



SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

2023-2028

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK



UCC GREEN CAMPUS



Table of Contents

- Foreword** _____ **1**
- Vision, Mission and Goals** _____ **2**
- Background, Structures and Key Areas** _____ **3**
- A Sustainability and Climate Action Plan** _____ **4**
 - 1. Research _____ **6**
 - 2. Learning and Teaching _____ **7**
 - 3. Climate Action _____ **8**
 - 4. Sustainability Citizenship _____ **9**
 - 5. Food Health and Wellbeing _____ **10**
 - 6. Landscape Heritage and Natural Resources _____ **11**
 - 7. Waste Reduction and Circular Economy _____ **12**
 - 8. Procurement and Contracts _____ **13**
 - 9. Commuting and Active Travel _____ **14**
- Monitoring and Reporting** _____ **15**



Foreword

Our planet is facing the most significant challenge in its history. Simply put, if society does not change those actions which impact on our environment, we will continue to see drastic changes to the way we live. It is incumbent on universities to act. To inspire future leaders so that sustainability can be rooted within their thoughts. To drive research that seeks to create a sustainable future for all. At University College Cork (UCC) we are proud to be Ireland's leading university committed towards creating this sustainable future.

Over a decade ago, together with our students, we set an ambitious path to ensure our learning and teaching, research, and operations were focused on building a better world. This Sustainability and Climate Action Plan stands on the shoulders of those who have ensured that today UCC is recognised as a globally leading university for the actions we take to protect our environment and society.

Our Green Campus Committee (GCC), in operation since 2007, and our Green Forum (GF), established in 2013, enable our students and staff to work together to drive our focus on sustainability across the institution and to build on the work that has been achieved to date. The Plan has been developed following a long period of consultation with staff and students, including our two Climate Assembly events. It supports the University's Strategic Plan "Securing our Future (2023-28)", in particular Goal 5: "Our Place, Our Footprint".

The implementation of this plan has seen the establishment of UCC's Sustainability and Climate Action Office within the Presidents Office at UCC. This office and it's staff have overall responsibility for the implementation of the Plan, reporting and communicating its outputs. It will coordinate cross university initiatives and programmes aimed at embedding an ethos of sustainability across the entire campus.

The plan will be supported by the significant research and teaching capacity in sustainability across the University and embedded in a whole of university approach through UCC Futures Sustainability. This plan covers a five year period from 2023-28 and is our institutional path on how we will achieve significant targets including becoming a zero waste campus by 2030 and a carbon neutral campus by 2040. In addition to our own targets we are deeply cognisant of the role we can play in inspiring and leading change so that the entire higher education sector can play its part in driving the transition to a more sustainable future.

UCC's Sustainability Strategy 2016, was the first Sustainability Strategy developed for an Irish HEI. In 2018, UCC was also the first University outside of North America to be awarded a STARS Gold rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. This recognition is testament to the work of our students and staff, but we are aware that much work remains to be done. This Sustainability and Climate Action Plan seeks to help us as a university navigate this path and help shape and inspire a world that protects our environment and our society.



Professor John O'Halloran,
President, UCC
Co-Chair of Green Forum



Mark Poland, Director, UCC
Buildings and Estates,
Co-Chair of Green Forum

Vision, Mission and Goals

Vision:

To be a globally leading university for sustainability impact and drive the agenda towards net zero through our world leading research, demonstration of best practice on campus, and education of current and future leaders and decision makers.

Mission:

- To be an overall positive force in the journey towards creating a sustainable world for all.
- To facilitate the development and empowerment of future leaders in sustainability through our research, teaching and learning activities.
- To engage our student body, staff and wider community in becoming active citizens for sustainability.
- To minimise the local, regional and global environmental impacts of our educational, research, and ancillary operations, and infrastructural development.
- To enhance the health and wellbeing of the University and wider community through the facilitation and promotion of healthy eating and living as an integral part of sustainable living.

Our values:

Our values as a university are compassion, agility, integrity, respect, discovery, equity, accountability, sustainability. Our sustainability programme will continue to be “student-led, research-informed, and practice-focused”. We will also be guided by the values of a “just transition”, remembering at all times that those who are most affected by the impacts of unsustainability are very often those that have the least power and influence to change those unsustainable systems. We will continue to take a collaborative approach in all that we do, linking with the University’s Equality Diversity and Inclusion, Community Engagement, and Healthy Campus teams to lead the way in realising a better and more sustainable future for all.

Strategic Goal:

Our key strategic goal is to continue to embed sustainability goals and targets across all aspects of the University’s educational, research, ancillary operations, infrastructural developments and interactions with the community.



