

TEACH^R

Australia's newest university and the Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

This paper reports on the first of a three-stage project designed to connect all staff at one university to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in both awareness and practice. This first stage of the project measured the baseline knowledge of both academic staff and support staff. To achieve this, a descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted. All staff were surveyed, including professional, academic and administration staff members at Avondale University in New South Wales, Australia. The data showed that part of our planned education on the SDGs in the next phase of the project needs to broaden staff thinking that sustainability is more than Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12). Current knowledge of staff about sustainability involved the recognition of visible icons such as solar panels, overuse of plastics and hybrid fleet vehicles. Future education could help them to extend their understanding of

sustainability to include more conceptual issues such as justice, peace, equality, decent work and economic growth.

Introduction

Avondale University was granted Australian University status in 2021. To align its operations and academic program to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (<https://sdgs.un.org/>) as shown in Figure 1, and to create an awareness of sustainability in the staff and community, a team of researchers undertook a project to assess current knowledge of SDG alignment at Avondale. This information was planned to be used in a program to create awareness of sustainability among the staff. This paper reports the initial findings and discusses frameworks to enhance the university's future alignment with the SDGs.

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly agreed to a set of 17 SDGs in response to globally significant issues associated with human rights, poverty, health, the environment, inequality, climate change, and sustainable production and consumption (Niklasson, 2019). These SDGs were predicated on the Millennium Development

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Figure 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals: Integrating Sustainability Initiatives with Long Term Value Creation*			
1. No Poverty	2. No Hunger	3. Good Health & Wellbeing	4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality	6. Clean Water & Sanitation	7. Affordable & Clean Energy	8. Decent Work & Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	10. Reduced Inequalities	11. Sustainable Cities & Communities	12. Responsible Consumption & Production
13. Climate Action	14. Life Below Water	15. Life on land	16. Peace Justice & Strong Institutions
17. Partnerships for the Goals			

Adapted from Busco, Frigo and Riccaboni. 2017. Sustainable Development Goals: Integrating sustainability initiatives with long-term value creation Strategic Finance (September): p. 28-29. <https://maaw.info/ArticleSummaries/ArtSumBusco2017>.

Goals (MDGs), an agreed upon set of International Development Targets that were primarily concerned with poverty and hunger (Aideyan et al., 2016; Alcántara-Rubio et al., 2022; Arora & Mishra, 2019; French & Kotzé, 2018). The rationale underpinning the SDGs was informed by a global commitment to reach a set of targets related to sustainable development by 2030, including 169 targets applicable to developed and developing countries. While sustainability addresses the use and depletion of natural resources, the term is not exclusively synonymous with environmental protection or nature conservation. Portney (2015) maintains that sustainability is concerned with the earth contending with human population and economic growth. The SDGs cover a broad range of priorities that include environmental issues such as climate change, but they also extend to areas that address inequality, fair work, urbanisation, human rights, gender equality, and peace and justice (Biggeri et al., 2019).

Background

Avondale University, situated in the rural territory of the First Nations Awabakal people, Lake Macquarie, has a history that is linked to the land and to the principles of sustainability and sustainable development. The founders of the University, more than 120 years ago, had a clear vision of the essential nature and purpose of what was then known as Avondale Missionary College. Underlying this vision was the intentional balance between academic and vocational studies, and the necessary connection to the land.

Although the word *sustainability* was not in

common use in the late nineteenth / early twentieth century, the underlying values and beliefs that motivate twenty-first century sustainability and sustainable development were activated in the early stages of the history of the University. Early documents report activities such as sustainable treatment of the land, enrichment of the soil, the establishment of orchards, vegetable gardens and dairy cattle, and strategies that demonstrated 'modern' and well-informed practices of sustainability. A letter written to family members in 1896 by one of the founders reported: "Thousands of acres of [local] land have been untouched because the owners say they will not raise anything. We have our farm as an object lesson" (White, Letter 162, 1896). The founders had been told the land would not be suitable for sustainable living but were surprised to find most varieties of fruit and vegetables thrived on the land. This was in addition to the sustainable development of university buildings, several of which continue to be in use as administration offices and spaces for student-based activities.

