



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHÉ  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

# Sustainability Governance Handbook

October 2024



## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. University Sustainability Advisory Board .....	3
3. CUSP General Board .....	5
4. CUSP Executive Board .....	7
5. CUSP Working Groups.....	8
6. Sustainability Office.....	9
Appendix 1 – Climate Action and Sustainability Policy.....	11

### Version control

This document was approved by the University Sustainability Advisory Board on 8 October 2024. It replaces the Sustainability Terms of Reference (May 2022).

# 1. Introduction

The University of Galway Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025 sets out our vision and commitment to lead the implementation of sustainability across the university mission and beyond. Using a Learn-Live-Lead approach, our strategic aim is to embed sustainability in our culture, operational policies and governance structures and empower our communities to be champions of sustainability. The focus of learn is to embed sustainability literacy into all aspects of University learning and research, the focus of live is to implement the principles of sustainability through campus operations and engagement activities, from a lead perspective the aim is to play a central and transformative role in attaining the SDGs by 2030.

Furthermore, the University of Galway Climate Action and Sustainability Policy (Appendix 1) commits to: (i) embed the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into all our major efforts in education, research, leadership, operations, administrative and engagement activities and (ii) embed carbon management into all University operations and processes with a view to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

To deliver on our sustainability commitments, University of Galway has established a cohesive governance structure to guarantee clear and consistent leadership, responsibility, accountability, and oversight of sustainability. The Climate Action and Sustainability Policy defines the roles of the President, Deputy President and Registrar, University Management Team (UMT), Heads, University Sustainability Advisory Board, and Community and University Sustainability Partnership (CUSP) General Board. The governance and reporting structure is summarised in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Governance and reporting structure

Established in 2015, the **Community and University Sustainability Partnership** (CUSP) is a multi-disciplinary, voluntary team of students and staff from across the campus and community partners all working together with the common aim of establishing the university as a leading institutional model for sustainability. CUSP comprises a General Board of approximately 40 members, 4 working groups and an Executive Board (chairs of the working groups).

Led by the Director of Sustainability, the **Sustainability Office** is a team of University of Galway staff that leads and promotes sustainability in all aspects of University learning and research, culture, operations and governance structures, and empowers our diverse communities of staff, students and partners to co-create tomorrow's sustainable campus and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainability Office supports CUSP and reports to the Deputy President & Registrar.

The **University Sustainability Advisory Board** provides strategic oversight of the University's commitment to sustainability, demonstrates leadership and recommends for approval and drives forward sustainability-related policies, procedures and action plans. The University Sustainability Advisory Board receives reports from the CUSP General Board and is chaired by the Deputy President & Registrar. The University Sustainability Advisory Board, through the Director of Sustainability, reports bi-annually to the University Management Team and reports annually to the Údarás na hOllscoile (Governing Authority) Standing & Strategic Planning Committee.

A set of **key performance indicators** (KPIs) has been developed based on the Sustainability Strategy, Climate Action and Sustainability Policy, and other commitments. Underlying data are compiled by the Sustainability Office, and the KPIs are reported to each layer of the governance structure for review, action and prioritisation.

The remainder of this document sets out the Terms of Reference for each layer of the sustainability governance structure at University of Galway.

## 2. University Sustainability Advisory Board

### Purpose

- Provide strategic oversight of the University's commitment to sustainability as detailed in University of Galway Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and the SDG Accord.
- As a signatory to the SDG Accord, demonstrate leadership in sustainability by aligning all major efforts with the SDG framework, including education, research, operations, administration and engagement activities.
- Support the development and implementation of the University of Galway Sustainability Strategy 2021 - 2025 and beyond.
- Demonstrate leadership for sustainability by collaborating with key staff across all disciplines to advise on necessary support and resources to improve sustainability performance.
- Undertake high-level strategic analysis to inform decision-making in the allocation of resources for the implementation of sustainable operations across University of Galway.
- Recommend for approval and drive forward sustainability-related policies, procedures and action plans. Support work that is already underway in the development of strategies to engage the campus community and other key stakeholders.
- Play a key role in development of strong governance structures and support the integration of sustainability into daily business at all levels of the University.
- Oversee the production of interim sustainability reports. Report bi-annually to UMT via the Director of Sustainability. Report annually to Údarás na hOllscoile through the Standing and Strategic planning committee via the Director of Sustainability.
- Work closely with external strategic partners to raise the profile of University of Galway amongst key national and international audiences.
- Engage on behalf of University of Galway in the developing network of universities promoting sustainability.

