

Responsible Futures Cohort catch up

Engaging and working with students on
sustainability

August 2026



Purpose of cohort catch ups

- Informal spaces bringing together staff and students to share updates and resources, ask and answer questions, and discuss work related to RF
- Each session will cover a specific theme relevant to education for sustainable development and the Responsible Futures framework. The catch ups include SOS and/or partnerships sharing case studies and information on the themes, and may include short presentations from guest speakers
- Always space for general discussion, as well as highlighting opportunities and resources

Space to reflect

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Cohort call - August



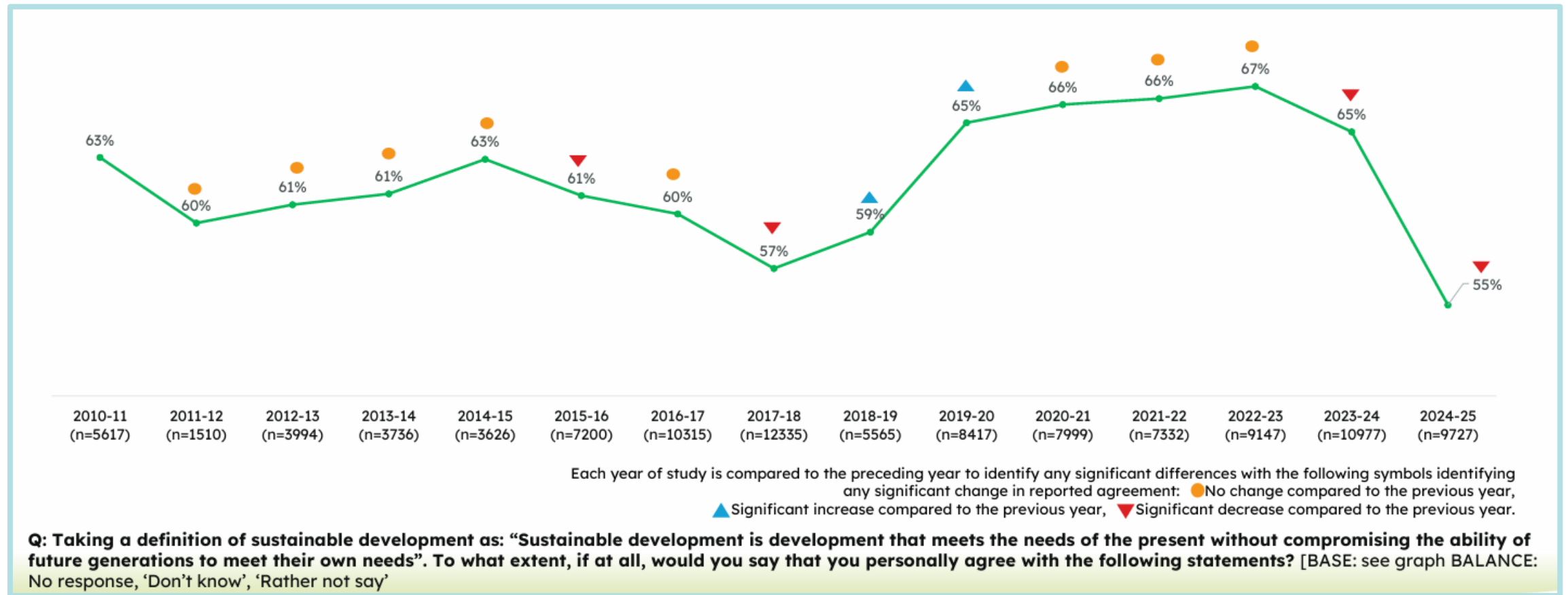
Slido poll: what challenges have you noticed facing students?

- Authenticity gap
- Emotional overload
- Students are working 2-3 jobs as well as studying
- Anxiety/despair
- Lack of knowledge
- Disengagement, probably to do with a sense that we're too far gone
- Lack of time
- Time and resource poor
- Time to engage with sustainability as working
- Students can lack confidence or agency

Competing priorities

Signs of shifting student interest in learning about sustainable development

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Sustainability in the crosswinds of societal pressures

- Cost-of-living
- Mental health
- Challenging job market and young people not in education, employment, or training
- Geopolitics and polarisation
- Rise of far-right politics and backlash to EDI
- Digital landscape: AI, social media, mis/disinformation, algorithm-driven echo chambers, manospheres
- Attention economies, hyper-individualism and scarcity mindsets
- Continued social and ecological crises

