

Student attitudes towards, and skills for, sustainable development

Summary I: Existing skills – the influence of further education
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September 2015



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Key:

First-year tracker (following responses from 2010 to 2014 from first-year students)

2012 cohort (following responses from 2012 first-years, 2013 second years and 2014 third-years)

I. Summary I: Existing skills – the influence of further education

Research into student attitudes towards, and skills for, sustainable development (SD) was conducted for a fifth consecutive year in 2014. This annual study:

- updates our understanding on student attitudes towards, and skills for, sustainable development through 3,775 first-year and 1,973 third-year respondents in academic year 2013/14;
- identifies trends in demands and expectations from first-year students new to university;
- tracks longitudinal demands and expectations from first-year students as they progress through their university career;
- analyses the longitudinal variability in 27,000 student responses between 2010 and 2014.

The research content repeated the previous questions to capture comparable longitudinal data. There was no reference to sustainable development in its promotion to reduce bias. Responses were weighted to reflect the demographic makeup of the UK student population.

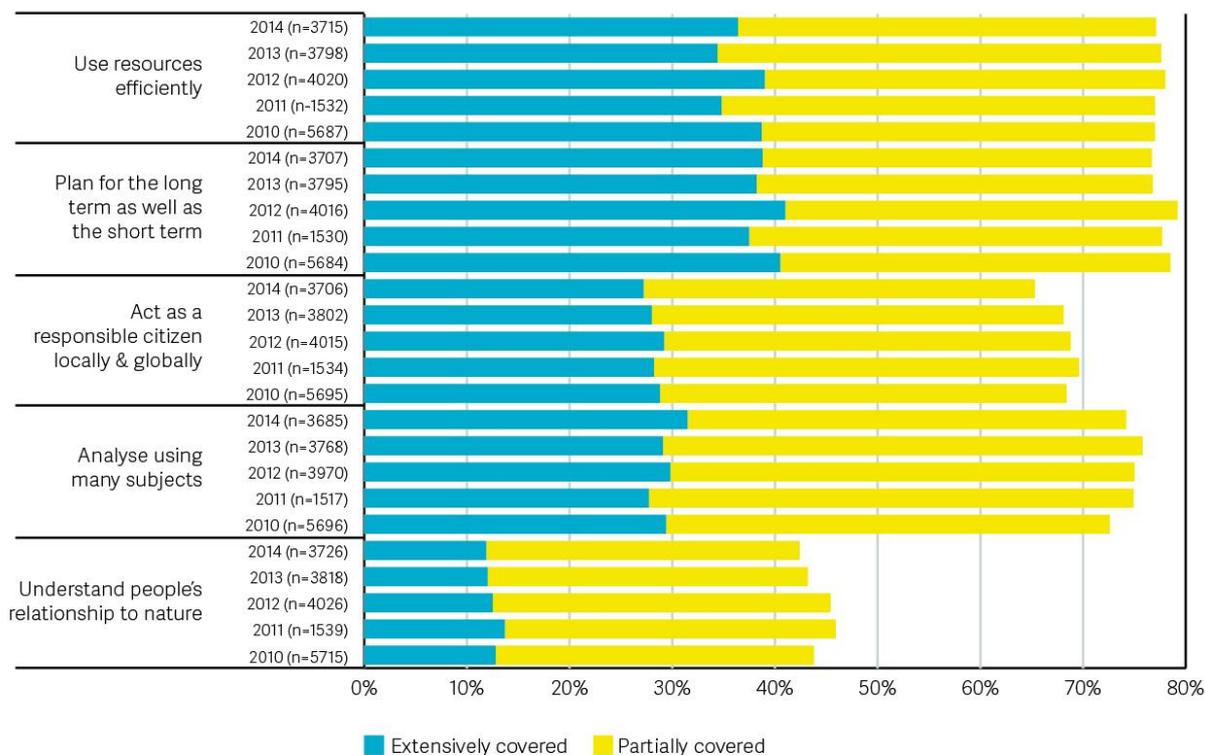
This summary sheet presents an exploration of the influence of and exposure to initiatives and teaching during respondents' time in further education (FE).