### Organisation

- The University Sustainability Advisory Board is chaired by the Deputy President and Registrar and reports bi-annually to UMT.
- The University Sustainability Advisory Board Reports annually to Údarás na hOllscoile through the Standing and Strategic Planning Committee via the Director of Sustainability.
- The University Sustainability Advisory Board is advised on all matters related to the University's commitment to sustainability by the Director of Sustainability.
- The University Sustainability Board meets at least two times a year, once each semester.
- The Community and University Sustainability Officer shall be Secretary to the University Sustainability Advisory Board, with responsibility for maintaining records and minutes of meetings.
- Copies of all minutes are forwarded to the University Management Team and held by the Sustainability Office.

## **Membership**

1. Deputy President & Registrar (Chair)
2. Chief Operating Officer
3. Vice-President for Research and Innovation
4. Vice-President for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
5. Dean of Students
6. Vice-President for Engagement, Marketing & Communications
7. Director of Strategy Implementation
8. SU President or their nominee
9. CUSP Research & Learning WG Chair
10. CUSP Nature & Ecosystems WG Chair
11. CUSP Sustainable Living & Wellbeing WG Chair
12. Director of Sustainability and CUSP Governance & Leadership WG Chair
13. Community & University Sustainability Officer
14. External representative
15. External representative
16. External representative
17. External representative

### 3. CUSP General Board

#### Purpose

- Align all our major efforts with the SDGs targets and indicators, including education, research, leadership, operational and engagement activities.
- Inform, advise and make recommendations to the University Sustainability Advisory Board on all matters relating to campus sustainability, including governance, policy, resourcing and implementation of sustainability.
- Report to the University Sustainability Advisory Board on the status of campus sustainability performance.
- Support the delivery of objectives, targets and measures of success set out in the University of Galway Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025, and subsequent strategies thereafter, through the working groups.
- Embed objectives, targets and measures of success set out in the University of Galway Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025 across each of University of Galway's colleges and units and annually report progress on achieving the SDG framework.
- Through working group(s), embed the SDG framework into our education and research and inform, encourage, support and monitor developments in teaching and research for sustainability.
- Through working group(s), embed the SDG framework into our operations and to sustainably manage our campus.
- Through working group(s), embed the SDG framework into our leadership activities and to scale sustainability successes beyond the campus by building sustainability partnerships with neighbouring communities, national bodies and partners across Europe and the globe.
- Disseminate information and feedback on sustainability accomplishments, tools, and challenges.
- Support the development of sustainability for the University's competitive advantage: in recruitment, fundraising, financial and resource management, and funded research.
- Act as ambassadors for sustainability both inside and outside the University.

#### Organisation

- The CUSP General Board is chaired by the Director of Sustainability.
- The responsibilities of the Chair include setting the agenda and distributing it to members before each meeting, facilitating meetings, and serving as a liaison for the CUSP General Board. The Chair, working together with the Community and University Sustainability Officer, shall be responsible for soliciting nominations to all CUSP General Board seats for the following term of service before the last meeting of the current term of service.
- The Community and University Sustainability Officer shall be Secretary to the CUSP General Board, with responsibility for maintaining records and minutes of meetings.
- The CUSP General Board has a direct reporting line to the University Sustainability Advisory Board.
- Each of the Working Groups will be chaired by a member of the CUSP General Board.