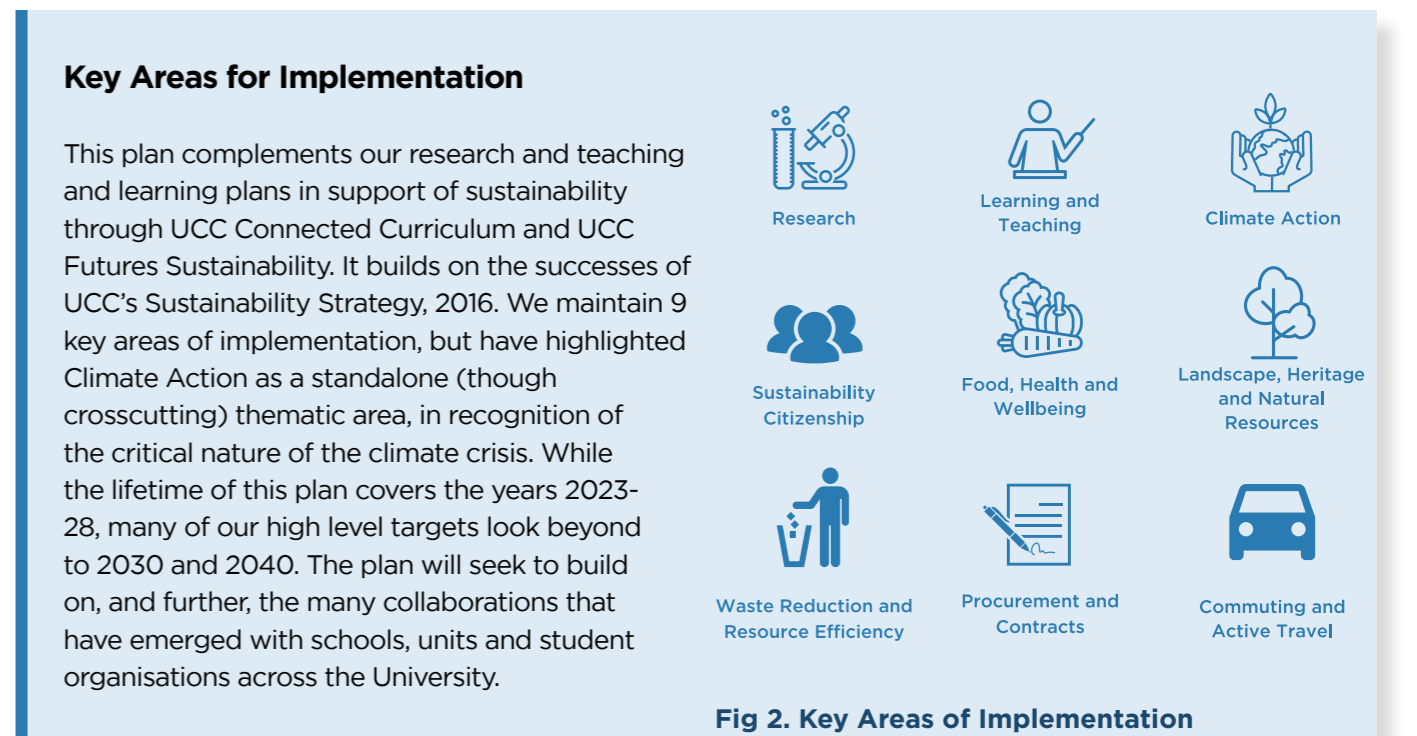
Background, Structures and Key Areas

This plan builds on the University’s significant strengths in sustainability research and teaching and practice. UCC Futures Sustainability, a research prioritisation and innovative academic recruitment programme recently saw 27 new academic posts recruited in key areas of sustainability across the institution. UCC’s Environmental Research Institute is home to many globally leading researchers in this field. The Institute works to generate new research knowledge for the understanding and protection of our natural environment, and develop technologies, tools, services and policy knowledge to facilitate a transformation to a zero carbon, resource efficient, and sustainable society.

UCC’s “Sustainable Futures” programme (awarded €3.9M under the HEA Human Capital Initiative) has developed a range of new educational and training offerings for industry and enterprise to catalyse the transition to zero carbon and resource efficient businesses in Ireland.

On a global level, UCC hosts the UNEP GEMS/ Water Capacity Development Centre, which aims to provide global capacity development in water quality monitoring and assessment directly addressing Sustainable Development Goal 6.3.2.

UCC’s strong commitment to sustainability has been reaffirmed with the establishment of an Office for Sustainability and Climate Action within the President’s Office. This Office, and associated staff, will continue to work alongside the Director of Buildings and Estates, the Green Forum, and the newly appointed Associate Vice President for Sustainability and Climate Action to ensure a whole-institution approach to sustainability is maintained. A Sustainability subcommittee of the University Leadership Team has also been established. This subcommittee will ensure a coherent structure and maintain the “whole institution” approach to sustainability.



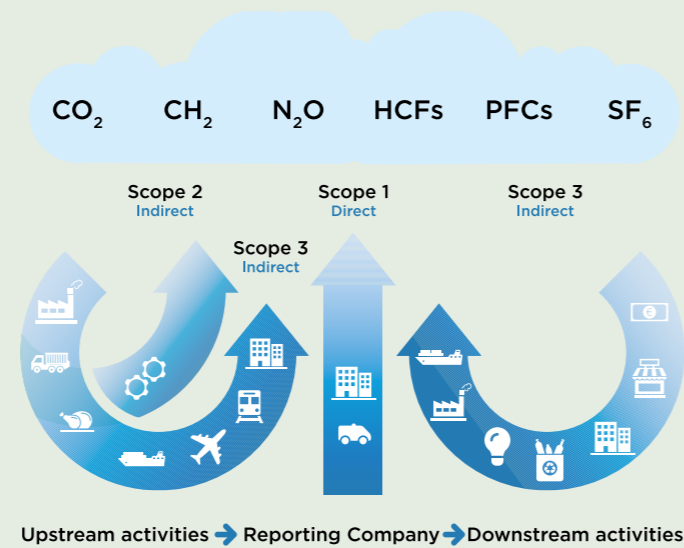
A Sustainability and Climate Action Plan

The Climate Emergency is now accepted as the biggest challenge of our time. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2022 identified "Climate Action Failure" and "Extreme Weather" as the first and second most severe risks on a global scale over the next 10 years. This iteration of UCC's Sustainability and Climate Action Plan therefore places a heavy emphasis on Climate Action and lays out the University's pathway to becoming a carbon neutral campus. Aside from operations, the University shall endeavour to place the "just transition" at the heart of all decision making (see 4.2 Sustainability Citizenship).

Under Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2023, all public bodies must operate within their allocated carbon budget for scope 1 & 2 GHG emissions. The permitted carbon budget is derived from (1) the expected decarbonisation of Ireland's electrical supply and (2) UCC achieving a 51% reduction in thermal / transport consumption, against a baseline of 2016-2018. The carbon budget is absolute and must be achieved irrespective of UCC's growth plans, changes in student numbers and increases in research activity. In addition to this target, UCC have signed the UNFCCC's Race to Zero campaign, committing to zero carbon by 2050 across scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

Understanding carbon footprint scopes

The carbon footprint of an organisation includes three scopes of emissions. Scope 1 emissions are direct emissions from owned sources. Scope 2 emissions refer to carbon produced from our purchased electricity, steam, heating and cooling. Scope 3 emissions include all other indirect emissions within our value chain. Scope 3 emissions are typically more difficult to measure, and are often not included within an organisation's carbon reduction targets.