The history and philosophy of Avondale are inextricably linked. The philosophical underpinnings of sustainability and SDGs are embedded in the graduate motto: *For a greater vision of world needs*. This is reflected in its five core values, particularly: *Wellbeing* (No. 3) - Avondale encourages personal and community wellbeing by fostering intellectual development, cultural enrichment, spiritual development, an active lifestyle, and environmental sustainability; and, *Service* (No. 5) - Avondale challenges its learning community to a more informed and responsive understanding of humanitarian

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needs and to a greater commitment to addressing the needs of those less fortunate and in want of care and support in Australia and overseas. This is further reflected in the eight graduate attributes that are the focus of higher education coursework, particularly: No. 2 - An orientation to service that includes the support of sustainable development; and No. 4 - An informed respect for individual worth, cultural and social diversity, and environmental sustainability (Avondale, 2025).

This history of the institution has led to the development of a learning culture and strategies that constructively enact these beliefs and values. Recent research on sustainability and the important role of educational institutions is exemplified by that of Spadaro et al. (2017) who argue, "... moral culture should be emphasized as a process aimed at sustainability" (p. 62). The development of a moral culture is an intentional priority of Avondale and presupposes the disposition to connect with and take responsibility, not only for nurturing and protecting the natural environment, but also meeting the needs of the communities who live in it. The principle of service, in the context of a Christian world view, provides one avenue for supporting communities in their attempts to navigate sustainable development. In our desire to further develop a culture that actively embraces the SDGs, including a holistic approach to achieving this, a logical place to start is surveying the knowledge and perceptions of university personnel regarding Avondale's engagement with the SDGs. The data gathered from this process can provide insight into strategies for moving ahead with this important aspect of the university.

One of the most significant challenges confronting all education institutions including Avondale, is that the world is rapidly changing and becoming more diverse. This impacts global sustainable development. These concerns form the basis of a global approach to achievable resolutions of the issues inherent in change. As Australia's newest university, Avondale has a practical interest in the SDGs that align with the university's impact statement: *Empowering graduates and staff to serve their world for good* (Avondale, 2025).

While the SDGs were unanimously agreed upon by the member states of the United Nations, there were no clear strategies to determine how these goals may be implemented and no evident way to hold individual governments accountable except for "naming and shaming" (Niklasson, 2019, p. 5). Another challenge associated with activating the SDGs is the broad scope of their targets and indicators which are difficult to manage (Bigerri et al., 2019). In addition to these complexities associated with implementing and monitoring the

SDGs, there is a considerable degree of difference regarding individual and collective responses to and perceptions of these sustainable development targets. The Global Survey on Sustainability and the SDGs, conducted between September 2018 and June 2019, included approximately 27,000 individuals and representatives from politics, business, science and research, the media and civil society (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, 2020). The survey focused on opinions and expectations regarding sustainability. Key findings revealed that less than half of the responders were familiar with the SDGs; Climate Action, Quality Education, Good Health, and Well-being were identified as the highest priority areas; and young people were most concerned with Climate Action in contrast to older generations who were more focused on Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, and Biodiversity.

Within the context of education and research, the Global Survey on Sustainability unearthed a lack of awareness of the SDGs, particularly in classical business studies and the research fields of economics (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, 2020). While all sectors rated SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) relatively low, this valuation was particularly evident in the field of research and education. Recommendations for action outlined in the Report of Results Global Survey on Sustainability and the SDGs focus on raising individual and collective awareness of the SDGs, with practical suggestions for everyday life to promote responsible action, and developing sector-specific goals for business, science, and education in response to concerns that the 169 sub-targets are primarily directed at governments.

As identified in the *Report of Results Global Survey on Sustainability and the SDGs*, there appears to be a deficiency of awareness regarding the SDGs in the context of education and research (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, 2020). This is a noteworthy concern because the SDGs are highly relevant to universities and their core business (Alcántara-Rubio et al., 2022). The Executive Summary of *Getting Started with the SDGs in Universities* claims that education, research, innovation, and leadership will be essential in shaping how society navigates the range of complex social, economic, and environmental challenges addressed in the SDGs, and that "arguably none of the SDGs will be achieved without the education and research sector" (Australia & NZ Edition, 2017, p. 2). According to Beynaghi et al. (2016), there is an increasing mandate for universities to further sustainability

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through societal collaboration, education, research, and outreach that will require such institutions to become more socially, environmentally, and economically oriented. This includes mobilising SDG 17 that focuses on Partnerships for the Goals.

