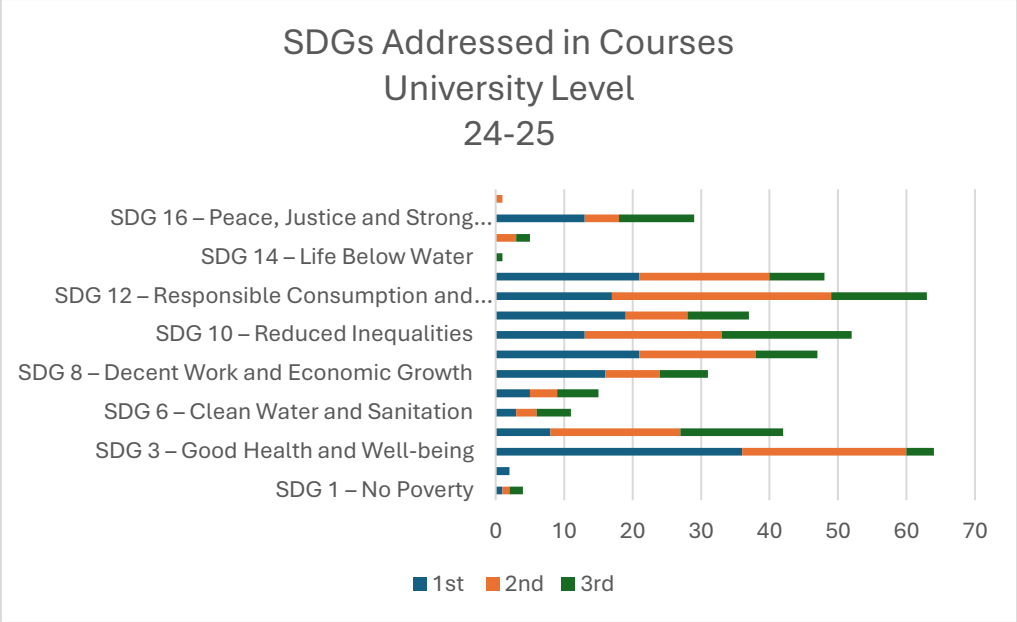

Figure 1: UN SDGs addressed in courses, whole institution.

Figure 1 shows that the most commonly addressed SDGs across courses are SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being, SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities, SDG 13 – Climate Action, and SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. This pattern is broadly consistent with previous years; however, SDG 12 has emerged as one of the most addressed this year, while SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions is no longer among the top. SDG 14 – Life Below Water and SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals continue to be the least addressed.

Learning and Teaching strategies, assessment and competencies:

While in some cases, the information in this section of the report was quite vague or difficult to parse, the table below shows the distribution of SDGs across modules on courses throughout KU.

Table 5 – Where SDGs are addressed in the course, whole institution.

Number of modules that address SDGs per course, whole institution		
	23-24 N=177	24-25 N=188
One module	46	72
Two modules	27	29
Three modules	28	22
Four modules	24	32
More than five modules	28	28
No information about the number of modules	11	10
The course does not address the SDGs	13	13

Table 5 shows a clear improvement in how SDGs are embedded across modules in 2024–25 compared to 2023–24. Notably, the number of courses addressing SDGs in one module increased from 46 to 72, and those with four modules rose from 24 to 32. This suggests broader integration of sustainability themes across curricula. Additionally, the number of courses with no information or no SDG engagement remained stable, indicating that while progress has been made, further efforts are needed to ensure colleagues feel confident in embedding sustainability in the curriculum and in articulating how they do it.

Table 6 presents the responses to how the SDGs are delivered in courses, specifically through the teaching, learning, and assessment activities selected, up to five per course.

Table 6 – Frequency of relevant teaching, learning and assessment activities.