The value of exploring students (dis)interest in sustainable development

Skills Survey 2025-26: key takeaways for FE



FE students feel more equipped to address climate change than the nature crisis and social sustainability issues

- Interconnections between these topics



Factors related to social, economic and environmental sustainability strongly influence what jobs students consider applying to



Common themes about why some (6%) students would not like to learn more about sustainable development: don't care, lack of time, know enough already, not relatable to daily life or course, boring

- Importance of tailored approaches, accessibility, creativity, and going beyond the green echo chamber

‘Meaningful’ student engagement with sustainability

‘Types’ of student engagement

Across formal, informal and subliminal learning spaces:

From passive/reactive...

- E.g., media views, clicks, general awareness

To direct...

- Attending events, completing assessments, dissertations, or surveys

And proactive engagement...

- Student leadership and mobilising others on shared causes
- Elected/recruited positions
- Alumnus and lifelong learning for sustainability

Any others?

Slido poll: what does meaningful student engagement mean to you?

- Humanity matters to many students, connecting with staff who show up as humans, not institutional representatives, and have that passion, not just a job role.
- Engagement which offers hope and optimism not despair.
- To ask students what themes they would like to see discussed or covered
- Integration of subject / discipline, relevant sustainability themes, and space to think through how they feel about that
- being an active participant and seeing the change in real time
- Engagement which encourages learners to be change agents for a more sustainable future.
- Something resonates with them, ideally leading to discussion or action
- Hope through agency that meaningful engagement helps students feel their actions matter, and that over co-creation/consultation, students engage when they help shape the work, not just comment on it.
- Students can see a benefit to their study or home life
- Not all students have to engage with sustainability to the same degree, it's about what works for them
- Different options and flexibility for students to engage
- No one-size-fits all approach

The importance of...

- Acknowledging that ‘students’ are not a monolith
- Avoiding one-size-fits all methods
 - Multiple pathways for students to engage and visibility of this
- Intentional, tailored, authentic communications
- Creative responses to echo chambers
- Holding space to understand challenges facing students
 - Supporting them to ‘join the dots’ between these challenges with sustainability issues and actions
- Tangible calls to action for students to inform, lead and take ownership of
- Recognising how competing priorities and different societal challenges reinforce why ‘sustainability’ needs to be woven throughout education

Examples

Murdoch University: Student Staff Partnership Hub

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- Centralised space signposting how students and staff can work together to enhance the university experience
 - Created by Tara Innes, one of the Student as Change Agents
 - Partnership defined as working **with** rather than **for** each other
 - Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower
 - Establishing student voice, feedback mechanisms, forums and guidelines following pilot student forums
- Informing wider Student Voice Australasia network

Empowering students to lead on active travel mapping

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- University of Worcester Student Ambassadors walked their city to map accessibility and the built environment
- Ongoing: training students as community Wellbeing Walk Leaders

Student-led lab for decolonising the SDGs beyond 2030, King's College London

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- Six paid international undergraduate Co-Creation Research Assistants critically evaluated the SDGs to co-create an alternative framework focused on values
- Holding space for students to be curious, explore and grow in critical pedagogies
- Supported by Candela Delgado Marin (King's Foundation department) and the King's Education for Sustainability Fund