Universities can support the implementation of the SDGs and their framework in a variety of ways, including creating learning and teaching opportunities that empower students to become agents of change by equipping them with the knowledge, skills and impetus required to address sustainable development issues. For example, within the context of SDG 5 (Gender Equality), The University of Sydney regularly facilitates programs that disseminate their work on gender, equality, and diversity. Universities can also contribute to achieving the SDGs through research that promotes disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches to addressing issues that globally affect individuals and communities (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2017).

The abovementioned approaches to engaging with the SDGs are particularly significant for higher education institutions such as Avondale University which is Australia's newest university. It is important to determine the extent to which staff at Avondale are aware of the SDGs and to understand how they perceive the alignment of this university's values and practices with the SDGs. Evaluating the nature of such responses to the SDGs will enable Avondale to develop an action plan for identifying, promoting, and implementing strategies that target these goals.

Method

To determine the knowledge that staff currently hold about SDGs, a descriptive cross-sectional survey

study was conducted (Byrnes, 2000; Robson & McCartan, 2016). The study design comprised a survey-intervention-survey structure in which a baseline survey was conducted, followed by an intervention which educated staff about SDGs and will be concluded with a final survey. Like other research studies within universities that have investigated their staff members' awareness of the SDGs (e.g., Leiva-Brondo et al., 2022; Omisore et al., 2017), we surveyed all of our University's staff, including professional, academic and administration staff members from both the city and regional campuses of Avondale University in NSW Australia.

The three-stage design of this study began with a baseline survey of staff in 2022, as reported in this article. Data gathered from this survey aimed to answer our first research question: *What knowledge do Avondale staff members have of the SDGs?* The study design planned for a set of awareness-raising activities about SDGs to follow the implementation of Survey 1 and will be concluded with a re-administration of the original survey to determine the change in staff's knowledge of SDGs. Overall, the study's two research aims are driven by two key research questions, nested within a three-stage methodology, outlined in Table 1.

The population targeted for this study comprised all staff of the University including professional, administration and academic staff, who were employed on a full-time basis or a part-time basis. Casual or sessional staff were not included in this study. The composition of staff invited to take part in the study and their response rates are outlined in Table 2.

The primary data collection instrument was the

“Universities can . . . empower students to become agents of change”

Table 1: *Research methodology stages of the whole project*

	Stage	Focus	Data collection method/ Activities	Timing	Research Question
ACHIEVED	1: Baseline knowledge of SDGs*	Staff members' baseline knowledge of SDGs	Initial descriptive cross-sectional survey: <i>Staff Sustainable Development Goals Survey 1</i>	May 2022	What knowledge do Avondale staff members have of the SDGs?
CURRENT	2: Awareness-raising events	Intervention: Education of staff re SDGs	SDG awareness-raising activities	Nov 2022 – Nov 2024	-
FUTURE	3: Revised knowledge of SDGs	Staff members' revised knowledge of SDGs	Re-administered descriptive cross-sectional survey: <i>Staff Sustainable Development Goals Survey 2</i>	Nov 2024	What knowledge do Avondale staff members have of the SDGs after the intervention?

*Reported in this article.

Table 2: *Participants*

Cross-section	Staff category	No. of staff invited to complete initial survey	No. of staff who completed initial survey	Response rate (%)
Professional	Professional Staff: Maintenance, Cleaning, Landscape, Cafeteria, Security	15	9	60
Professional	Professional Staff: Student Administrative Services, Finance, Information Technology, library, marketing, Student Life Services, Bookshop, Human Resources, Research Services Manager, Manager Quality, Equity.	65	32	49
Professional	Academic Support Staff	18	8	44
Academic	Academic staff	47	23	49
Administration	Avondale Executive member	5	2	40
	TOTAL	150*	74	49

*Indicates headcount of full-time and part-time staff.

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Staff Sustainable Development Goals Survey which incorporated a mixture of Likert-style and open-ended questions, adopting a similar style to the questionnaires about awareness of SDGs used by Omisore et al. (2017) and collated in Leiva-Brondo et al.'s article about Spanish university students' awareness and perception of SDGs and sustainability literacy (Leiva-Brondo et al., 2022). Our *Staff Sustainable Development Goals Survey* included a list of the 17 SDGs, followed by questions which invited the staff member participants to share their views about the extent to which Avondale contributed to each of the SDGs in the form of a Likert-style 5-point scale that ranged from 'I don't know' through to 'for sure'. The Likert-style question for each SDG was then followed by an optional open-ended question in which each participant was asked to comment on or ask questions about each of the SDGs.

