

Summary of the 2017/18 NUS Sustainability Skills Survey & Negative Environmental Impact Research

Introduction

In October and November 2017 the NUS ran a national survey of the students of higher education institutions in order to gauge the views of students on sustainability, the skills that they have or would like to receive training on and what they think their institution can do to improve on sustainability although not all questions in the survey were relevant to sustainability within Sheffield Hallam Students' Union or Sheffield Hallam University. As such this is a summary of the most relevant sustainability responses relating to Sheffield Hallam Students' Union.

The Green Impact team have also undertaken work to identify Sheffield Hallam Students' Union most significant negative impact on the environment through data on energy usage provided by Sheffield Hallam University's Estates team, waste produced from Veolia Waste Services and from internal reports in order to provide a focus for future sustainability projects.

The Survey

Sheffield Hallam Students' Union (SHSU) was one of 37 'institutions' to encourage students to participate that gained over 100 participants which meant that anonymous data from the responses was returned to SHSU. Four hundred and fifty four students at Sheffield Hallam University took part in the survey making it the 9th highest responder. Sheffield Hallam University has a student population of around 36,000 this survey represents about 1.3% of the student population. Some of the responses refer to Sheffield Hallam University as whole rather than just the Students' Union but give valuable insight in how the students perceive sustainability in a wider context.

The Responses

Below are the responses of six of the most relevant questions posed by the NUS Sustainability survey.

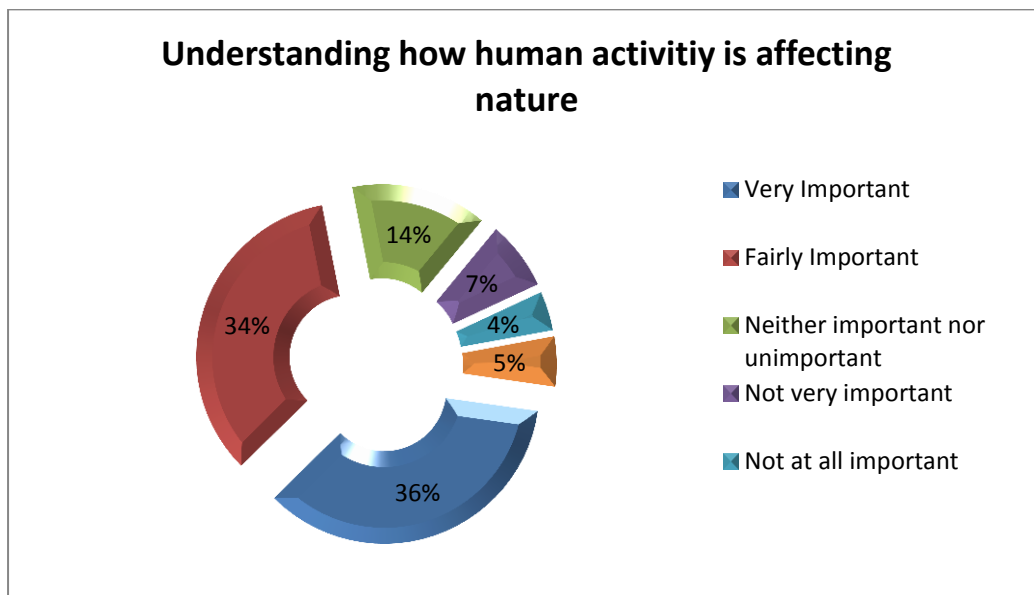


Figure 1

Students were asked to rate how important it was to them to gain an understanding of how human activity is affecting nature. From the results it can be seen that only 30% of the respondents do not think that gaining an understanding is not something that they wish to know more about during their time studying at university.

