

## **NUS Sustainability Skills Survey Report 2020/21**

### **Introduction**

Each year the National Union of Students (NUS) consults students nationally about their attitudes towards learning for sustainable development through the NUS Sustainability Skills Survey.

The NUS has conducted this longitudinal research for 10 years in a row now, and since 2010, around 80 per cent of students have stated that they want their institutions to be doing more on sustainability, and around 60 per cent want to learn more about it. These results have remained constant; despite changes such as the rise in fees, and the crash of the jobs market, the demand for action by institutions and students' desire to learn about sustainability has remained constant.

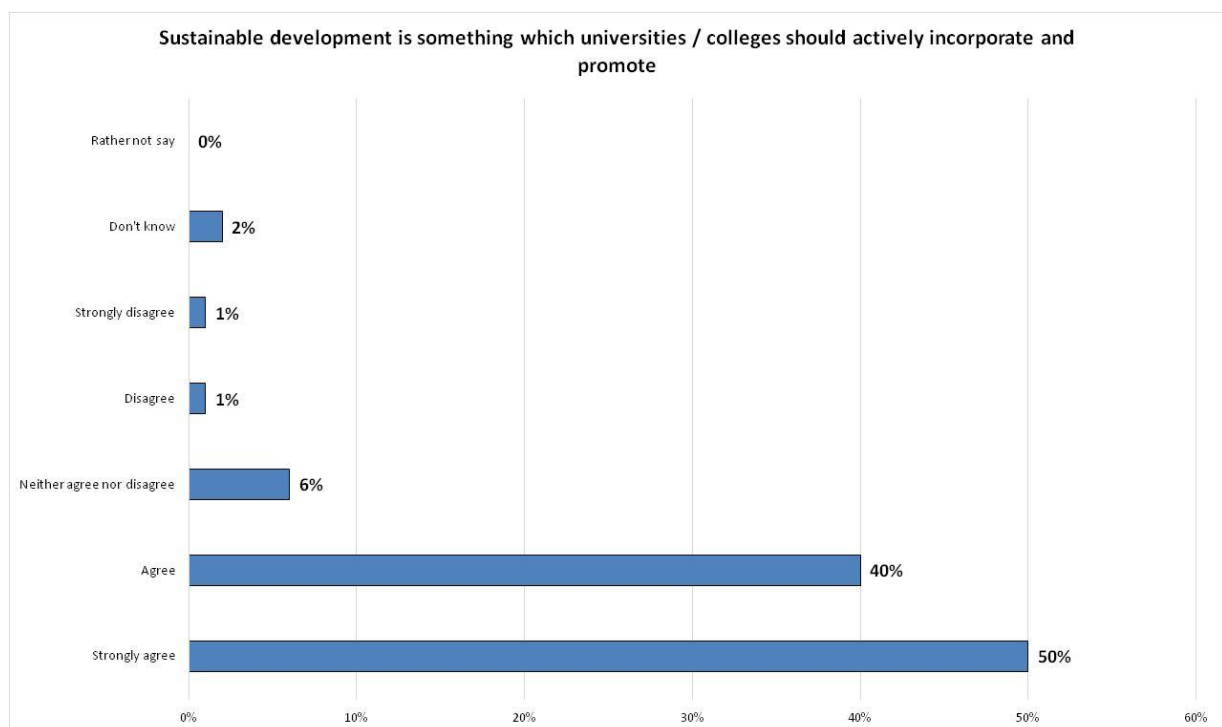
### **Background**

Over the last five years DMU has participated in the NUS Sustainability Skills Survey as a way of assessing our student's attitudes to sustainable development and expectations of the university. This report will highlight the results from DMU's 5<sup>th</sup> year of participation and provides a comparison with results from the four previous years' worth of data.

The survey is promoted as a lifestyle survey to the students to avoid any participation bias. The survey has been promoted through social media channels and through student societies. The questions within the survey ask about students' time at university, the skills that they have learnt and the skills that they feel will be important to their future prospective employer. The survey also defines sustainable development and then asks a series of questions around the student's attitudes to learning for sustainable development and what expectations they have for their university on these issues. This year's survey ran on the dates between 26<sup>th</sup> October – 15<sup>th</sup> November 2020, and we received the raw data from the NUS in December 2021.

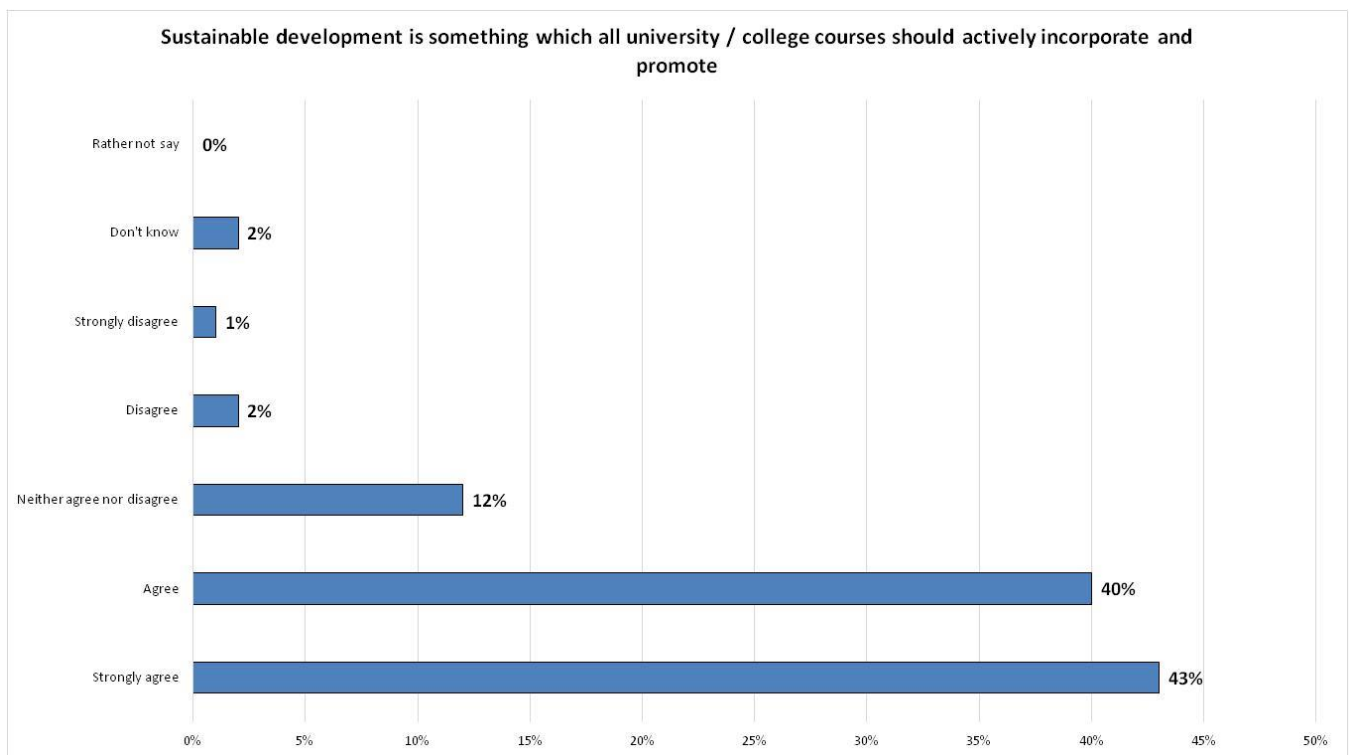
Universities had to achieve a minimum of 100 of their own student responses for the NUS to collate the survey answers and to give the raw data back to the university. This year there were 316 responses to the survey which whilst not statistically representative does provide a snapshot of student attitudes to sustainability and the results for 2020 are consistent with the previous four years.