This data collection tool was designed using the principles of a descriptive cross-sectional survey as our research purposes were observational and descriptive in nature, and because we were interested in gathering information about all categories of employees at Avondale. The participants' responses to closed questions elicited quantitative data responses to Likert-style questions, and their responses to open questions elicited qualitative data in the form of short text answers. This combination of question types provided the researchers with information about the staff member participants' current views about Avondale's recent performance in association with

each of the SDGs, and it also elicited points of interest or commentary about each of the SDGs from the university's staff members. Since the open-ended question component for each SDG was not compulsory, a lack of comments and answers suggested areas where future professional development about the SDGs may be required. We are currently facilitating a number of awareness-raising events (interventions) with the aim of increasing the knowledge that staff have about SDGs. To assess variations in staff knowledge of SDGs after the awareness-raising activities, the cross-sectional survey will be re-administered after the awareness-raising intervention is concluded.

The qualitative data gathered from the baseline survey were analysed using a thematic coding approach to identify the themes present in the data. We used a combination of deductive and inductive coding which enabled us to identify answers to the study's first research question in the form of themes that emerged from the participants' survey responses. Using an approach similar to that used by Stuckey (2015), we firstly categorised the qualitative data into codes and themes (meaningful groups of codes), using the study's research questions to organise the first level of coding, in conjunction with using a memoing system to clarify and interpret this analysis phase. Next, the data were inductively analysed to identify the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' responses to questions about the SDGs. A qualitative analysis software (NVivo) was used to electronically manage these data analysis

processes.

Descriptive statistical analyses were performed on the quantitative data (the participants' responses to Likert-style items) gathered from the first survey in the study. Findings from these analyses contributed to answering the study's first research question.

This research was approved as a negligible risk study by the Avondale University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Limitations

This paper reports on the first stage of a three-stage research study that adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey in which staff at Avondale University were surveyed to determine their knowledge of the SDGs before and after the implementation of a series of awareness-raising events about SDGs. Since this research aimed to focus upon the baseline knowledge about SDGs held by current staff at the University, no students or casual staff were included in the targeted population who were invited to participate in the study.

Analysis/Results

When the 74 participating staff were presented with the question "What do you know of SDGs?", 19 staff members did not respond and another 19 had not heard of them. Of the remaining 36 staff, 32 knew very little about SDGs with responses. Only four respondents provided evidence of knowing something further about the SDGs with one knowing quite a lot as they "have been on committees where they are discussed", and another has "read up in a little more detail on some of them".

Each of the 17 SDGs could be placed into one of

three groups: 1) the SDGs that Avondale University is seen to be contributing to very well, as indicated by more than 75% of all staff being favourable in their response; 2) those SDGs that Avondale University is seen as contributing to quite well, as indicated by 50-70% of staff being favourable in their response; and 3) those SDGs that Avondale University is not seen to be contributing to well, with less than 50% of all staff providing favourable responses (Figures 1-3).

Five SDGs were identified as those Avondale University contributes to quite well (Table 3, Figure 2). Of these, it was Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) that Avondale University was seen to be contributing most, with 68% of staff responding favourably and highlighting this as being core to the mission of the institution which is built on a Christian ethos. Of the remaining SDGs, it was noted that: education, support services and actions to raise awareness of minority groups have supported Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10); a negotiated workplace enterprise agreement and provision of quality education has supported staff and students in Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8); producing quality graduates through quality education and research in the areas of Lifestyle Medicine and Health have supported Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9); and a shift toward electronic communication rather than paper and separation of waste to promote recycling has supported Responsible Consumption and Productivity (SDG 12).

