
Sustainability Literacy Survey 2026

2026

HKUST

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Executive Summary

This report presents the 2026 Sustainability Literacy Quiz results for HKUST students and staff, compares selected trends across 2023, 2025, and 2026, and identifies priority areas for future sustainability education. The findings show that sustainability literacy varies across schools, academic levels, and staff groups, with recurring gaps in local government and international sustainability goals. The recommendations focus on targeted self-learning modules, seminars and workshops, orientation content, and curricular integration to strengthen sustainability literacy across the HKUST community.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Goal and Format

The Sustainability Literacy Quiz is a 19-question survey developed to assess HKUST students' and staff members' ability to learn and retain key concepts of sustainability. Sustainability literacy is essential for preparing the HKUST community to address sustainability challenges and contribute to the University's net-zero action plan by 2045. To track progress and strengthen sustainability education and operations, the survey regularly measures sustainability literacy across the community while also serving as an educational tool. This report is published on our publicly accessible website.

As of 2025, the measurement pool has been broadened to include all staff members, both academic and non-academic, as well as postgraduate and PhD students. By evaluating the ability to learn and retain key sustainability concepts, we gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of HKUST's educational and operational sustainability initiatives.

Refer to Figure 1 for examples of the quiz questions and answers, and Appendix 2 for full list of questions.

Figure 1: Examples of Quiz Questions and Answers



According to Hong Kong's 2030 Decarbonisation Strategy (Climate Action Plan 2030+), which of the following is estimated to make up the highest percentage of Hong Kong power generation in 2030?

Coal

Solar

Natural Gas

Nuclear

I don't know



It's Okay!!

The correct answer is **Natural Gas**.

Hong Kong is phasing out coal-fired electricity generation and replacing it with natural gas-fired electricity generation to meet our carbon intensity reduction target of 65% to 70% by 2030.

Natural gas is a reliable and available large-scale technology that can replace coal and reduce carbon emissions to a certain extent. However, it still generates carbon emissions; therefore, in order to achieve a higher carbon reduction target, alternative energy sources will need to be added to replace natural gas. Many people refer to gas as a "bridge fuel," meaning that it is a reasonable option while we ramp up the deployment of renewable resources.

Read about different climate actions taken by the HK government in this [link](#).



According to Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0, which of the following is NOT an initiative to reduce carbon emissions?

Changing the electricity fuel mix to reduce the use of coal

Establishing bicycle-friendly new town

Introduction of scooters as micro-mobility option

Charging scheme on Municipal Solid Waste

I don't know



Correct!

"Introduction of scooters as micro-mobility option" is **NOT** an initiative to reduce carbon emissions according to the Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0.

Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0 is a set of overall development framework which involves several initiatives that aim to enhance the effectiveness of city management and improve people's quality of living as well as Hong Kong's attractiveness and sustainability by making use of innovation and technology.

For more information, you can take a look at the following [link](#).

1.2 Methodology

With reference to the guidelines from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and THE Impact Rankings, tailored questions are designed by HKUST faculty and the Sustainability / Net-Zero Office to assess the community's learning of this knowledge. The assessments comprise right / wrong multiple-choice questions, with explanations and references provided for "correct", "incorrect", and "I don't know" responses. The survey is shared with all staff and students.

HKUST employs this recognized methodology to assess understanding of the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental knowledge and challenges, rather than opinions and sustainability culture. We have identified material sustainability topics to include United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), climate change basics, ESG issues, systems thinking, global poverty, and social equity. This aligns with Hong Kong's strategic climate directives like Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050, Climate Action Plan 2030+, and Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0. The questions are classified into three categories comprising local government and international sustainability goals, environmental concepts and social concepts.

2.0 Results and Analysis

Since 2025, the Sustainability Literacy Survey has expanded its reach to provide a detailed analysis of two key groups: students and staff. This segmented approach allows us to identify targeted opportunities for enhancing sustainability education and operational initiatives.

2.1 Students

2.1.1 By School

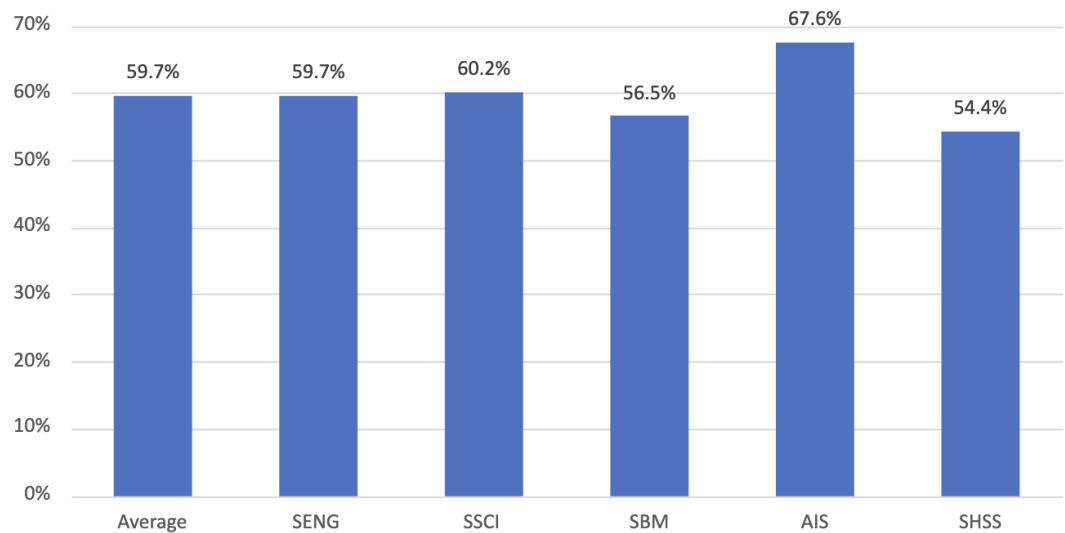
With the Sustainability Literacy Quiz results collected this year, the following key figures are observed:

- As shown in Figure 2, students in the School of Humanities and Social Science have lower average scores, while students in Academy of Interdisciplinary Studies recorded the highest scores.

Figure 2: Student Results by School

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%

Glossary: School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS), School of Engineering (SENG), School of Business and Management (SBM), School of Science (SSCI), and Academy of Interdisciplinary Studies (AIS)

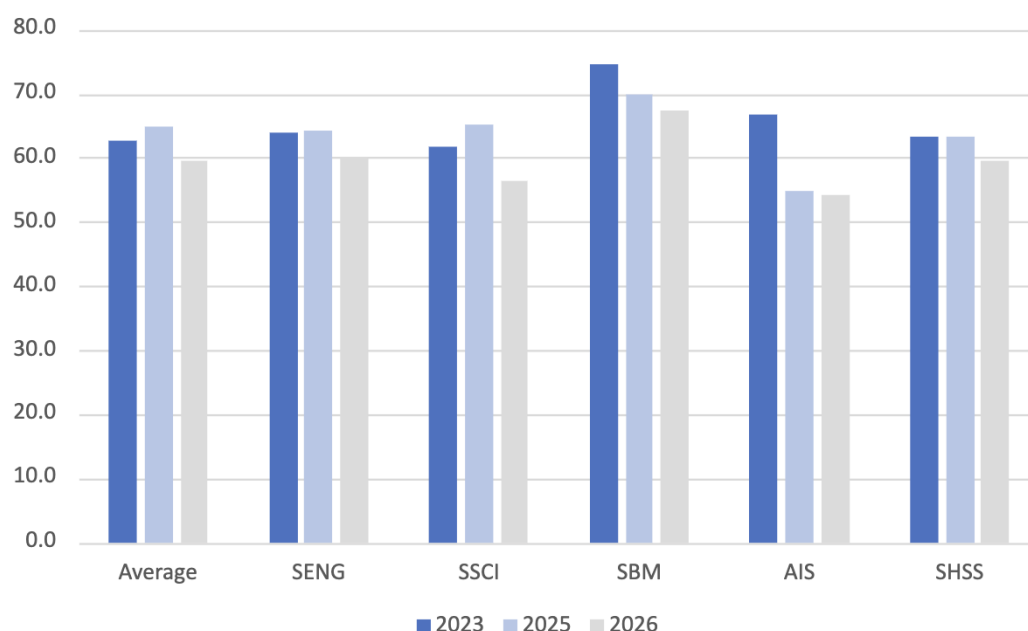


- As shown in Figure 3, the overall average score increased steadily from 2023 to 2025, before decreasing in 2026.

Figure 3: Student Results by School Comparing Survey Periods

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%

Glossary: School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS), School of Engineering (SENG), School of Business and Management (SBM), School of Science (SSCI), and Academy of Interdisciplinary Studies (AIS))



Upon analyzing the results by question, three distinct topic categories were identified: “Local Government and International Sustainability Goals”, “Environmental Concepts”, and “Social Concepts”. “Local Government and International Sustainability Goals” covers topics relating to UN SDGs initiative, Hong Kong's 2030 Decarbonisation Strategy, Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0, and Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050. “Environmental Concepts” cover topics relating to polluter pays principle-based policy, circular economy, Environmental Social Governance reporting, futures / systems thinking, environmental impact, planetary boundaries, and climate change. “Social Concepts” cover topics relating to Human Development Index, Living Wage, and Fair Trade. The following key trends were observed.

- “Local Government & International Sustainability Goals” is the lowest performing topic overall, especially for SBM (45.6%) and SENG (50.5%). SHSS (51.1%) and SSCI (54.4%) performed relatively better, while AIS (57.9%) had the highest average score.
- “Social Concepts” is the best performing topic across all schools with an overall average of 64.2%. AIS students performed the highest at 72.5%, followed by SSCI (64.1%) and SENG (62.0%).

- The “Environmental Concepts” topic consistently demonstrates strong performance across all schools, with AIS having the highest average of 69.4%.

