



University College Cork (UCC)

Assessment of UCC for Green Campus Award renewal

Date: 18th October 2023

Assessment Panel:

- Deirdre O’Carroll, Green-Campus Programme Manager, An Taisce Education Unit
- Joanne Scott, An Taisce, Green Schools Programme Manager
- Tracey Lydon, An Taisce, Safe Routes to School Programme Manager

Following the assessment, the panel recommends that the **Green Flag for UCC be renewed**

General Comments

The panel were most impressed with the content of the application and the clear demonstration of work achieved on campus. An Taisce and the panel members wish to congratulate UCC on their achievements thus far and look forward to working further with the campus long into the future.

Panel Feedback

Joanne Scott

Many thanks for the opportunity to join the judging panel for UCC’s Green Flag Assessment. I am delighted to recommend renewal of their Green Flag and have enclosed some comments, and suggestions.

I thoroughly enjoyed all the presentations on the day of the assessment and really appreciate the turn out of the committed members of the Green Campus committee despite the weather warning!

I was particularly impressed with the Student Union representative, Dearbhla, her passion for sustainability and commitment to making sure that UCC events align with their climate action plan, engaging a wider range of students, hosting sustainable events and engagement with COP28. I would be in favour of supporting the creation of a policy that only allow events that align with UCC’s climate action plan in the future.

KSG presentation was excellent and the savings because of the plastic cups ban are outstanding, it would be great to share the results across campus, a visual representation of the volume saved. It will give a great boost to students and staff while educating visitors to the campus on your success. The progress on food waste across campus is also brilliant, using innovative ways to get data and make improvements.

I love the green shoots project, and it is an excellent addition to the work of the Green Campus, Green Shoots changemakers sounds great too, offering transferable skills to students is very important and a great way to get an even wider range of students involved in Green Campus programme.

The energy management team are excellent, and it is clear from the presentation given by Pat that they have a clearly defined path of improvements despite the huge growth in UCC buildings and population.

Overall, every presentation given by the committee and the work presented in the application, clearly showed that constant improvement is the goal, always striving to do better. It is very clear that UCC have a committed team dedicated to making the campus as sustainable as possible

Tracey Lydon

Following a review of the University College Cork (UCC) Green Flag Reassessment Report, 2023, and considering the presentation to the assessment panel on the 18th of October 2023, I would recommend that the Green Flag for University College Cork, be renewed.

Below I have outlined some comments and recommendations for consideration by UCC.

The legacy of the work that has been carried out by UCC and the collective approach of all those involved in supporting the initiatives came across very well during the assessment. The Sustainability and Climate Action Plan 2023 – 2028 marks a continuation of this commitment.

It is heartening to see the positive role of the students' union in holding the university to account. It would be beneficial to demonstrate the range of faculties being represented in the committee's work and to elaborate on how diversity here is being achieved and maintained.

Continued efforts in terms of becoming plastic-free and significant reductions in CO₂ emissions, waste, and water use are commendable and rightfully being documented and acknowledged through the range of awards that have been bestowed on the university for their efforts.

The strong relationship with KSG catering is a credit to the university and has led to some creative and innovative data-driven solutions to reducing waste.

The work being carried out in certifying green labs across the campus is a very effective means of making lasting behaviour change in practice and I hope to see the work in this area continue to grow in the coming years.

Transport, be it commuting or business/ academic transport, plays a significant part in UCC's carbon footprint and I would like to see UCC focus on reduction in these areas going forward. Road transport accounts for 1/3 of Ireland's Energy Demand (SEAI, 2022 – National Energy Balance) and so the university's contribution to this is important. I would suggest that the university prepare a travel plan and consider ways of reducing traffic congestion on and off campus. The university could work towards the attainment of the [Smarter Travel Mark](#), which recognises and celebrates organisations efforts in terms of sustainable and active travel.

The Green Shoots programme is a wonderful addition to the work and focus of the university. I am very impressed by the wide-ranging incentives being rolled out under the programme and the duality of their focus being both extremely local and at the same time universally relevant. I think there would be some extremely beneficial collaboration possibilities between this programme and the [Green Schools](#) programme of An Taisce. Again, it would be beneficial to demonstrate the range of student backgrounds engaging with this programme and how the programme is managing to engage an increasingly wide range of the university population. I also think increasing the involvement of university staff in the initiatives run by the programme would have a positive impact.

I would like to have understood more about the SDG Toolkit and Digital Badge and its content. Its uptake in use by other organisations is a positive indication and certainly the university should further its work on its decimation and use.

Deirdre O'Carroll

I fully support the renewal of the Green Flag award for UCC based on the written application by UCC Green Campus and supported by the information presented to the assessment panel on 18th October 2023. Congratulations and well done to the UCC Green Campus team for their welcome to campus and for the informative presentations we received. Adverse weather interfered with our plans to have a campus tour as part of the assessment visit however it was great to get a sense of on campus projects from the presenters and from the application.