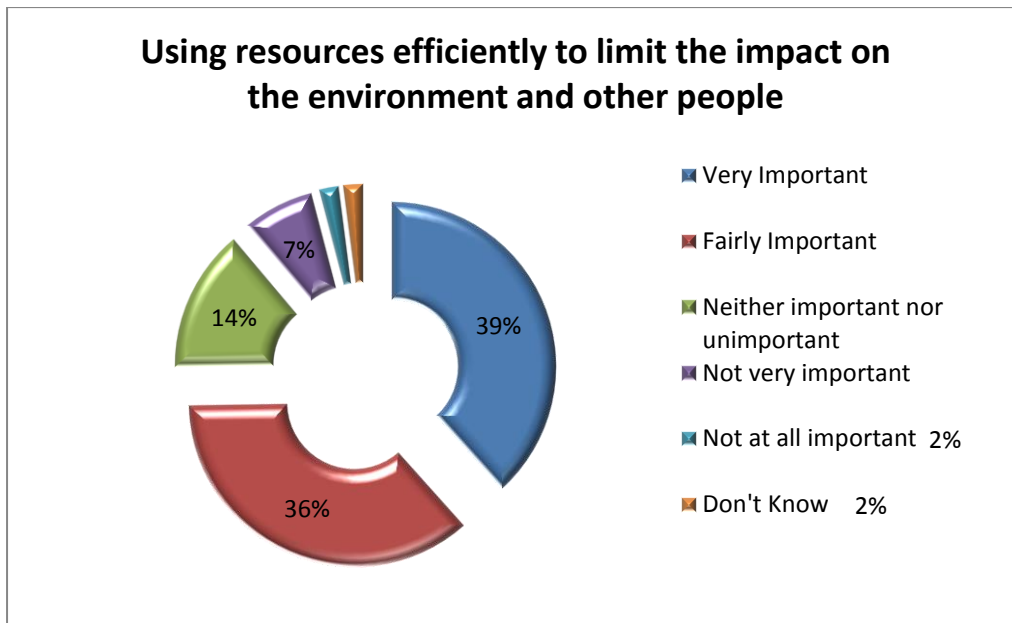


Figure 2

Figures 2 and 3 clearly shows that students want to learn the skills and knowledge that will help them to lessen their impact and the impact of any future organisation that they may be involved with on the environment and society as well as plan for the future, a key aspect of sustainability. As a students' union it will be our task to develop a strategy to help them achieve this.