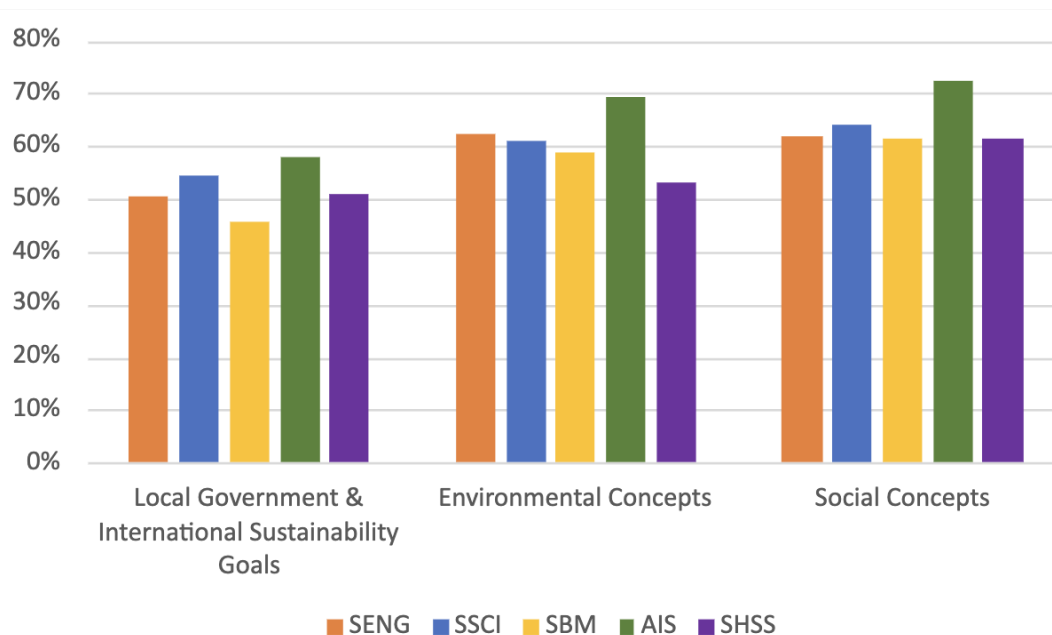
Figure 4: Student Results by Question Categories by School

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%

Glossary: School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS), School of Engineering (SENG), School of Business and Management (SBM), School of Science (SSCI), and Academy of Interdisciplinary Studies (AIS))

Definition of topics:

- *Local Government and International Sustainability Goal: Relates to UN SDGs initiative, Hong Kong's 2030 Decarbonization Strategy, Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0, and Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050.*
- *Environmental Concepts: Relate to polluter pays principle-based policy, circular economy, Environmental Social Governance reporting, futures / systems thinking, environmental impact, planetary boundaries, and climate change.*
- *Social Concepts: Relate to Human Development Index, Living Wage, and Fair Trade.*



Please refer to Appendix 1 for a comprehensive version of the survey results.

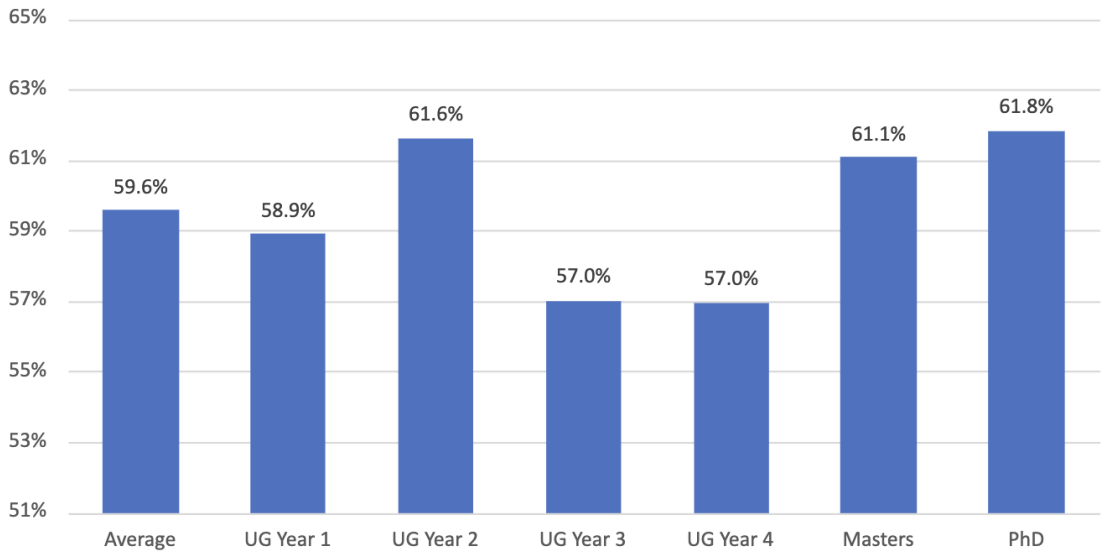
2.1.2 By Year Group

Since 2025, PhD and master’s students have been invited to participate in the survey. For student year groups, the following key figures are observed:

- As shown in Figure 5, Year 2 students (score: 61.6%) and PhD students (score: 61.8%) scored higher on average than other year groups.

