

Demystifying sustainability assessment and reporting frameworks

An analysis of six of the most popular frameworks used by higher education institutions (HEIs) and a step-by-step guide to help HEIs get started.

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1) Karatzoglou, B. (2013). An in-depth literature review of the evolving roles and contributions of universities to Education for Sustainable Development. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 49, 44–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2012.07.043>

2) United Nations. (27 September 2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved 11 February 2023 from <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030percent20Agendapercent20forpercent20Sustainablepercent20Developmentpercent20web.pdf>

3) World Commission on Environment and Development. (20 March 1987). Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Retrieved 11 February 2023 from <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have been at the forefront of sustainability research for many decades now.¹ But increasingly they are applying that same academic rigor and focus to understanding the environmental and social impact of their operations and outputs. One factor driving this change is the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and their 169 targets. Adopted by the UN in 2015, the goals aim to address the principal challenges we face today by stimulating global and collaborative action in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet, such as climate change.²

The term 'sustainability', both in terms of the SDGs and its use throughout this guide, refers to the ability to meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."³ It means using resources in ways that protect the long-term value of the natural environment and mitigate the hazardous effects of human activities, while improving the lives of populations globally, especially those in developing countries.

HEIs have a key role to play in delivering this sustainable future. And to measure and report on their activities in this area, many have turned to one of the sustainability frameworks for HEIs launched in recent years. These frameworks provide institutions with a methodology and set of indicators for assessment purposes. While primarily functioning as reporting and benchmarking tools, the frameworks also provide support for institutions embarking on their sustainability journey, and those seeking to improve on past performance.

At a high level, the frameworks have much in common. They assess the operational impact of an institution's physical infrastructure in relation to emissions, energy, water and wastage. They also look at its governance, partnerships, curricula, research, and engagement with faculty and students. However, the approach they take varies widely. For example, the performance assessment methods differ, as do the data types collected and the submission requirements. In addition, the weighting and scoring methodologies vary.

For institutions, participation in a framework requires significant time and resource investment, accompanied by the knowledge that failing to choose the right one could hinder their strategic mission, or even risk their reputation.

So, with so much at stake, how do institutions ensure they select the right sustainability framework for them?



I. The purpose of this guide

At Elsevier, we partner with research and higher education organizations around the globe to support them in delivering on their missions and goals. A key strand of that support involves providing them with knowledge and insights they can leverage in their work and decision making. For example, Scopus data is used in evaluations, rankings, reporting, landscape analyses and other strategic efforts worldwide. This includes the world university rankings published by Times Higher Education (THE) and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), as well as their sustainability rankings.

With this guide, we aim to provide a comprehensive and objective analysis of six of the most popular sustainability frameworks used by HEIs. Our hope is that this document will demystify those frameworks and help institutional leaders identify which of them is best placed to help their organizations drive action and achieve sustainable outcomes. We also hope the guide will prove a valuable resource for sustainability practitioners and students with an interest in this topic.

In the chapters that follow, we:

- Explore the importance of sustainability frameworks, including their benefits and drawbacks.
- Compare and evaluate the six most popular sustainability frameworks used by HEIs
 - People & Planet University League (UK only)
 - Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (hereafter referred to as STARS)
 - Sustainability Leadership Scorecard
 - Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings (hereafter referred to as THE Impact Rankings)
 - UI GreenMetric
 - Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Sustainability Rankings (hereafter referred to as QS Sustainability Rankings)
- Examine how each of these frameworks relates to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).
- Do a deep dive into the steps that led to University of Tasmania in Australia achieving a Gold STARS rating in 2022.
- Provide a quick start guide to help HEIs select a framework.

Insights around the SDGs and the GRI have been drawn from our matrix analysis of the frameworks' indicators, which is [publicly available here](#).

Key findings

1. **To accurately map the sustainability of the higher education sector, it is crucial for all HEIs to participate in reporting.** This report will support individual organizations seeking to benchmark themselves against industry standards, best practice and aggregated data. It will improve institutions' understanding of their impact on the environment and society, guiding them towards areas where they can improve their sustainability efforts. Importantly, it will contribute to a global collective knowledge of sustainable practices in higher education that will benefit all institutions.

2. **However, participation in some regions/countries may currently be hindered by a lack of resources.** Although most frameworks don't charge a participation fee, data collection and implementation of sustainability measures take significant time and resources, which are more readily available in high-income countries. There is potential for institutions in higher-income countries to support those in developing countries. This, in turn, would help to increase the supporting institutions' alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

3. All the frameworks we examined for this guide follow the principles of sustainable development and therefore align with the UN SDGs in some way. However, the depth and emphasis of that alignment varies. **STARS, Sustainability Leadership Scorecard and the THE Impact Rankings are the most closely aligned to the SDGs and their related indicators**, which makes them the easiest to use for assessing an institution's alignment with the SDGs.

4. **There are challenges to participating in sustainability frameworks.** These include:

- The complexity of participation and data gathering
- The time, financial and resource commitment required
- Ability to align to the SDGs
- Overall applicability

Institutions should consider these carefully before choosing to participate.

5. **Challenges of participation in a sustainability framework are likely to be outweighed by the advantages.** For example, adopting a framework shows a commitment to transparency and accountability, leading to greater trust from students, staff and the broader community; all while helping institutions attract funding and recognition for their sustainability efforts. Participation also helps to mitigate risk, advance reputation, improve efficiency gains, generate opportunities for partnerships and influence, and, importantly, it contributes to the creation of a more sustainable future for all.

6. The self assessment and data collection processes linked to these frameworks bring many benefits for organizations. Access to accurate and up-to-date data on their sustainability performance enables institutions to:

- Make informed decisions about how they can minimize their negative impact, amplify their positive impact and improve their overall performance.
- Uncover inefficiencies and discover where sustainable practices could help them reduce costs associated with waste, energy and water consumption.
- Get one step ahead of new legislation - self-assessment and disclosure of sustainability data is key to meeting regulation and industry standards, and it is likely that these will become more robust as governments start to strengthen and implement their own sustainability goals.

7. The number of higher education institutions participating in sustainability framework assessment has consistently increased since 2019 (see Figure 1). In addition, some universities are choosing to participate in more than one framework. Further research is needed to understand the extent to which this last point occurs, but a quick analysis shows that only two universities (Arizona State University Tempe and University of Connecticut) appear more than once in the top 10 rankings of five of the frameworks.

The number of higher education institutions participating in sustainability framework assessment has consistently increased since 2019.

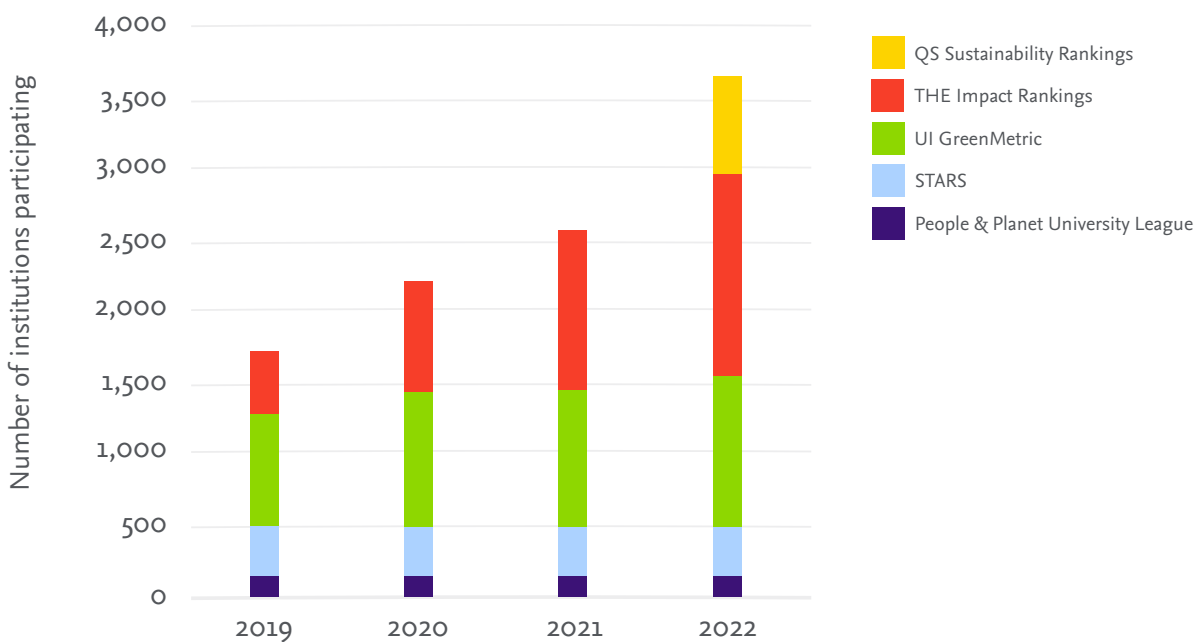


Figure 1: Participation in the majority of the frameworks we explore in this guide has increased year on year. NOTE: Participation data for the Sustainability Leadership Scorecard for 2021 and 2022 was not available at the time of analysis. Only frameworks that published rankings or ratings in 2019-22 are included in the graph.

Chapter 1: A comparison of the six sustainability frameworks

In this chapter, we compare and evaluate the key characteristics of each framework. A deeper dive into the indicators through the lenses of the GRI and SDGs takes place in [Chapter 2: Mapping the frameworks to the GRI and SDGs](#).

I. A brief overview of the frameworks



Established in 2007 by People & Planet, a UK-based student campaign group that has been around since 1969, the [People & Planet University League](#) (also referred to in this guide as **People & Planet**) is an independent annual ranking of UK universities based on their environmental and ethical performance. It draws on data from publicly available information on the institutions' own websites, as well as from the Higher Education Statistics Agency Estates Management Record. All 153 UK universities that have approved fee cap status and degree-awarding powers are included in the ranking and universities cannot choose to opt in or opt out.



Established in 2022 by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a global higher education research company, the [QS Sustainability Rankings](#) is a global ranking of universities based on their environmental, social and governance performance. Participation is voluntary and open to all universities worldwide. The ranking is based on data collected from public sources, such as websites and reports, and third party data sources including Scopus (Elsevier's research abstract and citation database). Universities also have the option to provide data in some areas. Seven hundred universities participated in the 2023 rankings.



Established in 2010 by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), the [Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System](#) (referred to in this guide as STARS) is a voluntary self-reporting framework open to all HEIs. The data is collected through an online reporting tool. Institutions are given a score and are recognized with a rating ranging from bronze to platinum, with both the ratings and reports published online. While STARS' focus is on the ratings, these can be sorted to reveal an institution's STARS ranking. Nearly 1,150 institutions have registered to use the STARS Reporting Tool, of which 591 have earned a STARS rating and 316 have an active rating¹.



Established in 2018 by a partnership between the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) and the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE), the [Sustainability Leadership Scorecard](#) (also referred to in this guide as SLS) is a UK-based initiative that incorporates Ireland. Unlike the other frameworks, the SLS does not produce a public ranking or score. Instead, participants can benchmark their results against aggregates and institutions decide if they want to make the results public. An annual report on the sector is produced each year. The methodology and benchmarking data are paywalled, although members of the EAUC and AUDE can access it for free. 172 institutions used the framework in 2023.

1) Figures for STARS are current as of 13 April 2023



Established by Times Higher Education, a provider of data, insights and expertise on higher education worldwide, the [Times Higher Education Impact Rankings](#) (also referred to in this guide as the **THE Impact Rankings**) is a global ranking of universities based on data drawn from public sources and third party data sources including Scopus (Elsevier's research abstract and citation database). Participation is voluntary and the results are freely available to the public. This framework has the highest alignment with the UN SDGs as its methodology is explicitly structured for SDG reporting. The 2023 Impact Ranking was the fifth edition and included 1,591 universities. THE provides an overall impact ranking, in addition to a ranking per SDG.



Established in 2010 by the University of Indonesia (Universitas Indonesia), UI [GreenMetric](#) is a global ranking of universities. Participation is voluntary and open to all universities worldwide. The ranking is based on responses to an online questionnaire. The results are scored according to a weighted analysis and the institutions are ranked accordingly. There are 1,050 institutions listed in the 2022 ranking.

A more detailed breakdown of the six frameworks can be found in Appendix C.



II. Purpose of the frameworks

As noted in the Introduction, although the frameworks have their differences, they all share the same purpose to empower and motivate HEIs to improve their social and environmental performance through insight and accountability. Each framework aims to help institutions identify areas for improvement and set achievable targets and action plans. But there are slight variations in how they achieve those goals, as we explore in this chapter.

III. Methodologies and scoring⁴⁻⁹

Each framework has its own methodology for measuring and assessing sustainability performance, and institutions are encouraged to review and update their performance in line with that framework's cycle. Most of the frameworks (with the exception of People & Planet University League) are based on a self-assessment process, which requires institutions to gather and report data on their performance using a set of predefined indicators or criteria. The methodologies for five of the frameworks are publicly available (see Appendix C for links). The exception is SLS, whose methodology can only be viewed by institutions in the UK and Ireland or those with paid access to the platform.

The way in which each framework assigns scores differs, an institution can achieve a high rating in one and a lower rating in another. For example, Wageningen University & Research in the Netherlands is #1 in UI GreenMetric but sits in the #101-200 category in the THE Impact rankings. Nottingham Trent University ranks #2 in UI GreenMetric, #11 in People & Planet, and #86 in the THE Impact rankings.

4) Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. (2019, June). STARS Technical Manual: Version 2.2. AASHE (Stars). Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://stars.aashe.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/STARS-2.2-Technical-Manual.pdf>

5) Association of University Estates Directors and The Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education. (2021). Sustainability Leadership Scorecard. EAUC. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.eauc.org.uk/sustainability_leadership_scorecard

6) People & Planet. (2023). People & Planet University League Methodology. People & Planet. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://peopleandplanet.org/university-league-methodology>

7) QS Quacquarelli Symonds. (2022, October 26). QS Sustainability University Rankings 2023. Top Universities. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/sustainability-rankings/2023>

8) Times Higher Education. (2023). Impact Rankings Methodology 2023 Version 1.2. Times Higher Education. Retrieved June 15, 2023, from https://the-ranking.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/IMPACT/IMPACT2023/THE.ImpactRankings.METHODOLOGY.2023_v1.2.pdf

9) Universitas Indonesia. (2022). UI GreenMetric Guidelines 2022 - English. Guidelines -UI GreenMetric. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://greenmetric.ui.ac.id/publications/guidelines/2022/english>

At first glance, some frameworks appear to have significantly more indicators than others; for example, the THE Impact Rankings lists 251 on its website, followed by SLS (144), People & Planet (88), UI GreenMetric (81), STARS (69) and the QS Sustainability Rankings (37). However, closer scrutiny shows that this is tempered by variations in terms used to refer to indicators and the structure of their scoring frameworks (for example, STARS is organized around topic-specific credits, many of which incorporate multiple indicators). This makes comparisons challenging.

Most of the frameworks have participation requirements that do not contribute to the overall score; for example, providing a statement of commitment from a senior leader.

IV. Data collection and submission processes

In addition to asking respondents to complete a survey or provide additional data, most of the assessments draw on publicly available information. In the frameworks that rely heavily on self-evaluation, there is always a degree of subjectivity involved – much depends on the rigor the institution applies to the exercise and its willingness to disclose all relevant facts.

The data for THE Impact Rankings and QS Sustainability Rankings are drawn from publicly available data sources, as well as survey data provided by participating institutions and third party data sources such as Elsevier's Scopus database.

Just under half the data for the People & Planet University League is sourced from the Higher Education Statistics Agency or other publicly verified data sources. The remainder is based on information the institution has publicly shared itself, for example, via policy documents and webpages.

STARS and UI GreenMetric data are self reported by institutions via an online survey while SLS makes use of an interactive platform.



V. Participation rates

The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings is the largest framework with 1,591 participating institutions in 2023, followed by UI GreenMetric (1,050 in 2022) and the QS Sustainability Rankings (700 in 2022). Although 1,147 institutions have registered to use the STARS Reporting Tool, only 591 have earned a STARS rating. Of these 591, 340 have an active rating, while 275 have a rating that has expired (ratings remain valid for three years)². As expected, the more country specific frameworks People & Planet (153 in 2022, UK only) and Sustainability Leadership Scorecard (172 in 2023 in UK and Ireland with 3 international clients) have a smaller number of participants relative to the global frameworks. For the Sustainability Leadership Scorecard a total of 381 institutions are included on the platform based on publicly available data but the 172 participants refer to institutions who have actively engaged.

These figures show that participation in sustainability rankings is catching up with participation in overall global university rankings. For example, the Times Higher Education and QS World University rankings have 1,799 and 1,426 participating institutions, respectively (see Figure 2).

In 2022/2023, participation in some sustainability frameworks neared participation in world university rankings.

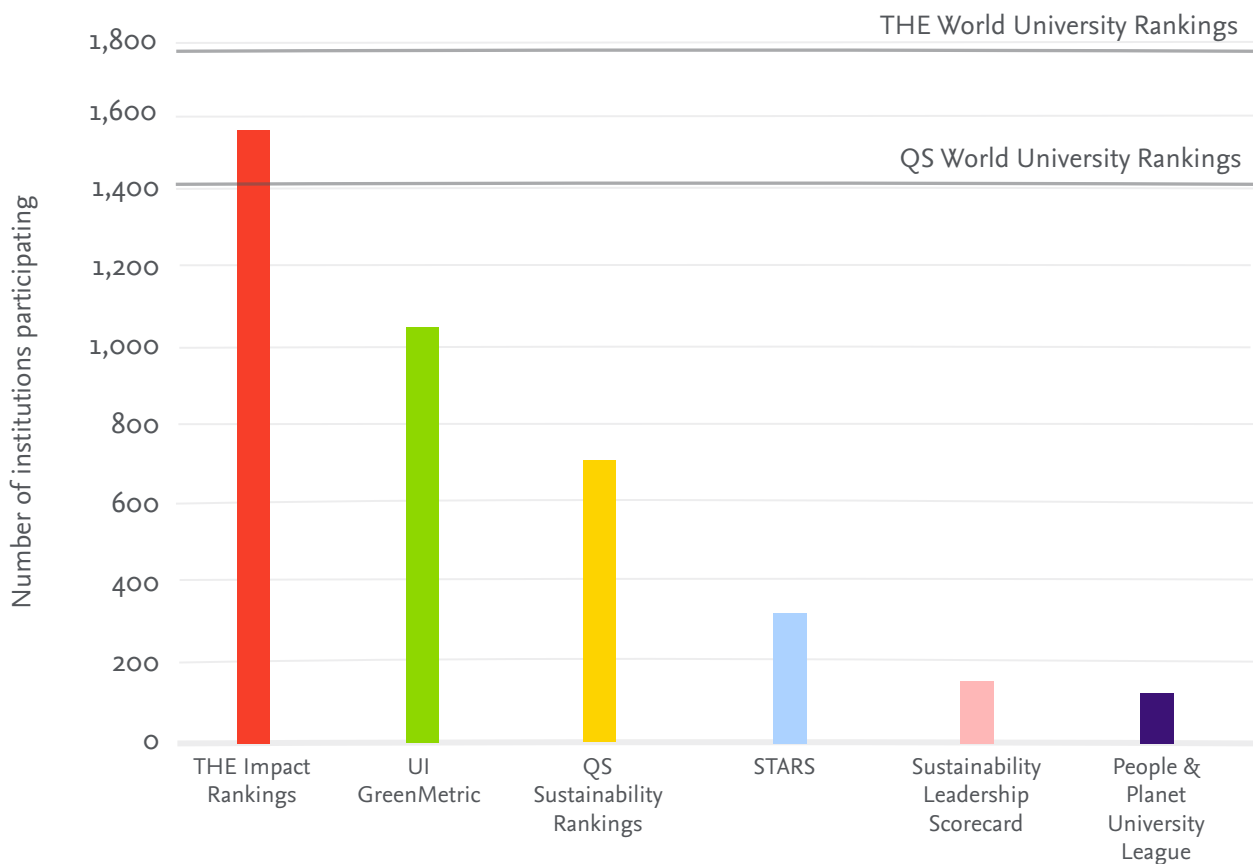


Figure 2: HEI participation rates in the six sustainability frameworks in 2022/2023, compared to participation in two of the largest global university rankings that year. NOTE: For STARS we show the number of universities with active ratings as of 13 April 2023.

²) All figures for STARS are current as of 13 April 2023

VI. Geography

The number of countries and regions participating in the THE Impact Rankings exceeded participation rates in the THE World University rankings in 2022 (see Figure 3). The geographic spread of institutions participating in the international frameworks is diverse. The THE Impact Rankings' top 10 features HEIs from Australia, the UK, Canada, the US and Denmark, as well as an institution from an emerging economy, Malaysia. In terms of the number of institutions represented, the US and Canada dominate the 316 active STARS ratings (260 and 36 institutions, respectively). The Sustainability Leadership Scorecard has 3 international clients, while all others are from the UK or Ireland.

In 2022, more countries and regions participated in the THE Impact Rankings than the THE World University Rankings.

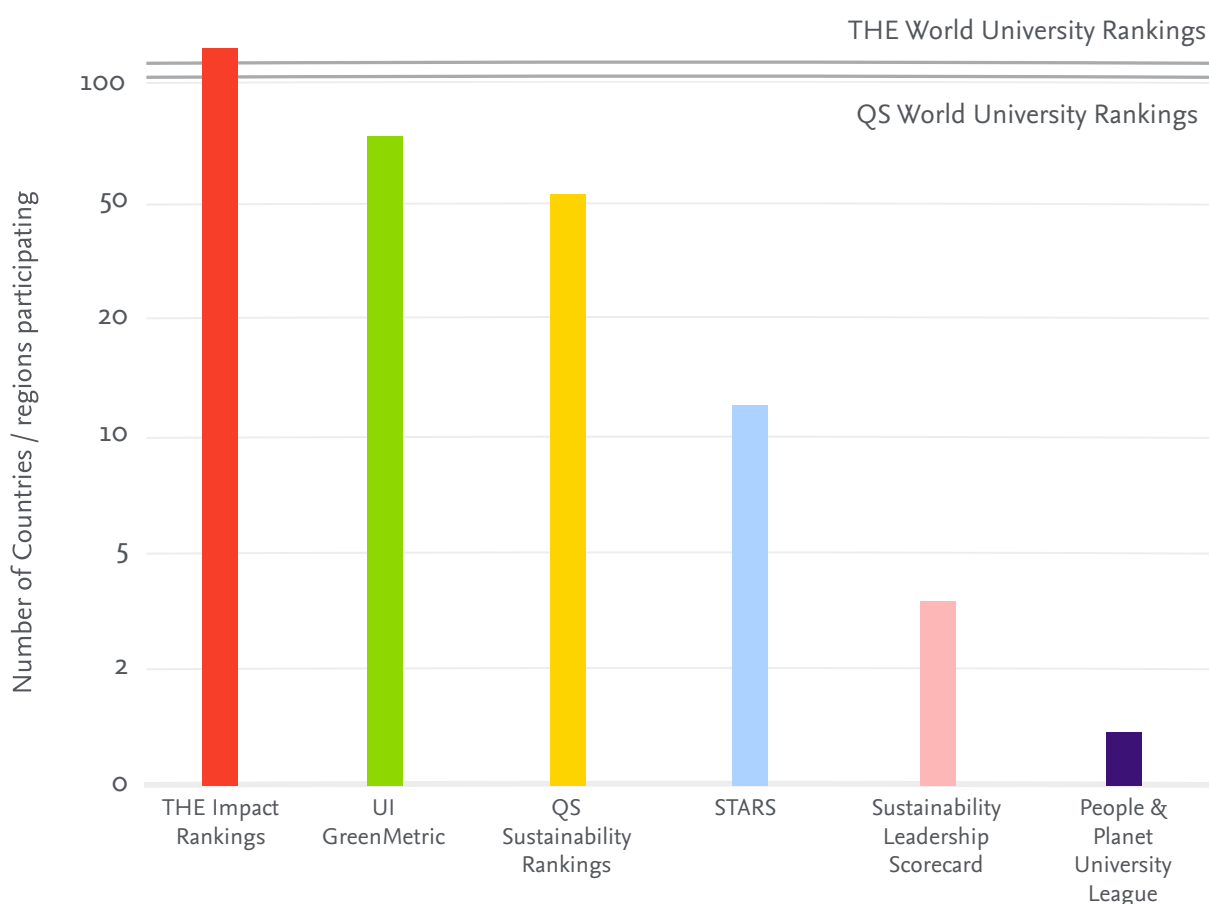


Figure 3: The number of countries that participated in each sustainability framework in 2022, compared to the number that participated in the THE World University Rankings that year. NOTE: For STARS we show the number of countries with universities that had an active STARS rating as of 13 April 2023.

Although global in scope, most of the frameworks assessed in this paper were developed in high-income countries (the UK or USA). The exception is UI GreenMetric, which was developed in Indonesia. The fact that the majority of the indicators were developed by the Global North signals potential geographic and systemic differences between the Global North and South, both in adoption rates of sustainability frameworks and opportunities to align with them. For example, for HEIs in regions or countries without significant renewables infrastructure (or the means to install it), it will be difficult, even impossible, to power a campus using renewable energy. This impacts their ability to score highly against clean energy indicators.

VII. Eligibility

The People & Planet University League is designed for HEIs in the UK. All universities having approved fee cap status and degree-awarding powers are assessed and universities cannot opt in or opt out. To be included in the 2022/23 edition, they must also have appeared in the 2021 edition or be registered with Universities UK.

The Sustainability Leadership Scorecard is designed for universities, colleges and post-16 year old education institutions in the UK and Ireland. Access is free for members of the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education (EAUC) or the Association of University Directors of Estates (AUDE), which includes all UK and Irish institutions.

The QS Sustainability Rankings stipulates that institutions must have been included in the previous QS World University Ranking, have a publicly available sustainability policy or strategy, and have evidence of at least two out of four SDG research metrics.

STARS, the THE Impact Rankings and UI GreenMetric are open to any college or university globally.

VIII. Costs³

Five of the frameworks are free for all eligible institutions to participate in. The exception is SLS, which is free for all EAUC and AUDE members in the UK and Ireland, there is an annual cost for international institutions.

While charging no fees for assessment, People & Planet offers an extra 'full data package' for a fee, which spans every edition to date and includes the scores for each question and participating institution. It also offers an individual data package for fee, which features results from the last three editions for a single institution. In addition, institutions can select an introductory webinar or internal policy review package.

STARS offers two levels of access. Basic access is available at no cost and allows an institution to document data in the online STARS Reporting Tool, with the option to publish an unscored report and receive STARS Reporter designation. Accessing data from other participants for benchmarking and analyses is also free of charge. Full access is available by annual subscription and unlocks additional features, including automated point calculation and the option to earn a STARS Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum rating. A subscription is cheaper for an AASHE member (and for members of Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS) through an AASHE-ACTS partnership) than a non-member. Renewal costs are lower than initial subscription costs.

While most of the frameworks are free, there are other costs involved in taking part that institutions should consider, such as training, consultation and equipment. For example, a comprehensive carbon assessment often requires the appointment of an internal specialist or external consultancy. And institutions may wish to pay for access to various databases, such as the Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Energy database, which offers annual subscriptions for a fee.

³) All prices are current as of 10 March 2023.