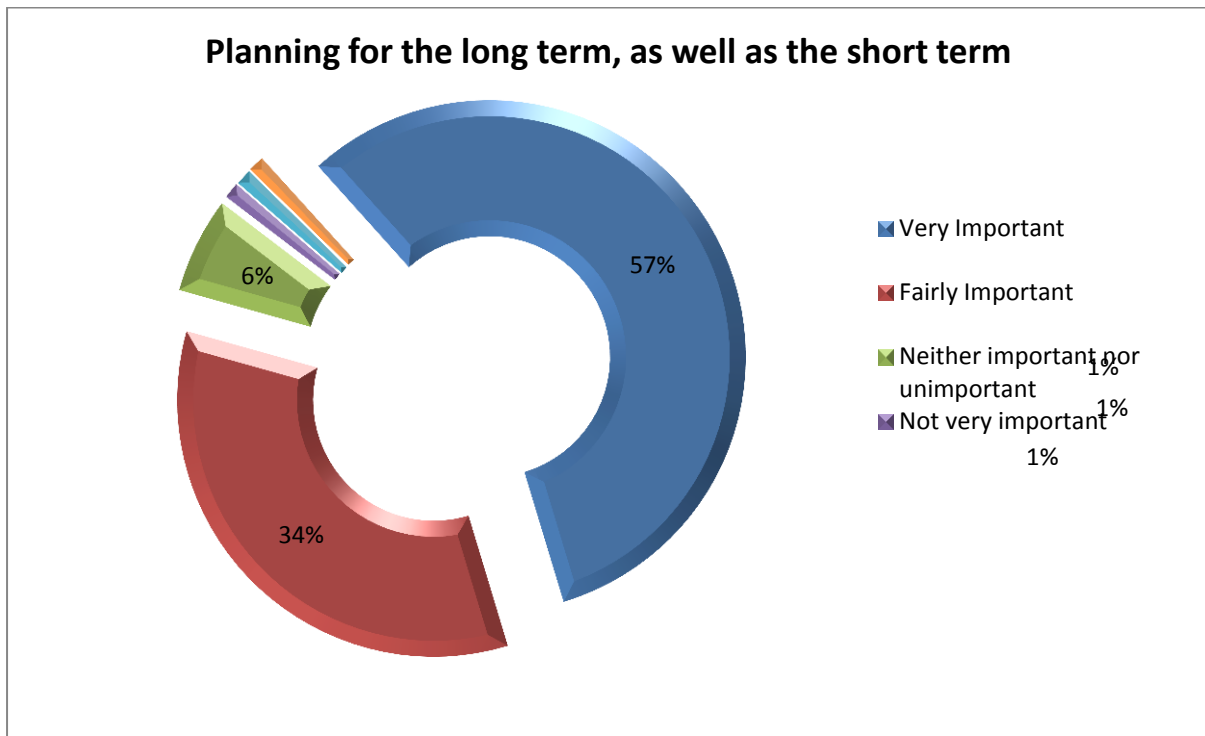


Figure 3

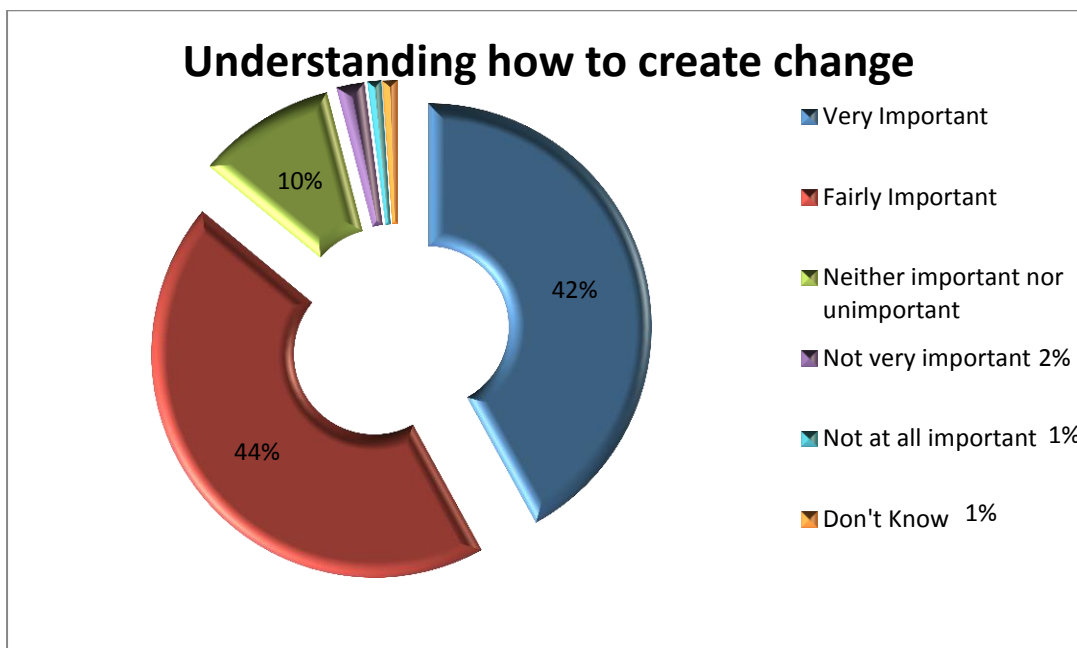


Figure 4

Figure 4 shows that 86% of the students that took part in the survey thought that understanding how to create change was either an important or very important skill. This was quite a broad question and did not refer directly to sustainability but shows that this was considered one of the most important skills that can be learnt whilst at university.

Figure 5 shows that students felt that the most relevant way to learn new skills and gain knowledge of how to help people and the environment was to offer work placements or work experience.