Figure 5: Student Results by Year Group

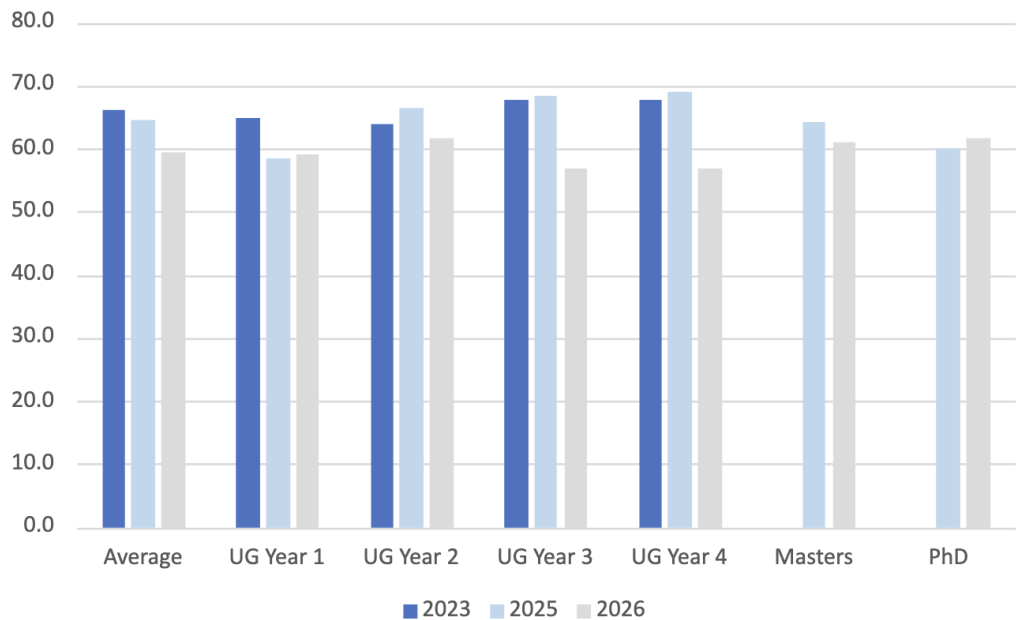
Data presented in percentage; total = 100%



- As shown in Figure 6, the overall average score for UG Year 1, UG Year 2, and PhD has shown improvement. The gap between year groups is narrowing.

Figure 6: Student Results by Year Group, Comparing Survey Periods

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%



The following key trends are observed across academic levels:

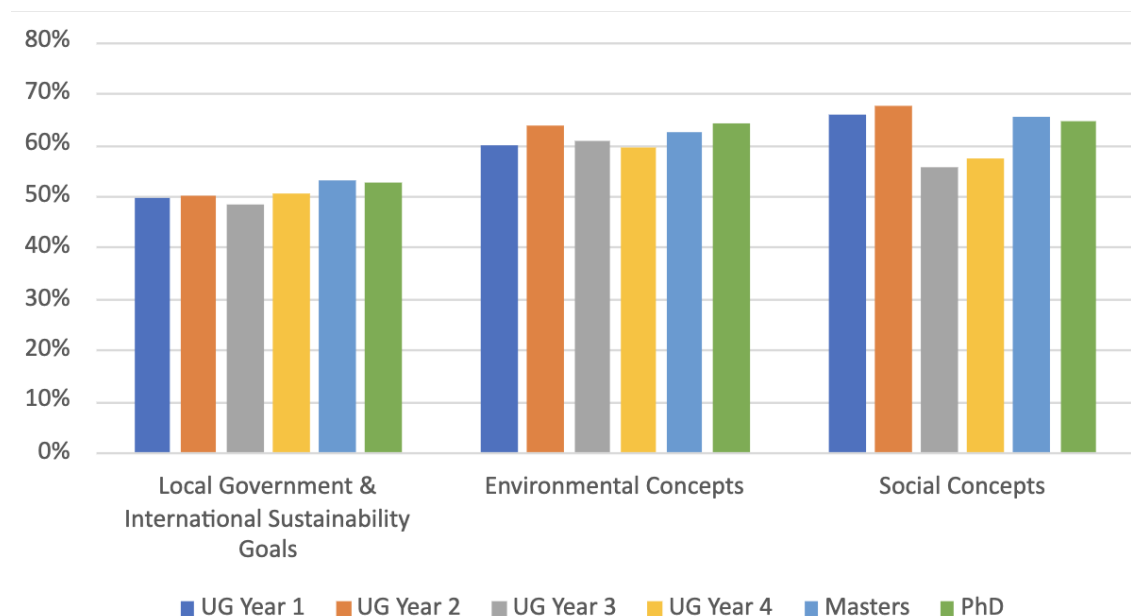
- “Local Government & International Sustainability Goals” is the lowest performing topic overall, with all year groups showing similar grade averages.
- “Social Concepts” was the best-performing topic across all academic levels, with an average score of 62.7%. UG Year 2 performed the best at 67.7%, while UG Year 3 scored the lowest at 55.7%.
- Averages were consistent across all year levels for the “Environmental Concepts” topic.

Figure 7: Student Results by Question Category and Year Group

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%

Definition of topics:

- *Local Government and International Sustainability Goal: Relates to UN SDGs initiative, Hong Kong's 2030 Decarbonization Strategy, Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0, and Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050.*
- *Environmental Concepts: Relate to polluter pays principle-based policy, circular economy, Environmental Social Governance reporting, futures / systems thinking, environmental impact, planetary boundaries, and climate change.*
- *Social Concepts: Relate to Human Development Index, Living Wage, and Fair Trade.*



Please refer to Appendix 1 for a comprehensive version of the survey results.