Other good practice examples

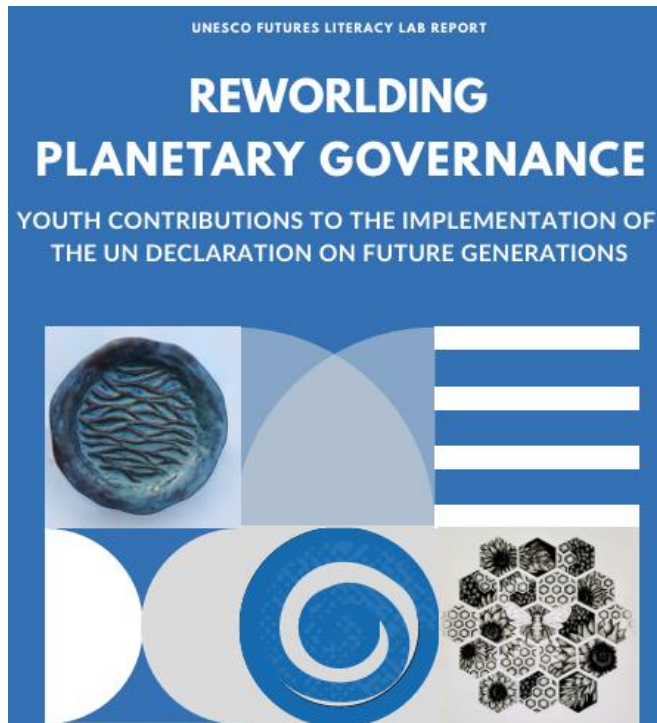
- Widescale student representation at The Students Union at UWE Bristol
- University of the West Indies Students Today, Alumni Tomorrow cross-campus programme
- Student-staff international solidarity campaigning led by Trinity College Dublin Students' Union
- Worcester Students' Union blueprint for maintaining continuity of sustainability post-SU elections
- Manchester Metropolitan University RISE platform and Sustainability: Student Advisory Board

What's happening where you are?

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- Where is further support or resourcing required?
- How can the RF programme and network help?
- What are your next steps?

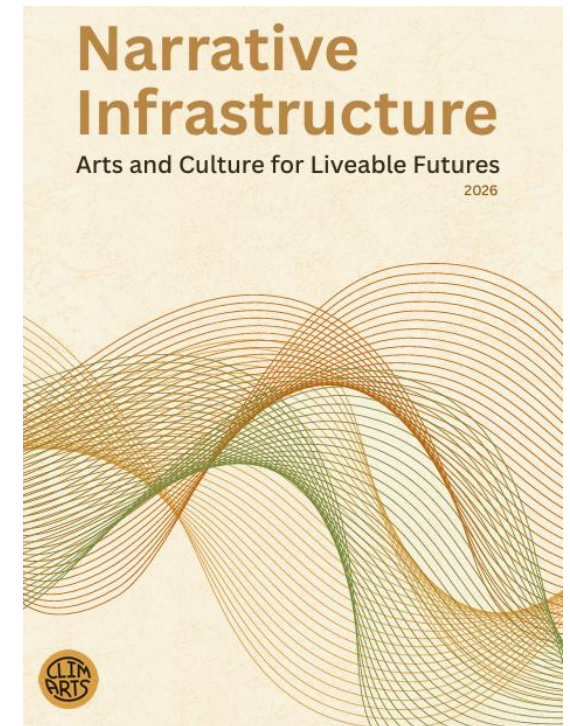
Further readings and inspiration



UNESCO Youth Futures Lab
on planetary governance
report 2025



Compass Project: psychology-
informed climate change education
report 2024



ClimArts narrative
infrastructure
research report 2026

“The heat has already spoken. Perhaps this is what it feels like when the world is ready for a new idea. Our task is not to announce it, but to build what lets it become the way we live.”

Neelambaree Prasad, ClimArts Founder, dance teacher and strategist

Updates and student opportunities

Education beyond 2030 consultation: For students from RF institutions aged 18-30

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#EDUCATION
BEYOND 2030

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SOS!UK
Students Organising
for Sustainability
United Kingdom

Have your say on the SDGs & education beyond 2030

10th September, 1-2pm BST, Microsoft Teams

Scan the code to join the
online discussion

We hope to include 30 students in the discussion (one from each RF institution) but will run the consultation with a smaller number of students if needed.

Cohort call - August

SOS!UK

Youth Climate Leaders Awards

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Free programme open to 18–25-year-olds who have worked or volunteered with SOS UK

- Further develop sustainability skills and experiences
- Mentored by sector leaders and activists
- Online workshops and in-person celebration events

Any questions, contact: Jack Di Francesco
(jack.difrancesco@sos-uk.org)

Reminder: New resource bank

- Now hosted on a password-protected page on the Responsible Futures website
- Featuring:
 - Cohort call slides/recordings
 - Previous Host Partnership recordings including this year's Exeter and Ulster University events
 - UK and International framework-specific guidance
 - General programme information, gap analysis to action plan templates, case studies and more

Reminder: Sign up for 2026/27

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- Published 2026/27 Responsible Futures [membership overview and costs](#)
- Please let us know any questions or challenges for participating in 2026/27
- Sign up [form](#)

Thank you!

Final cohort catch up for 2025/26:

9 and 10 September – reflection on the year