While many organisations are making ambitious net zero announcements, in practice these targets tend to rely on the purchase of carbon offsets. In this plan, we commit to taking a measurable, science-based approach in our target setting. We will only include carbon offsets in our programme, to address unavoidable scope 3 emissions and where those offsets are local, certified, and support our native biodiversity and social enterprises.

We will work to reduce our emissions through a planned pipeline of ambitious building upgrades and work to minimise our scope 3 emissions (see Fig. 3) by reducing transport related emissions and collaborating with our contractors and suppliers to support their climate goals (see Key Area 8: Procurement and Contracts)

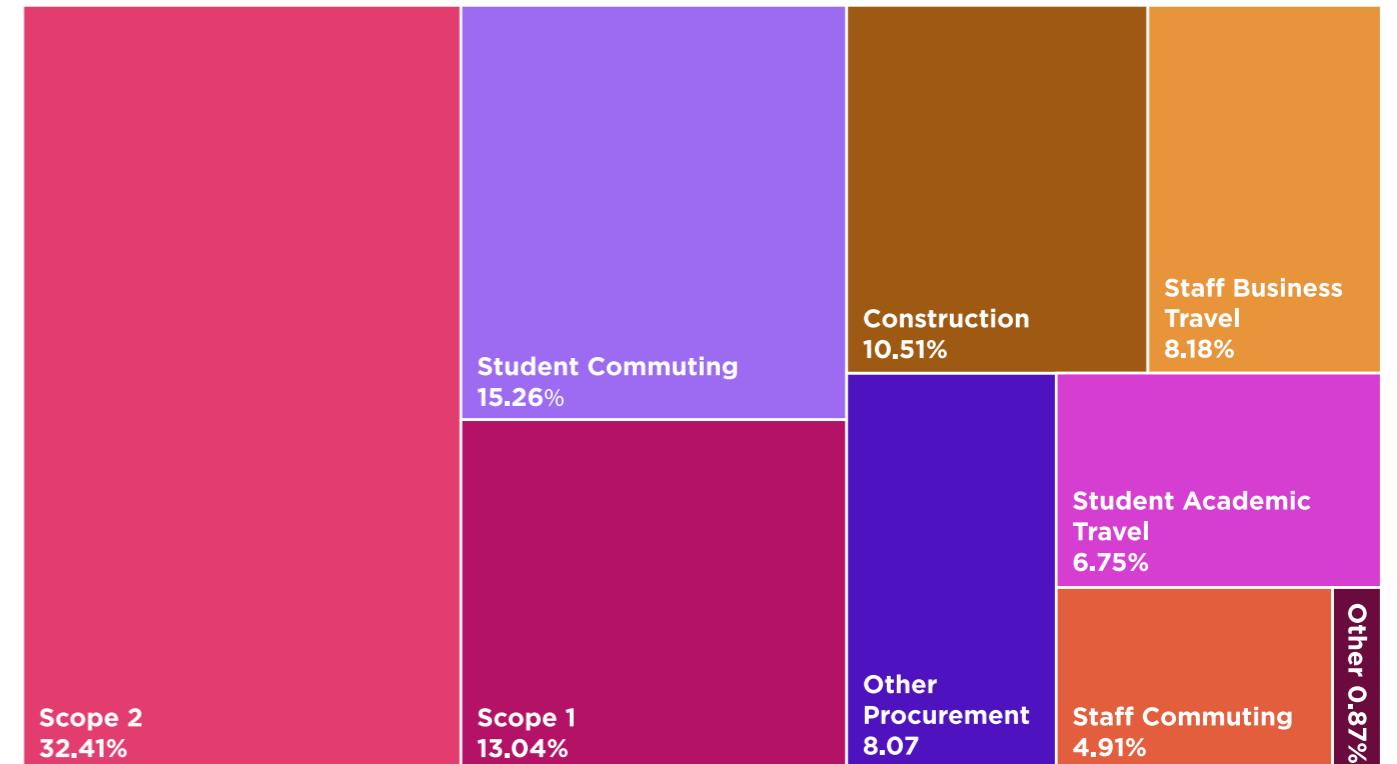


Fig 3. Breakdown of UCC Carbon Footprint into scope 1, 2 and 3 categories

Scope 1 & 2 emissions

With a short window to 2030, the University will also focus its efforts on energy efficiency projects and initiatives that will lead to a significant impact on reducing our GHG emissions and allow the University to operate within its 2030 carbon budget.

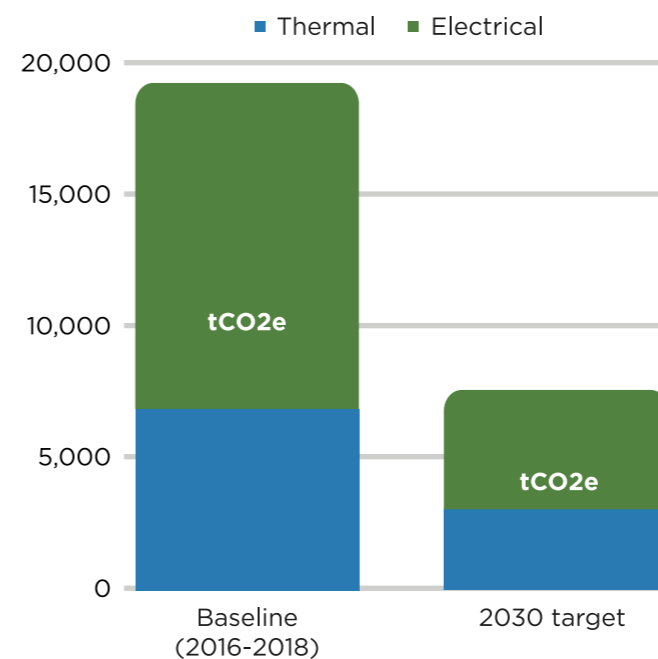


Fig 4. Scope 1 & 2 carbon reduction targets to 2030

Scope 3 emissions

UCC has undertaken carbon footprint analysis of our emissions four times in the last decade, each time adding more data to make the calculations more accurate and robust. Each iteration has revealed that a significant amount of our carbon impact results from our Scope 3 emissions (see Fig. 3). Of those emissions, student commuting and construction form the most significant part, with staff commuting coming in third place.