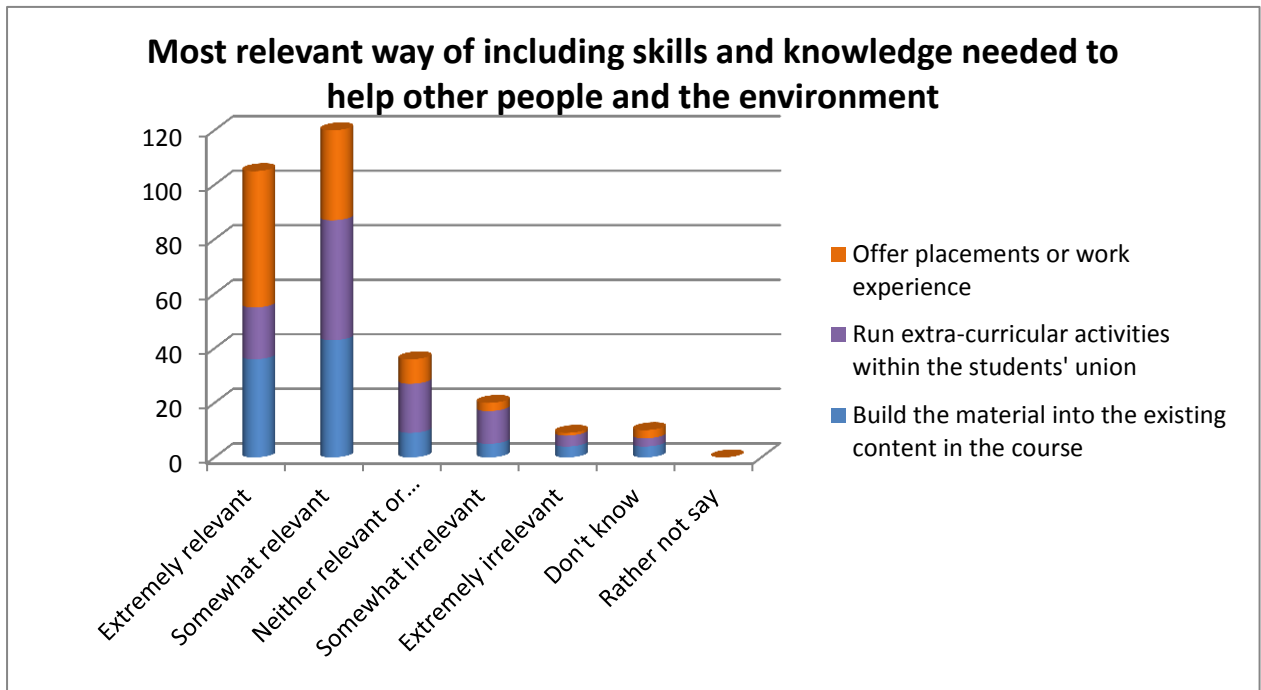


Figure 5

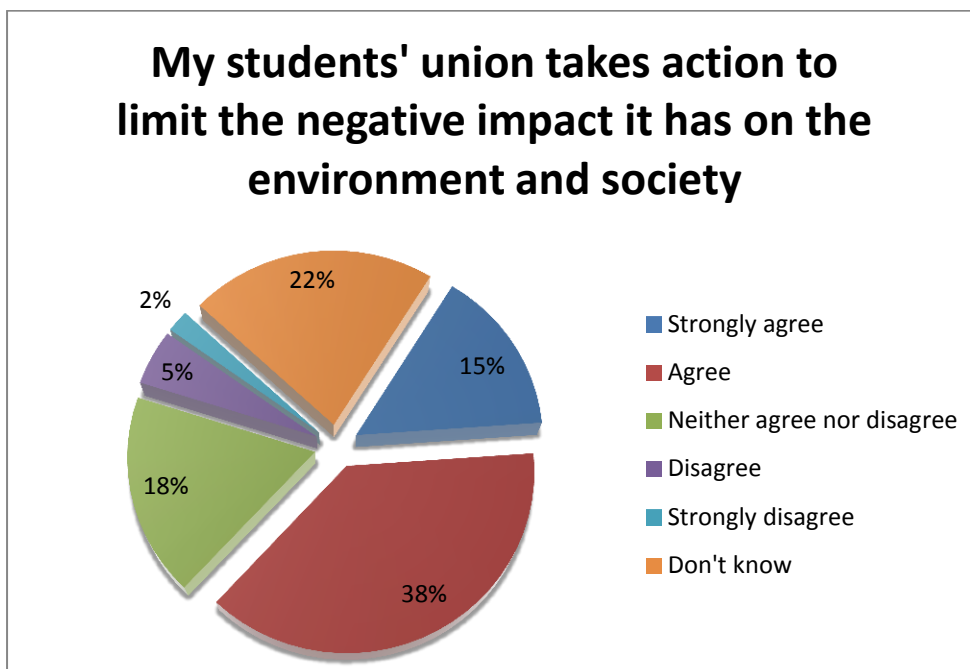


Figure 6

Figure 6 shows that whilst 53% of the students surveyed thought that Sheffield Hallam Students' Union takes action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment, 40% did not know or could not agree or disagree. This indicates that information about what Sheffield Hallam Students' Union does to minimise its impact on the environment and society is not reaching the student body.

Minimising the Negative Impact of SHSU on the Environment

All organisations have a negative impact on the environment from the waste they produce to the energy that they use.