### **Key Findings:**



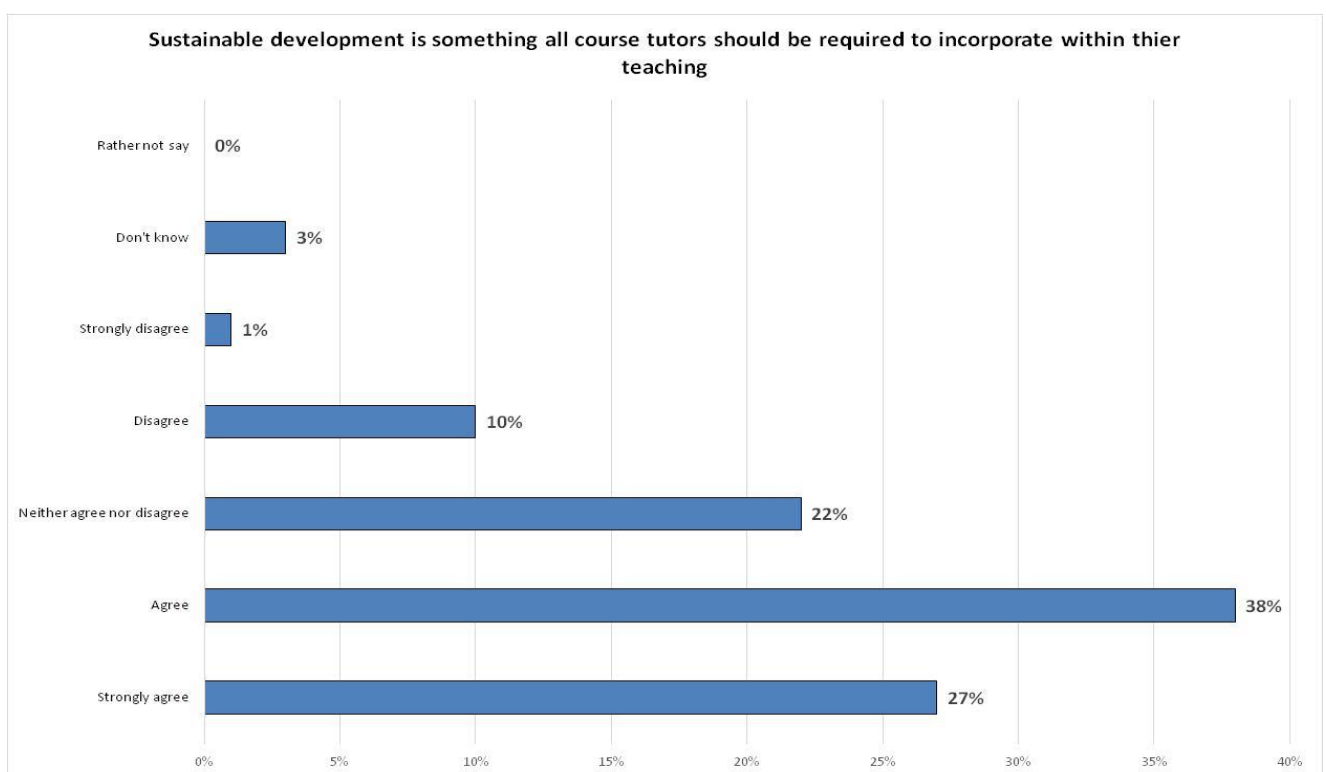
*(figure.1 – student expectations)*

From the data presented in (figure.1) we can see 90% of participants agree or strongly with the statement that sustainable development is something which universities / colleges should actively incorporate and promote.



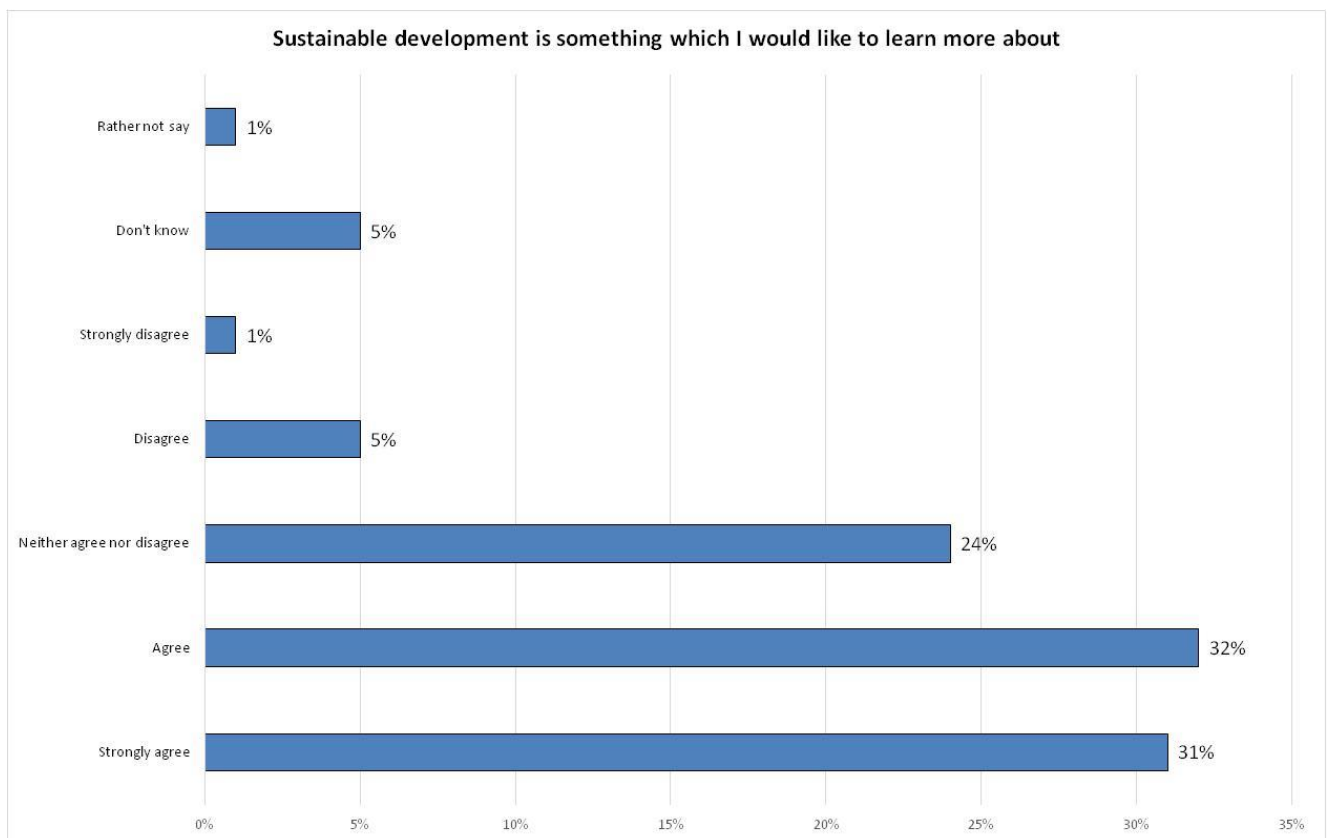
*(figure.2 – student expectations)*

Similarly, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that sustainable development is something which all university / college courses should actively incorporate and promote.



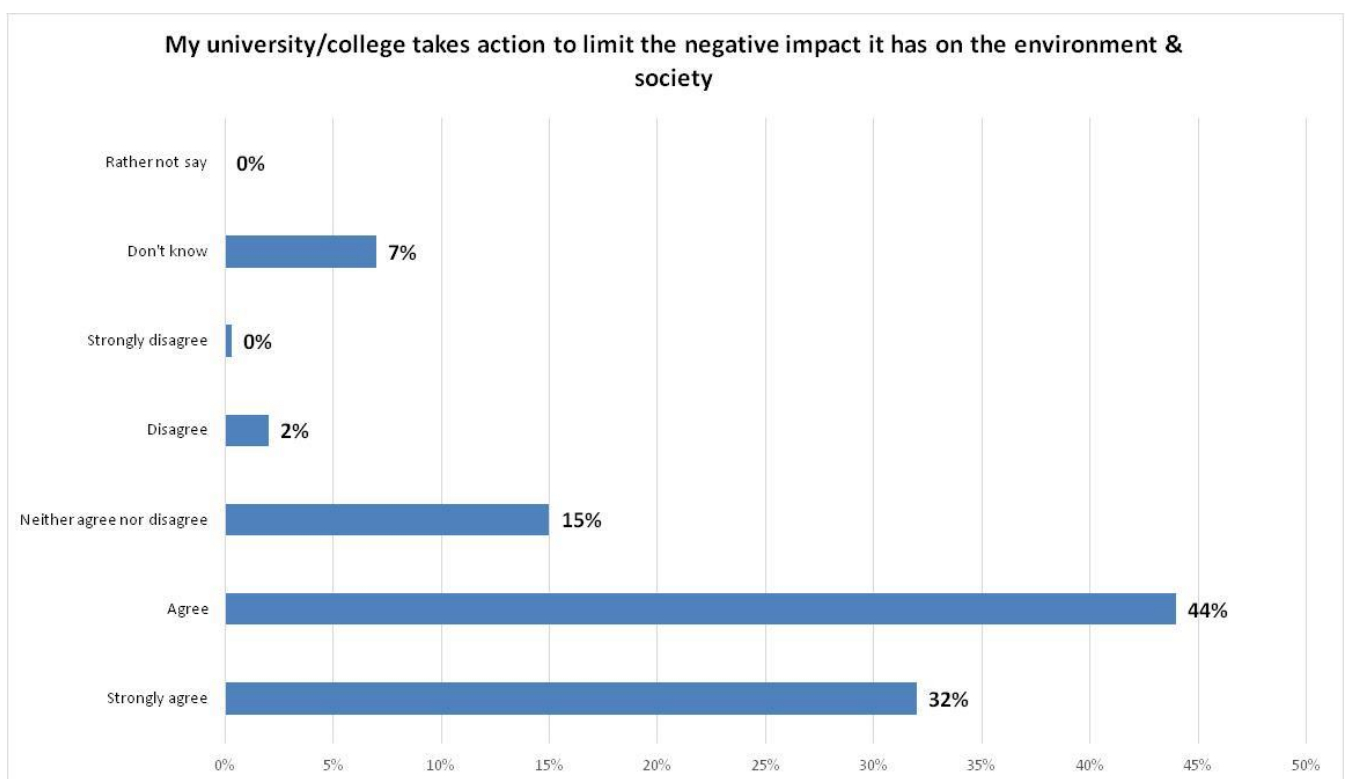
*(figure.3 – student expectations)*

Through the survey 65% of participants agreed or strongly that sustainable development is something all course tutors should be required to incorporate within their teaching.