- Each CUSP General Board member is required to actively serve on one of more of the Sustainability Working Groups.
- The CUSP General Board is advised on matters related to sustainability by the Director of Sustainability, the Community and University Sustainability Officer and the Working Groups.
- The CUSP General Board meets between 4 and 6 times per year.

### **Membership**

- The CUSP General Board membership is intended to broadly represent all campus constituencies; and provide expertise in operations, teaching & learning, research, student life, health and wellbeing, nature and ecosystems, marketing, communication, engagement and community.
- For a new member to join the CUSP General Board, a proposal is presented to the Chair and the proposal is raised as an agenda item at the next meeting for approval among members.
- The CUSP General Board includes the following members:
  - Director of Sustainability (Chair)
  - Sustainability Officer (Secretary)
  - Students' Union President and their nominated Vice-President
  - Representatives from Student Societies
  - Representatives from community groups
  - Representatives of staff from each College
  - Representative from each Research Institute
  - Representatives from professional services units (not limited to):
    - Buildings & Estates
    - Commercial Services
    - Engagement
    - Finance
    - Human Resources
    - Information Solutions & Services
    - Marketing & Communications
    - Research & Innovation
    - Student Services
- From the CUSP General Board, a chair for each of the working groups will be selected.

## 4. CUSP Executive Board

### Purpose

- Represent the CUSP General Board on the University Sustainability Advisory Board.
- Provide a forum from which the Director of Sustainability /or representative can solicit advice and recommendations from senior campus leadership on the creation and implementation of sustainability principles and policies to guide the campus.
- Distribute administrative responsibility, decision-making, and planning among CUSP General Board members.
- Review and assess budget and funding strategies to support sustainability and implementation of the strategic plan.
- To review proposals for major campus sustainability initiatives and bring forward recommendations to the CUSP General Board.

### Organisation

- The CUSP Executive Board is chaired by the Director of Sustainability.
- The CUSP Executive Board is a sub-committee of the CUSP General Board.
- The CUSP Executive Board meets between meetings of the CUSP General Board or as needed.
- The Community and University Sustainability Officer shall be Secretary to the CUSP Executive Board, with responsibility for maintaining records and minutes of meetings.

### Membership

The CUSP Executive Board shall be composed of the chairs of the working groups.

## 5. CUSP Working Groups

The CUSP General Board shall convene working groups to undertake activities to support the implementation of the University of Galway Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025. The working groups will report their progress to the CUSP General Board.

The current working groups are:

- Research & Learning
- Sustainable Living & Wellbeing
- Nature & Ecosystems
- Governance & Leadership

The CUSP General Board may establish, alter or discontinue working groups.

## 6. Sustainability Office

### Purpose

- The Sustainability Office leads and promotes sustainability in all aspects of University learning and research, culture, operations and governance structures, and empowers our diverse communities of staff, students and partners to co-create tomorrow's sustainable campus and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The Sustainability Office acts as a central point of contact internally, for all matters relating to campus sustainability, for all members of the university community (including UMT, Údarás na hOllscoile, colleges, schools and units). Our sustainability ambitions extend far beyond the campus walls, the Sustainability Office acts as a central point of contact for external stakeholders, (local, national and international) aiming to maximise our sustainability ambition and reach.
- Recognising that sustainability emerged as a core value of our campus community, the Sustainability Office works to develop and implement continuous opportunities for student and staff involvement in sustainability on campus. By working with colleges and units to identify and remove barriers to sustainability, the Sustainability Office aims to equip, empower and engage our campus community to co-create tomorrow's sustainable campus.
- The Sustainability Office supports the development of educational programmes for all students, staff and community partners to become lifelong learners who continue to pursue sustainability literacy. For example, developing a programme of sustainability induction training for new staff, recruitment and orientation material for students and leading the development of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes in sustainability.
- The Sustainability Office aims to elevate University of Galway as a transformative leader in sustainability building leadership opportunities locally, nationally and internationally as part of our collective response towards the achievement of the SDG framework.
- The Sustainability Office is responsible for leading the implementation of the University of Galway Sustainability Strategy and supporting development of strategic and operational plans at university and college/unit level.
- The Sustainability Office, working in conjunction with the Office of the Chief Operating Officer supports the development of the Climate Action Roadmap.
- The Sustainability Office is responsible for tracking progress, publishing annual and interim sustainability reports and working in conjunction with colleges and units to report progress on aligning all major efforts in their unit to the SDGs goals, targets and indicators.
- The Sustainability Office manages and supports sustainability related external rating programmes, for example, Sustainability Tracking Assessing and Rating Systems (STARS); Times Higher Education Societal Impact Ranking in conjunction with Institutional Planning and Research office and; An Taisce Green Campus in conjunction with Buildings and Estates office.
- The Sustainability Office manages the three university sustainability Boards: CUSP General Board, CUSP Executive Board and the University Sustainability Advisory Board.
- The Sustainability Office plays an integral role in developing new sustainability related policies and procedures and aligning all existing University of Galway policies and procedures to sustainability.