In addressing our scope 3 emissions, a number of factors must be taken into consideration, namely:

- The materiality of the sector,
- The reliability of the data,
- Our influence over the impact sector.

Taking these factors into consideration, we have developed a plan for addressing our scope 3 emission which involves prioritising the construction of student accommodation, while reassessing other developments. We will also work with all schools and functional areas to identify a fair way of disincentivising staff business travel.

1. Research



Strategic aims

To facilitate the development and empowerment of future leaders in sustainability through our research activities and, in doing so, maintain and enhance the University's standing and leadership in research on sustainability topics.

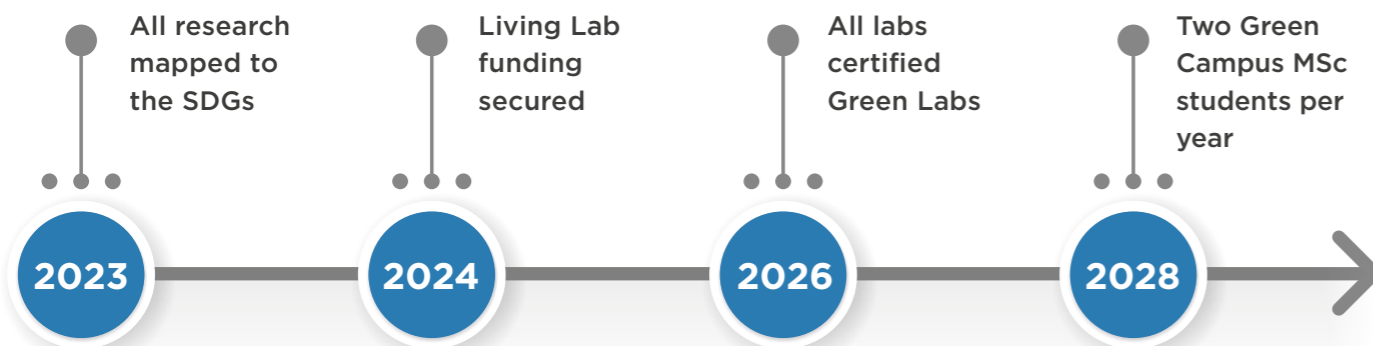
Objectives

- Gain a better understanding of how our research impacts on the SDGs and communicate this more widely.
- Broaden the positive impact of our research on the achievement of the SDGs while simultaneously seeking to reduce the environmental impact of our research practices.
- Engage with Cork City Council to identify areas for research collaboration associated with our shared net zero ambitions.
- Increase the utilisation of university infrastructure as a Living Laboratory for Sustainability.
- Promote collaboration and transdisciplinarity and support UCC Futures to integrate SDGs across all indicative areas.

Actions

- Identify a sustainable funding model for the UCC Green Campus Living Laboratory Programme, with a new call issued on an annual basis.
- Publish at least one academic paper/book chapter per year on UCC Green Campus as well as policy briefs and case studies.
- Strengthen and advance UCC's scientific excellence and leadership in sustainability research through UCC Futures Sustainability.
- Map all of UCC's research to the SDGs and support researchers to understand where their work impacts on the SDGs.
- Roll out a campus wide Green Labs programme aiming to have all labs assessed and certified by 2026.
- Achieve increased sustainable societal solutions through our engaged research with policy makers, business and communities.

Key Milestones



2. LEARNING AND TEACHING



Strategic aims

- To facilitate the development and empowerment of both current and future leaders in sustainability through our teaching and learning activities.
- To foster sustainability literacy through both formal and informal learning opportunities.

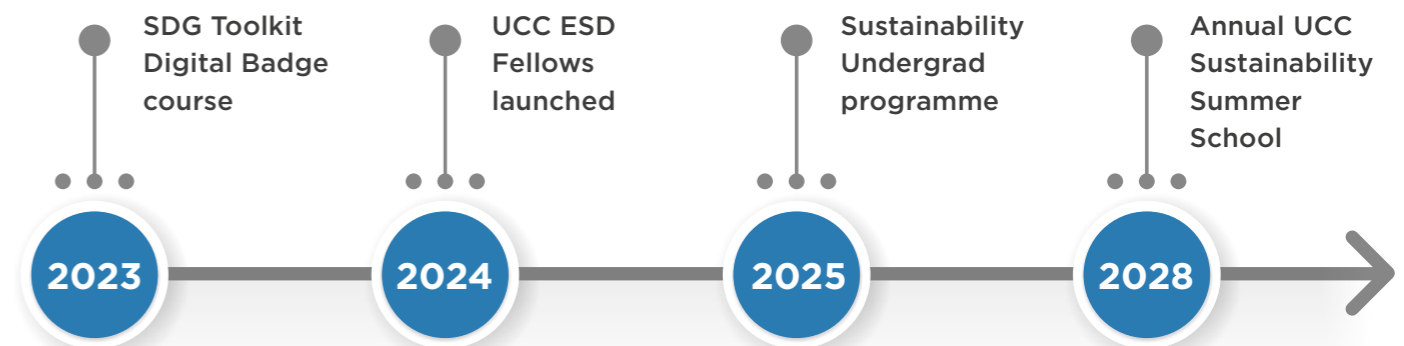
Objectives

- Support our teaching staff to integrate the SDGs into their curricula where appropriate.
- Develop a robust method of measuring and reporting SDG integration in UCC modules and programmes.
- Ensure every student at UCC is exposed to the global sustainability agenda through either their formal or informal education.
- Be a leader in the transition to a sustainable society through educational offerings for current and future leaders.

