Education for Sustainable Development in Higher Education in Ireland

A Landscape Report

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Introduction

1. Introduction

Ireland's first national strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was launched in 2014 (Department of Education and Skills, 2014). It aimed to ensure that 'education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the 'what'), the key dispositions and skills (the 'how'), and the values (the 'why') that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who act for a more sustainable future'. It framed ESD as being proactive and transformational focusing on 8 priority action areas of leadership and coordination; data collection and baseline measurement; curriculum at pre-school, primary and post primary; professional development; further education and training; higher education and research; promoting participation by young people; and sustainability in action. The strategy was released towards the end of the UN Decade of ESD (2005-2014), which sought to integrate the principles and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning (UNESCO, 2014).

This was followed by the UNESCO Roadmap for Implementing the Global Action Programme on ESD (2015-2019) (UNESCO, 2014), which set out 5 priority actions areas of Advancing Policy; Transforming Learning and Training Environments; Building Capacities of Educators and Trainers; Empowering and Mobilizing Youth; and Accelerating Sustainable Solutions at Local Level. These action areas were carried forward into UNESCO's ESD to 2030 Roadmap (UNESCO, 2020), which has a strategic objective of promoting ESD as a key enabler of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a particular focus on individual and societal transformation, and technological advances. The 2nd National ESD Strategy, 'ESD to 2030' (Government of Ireland, 2022[1]) remains committed to these five priority action areas and sets out an implementation plan that calls for the promotion and support in the use of ESD pedagogies amongst educators; the embedding of ESD in curricula and programmes; the production of high-quality resources for ESD; whole institution approaches encompassing biodiversity, transport, buildings, energy conservation, and resource management; systematic and comprehensive ESD capacity development; the recognition of young people as key contributors to ESD design, delivery and monitoring; fostering and supporting engagement with local communities, NGOs, and local authorities.

Two national progress reports on 'ESD to 2030' have demonstrated a considerable increase in ESD activity across the higher education sector since 2022. This has been in due (in no small part) to ESD been identified as one of the funding themes under the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning (SATLE) funding, the integration of Climate and Sustainable Development as a transversal theme in the Higher Education Authority's (HEA) Performance Framework Agreements 2024-2028, the Climate Action Mandate training requirements for public sector staff, and the allocation of dedicated resources to ESD.

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[1] Jointly developed by the Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), in consultation with key stakeholders. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is a cosponsoring department for the strategy's implementation.

This report aims to provide an overview of ESD practice across the higher education sector in Ireland through a review of institutional HEA Performance Agreements 2024-2028, Strategic Plans, Climate Action Roadmaps, Sustainability Strategies, and the most recent 'ESD to 2030' reports. This was done in consultation with each public higher education institute (HEI) in Ireland. The report is structured as a suite of case studies to cultivate a collaborative approach across higher education both in Ireland and internationally, with hyperlinks provided to publicly available strategies, roadmaps, implementation plans, resources, and initiatives. Ireland has a unique opportunity to build on this good work by becoming a global leader on ESD.

Atlantic Technological University
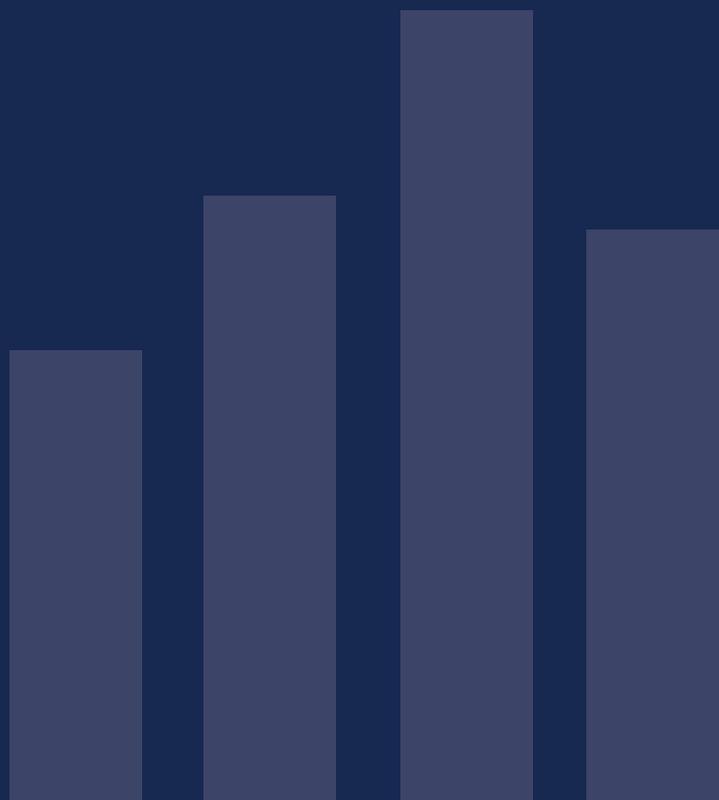
2. Atlantic Technological University

The Atlantic Technological University (ATU) was formally established on 1 April 2022 bringing together 3 Institutes of Technology, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology, Sligo and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. It has 9 main campuses with 26,692 students and 2,537 staff.

Photograph 2.1 ATU Connemara students reviewing woodland trail resources

2.1 Institutional Commitments

ATU's Strategic Plan 2024-2028 is framed by 5 Guiding Lights of Enabling Education, Engaged Research, a Connected Ecosystem underpinned by Organizational Transformation and viewed through the lens of Sustainability for the Future. Through this, ATU commits to '*economic, social, and environmental sustainability for our campuses, local communities and the region, and to the well-being of our planet.*' The 'Sustainability for the Future' vision includes integrating a sustainable futures curriculum; undertaking cutting-edge research for sustainability; promoting and delivering equitable sustainability and social impact; demonstrating operational excellence in relation to zero carbon emissions; and supporting sustainable development through community engagement and outreach.

ATU's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2024-2028 commits to ensuring that *'the principles of sustainability lie at the heart of our community embracing all aspects of our endeavours'.* Some key activities listed to achieve this include:

- Develop a resource sharing process on ESD and SDG activities across all ATU campuses.
- Include sustainability activities in assessment, work experience, partnerships and networks, green campus initiatives, and ESD/SDG CPD courses.
- Review progress and further embed ESD through the programme review process.
- Undertake a sustainable tracking and assessment review.
- Develop an ESD training programme for students.
- Consider ESD in the collection of data to obtain a robust, evidence-based measure of educational performance.
- Undertake a survey of academic staff to examine their understanding of ESD.
- Develop a programme design handbook for ESD.
- Promote ESD through the N-TUTORR Curriculum Framework.
- Embed ESD and the SDGs in all programme curricula to ensure that all graduates have ESD knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to cope and thrive in the face of an uncertain future and to act for sustainable development.
- Engage with stakeholders to ensure that future skills requirements and the transition to a low carbon and green economy are considered for all programmes.
- Assign responsibilities to designated staff to enhance coordination and cooperation on ESD.
- Establish the ATU Green Gown Awards to celebrate climate action and ESD.
- Establish a Sustainability Office, heading by a Vice-President/Lead for Sustainability to support a cross-campus approach to ESD.
- Develop and offer micro-credentials on ESD and topics such as climate change, biodiversity, the SDGs, gender equality, and human rights.
- Host annual hackathon events to engage learners with local and global challenges that will support the development of sustainability competences.

ATU's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 Performance Objective 1 commits to enhancing green literacy across all disciplines and highlights the work of the EU Green Alliance and the N-TUTORR project in supporting ESD. A key indicator supporting Performance Objective 1 is:

- Proportion (%) of new programme curricula (Level 8 major awards), identified at programme validation stage, which have embedded SDG content applicable to programme, cumulatively moving to a target of 80% by 2027/2028.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the pillars of Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, and Engagement in ATU's HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028.

The ATU Climate Action Roadmap 2023 highlights the role of the Centre for Sustainability in 'demonstrating leadership in ESD by embedding sustainability, the SDGs, and climate action more holistically across the curriculum to ensure sustainability and climate literacy are recognized as key graduate competences across all disciplines.'

Photograph 2.2 ATU Mayo and Mayo County Council Staff launching their community partnership on sustainability leadership.

2.2   ATU's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in ATU's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- The establishment of the ATU ESD Academy, which is a collaboration between the ATU Centre for Sustainability and the ATU Teaching and Learning Office.
- The development of an online self-paced 'stacked' Level 6 Certificate on the SDGs consisting of 4 modules focused on Partnership, People, Planet, and Prosperity funded through the HCI-funded Higher Ed. 4.0 project.
- The development of digital badges on the SDGs for staff and students funded through the N-TUTORR project.
- The ATU Radical Sustainability Lab, which explores how games and serious play can support student and staff engagement with sustainability, climate action, and the SDGs.
- ATU's participation in the SOS-UK International Responsible Futures Programme 2025, which is a whole-institution supported change programme and accreditation mark that aims to embed sustainability across all aspects of student learning.

- The ATU Postgraduate Certificate on Education for Sustainability was delivered in both semesters of the academic year targeting two different staff cohorts.
- ATU led and co-facilitated the 3rd national roll-out of the HEA Open Course on 'Education for Sustainability' in February 2025 and the 1st roll-out of the HEA Open Course on 'Embedding the SDGs across the Curriculum' in October 2024.
- The N-TUTORR project supported a range of Student-as-Partners and Innovation Fellowships projects focused on ESD and sustainability.
- The ATU Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainability Leadership was delivered to local community groups and local authority staff in the Mayo region.
- The ATU Department of Creative Education was the lead partner on the WOODCircle Erasmus+ project, which developed an open-source self-directed learning platform on the circular economy in the furniture and wood manufacturing sectors for young people.
- The EU Green Alliance is supporting a range of ESD initiatives through its various work packages, particularly focusing on developing an educational model centred on sustainability and SDGs.
- The SDS4HEI Erasmus+ project is developing a 7-step framework for the implementation of sustainable development in HEIs, a self-assessment tool for the validation of sustainable development practices, and a MOOC for strategic inter- and transdisciplinary implementation of the SDGs.
- The 'Power to Change' project is building capacity within communities to take positive actions to address the challenges of climate change focusing on community group training and mentoring, climate education clubs, and developing a living and learning native woodland environment.
- ATU hosted a Sustainable Futures Summer School supported by the Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme for 40 students and 15 international educators who worked on projects related to climate resilience, gamification, low-power data, and coastal modelling.
- As part of the N-TUTORR project, ATU developed an ESD Stories compilation sharing ESD practice from across ATU's campuses.

ATU shared some of their ESD practice during Week 7 (21/03/25) of HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Dr. John Scahill, Dr. Deirdre Garvey, Kevin O'Callaghen, Dr. Jan Gottsche, and Dr. Yvonne Lang.

For further information on ATU's ESD work, please contact Mark.Kelly@atu.ie

Dublin City University
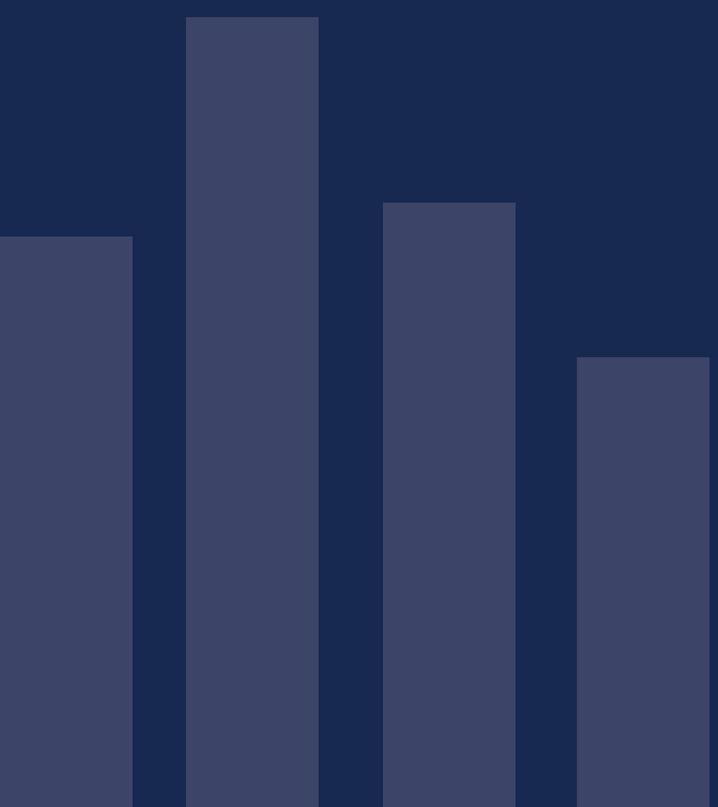
3.   Dublin City University

Dublin City University (DCU) achieved university status in September 1989, having been a National Institute for Higher Education since 1975. In September 2016, it incorporated 4 other educational institutions, namely the Church of Ireland College of Education, All Hallows College, Mater Dei Institute of Education, and St. Patrick's College. It has 3 main campuses with 20,377 students and 2,204 staff.

Photograph 3.1 DCU staff and students celebrating their Green Flag

3.1   Institutional Commitments

One of the four drivers outlined in DCU's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 is 'Sustainable Development' where DCU *'seeks to embed a sustainability ethos that will underpin all our activities and ensure sustainability in all areas of our operation'.*

DCU's Climate Action Plan 2021-2026 sets out a commitment to *'ensuring that all graduates understand the challenges of environmental sustainability and have the sustainability competences that will equip them to be global citizens, inspired and empowered to take the actions necessary for a sustainable future'.* Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is explicitly addressed through the lens of the DCU Graduate Skills competences and transversal skills embedded in DCU programmes particularly the DCU Futures programmes (Figure 3.1). The DCU Futures programmes are a suite of pilot programmes that radically re-imagine undergraduate education for the 21st century to meet the challenge of empowering students to be future-capable and thrive in an increasingly unscripted world defined by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.
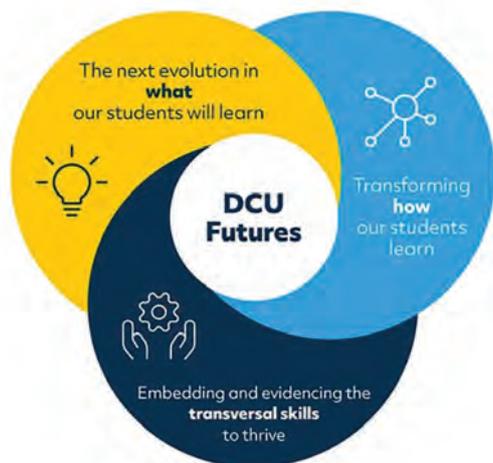
Figure 3.1 DCU Futures Framework

Within DCU's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028, ESD is highlighted as part of Performance Objective 1, which is to integrate transversal skills into curriculum delivery and university processes for an expanded set of undergraduate programmes across the five faculties. The embedding of transversal skills within curricula will impact on the theme of climate, sustainable development, and futures literacies. Performance Objective 4 focuses on the design of a cross institutional Sustainable Development Framework and a DCU Sustainable Development Steering Group to ensure organizational sustainability across all university areas and activities.

DCU's Climate Action Roadmap 2024 lists a suite of training and engagement activities including regular talks by the Head of Sustainability (8-10 per year), information sessions by the DCU Estates Energy Team (1-2 per year), sustainability information sessions with senior management and faculty management boards (4-6 per year); climate leadership training for senior management; dedicated resources on the sustainability webpage; staff and student workshops as part of Green Week. In 2025, DCU commenced the development a new sustainability focused training programme that will be available to all staff via the DCU People's Learning Management System (LMS) as part of compulsory training requirements.

ESD is highlighted as an important dimension of DCU's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and SATLE funding with a focus on mapping and integrating in a pedagogically relevant manner, creating staff opportunities to engage with ESD through the curation of shared resources and continuing professional development to support this work. The role of the ESD Officer, located within the DCU Teaching and Enhancement Unit, aims to create and support the culture of ESD across teaching and learning.