As seen in Figure 8, the following key trends are observed across schools and academic levels:

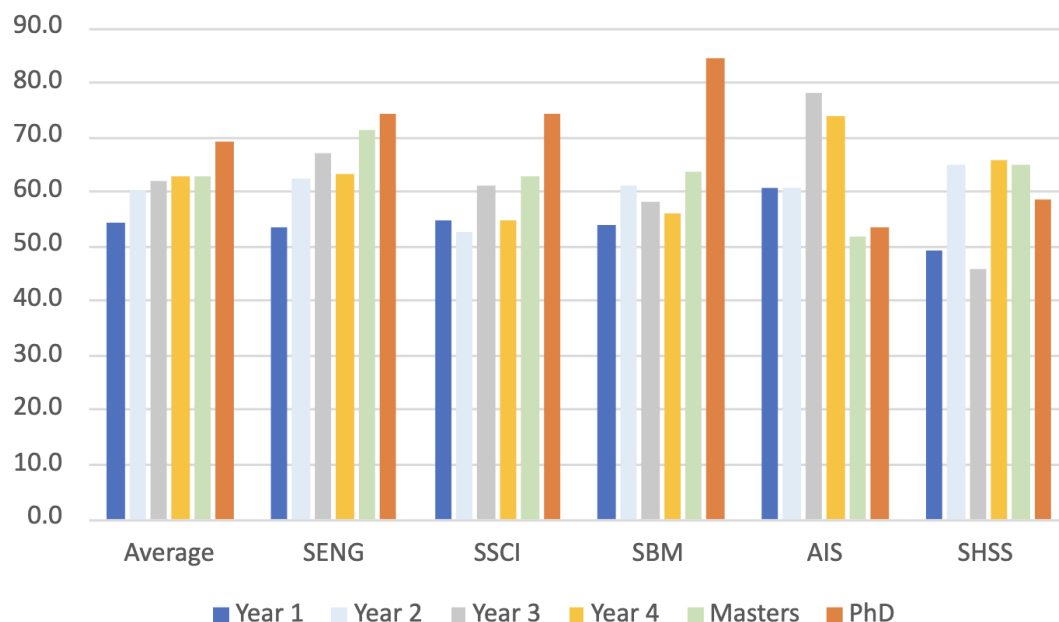
- A common trend across all schools shows that the average score increases as the Year Group increases, with Year 3 and Year 4 students averaging higher scores than the Year 1 and Year 2 students.

- AIS consistently scores the highest amongst Year Groups and schools

Figure 8: Student Results by School & Year Group

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%

Glossary: School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS), School of Engineering (SENG), School of Business and Management (SBM), School of Science (SSCI), and Academy of Interdisciplinary Studies (AIS))



2.2 Staff

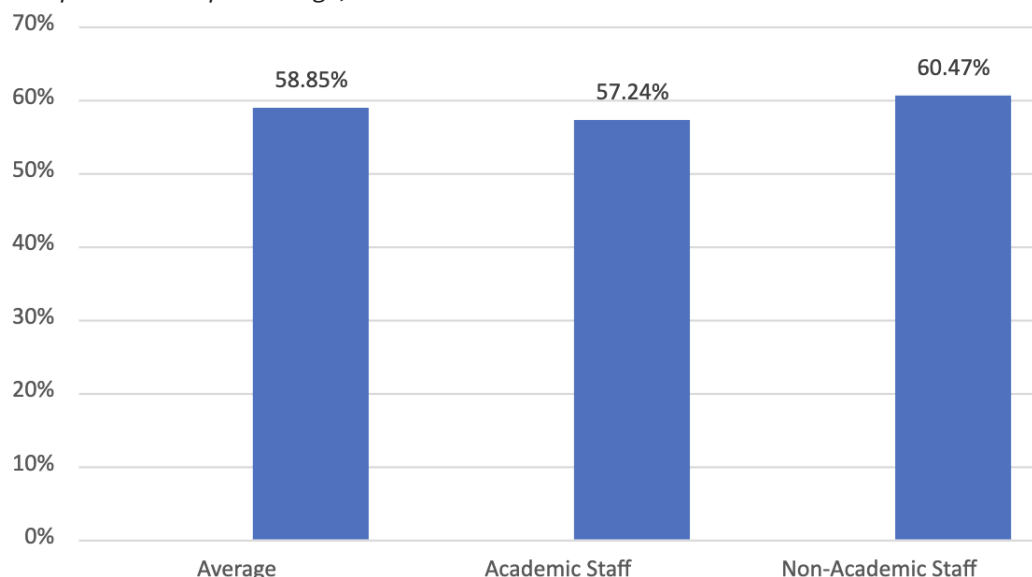
For staff, responses were categorized into academic and non-academic groups, offering insights into how sustainability concepts are understood within distinct professional roles.

2.2.1 By Staff Groups

Academic staff outperformed non-academic staff by 3.23%.

Figure 9: Staff Results by Staff Groups

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%



The following key trends were observed between academic and non-academic staff.