Chapter 2: Mapping the frameworks to the GRI and SDGs

The frameworks cover a wide range of sustainability topics, encompassing an institution's environmental, social, economic and governance impacts. In this chapter, to help us understand how the frameworks weight these impacts, we analyze their indicators through two common sustainability lenses. Information on the methodology we have used can be found in Appendix B.

The first of these lenses is the **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)**. This independent, non-profit organization publishes a set of global standards designed to help organizations understand and report on their impacts on the economy, environment and people in a consistent way. The GRI can be used to report on the United Nations' **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which is the second lens we have used. The SDGs are 17 global and interlinked objectives designed to end poverty and inequality, protect the planet, and secure health, justice and prosperity for all.

I. The GRI: Looking at the frameworks through a reporting lens

To identify which of the indicators in the six frameworks are specific to HEIs (e.g., teaching) and which are also applicable to organizations outside higher education (e.g., carbon emissions), we analyzed their relationship to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) indicators, which are officially referred to as the GRI standards. These work on a modular basis: there are universal ones that apply to every organization preparing a sustainability report, and topic-specific GRI standards that organizations can select from. These topic-specific standards are organized into three series: Economic, Environmental and Social (see Table 1).

To cater for the indicators that we were unable to match to the GRI, we created a new topic series called 'Higher Education Disclosures', which contains seven categories specific to the higher education sector.

Appendix D shows the importance each sustainability framework assigns to the individual GRI and Higher Education Disclosures categories.

Indicators in the six frameworks mapped to existing GRI topic series and categories.

Source	Topic series	Categories
Global Reporting Initiative	General Disclosures	General Disclosures
	Management Approach	Management Approach
	Economic	Procurement Practices
		Indirect Economic Impacts
		Economic Performance
		Anti-corruption
	Social	Training and Education
		Employment
		Diversity and Equal Opportunity
		Local Communities
		Public Policy, Customer Health and safety
		Occupational Health and Safety
		Labor/Management Relations
		Non-discrimination
		Supplier Social Assessment
		Security Practices
		Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining
		Child Labor
	Environmental	Emissions
		Energy
		Waste
		Water and Effluents
		Environmental Compliance
Biodiversity		
Materials		
Supplier Environmental Assessment		
Developed for the purposes of this guide	Higher Education Disclosures	Research
		Curricula
		Student/Faculty Engagement
		Capacity-building and Outreach
		Admission/Entry Practices
		Innovation
		Educational Attainment

Table 1: The indicators in the six frameworks were mapped to existing GRI topic series and categories. To capture framework indicators with no suitable GRI equivalents, we created a new topic series called ‘Higher Education Disclosures’.

Our analysis shows that Higher Education Disclosures comprise 70 percent of the QS Sustainability Rankings scoring (see Figure 4). This suggests that compared to the other frameworks, the QS framework places relatively greater emphasis on aspects of sustainability that are unique to higher education and relatively less emphasis on sustainability issues relevant to all organizations. This can be a pro or a con, depending on the perspective of the HEI.

We found that next to Higher Education Disclosures, the sustainability frameworks lean heavily on Environmental measures, which make up around 70 percent of the score in UI GreenMetric and People & Planet (see Figure 4). Within this topic series, the category Emissions typically receives the most weighting (see Appendix D for more details).

It should be noted that the bonus points that can be gained in the STARS framework are left out of scope of this analyses. For more details we refer to the methodology appendix.

There is an inverse relationship between the percentage of indicators mapped to ‘Higher Education Disclosures’ and Global Reporting Initiative ‘Environmental’.

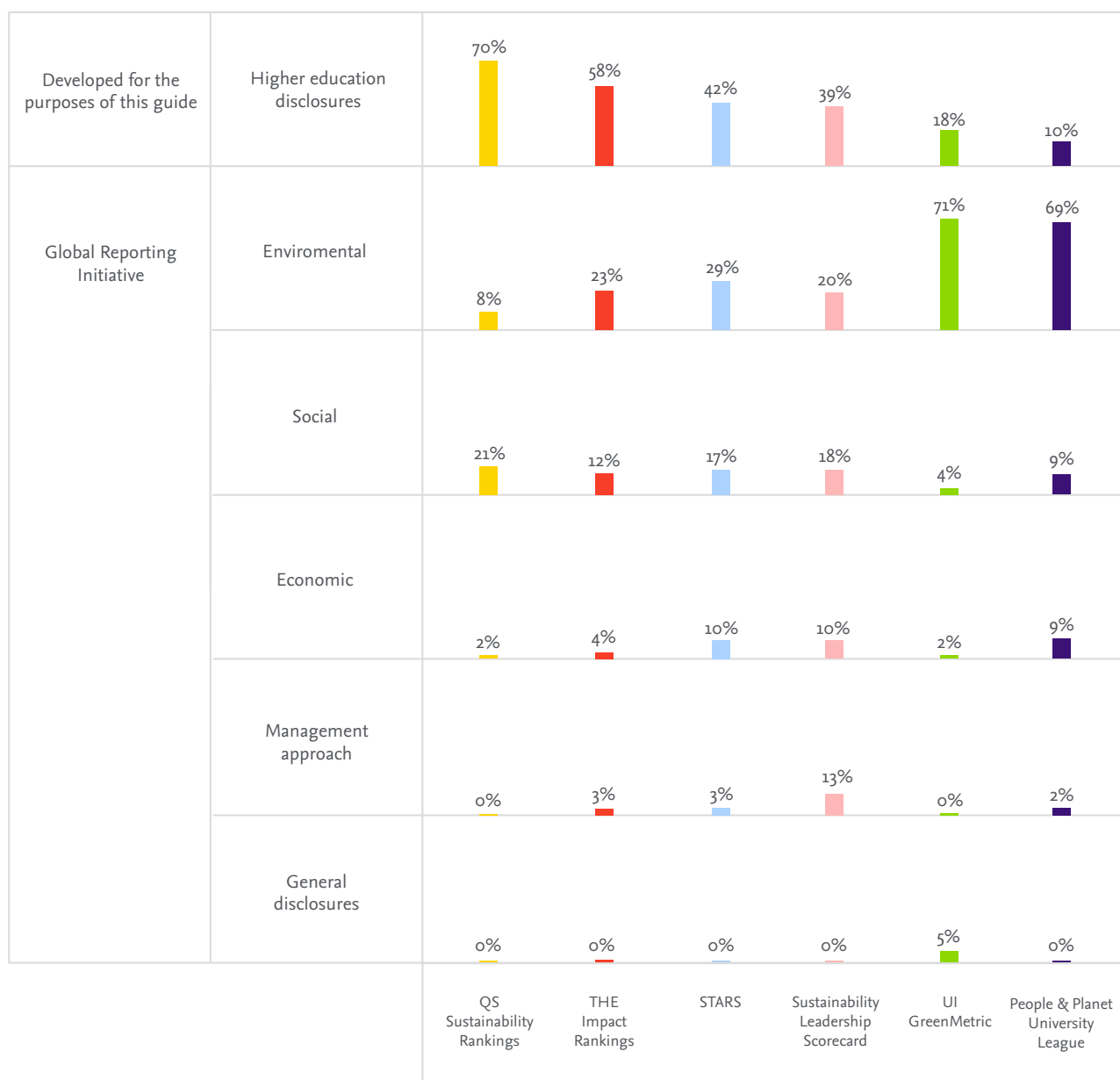


Figure 4: The graph shows the distribution of the indicators in each framework across the various GRI topic series, plus the Higher Education Disclosures topic series developed for this guide. A break down of the Higher Education Disclosure category is provided in Figure 5.

Within the ‘Higher Education Disclosures’ category, the ‘Research’ and ‘Curricula’ categories account for the greatest weightings.

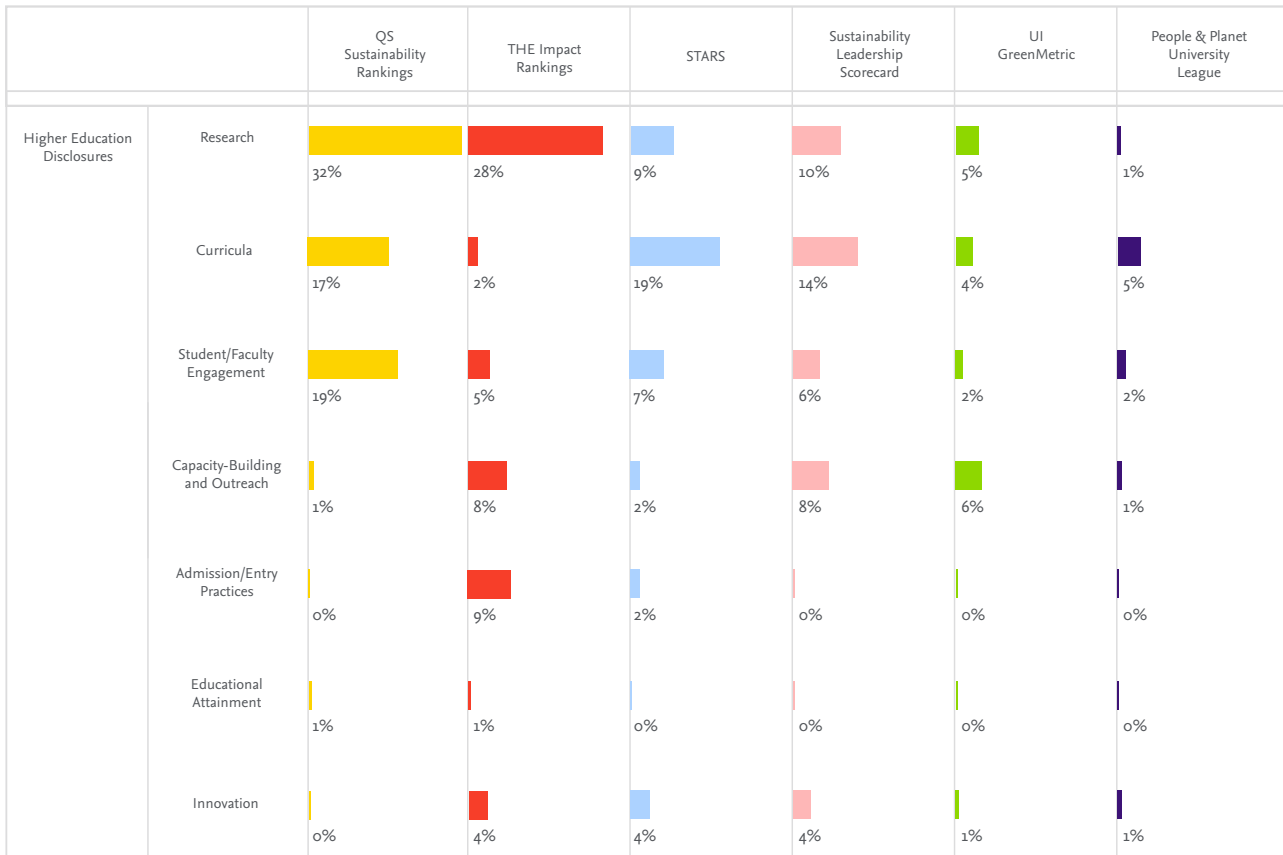


Figure 5: The graph shows a breakdown and the distribution of the various Higher Education Disclosures categories across the six frameworks.

Within the Higher Education Disclosures topic series, the categories Research (14 percent) and Curricula (10 percent) have the strongest weightings (see Figure 5). Staff and Faculty Engagement (7 percent) and Capacity-building and Outreach (4 percent) sit in the middle, while Innovation (1 percent) and Educational Attainment (0 percent) receive the lowest weightings.

There is some variation across the frameworks with the QS Sustainability Rankings and THE Impact Rankings weighting Research significantly higher than the others (32 percent and 27 percent, respectively). Curricula is particularly important to STARS (19 percent), QS (17 percent) and SLS (14 percent).

Understanding the degree to which a framework is tailored to the higher education sector is important for HEIs. Selecting a framework that is more specific to their needs can help them capture the value they create with greater detail and nuance. However, there are also benefits to reporting in line with global reporting standards, such as the GRI, that are generic to all sectors and organizations; namely that the HEI can benchmark its performance beyond the higher education sector.

II. The SDGs: Considering how the six frameworks align with key sustainability objectives

As discussed, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 interlinked objectives established by the United Nations in 2015 to “shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path” by 2030.² The goals recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations “must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.”¹⁰

Each goal corresponds with 5-19 targets and each target has a set of indicators. The initiative is primarily designed for action at the state-level, but the role of non-state actors in achieving the global goals is acknowledged by the UN Global Compact and the Global Reporting Initiative.¹¹⁻¹³



An example of the structure of the SDG framework.



Figure 6: Each of the SDGs corresponds with 5-19 targets and each target has a set of indicators. This image shows how that structure works in practice for SDG 1 No Poverty, and one of its associated targets.

2) United Nations. (27 September 2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved 11 February 2023 from HYPERLINK "<https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>"<https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030percent20Agendapercent20forpercent20Sustainablepercent20Developmentpercent20web.pdf>

10) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved 23 January 2023 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

11) UN GLOBAL COMPACT_2022 ANNUAL REPORT.pdf (ungc-communications-assets.s3.amazonaws.com)

12) GRI. The global standards for sustainability impacts. Retrieved 12 April 2023 from <https://www.globalreporting.org/standards/>

13) Sustainable Development Solutions Network – Australia/Pacific. (2017). Getting started with the SDGs in universities: A guide for universities, HEIs, and the academic sector. Sustainability Exchange. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from https://www.sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk/files/university-sdg-guide_web.pdf

The closeness of the relationship between the six HEI sustainability frameworks and the SDGs varies in depth and emphasis (see Figure 7).

The degree to which each framework aligns with the SDGs.