- The Sustainability Office represents sustainability interests in community partnership programmes.
- The Sustainability Office represents sustainable University of Galway in local to international settings.
- The Sustainability Office manages sustainability-related audit and risk.
- The Sustainability Office leads communications via the University of Galway sustainability website and social media platforms.

### Organisation

- The Sustainability Office is led by the Director of Sustainability, who reports to the Deputy President and Registrar. The Director of Sustainability, serves as an advisory function to the Deputy President and Registrar, who has overall responsibility for sustainability at University of Galway.
- The Sustainability Office currently includes four core staff members: Director of Sustainability, Community and University Sustainability Officer, Sustainability Accountant, and Sustainability Administrator.
- The Sustainability Office works closely with two Lecturers in Sustainability & Education for Sustainable Development, who are based in the Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching (CELT). See Figure 2.
- The Sustainability Office services the CUSP General Board, the CUSP Executive Board and the University Sustainability Advisory Board.
- The Sustainability Office receives formal input from colleges and units from a network of Sustainability Champions.
- The Sustainability Office reports progress on a bi-monthly basis to the UMT via the Deputy President and Registrar.
- The Sustainability Office reports progress on an annual basis to Údarás na hOllscoile via the Standing and Strategic Planning Committee.

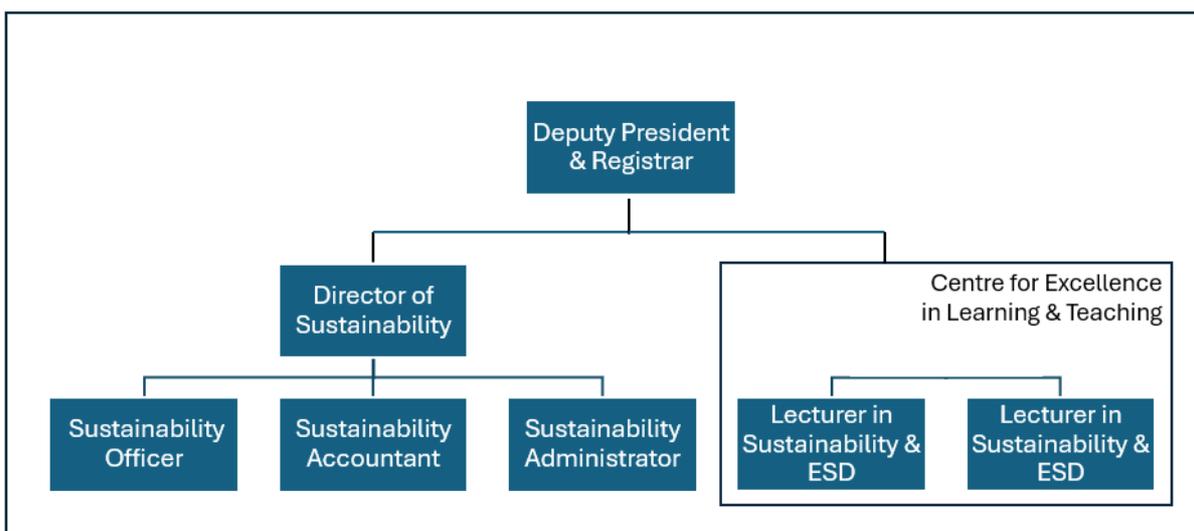


Figure 2. Sustainability Office structure

## Appendix 1 – Climate Action and Sustainability Policy

Code: QA205  
Title: Climate Action and Sustainability Policy  
Date: September 21st, 2021  
Approval: University Management Team  
Policy Owner: Deputy President & Registrar

### 1. Purpose

The 'University of Galway Strategic Plan 2020-2025' and the 'University of Galway Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025' commits to providing leadership to inform the transition to a sustainable future through our teaching, research actions and impacts; and to developing a roadmap to move ambitiously towards carbon neutrality by 2030. University of Galway, as a signatory to the 'SDG Accord', commits to align all major efforts with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), targets and indicators, including through our education, research, leadership, operational and engagement activities. University of Galway as a public body is required under the 'Climate Action Plan and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021' to lead in the achievement of net zero emissions, by 2050.