Actions

- Rollout the SDG toolkit Digital Badge course for UCC teaching staff.
- Work with partners to adapt the UN Sulitest for Irish students and roll out at UCC.
- Support academic community to develop at least one interdisciplinary undergraduate sustainability programme.
- Develop microcredential offerings for industry in support of recognised skills gaps in the workforce.
- Support Sustainable Futures HCI Programme to continue to place UCC at the forefront of education in support of sustainable society.
- Establish UCC ESD Fellows Programme.
- Establish and host UCC Sustainability Summer School in collaboration with CIRTL and Research Office.
- Develop sustainability and climate action continuous professional development courses for policy makers, businesses and communities.

Key Milestones



3. Climate Action



Strategic aims

To operate within our planned 2030 carbon budget and mitigate the impact of climate changes on our estate, while acting as a leader for climate action locally, nationally and internationally achieving net zero emissions by 2040.

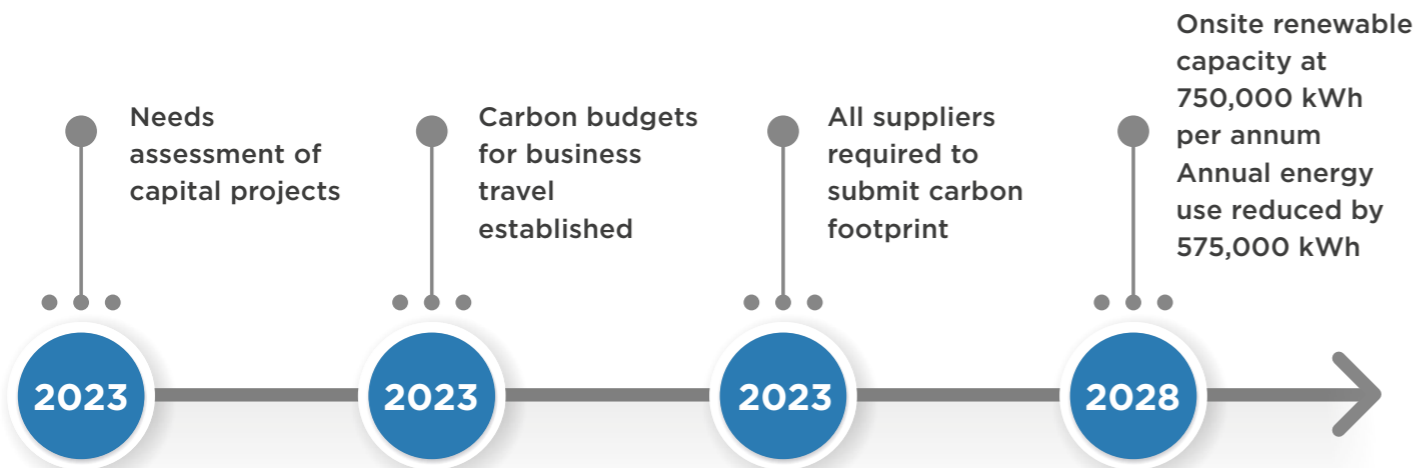
Objectives

- Exceed government target of reducing scope 1 and 2 GHG emissions by 51% by 2030 and achieving net zero total GHG emissions by 2040.
- Implement and adapt our estate management policies and infrastructure to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- Support students, staff and the wider community to minimise carbon emissions associated with on site activities.
- Capitalise on funding opportunities to deliver carbon reduction programmes and see the UCC campus act as a Living Laboratory for solutions to climate change.

Actions

- Secure funding for and implement programme to transition gas fed heating system to electricity and expand on site renewable generation.
- Continue best practice energy conservation, retrofitting, behavioural change initiatives and equipment replacement programmes.
- Review space allocation/utilisation and capital projects pipeline to reassess viability within carbon budget.
- Achieve BREEAM Excellent in all new developments and at least on “in-use” certification.
- Achieve ISO certification for carbon accounting, reporting and management.
- Work with schools/units to develop an equitable system for carbon budgets on business travel.
- Identify accredited local carbon offset solution for offsetting unavoidable emissions.

Key Milestones



4. Sustainability Citizenship



Strategic aims

- To support, enable and influence our students, staff, and wider community in achieving the SDGs and establish Sustainability Citizenship as a core ethos of UCC.
- To be transparent, accountable, and inclusive and to place the just transition as a core element of our programmes.