Leading research into societal responses to the climate crisis, the DCU Institute for Climate and Society, brings together transdisciplinary expertise to address complex research questions. The Institute also hosts the MSc in Climate Change: Policy, Media & Society.

The Teaching Enhancement Unit at DCU is committed to including ESD in its ongoing research to support the scholarship of teaching and learning. Projects for 2025/26 include:

- Trialing the Code of Good Practice for ESD with a group of academics in the School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering. This will involve a series of focus groups to identify opportunities and barriers to introducing ESD into modules and programmes. The findings will be used to support the rollout of the Code throughout the University.
- Mapping ESD competences to more general graduate attributes, combined with qualitative research with staff to understand how they perceive the value of ESD in ensuring graduates have the knowledge, skills, and values to understand and address contemporary issues facing people and the planet.

Photograph 3.2 DCU green spaces and allotments

DCU coordinates the UN Regional Centre of Expertise for ESD for the greater Dublin region in collaboration with Educate Together, An Taisce, Dublin City Council, Fighting Words, Exchange House Ireland and ECO-UNESCO.

3.2   DCU's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in DCU's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' progress report include:

- The development of an ESD hub offered through DCU Loop, which includes sections of sustainability knowledge and competences, pedagogy, and transdisciplinary activities.
- The first rollout of a DCU Education for Sustainability Open Course, adapted from the HEA National Forum Open Course. A new cohort of staff will be participating in the second iteration of this course in Autumn, 2025.
- The development of an ESD Code of Practice to build capacity at programme level.
- The creation of an ESD Ideas Exchange, to bring staff together to share best practice and explore opportunities. This is complemented by a staff/student network to align teaching and learning activities with student needs and expectations.

- Targeted faculty support i.e., developing the first national forum on ESD and sustainability for Executive MBA programmes and students; integrating sustainability explicitly into the BA Joint Honours programme in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; establishing a community of practice for ESD within the Faculty of Science and Health to build on their commitment to the Green Labs initiative; and redesigning challenge-based assessment to align them with DCU's INTRA (Integrated TRAining) internship programme.

- A DCU Sustainability Literacy framework consisting of 6 competency statements was developed in 2024 under the DCU Transversal Skills Initiative. Seven programmes have integrated these into formal learning outcomes with aligned assessments. In addition, twenty-four universal rubric statements were developed to ensure rigour, transparency, and consistency in the assessment of sustainability literacy across the entire university. Students from these programmes can now generate a personalized transversal skills profile that includes their level of sustainability literacy and competency.

- ESD is embedded into the existing Institute of Education programmes i.e., the 'Teacher-as-Person' module on the B.Ed. (Primary Teaching) includes a Global Citizenship Education (GCE) course. There is also a specialization on GCE, which includes 4 ESD-related modules. The B.Ed. in Geography Education option consists of 4 modules with strong engagement with sustainability, with one focused on ESD.

- Provision of micro-credentials related to ESD i.e., Environmental Legislation, Standards, and Risk and Citizen Science for Water Monitoring.

- The hosting of annual hackathon events each year i.e., DCU Business School Hack4Change, Science Hackathon, DCU Faculty of Engineering and Computing 'FIRST® LEGO® League' Hackathon.

DCU shared some of their ESD practice in Week 1 (21/02/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Barry Peak, Dr. Cliona McParland, and Dr. Michael Hinds.

For further information on DCU's ESD work, please contact barry.peak@dcu.ie

Dundalk Institute of Technology
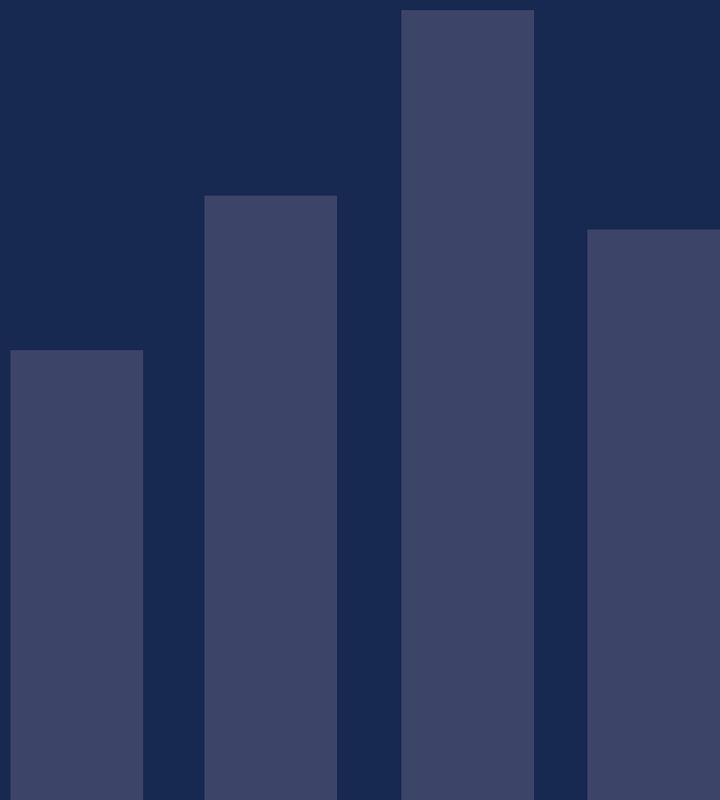
4.   Dundalk Institute of Technology

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) was designated as such in January 1998 having previously been a Regional Technical College. It has one main campus with 6,000 students and 1,000 staff.

Photograph 4.1 The DkIT winning team who participated in the 'Invent for the Planet' competition.

4.1   Institutional Commitments

Sustainability has been identified as a key cross-cutting theme across all aspects of the DkIT Strategic Plan 2024-2028, with the adoption of a *'whole-of-institute approach to embracing sustainability in all its dimensions'* highlighted as a core institutional value. The embedding of ESD as part of the programme review process (2023-2025) is highlighted with Objective 5 focusing on the enhancement of graduate attributes across all programmes that will 'foster the development of globally minded work-ready graduates who will contribute sustainably to society.'

DkIT's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 further reinforces the commitments outlined in the Strategic Plan through the 'enhancement of the curriculum to provide student centred, practice-based, research-informed, and inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that will ensure all students can achieve their potential and contribute sustainably to society' (Performance Objective 1). ESD is embedded as a core guiding principle in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy that informs the programme review process and Student Success Strategy. Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the three pillars of teaching and learning, research and innovation, and access and participation.

Photograph 4.1 DkIT staff participating in a Climate Fresk workshop

4.2   DkIT's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in DkIT's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- The use of the N-TUTORR Curriculum Framework to inform programme and module review processes.
- Seven N-TUTORR sustainability staff champions were appointed across the four schools, who worked with five sustainability student champions to build awareness and support staff.
- ESD was identified as a key theme in the programmatic review process.
- The DkIT Sustainability Council includes a focus on ESD.
- Several SATLE funded learning enhancement projects have focused on embedding ESD and the SDGs across the curriculum.
- A suite of resources on ESD was made available to staff on DkIT's programme review hub alongside a curated playlist of Linkedin Learning.
- A DkIT SDGs Trail was developed through an N-TUTORR Fellowship project.

DkIT shared some of their ESD practice in Week 21 (14/11/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Eamonn Mullen, Dr. Teresa O'Rourke, Dr. Ray Byrne, and Christian Mass.

For further information on DkIT's ESD work, please contact christian.maas@dkit.ie

Institute of Art, Design and Technology
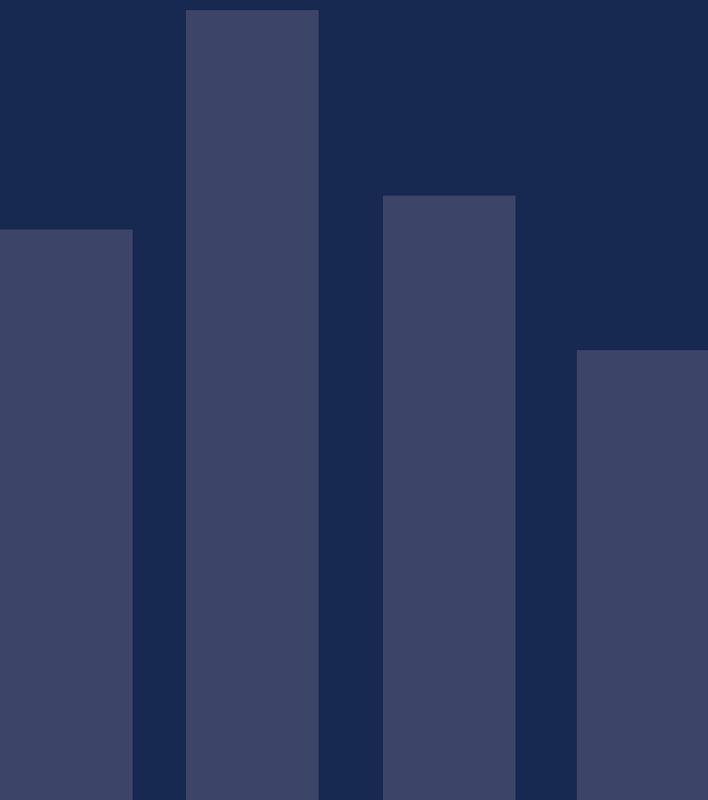
5.   Institute of Art, Design and Technology

The Dún Laoghaire College of Art and Design was given NCEA recognition in 1980, which paved the way for the establishment of the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT) in 1997. It has 2 main campuses with 2,468 students and 256 staff.

Photograph 5.1 Outdoor learning space at IADT

5.1   Institutional Commitments

Sustainability is listed as one of IADT's six priority areas that '*reflect the changing shape of the institutions and the challenges they must meet*' in the Strategic Plan 2024-2028. Within Priority 1: Education, IADT commits to actively incorporating sustainable practice into daily life i.e., in teaching and learning, managing, and inhabiting the physical spaces, and the use of resources. Key commitments include:

- Embedding climate action and awareness in all our teaching and learning ensuring that all our programmes are rooted in sustainable practices.
- Developing curricula to ensure students have agency and are empowered to become active global citizens.
- Ensuring sustainability is embedded in our approach to governance, leadership, and operations, making sustainable practices a part of everyday life.

Performance Objective 5 in IADT's HEA Performance Framework Agreement focuses on ESD and placing sustainability at the core of every decision to achieve a net zero campus, deepen impact, support and nurture connections with local, national, and European communities. The 'ESD to 2030' Priority Actions Areas 2 (transforming learning environments), 4 (empowering and mobilizing young people) and 5 (accelerating local level actions) are explicitly listed. IADT's role in leading the creative sector was also highlighted as an opportunity in relation to sustainability and SDG engagement. The FilmEU 'Dublin Declaration' commits to embedding sustainability in teaching programmes, reducing media and data footprint, and '*offsetting by doing*' through awareness raising and community engagement. Key indicators and targets related to Performance Objective 5 include:

- Proportion (%) of student projects subject to CO_2 audit, progressively moving to 80% by 2027/2028.
- Perceived leadership in sustainability at IADT (% student very satisfied[2], aiming to move to 33% by 2027/2028 from a current baseline of 13%).
- Embed sustainability programme learning outcomes in 50% of Level 9 programmes through the programmatic review process.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the engagement pillar in IADT's HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028.

IADT's Climate Action Roadmap 2025 commits to providing education and training opportunities for staff and students to increase their understanding of climate action and sustainability and to implement practices in their daily lives. IADT have developed a specific programme learning outcome that ensures that sustainable practices are embedded in all learning. More broadly, IADT are supporting the greening of Irish media production using the ALBERT carbon calculator to assess the environmental impact of productions. In the Faculty of Enterprise and Humanities, a Level 9 Postgraduate Diploma in Business: Circular Economy Entrepreneurship has been developed.

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[2] % responding 'leader' or better than other HE' to the question 'How do you feel IADT's performance in sustainability compares to other HEIs?'

Photograph 5.2 IADT green space

5.2   IADT's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in IADT's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- The 'Good Guide to Creative Practice for Students' was designed to equip students with practical principles to embrace ethical, sustainable, and inclusive practice in their creative work. It was developed through an N-TUTORR Fellowship project coordinated by the Public Design Lab and guided by the 3 principles of People, Planet, and Tech for Good.
- New electives on 'Climate Conversations' (Year 1) and 'Climate Connections' (Year 2) were developed by N-TUTORR academic champions.
- Students who completed the 'Climate Conversations' module participated in the 'IADT 2050: A Sustainable Utopia' art competition, with winners announced during N-TUTORR week.
- A suite of resources on ESD and the SDGs curated for staff on IADT's intranet.

IADT shared some of their ESD practice in Week 12 (30/05/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Rónán O Muirthile, Heitor Laforga de Araujo Monterio, Louise Glynn, Clyde Doyle, and Dr. Cormac Deane.

For further information on IADT's ESD work, please contact Ronan.O'Muirthile@iadt.ie

Mary Immaculate College
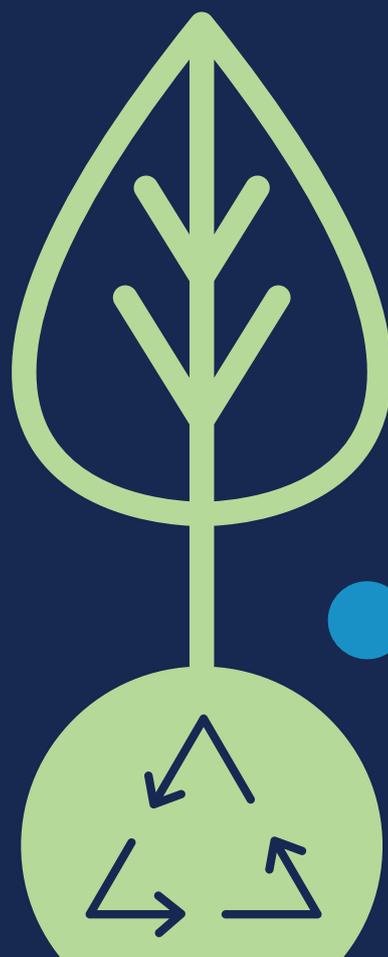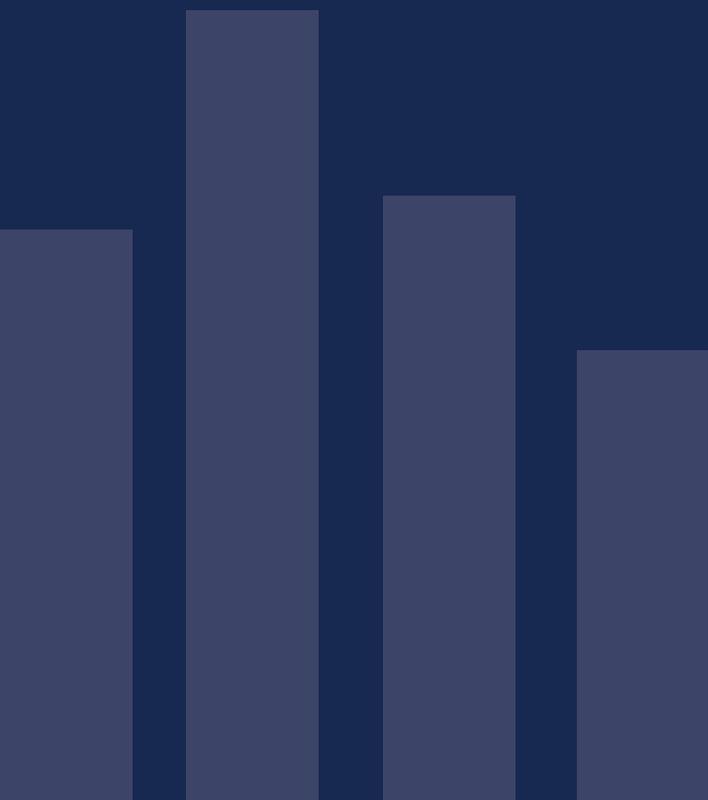
6.   Mary Immaculate College

Mary Immaculate College (MIC) was founded in 1898 to provide professional education for primary school teachers and has since developed into a specialist higher education institution with a strong national and international reputation in education, the liberal arts, and teacher education. MIC became the first College of Education to be recognized as a College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1974. Since 1991, the College has been academically linked with the University of Limerick as its accrediting body. Today, MIC operates across two main campuses and supports a vibrant academic community of approximately 5,000 students and over 400 staff.