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report, finds that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C, or even 2°C, will be beyond reach. Given the significant legislative and strategic requirements in the areas of climate change and sustainability, the purpose of the University of Galway Climate Action and Sustainability Policy is (i) to embed carbon management into all University operations and processes with a view to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 in line with global efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C. The Climate Action and Sustainability Policy will incorporate measuring carbon emissions and those that we offset with natural and artificial methods and (ii) to lead the transition to a sustainable future by embedding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), targets and indicators into all our major efforts, including education, research, leadership, professional support services, operations and engagement activities.

### 2. University Climate Action and Sustainability Goals

University of Galway will develop a roadmap to move ambitiously towards carbon neutrality by 2030. In line with the 'Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021', University of Galway commits to pursue and achieve no later than 2050, the transition to being a university with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions that is climate resilient, biodiversity-rich and environmentally-sustainable.

As a signatory to the 'SDG Accord', University of Galway aims to become a leader in the transition to a sustainable future by embedding the SDGs into all our education, research, leadership, professional support services, operations, administrative and engagement activities by building on the work of the Community and University Sustainability Partnership (CUSP) and its approach to learn live and lead sustainability.

### **3. Definitions**

The UN SDGs are a collection of 17 global goals that UN member states, including Ireland, are expected to use as a guide for tackling the world's most pressing challenges including ending poverty and hunger and bringing economic prosperity, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, peace and good governance to all countries and all people by 2030.

The SDG Accord is the University and College Sectors Collective Response to the Global Goals. The purpose of the SDG Accord is twofold: First it is to inspire, celebrate and advance the critical role that education has in delivering the SDGs and the value it brings to governments, business and wider society. Secondly, the Accord is a commitment learning institutions are making to one another to do more to deliver the goals, to annually report on each signatory's progress, and to do so in ways which share the learning with each other both nationally and internationally.

Climate Change refers to long-term changes in the earth's weather patterns or average temperature. A wide range of gasses known as greenhouse gases (GHGs) contribute to climate change. Carbon, in the form of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), is the earth's major emitted greenhouse gas (GHG). GHG emissions and the impact of an organisation on climate can be measured in terms of equivalent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Carbon management means, firstly, understanding where the organisations CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are coming from and then putting in place a plan to reduce/eliminate/offset the carbon. Carbon neutrality is defined by an internationally-recognised standard – PAS 2060 – which sets out requirements for the quantification, reduction and offsetting of greenhouse gas emissions.

