

Feedback towards research - topics arising from UCC's comprehensive Green Campus strategy – The practitioners' perspective from work on the ground

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As part of UCC's overall Sustainable Campus strategy, the UCC Green Campus Forum was established in 2010, covering all parts of UCC (students, faculty and management) , with Buildings and Estates playing an active role in this committee. B+E have initiated a whole number of operational initiatives, covering the fields of energy and water consumption, waste reduction and sustainable travel in connection with its Commuter Plan.

As Buildings and Estates by their nature do not conduct research activities, this paper should be understood as an input into the overall research realm of UCC. In the course of our operational green projects, we come across issues that seem to be worth being looked at in greater depth, so that one or the other research project can be created around such topics. Such input can help provide a better understanding of the background of our operational activities in future.

There are programmes and projects – both long time established and more recent ones – that work well and people are buying into within the UCC community: The P+R system, promotion of cycling and improved waste management for instance. Other projects could perform better in terms of larger scale participation, e.g. in the field of paper usage, or the attempt to designate “green” champions across the various parts of the campus.

For UCC's Green Campus initiatives it would be vital to find out about the “why”, to learn about possible impediments in the deeper background and getting a better chance to improve the schemes accordingly.

In the field of sustainable transportation for instance, lots of alternative, new services are based on “sharing”: Sharing the car journey (lift sharing), sharing a fleet of cars for occasional use (car sharing, e.g. GoCar), or doing the same with bicycles at the workplace (UCC CampusBike).

An interesting question here would be the aspect of human behavioural change. How far are people ready to either occasionally or permanently rely on mobility services that they share with others, instead of having their own car (and its cost) for example available 24/7 for their exclusive use, although it might actually be used for only one or two hours a day.

What psychological or practical barriers might exist that keep people from using such services on a larger scale? How far are they willing to accept a slightly higher degree of dependency in return for potential large scale savings? This would be a question for sociologists or applied psychologists.

Recycling would be another topic: The University is a consumer of large amounts of paper: Printer paper for offices and lectures, students buying note books etc. However, there seems to be very little use of recycling paper for all these purposes. Printers are said to be in extended need of maintenance due to dust from recycling paper particles. In the campus shops, there are no notebooks on offer made from recycled paper. What are the actual reasons for this? How vulnerable are printers really to the use of such paper? Where is paper being recycled, where would it be sourced from – meaning where are recycling plants located? Would the procurement of recycling paper result in longer transport distances and thus higher transport demand and related emissions compared to standard paper? Environmental engineers might be interested in a study.

The two fields mentioned above are only first examples for questions that arise from UCC's Green Campus projects. Getting deeper knowledge about the (background) effects of "green" initiatives in UCC operations would make decisions better informed, whether an initiative is viable, is really "greener" at the end and what might be circumstances impeding the activities' long term successes.

Having such research conducted with the in-house means of UCC (be it through student projects or post-graduate research) would emphasise the University's philosophy of Teaching, Research and Operation working hand in hand to achieve long term and lasting results in its efforts to run UCC in an overall sustainable fashion.