Photograph 6.1 MIC's 'flower corridor'

6.1   Institutional Commitments

MIC's Strategic Plan is currently under development. MIC's commitment to sustainability is outlined in their HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028 through Performance Objective 4, which includes the embedding of the SDGs across the curriculum, with a special focus on achieving engagement through the multiplier effect by targeting teacher education. MIC aims to enhance students' understanding of global issues and their interconnectedness; foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills related to sustainability; promote a culture of sustainability and social responsibility; and align their educational practices with national and international sustainability goals. MIC aims to use the AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating Systems (STARS)

methodology to conduct a curriculum audit and undertake a gap analysis; support curriculum development; catalyze stakeholder engagement; monitor and evaluate; report and communicate progress. Key indicators and targets for Performance Objective 4 include:

- Proportion (%) of academic modules (all levels) with the SDGs embedded to progressively move from a baseline of 6% in 2023/2024 to 15% in 2027/2028.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the engagement pillar in MIC's HEA Performance Agreement Framework 2024-2028.

MIC's Climate Action Roadmap 2030 outlines a commitment to align their practice and values with the principles of climate justice, sustainability, and global citizenship. MIC's approach to personalized learning experience, reflective practice, and experiential learning aims to instill a sense of stewardship for the environment, social justice, and the common good. The theme of 'Innovation in Teaching and Learning' is rooted in the principles of ESD and is guided by the SDGs to offer transformative programmes with sustainability at the core. At undergraduate level, sustainability is woven across a suite of modules that encourage critical thinking and problem solving. For example, all pre-service teachers are exposed to ESD place-based and outdoor educational approaches, while there is a Development Education and Global Citizenship Education (DICE) strand within the teacher education provision. At postgraduate level, there are dedicated programmes i.e., M.Ed. in Education for Sustainability and Global Citizenship, a MA in Climate Justice and Sustainability, and a MA/M.Sc. in Environment, Society and Culture. Key roadmap actions include:

- Curriculum SDGs mapping and further integration.
- Enhancing teacher education for climate action i.e., specialist electives on outdoor education, energy literacy, and climate justice; CPD programmes on teaching climate change and integrating sustainability in primary and post-primary classrooms.
- Promoting experiential and place-based learning.
- Advancing pedagogical innovation i.e., interdisciplinary methodologies, carbon conscious digital-enhanced learning.
- Developing new programmes i.e., flexible, micro-credentials for professionals looking to upskill.
- Fostering a culture of climate literacy.
- Support staff professional development including the establishment of a sustainability pedagogy forum to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Embedding sustainability into institutional practices i.e., living labs, competitions, events etc.
- Measuring and demonstrating impact i.e., active participation in national and international networks, case studies, publications etc.
- Engaging students as agents of change and empowered advocates for climate action.

Under theme 4 (Research and Knowledge-Sharing), MIC also commits to establishing itself as a hub for pioneering research in the areas of climate action, environmental sustainability, and ESD building on the following existing initiatives:

- 'Teaching Climate Change in Primary Schools: An Interdisciplinary Approach' book, published by Dr. Anne Dolan.
- 'Teaching the SDGs to Young Citizens' collaborative project focused on role of schools in fostering global citizenship.

Photograph 6.2 MIC campus

MIC prioritizes teaching, learning, and assessment practices that are future oriented and meaningful; equitable and inclusive; community centred and supportive. This year, the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development Centre (LEAD) will be putting a greater focus on sustainability and higher education training through the development of relevant case studies that demonstrate the integration of SDGs.

MIC shared some of their ESD practice in Week 6 (28/03/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Professor Lorraine McIlrath, Dr. Anne Dolan, Emma Gleeson, Dr. John Morrissey, and Dr. Katherine Whitehurst.

For further information on MIC's ESD work, please contact Michael.Keane@mic.ul.ie

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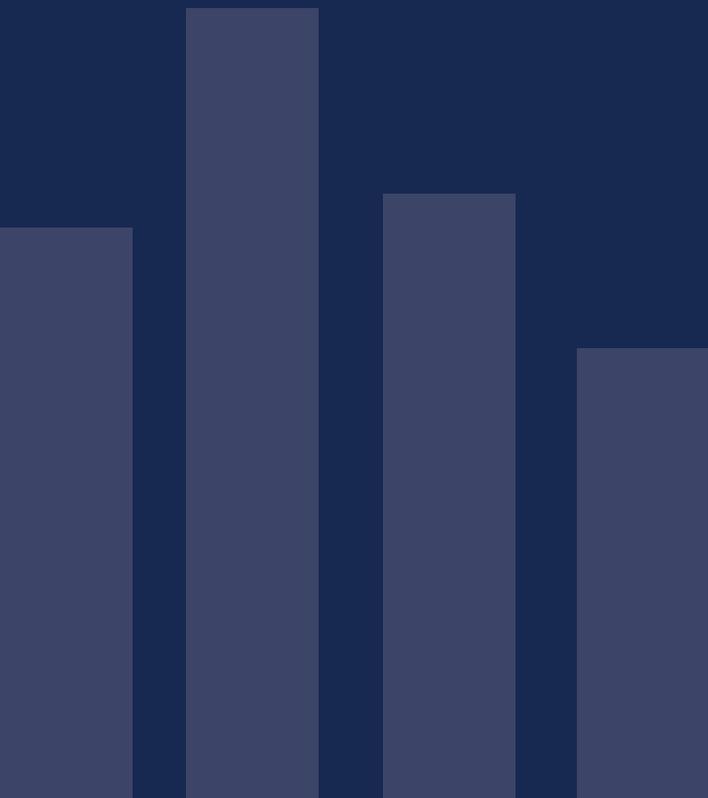
7.   Munster Technological University

Munster Technological University (MTU) was established in January 2021, bringing together two institutes of technology, Cork Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology, Tralee. It has 6 campuses with 18,000 students and 2,000 staff.

Photograph 7.1 Wildflower meadow in front the new MTU Le Cheile Building

7.1   Institutional Commitments

Sustainability and the SDGs are one of the 5 strategic enablers of MTU's Strategic Plan 2022-2027. This plan outlines MTU's mission to lead change and, through education, empower people for a successful future in a globalized world, guided by a vision *'to lead transformation through education'* and the plan recognizes the role of ESD in this transformation. A fundamental aspect of MTU's strategic direction is its deep commitment to sustainability and the UN SDGs. This commitment is designated as a strategic enabler for the entire organization, guiding its activities and facilitating the successful implementation of the strategic plan. MTU acknowledges the vast scale of the current environmental challenges and aspires to be a regional, national, and international leader in sustainability and climate-change through collaboration in education, research, innovation, and influence.

Central to its approach, MTU embraces ESD as an integral element of the SDG4 on quality education, recognizing it as a key enabler for all other UN SDGs. The university is committed to ensuring that its staff and

graduates are equipped to tackle complex sustainable development challenges. Across all disciplines, learners will acquire the necessary mindset, specific knowledge, and skills to contribute to the SDGs and drive positive societal change. By 2030, MTU aims to ensure that all learners gain the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, peace, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Within Theme 1: Learner Education and Experience, MTU explicitly embeds the UN SDG into all its activities and is committed to developing sustainability awareness in its graduates, MTU's culture is designed to facilitate staff, learners, and the wider community in fulfilling their potential with dignity and equality, and it actively seeks to remedy societal challenges such as poverty, barriers to human rights, and gender inequality through its work and practices. The university also recognizes the centrality of climate action, sustainability, UN SDGs, and the Circular Bioeconomy in supporting regional innovation, aiming to lead initiatives that benefit the region in a sustainable and inclusive manner. This comprehensive commitment is further reflected in one of its Key Performance Indicators, which focuses on MTU leading regional sustainability initiatives towards achieving and embedding UN SDGs across all its activities.

MTU's Sustainability Strategy 2025-2035 is shaped by the SDGs and framed through a People-Planet-Partnership lens. This supports the holistic embedding of the SDGs across the curriculum, utilizing MTU as a living lab, and ensuring that all students and graduates are educated and empowered to become active global citizens through ESD. An ESD group has been established to provide leadership and direction for this work with the following key actions:

- ESD included in staff inductions for academic staff.
- ESD train-the-trainer programmes developed within each faculty.
- SDG curriculum mapping, gap analysis, and training.
- Design and development of a Sustainability 101 digital badge for students.
- ESD as a consistent agenda item at course, departmental and faculty board; university executive; and academic council meetings.
- Embedding sustainability content into existing and new programmes.

The ESD group sits with the MTU Sustainability Centre and is facilitated by the Sustainability Project Coordinator. It includes representatives from key academic support units like the Teaching and Learning Unit, the Module Moderators Office, the UNESCO chair, and academic staff involved in ESD. The group will review progress on embedding ESD in teaching and learning and will support programme teams in integrating the UN SDGs into curricula. To ensure broad integration, Faculty Sustainability Champions from each faculty actively contribute to strategic review and development, working with the Sustainability Project Coordinator to implement objectives at their respective faculty levels.

MTU's Climate Action Roadmap 2024 commits to *'ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through ESD and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non- violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.'*

MTU ensures its graduates possess the necessary skills and mindsets for a sustainable future through its Inclusive Curriculum Framework for a Sustainable Future. This framework serves as the foundation for high-quality teaching and learning, establishing a shared vision, programme attributes, and educational pillars to prepare graduates for an ever-changing world, and it explicitly aligns with MTU's strategic enablers. Through this framework, MTU expects its graduates to become global citizens, dynamic, work-ready, and future-facing, notably possessing sustainability awareness and the skills to tackle complex sustainable development challenges at both regional and global levels.

These aspirations are reinforced by Programme Attributes which guide curriculum design, reflecting the University's values and strategic intent. These attributes ensure programmes embrace cultural integration, offer progressive pathways and flexibility, and prioritize holistic learner development. These programme attributes then establish the basis for eight Educational Pillars which include Education for Sustainability alongside Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, UDL, Digital Transformation, Academic Integrity, Entrepreneurship, Employability, and Research and Innovation. To embed sustainability into curriculum content and student experience, programmes must adhere to guiding principles. These include developing opportunities for students to acquire knowledge about sustainability and the UN SDGs, fostering active citizenship. Furthermore, programmes encourage design thinking, critical thinking, self-awareness, collaborative, and problem-solving skills to understand the interconnections among social, economic, and environmental factors.

MTU's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 refers to ESD within Performance Objective 1, where the all-of-university implementation of an 'Inclusive Curriculum for a Sustainable Future' framework will be a key driver with the following indicator:

- Proportion (%) of all new and existing taught programmes that have curricula aligned to the 'Inclusive Curriculum for a Sustainable Future' framework to progressively move to 100% by 2027/2028.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the Teaching and Learning pillar in MTU's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028.

MTU is currently embarking on its Faculty Enhancement Review (FER) process and under its Faculty Enhancement Review Policy the university's commitment to ESD is implemented by mandating alignment with MTU's Strategic Plan. FER develops five-year faculty strategies for areas like curriculum, explicitly stating these must align with the University's strategic plan. This plan, along with MTU's 'Inclusive Curriculum Framework for a Sustainable Future', positions sustainability and the UN SDGs as core strategic enablers. This process fundamentally embeds sustainability goals into faculty planning and self-evaluation. FER directly integrates ESD by requiring faculties to review their programme portfolio for coherence, sustainability, and responsiveness. It assesses the relevance of programmes to learners and employers, and the desired graduate profile. This directly connects to MTU's graduate attributes, which prioritize sustainability awareness and the skills to address complex sustainable development challenges. The detailed review of programmes and modules within FER scrutinizes how specific ESD principles – such as fostering knowledge of SDGs, critical thinking, and ethical aspects of sustainability – are incorporated at individual module and assessment level. A positive FER outcome enables revalidation of programmes for up to five years, thereby ensuring continuous quality assurance and consistent ESD implementation across MTU's academic provisions.

Photograph 7.2 MTU staff and students tree planting

7.2   MTU's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in MTU's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- A series of 'SDGs in MTU' videos were developed to highlight best practice.
- The 'Inclusive Curriculum for a Sustainable Future' framework is supporting the embedding of ESD through Faculty Enhancement Reviews, which is ongoing.
- ESD included in staff induction for new academic staff in 2025 with the aim of providing sustainability training to all staff by the end of 2026.
- A 'Sustainability 101' online training programme was developed and made available to all staff, with 116 completing the nine modules.
- Launched a CPD portal, which will be able to track sustainability courses for professional development.
- ESD train-the-trainer programme developed within each faculty.
- Environmental stewardship initiatives.
- Active Green Flag Committees.
- Dedicated green campus weeks.

MTU shared some of their ESD practice in Week 10 (16/05/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Dr. Niamh Power, Maria Cullinane, Dr. Aisling O'Gorman, Dr. Andrea Bickerdike, and Lisa Zimmermann.

For further information on MTU's ESD work, please contact Niamh.Power@mtu.ie

Maynooth University
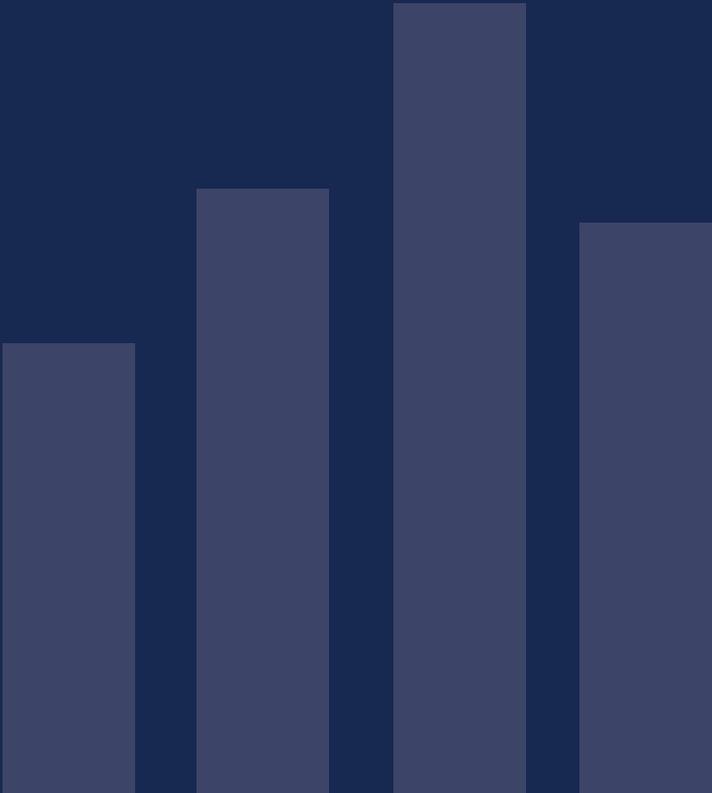
8.   Maynooth University

St. Patrick's College Maynooth was founded in 1795 as a seminary for the education of priests, and by 1850 had become the largest seminary in the world. In 1997, it become the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, a university independent of St. Patrick's College Maynooth. In 2014, it was rebranded as Maynooth University. It has 2 connected campuses with over 15,000 students and 1,400 staff.

Photograph 8.1 MU students working on campus allotments

8.1   Institutional Commitments

MU positions itself as a civic university in its Strategic Plan 2023-2028 with a focus on educating students to be global citizens and the next generation of leaders and change makers, committed to making a positive impact on our future. Sustainability is listed as a guiding principle for the key strategic enabler of *Infrastructure and Sustainability.* Sustainability is also included in specific Strategic Objectives, including enabling the use of the campus acting as a living lab for students' learning, staff wellbeing, and research.

MU's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 situates climate and sustainability across four performance objectives including developing future skills of graduates to engage on issues of sustainability and climate change. The theme of Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped to the Engagement pillar. In addition, ESD plays a central role across the University's Research Beacons (Sustainability and Climate Change, Health and Wellbeing, Data Science and Digital Transformation, Heritage, Culture, and Languages, and Society and Public Policy.

