

## **National Union of Students**

### **Students' Attitudes and Skills for Sustainable Development Survey 2014**

Over the past four years, the NUS and HEA have been conducting research into student attitudes towards and skills for sustainable development, through a survey of first and third year undergraduates. With the support of UPSU, Plymouth University took part in and promoted the NUS survey and, in 2014, Plymouth University returned the largest number of student responses - 585 students (458 first year undergraduates and 127 third year undergraduates) – from a broad range of disciplines. This summary outlines some of the key findings for Plymouth University.

- ❖ Students were asked how important a range of factors were in choosing which university or college to apply to. Choosing amongst reasons such as required 'A' level grades and the reputation of the university, 38% students believed that how seriously Plymouth University **takes environmental issues** was very important or somewhat important in their choice of institution. Interestingly, after the reputation of the course and 'A' level grades demanded, the third most influential factor were the teaching methods that the course used. 43% of students also believed that **how seriously Plymouth University takes global and development issues** was very important or somewhat important in their selection of university.
- ❖ Students were asked how far they believed that their university, course leaders, clubs and societies, and students' union **practices and promotes good social and environmental skills**. Responses were predominantly very positive and showed that 88% of first year students agreed or strongly agreed that their University/college practices and promotes good social and environmental skills, 76% believed their course leaders did the same, and 70% said the same for UPSU. Reassuringly, the third year responses showed a very similar story with 87% believing that the university practices and promotes good environmental and social skills.
- ❖ When asked to rank a number of skills, understanding people's relationship to nature was ranked as the least important skill by a clear majority of first year students, and UPSU have identified this as an area that they wish to develop and enhance in the future. Again, a similar picture emerges for third years, who continued to rank the understanding of people's relationship with nature as the least important skill.
- ❖ During their time at Plymouth University, third year students said they had taken part in a range of pro-sustainability behaviours, including 56% who had volunteered, 86% recycled, 68% donated to charity, 56% bought locally, 70% saved energy, 11% who had taken part in

an environmentally friendly scheme or project, and 19% who had reduced the amount of air travel they took.

- ❖ Finally, 73% agreed or strongly agreed that universities and colleges should be obliged to develop students' social and environmental skills as part of their courses, with 69% believing running extra-curricular activities within the students' union to develop environmental and social skills would be the most relevant way to build sustainability into their university experience.