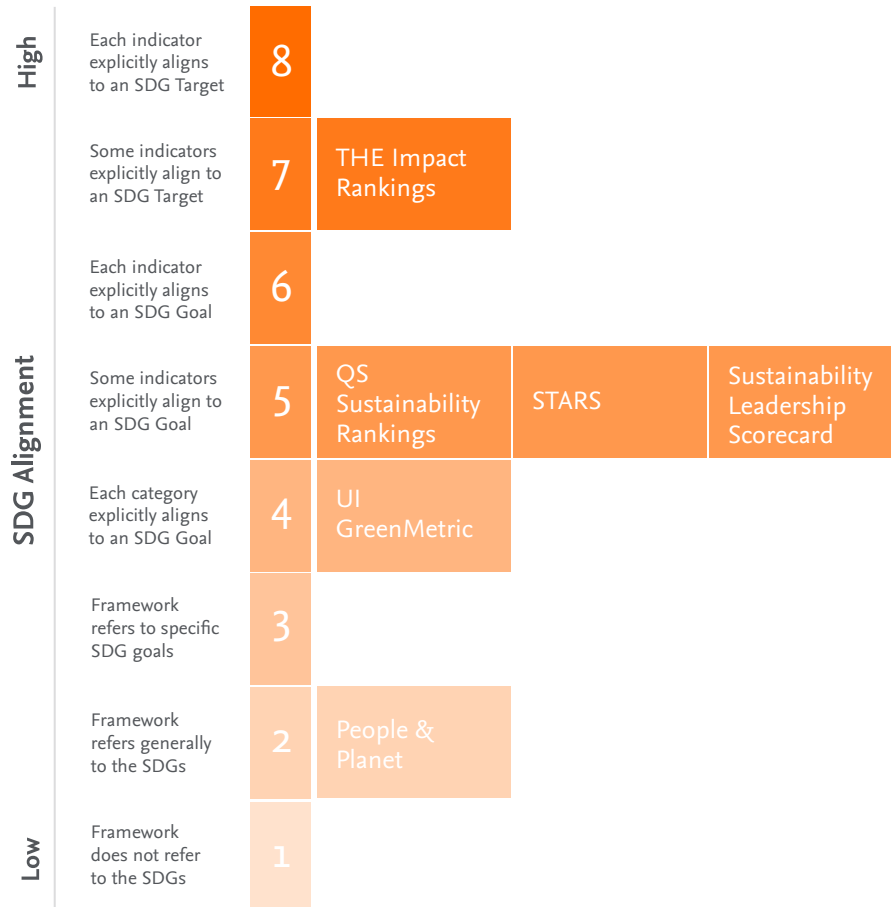


Figure 7: This graph captures the degree to which each framework aligns with the SDGs. The degree of alignment is given as a value out of 8, with 1 representing low alignment and 8 representing high alignment.

The THE Impact Rankings has the strongest explicit alignment to the SDGs. Each category in its methodology represents an SDG, and some indicators in those categories are directly aligned to SDG targets.

The QS Sustainability Rankings, STARS, Sustainability Leadership Scorecard and UI GreenMetric also have strong connections to the SDGs, with each category aligning to an SDG goal. QS, STARS and SLS also explicitly align some of their indicators to an SDG goal.

Although People & Planet aligns with the SDGs in practice, its methodology only explicitly refers to one SDG under ‘Access to Higher Education’ in ‘Education for Sustainable Development’. There are other references to ‘sustainable development’ throughout the methodology, but alignment with the SDGs is implicit for the most part.

We wanted to understand which SDGs were most prevalent across the frameworks. In most cases, framework indicators were linked to their most closely related goal and target using the [SDG Compass](#), keywords and consideration of each indicator’s core aim. However, for some this was challenging because the indicator aligned to multiple goals or targets, or because it didn’t appear to align to any. We explore the methodology used to match these in Appendix B.

Example: In the QS Sustainability Rankings, the ‘Quality of Life’ indicators assess research output in SDGs 1, 2, 3 and 6. Although the indicators could be aligned to all those goals, we selected the most relevant - SDG 3, Good Health and Wellbeing.

Once the mapping of framework indicators to SDG goals was complete, we divided the weightings we had assigned by five (the total number of frameworks analysed) to show the percentages of the combined scoring attributable to each SDG (Figure 8). The THE Impact Rankings has a unique scoring structure (see Appendix B) so we excluded them from this comparison analysis.

SDG 4 Quality Education has the highest percentage of attributable scoring in five of the frameworks combined.

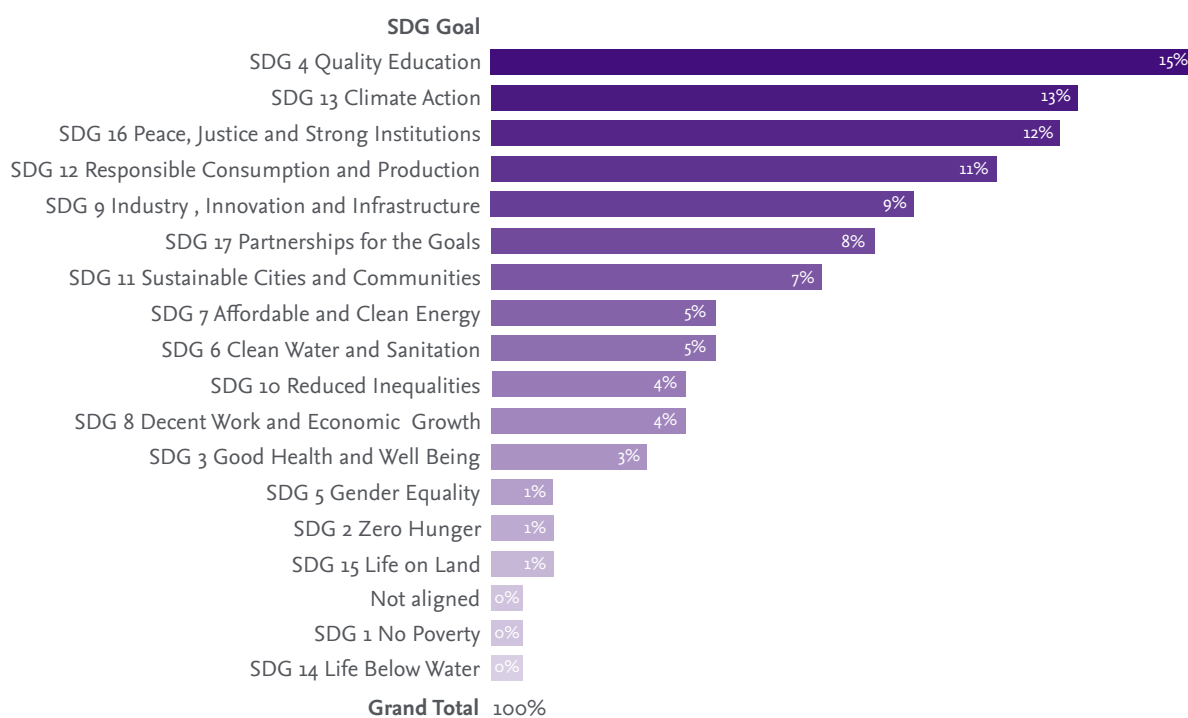


Figure 8: The most prevalent SDGs in five of the sustainability frameworks combined. The THE Impact Ranking is not included in the totals because participants' top 3 SDGs are weighted the most highly and is therefore bespoke to each institution.

The eight most prominently featured SDGs across five of the frameworks.

SDG	Percentage of combined scoring attributable to the SDG	Rationale for its frequent appearance in the frameworks
SDG 4 Quality Education	15 Percent	Its prominence is no surprise given that HEIs play a critical role in providing inclusive, equal access to quality education for all, regardless of age, race, ability or gender.
SDG 13 Climate Action	13 Percent	It is critical that all state and non-state actors, including HEIs, accelerate efforts to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. HEIs play an additional role by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating their students, staff and communities about climate change • Sharing research on climate change and its impacts to shape government policy • Creating and sharing research-based solutions to climate change's most hazardous effects
SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	12 Percent	HEIs promote peaceful and inclusive societies by embedding knowledge of sustainable development in their curricula and driving research outputs on these topics. They help to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels by critically studying networked power.
SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production	11 Percent	HEIs play a key role in the transition to more responsible consumption and production patterns by reducing their environmental and social impacts, producing relevant research, and promoting action among students and staff.
SDG 9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure	9 Percent	HEIs are at the forefront of research, driving innovative solutions for sustainable infrastructure and industrialization, and equipping students with sustainable development skills and knowledge that they take into the workforce. HEIs also collaborate across the private and public sectors, supporting sustainable infrastructure, industrialization, and innovation through partnerships and incubation or entrepreneurship projects.
SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals	8 Percent	HEIs are places of collaboration and innovation. Through participation in multi-stakeholder initiatives and public-private partnerships, HEIs act as hubs for knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and advocacy on key sustainability objectives.
SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	7 Percent	HEIs support sustainable transportation and infrastructure, engage in research and education on sustainable urban development, and work with local governments and communities to find solutions to challenging problems.

Table 2: The table shows the eight most prominently featured SDGs across the five frameworks (excluding the THE Impact Ranking).

We also looked at each individual framework’s relationship to the goals (see Figure 9), which highlighted where there were deviations from the combined scoring.

Example: Although SDG 9 ‘Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure’ takes up 9 percent of the frameworks’ scores overall, it isn’t measured by the People & Planet framework. We can see a similar pattern with SDG 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ (2 percent versus 8 percent), SDG 11 ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities’ (1 percent versus 7 percent) and SDG 3 ‘Good Health and Well-Being’ (0 percent versus 3 percent).

We found that the QS Sustainability Rankings covers far fewer SDGs than the other rankings. SLS, however, has a greater breadth of scoring across all the SDGs, except for SDG 1 ‘No Poverty’ and SDG 14 ‘Life Below Water’ (0 percent). Together, SDGs 16 ‘Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions’ and 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’, with their emphasis on partnerships and institutional power, take up half of SLS’ score. This is not surprising given that SLS was developed by two membership organizations and focuses on cooperation and collaboration.

Nearly a third of the score for STARS is attributable to SDG 4 Quality Education (34 percent). This is to be expected as many of the criteria focus on curricula and research. As noted above and in Appendix B, the THE framework is unusual. Participants’ scores are based on their top three categories, each of which aligns to an SDG and is worth 26 percent. The fourth category is aligned to SDG 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ and is worth 22 percent.

Example: If an institution performed best in SDGs 1-3, each of those categories would be weighted 26 percent in the THE Impact Rankings, SDG 4-16 would be weighted 0 percent, and SDG 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ would be weighted 22 percent.

UI GreenMetric weights a third of its score to SDG 11 ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities’ (29 percent) and a fifth to SDG 12 ‘Responsible Consumption and Production’ (20 percent). SDGs 7 ‘Affordable and Clean Energy’ (13 percent), 6 ‘Clean Water and Sanitation’ (10 percent), and 13 ‘Climate Action’ (8 percent) follow behind. SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 14 and 15 are not scored.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) %

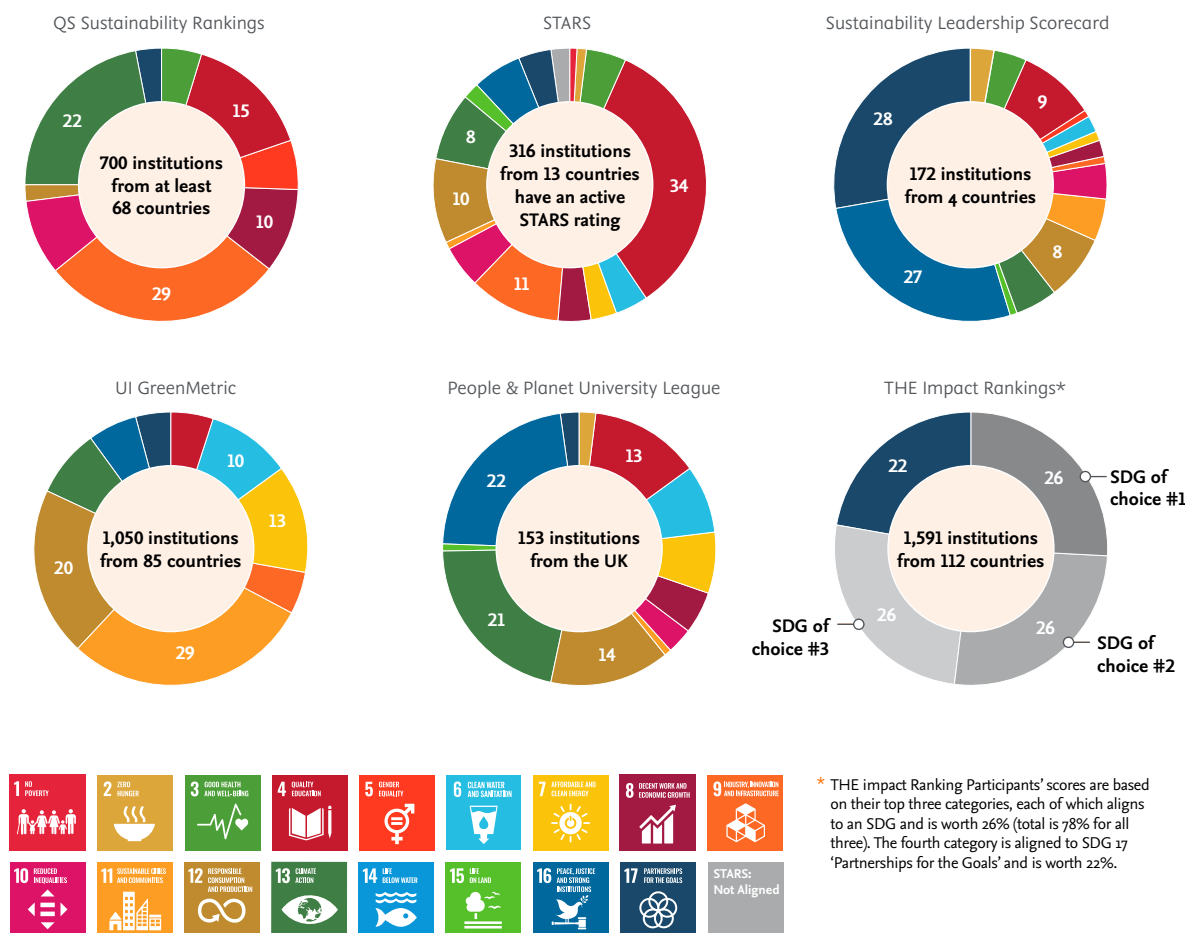


Figure 9: Weighted distribution of each SDG per sustainability framework.