The University participates in the THE Impact Rankings in four of the 17 SDGs – Quality Education, Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities, Partnership for the Goals, ranking 68th out of 1,261 for Reducing Inequalities.

Photograph 8.2 Outdoor learning with MU students

8.2   Maynooth University's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in MU's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- ESD is embedded across Maynooth University teaching, learning and assessment through programme and module design, inclusive pedagogies, and sustainability education. It is also enacted through dedicated programmes such as Special Purpose Certificate in Community Work in a Changing Ireland and Global Youth Work, Certificate in Global Citizenship Education, MSc in Climate Change and MSc in Spatial Justice.

- MU has developed micro-credentials on ESD-related topics for example Mentoring for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Climate Action and Sustainable Development.

- Environmental sustainability and circular economy principles are integrated into MU's teacher education programmes across primary, second level, further education and training (FET) and adult education sectors.

- The Centre for Teaching and Learning is supporting the further integration of sustainability education through the Leadership and EducAtion Framework (LEAF) initiative and recruiting a five-year Senior Educational Developer post focused on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to support research, development and embedding of social justice and environmental sustainability in the curriculum.

- Maynooth University holds a cross-campus annual Social Justice Week and in 2025 Maynooth University hosted the Equitas – EDI in Practice in Higher Education Conference.

- The 2025 MU Teaching and Learning Showcase featured a very well attended panel session, chaired by the

Vice-President (Students and Learning) and including the University's Climate and Sustainability Champion providing a focus on sustainability.

- Maynooth Green Campus is a strategic coalition between Maynooth University (MU), St Patrick's Pontifical University (SPPU) and Trócaire that seeks to promote environmental sustainability and climate justice. Its vision *'centres on the global significance of local action to promote environmental sustainability in the context of teaching, research, public engagement and other activities on the campus'.*

- A new role, Professor of Climate Justice, was established in June 2024 within the ICARUS Climate Research Centre. Professor Jennie Stephens is actively engaged in cross-faculty efforts to integrate sustainability throughout the curriculum.

- MU has an Education for Sustainable Development Community of Practice (CoP) with 90+ members from over 25 departments/unit. The CoP conveners are currently working in collaboration with the University Climate and Sustainability Champion to agree an action plan for 2025/26 which will likely include a Visioning/Foresight project connected to the 2025 national climate targets, supporting the development of in-house Climate Action Leadership/Sustainability/ESD professional learning for all staff, sharing resources, showcasing good practice, and Special Interest Groups.

- Sustainability is embedded across a range of groups and projects i.e., Sustainable Ecosystems Group which supports the next generation of researchers by enshrining sustainability into our practices and behaviours; Erasmus + projects such as the SEED project for Capacity Building in Higher Education for Sustainable Community-based Enterprise Development which is working with universities in Malawi and Zambia to co-develop micro-credentials which are community-based and responsive to local needs in terms of climate change and sustainable local enterprise.

MU shared ESD practice in Week 18 (17/10/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series with contributions from Professor Jennie Stephens, Lily Kilmartin-Smith, Dr. Alison Farrell, and Dr. Patricia Healy Kettle.

For further information on MU's ESD work, please contact alison.m.farrell@mu.ie or jennie.stephens@mu.ie

National College of Art and Design
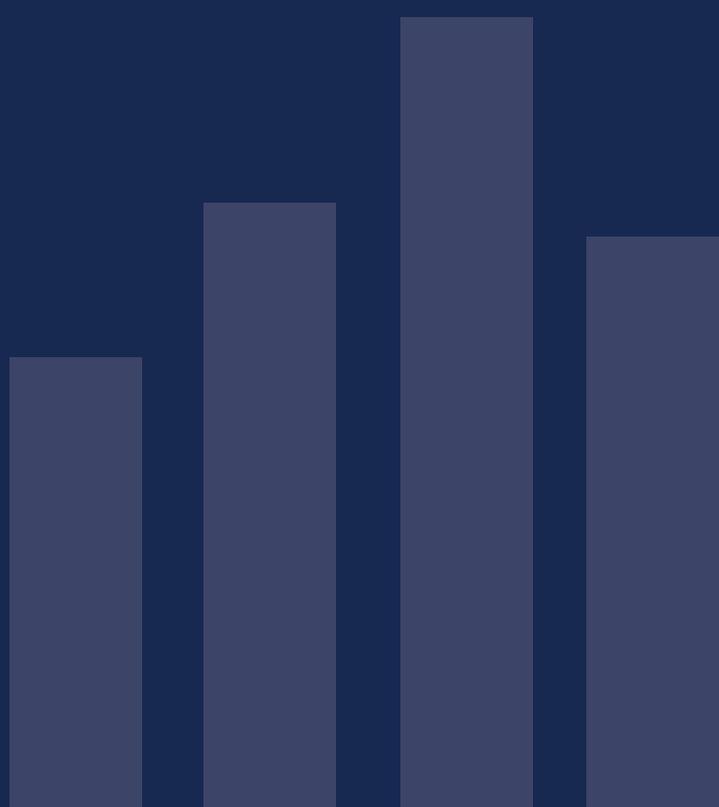
9.   National College of Art and Design

The National College of Art and Design (NCAD) origin dates from 1746 when the Dublin Society took over a private drawing school. In 1877, it was renamed the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, becoming the National College of Art in 1936, and the National College of Art and Design in 1971. In 1996, NCAD became a recognized College of the National University of Ireland. NCAD has over 1,300 full-time students and a further 700 students who take award and non-award bearing part-time classes and 300 staff. It has one main campus with 2 rented buildings at different addresses.

Photograph 9.1 NCAD students and staff participating in an interactive sustainability workshop

9.1   Institutional Commitments

NCAD's Strategic Plan is currently under development. NCAD's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 addresses climate, environment, and sustainability within a decarbonization context and maps climate and sustainable development to the Research and Innovation Pillar through Performance Objective 2. NCAD's Climate Action Roadmap is under development for 2025/26 alongside the Strategic Campus Development Plan which aims to develop our campus with sustainability as a key design criterion. This will also inform the preparation of a dedicated NCAD Sustainability and Climate Action Strategy, to be completed in 2026.

Photograph 9.2 The Creative Boardroom Exhibition

9.2   NCAD's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in NCAD's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- An ESD goal is embedded as part of the development of a new Strategic Plan.
- The 2024 NCAD Teaching and Learning Symposium showcased a range of ESD examples including Caring about the sea in the Anthropocene; Sustainability in the Fashion Industry; Circularity in Design, Art and Ecology; Frugal Filmmaking, sustainable practices in Fine Art Media.
- NCAD's CFA Studio+ electives enhance interdisciplinary collaboration among learners from Fine Art, Design and Visual Culture, bridging multiple disciplines and allowing students from diverse backgrounds to tackle sustainability challenges from multiple perspectives.
- CFA Level 9 programmes integrating alternative teaching environments and real-world collaborations i.e. exploring contemporary art and ecological practices through workshops and outdoor learning at the NCAD FIELD as part of the Professional Diploma in Art and Ecology; MA and micro-credential 'Circular by Design' equip designers with skills to lead the transition to circular, covering sustainable design strategies and policy frameworks; Creative Boardroom: Collaborate4Climate project where Chartered Directors and design students co-create climate solutions in textiles, food, mobility, and the built environment; professional Certificate in Sustainable Exhibition Making teaches sustainable practices in exhibition design, focusing on materials, energy efficiency, and waste reduction and professional Certificate in Design for Transformation explores design as a tool for social and environmental change.
- Integrating the SDGs within the ITE curriculum (undergraduate and postgraduate) specifically harnessing the

teaching and research informed Change Lab module (10 ECTS module underpinned by ESD and the SDGs) to develop co-created art practice learning outcomes and ESD competences for PME students.

- Establishing platforms of dissemination for PME students to exchange learning and education practice, demonstrating integration of ESD within teaching materials with a wider audience (students, teachers NGOs). This will be linked to the annual NCAD exhibition showcase.

- Recognizing ESD as inherently interdisciplinary by introducing it through postgraduate shared modules and programmes, specifically targeting students who aim to work as educators, arts facilitators, within non-formal education (MA Art and Social Action).

- Disseminating ESD practice internally and externally through conferences, seminars and poster presentations and NCAD Exhibition space. This will be reviewed in internal research and teaching and learning forum.

- Continue links with Interreg SEALabHaus Project (NCAD is an associate partner) and bring international perspectives on blue tourism and ESD into teacher education programmes within NCAD.

- NCAD is a partner HEI in the UNESCO Dublin Learning City project and contributes events as part of Dublin Learning Festival.

NCAD shared some of their ESD practice in Week 11 (23/05/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Enda O'Dowd and Louise Allen.

For further information on NCAD's ESD work, please contact allenl@staff.ncad.ie

Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
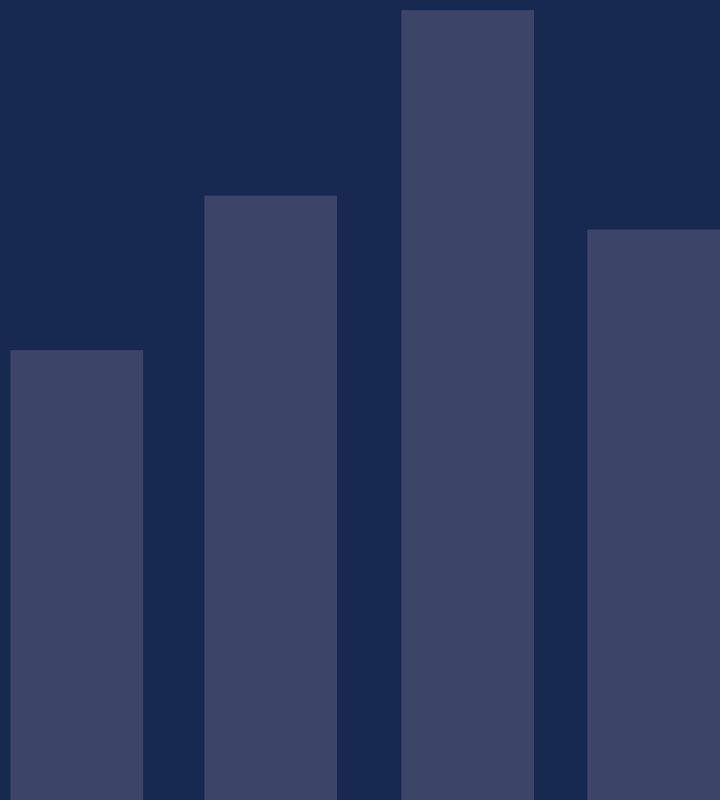
10. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) was founded by Royal Charter in 1784. The RCSI became a recognized College of the National University of Ireland (NUI) in 1978. In 1996, Penang Medical College in Malaysia opens as a cooperative initiative between RCIS and UCD followed by the launch of RCSI Bahrain in 2004, and the official opening of the PU-RCSI School of Medicine in Perdana University in Malaysia. In 2019, RSCI gets authorization to use the title of university in Ireland. RCSI has 5,602 students and 1,469 staff on one main campus Ireland, while also having international operations in Bahrain, Malaysia, and China.

Photograph 10.1 RCSI Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) Programme

10.1 Institutional Commitments

The RCSI Strategy 2023-2027 commits to quality engagement, sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion focusing on the SDGs related to health, education, and environmental sustainability. This includes incorporating sustainability into educational programmes.

The RCSI Climate Action Roadmap 2024 reaffirms the strategic prioritization of sustainability by the senior management team, recognizing its vital role in shaping the future of health professionals' education, research, and healthcare. The Sustainability and Climate Health Committee is responsible for integrating sustainability seamlessly into the fabric of RCSI's education programmes, research, engagement and operational activities. RCSI aims to foster a culture of ESD to empower students to become compassionate healthcare professionals and agents of positive change, dedicated to promoting health equity, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility in their future careers. RCSI, in conjunction with the Irish Doctors for the Environment (IDE), formed a network of seven universities representing all medical schools across the island of Ireland, entitled Climate Health in Medical Education (CHIME) Ireland. The project brought together academic staff to agree what should be included in a planetary health curriculum for medical students. At RCSI, this has included integrating planetary health content throughout the Population Health and Healthcare Delivery theme, introducing a dedicated student module on Climate and Health, and offering a non-accredited online module on Sustainable Healthcare, featured on the SDG Academy.

The RCSI Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategy 2023–2027 recognizes the university's responsibility to build sustainability knowledge and action among staff and students. The strategy sets out a commitment to embedding sustainability across learning, teaching, and assessment practices, in alignment with the UN

- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some key actions include:
- Review existing curricula and outline which content aligns with and amplifies the SDGs.
- Identify and address SDGs gaps in the curriculum.
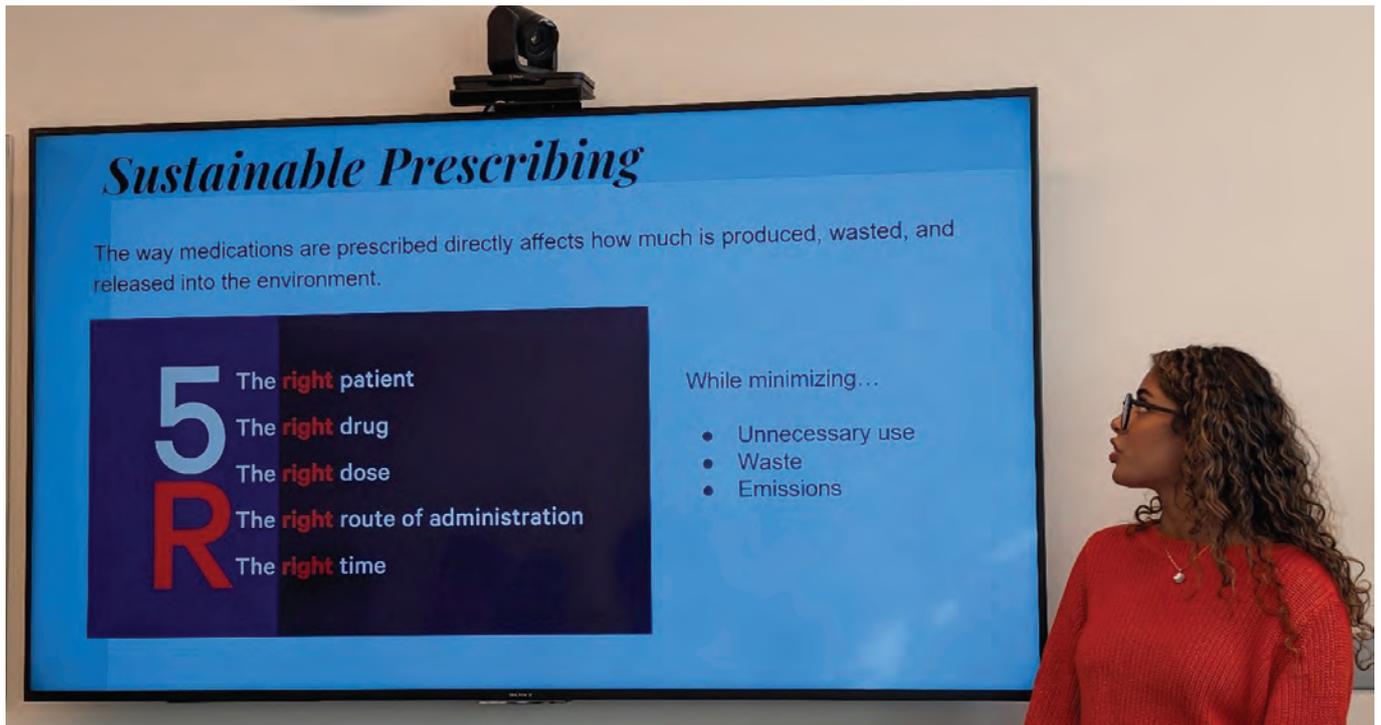
Photograph 10.2 RCSI students presenting project work as part of the 'Sustainability and Planetary Health' module.