I.1 Key questions:

- What skills were covered by the curriculum in further education?
- What are the levels of awareness of ethical and environmental initiatives during further education?
- How important was coverage of social and environmental skills during further education for respondents' current course in higher education?
- What additional social and environmental skills or topics should be covered during further education?

2. What skills were covered by the curriculum in further education?

Figure 2.1 | Thinking of the last place you studied before your current university/college, for each of the following descriptions please tell us to what extent, if at all, you believe these were covered in your curriculum: [FIRST-YEARS TRACKER]



2.3 Key findings

Continuing the trend identified across all three previous years of research, respondents most frequently allocated ascription of responsibility for developing skills and preparing for the graduate job market to their university/college or to themselves.

2.4 First-year tracker

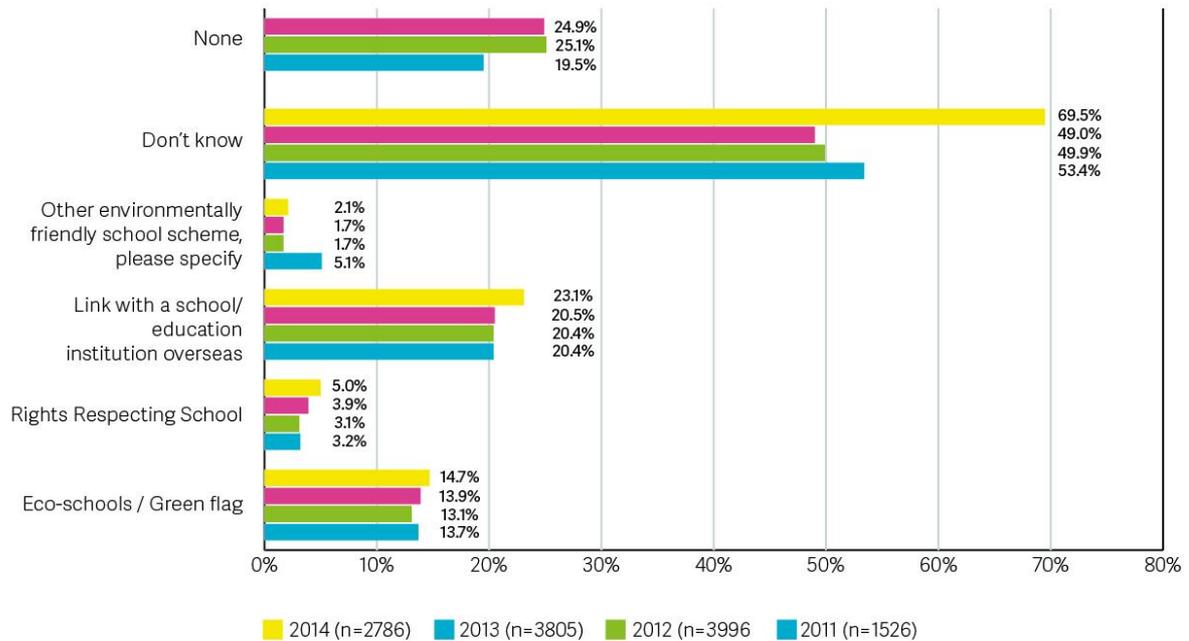
The 2014 first-years continue the existing trend of at least partial coverage with the exception being an ability to 'understand people's relationship to nature'. First-years in 2013 and 2014 are significantly more likely to state that "understanding people's relationship to nature" was "not mentioned and not covered during their time in further education.

This lack of engagement with the natural environment has been uncovered elsewhere in research by the RSPB and the National Trust, warning of a 'nature deficit disorder' which has the potential to immediately influence physical and mental well-being as well as influencing motivations to protect the environment later in life¹.