Achieving carbon neutrality means that the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions attributable to University of Galway are fully compensated by CO<sub>2</sub> reductions or removals exclusively claimed by University of Galway, such that University of Galway's net contribution to global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is zero, irrespective of the time period or the relative magnitude of emissions and removals involved. An organisation can purchase credits to become 'carbon neutral'.

Net Zero Emissions means achieving an overall balance between greenhouse gases emitted and those that can be taken out of the earth's atmosphere through natural or artificial systems, referred to as off-setting. A net-zero GHG emissions organisation reduces its emissions following science-based pathways, with any remaining GHG emissions attributable to University of Galway being fully neutralised by like-for-like removals of emissions from the earth's atmosphere, without purchasing carbon credits, in line with global efforts to limit warming to 1.5oC. The boundary of a net zero target for University of Galway includes global scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions attributable to University of Galway, as defined in The Greenhouse Gas Protocol – A Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard .

The Community and University Sustainability Partnership (CUSP) was established in 2015 under the direction of the Deputy President and Registrar to showcase how a university can become a role model for the transition to a sustainable future. CUSP is a multi-disciplinary, voluntary team of over 30 students and staff from across the campus and community partners, all working together with the common aim of establishing the university as a leading institutional model for sustainability. CUSP operates through a multidisciplinary board - the CUSP General Board. The University Sustainability Advisory Board provides strategic oversight of University of Galway's commitment to

sustainability as detailed in the Strategic Plan, Sustainability Strategy, SDG Accord and Climate Action and Sustainability Policy. The Sustainability Terms of Reference sets out roles, responsibilities and constitution of the CUSP General Board and University Sustainability Advisory Board.

At University of Galway, we adopt a Learn, Live, Lead approach to sustainability. The aim with learn is to embed learning about sustainability into all aspects of university practice, learning and research, so that our campus community can gain the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate sustainable thinking and decision-making in the wider world; the aim with live is to implement the principles of sustainability through campus operations, so that our communities understand the importance of sustainable living in all aspects of their lives and value their connection to the physical environment, ecosystems and biodiversity; the focus of lead is developing the campus as a role model for sustainability and fostering partnerships between community and university so that we all work together to address local and global sustainability challenges.

#### 4. Governance and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
President	As the Head and Chief Officer of the University, provides leadership, commitment and support for the University's Climate Action and Sustainability Policy.
Office of the Deputy President & Registrar	The Deputy President is the UMT Leader with responsibility for the sustainability function of the University and oversees compliance with this Policy.
Office of the Chief Operating Officer	The Chief Operating Officer is the UMT Leader with responsibility for achieving carbon neutrality and net zero emissions.
University Management Team	Play a lead role in supporting the integration of climate action and sustainability into daily activities and all levels of the University and ensure leadership and implementation of climate and sustainability goals set out in this policy.
Heads of School/College/Research Centres/Support & Professional Units	Annual operational plans for all schools/colleges/research centres/ Support & Professional Units must include clear actions for fulfilling the university's Climate Action and Sustainability Policy. All schools/colleges/research centres/ Support & Professional Units must annually report progress on achieving the Climate Action and Sustainability Policy.
University Sustainability Advisory Board	Provide strategic oversight of the University commitment to sustainability as set out in the University of Galway Climate Action and Sustainability Policy. Undertake high-level strategic analysis to inform decision-making in the allocation of resources for the implementation of

	<p>sustainable operations across University of Galway. Recommend for approval and drive forward sustainability-related policies, procedures and action plans. Play a key role in development of strong governance structures and support the integration of sustainability and climate action into daily business at all levels of the University.</p>
CUSP General Board	<p>Responsible for developing the University's Climate Action and Sustainability Policy based on relevant Government Policy, EU Directives and Best Practise Guidelines; and for monitoring compliance with the Climate Action and Sustainability Policy. Inform, advise and make recommendations to the University Sustainability Advisory Board on all matters relating to Climate Action and Sustainability Policy development and implementation, including governance, resourcing, monitoring and performance.</p>