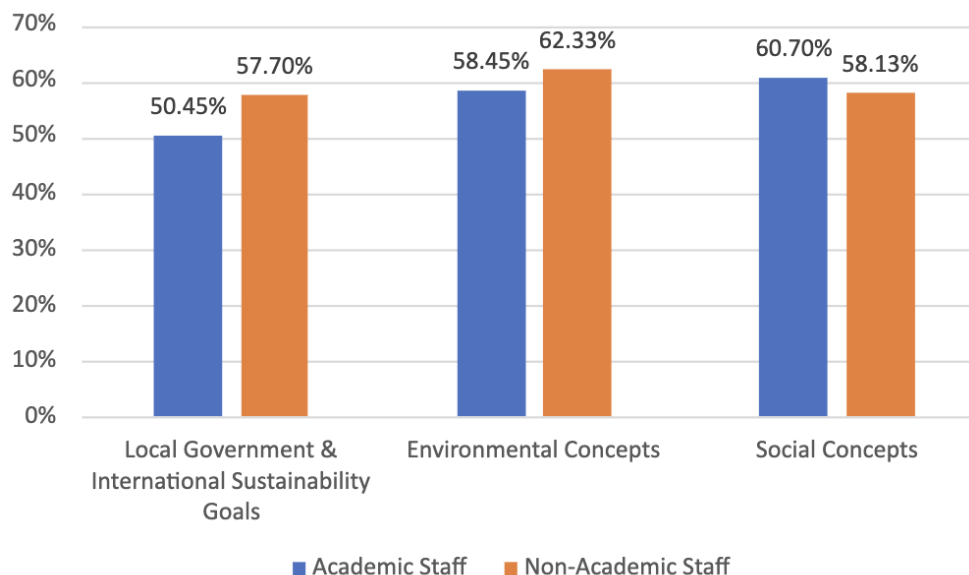
- Non-Academic Staff slightly outperformed Academic Staff in “Local Government & International Sustainability Goals” and “Environmental Concepts” topics.
- Academic Staff performed significantly better in the “Social Concepts” topic.

Figure 10: Staff Results by Question Categories

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%

Definition of topics:

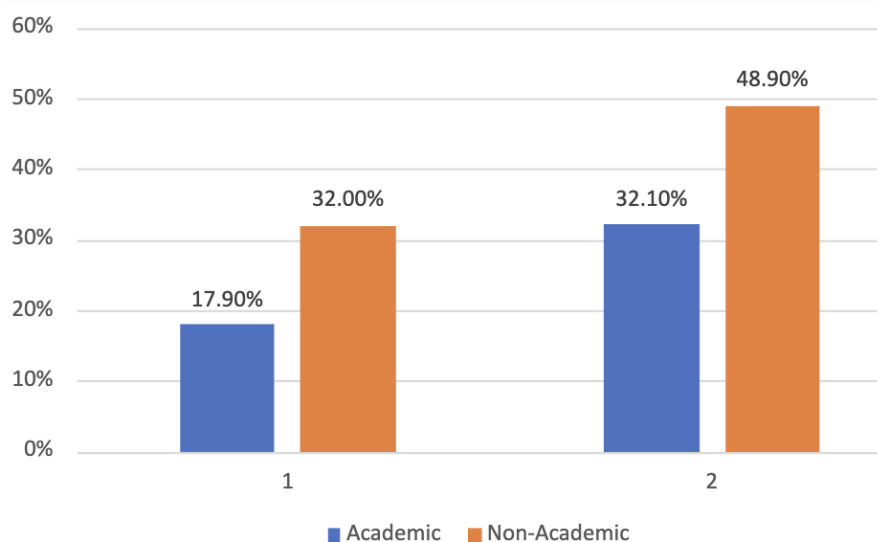
- *Local Government and International Sustainability Goal: Relates to UN SDGs initiative, Hong Kong's 2030 Decarbonization Strategy, Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0, and Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050.*
- *Environmental Concepts: Relate to polluter pays principle-based policy, circular economy, Environmental Social Governance reporting, futures / systems thinking, environmental impact, planetary boundaries, and climate change.*
- *Social Concepts: Relate to Human Development Index, Living Wage, and Fair Trade.*



- Largest performance gaps are found for “Greenhouse Gases” (+14.1%) and “Polluter Pays Principle-based Policy” (+16.8%) between academic staff and non-academic staff.

Figure 11: Performance Gaps between Staff Groups for “Greenhouse Gases” (+14.1%) and “Polluter Pays Principle-based Policy” (+16.8%)

Data presented in percentage; total = 100%



3.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, several key trends emerge. First, sustainability literacy shows a positive correlation with years of study, as average scores generally increase from UG Year 1 to PhD students, indicating that higher education deepens sustainability literacy.

Second, students and staff demonstrate different areas of strength and weakness: students perform strongest in social concepts, while staff demonstrate stronger knowledge in environmental concepts. However, both groups show gaps in understanding local government and international sustainability goals. Finally, the trend between 2025 and 2026 shows an overall decline in literacy scores across cohorts, pointing to the need for reinforced and continuous sustainability education.

To raise overall sustainability literacy among students and staff, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. Online Self-Learning Modules for Staff – Life Cycle Thinking and Circular Economy

To enhance staff capacity in key sustainability approaches and address major knowledge gaps, the promotion of existing online self-learning modules for staff are recommended. These modules are targeting the two largest performance gaps between academic and non-academic staff: Greenhouse Gases and Polluter Pays Principle-based Policy.