Chapter 3: Evaluation of the frameworks

I. The benefits to HEIs participating in the frameworks



Moral

To achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and bring about real, lasting change, every individual and organization on the planet must act. Changing business-as-usual to business-for-good will take a huge effort, and HEIs are uniquely positioned to educate and influence students, staff, the wider community, and national governments. Participation in sustainability assessment frameworks helps HEIs to guide and quantify the part they play in addressing social and environmental issues, and identify where they could play a bigger role in accelerating the realization of the SDGs.

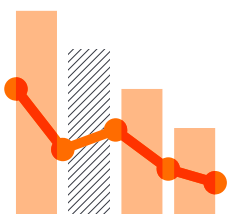


Reputational

HEIs that participate in sustainability frameworks develop an evidence-base for sustainability-related claims, helping them communicate their sustainability credentials in a transparent, authentic and meaningful way.

This helps them to build their reputation, which, in turn, brings many benefits. For example, a positive assessment or high ranking from these frameworks can help with recruitment and retention of students and staff. There is growing evidence¹⁴⁻¹⁶ that prospective students seek out institutions that prioritize sustainability and offer opportunities to engage with environmental and social issues. According to a recent QS survey of more than 3,000 prospective international students, nearly half (49 percent) of all respondents consider a university's social impact to be 'very important' when deciding where to study. Enrolment decisions are influenced by factors such as the degree to which the university supports and respects human rights (71 percent); protects and supports biodiversity (62 percent); and whether the university aspires to be carbon neutral (41 percent).⁹ Existing students also want to see evidence of strong environmental and social responsibility policies and programs.

Choosing not to participate in frameworks, or scoring poorly, can constitute a reputational risk for HEIs as they may lose talent and money to their more sustainable counterparts. Equally, selecting the wrong framework, i.e., one that does not align with their strategic direction, can also prove problematic, hindering them in achieving their goals.



Risk

Many of the frameworks align with national and global policy objectives, such as Net Zero targets and the Nationally Determined Contributions defined as part of the Paris Agreement.² The frameworks enable HEIs to align themselves with national and international policy, ensuring they are compliant with current expectations and regulations. Importantly, by prioritizing sustainability, HEIs can also ensure their readiness for future legislative changes implemented at the state and local level. Essentially, the frameworks can help HEIs to future-proof and secure their longevity.



Benchmarking

Benchmarking performance against other institutions at a national and international level is one of the main benefits of participating in a sustainability framework. For an HEI, understanding where it sits in relation to its counterparts can help it to identify its strengths, as well as areas where improvement is necessary. Participation also allows institutions to track their progress over time. Results of such benchmarking can be a real driver in internal decision-making, motivating institutions to see where they can do more, and aiding them to become sustainability leaders. This 'healthy competition' aspect can lead to an improvement in the overall sustainability of HEIs, and ensure the minimum acceptable threshold continues to rise.



Efficiency

Large campuses with high numbers of staff and students use significant resources, especially energy and water. They also generate significant waste and greenhouse gas emissions. Old campus buildings and infrastructure that require retrofitting or high levels of upkeep, heating and cooling use significant amounts of energy. As HEIs meet the goals of the frameworks, it's likely that they will see improved energy efficiency, waste management and water conservation. An added benefit is operational efficiency often comes with cost savings. For example, improving energy efficiency can lead to reduced energy consumption and lower utility costs. These savings free up funds for research, education and innovation.



Engagement

Participation in sustainability rankings and frameworks increases engagement with key stakeholders, such as students, staff and local communities. It can also help HEIs highlight their expertise in areas relevant to local and national sustainability issues. This positions them to become media spokespeople or to partner with policy makers; for example, contribute specialized knowledge to global initiatives, such as the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. This multi-stakeholder engagement can lead to a better understanding of sustainability issues specific to the institution and its socio-environmental context, and help foster a culture of sustainability within and around the institution. In addition, it can help to create a common dialog for complex topics, smoothing the path for future partnerships and open communication.

2) United Nations. (27 September 2015). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved 11 February 2023 from <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030percent20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>"<https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030percent20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

7) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (12 October 2018 – updated 21 April 2022). Most students want sustainable development as part of all university courses, survey reveals. Retrieved 5 April 2023 from <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/most-students-want-sustainable-development-part-all-university-courses-survey-reveals?%20>"<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/most-students-want-sustainable-development-part-all-university-courses-survey-reveals?%20>"

9) Universitas Indonesia. (2022). UI GreenMetric Guidelines 2022 - English. Guidelines - UI GreenMetric. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from <https://greenmetric.ui.ac.id/publications/guidelines/2022/english>

14) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (12 October 2018 – updated 21 April 2022). Most students want sustainable development as part of all university courses, survey reveals. Retrieved 5 April 2023 from <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/most-students-want-sustainable-development-part-all-university-courses-survey-reveals?%20>"<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/most-students-want-sustainable-development-part-all-university-courses-survey-reveals?%20>"

16) Daniel, T. (23 November 2022). Do students care if their universities value social sustainability? QS Quacquarelli Symonds. Retrieved 18 February 2023 from <https://www.qs.com/do-students-care-if-their-universities-value-social-sustainability/>

II. The drawbacks and challenges

A fundamental difficulty for any framework is to adequately condense what is often qualitative information into a simple number or score. In the case of sustainability frameworks, finding an effective way to track important elements is challenging enough, let alone translate them into a meaningful number or percentage.

For HEIs, other challenges can be found in areas such as:

SDG alignment

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are designed to be implemented at the national level. Contextualizing them for HEIs requires a degree of interpretation so that everyone on campus, from senior decision-makers to students, can understand and support them. Additionally, HEIs have varying strategies for tackling the SDGs. For example, some support all 17 SDGs while others focus on those that align with their institution and ethos. The strategy they choose will influence which framework they find most useful.

As each SDG covers a broad range of issues, organizations must narrow their focus to the individual goal's targets and select a framework that will assess them on those targets. This requires an in-depth familiarity with the SDGs. While some frameworks explicitly state the SDG targets and their relationship to higher education, others don't (see Chapter 2: Mapping the frameworks to the GRI and SDGs).

Finally, institutions must be aware of selection bias when contextualizing the SDGs for their purposes. Choosing to focus on SDGs where they already perform well, rather than on areas that may be more challenging but equally pertinent, could lead an institution to miss out on valuable insights into areas of improvement, potential cost savings and reputation building. They may also be accused of 'greenwashing'; in other words attempting to appear more sustainable and environmentally friendly than they actually are.

Scope

Ranking and rating systems are not the only way to evaluate the sustainability performance of HEIs. Other factors to consider include the comprehensiveness of the institution's internal sustainability policies, initiatives and goals - and the progress they have made towards achieving them. The institution's external context, along with the specific needs and challenges of the surrounding region, should also be taken into consideration.

Costs and resources:

HEIs must have sufficient time, expertise and financial resources to participate in these frameworks. This is likely to be easier for larger and high-income institutions, which are also in a better position to fund additional costs related to sustainability knowledge and action; for example, the purchase of database access or membership subscriptions, training, consultation and equipment. This could translate into an advantage when it comes to submitting data and achieving a high ranking. And those who are unable to employ such services may need to invest a greater amount of time and energy into collecting and submitting data. This can be a significant challenge for resource-constrained organizations, and it may prevent smaller institutions, or HEIs in low-income countries/regions, from participating.

Similarly, resourcing issues may make it difficult for some institutions to implement recommendations after participating in a ranking framework.

Example: Carbon management and reduction goals form a significant part of several frameworks. Measuring greenhouse gas emissions and forming a carbon management policy is a specialized and potentially complicated process. It requires expertise in emissions data and knowledge of data systems and reporting. Some institutions will be able to use third-party carbon accountancies to gather granular data and generate reports. Others may need or choose to measure their carbon emissions in-house, which could affect the accuracy of data (through using estimation-based tools, for example), or could take a significant amount of time, especially if they are unfamiliar with carbon accounting.

Complexity

There are several complexities involved in sustainability framework participation. For example, it's likely that cross-institution and multi-level collaboration will be necessary to gather all the data required by the frameworks, including collaboration with suppliers, such as food providers, and waste disposal partners. Coordinated and centralized data collection is another important consideration.

Additionally, some frameworks may be easier to understand or more intuitive than others. If an institution has a limited understanding of the framework and the requirements needed to evaluate their sustainability performance, it could lead to difficulties in interpreting the results and identifying areas for improvement. It could also lead to inaccurate scoring.

Recognition

Some sustainability frameworks are more widely recognized than others (or are more generally accepted by the higher education sector and external stakeholders). Choosing to use a less widely recognized framework can limit the impact of participation, and institutions may have to do additional work to showcase their sustainability credentials.

Eligibility and applicability

Geographic relevance is one consideration. Some are region-specific, such as People & Planet University League, which targets UK universities. Another point HEIs should consider is the weighting a framework assigns to sustainability aspects important to their mission. For example, some frameworks may place particular weight on the delivery of quality education, leading to an overall high score for an HEI. However, such weighting could overlook or obscure a lack of robust policy elsewhere in the institution, such as gender equality.

As mentioned previously, when it comes to aligning with a framework, some institutions are likely to face systemic geographic and developmental barriers; for example, a renewable energy infrastructure may not be available in their region. As a result, it may be unfair to expect low-income institutions in the Global South to meet indicators developed by high-income institutions in the Global North. Next to that, it seems unlikely that the frameworks are able to capture all impact that is generated by a university. Because the frameworks have mainly been developed in the Global North the expectation is that more impact may go unreported for universities in the Global South. How these frameworks could be developed to overcome these disparities is worthy of further consideration.

Methodological variation

While it's easy to compare institutions participating in the same framework, it is much more difficult to compare the results of one framework to another, as each framework is supported by a different methodology.

Chapter 4: University of Tasmania: a case study

Over the past 13 years, Australia's University of Tasmania (UTAS) has made sure and steady progress towards its goal to deliver - and exemplify - holistic sustainability.

The year 2019 marked a significant intensifying of that commitment, with broader and deeper institution-wide action. This step change was supported by using both the THE Impact Ranking and STARS to inform and drive institutional initiatives. According to UTAS, since their introduction, these frameworks have guided the university on its holistic sustainability journey, measuring its progress and identifying gaps to be addressed.

Before selecting them, UTAS explored and/or tested various other frameworks, including GRI, UI GreenMetric, and Learning in Future Environments (LiFE) - the precursor of SLS. While the THE Impact ranking was chosen for its direct alignment with all SDGs, STARS was chosen for a variety of reasons. One important aspect for UTAS was that the STARS framework has been developed specifically for the higher education sector by HEIs themselves. But the university was also swayed by its:

- Formalized approach to updates. This enables STARS to respond to the changing understanding of business-as-usual.
- Inclusion of all aspects of sustainability relevant to the sector and combining of quantitative and qualitative data. This allows institutions to 'tell their story'.
- Detailed Technical Manual, which provides specific initiatives that can be used as a guide towards best practice.
- Clear scoring. This enables institutions to self-assess prior to reporting.
- Complete transparency. All reports are made public online, facilitating benchmarking and knowledge sharing, and promoting collaboration, rather than competition.
- Fostering of engagement across the whole institution, and with peer-organizations through an online community, a peer-review process and mentoring.



In 2020, UTAS attained a STARS Silver rating, making it the first university in Australasia to attain a STARS rating. This provided the University with a baseline to measure progress against. After identifying action areas, UTAS co-designed 50 cross-institution initiatives designed to deliver significant improvements. The implementation of these initiatives led to UTAS achieving a STARS Gold rating in 2022. Since then, a new set of initiatives has been introduced to support UTAS' aim to achieve a STARS Platinum rating in 2025. As only 13 of the 591 global universities that have ever earned a STARS rating have achieved Platinum status, this is a significant and ambitious aim.

With regards to the THE Impact Rankings, UTAS has progressively improved its position since 2019. In 2022 and 2023, UTAS ranked the number one tertiary institution globally for Climate Action (SDG 13). In 2022, UTAS ranked number 25 globally for the overall ranking and jumped to number 5 globally in 2023.¹⁷ Key contributors to its ability to achieve this impressive ranking are UTAS' [Strategic Framework for Sustainability](#) and [Sustainability Policy](#), which are directly informed by the SDGs. Forensic assessment of the THE Impact Rankings scoring has also helped UTAS design initiatives to achieve its desired impact outcomes locally, while also improving its recognition in the rankings.

¹⁷Times Higher Education. (27 April 2022). Impact Rankings 2022: climate action. Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2022. Retrieved 11 February 2023 from https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/impact/2022/climate-action#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/undefined

Chapter 5: A quick 6-step guide to selecting a framework

In this chapter, we run through some of the key points that HEIs should consider in the early stages of selecting and adopting a sustainability framework.