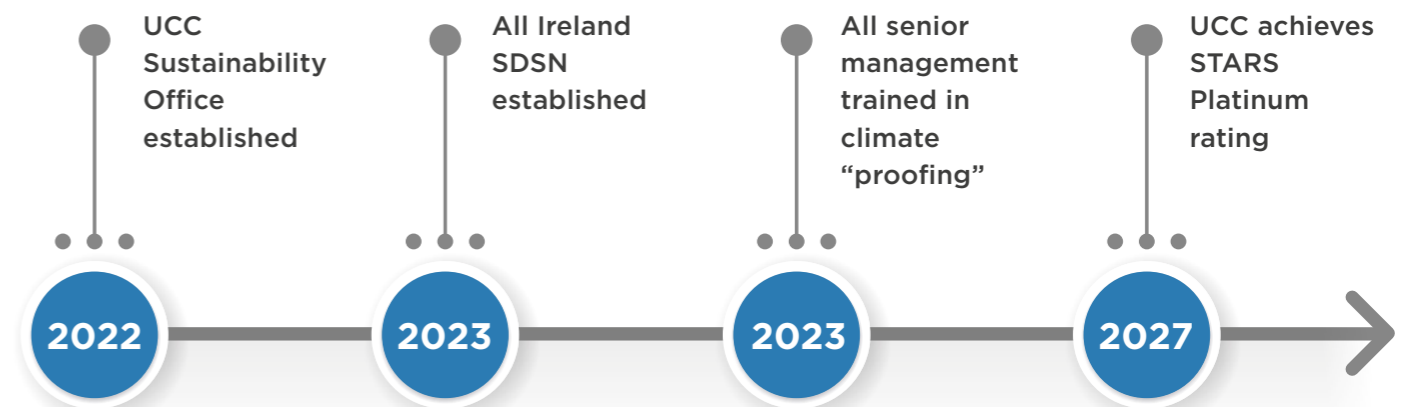
Objectives

- Align UCC sustainability programme with relevant UCC strategies including Community Engagement, EDI, teaching and learning and research strategies.
- Maintain UCC’s standing as Ireland’s Green University and build meaningful partnerships with institutions that share our values and ethos.
- Resource the sustainability agenda in a way that is appropriate to its strategic importance and develop appropriate accountability mechanisms.
- Connect different elements of sustainability across UCC to add value and better communicate our impact.

Actions

- Establish and host the All-Ireland Sustainable Development Solutions Network, focused on public engagement in the SDGs.
- Deliver leadership course for UCC senior management in climate “proofing” decisions.
- Establish a “UCC Climate Leaders” award scheme.
- Offer SDG/carbon literacy training for UCC staff and students.
- Establish Green Shoots programme to engage the student body in Climate Action and Sustainability.
- Develop a coherent and transparent Sustainability reporting process that is inclusive of all stakeholders
- Publish annual UCC SDG impact report.
- Contribute to international climate policy through UCC’s participation in the UNFCCC

Key Milestones



5. Food, Health and Wellbeing



Strategic aims

To enhance the health and well-being of the University and wider community through the facilitation and promotion of aspects of healthy eating and living as an integral part of sustainable living.

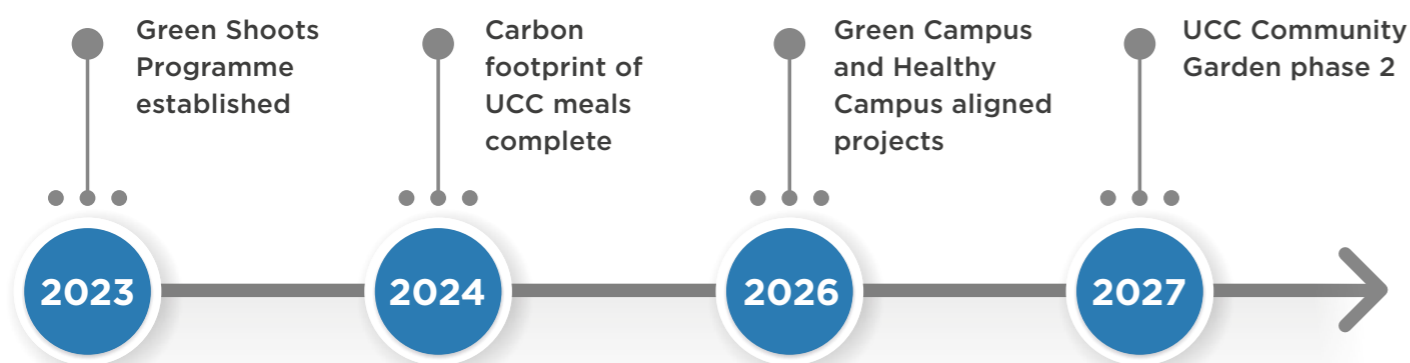
Objectives

- Ensure the entire campus community have access to healthy and affordable plant-based meal options.
- Ensure all food in UCC is ethically sourced and seek certifications such as Fairtrade and Palm Oil Free.
- Expand the opportunity for on-campus food growing initiatives, and encourage the campus and wider community to engage with these.
- Support UCC’s Healthy Campus initiative and collaborate with the Healthy Campus Officer on complementary projects.
- Ensure a healthy air quality for all staff and students internally and externally, and promote air quality initiatives in the wider community.
- Support staff and students to utilise active modes of transport in their daily commute.

Actions

- Work with UCC Community Engagement and local charities in developing community growing projects on UCC owned land.
- Assess the carbon footprint of food options in UCC restaurants and investigate the impact of advertising this footprint on consumer preferences.
- Develop a Green Shoots programme promoting engagement with campus green space among students.
- Work with KSG to establish a vegan restaurant in the mini restaurant.
- Develop and implement a no-idling policy for cars and delivery trucks on campus.
- Support active travel through better provision of cycling storage and changing facilities.
- Support implementation of Healthy Campus Charter.

Key Milestones



6. Landscape, Heritage and Natural Resources



Strategic aims

- Implement the Mitigation and Conservation Hierarchy of “Refrain, Reduce, Restore, Renew” in all our operational activities.
- Promote engagement with campus green space amongst campus and local community.