Online modules hosted on digital learning platforms offer self-paced and interactive learning experiences, helping to build a common language of sustainability across departments. In addition, upcoming sustainable procurement staff training can also reinforce these concepts.

2. Enhance Engagement through Sustainability Seminars, Workshops, and Orientation Programs

For staff, a series of initiatives is recommended to cultivate a culture of sustainability. These include seminars and workshops that connect sustainability concepts to daily operations, such as green procurement, environmental policy updates, and life cycle thinking. A sustainability segment have also be incorporated into the new staff orientation program to ensure new employees understand HKUST's current campus green initiatives and goals. These initiatives should be continued and focus on reinforcing gaps in understanding local government and international sustainability goals. Topics may relates to UN SDGs initiative, Hong Kong's 2030 Decarbonization Strategy, Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint 2.0, and Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050.

For students, SDG-specific seminars are recommended to help students deepen their understanding of SDG concepts. Collaboration with NGOs, experts, and practitioners would bring real-world insights and inspiration to students. These seminars should continue to serve the wide range of student groups and broaden the SDGs concepts covered.

3. Strengthen Literacy through Curricular Integration and Targeted Training via new Common Core courses

For students across all academic levels, the integration of sustainability education into the formal curriculum is recommended. This will be achieved through the implementation of the new Common Core curriculum, which includes dedicated SUST courses for all undergraduates, alongside the growing popularity of specialized programs such as the B.Sc. in Environmental Management and Technology (EVMT), the B.Sc. in Sustainable and Green Finance (SGFN), and the Extended Major in Sustainability. These curricular additions will help strengthen sustainability-mindedness among students.

Prioritizing these strategies now will help reverse the current trajectory and re-establish a culture of continuous improvement in literacy across the entire school community.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Score Results for the Sustainability Literacy Quiz (2023, 2025, 2026)

Results for All Year Groups in 2023 (Total Score: 18)

2023	Average	AIS/IPO	SBM	SENG	SHSS	SSCI
Year 1	11.7	10.9	11.1	12.1	13.5	10.8
Year 2	11.5	13.2	11.3	11.1	11.0	11.1
Year 3	12.2	14.5	11.1	10.6	12.2	12.6
Year 4	12.2	14.9	11.2	11.9	11.3	11.6
Participants: 258	11.9	13.4	11.1	11.4	12.0	11.5

Results for All Year Groups in 2025 (Total Score: 19)

2025	Average	AIS/IPO	SBM	SENG	SHSS	SSCI
Year 1	11.1	10.5	11.3	10.9		11.1
Year 2	12.6	12.4	12.9	13.0	8.0	11.3
Year 3	13.0	13.4	12.4	12.9	13.5	14.6
Year 4	13.1	14.3	13.4	12.1		13.8
Masters	12.1	13.5	11.9	12.1	9.8	12.3
PhD	11.4	14.1	16.0	10.1		11.1
Participants: 304	12.3	13.3	12.4	12.0	10.4	12.2

Results for All Year Groups in 2026 (Total Score: 19)

2026	Average	AIS/IPO	SBM	SENG	SHSS	SSCI
Year 1	8.3	11.5	10.2	10.1	9.3	10.4
Year 2	11.4	11.5	11.6	11.8	12.3	10.0
Year 3	11.8	14.8	11.0	12.7	8.7	11.6
Year 4	11.9	14.0	10.6	12.0	12.5	10.4
Masters	11.9	10.8	12.1	12.2	12.3	11.9
PhD	13.1	10.1	16.0	13.1	11.1	14.1
Participants: 627	11.4	12.1	11.9	11.9	11.0	11.4

Appendix 2: 2026 Question Correctness for Students (By School Group)

By Topic	AIS	SBM	SENG	SHSS	SSCI
Local Government & International Sustainability Goals	68.6%	45.6%	50.5%	36.4%	54.4%
Environmental Concepts	69.4%	58.5%	62.2%	53.0%	60.9%
Social Concepts	72.5%	61.3%	62.0%	61.4%	64.1%

Appendix 3: 2026 Question Correctness for Students (By Year Group)

By Topic	UG Y1	UG Y2	UG Y3	UG Y4	Masters	PhD
Local Government & International Sustainability Goals	49.6%	49.8%	48.5%	50.6%	53.1%	52.6%
Environmental Concepts	59.7%	63.7%	60.6%	59.3%	62.3%	64.3%
Social Concepts	66.0%	67.7%	55.7%	57.1%	65.6%	64.4%

Appendix 4: 2026 Question Correctness for Staff

By Topic	Academic Staff	Non-Academic Staff
Local Government & International Sustainability Goals	50.45%	57.70%
Environmental Concepts	58.45%	62.33%
Social Concepts	60.70%	58.13%

Appendix 5: 2026 Respondent Percentage

Percentage of Year Group and School for Respondents in 2026 (Total: 627)

	Total	UG Year 1	UG Year 2	UG Year 3	UG Year 4	Masters	PhD
Total Count (All)	627	127	122	80	96	143	59
SENG	35.7%	33.9%	29.5%	31.3%	31.3%	40.6%	54.2%
SSCI	20.9%	29.1%	18.0%	23.8%	18.8%	13.3%	27.1%
SBM	28.7%	29.9%	38.5%	35.0%	38.5%	21.0%	0.0%
AIS	11.2%	6.3%	11.5%	6.3%	10.4%	16.1%	16.9%
SHSS	3.5%	0.8%	2.5%	3.8%	1.0%	9.1%	1.7%