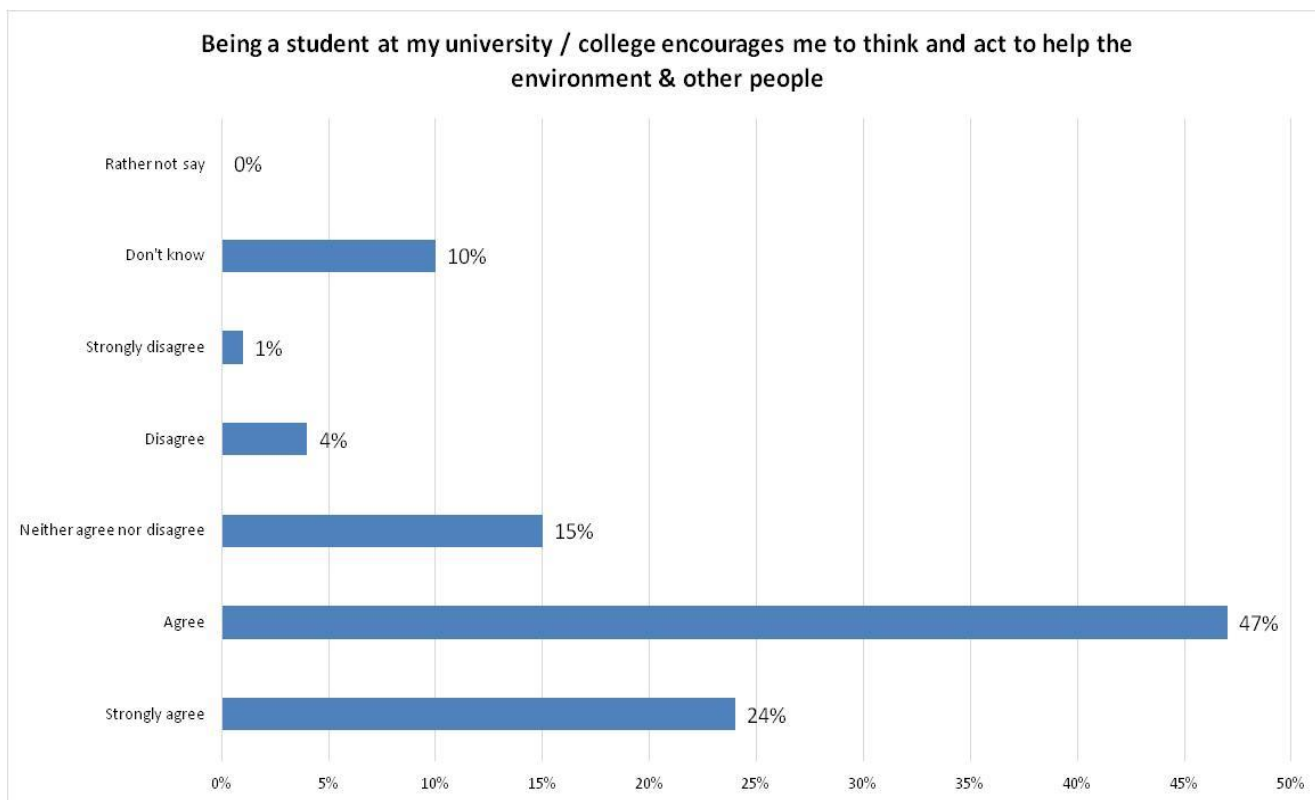
(figure.4 – student expectations)

The data in (figure.4) shows that 63% of all participants agree that sustainable development is something which they would like to learn more about.



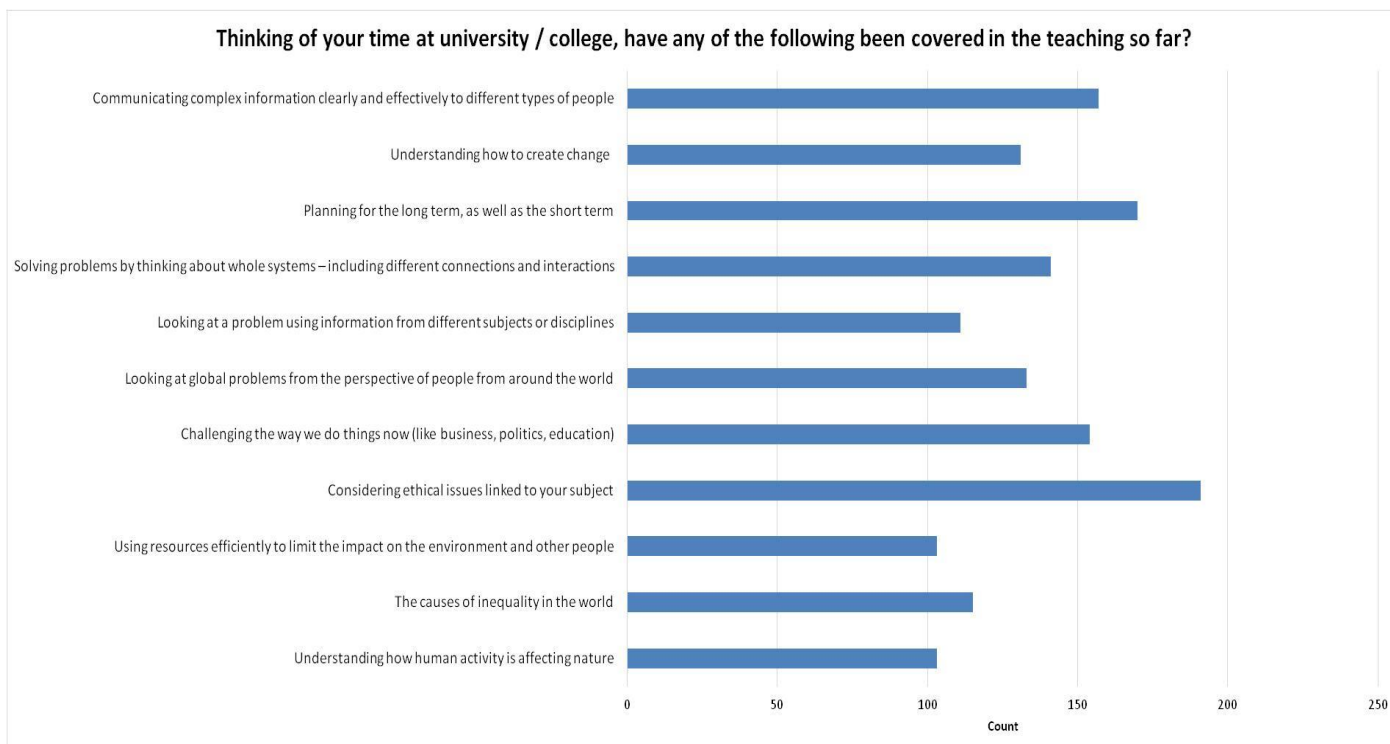
(figure.5 – student expectations)

The results from this data is a very encouraging as 76% stated that they agree that DMU takes action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society. Which goes to show that there is awareness that DMU is actively embedding sustainability in the DMU community and culture.



