



## SDG Champions Programme



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



### Integration of SDGs in

- Governance and strategy
- Whole institution approach

### SDG focus

- Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals

## *SDG Accord Case Study*

### **What did we do?**

In May 2023, University of Galway was designated as a national [SDG Champion for 2023-24](#) by Minister for the Environment, Climate, Communications and Transport Eamon Ryan T.D. We are the first University to hold this honour and the designation recognises the leading role the University is playing in achieving SDGs. The role of an SDG Champion is to raise public awareness of the SDGs and act as a good practice example of how an organisation can contribute to and integrate the SDGs into their work and activities. We use the designation to highlight the role that the SDGs play in our teaching, research, operations, and engagement. From hosting our first SDG week; to developing and launching an SDG Trail through the campus; publishing SDG quarterly reports and launching a new SDG focused podcast series - the designation is a great opportunity to showcase, share and promote our efforts at developing the campus as a living lab for best practice in embedding the SDGs.

### **Quote: University of Galway President Professor Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh**

**said:** "University of Galway is delighted to be designated as SDG Champion. Our university community has defined sustainability and openness as two of our core values, and in this spirit, we are making good use of our SDG Champion status to highlight the importance of the SDGs for our students, our society, and our planet".

### **What were the benefits and outcomes?**

1. We developed and launched an [SDG Trail](#) through the campus to showcase, share and promote our efforts at developing the campus as a living lab for best practice in embedding the SDGs. Walking the trail, participants learn about the 17 SDGs and gain insights into the scale and breadth of projects and initiatives taking place across the University that are progressing the SDGs. Many of the facilities were put in place in 2023 and included as stops along the trail to raise awareness, e.g. outdoor gym (SDG3), new water fountains (SDG6), a new geothermal borehole (SDG13). Others are more well-established, e.g. Zoology and Marine Science Museum (SDG14), biodiversity trail (SDG15) and the Irish Centre of Human Rights (SDG16).
2. Motivated by our Champion status, we hosted our inaugural University of Galway [SDG Week](#). 25 student-led and staff-led events took place throughout the week, from seminars to seed sowing, an environmental summit, poster presentations, workshops, a quiz night, a guided walk, and a community recycling day. On the back of this, we have partnered with European Sustainable Development Week and plan to host an SDG week on annual basis. SDG week is an opportunity to increase understanding and awareness of the SDGs among students, staff, and community partners. The week of action also provides leadership opportunities for our students, creates opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and helps embed sustainability and the SDGs into the campus culture.
3. Our SDG Champion status is a platform for networking, collaboration, and highlighting the University's achievements in progressing the SDGs. For example, the [23-24 Winter Edition of Cois Coiribe](#) (University e-zine) is dedicated to our status as a National SDG Champion and academics, alumni, students, and staff, share their stories on the range of possibilities for climate action. In 2023, the University also launched a Sustainability Podcast, which to date has featured the SDGs and our Sustainability Strategy, energy efficiency and renewable

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energy projects, and the Student Pantry, an initiative aimed at reducing food wastage, saving money, and lowering carbon missions. We also publish quarterly and annual [reports](#) on the SDGs.

### **What barriers or challenges did you encounter in embedding this aspect of the SDGs into your work and how did you overcome them?**

1. One of the challenges we faced was the human resources capacity to take advantage of the very many opportunities that exist in embedding the SDGs across all our activities. In January 2024, the University responded by establishing a fully staffed Sustainability Office, comprising a Director of Sustainability, Sustainability Officer, Sustainability Accountant, two Lecturers in Sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development, and a Sustainability Administrator. The Sustainability Office is providing the leadership and capacity to champion the SDGs.

2. Not all students and staff are fully aware of the SDGs or their relevance to their roles and disciplines. We have now hired two lecturers in Sustainability and Education for Sustainable Development to work with academic staff to further develop and embed sustainability into the curriculum. Furthermore, Sustainability and the SDGs is now part of the New Staff Induction programme; and the SDG focused [Student Sustainability Leadership Awards](#) programme is an opportunity to further engage with students on the UN SDGs.

### **What are your conclusions and recommendations for others?**

*Focus on leadership and institutional commitment:* A flagship action from the University of Galway Strategic Plan 2020-2025 'We will commit to and sign the SDG Accord and aim for SDG Champion status'. The day we launched the Strategic Plan our University President signed the SDG Accord, a public commitment to align all our major efforts to the UN SDGs. Leadership also requires a bottom-up approach, focused on student voice, action, and activism. This can be achieved by supporting student led organisation and initiatives focused on the SDGs and involving students in sustainability related policy development and decision making.

*Apply to become an SDG Champion:* The [SDG Champion](#) programme offers several benefits, for example, adds credibility and further visibility to sustainability endeavours thereby enhancing reputation; offers partnership and collaboration opportunities; provides a platform to embed new sustainability practises; and the programmes engagement and awareness activities offers new ways to embed the SDGs into campus culture.

### **Web link to further information**

[https://www.universityofgalway.ie/sustainability/the-sustainable-development-goals-\(sdgs\)/](https://www.universityofgalway.ie/sustainability/the-sustainable-development-goals-(sdgs)/)