RCSI's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in RCSI's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- A sustainability focus was integrated into the RCSI MyHealth Lecture Series.
- An 'SDG Champion' Award and 'Sustainability and Climate Health Research' Award were launched.
- RCSI signed the Healthy Campus Charter and established a Healthy Campus Committee.
- Introduction of a Certificate in Lifestyle Medicine for undergraduates.

RCSI shared some of their ESD practice in Week 17 (10/10/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series with contributions from Dr. Aisling O'Leary, Dr. Ross Brannigan, Dr. Graeme Kelly, Professor Gozie Offiah and Catherine Sullivan.

For further information on RCSI's ESD work, please contact catherinesullivan@rcsi.ie

South-East Technological University
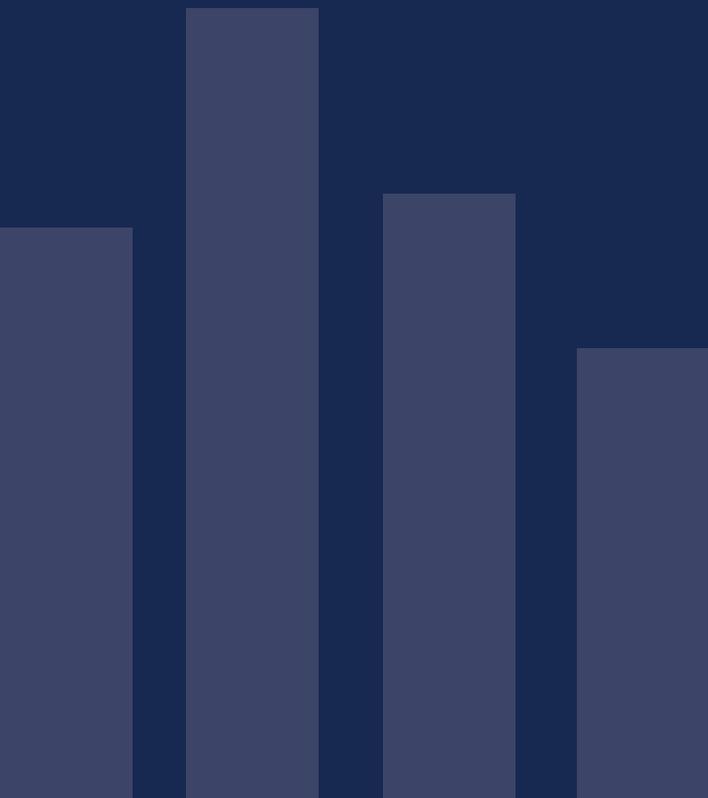
11. South-East Technological University

The South-East Technological University (SETU) was established on 1 May 2022 through an amalgamation of two existing Institutes of Technology in the region, Waterford Institute of Technology, and Institute of Technology, Carlow. SETU has 18,350 students and 1,607 staff on 9 campuses in Waterford, Carlow, and Wexford.

Photograph 11.1 SETU students participating in the 'Sustainability in the Arts' Festival

11.1 Institutional Commitments

SETU's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 sets out a commitment to reshape its curriculum to tackle the challenges associated with climate change and in support of sustainability, ESD and progressing the SDGs. Sustainable development will be embedded into SETU's leadership, governance and operations ensuring that staff and students incorporate sustainability into daily university life. SETU's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 commits to curriculum development which takes account of employment, civic and social needs, especially in relation to sustainability and EDI (Performance Objective 1). A key indicator is the:

- Percentage of programmes with SDGs embedded in the curriculum to progressively move to 100% by 2027/2028.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped across the pillars of Teaching and Learning, and Research and Innovation. The SETU Climate Action Roadmap 2024 highlighted how SATLE funding and the N-TUTORR project has been supporting progress towards building sustainability competences and educating students for sustainable development.

The SETU vision for ESD is guided by three interconnected pillars:

- **People**, empowering students and staff with sustainability competences, agency, and the capacity to embed transformative approaches in teaching, research, operations, and engagement.
- **Place**, reshaping curricula, developing accredited sustainability offerings, and advancing recognition of the south-east as a UNESCO Learning Region, while applying our Strategic Design framework through Living Labs with our communities and partners.
- **Impact**, positioning SETU as a driver of the green and digital transition, co-creating solutions across disciplines, and delivering outcomes that build sustainable futures, regional development, and global citizenship.

This approach recognizes that the interconnected nature of the SDGs and positions them as complex, interrelated 'wicked' or 'messy' problems that cannot be solved through technical solutions or single disciplines alone, but require collective problem solving. They demand new ways of thinking, acting, and working together. SETU commits to embracing this complexity, fostering ecologies of learning where students, staff, and partners collaborate across boundaries to co-create knowledge and drive solutions for sustainable futures. This vision is captured in our strategic priorities as *'Integrate an Education for Sustainable Development approach into our teaching, learning, research and engagement across all disciplines, equipping our students with the knowledge and skills to navigate a complex and rapidly evolving world, and empowering our graduates to both embody sustainability and embrace the opportunities it offers in their careers and in their daily lives.'*

Photograph 11.2 Pre-loved clothes exchange at SETU

11.2   SETU's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in SETU's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- The launch of sustainability literacy programme for academic staff using Sulitest, flipped learning workshops, TASK certification, and short individual onboarding support through the Quality Promotion and Academic Policy Development Office.

- An expanded 'Sustainability in the Arts' Festival, which also won the HEA National Forum SATLE Impact Award for ESD.

- SETU has initiated the SETU Academic Portfolio Project with a team of academic integration leads undertaking a review of the existing academic portfolio to explore new opportunities across undergraduate and postgraduate offerings including the support of the regional green transition through the embedding of sustainability across the curriculum.

- The development of a Level 9 Certificate on Environmental Sustainability in Education.

- N-TUTORR staff and student champions leading a range of sustainability and ESD projects.

- The Land Sciences Living Lab at Carriganore has been developed as a dynamic hub that facilitates education, research, knowledge exchange, and community engagement. It serves as a collaborative space for a diverse range of stakeholders, the SETU biodiversity and sustainability forum, outreach groups and visiting collaborators and provides a variety of practical learning spaces for: outdoor education programs, demonstrations, and workshops e.g., a community and educational garden fosters hands-on learning for landscape and design students.

- The SETU Artist in Residence (funded by the Arts Council) collaborated with Early Childhood Education programmes to inspire ecologically sound creative expression among early childhood educators i.e., biodiversity practical, sustainability art exhibition, connected with nature on campus workshop, ESD through the creative arts sessions, designing a teaching and learning garden, development education, Global Goals and forest school workshops.

- The SETU GrowthHub develops student entrepreneurial potential through a range of workshops and events, all underpinning by the SDGs.

- Launch of a Biodiversity and Sustainability Forum to provide a collaborative space for the enhancement of biodiversity, nature restoration and sustainability across the South-East region.

SETU shared some of their ESD practice in Week 8 (11/04/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Dr. David Ryan, Dr. Denise O'Meara, Dr. Hazel Farrell, Juergen Bauer, and Dr. Margaret Tynan.

For further information on SETU's ESD work, please contact David.Ryan@setu.ie or michelle.maher@setu.ie

Trinity College Dublin
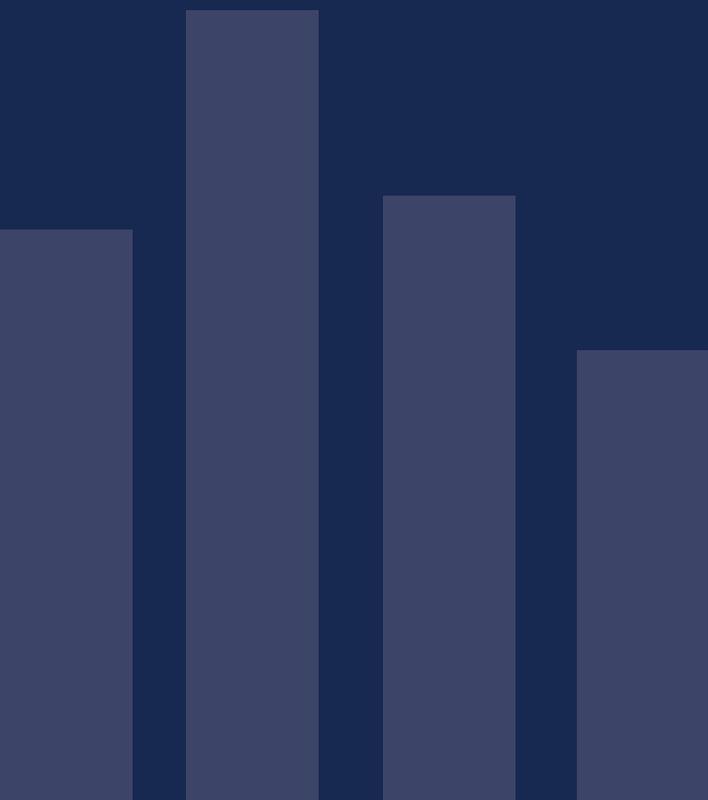
12. Trinity College Dublin

Trinity College Dublin (TCD) was created by Royal Charter in 1592. TCD has one main campus in Dublin City Centre with 2 other campuses, Trinity East and Trinity Central, and affiliated hospitals in Dublin City. TCD has 17,000 students and 3,000 staff.

Photograph 12.1 TCD staff who completed the 'Enacting ESD' postgraduate certificate

12.1 Institutional Commitments

Trinity's core mission stated in its Strategic Plan 2020-2025 includes civic action through teaching, research, and public engagement to courageously advance the cause of a pluralistic, just, and sustainable society. Trinity has committed to aligning itself to the SDGs, to significantly increase the extent to which research and teaching contribute to a healthy and sustainable planet.

The task of reimagining Trinity through the lens of sustainability as part of the next strategic plan (2025-2030) is highlighted in the HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028. Performance Objective 1 aims to '*empower all Trinity students and staff to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to act as successful agents of change, individually and collectively, in working for sustainable development within planetary boundaries.*' Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the Teaching and Learning and Research and Innovation Pillars in the HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028. The Trinity Sustainability Strategy 2023-2030 envisages that the Trinity curriculum will facilitate students to develop key competencies for sustainability as outlined by UNESCO and the European Commission, and that opportunities for professional development will be made available to all teaching staff. A series of targets have been selected to challenge Trinity to improve knowledge, skills and competences of ESD amongst students and staff.

An ESD Implementation Plan for sustainability includes the development of appropriate pedagogical approaches; developing common interdisciplinary modules, which develop ESD competencies; mapping ESD provision across Trinity's undergraduate and postgraduate curricula; integrating ESD within existing new staff development offerings; promoting the use of Living Lab projects within the curriculum; and including sustainability as a career options theme. These objectives are being implemented by an interdisciplinary team within the Centre for Academic Practice, comprising Education Fellows, Academic Developers and Student Interns, who are working in partnership with Trinity Sustainability. Key indicators and targets for Performance Objective 1 include:

- Proportion (%) and number of undergraduate students registered for interdisciplinary taught module(s) that address ESD themes and develop key competences for sustainability progressing from a baseline of 2.3% in 2022/2023 to 16% (2,354) by 2027/2028.

- Proportion (%) of postgraduate programmes with ESD embedded in at least one module targeting an increase of 20% by 2027/2028 on baseline to be established in 2025/2026.

- The number of teaching staff reporting increased awareness of ESD competences and pedagogies following training aiming for a cumulative target of 200 staff over 4 years to 2027/2028.

- The number of sustainability-related career events as proportion of total careers events organized by Trinity Careers Service, with a cumulative target of 13 by 2027/2028, representing 2.9% of 452 events over the 4-year period.

- The number and proportion (%) of sustainability-related employment opportunities (graduate jobs and summer internships) advertised to Trinity students via the MyCareer Portal, with a cumulative target of 773 by 2027/2028 representing 6% of all opportunities advertised over the 4-year period.

Trinity's Climate Action Roadmap 2024 states an ambition to go beyond GHG reduction targets to encompass wider sustainability challenges, setting meaningful targets to become a nature positive, low carbon, healthy university. Trinity's aim is to embed environmental sustainability holistically across education, research, operations, and partnerships.
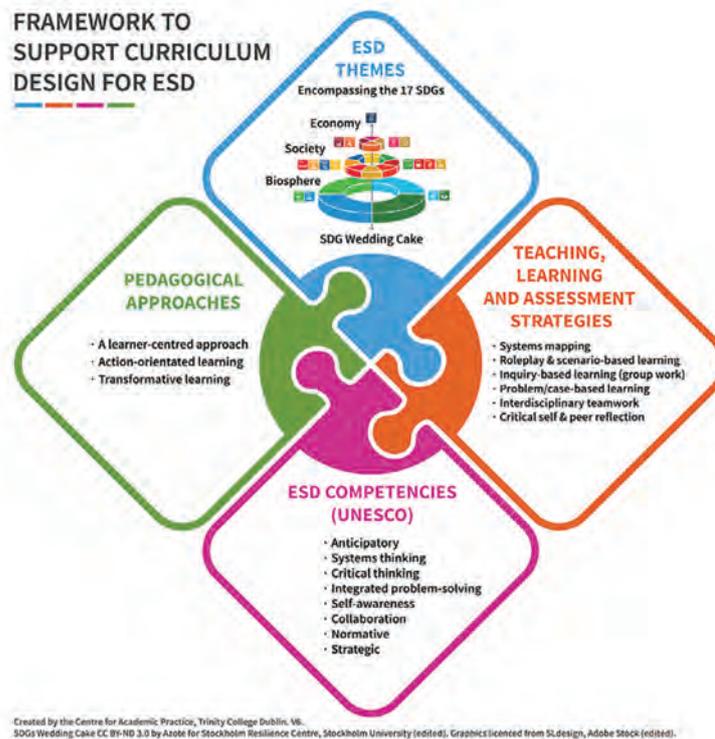
Figure 12.1 TCD's ESD Curriculum Design Framework

12.2   TCD's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in Trinity's second 'ESD to 2030' report, and those more recently delivered or in progress include:

- The preparation of a set of ESD Strategic Objectives and a Strategic Vision, which sets out a set of co-creation, piloting, and roll-out phases focused on curating resources, developing content and modules, creating pathways for integration, curriculum mapping, providing and coordinating staff development opportunities, exploring Living Lab opportunities, developing an implementation toolkit, and disseminating and sharing learnings. Key actions include:

  - Defined and articulated the competences students should develop through ESD and integrated with the new Trinity ESD Curriculum Framework.

  - Development of a common interdisciplinary module, which addresses ESD themes and develop key competences for sustainability that can be adapted for integration within all undergraduate and postgraduate curricula, and within staff development programmes. Three iterations of this module have taken place with staff, and one with undergraduate students in the School of Business with two further iterations scheduled for 2025/26.

  - Enable all undergraduate students, regardless of their degree programme, to complete taught modules and interdisciplinary modules within their discipline that address ESD themes and develop key competences for sustainability as part of their degree curriculum. The design of an elective module using the new Trinity ESD Curriculum Framework is underway.

- Enable all postgraduate taught and research students to complete module(s) that address ESD themes and develop key competences for sustainability. Trinity has approved an action to include at least one ESD-focused learning outcome in all new undergraduate programmes
- Enable all teaching staff to complete development programmes on ESD. ESD is being embedded in the Special Certificate in Teaching, Learning and Assessment as well as standalone workshops and webinars for staff
- Make programmes/courses which address ESD themes and develop key competences for sustainability visible to prospective students.
- The mapping of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is continuing, including the innovative use of GenAI to support large scale mapping of numerous modules.
- The design of an implementation plan for Trinity as a Living Lab is underway.
- Expand career options students are exposed to during their programmes to include more opportunities in sustainable development and establish a related internship programme.