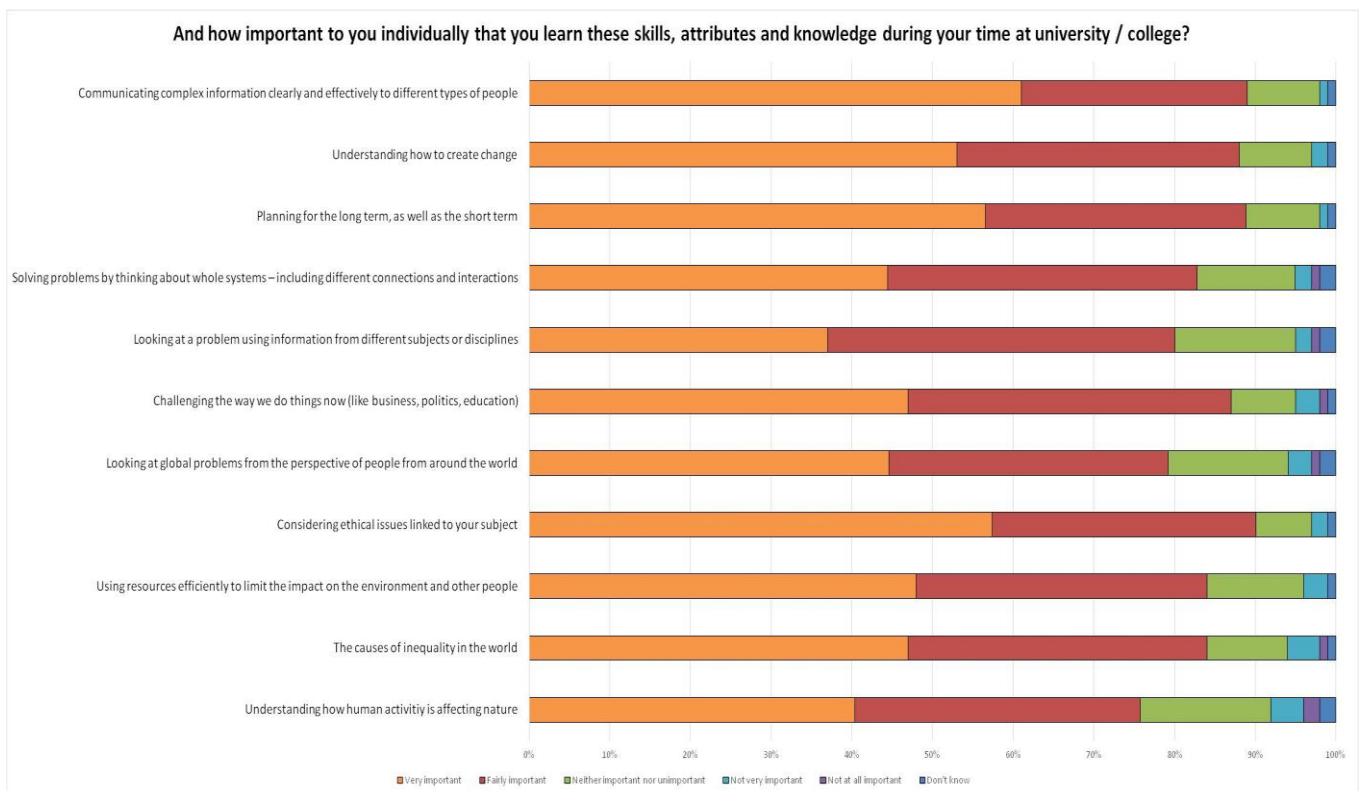
*(figure.6 – student expectations)*

(figure.6) shows 71% of participants in this survey agree that being a student at my university / college encourages me to think and act to help the environment and other people.



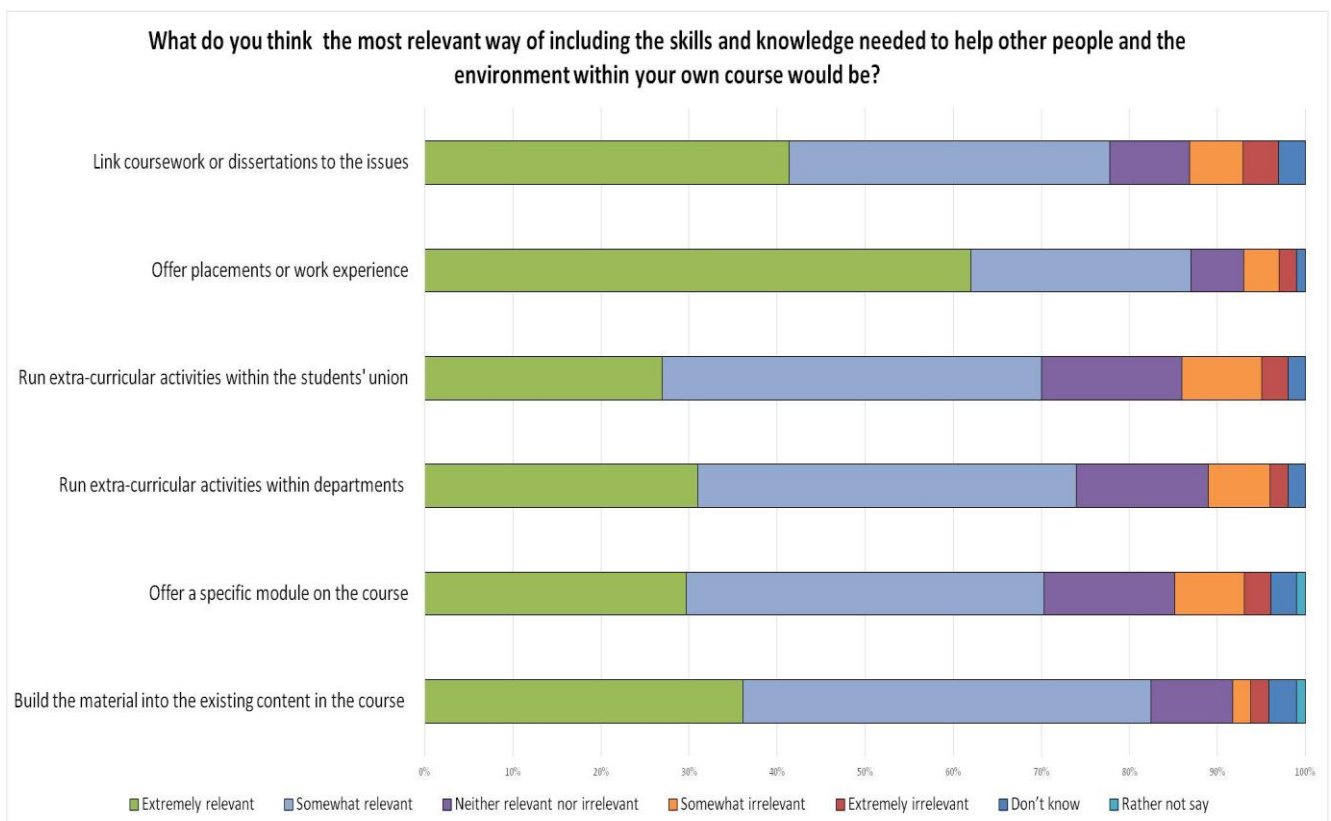
*(figure. 7 – skills already learnt at university)*

Figure 7 shows the skills that students have already learnt about at their time at university. Ethical issues had the highest response followed by planning for the long term as well as the short term and communicated complex information clearly and effectively to different types of people.



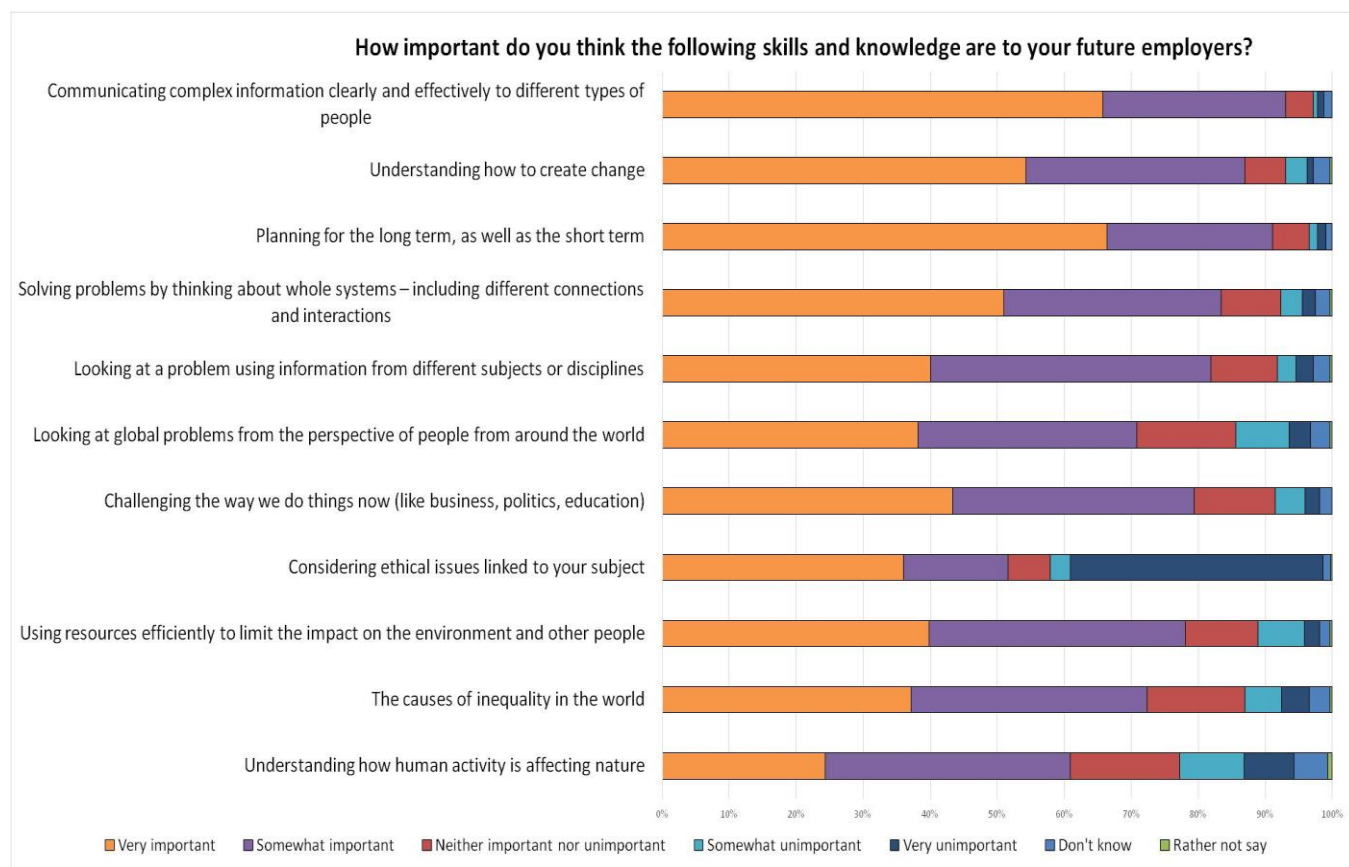
(Figure 8 how important is it that you learn these skills...)

Figure 8 shows that students ranked the skills on a fairly even basis with ethical issues being identified as the most important followed by communicating complex issues and planning for the long term.