Quality Education (SDG 4), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) and Gender Equality (SDG 5) were seen to be SDGs that Avondale University contributed to very well, with 93%, 87% and

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Figure 1: SDGs that over 75% of staff believe Avondale University is contributing to

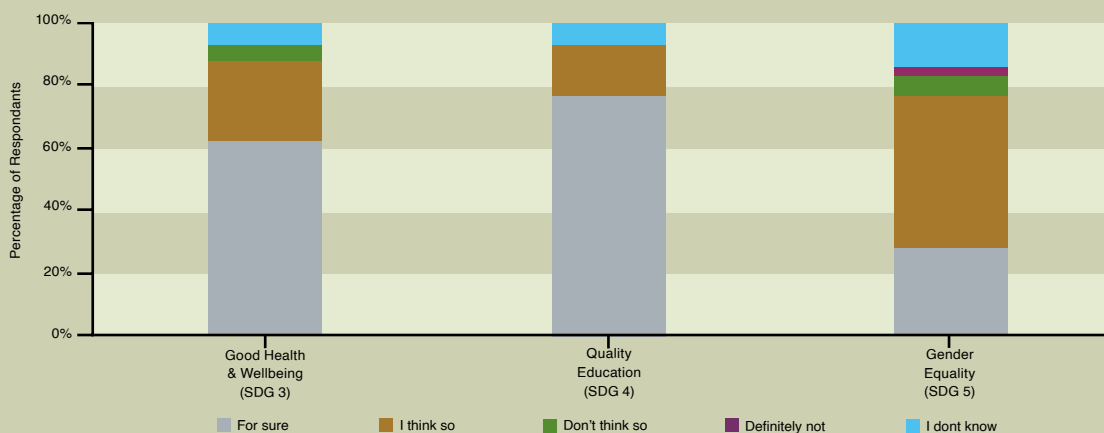


Table 3: *SDGs in decreasing order that staff overall believe Avondale University is contributing toward, including the breakdown of responses for Academic Staff and Support Staff*

Sustainable Development Goal	All staff (n=74 ^a)			Academic Staff (n = 25 ^b)			Support Staff (n=40 ^c)		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)
Contributing to very well									
Quality Education (SDG 4)	93	0	(7)	100	0	(0)	88	0	(13)
Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3)	87	4	(9)	100	0	(0)	80	3	(17)
Gender Equality (SDG 5)	77	8	(15)	100	0	(0)	63	10	(28)
Contributing to quite well									
Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)	68	3	(29)	92	0	(8)	45	3	(51)
Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)	61	12	(27)	91	4	(4)	43	20	(38)
Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)	58	7	(35)	67	8	(25)	51	3	(46)
Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9)	56	12	(32)	80	8	(13)	45	11	(43)
Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12)	53	15	(32)	72	16	(12)	43	11	(46)
Not contributing well									
Life on Land (SDG 15)	49	11	(39)	72	16	(12)	32	3	(66)
Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7)	43	25	(32)	46	37	(17)	38	14	(49)
Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6)	41	26	(33)	54	33	(13)	28	23	(50)
No Poverty (SDG 1)	37	17	(45)	48	32	(20)	26	10	(65)
Climate Action (SDG 13)	37	28	(36)	56	36	(8)	24	21	(56)
Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)	36	22	(42)	56	28	(16)	23	18	(60)
Zero Hunger (SDG 2)	33	22	(45)	56	32	(12)	11	14	(74)
Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17)	32	10	(57)	46	13	(42)	26	6	(69)
Life Below Water (SDG 14)	22	26	(52)	36	32	(32)	10	26	(64)

^aNine of these staff did not provide their staffing status.

^bDue to incomplete surveys, each question was answered by 24-25 academic staff.

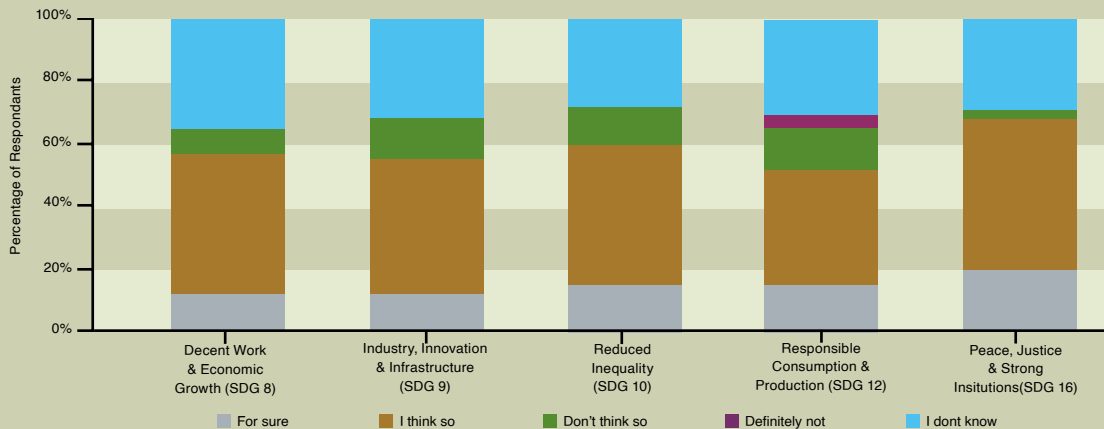
^cDue to incomplete surveys, each question was answered by 35-40 support staff.