Following the impact of COVID on the higher education sector in Ireland it is inspiring to get a sense from the UCC team that they have a renewed and refreshed focus on sustainability on campus. It is especially heartening to see the focus placed on sustainability by campus management including through the appointment of a dedicated office for sustainability and climate action within the President's Office, the appointment of an associate VP of Sustainability and the prioritising of sustainability in the University Strategy and through the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan.

Committee structure: Your committee structure is excellent and shows strong integration between your committee and other structures within the site such as the Sustainability and Climate Action Office, Students Union, Student societies, Buildings & Estates, the Green Forum, the University's leadership team, the Greenshoots programme etc. The challenges associated with operating a committee within a complex structure and relying on individual commitment to the committee are noted.

Student engagement: Student engagement is a cornerstone of Green Campus activities and it was very interesting to hear from a students union representative (Dearbhla) on SU sustainability actions and in particular work on a fossil-fuel non-proliferation treaty and the intersections of their work with climate justice along with efforts to hold the university to account on environmental commitments. Well done also on recognising the importance of student societies to environmental action and well done to the various student societies including UCC Enactus and UCC environmental society members for their sterling work on a variety of innovative projects such as Climate Action Week, the Green Market, sustainable fashion events and more research led projects such as the Cork Urban Soil Project. Cross collaborations with other societies such as the crochet society, knit society, Macra na Feirme and UCC surgical society are also to be commended. Student empowerment and environmental citizenship are supported through the Greenshoots programme and the Greenshoots changemakers programme and we will be watching developments with interest.

Campus and wider community engagement: Your work in this area sets an example for other sites to follow with evidence of excellent campus engagement such as through the Plastic Free UCC project, the Green Shoots programme, Green Week, Earth Week, the UCC community garden and excellent Green Campus communications in the form of podcasts, blogs, childrens' books etc. Interactions with the wider community indicate a willingness to engage and show leadership beyond the campus gates both locally in Cork and more widely through SDSN Ireland, involvement in COPs and international research. Your team has always shown generosity and willingness to engage with the wider Green Campus network through innovative projects, attendance and participation at our various events and research plus engagement with other sites nationally and internationally. Well done on prioritising staff and student wellbeing through various community garden events, meditation sessions, climate anxiety workshops, on campus nature and biodiversity based events, international swap shops etc.

Linking to learning on site: excellent efforts here to integrate green campus in to research, teaching and learning on site through efforts to embed sustainability into learning on site through: the SDG teaching toolkit, Digital Badge course, the University wide module on sustainability, the sustainable futures programme, the Living Laboratory programme, carbon literacy training etc.

Thematic areas:

- Energy, water and climate action: actions and achievements in this area are impressive in particular: efforts to measure and reduce Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, retention of ISO50001, a 44% reduction in water usage since the 2016 baseline all aligned with ambitions to become a carbon neutral campus by 2040. It is heartening to hear that the Green Campus committee is the key mode of communications with staff and students in the area of behavioural change, building operations (Saver Saves Scheme) and making data freely available to staff and students. The physical makeup of the campus has changed since the last assessment so well done on adapting to the new energy and water requirements and using opportunities to introduce renewables, employ best practice in new builds and retrofitting and using opportunities to detect and fix leaks.
- Waste: Waste minimisation and Waste compliance/correct waste segregation present common challenges across all of our Green Campus sites – well done on actions to address this including the Plastic Free UCC project, reusable cup project, food waste initiatives in partnership with KSG catering, sustainable printing policy, the Green Labs initiative and more.
- Biodiversity: the transformation of landscape management on site is outstanding and serves as an example to other sites on how to approach landscape management in harmony with nature and with consideration for community wellbeing and the effects of eco-grief. The practices employed in landscape management here are on a large scale but could be replicated in other public spaces, on a different scale in smaller campuses and also in staff and students own greenspaces and, as mentioned in the application, can have an influence on the wider community.
- Travel and Transport: It is encouraging to see the University's commitment to promoting sustainable travel options which is demonstrated by the campaigns and innovative initiatives in place for example the Blended Working Policy, no idling policy, and campus cycling promotion plus engagement with policy makers. The most recent travel surveys indicate some challenges in relation to the promotion of sustainable transport to and from the campus by staff and students. It is hoped that actions to encourage more staff and students to adopt sustainable travel options through communications and provision of sustainable travel features or promotion of existing features to staff and students (as per page 14 of the action plan) will help to achieve these aims.
- Green Procurement: wonderful and high impact actions here

I would like to congratulate UCC Green Campus on achievements to date and I very much look forward to working with you as you continue on your Green Campus journey. Thank you for your continued support of and commitment to the Green Campus programme.