Step 1: Undertake an analysis of your institution's existing sustainability efforts to determine priority areas

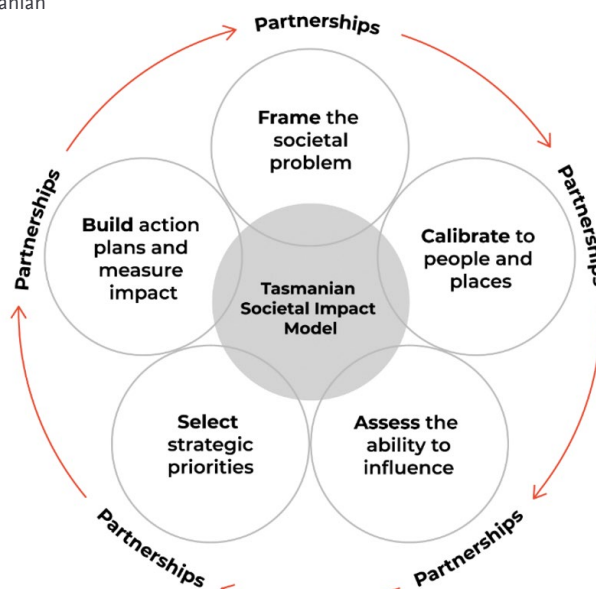
This includes identifying the societal risks and opportunities that are important in your locality and mapping your institutional strengths and weaknesses in these areas. It also includes establishing how your community and partnerships contribute to your priorities. Importantly, it also involves looking at how your surroundings and collaborators benefit from their relationship with your institution. For example, research shows that universities have a positive economic impact on their local communities by attracting diverse students, funding, and innovation to their campuses that result in higher wages and productivity for the surrounding areas.¹⁸ One study shows that a 10 percent increase in the number of universities per person correlates with a 0.4 percent higher future GDP per person in that region.¹⁹ These positive flow-on effects include cross-licensing technologies to the private sector, developing local businesses out of academic projects and academics consulting for local businesses.

The University of Tasmania in Australia and Elsevier have published the [Tasmanian Societal Impact Model \(TSIM\) Playbook](#), a freely available guide to help institutions plan for and amplify their societal impact.

The TSIM's five stages are designed to support your institution in identifying and prioritizing specific societal risks and opportunities to address (see Figure 11). These are areas where research capabilities are robust, where educational capacity is strong, and where effective partnerships and community engagement have been (or can be) readily established for greater influence.²⁰

This analysis leads to strategic priority setting; the areas that are both important for society and where you have high potential to influence become clear investment priorities. And those priorities feed into action plans that translate activity into actual impact that can be measured and tracked.²¹

Figure 10: The five steps of the Tasmanian Societal Impact Model.



Step 2: Engage stakeholders and partners

Gaining the support of students, staff and faculty on campus, along with alumni and the local community, is invaluable for gathering the data you will need – not only for these early steps, but for later tracking and reporting. It will also help you gain buy-in for your institution’s sustainability initiatives.

Clear communication is important and there are a few points worth bearing in mind when reaching out to stakeholders.

- **Keep it simple:** Communicate your goals and progress against them in plain language and avoid jargon. Define what ‘sustainability’ means within the context of your institution. Consider explaining the Sustainable Development Goals – they can help to contextualize your internal goals and participation within a framework.
- **Ensure communication isn’t one way:** Including calls to action and communicating exactly how stakeholders can contribute to the institution’s sustainability goals can accelerate progress toward meeting them. Encouraging students and staff to mobilize on issues that matter to them can increase the sense of community and create a shared culture within your institution. In addition, the participation of stakeholders increases the pool of inspiration and ideas you can draw on to find innovative solutions to sustainability challenges.

Once assessment has taken place, it’s important to be accountable by reporting back to stakeholders on the results. In fact, regular, clear sustainability reporting will also help your institution align with the SDGs - Goal 16 calls for the development of “effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels,” while Goal 17 calls for all organizations to support knowledge exchange, identify good practices and strengthen stakeholders’ engagement.¹⁰

In all communications, it’s important to address weaknesses as well as strengths: This level of transparency is often accompanied by an element of reputational risk, but when it comes to sustainability, only focusing on successes can invite accusations of greenwashing. It is often better to acknowledge areas of weakness and communicate plans on how these areas will be addressed in the future. This will further your organization’s reputation as a leader in transparent sustainability communication and action.

It’s also important to work closely with other institutions, organizations, businesses and governments to share knowledge, resources and best practices. This will strengthen your institution’s network of support and amplify the impact of your sustainability initiatives.

10) United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved 23 January 2023 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

18) Moretti, E. (2004). Estimating the social return to higher education: evidence from longitudinal and repeated cross-sectional data. *Journal of Econometrics*, 121, 175 - 212. <https://eml.berkeley.edu/~moretti/secret.pdf>

19) Valero, A., & Van Reenen, J. (2019). The economic impact of universities: Evidence from across the globe. *Economics of Education Review*, 68, 53 - 67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2018.09.001>

20) University of Tasmania and Elsevier. (2023). The Tasmanian Societal Impact Model (TSIM) Playbook. Retrieved 18 April 2023 from <https://www.societalimpactmodel.org/publications/21252030percent20Agendapercent20forpercent20Sustainablepercent20Developmentpercent20web.pdf>

21) Schultz, R. (2020). Closing the Gap and the Sustainable Development Goals: listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 44(1), 11–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12958>

Step 3: Decide exactly what you want to measure and establish a baseline

As outlined in Chapter 2, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is an independent, non-profit organization that publishes a set of freely available global standards to help organizations understand and report on their impacts on the economy, environment and people in a consistent way.

They are designed as an [easy-to-use modular set](#), delivering an inclusive picture of an organization's activities, their related impacts and how they are managed.¹²

These standards are also a useful tool to help your institution identify the sustainability activities you want to measure. For example, is the impact of research in relevant fields important? Do you want to track how green your campus is? Or how sustainability is reflected in your curricula?

Your institution will also need to establish a baseline from which you can measure progress – this requires gathering the data necessary to form a clear picture of your current practices and performance in the areas you've identified.

Step 4: If relevant, determine how the priorities and targets you've identified align to the SDGs

Once you have a clear sense of your priorities, you may find it useful to align them to the Sustainable Development Goals. There are a number of resources available to help you do this, including the [SDG Compass](#) and the [UN Sustainable Development Goals website](#), as well as the GRI's guidance for [Business Reporting on the SDGs](#).

Examining sectoral policies and priorities at the national and subnational levels can also provide a useful springboard for this alignment process.

Example 1: Australian institutions may choose to focus on SDGs related to development indicators for First Nations Australians. Security of their rights to territories, lands and natural resources, for example, could be addressed by acting on SDG 2 (No Hunger), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 14 (Life on Land), SDG 15 (Life Below Water) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).²¹

Example 2: On the other hand, New York institutions may want to focus on the five SDGs prioritized by New York City's 2019 Voluntary Local Review of SDGs: Quality Education (SDG 4), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), Climate Action (SDG 13) and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16).¹⁵

Step 5: Select a framework!

The information you've gathered in the first four steps, along with the analysis in this document, can help you identify the framework that best aligns with your institution's goals, culture, existing systems and overall mission.

Important points to consider include:

- **Purpose:** Does the framework's purpose align with your institution's mission and goals for sustainability, who you want to communicate the results to, and what matters to them?
- **Eligibility/scope:** Are you looking for a national or international framework? If you are an Indonesian institution, your shortlist might include the Indonesia-based UI GreenMetric, but not the UK-based People & Planet. Also, does your institution fit the participation qualifications? For example, requirements for the QS Sustainability Rankings include an appearance in the previous QS World University Rankings.

12) GRI. The global standards for sustainability impacts. Retrieved 12 April 2023 from <https://www.globalreporting.org/standards>

15) SOS – Students organising for Sustainability United Kingdom. Sustainability Skills Survey. Retrieved 5 April 2023 from <https://www.sos-uk.org/research/sustainability-skills-survey>

21) Schultz, R. (2020). Closing the Gap and the Sustainable Development Goals: listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 44(1), 11–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12958>

- **Costs and efforts:** What are the costs associated with a carbon assessment or an environmental assessment? Most of the frameworks require annual data submissions so it's important to think about how many employee hours are required to conduct the data collection (and report on your results). The number of indicators is a good indication of the degree of resource involved, i.e., a framework with fewer indicators may be a good entry point if you are just starting out on your sustainability journey. You should also consider whether the access model requires you to purchase a membership subscription. Finally, you should consider the level of support and extra services provided by the framework. **Participating institutions and countries:** You may choose to opt for a sustainability framework that is more widely used by HEIs in your country or region. Or if there are specific universities you'd like to benchmark against, it can be useful to find out which frameworks they use.
- **Methodology and data:** It's important to check what data each framework requires and whether you already have that data to hand, or can access/collect it. Some data collection exercises, such as carbon emissions assessments, range in complexity and may require a trained professional.
- **Topics and SDGs included in the analysis:** Do they reflect the material concerns of your institution? Are they areas in which you can - and should - make meaningful changes? If you followed Step 4 in this chapter and determined how the priorities and targets you've identified align with the SDGs, you can use the [matrix](#) developed for this report to identify which framework most closely reflects your assessment.

Step 6: Get to grips with your chosen framework and its requirements

Once you've decided which framework best suits your institution's needs, it's important to familiarize yourself with the concepts, terminology and specifications. This will help to ensure that you comply with any necessary requirements; for example, provide the right data in the right format within the timeframe required. Most of the frameworks evaluated in this guide have annual assessment rounds, which promote regular reporting cycles, allowing organizations to track their progress against their own goals and the achievements of their peers.

Finally, it's important to note that selecting the framework is only the start of your institution's assessment and reporting journey. There are other tasks to tackle. For example, it's important to have tools and strategies in place to understand performance against the framework's requirements. These include benchmarking, monitoring and reporting on key performance indicators (KPIs). Tracking performance enables your institution to evaluate which interventions are successful over time. It also equips you with the data you need to build capacity for ongoing engagement in sustainability. For example, you can identify what kind of training, education and professional development opportunities are needed for members of your institution's community.



Appendix A: Authors and contributors

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- Analysis and report writing: Eliza Kavanagh and Sophia Kesteven
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Appendix B: Methodology for Chapter 2

We chose a matrix approach for our analysis – [the matrix we created is freely available to access here](#). Using Google Sheets, we populated the rows with the individual indicators of each framework and the columns with the variables framing our analysis. This included which United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) or Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) category and subcategory the indicator best aligned with, how the indicator was weighted within the overall framework, and the requirements for completion. Where it was not possible to match an indicator to one of the GRI’s, we created a new sector-specific topic series called Higher Education Disclosures. In this series are seven categories specific to the higher education sector, such as Research and Curricula.

The matrix format produced a searchable database of indicators that we could filter and turn into tables and graphs. It enabled us to compare like-for-like, insofar as that is possible for the frameworks, which vary considerably in their methods.

The main shortcoming of the format was its rigidity. Some indicators aligned to multiple SDGs but including this in our analysis would have distorted the weightings. As such, we chose to include one SDG per indicator, opting for the one with the strongest alignment.

As a consequence some SDGs may be overestimated and some may be underestimated. The methodology evaluates STARS at the credit level rather than the indicator level and only allows each credit to be related to a single SDG. This means for example that the STARS Inclusive and Participatory Governance credit (which actually includes an indicator on “Gender equity in governance”) isn’t counted as contributing to SDG 5 Gender Equality.

Furthermore, specific to the STARS framework is that bonus points can be gained from the STARS Innovation & Leadership catalogue as they reward activities that go beyond what is captured in the core credits of STARS. These extra credits are added to an institution’s overall score with the total of bonus points being capped at 4. We have excluded bonus points from our analysis and as such, STARS ‘Innovation’ may be underrepresented here.

Most of the framework methodologies are published in a PDF format. To transfer them to the matrix, we had to manually copy and paste or type each of the 670 indicators in. Although we were thorough in this process, double- and triple-checking the matrix against the methodologies, the scale of the task leaves a margin for error.

Once we had populated the matrix with the indicators and our analysis of each variable, we encountered an outlier with the THE scoring method compared to the other five framework methodologies.

The THE Impact Rankings takes the top scores from three categories (SDGs), each worth 26 percent, plus

the score for SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), worth 22 percent. For example, if an institution performed best in SDGs 1-3, each of those categories would be weighted 26 percent, SDGs 4-16 would be weighted 0 percent, and SDG 17 would be weighted 22 percent.

This approach is presumably designed to make it easier for institutions to assess their performance in the SDGs that are most important to them. However, it makes it particularly hard to compare THE to the other frameworks. Instead of adding up to 100 percent, like the other frameworks, the weighted scores for THE add up to 438 percent.

To make them comparable with one another, we scaled the THE scores to 100 percent. This is not a perfect approach as the indicators would be much more strongly weighted in the actual score, but it was the best means of achieving comparability. For HEIs intending to apply to THE, we advise using the unscaled data in the matrix and selecting their SDGs of choice.

We scored the THE Impact Rankings and the STARS framework as the easiest to align with the SDGs.

QS Sustainability Rankings 4.4	People & Planet University League 4.1	UI GreenMetric 3.7
Sustainability Leadership Scorecard 4.3	STARS 1.8	THE Impact Rankings 1.2

Figure 11: The process of linking each framework’s indicators to their most closely related SDG and target was assigned a score out of 7, with 1 being very easy and 7 very difficult. The assessment was a qualitative one determined by how clearly the framework’s documentation explicitly linked to the SDGs.

Appendix C: Summary of each framework

	People & Planet University League	QS Sustainability Rankings	Sustainability Leadership Scorecard
Established	2007	2021	2018
Organisation	People & Planet, a UK-based student campaign group.	Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a UK-based company that specializes in education and study abroad.	AUDE (the Association of University Directors of Estates) and EAUC (the Alliance for Sustainability Leadership in Education).
Purpose	To provide a comprehensive and independent league table of UK universities ranked by environmental and ethical performance.	To provide a comprehensive and independent ranking of universities worldwide based on their sustainability performance.	To assess and track the sustainability performance of universities, colleges and post 16 year old education institutions in the UK and Ireland and to further education.
Best for	UK-based institutions focused on reporting transparency and communication.	Institutions looking to assess the impact of their research output on sustainability, and to compare their sustainability performance with other institutions and communicate their progress.	Institutions in the UK and Ireland looking to identify their strengths, assess their alignment with chosen SDGs, and discover areas for improvement in sustainability performance.
Timing	Annual	Annual	Annual
Recognition type	Ranking	Ranking	Ranking
Funding model	Funded by People & Planet – a UK-based charity, which is supported by donations, grants and revenues from its campaigns and activities.	Funded by QS – a for-profit company, which generates revenues from its various services, such as rankings, consulting and events.	Funded through membership fees and participation fees paid by colleges and universities that participate in the program.