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Avondale University was also viewed favourably for Gender Equality”

77%, respectively, of all staff being favourable in their responses (Table 3) and the majority of the responses for SDG 4 and SDG 3 being 'For sure' (Figure 1). These three SDGs also had the lowest percentage of respondents who were unsure (Table 3, Figure 1). Quality Education (SDG 4), being the most favourably viewed of all the SDGs, was highlighted by staff through Avondale's quality education degrees, academic support, and dedicated staff and this is Avondale University's core business. Regarding Avondale University's

support of Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3), staff specifically mentioned weekly wellbeing emails, weekly free meals to staff and students, and the Lifestyle Medicine course and wellbeing programs offered at Avondale University as contributing to this area. Avondale University was also viewed favourably for Gender Equality (SDG 5) due to a high representation of females in leadership positions at all levels and career progress opportunities being equal for both genders. Some staff suggested a potential imbalance of gender

Figure 2: SDGs that 50-70% of staff believe Avondale University is contributing to



representation with males being less represented.

Whilst there were few improvements suggested by staff relating to how Avondale University can better contribute to the SDGs in which the institution is doing very well or quite well, there were many comments for Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) (Table 4).

Avondale University was seen by less than 50% of all staff to be contributing to the remaining nine SDGs, with less than one-third of all staff seeing Avondale University contributing to Zero Hunger (SDG 2) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17), and only 22% seeing Avondale University contributing to Life Below Water (SDG 14) (Table 3, Figure 3). Many improvements were suggested in these nine areas as noted in Table 4. Despite these nine SDGs not typically being viewed as areas Avondale University contributes to, many comments did provide evidence it was. These included: the provision of education for the future financial security of graduates, student scholarships and a Christian ethos to support No Poverty (SDG 1); mission trips and staff representation in local environmental decision-making contributing to Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6); expansion of rooftop solar panels have contributed to Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7); the community shared bike path on campus, campus gardens, recycling, walking tracks around the estate, sustainable farming and the community Park Run contributing to Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11); bush regeneration supporting Climate Action (SDG 13); responsible land management on the farm and in the establishment of community walking tracks supporting Life Below Water (SDG 14) and Life on Land (SDG 15); and international partnerships and

relationships with denominational entities such as Sanitarium Health Food Company and Adventist Schools Australia supporting Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

When the results for academic and support/professional staff were analysed separately, similar trends emerged. For example, the top three SDGs that Avondale University was perceived to contribute to most remained the same for both cohorts (Table 3). Similarly, the SDGs represented within the cluster of five SDGs the institution was seen to be contributing to quite well and the cluster of nine SDGs the institution was not contributing to well remained the same, albeit sometimes in a changed order. Differences did occur between the cohorts in the degree of certainty in their responses. For example, 69% of academic staff chose an option in favour of Avondale University contributing to the SDGs, on average, compared to only 40% of support/professional staff. In contrast, only 14% of academic staff were not sure whether Avondale University contributes to the SDGs, on average, whilst nearly half (49%) of support/professional staff were unsure.

Discussion

The purpose of the first stage of the project this paper is based on was to establish a baseline of the knowledge current staff have of the SDGs, but also to identify areas where we, as an institution, are already working alongside the SDGs. It was clear to the research team that Avondale University has a long history of sustainable practices in many areas without having made the link to the SDGs because that framework is recent relative to the age of the institution, and it has not been something we have worked with before. It is deemed important

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“sustainability is both a venture and a responsibility”

Table 4: Areas that Avondale University may better contribute to the SDGs as suggested by staff. The SDG that each suggestion relates to is noted in brackets.