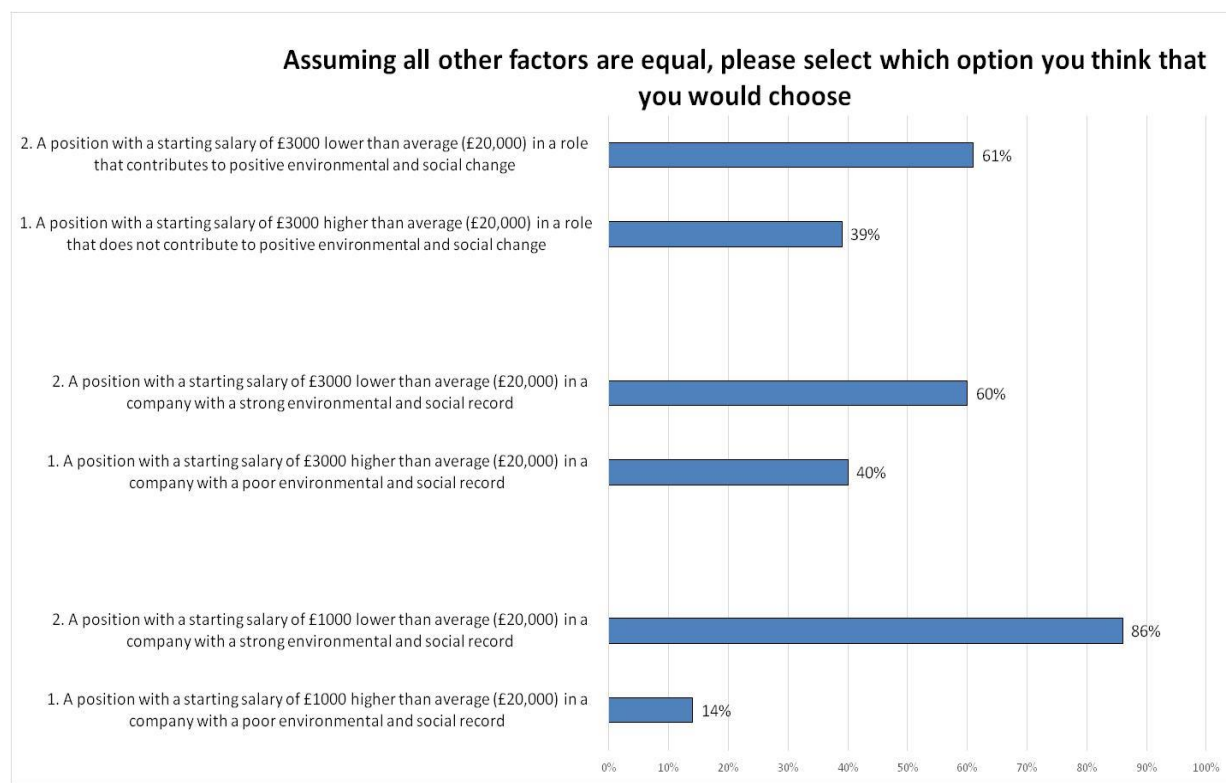
(figure.9 – most relevant ways to incorporate sustainability in taught courses)

The responses shown in figure 9 show that students think that the best way of including these skills in their learning is to offer placements and work experience followed by building the material into the existing content in the course.



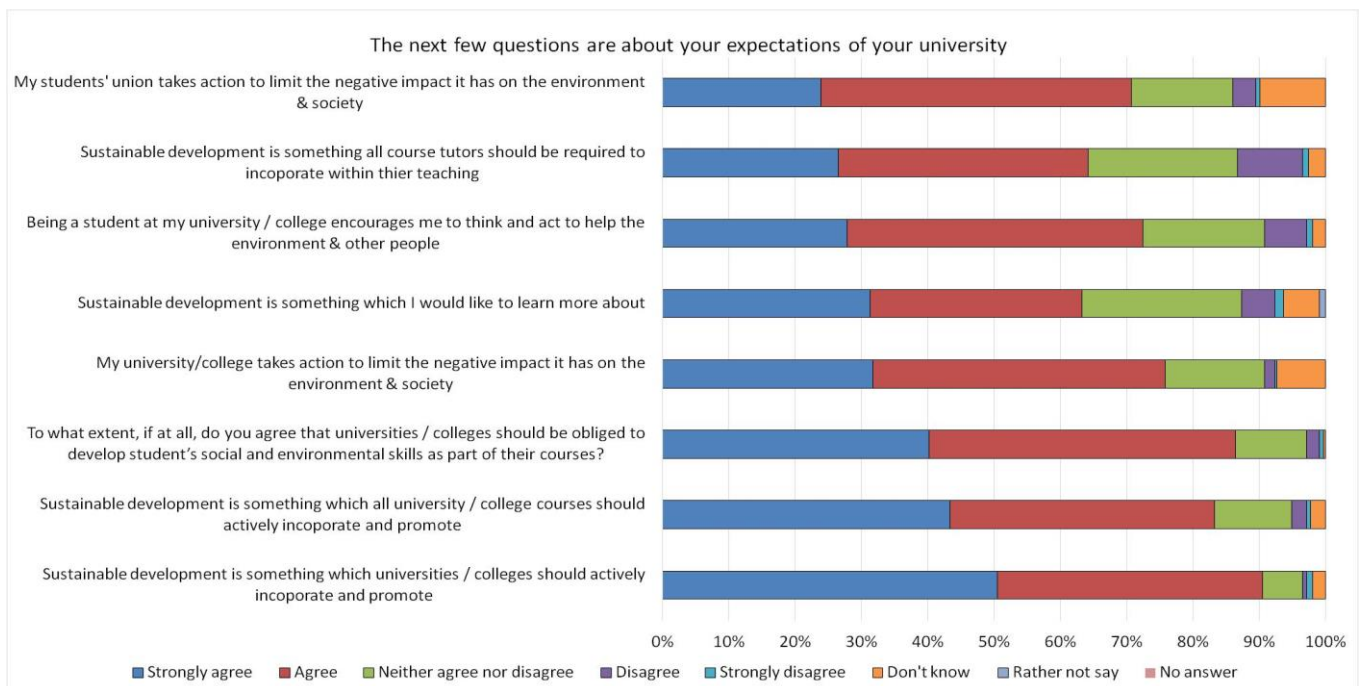
(figure.10 – importance of skills and knowledge to future employers)

The data represented in (figure.10) shows that students believe that sustainability skills will be important to future employers. Of particular importance are skills relating to communicating complex issues and planning for the long term as well as the short term. Perhaps surprisingly is the low response to the skills around considering ethical issues linked to the subject.

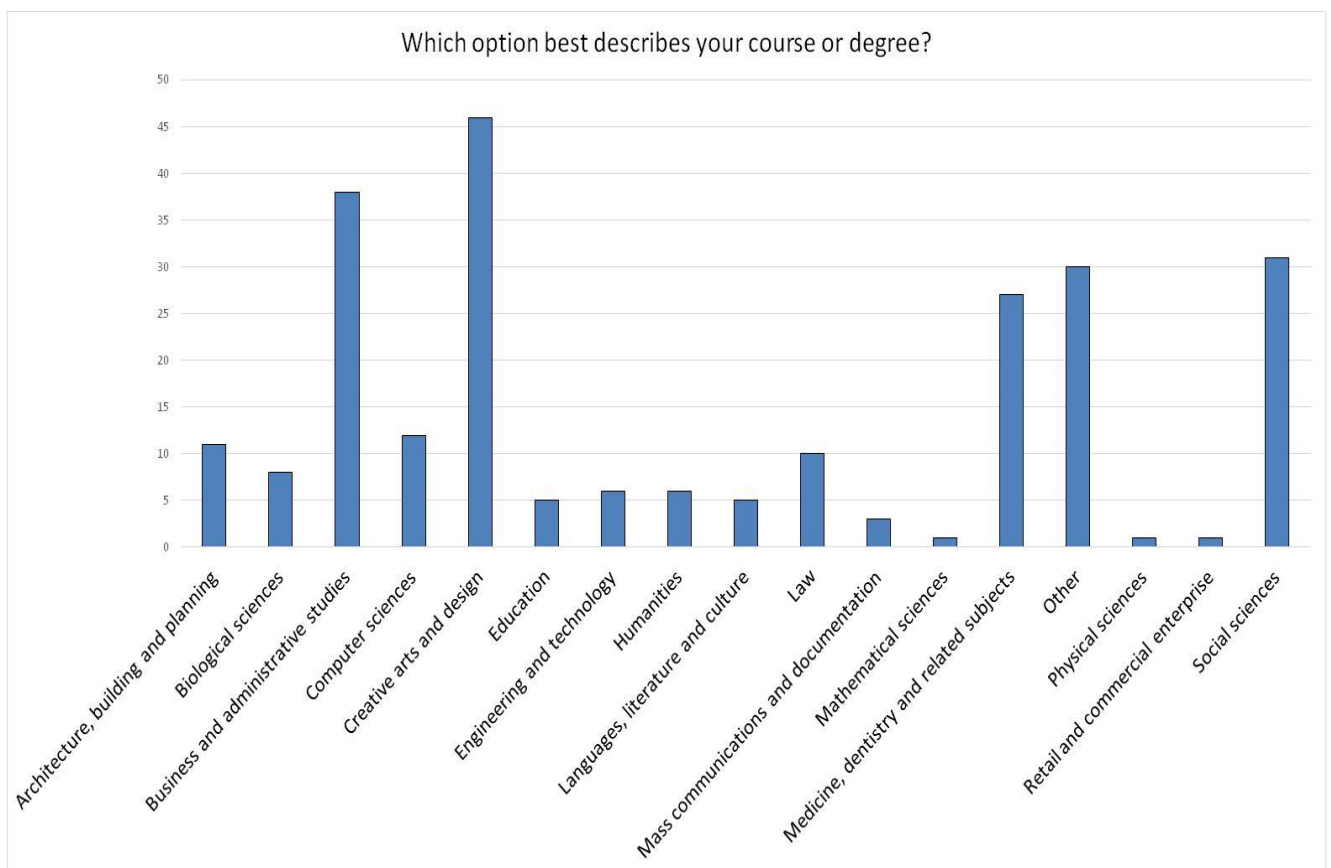


(Figure.11 – salary in accordance to company ethos)