Utilities

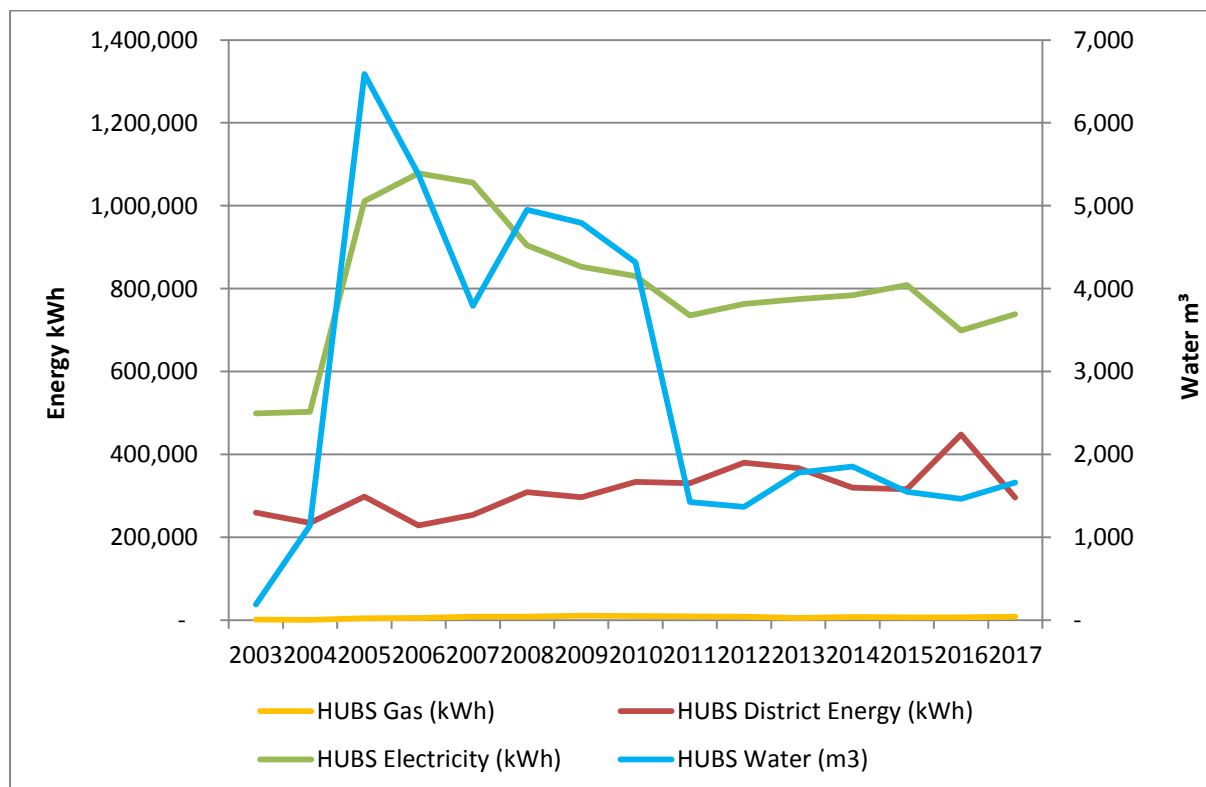


Figure 7

Figure 7 shows that since Sheffield Hallam Students' Union moved into the building in 2004 the utility usage has been on a downward trend as the usage of the building has changed over time. Since the closure of the nightclubs the usage of water and electricity dropped dramatically during which time the general usage of the building also dropped but as the building has started to revive its events calendar some of the utility usage has increased again. In 2016 there was a spike in district heating usage due to colder than average temperatures over the winter/spring period. SHSU has invested in more energy efficient lighting (LED and sensor technology) and has run a programme of heating review with the University of Hallam estates team to make the system more efficient.

Waste

Sheffield Hallam Students' Union is committed to zero to landfill waste and uses Veolia Waste Management to remove its waste. Veolia recycle glass, plastic, paper and metal products and convert food waste into fertiliser products that are used in the parks and green spaces in Sheffield. All other non-hazardous waste (e.g. refrigerators) is combusted for district heating which reduces landfill waste and is utilised by the SHSU. All hazardous waste such as refrigerators are disposed of and recycled as per the appropriate regulations.

Sheffield Hallam Students' Union has also joined the Last Straw campaign to reduce single non-biodegradable use straws and has introduced biodegradable straws and only gives them out on request in its commercial outlets. SHSU is also introducing reusable cups and is looking to introduce 100% recyclable disposable cups in Coffee Union.

Recommendations

From the NUS Sustainability survey it can be seen that students feel that sustainability is an important issue and would like to gain more knowledge and skills in learning how to affect change. This can be achieved through a number of means, course representatives liaising with course leaders to include more information within their courses, courses run by the Students' Union Skills and Development team that are specifically aimed at sustainability, talks and events geared towards fostering changes in sustainable development. Sheffield Hallam Students' Union will need to undertake feasibility studies in order to decide which course of action to take.

It can also be seen that students aren't aware of the steps that Sheffield Hallam Students' Union are taking to reduce its own negative impact on the environment and society and how the students can get involved with this. It is recommended that more is done to advertise this work and inform the students.

In order to reduce Sheffield Hallam Students' Union's energy usage the Union needs to engage more with Sheffield Hallam University to install more energy saving measures such as LED lighting where possible. SHSU has engaged with the University's Green Champion network and has started its own group of Green Champions to aid in this work.