



Redefining Standards for Higher Education



Introduction

In recent years, Higher Education has pivoted away from traditional methods of teaching in the face of unprecedented change and has prioritised student attraction, retention, diversity and wellbeing at rapid pace.

Campus life has largely resumed, but the global pandemic has accelerated the sector's use of student data, redefined learning long term and sparked an alarming decline in mental health among the student population. Indeed, according to the Office for National Statistics, 37% of first year students exhibited moderate to severe symptoms of depression in October 2021, with 39% showing signs of some form of anxiety.

Evidently, Higher Education is in a significantly different place compared to 2020. Whether it is the profitability of courses in a competitive post-pandemic marketplace, or the implementation

of sustainability strategies following COP26, universities are now under immense pressure to meet increasing social and economic demands.

For SGS UK Ltd, understanding these pressures is paramount.

It is what enables us to help universities thrive in the face of unprecedented change, and it is how we ensure we are helping you to grow your reputation in the Higher Education sector - placing you in a far stronger position compared to your global and UK counterparts.

As the world's leading inspection, testing and certification company, SGS is dedicated to supporting Higher Education providers nationwide. Thanks to our experience empowering the public sector with end-to-end solutions, we are able to deliver a comprehensive range of services to support universities in the evolving Higher Education landscape.



SGS' experience in the public sector

Recognised as the global benchmark for quality and integrity, SGS has over 50 years' experience supporting and building long-standing relationships with:



Central
government



Local authorities



Universities



Ministry of
Defence (MOD)



National Health
Service (NHS)

These partnerships have allowed us to gather valuable insights into how Higher Education, and the public sector as a whole, operates. Our solutions enable senior leadership and those on the front line of teaching to build and retain trust by continuously meeting the expectations of students and key stakeholders.

Drawing on our knowledge and expertise working in partnership with the Higher Education sector, our network of public sector-experienced auditors and experts will help you:

- **Ensure compliance with relevant standards and regulations**
- **Support the training and professional development of staff**
- **Manage risk across your organisation and improve operational efficiency, sustainability and your value to society**



"The certification award is also a tangible outcome, testifying to our commitment in providing the best possible experience."

Craig O'Callaghan,

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer,
University of London International Programmes

"I've found SGS' contribution to be efficient and effective at all times. They've always been helpful and flexible in arranging meetings to discuss the standard itself, which was especially necessary when we were discussing how to achieve our goals in a realistic time frame."

Jim Burns,

Head of Quality Systems, City of Glasgow College



ISO 27001 Information Security - Student Data

A recent Higher Education study* found that 86% of academics believe student data can support long-term goals, including student attraction/retention, the student experience and virtual learning.

In addition to being an untapped resource, student data presents a serious risk for the Higher Education sector as a whole, and universities now have a greater obligation to ensure student data is safe, secure and handled responsibly at all times. Any university that fails to take the necessary precautions risks significant financial and reputational damage.

However, with **ISO 27001 Information Security Management Systems certification**, universities are now able to validate the integrity of their data

and systems to prospective students and key stakeholders alike.

By demonstrating your commitment to information security, you will enable your university to boost student attraction and retention levels, strengthen employee ethics and reinforce the notion of confidentiality throughout your organisation. ISO 27001 also empowers universities to enforce information security and reduce the risk of fraud, data loss and the disclosure of sensitive information.

Partnering with SGS for your ISO 27001 certification will enable you to put efficient information management processes in place, benefit from our knowledge, experience and best practice and develop closer and more sustainable relationships with students and Higher Education stakeholders.

*How Data Supports Higher Education Goals and Outcomes 2022/23, Crimson

Information Security Management System (ISMS) certification allows you to:



Keep sensitive data safe



Establish a culture of security



Demonstrate compliance with laws and regulations



Instil students and stakeholders with confidence

In May 2018, a security breach - in which the personal data of 19,500 students was made public - resulted in a £120,000 fine for one university. Crucially, the data included names, addresses, dates of birth, phone numbers, signatures and – in some cases – physical and mental health conditions.

ISO 45003 Psychological Risk - Student Wellbeing

Student wellbeing remains a priority within the Higher Education sector. The global pandemic has sparked a mental health crisis, the effects of which are still being felt today.

Current estimates place the number of students entering Higher Education with a mental health condition at over 70,000 each year. Worse still, according to a recent UCAS survey of first year students, 49% said that they had not shared this information with their chosen university*.

Clearly, the Higher Education sector is committed to providing meaningful support to all students, but what can individual universities do to foster a culture of care within their organisation?

ISO 45003 Psychological Risk - Student Wellbeing certification enables universities to identify the early indicators of mental health risk, react swiftly with appropriate support and champion wellbeing in all its forms.

The first global standard for managing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, ISO 45003 provides universities with effective guidance on the management of psychological risk as part of a wider occupational health and safety management system.

Empower your teachers to recognise early warning signs and provide a consistently high level of support to the students in your care, whether they are campus-based, learning from home or anywhere in between.

*Starting the Conversation: UCAS Report on Student Mental Health, 2021

Psychological Risk - Student Wellbeing certification allows you to:



Identify the early indicators of mental health risk



Take simple and effective action to manage student wellbeing



Establish mental health best practice



Foster a culture of care within your organisation



Sustainable Development or Environment, Social and Governance (ESG)

Sustainable Development is expansion in capacity or increase in levels of various activities that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Similarly, Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) is the adoption of a framework to support the sustainable development principles within a commercial environment or organisation.

This means adopting an enduring, balanced approach to economic activity, environmental responsibility and social progress. ESG is about integrating the goals of human wellbeing, good health and prosperity with social justice, and maintaining the earth's capacity to support life in all its fullness.