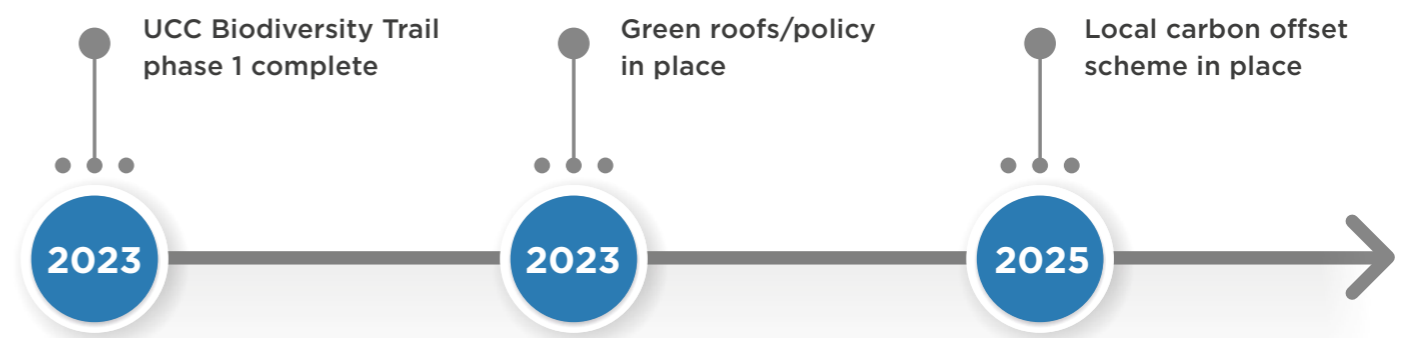
Objectives

- Prioritise the protection of campus green space in line with UCC Campus Masterplan and promote restoration where possible.
- Promote better integration and connection of green spaces across UCC campus and its surroundings.
- Promote and enhance the use of our natural resources in teaching and learning and research on sustainability as well as in everyday use and recreation.
- Promote and facilitate social and physical access to green space, and raise awareness of the associated ecosystem, biodiversity, heritage, social and health related values.
- Continue current best practices in assessment and management of campus green spaces and expand areas managed for biodiversity where possible.

Actions

- Develop a programme with Cork City Council that would assess green space use and promote wild areas, green space, and food growing initiatives.
- Incorporate green infrastructure and biophilic design principles in new builds and major retrofits.
- Develop a green walls/roofs policy.
- Assess local opportunities to develop or regenerate new, permanent green spaces for carbon storage and assess offsetting potential.
- Further develop campus walkways and greenways to ensure accessibility of our green space.
- Implement ISO 46001 standard for water efficiency.

Key Milestones



7. Waste Reduction and Circular Economy



Strategic aims

- To minimise the local, regional and global environmental impacts of our educational, research, operations, and infrastructural development.
- To make reuse the first option and promote a circular economy approach at all times.

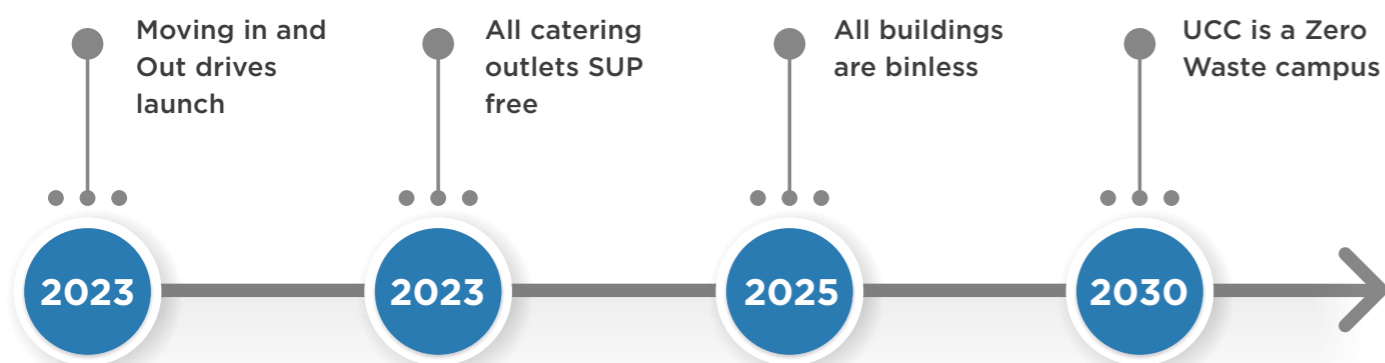
Objectives

- Become single-use plastic free across catering operations and work with the wider community to minimise plastic consumption in laboratories.
- Make reuse a first option promote a sharing economy across campus and into the community.
- Ensure a full life cycle cost approach as part of tendering processes and everyday purchases across UCC.
- Trial innovative approaches to waste reduction and reuse in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.
- Gain a better understanding of the types of waste generated across departments and develop strategies for reuse of these materials.
- Ensure best practice in construction waste management.

Actions

- Roll out binless office system across all buildings on campus.
- Carry out a full assessment of laboratory waste and implement Green Labs programme.
- Work with UCC Procurement Office to engage with suppliers in reducing waste and taking a lifecycle approach to all activities.
- Collaborate with UCC IT Services to promote efficient reuse and repair of IT equipment.
- Establish Warp-It system (or similar) to promote reuse of office items and consumables on campus.
- Establish “Moving In and Out” drives with campus accommodation to promote reuse of household items.
- Implement ISO 14001 standard for Environmental Management

Key Milestones



8. Procurement and Contracts



Strategic aims

- To minimise the local, regional and global environmental impacts of our educational, research, operations, and infrastructural development.
- To promote and provide leadership in green procurement nationally and internationally.