Data in (figure.11) demonstrates the importance of corporate social responsibility, organisation operations and business ethos to students when selecting a company to be a part of. Over 86% of students said they would rather work for a company with a strong environment and social record and earn £1000 less, than to work for a company with poor environmental and social record earning £1000 more. The same trend is apparent with 60% of students answering the same with a £3000 salary sacrifice. Similarly, 61% of students would rather a £3000 lower salary if the job role contributes to positive environmental and social change.



(Figure.12 – student's expectations form their university)

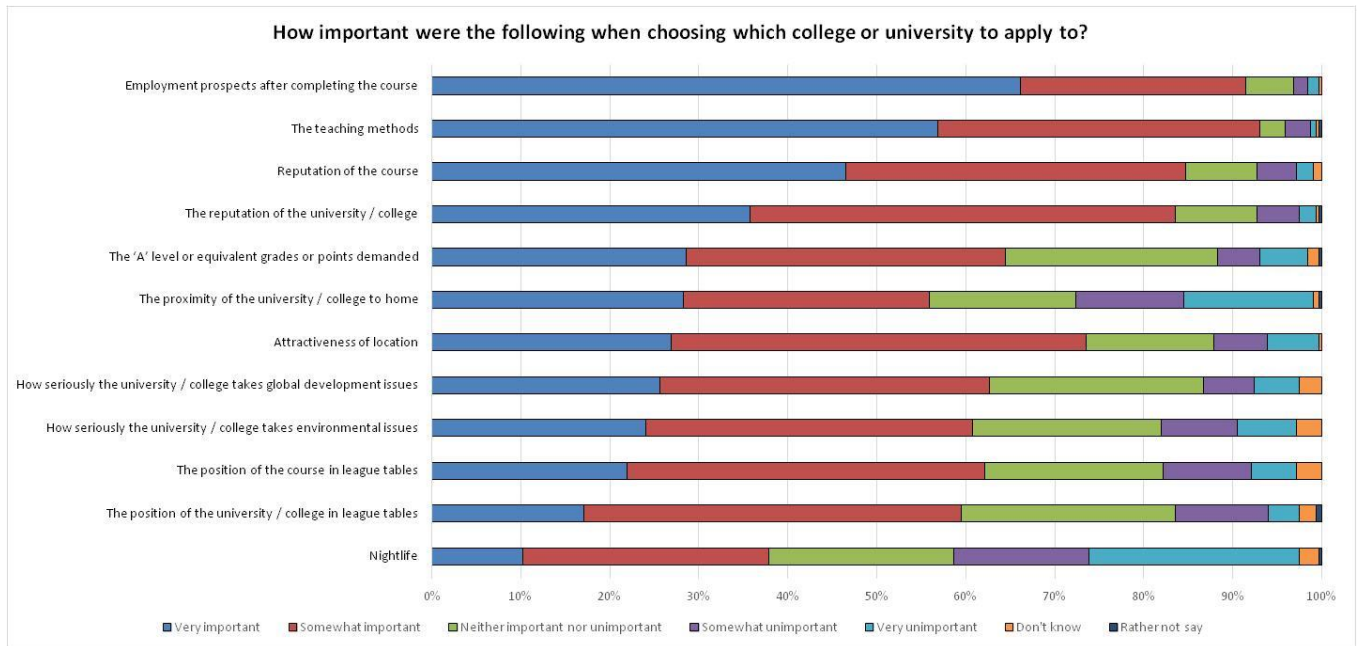


(Figure.13 – what option best describes your course?)

Around 25% of students didn't answer this question shown in (figure.13). Nevertheless the data shows most of the respondents come from creative and design courses followed by business courses and



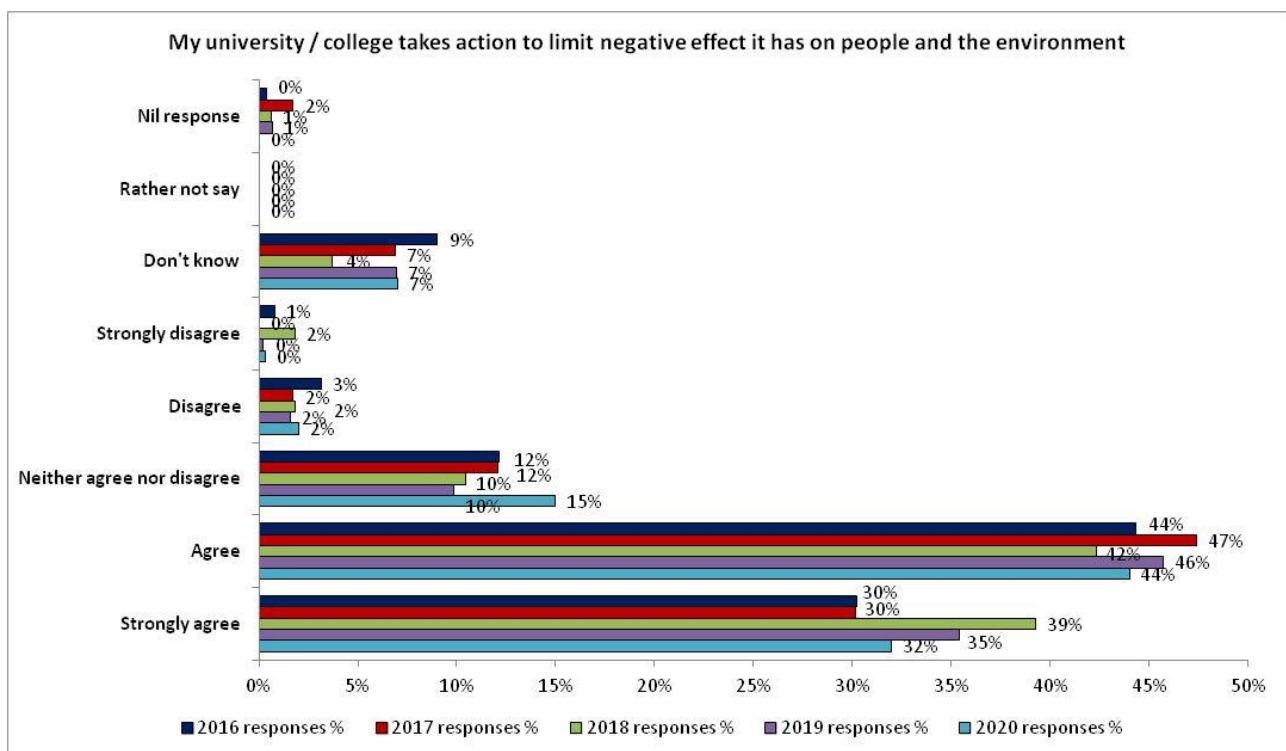
medicine related studies. From this we cannot conclusively say that there is a reason for this and because the survey was advertised as a lifestyle survey there was no participant bias.



(Figure 14 how important are these factors in choosing which college or university to apply for)

Environmental and global development issues were identified as factors when choosing a college of university. These factors were highlighted as being more important than the position of the university in league tables, its nightlife, and the proximity to home.