- Based on the UNESCO defined ESD competencies and recommended pedagogical approaches, the ESD team have developed a conceptual framework to support the embedding of ESD into the curriculum, the Trinity ESD Curriculum Framework. This Framework is being used to both map the current Trinity curriculum to ESD and to support teaching staff with curriculum design in this context.
- Trinity participated in and successfully achieved accreditation under the SOS-UK Responsible Futures programme.
- A dedicated ESD Resource Hub within the Centre for Academic Practice, Trinity Teaching and Learning, has been authored and published online. It provides a suite of resources related to competences, learning outcomes, teaching strategies, case study examples and quick guides.
- The common module 'Enacting Sustainable Development' was developed and delivered to 600 undergraduate business students in 2024-25 with a further cohort to take the module in 2025-26.
- A library of ESD Teaching Materials as Open Educational Resources (OERs) arising from "Enacting Sustainable Development" module has been published to the Centre for Academic Practice website. Comprising lesson plans, multimedia resources and a variety of digital content these resources are designed to support educators to embed ESD in their modules/programmes and to help learners understand and address complex sustainability challenges across environmental, social, and economic dimensions.
- The ESD Fellows initiative established in 2024 is continuing: Fellows work as part of an interdisciplinary ESD Team comprising Academic Developers, staff and students, and are focused on implementing Trinity's ESD Strategy.
- ESD is being integrated into recognition mechanisms for Trinity Teaching and Learning Awards.

Trinity shared some of their ESD practice in Week 9 (09/05/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Dr. Claire McAvinia, Dr. Caitríona Ní Shé, Dr. Cicely Roche, Dr. Norah Campbell, Dr. John Gallagher, and Dr. Jonathan Hodgers.

For further information on TCD's ESD work, please contact claire.mcavinia@tcd.ie

Technological University Dublin
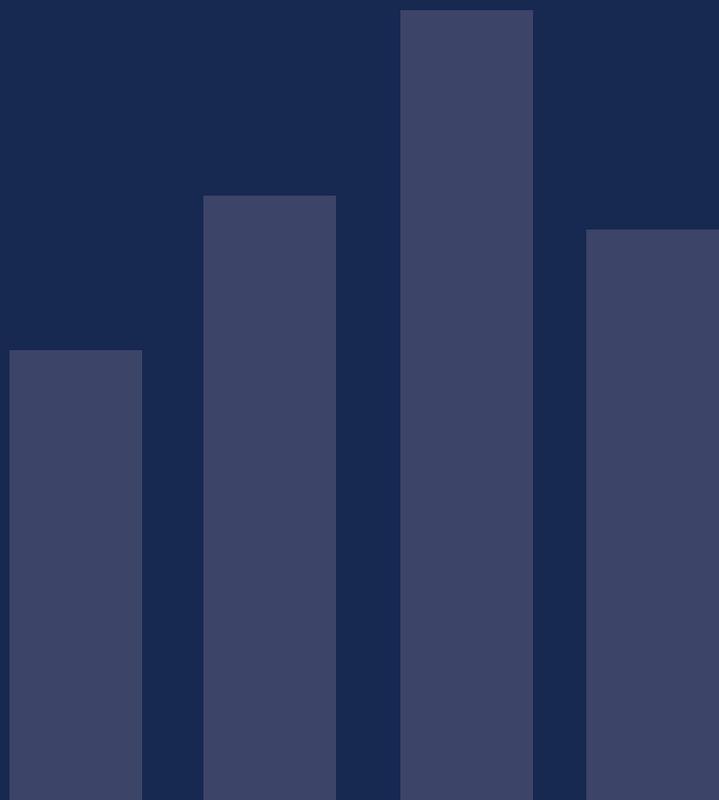
13. Technological University Dublin

Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) was formally established on 1 January 2019, bringing together 3 partner institutes – Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown, Dublin Institute of Technology, and Institute of Technology Tallaght. TU Dublin has 3 campuses catering for 28,500 students and 3,500 staff.

Photograph 13.1 Student-led Climate Action Summit at TU Dublin

13.1 Institutional Commitments

TU Dublin's Strategic Plan 2024-2028 is framed by a People-Planet-Partnership focus where there is a commitment to become a '*powerhouse for living and breathing sustainability*'. One of the core strategic priorities for 2030 focuses on sustainability leadership by becoming a beacon for sustainability and developing responsible global citizens. Key to this is ensuring that '*all staff and students engage in sustainability education and training (by 2028) to equip them with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and tools to help address the sustainability agenda effectively*'.

TU Dublin's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 reaffirms the strategic intent through Performance Objective 2 and the commitment to support and empower a new generation of TU Dublin graduates to lead the sustainability agenda with passion and purpose. The TU Dublin Sustainability Education Framework was highlighted as driving the whole-of-institution approach to embedding sustainability supported by a programme of work, which includes:

- All faculties to identify relevant SDGs and key areas for sustainability impact.
- All faculties to identify key existing resources to deliver on sustainability education objectives.
- All staff to engage in sustainability training and education to support climate leadership and to deliver on commitments.
- Academic programme review process to demonstrate evidence of sustainability embedded into programme and module learning outcomes.
- All incoming students to undertake Sustainability Literacy testing (Sulitest) in mandatory orientation and extended induction.

Key indicators and targets for Performance Objective 2 include:

- The percentage of modules that are defined as sustainability-focused or sustainability-inclusive, progressing from a baseline of 5.5% in 2024 to 15% by 2027/2028.
- The percentage of schools with at least one sustainability-focused or sustainability-inclusive module in their academic programmes, progressing from a baseline of 25% in 2024 to 75% in 2027/2028.
- The percentage (cumulative) of academic and non-academic staff who have engaged in sustainability education, professional development and/or training, progressing from 4% in 2024 to 75% in 2027/2028.
- Percentage of students who complete the Sulitest, progressing from 4.3% in 2022/2023 to 20% in 2027/2028.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, and Engagement pillars in the HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028.

TU Dublin's Climate Action Roadmap 2024 highlights its role in relation to SDG4 providing quality education where *'learners, educators, researchers, and partners share our ambition to be responsible global citizens who transform themselves to take action to address climate change in their daily lives'.* The Sustainability Education team has delivered a series of sustainability and climate action challenges across all five campuses, which has engaged over 300 students on topics such as biodiversity and habitat conservation, emissions reduction, climate adaptation and resilience. Introductory sustainability and climate action initiatives have been embedded into the first-year student orientation reaching 5,400 students. The Climate Fresk workshop has been facilitated with over 200 students and staff participating, and 19 staff becoming facilitators themselves. Over 560 academic staff participated in 34 workshops focused on embedding sustainability and climate action into the curriculum. A Level 9 'Educating for Sustainability' certificate was delivered in hybrid form to over 100 staff over the last 2 years. TU Dublin also co-facilitates the national Open Course on 'Education for Sustainability' in collaboration with ATU and SETU. Over 635 staff and students participated in the TU Dublin Green Week in March 2024 with more than 100 events focused on taking local and national action for the environment.

The University Education Model (UEM) at TU Dublin is a transformative approach to education, designed to provide meaningful learning experiences that support the diverse needs of learners. Grounded in the university's Strategic Intent and aligned with SDG4 (Quality Education), the UEM focuses on three key components: Learner Support, Learner Choice, and Learner Experience. These components work synergistically to foster growth, personal development, and societal contribution. The UEM creates an inclusive and sustainable learning environment where learners and staff can thrive, enabling TU Dublin to produce digitally literate graduates who are equipped to positively impact society and the planet. This model sets out seven Fundamentals, one of which is that *'Learning outcomes related to sustainability are transparent. Learners develop a deep, practical understanding of sustainability, both within their discipline as well as for life, which encourages positive sustainability change'.*

As part of the process of implementing the University Education Model, the TU Dublin Academic Council has approved three Graduate Attributes, one of which is Graduate Attribute 2: Planet. Sustainability-focused, global citizens: Graduates who are socially engaged and responsible graduates leading the sustainability and equity agendas with passion, purpose, and resilience.

Photograph 13.2 Participants 'Stepping into the Doughnut' in TU Dublin

13.2   TU Dublin's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in TU Dublin's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- The development of a sustainability education toolkit Open Educational Resource (OER).
- The co-facilitation of the HEA National Forum Open Course on 'Education for Sustainability'.
- The development of a graduate attributes framework for sustainability-focused global citizens.
- Continued facilitation of the SDG Literacy community of practice.
- Embedding sustainability and climate action into student orientations.
- Coordinated the development of a Sulitest questions relevant to the Irish context.
- Development of a toolkit to promote Early Childhood Education for Sustainability during student work placement.
- Establishment of a Research Sustainability in Education Award.
- N-TUTORR staff and student sustainability champions worked on a range of projects.
- Hosted a Student Climate Summit 2024 to empower and mobilize young people to explore the role of higher education in tackling the impacts of climate change and climate injustice.
- Hosted the TU Dublin President's 2-day Hackathon focused on food waste, fast fashion, and e-waste.
- The upcoming launch of the Sustainability Action Lab, a university-wide programme that supports UN SDGs aligned learning collaboration with societal partners in real-world settings. This has evolved out of the 'Students Learning with Communities' programme, which has been running since 2008.

TU Dublin shared some of their ESD practice in Week 5 (21/03/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Dr. Brian Gormley, Dr. Olivia Freeman, Dr. Lucia Walsh, Rachel Freeman, Caitríona Quinn, and Dr Róisín Vize.

For further information on TU Dublin's ESD work, please contact brian.gormley@tudublin.ie

Technological University Shannon
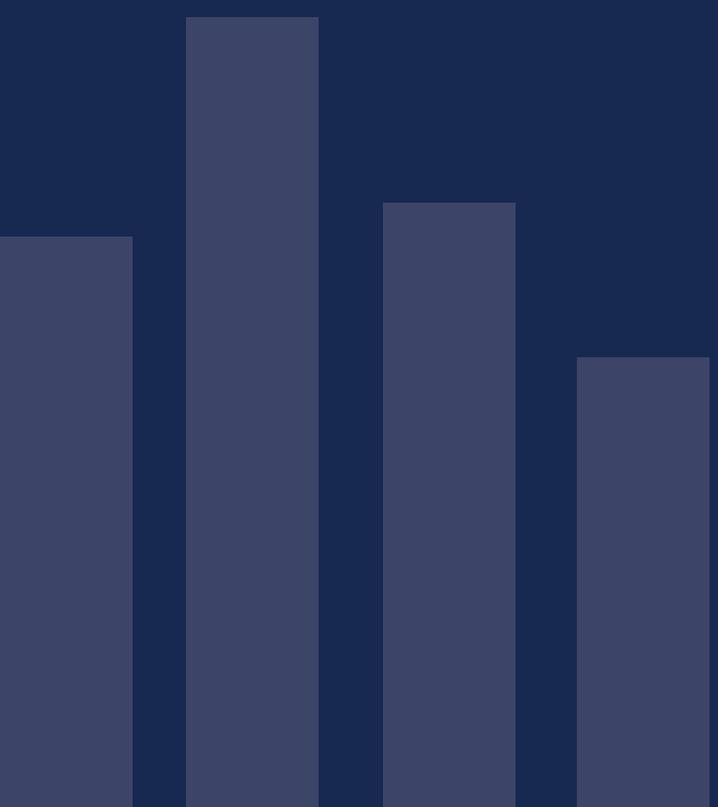
14. Technological University Shannon

The Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS) was established on the 1 October 2021 bringing together two existing institutes of technology, the Athlone Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology. TUS has 7 campuses catering for 15,000 students and 1,909 staff.

Photograph 14.1 TUS ESD Compendium Launch

14.1 Institutional Commitments

The TUS Strategic Plan 2023-2026 lists sustainable development as a strategic enabler and aims to '*support sustainable development and embed UN SDG integration across all initiatives to generate positive impact*'. The plan commits to a whole institution approach to the challenges of sustainable development.

The TUS HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 highlights the role of the University Sustainability Committee in driving the climate action and sustainability agenda noting the need to 'strengthen and deepen its knowledge across all areas of sustainability including environment conservation, economic development, and social sustainability'. Performance Objective 4 aims to enhance the sustainable development of the institute and the region through a whole-of-institution approach to engagement and sustainability. There is a specific focus on the Just Transition agenda, given the regional and industrial context and significant social, economic, and cultural impacts stemming from this. TUS are utilizing the EAUC Sustainability Leadership Scorecard to evaluate performance under 18 priority areas across the categories of Leadership and Governance, Estates and Operations, Partnership and Engagement, Learning/Teaching and Research. Key indicators and targets include:

■ Percentage score on Sustainability Leadership Scorecard, progressing from a baseline of 34% in 2023 to 70% in 2027/2028.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the Engagement pillar in the HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028.

The TUS Climate Action Roadmap 2023-2026 reaffirms the strategic commitments recognizing that *'executive management teams should consider how ESD/SDGs are integrated into institutional governance, strategy, and structures'.* The TUS Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy Graduate Attribute 6 is *'ethical, social, intercultural, environmental awareness and responsiveness'.* TUS graduates will be *'committed to contributing to their local communities, while also being empathetic global citizens with personal and professional values which demonstrate a strong sense of ethical, social, intercultural, and environmental responsibility'.*

Photograph 14.2 TUS students leading the 'Safe Inhaler Disposal' campaign

14.2   TUS's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in TUS's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- Carbon Literacy training and Climate Fresk workshops were offered to staff and postgraduate students as part of the N-TUTORR project.
- TUS offer a Postgraduate Certificate in 'Embedding ESD in the Curriculum' to staff as part of their MA in Academic Practice.
- An ESD compendium was launched in Sept. 2025 which provides a suite of good practice case studies across a wide range of disciplines.
- A review of undergraduate programmes using the STAUNCH tool was undertaken to generate a baseline of programme descriptors alignment with sustainability principles.

TUS shared some of their ESD practice in Week 16 (03/10/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series, with contributions from Seamus Hoyne, Dr. Nuala Harding, Dr. Noëlle O'Connor. Dr. Rita Scully, Dr. Marie Taylor, and Dr. Gary Stack.

For further information on TUS's ESD work, please contact Noelle.OConnor@tus.ie

University College Cork
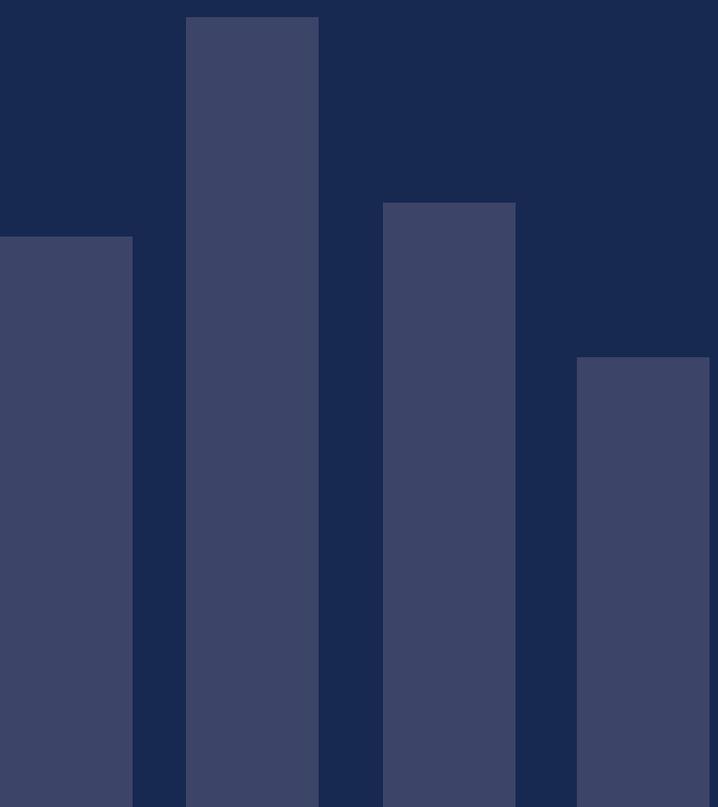
15.   University College Cork

Queen's College Cork was established in 1845, becoming University College Cork (UCC) in 1908. UCC has one main campus catering for 26,000 students and 3,400 staff.