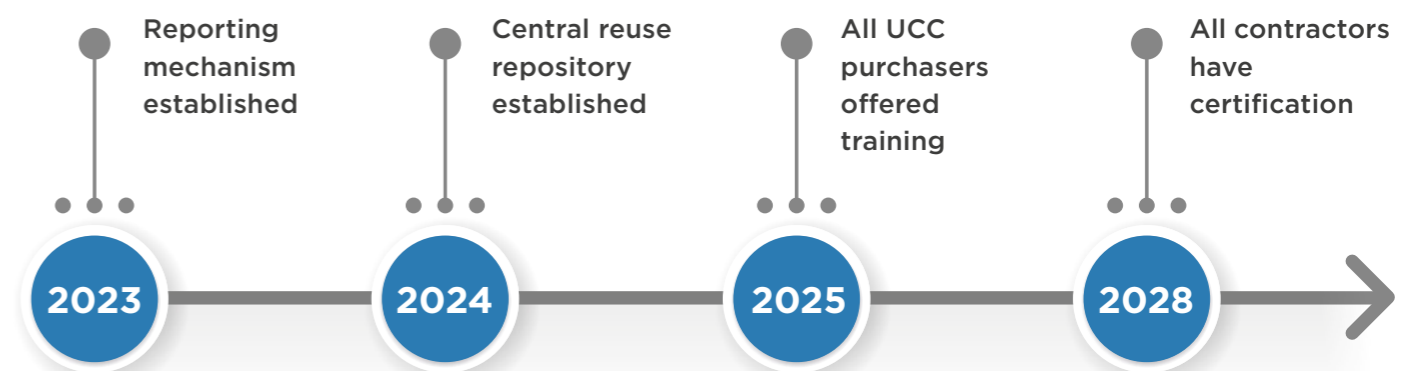
Objectives

- Work with our suppliers to better understand and manage the environmental impact of our purchases and to support them to develop their own sustainability programmes.
- Ensure that all UCC staff who purchase goods on behalf of the University have the relevant knowledge and skills to make the “greenest” choices.
- Continue to be the voice for sustainability when participating in large procurement consortia.
- Promote green procurement, better assess its impact, and effectively communicate our best practice more widely.
- Ensure UCC’s investment portfolio meets the highest ESG standards.

Actions

- Establish a central repository within UCC for consumable items that could be reused.
- Establish appropriate and effective reporting mechanism to enable better measurement and communication of green procurement in UCC.
- Work with relevant third party contractors to make UCC a Fairtrade and Palm Oil free campus.
- Undertake needs assessment of UCC procurement office staff and roll out relevant training programmes.
- Develop green procurement training for all procurers across the University.
- Require that all tendered contractors have environmental certification and encourage selection of suppliers with same in all campus purchasing practices.

Key Milestones



9. Commuting and Active Travel



Strategic aims

- To promote the use of more sustainable methods of commuting amongst our staff and students.
- To capitalise on the opportunities presented by UCC's blended working policy, to reduce our transport related emissions.

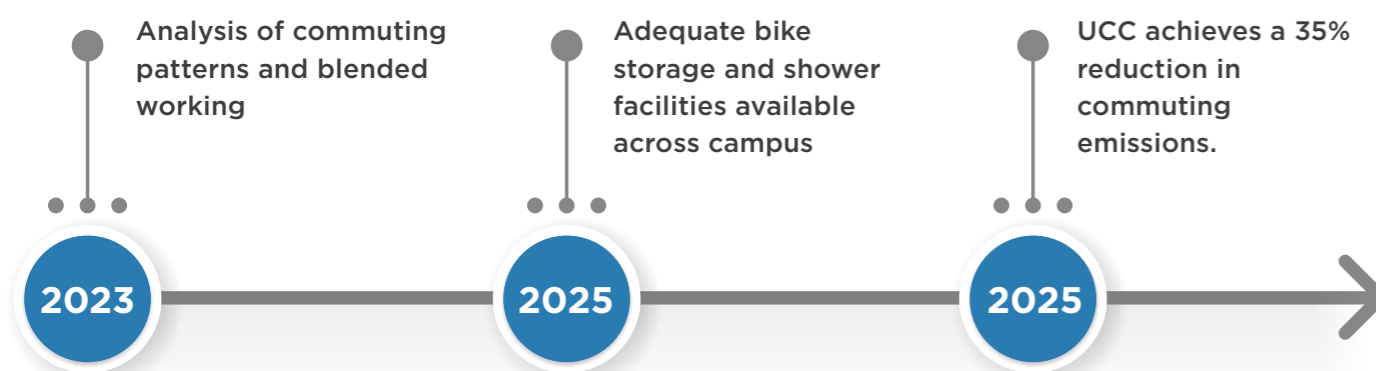
Objectives

- Reduce the number of staff and students commuting to campus by single car journeys.
- Reduce the overall carbon emissions associated with staff and student commuting to UCC.
- Analyse the impact of UCC's pilot blended working policy on staff commuting emissions.
- Support staff and students in choosing more sustainable transport options by providing the correct incentives and infrastructural improvements.
- Ensure all vehicles used in campus operations are zero carbon.

Actions

- Undertake a more detailed analysis of single car journeys to UCC and determine geographical locations with highest impact on commuting emissions.
- Assess potential for local hubs to support blended working and reduce commuting emissions.
- Monitor and prioritise the provision of student accommodation with a view to reducing need for students to commute to campus daily.
- Increase the provision of secure bike parking and showering facilities in each building/campus area.
- Continue working with partner institutions and the city council to drive provision of better cycling and public transport infrastructure.
- Ensure future iterations of Commuter Plan look at carbon emissions associated with modal split.
- Work toward a car free main campus.

Key Milestones



Monitoring and Reporting



Each action within this plan has been assigned an owner responsible for its implementation and monitoring. The newly created Office of Sustainability and Climate Action will have overall responsibility for reporting and communicating the associated outcomes. Certain actions have been identified as requiring an action group established to oversee the development of targets and ensure successful delivery. These action groups will be established imminently. UCC will continue to produce Sustainability Reports outlining progress against each action and target within this plan. UCC reports to the Irish government on it's progress in relation to the public body carbon reduction targets. In addition, we will continue to report to the following voluntary sustainability accreditations/rankings:

- Green Campus Ireland
- STARS
- Times Higher Education Impact Ranking
- Principles of Responsible Investment
- UI Green Metric
- EAUC SDG Accord
- UNFCCC Race to Zero.
- ISO 50001

A subgroup of the University Leadership Team has been established to oversee implementation of this strategy and the overall embedding of sustainability across UCC. The Green Campus Committee and Green Forum will continue to act as open spaces for staff and students within UCC to drive innovative and impactful projects and initiatives for the entire UCC community.





SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

For any queries regarding this plan or any element of UCC's Sustainability programme please contact: Dr Maria Kirrane, Head of Sustainability and Climate Action, Office of Sustainability and Climate Action, President's Office, UCC m.kirrane@ucc.ie

