

10 000 young people to imagine a more sustainable higher

General summary: the main lessons

1. You said sustainable development?

An environmentally centred definition of "sustainable development"

Beyond the notion of **intergenerational linkage** (88%), definitions of Sustainable development primarily focus on its **environmental dimension**: 77% of definitions refer to the preservation of natural resources, 75% believe that this will be one of the major challenges of the twenty-first century and 58% address the theme of natural resources and biodiversity during their training.

Diverse perspectives?

We note that, on a subject as diverse as sustainable development, students are still **discernible by their field of study and gender**: engineering students have a technical approach, those in business schools concentrate on the economy, women are more aware of social issues and men more economic and environmental issues.

Furthermore, the **diversity of sustainable development**, which aims to place itself at the confluence of the three pillars which are ecology/environment, economics, and social, **potentially hinders full integration**.

"Sustainable development", a term synonymous with hope and opportunity for the future

A large majority of students (72%) consider sustainable development as **an opportunity to find alternatives and solutions to current crises**, and 71% even say that it is **a way to reinvent the way they want to live**. In a same vein, 93% said that sustainable development is **a major or important issue**.

A global ignorance of the issues of Sustainable Development, leading to high demand for information and assumptions of possible solutions

Optimism and voluntarism cannot hide a **lack of knowledge and comprehensive technique**, at least on the orders of magnitude. This shows de facto the low control of issues and areas for priority action. As a result, they are naturally seeking information, experiences and practical solutions, and are readily prepared to commit, as long as they are supported by their establishment. Most often, courses and school projects are perceived as too theoretical, and do not expose the issues - nor the related solutions - in a sufficiently balanced and pragmatic framework. Moreover, there remains a lack of regular involvement of professional specialists on Sustainable Development.

The transformation of courses could therefore be settled both from the content taught as from the manner to teach.

2. Sustainable development in higher education

The four main student expectations of their institutions

- **Broad introduction of Sustainable Development on campus:** The plebiscite was unanimously in favour of the introduction of sustainable development in their place of training, 98% of students think we need to introduce sustainable development in the establishment, both in the operation of the campus (92%) and on the course (73%);
- **Lessons seamless integrating sustainable development in all curriculums:** 80% of students want sustainable development to be integrated into the content of their training. In total, 67% of students who say they are ready to make of sustainable development a criterion for choosing their courses or their institutions, of which just over 32% believe that this can be an important criteria if not decisive;
- **Active learning based on practice,** as opposed to the standard approach that students perceive as too academic and too theoretical, failing to incorporate practical actions and concrete solutions;
- **More interaction with professionals and stakeholders:** For 84% of students, it is important to meet, whilst studying, the stakeholders of the professional world. Students are aware of the link between sustainable development issues and their future activity and estimate that it will be strongly influenced (50%) or partly influenced (41%) by them.

A vital link between the activism of students and the establishment of sustainable development

It appears that the presence of **an active student association**, with support from the university, **is fundamental for both a successful sustainable development policy, and also with regard to the wider student perception.**

This correlation is shown in conclusive results: the different levels of student activism and support from the university appear to affect the performance of the institution. Moreover, the inclusion of a sustainable development policy by the institution impacts perceptibility (respectively 93% when the student association is considered sufficiently active, 83% when the association is active but too quiet in terms of communication or not sufficiently supported by the university, 54% when there is no association).

The importance of an identified contact person on the campus

Even though **47% of students do not know who to contact on the issue of sustainable development within their institution**, it appears that having a supported, known and recognized sustainable development representative greatly contributes to the integration of the issue. In fact, it raises the feeling of consideration of sustainable development within the school by its students by a rate of more than 20%.

3. Students in action

A desire for change ...

Students share their **real desire to be agents of change on a daily basis**, on topics as diverse as food, energy, transport, training, etc. They are already doing so on a daily basis, even their motives may vary. It is clear that practical actions and simple everyday actions for students are the most easily modifiable and generate change.

Corroborating this element, the **desire to integrate this change in their training is advocated by 60% of the students.**

... Even though 60% of students feel powerless to act!

Students encounter many difficulties or the inability to act:

60% of respondents feel able to do "a little", while 20% would like to act but do not know how. Convinced of the need for, and importance of, the relationship between the administration and students, they highlight facing difficulties in building one, citing a lack of recognition from their institutions.

It is interesting to note that **30% of "passive" students say they would be willing to take action if doing so would be valued in their studies.**

Food and mobility as levers for action

Responsible food appears high on the agenda: it is in the eyes of students a simple and effective way to act responsibly, especially to fight against the emission levels of greenhouse gas emissions (83%). Followed by **sustainable mobility** (67%) and **decreased consumption of heating** (63%).

To the question "What should your university do to better address the challenges of sustainable development?", "Promoting responsible food" generated 56% (highest score). 49% rely on cooperation with other institutions, and 46% on the establishment of a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development on campus. Finally, to the priorities to be implemented within the establishment, those relating to the operation of the campus (energy issues first, responsible food, waste management) appear in the first plan (92%), followed by education projects (73%) and research (59%).

4. Students promoters of ideas

These ideas are taken directly from our analysis of the proposals by students and incorporate different recommendations emanating from this consultation.

Towards a committed strategy and a participative governance

No. 1.1: Move towards the establishment of ambitious commitments towards sustainable development, particularly through the implementation of the Green Plan (Section 55 of the Act Grenelle I).

No. 1.2: Create a steering structure dedicated to sustainable development within the university, provided with means to meet the challenges.

No. 1.3: Systematically involve students in the decision processes and subsequent actions.

No. 1.4: Establish a mechanism to involve and develop the student's participation for sustainable development (eg ECTS, contests, civic service).

For an innovative training adapted to the challenges of today and tomorrow

No. 2.1: Allow each student to acquire a knowledge base through the implementation of a day of awareness of sustainable development.

No. 2.2: Provide mandatory courses on sustainable development for a global and undifferentiated knowledge concerning the major issues of our society.

No. 2.3: Set up specific modules by programs.

No. 2.4: Decentralise disciplines and integrate sustainable development across the curriculum.

No. 2.5: Adopt an active learning, with less theory and more practice.

No. 2.6: Include external stakeholders.

No. 2.7: Train teachers and raise staff awareness of issues and practices of Sustainable Development.

Towards an exemplary management of campuses

No. 3.1: Introduce a more responsible food policy.

No. 3.2: Amplify actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (energy of the building and transport).

No. 3.3: Aim to save natural resources and recycle waste.

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