Photograph 15.1 UCC students on a Climate march

15.1   Institutional Commitments

UCC's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 recognizes the role of universities to *'act, to research, to educate, to lead, and to develop leaders to tackle climate change and create a sustainable future for all of us'.* Central to this is the UCC Connected Curriculum and Graduate Attributes Programme, which explicitly links the curriculum to research, employability, civic engagement, the SDGs, other disciplines, and the wider world. Goal 2 Student Success is framed through the values of compassion, respect, equity, and sustainability with the aim of implementing an academic plan to further embed the Connected Curriculum and lifelong learning, enabling education and professional success for all students. Goal 5 focuses on developing innovative sustainability solutions for local, national, regional and global impact, and embedding sustainability into education, research, operations and recognition initiatives for staff and students.

UCC's HEA Performance Agreement Framework 2024-2028 reaffirms the commitments outlined in the Strategic Plan 2023-2028 and the UCC Sustainability and Climate Action Plan 2023-2028, specifically related to reducing UCC's carbon footprint, meeting the national carbon emissions reduction targets, and maintaining their AASHE STARS score and rating. Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the Engagement pillar.

UCC's Climate Action Roadmap 2024 reaffirms UCC's commitment to place sustainability at the core of *'everything they do…from education of future and current decision-makers, engaging with communities in Cork and beyond, improving the organizational environment footprint and leading research on sustainability topics.'* A range of actions are showcased in UCC's Annual Sustainability Report for all the 17 SDGs.

UCC's Sustainability and Climate Action Plan 2023-2028 sets out the following strategic aims related to teaching and learning:
- To facilitate the development and empowerment of both current and future leaders in sustainability throughout teaching and learning activities.
- To foster sustainability literacy through both formal and informal learning opportunities.

Underpinning these strategic aims is a series of objectives and actions:

- Support our teaching staff to integrate the SDGs into their curricula where appropriate.
  - Roll out the SDG toolkit digital badge course for UCC teaching staff.
  - Support the academic community to develop at least one interdisciplinary undergraduate sustainability programme.
  - Establish the UCC ESD Fellows Programme.
- Develop a robust method of measuring and reporting SDG integration into UCC modules and programmes.
- Ensure every student at UCC is exposed to the global sustainability agenda through either formal or informal education.
  - Work with partners to adapt the Sulitest for Irish students and roll out in UCC.
  - Establish and host a UCC Sustainability Summer School in collaboration with CIRTL and the Research Office.
- Be a leader in the transition to a sustainable society through educational offerings for current and future leaders.
  - Support Sustainable Futures HCI Programme to continue to place UCC at the forefront of education in support of a sustainable society.
  - Develop sustainability and climate action CPD courses for policy makers, businesses, and communities.

Photograph 15.2 UCC recognizing excellence in sustainability

15.2   UCC's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in UCC's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- 'Learning and Teaching with the SDGs' digital badge rolled out to UCC staff. To date, 53 staff and students have completed the badge with many more using the content as a resource library.

- UCC is the co-host of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) with Queen's University Belfast.

- UCC is a member of the UNIC European University Alliance and co-leads the sustainability theme, which is prioritizing ESD as a central innovative pedagogy. The UNIC Alliance launched a joint-Masters programme Redesigning the Post-Industrial City (RePIC) in 2023.

- UCC continues to host the open-source web-based SDG toolkit, which has over 22,000 viewers (58.1% from Ireland, 24.4% from OECD countries, and 9.6% from Global South). The Toolkit also featured as global best practice by UN Academic Impacts. This toolkit was also adapted into the Greek context as part of the ERAMSUS+ funded SDG4U project.

- An interdisciplinary B.Sc. in Sustainability was developed to commence in 2026.

- All UCC programme directors were required to self-evaluate their programmes utilizing the SDG Toolkit mapping tool. Of the 700 programmes UCC offers, 435 were shown to map to the SDGs. On a deeper review of these findings, 46 of the 63 undergraduate programmes offered by UCC (73%) provide insight into the SDG from the perspective of their discipline.

- The UCC Sustainability Academy was launched drawing on expertise from over 100 UCC academics, which focuses on training and education to attain professional CPD recognition.

- A suite of ESD video case studies was collated from a wide range of disciplines.

- The UCC Green Campus podcast series showcases good practice by UCC staff and students.

- The UCC Interpretative Biodiversity Trail offers students, staff, and visitors an opportunity to directly connect with nature on campus.

- The UCC Open Arboretum Project reimagines UCC's tree collection as a teaching tool and is embedded into a pharmacy programme focused on medicinal plants.

- The 'Walking at the Margins of the Anthropocene' is a walking 'classroom' that explores the SDGs, UCC's sustainability vision, and reimagining urban spaces with the pedagogical aim of developing anticipatory and normative competences.

- The SDGs and ESD have been integrated as key criteria in the annual Teaching and Learning awards, where staff must demonstrate alignment with UCC's Connected Curriculum and graduate attributes that incorporate sustainability, civic and community engagement as core elements.

- UCC has been sending students and staff as Official Observers to the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties on Climate Change since COP26 in Glasgow.

- UCC continues to host an annual mock COP Climate Conference for student engagement, which is co-organized with students from the UCC Green Campus and 6 student societies and staff from engineering, business, economics, health, environment, and law to create an interdisciplinary learning experience for participants.

- UCC's university wide module in Sustainability is open to staff, students, and the public since 2015 and provides a broad overview of the SGs from an interdisciplinary perspective with a local focus.
- UCC is a lead partner in the Cork Learning City programme. Cork is as key member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities which has a strong focus on advancing SDG4 through lifelong learning.

UCC shared some of their ESD practice in Week 3 (07/03/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Dr. David Nyaluke, Dr. Catherine O'Mahoney, and Dr. John Barimo.

For further information on UCC's ESD work, please contact DNyaluke@ucc.ie

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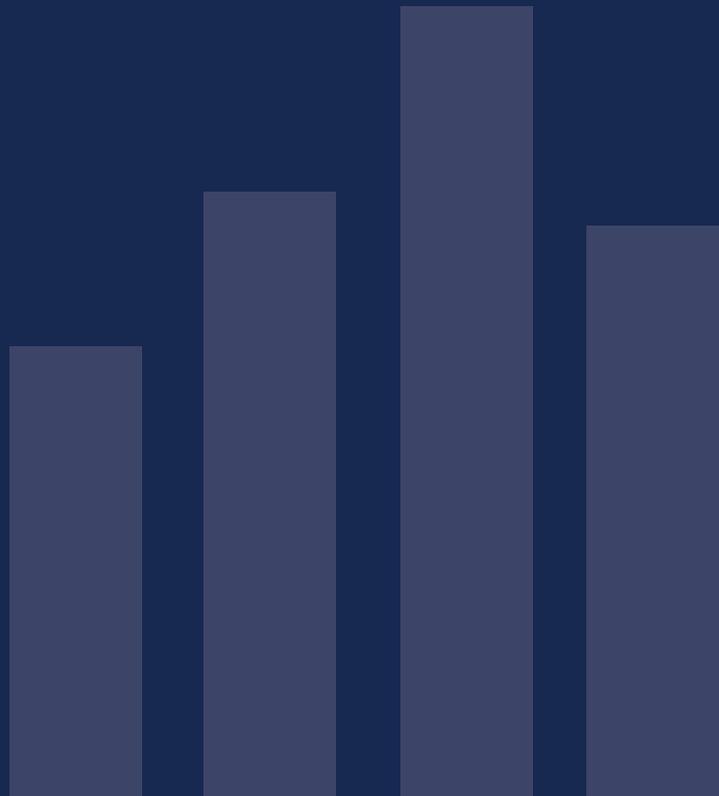
16. University College Dublin

The Catholic University of Ireland was founded in 1854, becoming University College Dublin (UCD) in 1908. UCD has two campuses in Ireland, one campus jointly operated with the RCSI in Malaysia and 3 joint colleges in China catering for 39,522 students (5,000 outside of Ireland) and 4,259 staff.

Photograph 16.1 UCD students participating in Innovation Academy Hackathon

16.1 Institutional Commitments

UCD'S Strategy to 2030, 'Breaking Boundaries' commits UCD to becoming a 'leader in knowledge generation, learning and action across the sustainability agenda with carbon emissions reduced by 51% (by 2030) and on track for net zero by 2040.' From an educational perspective, UCD aims to provide its students with structured opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in areas such as Artificial Intelligence and digital skills, sustainability, leadership, well-being, and languages.

UCD's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 aligns the commitment to 'support growing numbers of undergraduate and graduate students to engage in work-integrated learning and other experiential learning modes to deepen applied subject knowledge and acquisition of transversal skills' (Performance Objective 1) to the National ESD to 2030 Strategy. The rationale for Performance Objective 4 is to 'transform lives and positively influence the world through UCD's research, innovation and education in alignment with the SDGs.' Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the pillars of Research and Innovation and Access and Participation.

UCD's commitments in relation to Ireland's Climate Action Plan are laid out in the Climate Action Roadmap update 2024 and include a wide range of initiatives for training staff and engaging staff and students.

The UCD Sustainability Plan to 2030 captures UCD's commitments to the wider sustainability agenda and declares a mission to be 'a thought and action leader of transformational change for sustainability'. It commits to maximizing and reporting UCD's contributions to the implementation of the National ESD to 2030 Strategy, the National Biodiversity Plan, and other relevant policies. A key enabler is the promotion of a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration and leadership for sustainability through the integration of education, research, and operations. Participatory structures include core working groups on: Education, Student Experience and Professional Development; Research, Innovation, and Impact; Operational Integration; SDG Engagement and Impact. From a student experience and professional development perspective, the Sustainability Plan lists the following objectives and actions:

- Putting measures in place to enable students and staff to develop as sustainability-aware citizens, empowered to succeed with integrity in a rapidly evolving world.
- Promote and support student-led initiatives that advance sustainability.
- Develop a framework to promote sustainability in the student experience.
- Build organizational capacity through the provision of sustainability training and professional development opportunities.
- Provide the resources, tools, and professional development opportunities for staff to integrate sustainability into the curriculum.
- Assess course offerings for sustainability and promote increased content.
- Identify and communicate alignment of modules and programmes to the SDGs.
- Produce and maintain an inventory of degrees and modules related to sustainability.
- Leverage UCD campuses and educational partnerships for insights and solutions.
- Promote international student innovation competitions for sustainability.

Photograph 16.2 UCD students participating in a Sustainability Field Course in Copenhagen, Denmark

16.2   UCD's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in UCD's 2ⁿᵈ 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- Sustainability has been embedded into student orientations and introductory lectures for incoming first year students.
- A Sustainability Toolkit was launched. It was developed primarily by students and includes interactive learning with a focus on climate literacy and climate action.
- A GIS-based Sustainability Dashboard was developed by staff and student team. It provides information on campus actions and infrastructure to address each SDG, with data layers that can be downloaded for research or education and added to by users.
- A wide range of programmes have been developed including the interdisciplinary B.Sc. in Sustainability; B.Sc. in Sustainable Food Systems; M.Sc. in Digital Technology for Sustainable Agriculture; M.Sc. in Environmental Sustainability; M.Sc. in Environmental Technology; M.Sc. in Global Change: Ecosystem Science and Policy; M.Sc. in Risk, Resilience and Sustainability; M.Sc. in Architecture, Urbanism and Climate Action; M.Sc. in Sustainable Development; MEng.Sc. in Sustainability Energy and Green Technologies, and M.Sc. in Sustainable Finance.
- A diverse range of relevant micro-credentials is offered, many of which focus on sustainability topics and the UCD Innovation Academy offers courses to suit a wide range of students, such as the Graduate Diploma in Design Thinking for Sustainability, Professional Diploma in Innovation for Sustainability.
- The UCD Sustainability Seed Funding programme was launched in 2024, which included a scheme to 'bring the university community together to unlock the campus potential as a living lab for sustainability solutions'.
- UCD Greenacre Sustainability Hub has been established and is being co-developed by staff and students, with innovative installations, an outdoor learning space and a community garden.
- UCD Sustainability collaborated on a hackathon with the UCD Innovation Academy and ten students were selected to represent UCD in a Tri-Continental Sustainability Competition, which is a strategic partnership with the University of Notre Dame, USA and Strathmore University, Kenya to broaden student perspectives and promote exposure to international considerations for global sustainability challenges.

UCD shared some of their ESD practice in Week 14 (20/06/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Professor Tasman Crowe, Professor Emma O'Neill, Kirsten Southard, Kendra Paleczny, and Ainhoa González.

For further information on UCD's ESD work, please contact emma.oneill@ucd.ie

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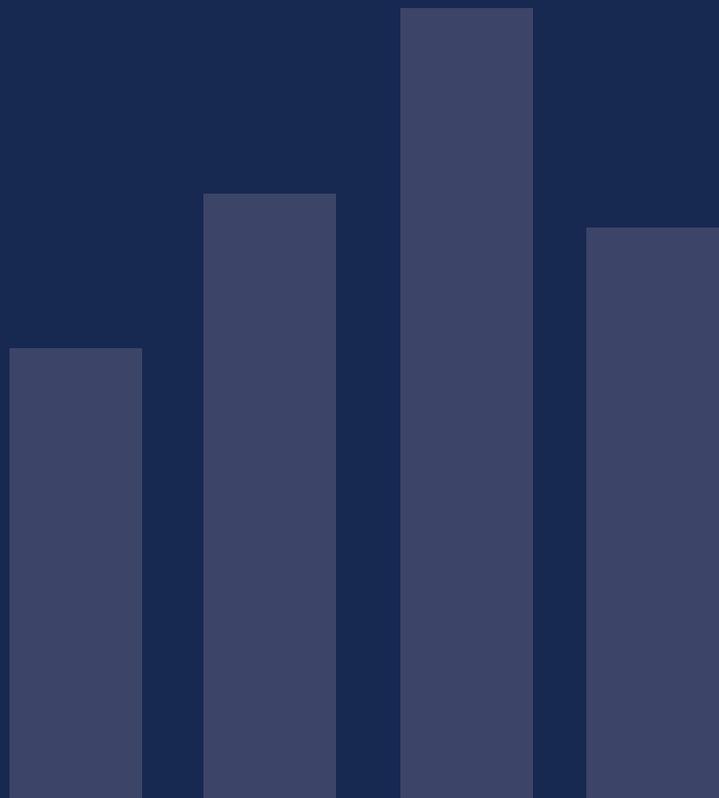
17. University of Galway

Queens College Galway was established in 1849, becoming University College Galway (UCG) in 1908 followed by National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway) in 1997 to its current name, University of Galway in 2022. The University of Galway has one main campus, a reginal campus, 3 Gaeltacht centres and research sites, and 5 medical academies catering for 18,874 students and 2,555 staff.

Photograph 17.1 University of Galway celebrating SDGs week

17.1 Institutional Commitments

The University of Galway's Strategy 2025-2030 commits to *'providing leadership to inform the transition to a sustainable future through our teaching, research, actions, and impacts'* and *'developing the next generation of students, researchers, and innovators for tackling society's evolving sustainable development challenges'.* ESD-related Strategic Flagship Goals include embedding sustainability across all programmes as well as research, and student experience to ensure that the entire campus community gains the necessary knowledge and skills to become sustainability role models and leaders, scale sustainability success beyond the campus by building sustainability partnerships with communities, national bodies, European and global partners.