Table 3: Summary of the six sustainability assessment and reporting frameworks.

STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System)	THE Impact Rankings	UI GreenMetric
2010	2019	2010
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), a membership-based organization consisting of colleges and universities in the United States and Canada.	Times Higher Education (THE), a UK-based provider of data, insights and expertise on higher education worldwide.	University of Indonesia (Universitas Indonesia), a public university in Depok, West Java and Salemba, Jakarta, Indonesia.
To provide a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance.	To provide a ranking of universities based on their performance in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	To provide a comprehensive and independent ranking of universities based on their environmental sustainability performance.
Institutions that want a comprehensive assessment of their social and environmental sustainability performance, and to benchmark themselves against other institutions internationally.	Institutions looking to assess and compare their contribution to meeting the SDGs and communicate their progress to others.	Institutions looking to improve their environmental performance and communicate their progress to others.
Institutions can apply at any time and ratings are valid for three years	Annual	Annual
Rating	Ranking	Ranking
Funded through membership fees and participation fees participation fees paid by colleges and universities that participate in the program	Funded by Times Higher Education – a for-profit company, which generates revenues from its various services, such as rankings, consulting and events.	Funded by the Universitas Indonesia (UI), which provides the resources and expertise to support the development and implementation of the framework.

	People & Planet University League	QS Sustainability Rankings	Sustainability Leadership Scorecard
Eligibility	Every UK university that has approved fee cap status and degree-awarding powers. To be eligible for the 2022/23 edition, universities that were not included in the 2021 edition must be registered with Universities UK.	Institutions must have been included in the previous QS World University Ranking, have a publicly available sustainability policy or strategy, and have evidence of at least two out of four SDG research metrics.	All EAUC and AUDE members in the UK and Ireland automatically have access. Other institutions must pay a fee.
Cost	Free	Free	Free for EAUC and AUDE members in the UK and Ireland. There is an annual fee of US \$150 for international institutions.
Scope of focus	UK	Global	UK and Ireland. Available global.
Number of participating institutions and countries	153 institutions (2022) from the UK.	700 institutions (2022) from at least 68 countries	76 (2020) institutions from the UK and Ireland.
Participation	All eligible universities are assessed (no opt in or opt out)	Voluntary	Voluntary
Link to Methodology	Methodology (People & Planet, 2023)	QS World University Rankings: Sustainability (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2022)	Not publicly available. The general user guide and webinar are available on: https://www.eauc.org.uk/sustainability_leadership_scorecard
Methodology and data	Weighted assessment of a range of environmental and ethical indicators based on publicly available information on the institutions' websites and the Higher Education Statistics Agency Estates Management Record.	Weighted assessment of a range of indicators based on self-reported data from institutions, as well as data pulled from existing QS data sets (for example, its Academic Reputation Index) and external sources, such as Elsevier's Scopus database.	A scorecard with four overarching categories and 18 subcategories, each assessed according to eight indicators, which the institutions score themselves out of 4. Institutions do not need to provide data, beyond completing the scorecard. They are directed to external tools to support them in their assessment.

5) 1,147 institutions have registered to use the STARS Reporting Tool, of which 591 have earned a STARS rating. Of those 591, 316 have an active rating while 275 have a rating that has expired (ratings remain valid for three years). Figures current as of 13 April 2023.

STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System)	THE Impact Rankings	UI GreenMetric
Any college or university may participate. Other types of secondary, post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions are also welcome.	The rankings are open to any university that teaches at either undergraduate or postgraduate level. Although research activities form part of the methodology, there is no minimum research requirement for participation.	Any college or university may participate.
Free at basic level, with subscription offered. Discounts available depending on AASHE membership and income.	Free	Free
Global	Global	Global
316 institutions (April 2023) from 13 countries have an active STARS rating. ⁵	1,591 institutions (2023) from 112 countries.	1,050 institutions (2022) from 85 countries.
Voluntary	Voluntary	Voluntary
STARS Technical Manual (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, 2019)	Impact Rankings Methodology 2023 Version 1.2 (Times Higher Education, 2023)	Guidelines (UI GreenMetric, 2022)
STARS includes a comprehensive set of sustainability indicators. The assessment is based on self-reported data from participating institutions.	The ranking is based on a range of indicators that assess performance across all 17 SDGs using a balanced scorecard approach. Universities' performance is analyzed based on self-reported data from participating institutions as well as publicly available data, and data from THE's data partners (including Elsevier's Scopus database). In 2023, THE changed the methodology for the overall rankings, now averaging the score with the previous year. For universities that are new to the rankings, THE will use the initial year's score by itself.	The assessment is based on self-reported data from institutions on a range of indicators. The university earns in proportion to its policies and practices for each indicator. A predetermined scale, based on points earned for the indicators, is then used to determine the total point for each category.

	People & Planet University League	QS Sustainability Rankings	Sustainability Leadership Scorecard
Topics included in the analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and strategy • Environmental auditing and management systems • Managing carbon • Sustainable food • Ethical investment and banking • Ethical careers and recruitment • Staff and human resources • Workers' rights • Staff and student engagement • Education for sustainable development • Energy sources • Waste and recycling • Carbon reduction • Water reduction 	<p>Social impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality • Knowledge exchange • Impact of education • Employability and opportunities • Quality of life <p>Environmental Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable institutions • Sustainable education • Sustainable research 	<p>Leadership and Governance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and wellbeing • Leadership • Risk • Staff engagement and human resources <p>Estates and Operations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel and transport • Water • Resource efficiency and waste • Construction and renovation • Energy • Biodiversity • Climate change adaptation <p>Partnership and Engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and public engagement • Business and industry interface • Food and drink • Procurement and supplier engagement <p>Learning, Teaching and Research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research • Student engagement • Learning and teaching

STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System)	THE Impact Rankings	UI GreenMetric
<p>Institutional characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional characteristics <p>Academics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Research <p>Engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus engagement • Public engagement <p>Operations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air and climate • Buildings • Energy • Food and dining • Grounds • Purchasing • Transportation • Waste • Water <p>Planning and administration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination and planning • Diversity and affordability • Investment and finance • Wellbeing and work <p>Innovation and leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation and leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDG 1 No poverty • SDG 2 Zero hunger • SDG 3 Good health and well-being • SDG 4 Quality education • SDG 5 Gender equality • SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation • SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy • SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth • SDG 9 Industry, innovation, and infrastructure • SDG 10 Reduced inequalities • SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities • SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production • SDG 13 Climate action • SDG 14 Life below water • SDG 15 Life on land • SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions • SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting and infrastructure • Energy and climate change • Waste • Water • Transportation • Education and research

	People & Planet University League	QS Sustainability Rankings	Sustainability Leadership Scorecard
Number of indicators ⁶	88	32	144
Number of SDGs covered	14	9	15
SDG alignment ^{*7}	7	4	4
Access to results	Publicly available, with the option to purchase full datasets.	Publicly available.	Institutions choose whether to make their results public or not. SLS publishes an industry analysis that is not university-specific.
Latest Rankings	2022/23 People & Planet University League	QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2023	Sustainability Leadership Scorecard Annual Report 2020
Top 10 ranked/rated universities	The following universities are all in the UK. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cardiff Metropolitan University 2. University of Bedfordshire 3. Manchester Metropolitan University 4. University of Reading 5. University of the Arts London 6. University of Exeter 7. University College London 8. University of Greenwich 9. University of Salford 10. Bangor University 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University of California, Berkeley (US) 2. University of Toronto (Canada) 3. University of British Columbia (Canada) 4. University of Edinburgh (UK) 5. University of New South Wales (Australia) 6. University of Sydney (Australia) 7. University of Tokyo (Japan) 8. University of Pennsylvania (US) 9. Yale University (US) 10. University of Auckland (New Zealand) 	SLS does not produce a ranking, only an annual sector report.

6) ¹These numbers are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the total number of indicators per framework. Figures are impacted by variations in the terms used to refer to the indicators (for example, STARS uses the term credits) and how their scoring frameworks are structured. This makes comparisons challenging.

7) 1 = Each indicator explicitly aligns to an SDG Target. 2 = Some indicators explicitly align to an SDG Target.
3 = Each indicator explicitly aligns to an SDG Goal. 4 = Some indicators explicitly align to an SDG Goal.
5 = Each category explicitly aligns to an SDG Goal. 6 = The framework refers to specific SDG Goals.
7 = The framework refers generally to the SDGs. 8 = The framework does not refer to the SDGs.

STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System)	THE Impact Rankings	UI GreenMetric
63	251	64
15	17	9
4	2	5
Publicly available.	Publicly available.	Publicly available.
STARS Participants & Reports	Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2022	UI GreenMetric Overall Rankings 2022
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Université de Sherbrooke (Canada) 2. University of California, Irvine (US) 3. Colorado State University (US) 4. Arizona State University (US) 5. Cornell University (US) 6. Thompson Rivers University (Canada) 7. University of New Hampshire (US) 8. University of Connecticut (US) 9. Stanford University (US) 10. State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (US) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Western Sydney University (Australia) 2. University of Manchester (UK) 3. Queen's University (Canada) 4. Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia) 5. University of Tasmania (Australia) 6. Arizona State University (Tempe) (US) 7. University of Alberta (Canada) 8. RMIT University (Australia) (equal 7th) 9. Aalborg University (Denmark) 10. University of Victoria (Canada) (equal 9th) 11. Western University (Canada) (equal 9th) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wageningen University & Research (the Netherlands) 2. Nottingham Trent University (UK) 3. University of Nottingham (UK) 4. University of Groningen (the Netherlands) 5. University of California, Davis (US) 6. Umwelt-Campus Birkenfeld (Trier University of Applied Sciences) (Germany) 7. University of College Cork (Ireland) 8. University of Connecticut (US) 9. Universität Bremen (Germany) 10. Universidade de São Paulo USP (Brazil)

Appendix D: The importance assigned to individual topic series categories per sustainability framework

Importance per category of the GRI topic series, in addition to the Higher Education Disclosures topic series developed for this report per framework.

Category	Topic series	Category	QS Sustainability Rankings	THE Impact rankings	Sustainability Leadership Scorecard	STARS	UI GreenMetric	People & Planet University League
Developed by the authors	Higher Education Disclosures	Research	32%	28%	10%	9%	5%	1%
		Curricula	17%	2%	14%	19%	4%	5%
		Student/Faculty Engagement	19%	5%	6%	7%	2%	2%
		Capacity-Building and Outreach	1%	8%	8%	2%	6%	1%
		Admission/Entry Practices	0%	9%	0%	2%	0%	0%
		Innovation	0%	4%	1%	4%	1%	1%
Educational Attainment	1%	1%						
Global Reporting Initiative	Environmental	Emissions	8%	3%	6%	8%	22%	22%
		Energy	0%	5%	2%	9%	16%	7%
		Waste	0%	5%	1%	6%	18%	8%
		Water and effluents	0%	6%	3%	5%	11%	8%
		Environmental compliance	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	19%
		Biodiversity	0%	3%	3%	1%	3%	0%
		Materials	0%	1%	5%	0%	0%	3%
	Supplier environmental assessment	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	
	Social	Training and education	8%	0%	4%	3%	0%	4%
		Employment	5%	2%	2%	1%	0%	4%
		Diversity and equal opportunity	6%	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%
		Local communities	0%	2%	4%	4%	1%	0%
		Public policy, customer health	2%	4%	0%	1%	0%	0%
		Occupational health and safety	0%	0%	5%	1%	1%	0%
		Labor/management relations	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%
		Non-discrimination	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%
		Supplier social assessment	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
	Security practices	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	
	Freedom of association and child labor	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	
	Economic	Procurement practices	1%	1%	9%	6%	0%	1%
		Indirect economic impacts	1%	2%	0%	4%	0%	9%
		Economic performance	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
		Anti-corruption	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Management approach	Management approach	0%	3%	13%	3%	0%	2%
	General disclosures	General disclosures	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%

Figure 12: Importance per category of the GRI topic series, in addition to the Higher Education Disclosures topic series developed for this report per framework

Appendix E: Percentage of the frameworks' scoring attributable to the SDGs

The graphic shows the distributed weighting of the SDGs for each sustainability framework.

The THE Impact Ranking is not included because participants' top 3 SDGs are weighted the most highly and is therefore bespoke to each institution. Universities can supply THE Impact Ranking with information for all SDGs but in the final score THE will choose the 3 highest scoring SDGs (each 26%) plus SDG 17 (22% - mandatory to submit).