Percentage of Staff Groups for Respondents in 2026 (Total: 287)

	Percentage	Count
Academic Staff	6.1%	56
Non-Academic Staff	25.3%	231
		Total Count: 287

Appendix 6: Question and Answer List

Social Concepts What is the difference between a Living Wage and a Statutory Minimum Wage? They are the same thing The statutory minimum wage is always higher The living wage reflects the actual amount of income needed to meet basic needs The living wage is a legally binding regulation I don't know	Environmental Concepts "Futures thinking" is an important concept in sustainability. Which of the following is NOT considered a "Futures Thinking" exercise? Scenario planning Payback analysis Forecasting and back-casting Life cycle cost analysis I don't know	Environmental Concepts Which of the following is NOT an example of a Polluter Pays Principle-based policy? Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) charging Incentive schemes for bringing your own bottle Deposit fee for bottles Carbon Tax All of the above I don't know	Government Policies What statement is NOT true about the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative? It was adopted by all of the UN member states It recognizes that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge and a key to healing our planet It aims to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives It is in direct competition with the Millennium Development Goals I don't know
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Environmental Concepts The Urban Heat Island Effect is: The trend of people moving from rural areas moving to urban areas The increase in temperature in tropical urban areas caused by climate change An increase in the number of cities that reduce exports and imports during hot summer months A higher of temperature in urban areas due to the density of buildings, the sparseness of greenery and other human activities. All of the above I don't know	Environmental Concepts In order to prevent the worst effects of global climate change, scientists recommend that we: Eliminate the emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 Emphasize the deployment of renewable energy resources Eat less meat and dairy Focus on increasing the efficiency of buildings and transportation systems All of the above I don't know	Government Policies According to Hong Kong Smart City Blueprint, which of the following is NOT an initiative to reduce carbon emissions? Changing the electricity fuel mix to reduce the use of coal Establishing bicycle-friendly new town Introduction of scooters as micro-mobility option Charging scheme on Municipal Solid Waste I don't know	Environmental Concepts Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of a circular economy? Closed-loop system Waste are regenerated into raw materials Extra costs for manufacturers Minimizing the use of resource inputs I don't know
Environmental Concepts A technique to assess environmental impacts associated with all the stages of a product's life from cradle to grave (resource extraction through usage and disposal), is called: An annual review A life cycle analysis An energy audit A system analysis I don't know	Environmental Concepts Environmental, Social Governance (ESG) reporting is now required by companies listed on the Hang Seng Stock Exchange. What is an example of a topic included in a typical ESG report? Labor practices Greenhouse gas inventory Community service Performance data and KPIs All of the above I don't know	Environmental Concepts Which of the following are principles of systems thinking? It views individual elements within a larger, more complex system It addresses problems in a way that does not create new problems in the future It considers the impact and consequences of actions over time It allows us to understand how our actions are influenced by something else All of the above I don't know	Environmental Concepts "Living within our planetary boundaries" means: Using natural resources as slowly as possible Using only as much resources as can be replaced by natural processes No introducing new technology too quickly Discovering new resources to allow maximum economic growth I don't know
Environmental Concepts Which of the following is NOT a stage in life-cycle analysis? Disposal Habitat Conservation Product Use Raw Material Production I don't know	Social Concepts The Human Development Index (HDI) was developed as an alternative to use economic growth as a measurement of the health and development of a country. Which of the following is NOT included in the HDI? Life expectancy CO₂ Emissions Literacy Rate GDP per capita I don't know	Environmental Concepts Which of the following statements about greenhouse gases is FALSE? Humans would be better off without greenhouse gases Greenhouse gases trap part of the heat from escaping back into space Without fossil fuels, the concentration of greenhouse gases would be largely constant within the atmosphere There are several other greenhouse gases in addition to carbon dioxide All of the above are TRUE I don't know	Government Policies According to Hong Kong 2030 Decarbonisation Strategy, which of the following is estimated to make up the highest percentage of Hong Kong power generation in 2030? Coal Solar Natural Gas Nuclear I don't know
Social Concepts Which is NOT an accurate goal of the "Fair Trade" movement? To guarantee local producers a fair, stable price for products like coffee, chocolate, and handicrafts To develop longer-term trading relationships between local suppliers and wholesalers To designate a recognizable brand to help consumers make more sustainable choices To maximize the consumption of local natural resources I don't know	Social Concepts When adopted in 1948, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was considered a great achievement because: For the first time in history, it identified a set of fundamental human rights to be universally protected It declared that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights It expressed that everyone has the right to express their opinions freely and without interference The articles have formed the foundation for numerous international treaties and national constitutions I don't know	Government Policies As a coastal city, Hong Kong is vulnerable to weather-related threats. Which action is NOT outlined in Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2050 to enhance resilience against these extreme weather events? Strengthen coastal defences infrastructures Stabilize slopes and conduct drainage improvement works Upgrade emergency response systems as early warning mechanisms Mandate new commercial buildings to be typhoon-proof with reinforced structures I don't know	