### Yearly Comparisons

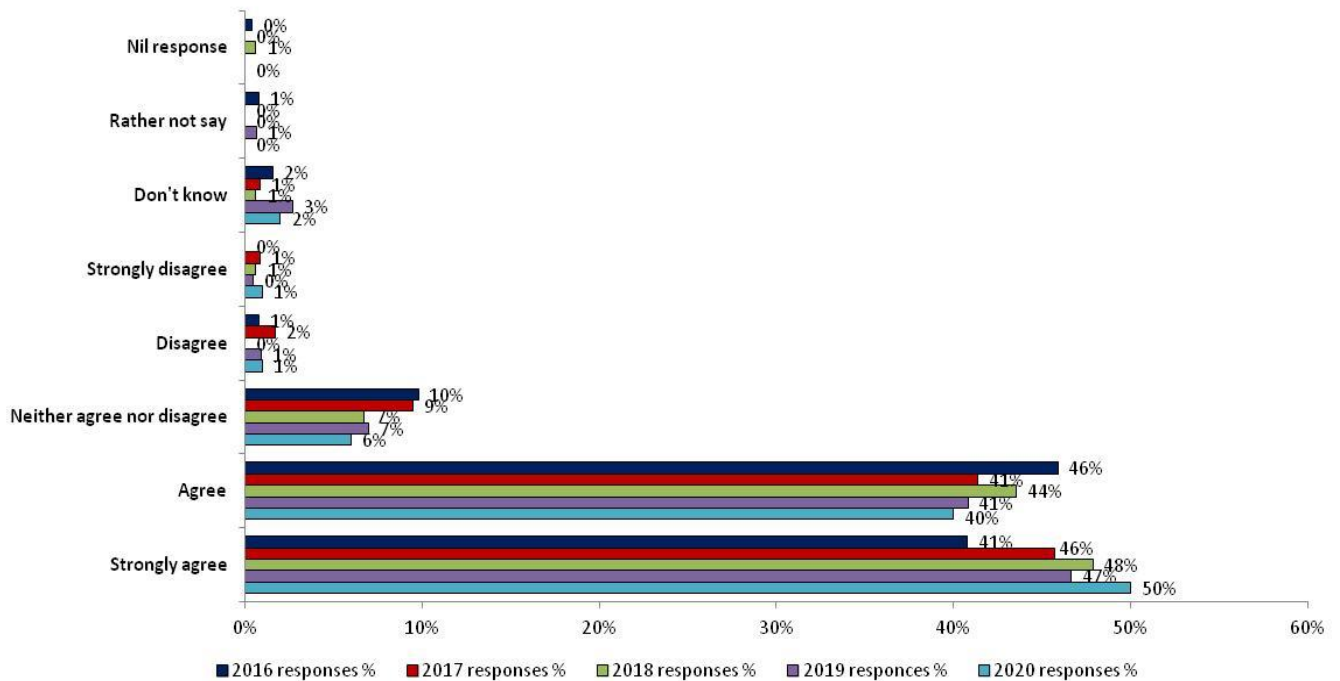


(Figure.15– My university takes action to limit the effect it has on people and the environment)

The data in (figure.15) is very encouraging because 76% of student agree that DMU is taking action to limit its effect on people and the environment but 9% of students are not recognising what we are doing or disagree with the statement or didn't know. Over the five years of data this has been a consistent response.



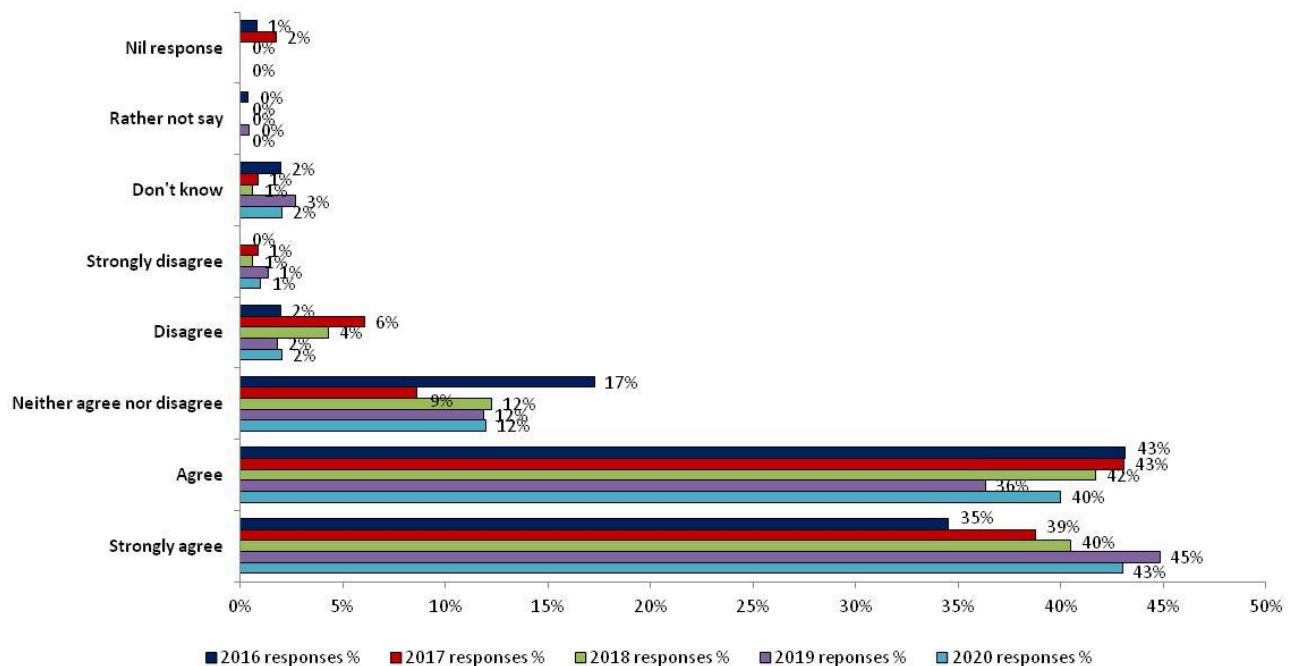
### Sustainable development is something which universities / college should actively incorporate and promote



(figure.16 – sustainable development is something DMU should actively incorporate and promote)

The yearly comparison depicts the consistency of the student views in regards of the statement in (figure.16). There has been a slight shift in responses from agree to strongly agree and this again is a clear trend over the five years worth of data for this question.

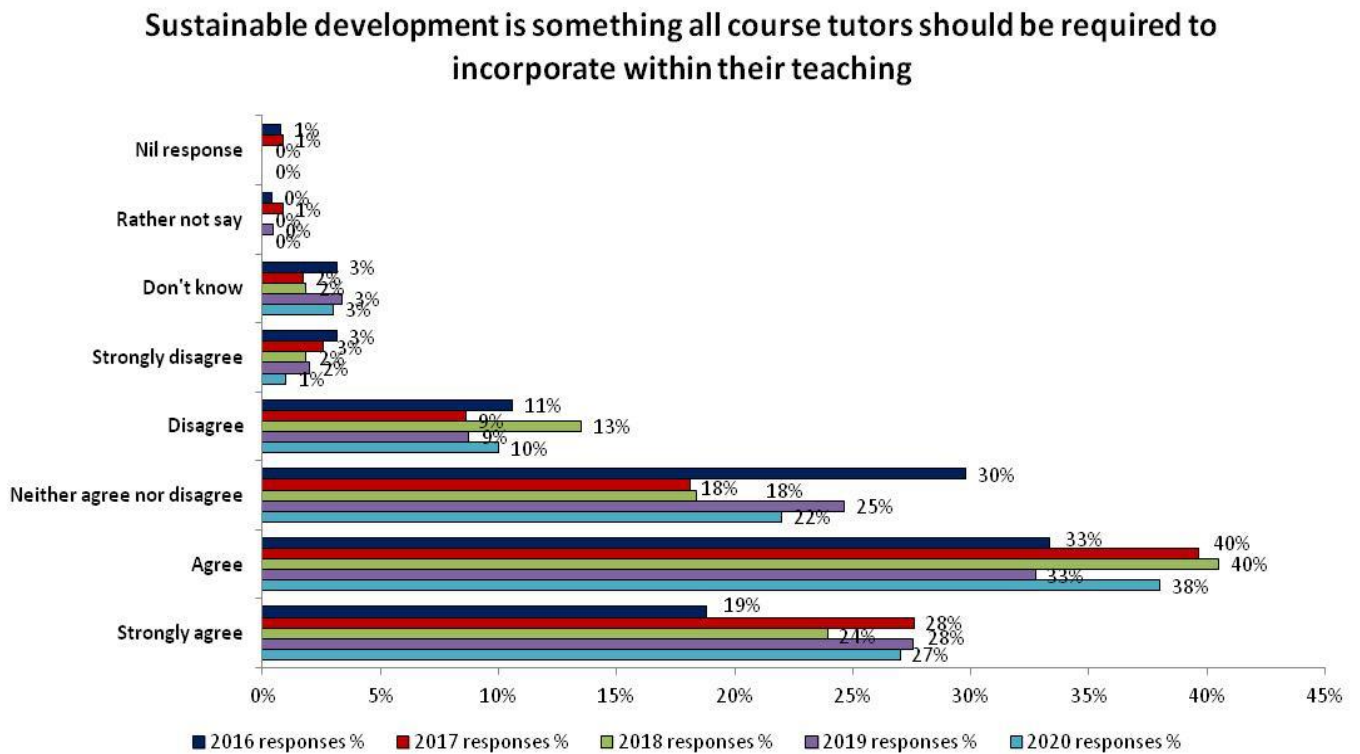
### Sustainable development is something which all university / college courses should actively incorporate and promote