Need for an international development studies degree (SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 6)
Further focus on entry pathways for minority groups (SDG 1, SDG 10)
Food support to the local community (SDG 2)
Overworked and unrealistic work expectations (SDG 3, SDG 8)
Need for more environmental concern (SDG 6)
Expansion of rooftop solar panels to other buildings (SDG 7)
Improved opportunities for career advancement (SDG 8)
More funding is needed (SDG 9)
Provision of more time to focus on innovation (SDG 9)
Need for an agricultural degree (SDG 11)
Establish a community garden (SDG 11)
Management of e-waste (SDG 12)
Reduce contamination of recyclables (SDG 12)
Reduction of single-use plastics (SDG 12)
Reduce food wastage, especially in the cafeteria (SDG 12)
Greater use of renewable energy sources (SDG 12)
Move toward a net zero carbon emissions target (SDG 13)
Move toward electric or hybrid fleet vehicles (SDG 13)
More support for water quality initiatives (SDG 14)
Assessment of biodiversity on the campus (SDG 14, SDG 15)
Need for science degrees (SDG 14, SDG 15)
Expansion of global partnership programs and volunteer student service trips (SDG 17)
Supported research into the SDGs (all)

however for universities to initiate sustainable practices and support their integration into all aspects of the administrative and academic program (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2017). These practices include relating the SDGs to policies, practices, research projects, and teaching curriculums.

Given that a federal government survey revealed that less than half of those interviewed appeared familiar with the SDGs (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, 2020), it has been a pleasing finding that more than half of the respondents in this study acknowledged that Avondale has a connection to

eight of the 17 SDGs. There is clear work ahead of us to not only ensure all staff recognise Avondale's work in these SDGs, but to also educate the staff in the ways we are already working with the remaining nine SDGs. As stated by Alcántara-Rubio et al. (2022), a working knowledge of, and orientation to the SDGs is important because they are vital to the core business of a university.

It has been revealing to realise that sustainability is both a venture and a responsibility (Beynaghi et al. 2016) that academic staff and professional and support staff can work on together. Indeed, many of the most visible projects developed at Avondale in the last decade have been undertaken by support

Figure 3: SDGs that less than 50% of staff believe Avondale University is contributing to

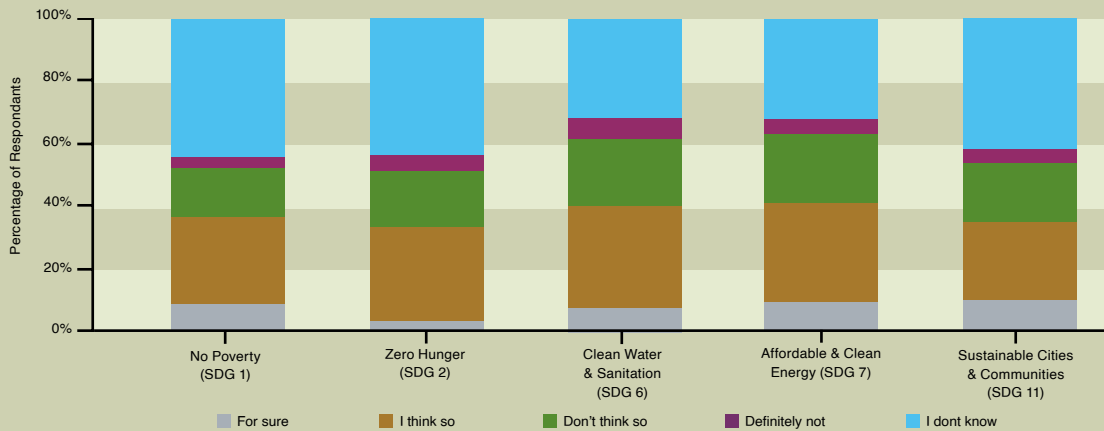
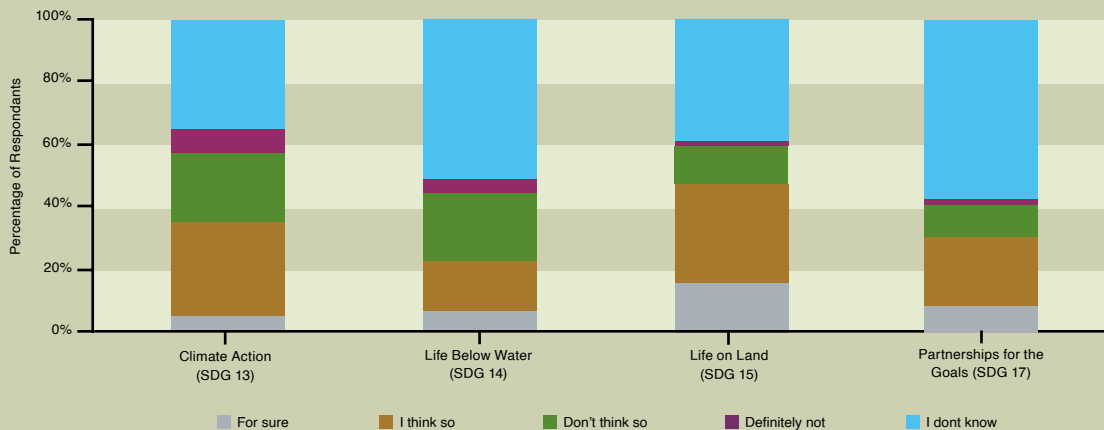