The University of Galway HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 reaffirms sustainability as one of the university's core values demonstrated by being named as an SDG Champion by the Department of Environment, Climate, and Communications in 2024, ranking 34th in the world (first in Ireland) for sustainable development by the THE Impact Ranking, receiving a gold rating from AASHE STARS, and Green Campus flag awards. The adoption of a Climate Action and Sustainability Policy by the University Management Team was highlighted as well as the work of the multidisciplinary Community and University Sustainability Partnership (CUSP). Performance Objective 1 Enabling Student Success aligns to the Academic Strategy 2021-2026 commits to embedding the SDGs into the curricular and co-curricular offerings. Performance Objective 8 places sustainability as the core of the university experience to *'lead and promote sustainability in all aspects of learning and research, culture, operations, and governance structures to empower our diverse communities of staff, students, and partners to co-create tomorrow's sustainable campus and deliver on the SDGs'*. The following series of actions have been outlined to achieve this objective:

- Measure and increase the number of programmes delivering sustainability content at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.
- Map and monitor sustainability literacy; we will extend the use of Sulitest as a method to measure and improve sustainability literacy.
- Compile and encourage implementation of a suite of learning tools and resources to enhance understanding of sustainability and climate change e.g. En-ROADS Climate Solutions Simulator.
- Work with Colleges, Schools, disciplines and units to identify a network of sustainability curriculum champions who will support academic staff, module owners and programme directors to review learning objectives and integrate sustainability across the curriculum.
- Work with students to make university participation more accessible and affordable for them, to ensure that sustainability education and experiences are available at every income level.
- Embed sustainability across the entire student experience including the student recruitment stage, new student orientation, activities and life on campus (e.g. Students' Union, clubs, societies, outreach).
- Develop on-campus student sustainability leadership opportunities e.g. institutional awards and student-led demonstrator projects.
- Work in conjunction with the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) to develop and measure co-curricular experiences that achieve sustainability learning objectives and support student organizations, clubs, societies and events focused on sustainability.
- Incorporate sustainability as part of employee recruitment, staff induction, training and professional development.
- Offer widely accessible sustainability workshops, awareness days, engagement events, seminars and tours to students, staff and the wider community.
- Champion inter-, cross- and trans-disciplinary collaboration and engagement as drivers of sustainability teaching and research — for example, by developing our transdisciplinary 'Introduction to Sustainability' module as a university-wide module available to students across all four colleges.
- Adopt a co-creative approach by working with organizations in the wider community that embrace sustainability.

- Develop targeted relationships with universities in low- and middle-income countries focused on sustainability and create sustainability-related scholarships for students.
- Expand innovation and entrepreneurship programmes that enable our faculty, staff and students to sustainably make an impact and promote sustainability within leadership roles.

Key indicators listed include:
- Proportion (%) of undergraduate and postgraduate taught modules that are sustainability modules, moving from a baseline of 25% in 2022/2023 (n398) to 50% by 2027/2028.

Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the Research and Innovation and Engagement pillars in the HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028.

The University of Galway Climate Action Roadmap 2024 highlights the incorporation of sustainability and climate action into both student education and staff training with the university offering more than 300 sustainability modules across all disciplines e.g., the 'Introduction to Sustainability' module utilizes the expertise of staff from across the university to provide students with a foundational introduction to the topic' the 'Green Labs: Principles and Practices' training programme is available to all lab-based staff and students. The appointment of 2 lecturers for ESD provides support for academic and professional staff to ensure that the SDGs, sustainability, the climate emergency, and related issues are embedded across the curriculum.

The University of Galway Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025 is guided by a Learn-Live-Lead model, which sets out a series of commitments related to ESD:
- Integration of sustainability across all education programmes of the university.
- Availability of co-curricular sustainability experiences for all students.
- Provision of opportunities for all to learn about sustainability and be part of the change process in the transition to a sustainable campus.

The University is currently developing a new Sustainability Strategy 2026-2030.

The University of Galway Academic Strategy: Teaching and Learning 2021-2026 commits to:
- Recognize the climate emergency and other environment/societal challenges by committing to the SDGs and reflecting this through our curricula and co-curricular offerings to students.

Photograph 17.2 University of Galway staff and students celebrating their Green Flag award

17.2   University of Galway's ESD Initiatives

The University of Galway have two dedicated lecturers in sustainability and education for sustainable development. These two lecturers are responsible for embedding ESD in all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the University. They have developed a curriculum design approach to embedding ESD in the curriculum that reflects a whole of institution and whole of student approach. Their work involves collaborating with colleagues across the university on research and teaching practices involving decolonization of the curriculum and eco-distress. Vehicles for action include:

- A micro-credential 'Embedding Sustainability in the Curriculum' was developed and delivered to staff.
- Establishment of an interdisciplinary ESD Community of Practice.
- Tailored workshops and training for schools and programmes.
- ESD events including the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching 2025 Symposium: Preparing Students for a Challenging World: Education for sustainable development and the socio-emotional domain.

Additional ESD initiatives highlighted in the University of Galway's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- Two thirds of undergraduate degree programmes have been mapped using the Accelerating Action Tool.
- The Student Sustainability Leadership Awards aims to develop student leaders who will work on creating a more sustainable campus and community.
- An annual Climathon is hosted by the Ryan Institute.

The University of Galway shared some of their ESD practice in Week 4 (14/03/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series featuring Dr. Elizabeth Hurley, Dr. Alma Clavin, Dr. Gesche Kindermann, Dr. Fintan Hegarty, Dr. Kelly Fincham, and Dr. Joanne O'Dwyer.

For further information on University of Galway's ESD work, please contact alma.clavin@universityofgalway.ie or elizabeth.hurley@universityofgalway.ie

University of Limerick
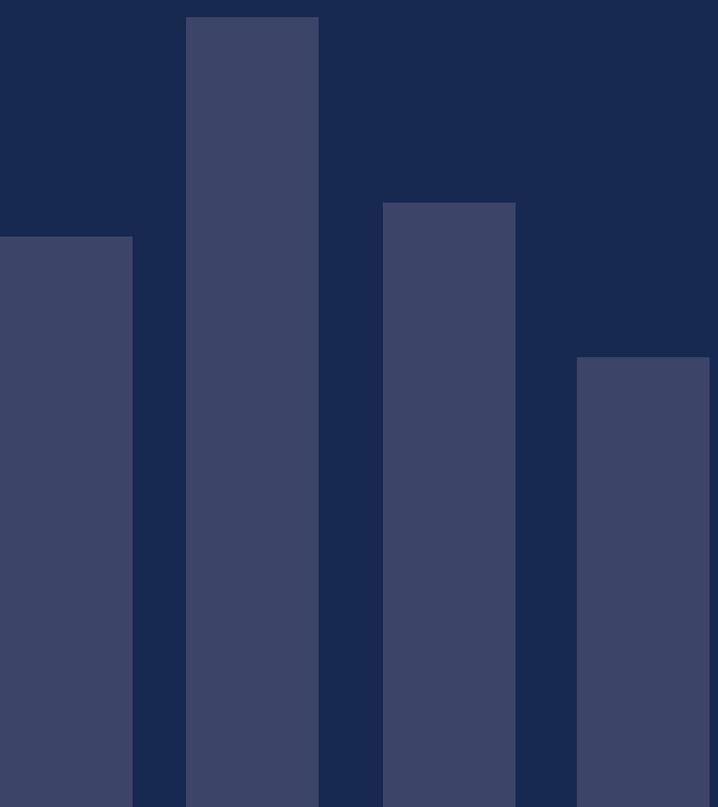
18. University of Limerick

The University of Limerick (UL) was established in 1972 as the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick before becoming a university in September 1989. UL has one main campus catering for 18,200 students and 1,965 staff.

Photograph 18.1 UL Student Sustainability Challenge launch

18.1 Institutional Commitments

UL's Strategic Plan 2019-2024 lists 'ethical and sustainable' as a core value to 'do the right things, in the right way, for the right reasons' with an ambition that the campus attain the highest standards of sustainability and climate protection.

UL's HEA Performance Framework Agreement 2024-2028 highlights the development of a Sustainability Framework 2030 that will 'weave sustainability into every facet of university of operations' and the role of the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework (ICDF) to integrate the SDGs into the curriculum. Climate and Sustainable Development is mapped against the Teaching and Learning and Research and Innovation pillars. UL's Climate Action Roadmap Update 2024 highlighted a commitment to student-focused initiatives including:
- Providing Climate Fresk training at the Kemmy Business School.

UL's Mission-Based Sustainability Framework 2030 commits to becoming a steward of higher education's sustainability transition through the adoption of new approaches to leadership and governance. Sustainability education is identified as one of the key outcomes. UL's Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022-2027 includes a Transforming the Curriculum pillar that aims to support an excellent student experience via the ICDF together with the integration of the revised Graduate Attributes. The SDGs and social good/justice are referred to in the ICDF, in relation to alignment with Programme Learning Outcomes.

Photograph 18.2 UL schools engagement on sustainability

18.2   University of Limerick's ESD Initiatives

Some notable ESD initiatives highlighted in the UL's 2nd 'ESD to 2030' report include:

- 179 staff completed a 6-module online UN Climate Literacy programme.
- 69 senior staff attended the UL Climate Summit.
- The Climate Fresk workshop was delivered to 42 staff and postgraduate students with a view to completed the facilitator training.
- The Kemmy Business School (KBS) is an active member of the international Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) network and is developing supports for enhanced integration of ESD into teaching, research, and university systems.
- Several programmes deliver sustainability content at programme level e.g. M.Sc. Design for Health and Wellbeing, PD Climate Adaption & Sustainability, Grad Cert/Dip. EDI, Dip. Community Wellness, Empowerment, Leadership & Life Skills, HDip. Environmental Science, PD Civic Engagement. A cross-disciplinary M.Sc. Sustainability and Climate Futures under development.
- All engineering programmes have been mapped to SDGs for programme accreditation (188 modules) with sustainability-focused Learning Outcomes also mapped.
- All Biological Science programmes begin with content on relevant SDGs.
- The UL Doctoral School has 3 overarching principles of Equity, Internationalization and Sustainability and a focus on sustainable contributions to society while reducing the environmental impact of research.
- The Science and Engineering lab manual for all students has embedded SDG practice.
- A series of co-created sustainability resources have been developed i.e., UL Food Philosophy, UL Human Rights and EDI strategy, and a Biophilic toolkit.

- UL was successful in securing a UNESCO Chair in Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy for Sustainable Development with objectives to develop and disseminate innovative research on pressing issues and potential synergies between physical education, sport pedagogy and sustainable development, and establish an international and sustainable network across academia, civil society, local communities, practitioners and policymakers that builds stakeholder capacity in physical education and sport pedagogy for sustainable development.

- The Department of Physical Education and Sports Science produced open access educational resources to enhance schools (and HEIs) understanding of how transformative ESD pedagogies can impact student-teachers' learning and awareness of the importance of inclusive and socially just teaching and learning environments with 160 student-teachers and six educators participating.

- The Centre for Sustainable Futures and Innovation (CSFI) led the development of Erasmus+ module 'Engaged Research Design for Sustainability' for PhD students. Developed with YERUN Universities, UL Doctoral College and UL Engage, the blended intensive programme emphasizes place-based learning and interdisciplinary collaboration. Currently, there are 26 PhD students registered from 13 universities.

- CSFI partnered with University of Southern Norway to develop an Erasmus+ BIP in 2023 and 2024 'Driving Sustainable Futures in Higher Education'. The programme had participants from 11 Universities.

- KBS staff produced an Erasmus-funded EU Lab Sustainability Challenge Toolkit.

- A dedicated Student Sustainability coordinator organized training and development opportunities at an institutional level to empower young people, with a focus on action-oriented learning with examples below:

  - The Student Sustainability Challenge, where students proposed and developed a project that addresses sustainability challenges locally, internationally, or in their community.
  - The Mission Innovation Bootcamp, a 6-week programme to develop sustainability project ideas.
  - Hosted an SDG speaker and panel series.
  - The 6-week Global Leadership for Sustainable Development Programme for international students.
  - Participative workshops for school-age children e.g. Eco-builders workshop (imagine and redesign your school to be more sustainable) and Student Entrepreneurship and Innovation Bootcamp for Transition Year Students.

- The KBS led the PRME Global Sustainability Challenge Programme, 'One Week to Save the World', a 1-week immersive initiative in collaboration with 6 other PRME Champion Business Schools.

- The Citizen Innovation Lab (CIL) is a collaboration between UL and Limerick City and County Council to drive innovative climate action e.g. Clean Air Together Limerick City, which is a citizen science project in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), recruiting 400 participants to record air quality in their local areas.

UL shared some of their ESD practice in Week 20 (07/11/25) of the HEA ESD Spotlight Series, with contributions from Una McInerney, Dr. Íde O'Sullivan, Dr. Annmarie Ryan, Dr. Antonio Calderón, Marta Fortes Saez, and Gordon Armstrong.

For further information on UL's ESD work, please contact Una.McInerney@ul.ie

Conclusions
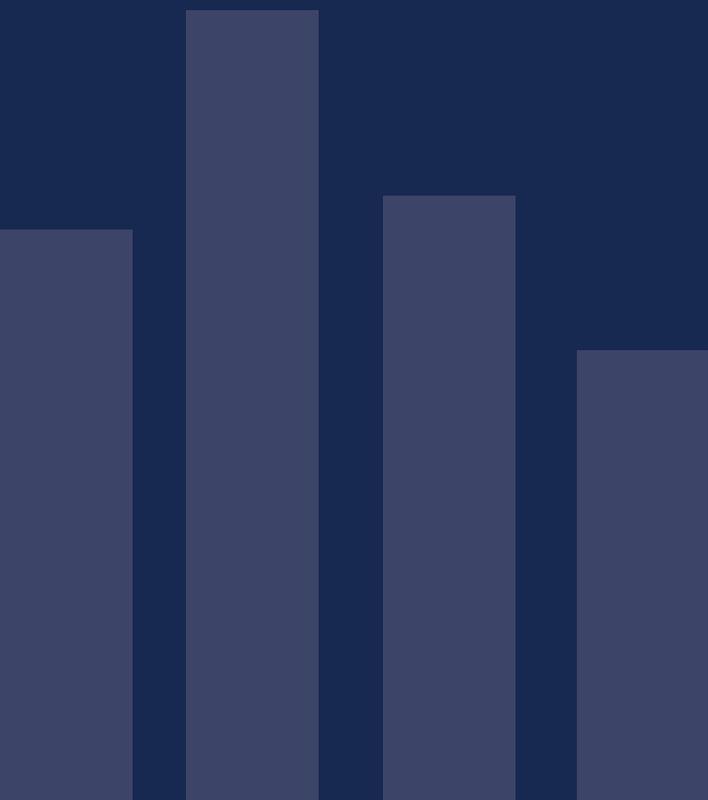
19. Conclusions

This report aimed to provide an overview of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) practice across the higher education sector in Ireland through the lens of national and institutional commitments i.e., HEA Performance Agreements 2024-2028, Strategic Plans, Climate Action Roadmaps, Sustainability Strategies, and the most recent 'ESD to 2030' reports. It should be noted that these are not the only drivers of ESD practice, with international rankings i.e., Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings, Green-Metric World University Ranking; accreditation i.e., AASHE STARS, SOS-UK Responsible Futures; and disciplinary professional body requirements also evaluating (in part) how embedded ESD is across the curriculum[3].

It is clear from the institutional case studies presented in this report that there is substantial work going on across the sector, which reflects the institutional commitments and directly correlates to resources specifically assigned to ESD. While this work must continue, there is now an opportunity to harness and build on this work to move towards a more collaborative approach across the sector. The 'ESD to 2030' priority actions areas of Advancing Policy; Transforming Learning Environments; Building Capacities of Educators; Empowering and Mobilizing Youth; and Accelerating Local Level Actions will act as guiding lights for this collaborative approach.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) ESD Compendium launched in the Royal Irish Academy in November 2025, provides a snapshot of the extensive work going on across the sector. Ireland has a unique opportunity to lead internationally on evidence-based and research-informed ESD practice. To do this, we must embrace intra- and inter-institutional collaboration to ensure ESD is fundamental to everything we do. The 6Cs model (Figure 19.1) provides a reflective framework to guide holistic integration, with the **Curriculum** focusing on the vertical and horizonal integration across all disciplines and programmes; **Campus** focusing on how ESD can support nature-positive and decarbonized campuses; **Community** focusing on the fostering of reciprocal engagement and relationships with our local communities through the lens of ESD; **Collaboration Research**, focusing on catalyzing ESD research that informs sectoral and international best practice; **Culture**, focusing on the integration of ESD into the governance and values of our institutions; all centred through the lens of **Care** – care for our students, staff, communities, and our environment.

Figure 19.1 6Cs Framework

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3   These were not reviewed as part of the process as participation is not consistent across the HE sector in Ireland.

20. References

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