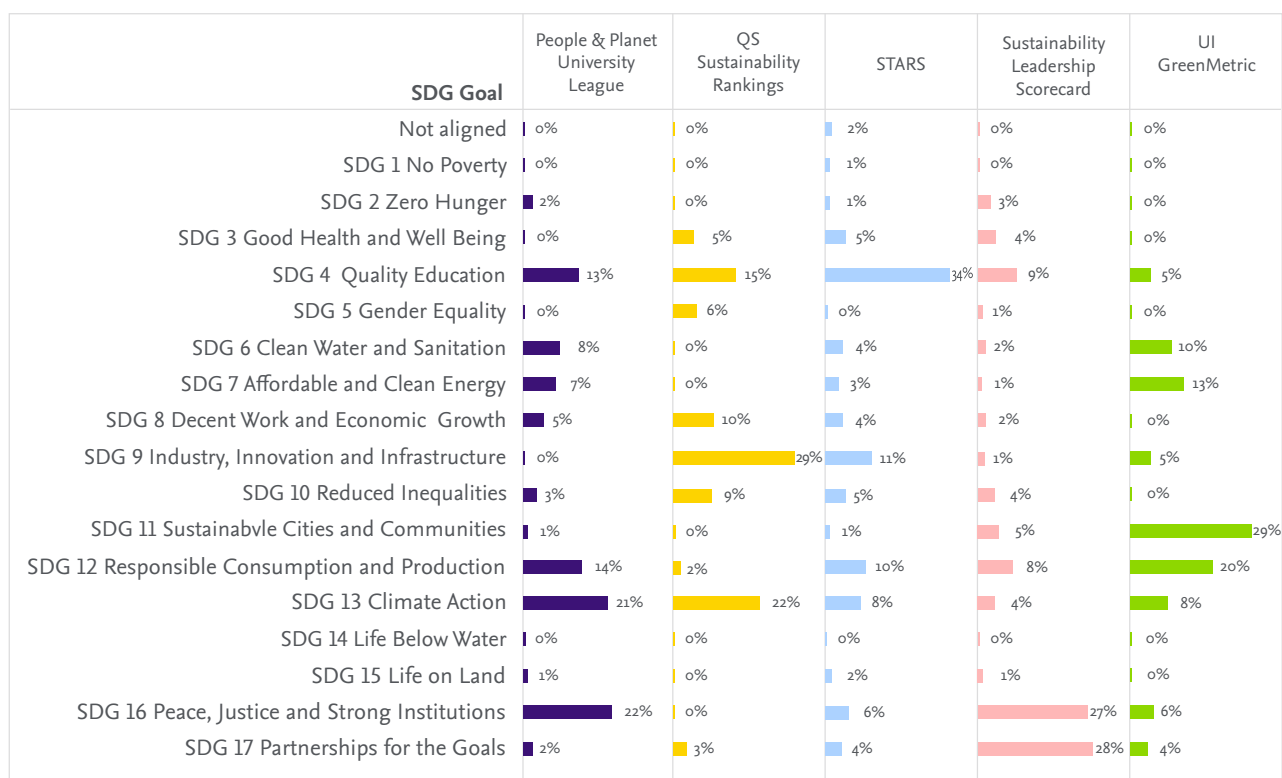




Figure 13: Percentage of the frameworks' scoring attributable to the SDGs.

Appendix F:

University of Tasmania's SDG contextualization document

This document was developed by a working group of the UTAS Sustainability Committee (including academics, professional staff and students) with the purpose of summarising relevant aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals in the UTAS context and providing examples of UTAS initiatives to facilitate the mapping of UTAS education, research and other activities to the SDGs.

SDG	SDG Summary	What the university is doing in this space
 <p data-bbox="151 1111 295 1196">End poverty in all its forms everywhere</p>	<p data-bbox="368 913 847 1182"><i>No Poverty</i> aims to reduce poverty in all its dimensions including implementing social protection systems, providing equal rights to economic and natural resources and access to basic services, reducing exposure and vulnerability to disasters, or creating sound policy frameworks to support poverty eradication actions.</p>	<p data-bbox="879 913 1450 1285">The University supports the eradication of poverty by providing regional and accessible education in Tasmania including via the provision of scholarships and alternative learning pathways - acknowledging that education builds human capital and facilitates access to quality jobs. We seek to enable social and economic development for all Tasmanians including Indigenous, rural, and disadvantaged communities and improve community health and wellbeing so individuals can reach their potential.</p>
 <p data-bbox="151 1570 338 1771">End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</p>	<p data-bbox="368 1368 847 1570"><i>Zero Hunger</i> aims to provide safe, nutritious and sufficient food for all through transforming agriculture and food systems to be more inclusive and sustainable, providing social protection for vulnerable persons and reducing food waste.</p>	<p data-bbox="879 1368 1450 1809">The University partners with government, business and community to encourage sustainable food production, improve delivery to and connection with markets. We support research into sustainable and innovative food production, while increasing the skills and employability of people in the rural sector. We actively explore approaches to enhance food security by addressing social inequities through on-campus programs and activities to allow access to food and through education to increase health literacy, climate change mitigation and adaptation in food systems, and supply chain management in agribusiness.</p>



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Good Health and Well-Being aims to ensure good health, including sexual, reproductive and mental health and promote wellbeing for all. This can be achieved through proactively reducing birth-related and young children's deaths, combating communicable diseases (including epidemics), reducing mortality from non-communicable diseases, accidents and pollution, and preventing and treating substance abuse. Ensuring access to quality essential health care information, services and medicines are key to achieve this goal.

Our University works with government and communities to improve the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians, and from Tasmania to the world, through medical research; educating future and current health workforce; improving quality and sustainability of healthcare and health systems; increasing educational attainment and health literacy; and addressing social inequities, local and global environmental challenges, and planetary health. The University recognises that Indigenous views of health include relationships to lands and waters, and health of Country.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Quality Education aims to ensure that quality lifelong education promotes sustainable development and lifestyles, including human rights, peace, global citizenship and appreciation of diverse cultures' contributions to the world. Quality education should be accessible, inclusive and equitable for people of all genders, orientation, abilities, indigeneity, ethnicity, socioeconomic means and other.

As a university, we seek to equip our students, teachers and mentors, to contribute to a sustainable future for Tasmania and the world. We strive to ensure that education is valued and accessible to all, to expand literacy, numeracy, knowledge and opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship. We provide purpose-built and flexible infrastructure, and engaging on-campus, distance and hybrid learning opportunities for various types of education, training, and preparedness to successfully and meaningfully engage in global society.



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Gender Equality aims to ensure gender equality by eliminating all forms of discrimination, unfair treatment and violence (including exploitation) against women, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and facilitating women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities in all aspects of political, economic and social life (e.g., by providing needed public services, infrastructure, equal rights to economic resources and financial services, social protection policies and laws).

Our University recognises that there are people of diverse gender identities. We aspire to have a positive impact on the lives and experience of Tasmanians by improving gender equity through teaching, research, policies, procedures, and targeted scholarships and programs.



Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

Clean Water and Sanitation aims to ensure access to safe, affordable drinking water, as well as adequate hygiene and sanitation as a basic human need and right. This goal acknowledges that water pollution, access and security are growing problems. Management strategies include improving water quality, usage efficiency, desalination, and wastewater treatment and recycling. Integrated water resource management across state and national boundaries must be equitable, sustainable and cooperative, involving local communities.

University research and education seeks to understand hydrological cycles, effects of water-borne diseases and pollutants on health, and to address local and global environmental water challenges. We partner with local communities and Indigenous knowledge holders to enhance water management. We work with industry to reduce water use and negative impacts on ecosystems to improve human and environmental health.



Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy

Affordable and Clean Energy aims to ensure universal access to well-established, affordable and modern clean energy services including renewable energy and energy efficiency by facilitating clean energy research and technology as well as improving sustainable energy infrastructure and decreasing energy use.

The University is committed to contributing to Tasmania being a leader in affordable and clean energy and efficient energy use. We will drive innovation for the global application of Tasmania’s renewable energy expertise, including hydroelectric, wind and marine platforms for offshore energy production. We also drive innovation for energy efficiency through our research and built environment programs.



Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all

Decent Work and Economic Growth aims to drive sustained and inclusive economic growth, create decent work for all, and improve living standards. This can be achieved through technological innovation, sustainable development policies, reducing youth unemployment, procurement policies, protecting labour rights, efficient resource use, and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation.

The University partners with government, business and communities to ensure that our students and graduates have opportunities to work in diverse, inclusive, innovative, sustainable existing and emerging industries. Our connection to Tasmania’s economy ensures we contribute to local innovation and provides opportunities to share our research and knowledge with the world. Tasmania’s environment uniquely places us to explore sustainable industries.



Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation

Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure aims to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and build quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure. This can be achieved through innovation, technological progress, and research enhancement to find lasting solutions to environmental, social, and economic challenges, including increased resource and energy efficiency.

The University is committed to develop services and infrastructure to promote sustainable industry innovation and adopt sound and novel technologies to meet global and regional industry needs. We encourage our students and staff to collaborate with industry, government, and local organisations to promote sustainable development in Tasmania. We offer scholarships and directly support students, including students from developing countries, to contribute to research and gain technological capabilities, creating more sustainable trends across industries.



Reduce inequality within and among countries

Reduced Inequalities aims to ensure equal opportunity and to empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, gender, ability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. This will ensure that vulnerable populations (including refugees and migrants, Indigenous peoples, older persons, people with disabilities and children) are not left out of progress.

The University is committed to reducing inequality by facilitating access to quality education. We have created a culture that ensures zero tolerance to all types of discrimination and awareness of the complexity of intersectionality. We provide alternative pathways as a non-traditional entry to our courses. Scholarships have been refocused to support students with the greatest needs. Students are supported throughout their learning journey.



Sustainable Cities and Communities aims to make cities safe, sustainable, healthy, and resilient. This will be achieved through focus areas in cities including accessible housing; sustainable and affordable transport systems; inclusive and green public spaces; protected cultural and natural heritage; and reduced environmental impacts.

The University adopts whole system thinking to promote interconnection across and within systems to create, maintain, and regenerate sustainable cities and communities. The University is contributing to sustainable cities through the creation and upgrading of its campuses, including future proofing against environmental disasters, reducing its carbon footprint, and providing public green spaces.



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Responsible Consumption and Production aims to ensure responsible and sustainable consumption and production. This will be achieved through the application of a circular economy that seeks to promote sustainable lifestyles, minimise material use, reduce waste and pollution, circulate products and materials, and decouple economic growth from environmental degradation. This can contribute substantially to poverty alleviation and the transition towards low-carbon and green economies.

The University consistently applies sustainability criteria when making procurement, resource, and waste management decisions. We work towards minimising our waste, with a long-term aspiration to achieve zero waste to landfill. We encourage our staff to consider the need of any purchase and, if the purchase is required, to choose environmentally and socially preferable products and services from companies committed to sustainability, to interrogate the supply chain with regard to modern slavery, and to support just and resilient local economies.



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Climate Action aims to take climate action encompassing mitigation and adaptation. It includes climate change measures incorporated into strategies and plans, using investment to support rapid decarbonisation of our economy, a focus on green jobs and sustainable, equitable and inclusive growth, improved education and awareness-raising, and increased institutional capacity to address climate risks, all fostered through cooperation.

The University acknowledges the climate emergency by being a signatory to the Race to Zero initiative. We are carbon neutral certified, are implementing an Emissions Reduction Strategic Plan, and have achieved full divestment from fossil fuel exposed investments. The University prioritises research on climate impacts and engages with community, business, and government to raise awareness, mitigate impacts, and contribute expertise to strategies and policies. Climate emergency causes, impacts, mitigation, and adaptation are the focus of a number of courses that we offer.



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources

Life Below Water aims to conserve and preserve our oceans and their resources. This requires an interdisciplinary approach and involves the sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture; reduction of ocean waste and pollution (including from land activities); blue and green economies; mitigation, adaptation and management of the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification; protection and restoration of marine and coastal environments; management of sustainable coastal and marine tourism; and national and international laws relating to marine systems.

The University offers a range of courses and research opportunities that leverages off the unique position of our island, our surrounding waters, the Southern Ocean and beyond. We have an interdisciplinary University research theme of Antarctic and Southern Ocean that aims to establish a national institute for Antarctic and Southern Ocean science and position ourselves as a model for the world. We partner with Indigenous knowledge holders to integrate Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and culture into emerging marine and freshwater management practices and to enhance the biodiversity and environmental health of Tasmania. The University aims to minimise ocean waste and pollution, including plastics and carbon emissions in all our activities.



Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

Life on Land aims to conserve and restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems and their services, including forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands. This can be achieved through managing ecosystems in a sustainable way, including by halting deforestation and increasing afforestation and reforestation in the case of forests; restoring degraded land and soil; halting biodiversity loss; preventing introduction and reducing the impact of invasive species; preventing species poaching, trafficking and extinction; fair and equitable sharing of natural resources and their benefits (including genetic resources); and integrating natural values into planning and development processes. The mobilisation of financial resources is key to achieve this goal.

The University's contribution to this goal includes researching and developing practical and ready-to-apply management methods for restoring degraded landscapes as well as improved processes for forestry and agriculture. Our teaching addresses terrestrial conservation issues in a multidisciplinary way including governance, sustainable agriculture, and restoration ecology. We partner with Indigenous knowledge holders to integrate Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and culture into emerging land management practices and to enhance the biodiversity and environmental health of Tasmania.



Promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies

Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions aims to promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies. Just societies can be achieved through reducing violence, corruption, exploitation, and abuse; developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions; protecting fundamental freedoms and ensuring access to information and justice; and transparent and inclusive decision making. Achieving this goal will enable individuals to reach their full potential by improving educational outcomes, health, and wellbeing.

The University supports the implementation of this goal by valuing diversity and subscribing to the fundamental values of honesty, integrity, responsibility, trust, respect, fairness and justice. It supports healthy, civil, and sustainable local and global societies through education, research, and community engagement.



Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

Partnerships for the Goals aims to revitalise partnerships through cooperation focusing on finance, technology, trade, and systemic issues. This goal can be achieved through resource and knowledge sharing; capacity building; the coordination, coherence, and respect of policies across borders; and universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory, and equitable multilateral trading system.

The University aims to achieve positive impacts and address disparities across Tasmania and beyond through partnerships with local communities, businesses and governments. We provide educational opportunities to support student success; encourage environmental stewardship; create fair, inclusive, and equitable communities; and provide fact-based information to support decision making.



