



**Integration of SDGs in**

- Institutional governance/strategic level
- SDGs in research
- SDGs in campus operations
- SDGs in curriculum development
- SDGs in student engagement activities
- SDGs into community activities
- SDGs at a whole-institution level

**Focus on**

- Goal 1 - No poverty
- Goal 2 - Zero hunger
- Goal 3 - Good health and wellbeing
- Goal 4 - Quality education
- Goal 5 - Gender equality
- Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation
- Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 8 - Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Goal 10 - Reduced inequalities
- Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities
- Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production
- Goal 13 - Climate action
- Goal 14 - Life below water
- Goal 15 - Life on land
- Goal 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals

## *SDG Accord Reporting 2021 CASE STUDY*

### **The Community Knowledge Initiative**

The Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) aims to educate students for their role as active citizens and to equip graduates with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to understand and address the SDGs for positive societal change. The CKI has given rise to a number of flagship programmes that include:

[Service Learning](#) encourages students to learn and explore issues vital to society inside and outside the classroom. Students learn from engaging with communities by active participation. In partnership with the CKI, academic staff have created over 30 modules that engage the SDGs across the curriculum. These opportunities aim to instil in students social responsibility and civic awareness in partnership with the community. These modules are taught by over 100 staff and relate to all disciplines.

[Engaging People in Community \(EPIC\)](#) fosters collaborations between the University and wider community, in facilitating knowledge sharing and engaged research to address issues of societal concern. Staff and students are supported to develop partnerships with the community to work on issues vital to the community and societal challenges that relate to the SDGs.

[ALIVE Volunteer Programme](#) enables volunteering opportunities in the community, promotes civic leadership skills in students and connection with the SDGs. Over 15,000 students have attained the ALIVE certificate since 2004 for the volunteering contribution they make to community through clubs, societies and directly through engagement with over 400 community organisations and voluntary bodies.

[SAOL Café](#) is the first social inclusion café in a higher education institution in Ireland founded by the CKI in partnership with the NUI Galway commercial office and a community based innovation and enterprise centre (SCCUL Enterprises).

In 2019, NUI Galway was designated a national Irish [University of Sanctuary](#) following three years of extensive work that was initially student-led but became an institution-wide response through the CKI.

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Outline the benefits of integrating this theme.

1. The existence of the CKI has brought many benefits to the student population and is highly transformative; it has effected change in terms of engagement with the SDGs and developed within our students/graduates a lifelong commitment to respond to challenges within society. Our students have reported that the engagement opportunities helped transform themselves and the society they live in. For example, in the [Irish Times article](#) written by Niamh Kelly, 2<sup>nd</sup> year BA English service learning student. Civil Engineering student reported that his work in Africa "*was wonderful...aware of the great divides that exist...provides us with a way to put something back...continue along this path as part of our working lives.*"
2. NUI Galway is known as a University that cares for community and society. The core function of the CKI is to educate students for their role as active citizens and to ensure that graduates have knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to understand and address the SDGs for positive societal change. This is reflected in the NUI Galway Strategy 2020-2025 Mission Statement "*NUI Galway is for the Public Good*". The CKI established a number of flagship programmes engaging students to community and society. These flagship programmes connect to the four dimensions of the CKI: service learning, volunteering, engaged research and knowledge sharing and help tackle society's evolving sustainable development challenges. Central to our methodology has been to work as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) that brings huge benefits as we work in partnership with students, staff and the wider community, as well as funding agencies and statutory bodies, to develop positive responses to the SDGs.
3. At a conservative level, since 2004 over 50,000 students have engaged with the CKI through service learning, volunteering, engaged research and knowledge sharing. Annually we work with in excess of 500 community-based organisations and statutory bodies, all working together toward the SDGs and the transformation of community and society. We have hosted a number of international conferences on the engaged role of higher education in community and society attracting international audiences and have worked in partnership with hundreds of higher education institutions internationally. Through our work we are building new connections and long terms partnerships with organisations who directly benefit from the experience of students and the application of knowledge in wider community and society.

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### **BARRIERS**

- 1. Covid 19** - A particular challenge during the last 14 months (2020-2021) was self-isolation during Covid-19 and maintaining our work with community. However, we found new and beneficial ways to connect to the community remotely. One service learning initiative demonstrated leadership in the SDGs during this difficult time by promoting sustainability, social justice, human rights, inclusion & citizenship. The Community Engagement [Build-A-Box](#) module, designed with Occupational Therapy students, focuses on mitigating impacts of social distancing & cocooning on some of the most vulnerable members of the community (older adults, mothers in direct provision, children in lower socio-economic areas). Using evidence-based practice, students designed custom-made boxes to reduce negative effects of confinement & social distancing; the items in the box were chosen sustainably with community partners.
- 2. Networking and Scaling Up** - The CKI was the first centre to be funded in a higher education institution (HEI) in Ireland to be solely developed to redress levels of social capital, community engagement and the SDGs. In practice this meant that the team in NUI Galway had no other national colleagues to collaborate with and grow this important pillar in Ireland. Modelled on our practice, we influenced other HEIs to become engaged with community & society. In 2007, we created the national network [Campus Engage](#) Chaired by Dr Lorraine McIlrath in 2021 and have; [trained](#) more than 1000 academics in service learning & engaged research. In 2014, the Irish HEI Presidents signed [Charter for Civic & Community Engagement](#). Campus Engage was funded by the Irish government, Higher Education Authority (1.4m) and then mainstreamed at the Irish Universities Association in 2014. It is now core funded by the 8 universities. Also, we influenced the Engagement pillar of the [National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030](#).
- 3. Impact** - Increasingly higher education globally is becoming more interested in the impact agenda and how our work impacts on the world. The societal impact agenda is particularly topical and the CKI had been keen to develop meaningful ways to capture the impact of its pathways on community and society. The CKI led Irish pilot of the [Carnegie Framework](#) to assess impact of engagement across higher education in Ireland in collaboration with 10 HEIs in Ireland. This framework tool allowed the 10 HEIs to look at community engagement and the impact of this work regionally and nationally. This Irish pilot made global change as the framework project has led to similar studies in Australia & Canada.

NUI Galway CKI was shortlisted for the National Chamber of Commerce Corporate Social Responsibility Award 2019



NUI Galway Occupational Therapy Students promoting their Build-A-Box Campaign as part of a service learning module

## CONCLUSIONS

HEI engagement with community and society is vital to any society. The sharing and the application of knowledge with the community is central to the survival and the flourishing of people and their place. It is also crucial that as part of the student experience we ensure that students have a sense of themselves and the role that they play in their own communities. From our experience within the CKI, student gravitate towards a meaningful engagement with community and academics want to create real life learning experiences for students. It is a win win situation and what is sometimes needed is a centre such as the CKI to create connections, build capacity and support the work so that it can be sustained.