**Sustainability & Modern Society; some thoughts looking forward.. 20/11/2012**

**Dr Kieran Keohane**

As part of the looking forward element of the final session of the Sustainability & Modern Society seminar series, Kieran Keohane (Head, Dept. of Sociology) delivered a relfection in which he asked:

‘*What can we develop here in the university as an institution [on this theme]? - educational programmes, modules, a series of conferences?...*’

He referred to work he’d been developing over the past several years on the area of ‘creative educations’ and reflected that inter and trans-disciplinary projects always presented difficult challenges as they did not fit into the realm of orthodox educational research and teaching which promoted increased specialisation.

He thus proposed that we might consider inventing ‘Sustainability and Modern Society’ as a ‘specialisation’, as a means of overcoming some of the barriers that present to this type of work.

This series of evening presentations on ‘Sustainability and Modern Society’ could quite easily be formalized and institutionalised as a module (credited, on the Calendar etc). This module in turn could be one essential element of a suite of modules (already existing and readily available) from the many disciplines represented in the series –Law, Engineering, Philosophy, Art, etc; and these modules at UCC could be linked with modules at international institutions (in Austria, for instance). Such a suite of modules, interdisciplinary, interinstitutional and international, linked to conferences and summer schools (which can also be formulated as credited modules) would, taken together, comprise an extraordinarily rich programme. It would be a very attractive programme to local and international students, and to students coming from unconventional routes, people already actively engaged in practice, though seeking a more formal opportunity to reflect on their problems and their practices.

He outlined four aspects that such a ‘specialisation’ would entail:

1. A ‘golden core’ (rather than a more tenuous ‘red thread’) which would comprise a nexus of problems or issues e.g. food, water, climate, etc.
2. Identify a shared body of literature – a recognised group of texts that would provide us with a common platform. This itself could be the basis of an educational project.
3. Develop frameworks of interpretation/paradigms such as an epistemology or philosophy of science, which allows us to think paradigmatically across disciplines.
4. Identify substantive sites of collaborative engagement as ‘method’. This could be the basis of ‘placements’ for students in, for e.g. permaculture, architecture, transition towns, etc.