Figure 4: SDGs that less than 50% of staff believe Avondale University is contributing to



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Gender equity is seen as a priority
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staff. These include the installation of banks of solar panels and mechanisms to facilitate the responsible disposal of food waste. Such projects are the obvious types of initiatives that most people associate with sustainability (SDGs 7, 11, 12).

The three SDGs that the data indicated staff understood and recognised that we as an institution are identifying with are Quality Education (SDG 4), Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3) and Gender Equality (SDG 5). This is no surprise and correlates to the findings of the government survey (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, 2020) where Quality Education, Good Health and Wellbeing, also featured heavily as the highest priority by the general population. Gender equity is seen as a priority based on the

national survey and is recognised by our staff as already enacted. It is possible that staff noted an alignment to Gender Equity because half of our senior management are females, and all our heads of schools are female. Indeed 62.8% of all permanent staff at Avondale are female. There was some discussion among the team that staff are calling this ‘gender equity’ because of the recognition and reward of female staff members rather than having achieved gender balance.

The fact that Avondale staff are uncertain about how the university relates to Life Below Water (SDG 14) and Life on Land (SDG 15) is evidence that we need to make the SDGs a more common language on campus and communicate more about our alignment to the SDGs. One of our academic staff

has a great interest in life below water and shares this with both students and the community. Our main campus at Lake Macquarie has professionally developed and managed walking tracks with professional signage bringing awareness of local flora and fauna. There is no doubt that most staff are aware of these activities and facilities but are not at the point of making the connection to sustainability. Again, this highlights the need for staff and students to make that connection because places of learning need to be institutions where such focus will spread to society in the form of collaborations and research projects (Beynaghi et al. 2016).

The baseline data that has been collected to date indicates that part of our planned education on the SDGs in the next phase of the project needs to broaden staff thinking that sustainability is more than Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12). When asked for ideas of how we could relate more closely to the SDGs, their current knowledge took them to visible icons such as solar panels, overuse of plastics and hybrid fleet vehicles. Education could help them to also see sustainability as things not so visible such as justice, peace, equality, decent work, and economic growth.

It is worth noting that support staff had lower “Yes” responses and higher “Unsure” responses. This may reflect the higher proportion of new staff into the support staff space whereas the academic staff are less transient. However, this is a point of great interest as the support staff are more likely to be a better barometer for public and student perceptions of the contributions of Avondale University to the SDGs. Also, it is worth considering that some respondents may have answered “I don’t know” for all SDGs because they do not know what Avondale University contributes to them, or they do not know enough about the SDGs to make an informed decision.

Overall, the results of this first stage of the study suggest that most staff tried to relate to sustainability and SDGs but there was a lack of knowledge about identifying the SDGs and the various initiatives Avondale University has adopted in the area of sustainability.

Conclusion

While it is accepted that most educational institutions include sustainability and global citizenship in their curriculum, having the United Nations SDGs as a framework to incorporate environmental education into student experiences increases awareness and intentionality. This paper is about the experiences of a university, but the principles of curriculum planning and implementation can be applied at a school level also.

For Avondale, this first stage of the project has provided us with baseline information about staff knowledge of the SDGs and about the SDG-related practices Avondale University already has in place. The research team has already decided to recommend that all meeting agendas have an item on sustainability that is designed for either professional learning or for staff to report and have on record areas where they have aligned to the SDGs. **TEACH**

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