¹ National Trust, (2012) (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/document-1355766991839/>) and RSPB, (2013) (http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/connecting-with-nature_tcm9-354603.pdf)

3. What are the levels of awareness of ethical and environmental initiatives during further education?

Figure 3.1 | What awards/initiatives did your previous institution (prior to current university/college) take part in, if any? [FIRST-YEARS TRACKER]



3.3 Key findings

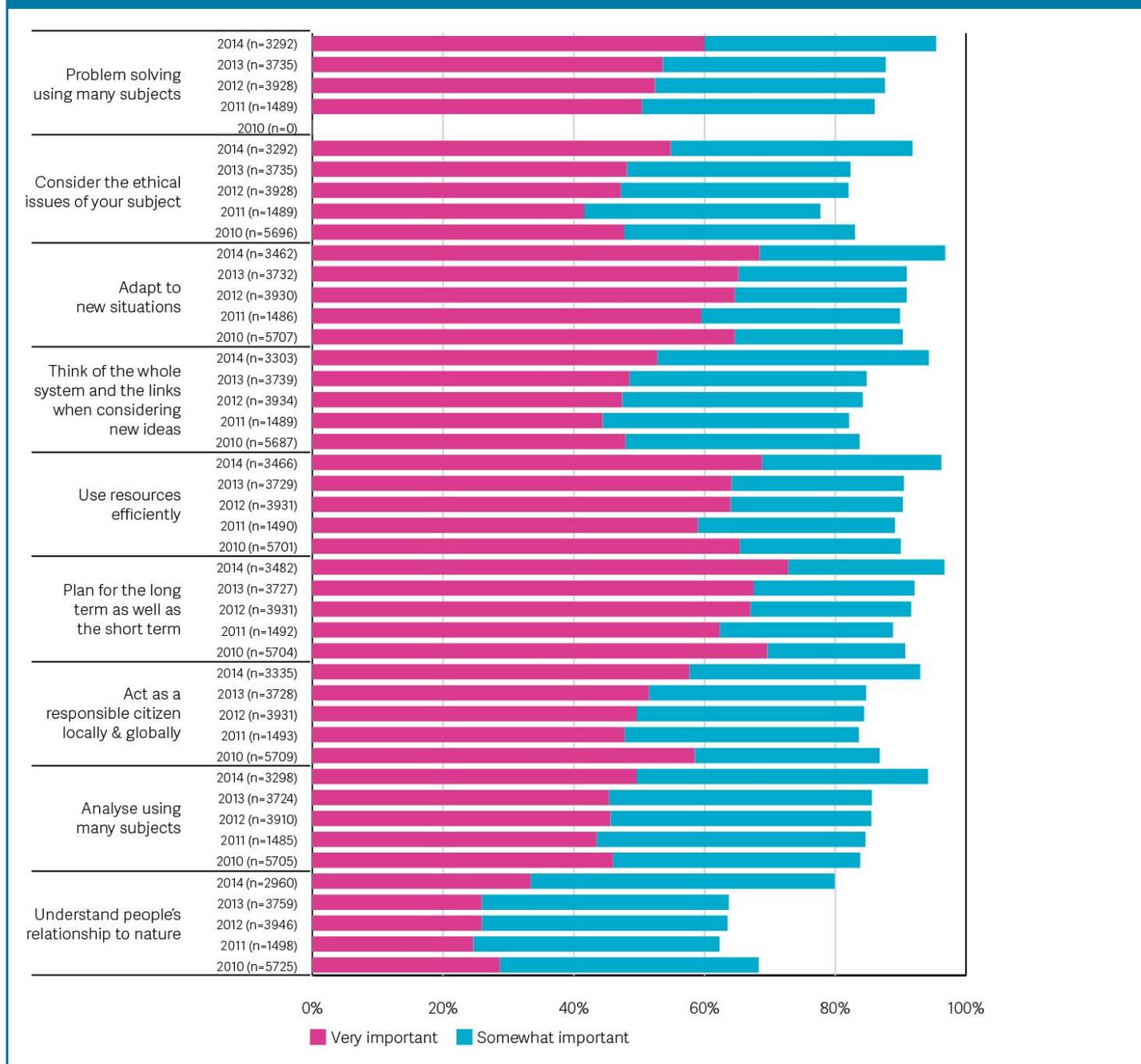
Awareness levels of sustainability focused schemes operating in further education are relatively low, around half indicating that they did not know what initiatives their previous place of study took part in. This increases to almost 70% in 2014.