	Whole institution N=188	**FHSSCE n=55**	**FBSS n=43**	**FECE n=43**	**KSA n=47**
Assessed coursework (e.g., essays, exams, projects, dissertations, etc.)	279	97	56	53	73
Lecture topics and slides	264	87	63	58	56
Class discussions	198	59	47	37	55
Course aims, objectives, or learning outcomes	156	45	22	43	46
Class group work	120	31	16	32	41
Case studies	96	16	16	24	40
Challenge and problem-based learning	70	19	8	27	16
Place-based learning (e.g., placements, internships)	35	22	6	0	7
Hackathons	8	0	3	5	0
Project live briefs involving external community stakeholders	35	0	8	3	24
Fieldtrips	19	3	1	3	12
Role-play and scenario-based learning	17	8	3	2	4
Laboratory and experimental activities	16	5	0	7	4
Multi-, inter-, cross-, or transdisciplinary projects	15	0	0	4	11
Storytelling	8	0	0	3	5

Table 6 highlights that traditional and passive teaching strategies—such as lecture topics and slides, class discussions, and case studies—remain the most commonly used methods for delivering SDG-related content across faculties. While this reflects a continued reliance on familiar formats, there has been a notable improvement in the use of assessed coursework and the integration of SDGs into course aims, objectives, and learning outcomes, indicating progress in embedding sustainability into formal evaluation. However, the limited adoption of more active and student-centred approaches points to a need for further professional development to support transformative learning. Strengthening staff capacity in experiential, interdisciplinary, and real-world pedagogies will be essential to prepare students for the complexities of sustainability challenges and the evolving demands of the job market.

While the ESD competencies are not a perfect match with Kingston University's Graduate Attributes, they are deeply interconnected. Each ESD competency (Systems Thinking, Anticipatory Thinking, Problem-Solving, Strategic Thinking, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Self-Awareness, Normative thinking) requires the full spectrum of graduate attributes to be effectively developed and applied. This alignment reflects Kingston's commitment to an Inclusive Curriculum and supports the goals of our Future Skills framework, ensuring that students are equipped not only for employment but also for meaningful, sustainable impact in their communities and professions. The table 7 shows their alignment.

Table 7 – Graduate Attributes and ESD alignment

Kingston Graduate Attribute	ESD Competencies	Explanation
Creative Problem Solving	Problem-Solving, Strategic Thinking	Encourages innovative approaches to sustainability challenges.
Digital Competency	Anticipatory Thinking, Systems Thinking	Supports future-oriented and systemic digital solutions.
Being Enterprising	Strategic Thinking, Normative Thinking	Drives change with values-based and goal-oriented action.
Questioning Mindset	Critical Thinking, Normative Thinking	Challenges assumptions and explores ethical dimensions.
Adaptability	Anticipatory Thinking, Self-Awareness	Prepares for uncertainty and reflects on personal growth.
Empathy	Collaboration, Normative Thinking	Fosters inclusive and values-driven engagement.
Collaboration	Collaboration, Systems Thinking	Builds collective capacity and shared understanding.
Resilience	Self-Awareness, Strategic Thinking	Enables persistence in long-term sustainability efforts.
Self-Awareness	Self-Awareness, Normative Thinking	Encourages reflection on values, identity, and impact.

In terms of the course fostering the development of graduate attributes and sustainable development competencies proposed by the AdvanceHE and QAA (2021), the figure below shows the results:

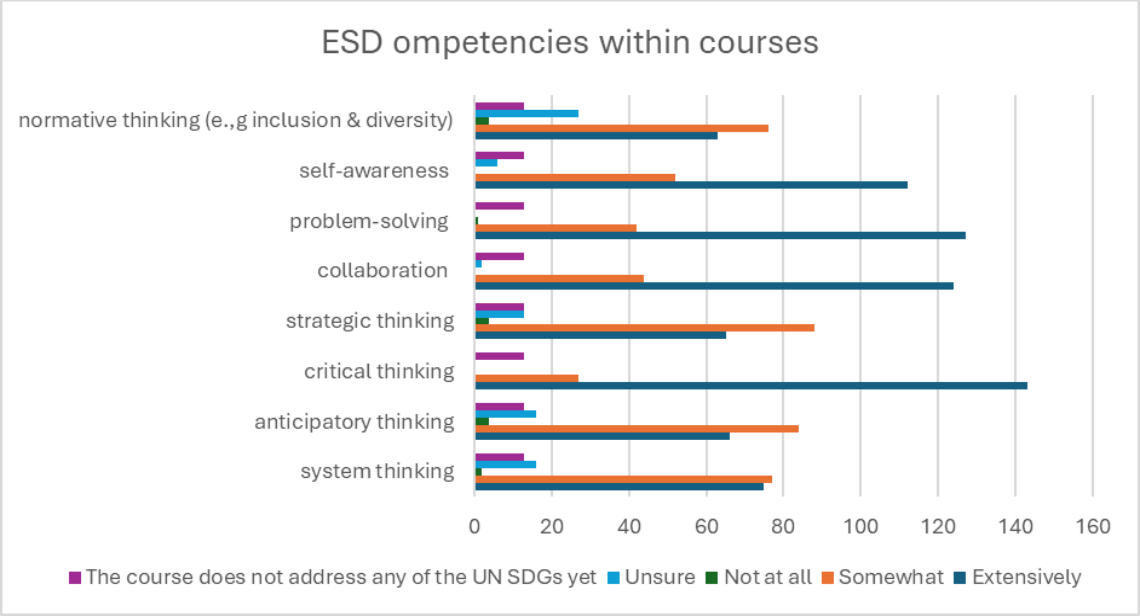

Figure 2: Graduate attributes and ESD competencies that are developed with the courses, whole university.

The most commonly fostered graduate attributes in the course were **critical thinking**, **problem-solving**, **collaboration**, and **self-awareness**, which are foundational for navigating complex sustainability challenges. However, two competencies that appear less developed, yet are crucial for transformative education, are **system thinking**, **normative competency** and **anticipatory thinking**.

Normative competency refers to the ability to understand, reflect on, and negotiate sustainability values, principles, and goals. It involves engaging with the ethical dimensions of sustainability and making value-based judgments about what ought to be done. This competency is closely linked to inclusion and diversity, as it requires learners to critically examine whose values are being prioritized and whose voices are being heard.

By fostering normative competency, we empower students to become not only effective problem-solvers but also value-driven change agents who can advocate for inclusive and equitable sustainability transitions. This aligns directly with our Inclusive Curriculum Framework, highlighting the need for greater efforts to embed inclusive approaches throughout the curriculum. The current findings suggest that the curriculum may not be sufficiently supporting the development of this competency.

Moreover, in preparing graduates for international careers or work within multicultural communities, normative competency becomes essential. It enables students to propose solutions that are ethically sound and culturally appropriate, ensuring they can navigate diverse contexts with sensitivity and respect.

Anticipatory thinking is the ability to envision possible futures, assess risks, and prepare for emerging challenges. While problem-solving addresses current issues, anticipatory thinking is about foresight, identifying potential problems before they arise and designing proactive strategies. In ESD, this competency is particularly vital because sustainability challenges are often long-term, uncertain, and systemic. Cultivating anticipatory thinking helps shift the

educational focus from reactive to preventive and strategic action, which is indispensable in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequalities.

SDGs Course's Levels of Maturity

To assess how maturely sustainability is being addressed within the course, a level of maturity was assigned. These levels were defined during the last academic year, drawing on key literature (e.g., AdvanceHE, 2021; Friman et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2022; Mokski et al., 2023), and were further refined to enhance their robustness by incorporating more recent research (e.g., White et al., 2025; Leal Filho et al., 2025).

The framework developed for this reporting enables us to evaluate and report on progress toward our Sustainability Plan targets, identify which SDGs Kingston University is actively addressing, and generate valuable insights to inform the design of future staff development and student engagement opportunities. The levels framework developed can be described as follows:

Awareness

- **Focus**: Recognizing unsustainable social, economic, or environmental practices are an issue. Teaching about sustainability
- **Depth**: Surface-level understanding; may involve exposure to key terms, concepts, or global challenges
- **Goal**: To spark interest and concern.
- **How**: Class discussions or Lecturers' topics and slides
- **ESD competencies**: Not developed.

Beginners

- **Focus**: Starting to engage with sustainability and UN SDGs concepts more actively. Teaching for sustainability.
- **Depth**: Slightly deeper than awareness; may involve basic knowledge and initial actions
- **Goal**: To build foundational understanding and skills. Case studies
- **How**: examples may include Laboratory and experimental activities; Fieldtrips; Assessed coursework (e.g., essays, exams, projects, dissertations, etc.); Place-based learning
- **ESD competencies**: Somewhat developed.

Change:

- **Focus**: Applying knowledge and skills to drive change. Teaching as sustainability
- **Depth**: System thinking and leadership.
- **Goal**: Influence systems and communities while fostering preparedness for the changes in the industry and economy.
- **How**: Experiential learning, examples may include: Course aims, objectives, or learning outcomes, assessed coursework; Place-based learning; Challenge and problem-based learning; Case studies; Role-play and scenario-based learning; Fieldtrips; Hackathons; Multi-, inter-, cross-, or transdisciplinary projects; Project live briefs involving external community stakeholders; Storytelling.
- **ESD competencies**: Extensively developed.