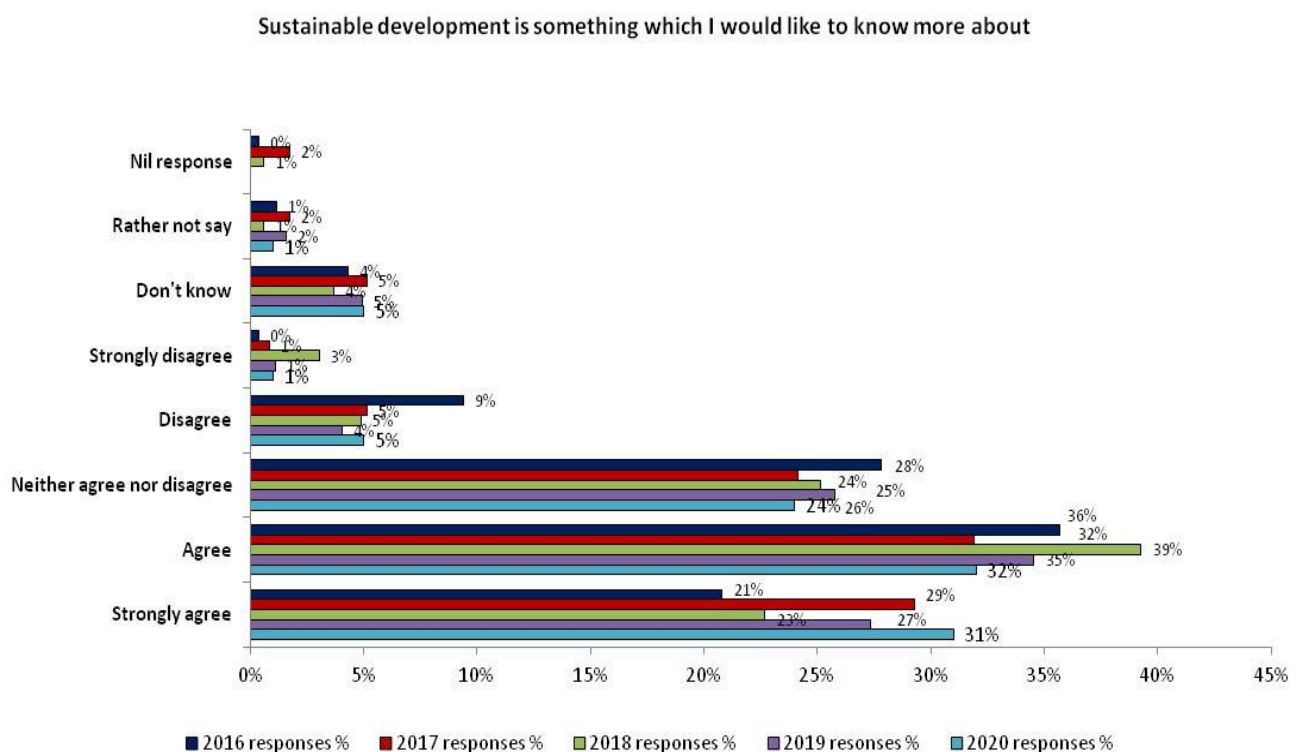
(Fig.17 - sustainable development is something all universities/ colleges should actively incorporate and promote)

As with all the yearly comparative data there is a clear theme / trend in the data results where the majority (upwards of 80%) agreed to the statement. This year has shown an increase in participants strongly

agreeing or agreeing with the statement that all universities/ college courses should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development.

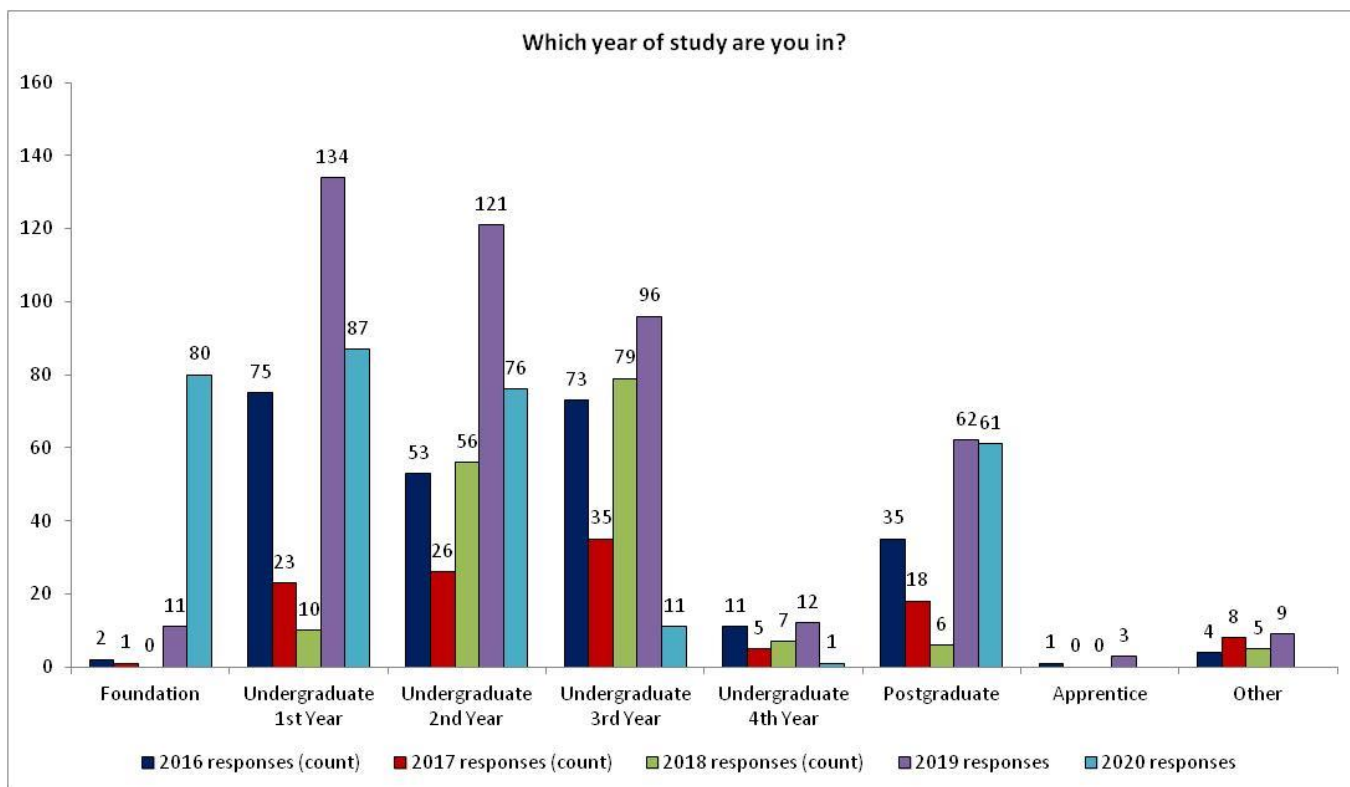


(Fig.18 - sustainable development is something all course tutors should actively incorporate and promote)



(Figure.19 - sustainable development something I would like to know more about)

Year on year we see consistency in the responses to these statements, represented by the coloured bars in (figures. 16-19) showing the constant pressure and desire for students to learn more about sustainable development and issues.



(figure.20 – which year of study are you in?)

(figure.20) represents what year the participants are in. The 2020 data shows we have had responses from across the different year groups of students and postgraduates as well. This is advantageous for the validity of the survey, because we can see the whole spectrum of student attitudes within the student community at DMU. Making it easier for us to get the holistic picture of student attitudes towards sustainability, adding credibility to the data.

### **Summary:**

This year there were 316 responses to the survey which is reduction on the previous year's response rate. Whilst the lower response rate is not statistically representative of the student population at DMU the results do provide a snapshot of student attitudes to sustainability and the results for 2020 are consistent with the previous four years.

The results of the survey this year continue to show strong support for the active promotion and incorporation of sustainable development within DMU. The response to this question has registered the second highest positive response with 90% of respondents agreeing to statement that sustainable development is something that universities / colleges should actively incorporate and promote and 50% strongly agreeing. This is the highest response in the strongly agree category since the survey was collected.

It is conclusive that most students feel passionate and strongly that institutions and DMU should be actively incorporating and promoting sustainability in the university and taught courses. This is clearly evident from (figures.1-6) A range of sustainability skills continue to be important to students when asked what they think personally are important skills to learn and also what future employers are looking for when entering employment. For example, ethical issues, equality, how to create change, global issues and understanding how human activity is affecting nature.

Furthermore, the data shows that 60% of students want to learn more about sustainable development, which reinforces the 90% saying they agree that sustainable development is something that universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote. Likewise, 83% of respondents agree that sustainability is something all courses should actively incorporate and promote. Data from the survey also suggests how students would like to learn about sustainable development skills and competencies. The data suggests that students would like to learn about sustainability by providing relevant placements and work experiences and by having it embedded into the taught course, instead of isolating sustainability as a module.

This year, respondents remain more likely to say they would accept a salary sacrifice of £1000 - £3000 to work for a company with a strong environmental and social record.

As with the previous 4 years of research completed by HE students, there is overwhelming agreement amongst 2020 respondents in HE that sustainable development is something that universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote. They are also in agreement that sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about. This broadly matches the historic data gathered by the NUS throughout the 9 years of running this survey. Giving concrete evidence this is not just an anomaly or phase.

It is important to note the significance of this annual sustainability data and the continuous annual promotion of the survey. The data enables DMU to recognise the progress we are making to meet our targets and goals set out in the strategic plan in relation to sustainable development and the SDGs, in addition to giving us an invaluable insight on the expectations and opinions of our key stakeholders.

With the current focus in sustainability at DMU through the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Project and the emerging sustainableDMU Project, there is a need to ensure that the survey is promoted through the university's communications and marketing channels and that the survey is added to the list of surveys which will be supported and promoted by the university. The goal for this year's survey is to get as many faculties and directorates on board to further promote this survey and have a wider student participation.

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