3.4 First-year tracker

Recognition of SD schemes amongst first-year students remains remarkably consistent although in 2014 there are significant increases in awareness levels, particularly of links made with overseas schools or education institutions. However, in 2014 there is also greater uncertainty over the participation in ethical and environmental initiatives, with 69.5% (n=1927) stating that they don't know what schemes their FE institution took part in.

4. How important was coverage of social and environmental skills during further education for respondents' current course in higher education?

Figure 4.1 | How important do you feel it is that these skills were covered in your previous place of study? [FIRST-YEARS TRACKER]



4.2 Key findings

Skills for sustainable development are, on the whole, seen as important to be covered during further education in terms of the skills they need to study their course at university/college, however the more overtly sustainability related skills are not seen as being as relevant.

First-years in 2014 are significantly more likely to rank some skills as being very important compared to first-years in previous years of the research, for example 49.6% (n=1624) rank “analyse using many subjects” as very important in 2014, compared with 45.4% (n=1674) first-years in 2013. Despite being seen as less important overall, the sustainability skills saw a significant increase in terms of their perceived importance. For example, 33.4% (n=982) 2014 first-years ranked as very important compared with 25.9% (n=963) 2013 first-years.

5. What additional social and environmental skills or topics should be covered during further education?

Feedback was gathered from respondents on additional social and environmental skills or topics that they would have liked to see covered during their time in further education.

5.1 Quotes | What other environmental and social skills or topics would you like to have seen covered in your previous place of study? [FIRST-YEARS TRACKER]

“Dedicated lesson every week to do with eco issues (e.g. energy saving, how to effectively use resources etc).”

“Team working on an extracurricular or outside of course level. Opportunities to try a wider range of subjects.”

“The impact charity has on society and how everyone can contribute to bettering themselves, that it is not the responsibility of an individual but of a community.”

“Being interactive with all races.”

“More about what we could do to get involved on a bigger scale (rather than telling us to do the small things)”.

“More practical and research skills; thinking critically.”

“Having a set lesson every week in which you would be given a topic to go and look up (perhaps to do with the course you’re interested in) and then present a poster or a presentation the next week. This would have helped with adapting to university life.”

5.2 Key findings

Respondents identified a range of suggestions in terms of the sustainability related topics and skills they would like to have seen covered further during further education. These include more in-depth knowledge of environmental issues, including the full range of action that individuals can take to address these issues, and activities designed to encourage exposure to different cultures and communities.

Others reflected on the specific skills they would like to have seen covered in more depth, including increased independent research, access to a broader range of subjects and the ability to critically evaluate.

6. This summary forms part of a series of short reports. Further detail on different aspects of the research can be found at:

Executive summary: Student attitudes towards, and skills for, sustainable development

Executive summary: Employer attitudes towards, and skills needs for, sustainable development

Summary 2: Understanding attitudes and behaviours for sustainable development during higher education

Summary 3: Learning and using skills for sustainable development during higher education

Summary 4: Sustainability, skills, and employability

Appendix 1: Methodology

Appendix 2: Desk review – student attitudes towards, and skills for, sustainable development

Appendix 3: Desk review – employer attitudes towards, and skills needs for, sustainable development

Appendix 4: Student surveys

Appendix 5: Employer survey

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