Any organisation that does not consider ESG principles within its strategic planning and implementation would have elevated transitional risks such as reputational loss, litigation, critical issues in business continuation, loss of business value and loss of stakeholder confidence.

Moreover, the organisation would fail to capitalise on opportunities the transitional period presents for business value addition and generation of competitive advantage.

Unsurprisingly, ESG has become an important goal for universities. Students, parents and market demands are placing increased pressure on universities to engage in more sustainable business practice. Public and Not-for-profit (NFP) universities

and colleges are turning to the bond market to support business model growth in the age of low interest rates. But sustainable bonds also offer new opportunities to meet investor demand, and environmental and social commitments, for ESG-conscious institutions

As an approved verifier for Climate Bonds Certification worldwide, SGS can act as a third-party verifier to assess whether your green bonds meet the requirements for certification. Drawing on our international ESG experience, we are well placed to share best practice and ensure your bonds deliver the levels of social and environmental growth your organisation needs.

Net Zero strategy planning

With the drive to reach Net Zero continuing to grow and pressure mounting on universities and other organisations to begin implementing strategies to reach these targets, universities and other organisations need to start considering their plans.

SGS' Climate Bonds Certification allows you to:



Deliver on your environmental and social commitments



Offer new opportunities to meet investor demand



Support business model growth



Strengthen your reputation for environmental responsibility

In 2021, University College London issued the first sustainable bond for the Higher Education sector in accordance with their Sustainability Finance Framework, a move that allows them to issue green, social or sustainability bonds or loans to support their environmental and social initiatives.

ISO9001 Quality Management - University Success, Profitability and Market Potential

While the UK remains a choice destination for thousands of international students each year, there is renewed pressure for universities to improve both the attractiveness and profitability of their courses in the face of increasing competition from USA, Canada and Australia.

In response, ISO 9001 certification will enable you to continuously improve university performance and focus on providing students and key stakeholders with modules, courses and outcomes of consistent quality.

Supporting the aims and objectives of Higher Education institutions, an **ISO 9001 quality management system (QMS) documents** the processes, procedures and responsibilities for achieving quality policies and objectives university-wide. The ISO 9001:2015 standard defines the way universities meet the requirements of students and key stakeholders based on seven core quality management principles:

- **Customer focus**
- **Leadership**
- **Engagement of people**
- **Process approach**
- **Improvement**
- **Evidence-based decision making**
- **Relationship management**

An ISO 9001:2015 audit from SGS will enable your university to develop and improve performance and prospects in an increasingly complex and competitive marketplace.

In addition to ISO 9001 audits, we also offer a range of complementary services, including:

- **ISO 9001 training courses**
- **ISO 9001 Gap Assessment – to assess readiness for certification**
- **Integrated Management Systems Certification – audit solutions against bespoke quality performance criteria**

Certification follows successful completion of an audit against the ISO 9001 standard and enables universities to:



Operate more efficiently



Meet statutory and regulatory requirements



Reach new markets



Identify and address risks



Training – SGS Academy

SGS Academy can empower you with the skills and knowledge necessary to transform your people and processes, deliver better student outcomes and boost university performance.

Additionally, while universities are places of academic learning and personal growth, they are also essential to providing students with practical skills and experience. Here, SGS has the capability to partner with Higher Education institutions, with

a view to empowering students with meaningful qualifications that enable them to enter the working world as soon as they graduate.

SGS is also able to partner with Higher Education institutions to define your training needs and deliver customised solutions to meet your exact learning requirements. With access to expert trainers, all of whom are experienced in their respective fields, our training moves beyond theory to give you valuable real-world insights.

SGS has partnered with Cardiff Metropolitan University to delivering a semester-long course that will provide students with qualifications to implement ISO 27001 within an organisation, providing skills ahead of their peers and improving employment potential.

Our training courses cover everything from safety to quality, compliance to sustainability, and brand protection to risk management, allowing your university to:



Remain in step with Higher Education best practice



Gain the necessary skills and knowledge to take your organisation forward



Learn how to manage and minimise your environmental impact



Engage, develop and retain your talent



Improve productivity, integrity and performance throughout your organisation



Learn in a way that suits your specific needs, learning styles and goals with a range of flexible

Conclusion

Following a period of unprecedented change, Higher Education institutions are being asked to radically redefine how they operate at rapid pace.

Whether it is supporting student wellbeing in the face of an ongoing mental health crisis or boosting sustainability against a backdrop of rising emissions and climate change, universities must now contend with an increasing range of social, economic and, in some cases, existential issues.

Add to this the operational pressures associated with leveraging student data responsibly or the burden of improving university performance in an increasingly competitive national and international marketplace, and the scale of the challenge facing academia becomes apparent.

Collectively, these factors have made certification and training a necessity for any forward-thinking Higher Education provider. In addition to their

prestige or the programme of courses they offer, universities are today defined by their commitment to these core issues. Demonstrating this commitment and strengthening skills and knowledge in these key areas must now be a priority.

Recognised as the global benchmark for quality and integrity worldwide, SGS is dedicated to supporting our partners in the Higher Education space. Our 96,000 employees operate a network of 2,600 offices and laboratories, meaning we have the resources and expertise in place to support your certification goals and deliver better student outcomes and more profitable courses.



**For more information about our Higher Education
certifications, please contact:**

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"We chose to work with SGS due to them being recognised as a global leader in inspection, assessment and certification services. It has been a pleasure to work with SGS; the support and guidance they have provided year on year has enabled us to continue to consolidate our position and to provide an enhanced level of customer service in a variety of the standards criteria."

Feedback from a recent SGS client