The table below describes further each of the levels of maturity.

Tabel 8 – Institutional level of course SDG maturity

		23-24	24-25
Level of maturity		Total %	Total %
	SDGs are not addressed in the course	7.3	6.9
A Awareness	**Level 0 -** It is unclear how the information submitted relates to the SDGs or there was not enough information to make a judgment, or the course only addresses one SDG.	31.1	6.9
	Level 1 - SDGs are addressed superficially in learning and teaching and in a way that is very focused on the discipline.	3.4	16.0
B Beginners	**Level 2 -** SDGs are addressed in learning and teaching in connection to real-world situations, but not in assessment.	10.2	11.7
	Level 3 - SDGs are addressed holistically and in connection to real-world situations, in learning and teaching and in assessment.	19.8	20.7
C Change	**Level 4 -** SDG targets and indicators are fully embedded in learning and teaching, but no information if they are assessed. Its development is extensively fostered by at least four ESD competencies.	2.3	4.3
	Level 5 - SDG targets, indicators are fully embedded in learning, teaching, and assessment. Its development is extensively fostered by at least four ESD competencies.	26.0	33.5

The 2024–25 data on the institutional maturity of course engagement with the SDGs reveals encouraging progress in embedding sustainability across the curriculum. The proportion of courses at Level 5, where SDG targets and indicators are fully embedded in learning, teaching, and assessment, and supported by at least four ESD competencies, has increased from 26.0% to 33.5%. This reflects a growing commitment to holistic, transformative sustainability education, and preparing our students to the changes the job market is experiencing (greener economy and greener industry).

At the same time, Level 0 courses, those with unclear or insufficient engagement, dropped significantly from 31.1% to 6.9%, suggesting improved clarity in reporting and a stronger institutional understanding of SDG integration. Courses at Level 1, rose from 3.4% to 16.0%, indicating that more courses are beginning their sustainability journey, though further support is needed to deepen this engagement.

The data highlights the need for continued monitoring, support, and sharing of good practice to ensure full alignment with Kingston University's Sustainability Plan and its commitments under the UN SDG Accord and above all, to ensure that all students graduate with the competencies needed to contribute to a just and sustainable future.

Table 9- Level of course SDG maturity per faculty

Course UN SDGs level of maturity per faculty									
		FHSSCE		FBSS		FECE		KSA	
		n=64	N=55	n=35	n=43	n=25	n=43	n=53	n=47
	No SDGs	5	5	1	1	4	7	3	0
A Beginners	**Level 0**	24	6	8	5	6	1	17	1
	Level 1	2	5	1	14	0	8	3	3
B Awareness	**Level 2**	14	12	3	2	0	0	1	8
	Level 3	10	9	12	5	2	10	11	15
C Change	**Level 4**	1	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
	Level 5	8	15	10	14	12	16	16	18

KSA leads with the highest number of courses at **Level 5** (18), reflecting strong integration of SDG targets in teaching, learning, and assessment.
FECE follows closely with 16 courses at Level 5, but also has the highest number of courses not addressing SDGs, indicating a gap in consistency.
FBSS shows moderate progress, with 14 courses at Level 5 but many still at Level 1, suggesting superficial engagement.
FHSSCE presents a widespread, with 15 courses at Level 5 but a significant number at lower levels, pointing to uneven implementation.

Detailed information by faculty on Fairtrade

To support our Fairtrade University two-star Award and avoid questionnaire fatigue, we took this opportunity to ask if courses embed Fairtrade, just and ethical trade, in the curriculum.

FHSSCE

Fairtrade, just and ethical trade embedded in the curriculum?	**Frequency**
Yes	5
No	6
No information	44

FBSS

Fairtrade, just and ethical trade embedded in the curriculum?	**Frequency**
Yes	3

No	13
No information	27

FECE

Fairtrade, just and ethical trade embedded in the curriculum?	**Frequency**
Yes	1
No	10
	32

KSA

Fairtrade, just and ethical trade embedded in the curriculum?	Frequency
Yes	16
No	10
No information	21

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