

# Green Campus Climate Assembly Guide

Produced by UCC Green Campus

## Climate Assembly Guide - UCC Green Campus

In February and March of 2021, UCC held a climate assembly for students and staff. This was the first climate assembly to be held by a university in Ireland. It was only possible through the collaboration of the Students' Union, UCC Societies, and the Green Campus Committee. Students led, and pushed for this initiative, and found enthusiastic support from the University staff and management. A series of workshops were held on different themes, and the feedback and suggestions from these, along with the results of a survey, were used to create a report, which includes several recommendations to the college.

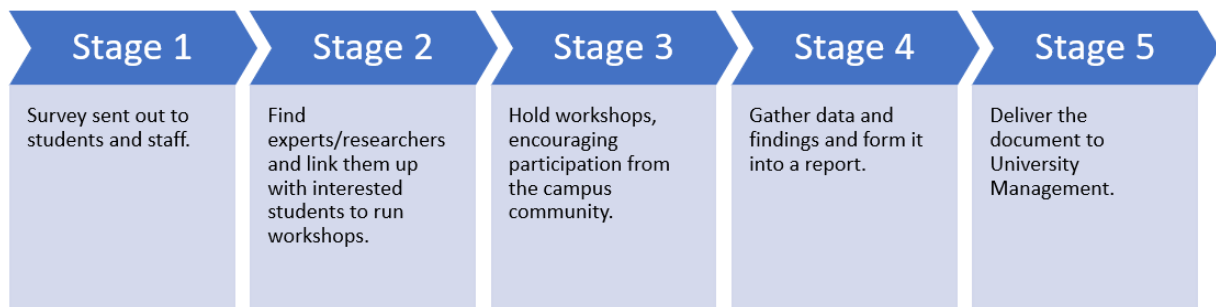
If we are to address the climate crisis, we must do it through a climate justice framework, ensuring that marginalised communities and those most affected by climate change will be supported. Community engagement and collective decision making is vital to ensuring that our vision for the future is not determined by a select few. We must aim to include as many people as possible in these decisions.

This guide serves to encourage other institutions to run climate assemblies, and facilitate their communities to engage in pushing these institutions forward.

The full report is available to read [here](#).

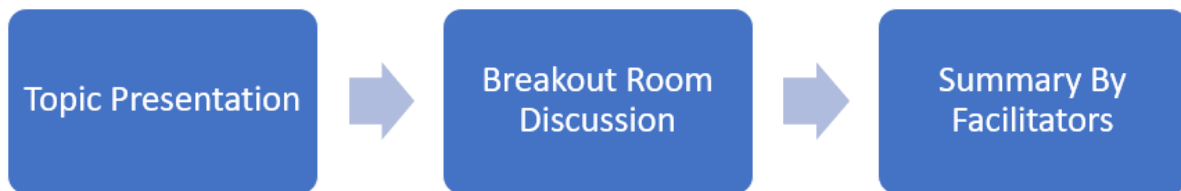
### Structure of the Climate Assembly

The climate assembly was inspired by the idea of a citizens' assembly. The idea was to give a platform to the University's community to voice their concerns and ideas. The way we decided to do this was to first send out a survey, and collect as much data through this as possible. Following the survey, we ran a series of workshops. These workshops were largely in line with the areas outlined in UCC's Sustainability Strategy. This allowed us to tie in with the key performance indicators that were outlined in the strategy. These themes were very broad, and may not suit every institution. If your institution has similar documentation and strategic goals, it may make sense to base your workshops off these areas.



A google form was sent out with the survey, where students and staff could sign up to attend one or more of the workshops. We asked people to sign up through their institution email so as to ensure it was only UCC community members at the workshops.

Each workshop was co-facilitated by a student and staff member. They were open to anyone in the campus community. At the beginning of each workshop, there was a short presentation from a researcher or expert in the field, giving a background to the area which was to be discussed. In this presentation, UCC's current aims and achievements were outlined, this ensured that there weren't suggestions for ideas which are already being implemented.

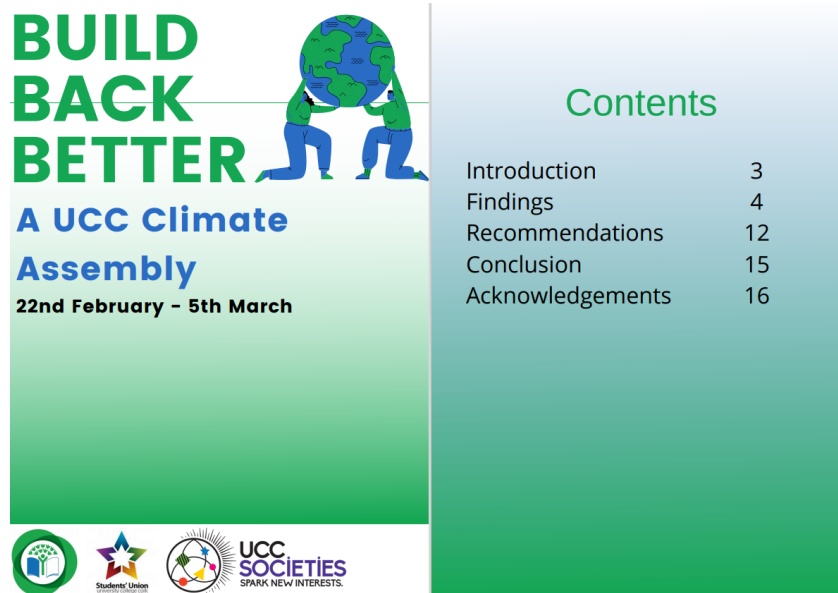


After the presentations, the workshops were split into breakout sessions. In these sessions, participants discussed what they wanted to see from UCC, areas where UCC wasn't doing enough, and areas which UCC were doing well, but needed improvement or more awareness. The inclusion of researchers and operations staff in these workshops helped to guide the discussion, and clarify current policies or actions that the university is taking.

Facilitators took notes during the workshops, and these notes were then used to feed into the report. These notes are the primary means of data collection from the workshops, so ensure that they are as detailed as possible. We also sent a feedback form after the workshop to allow people to give additional ideas which they may not have had time to in the workshop.

## Structuring the Report

The report is divided into an introduction, findings, recommendations and conclusion. It is important to explain the process and give the scope of the assembly in the introduction. In the findings section, you should aim to summarise the data collected in the survey, and the suggestions and discussions from the workshops. An effort was made to keep the report as short as possible so that it was easier to read, this meant a lot of the findings had to be summarised.



The recommendations can be seen as the most important part of the report. These recommendations should take suggestions from the workshops, and formulate key points which the institution can enact. It is useful to have a timeframe on these recommendations. Depending on the size of your assembly, the amount of data you gather might be difficult to condense. This is why a conclusion is useful. Often there were underlying sentiments across several workshops, e.g promoting cycling for cleaner air, reduced emissions, and a healthier community. Taking these key points that are relevant to several areas is a good way to communicate the findings of the report in a conclusion.

## Advertising/ Engaging with the community

The climate assembly will benefit from being as inclusive as possible, and having input from people from different backgrounds and disciplines. This can be aided by directly involving different departments and student groups in the planning process. Having the assembly in your college calendar a few months before gives people plenty of notice. Involving groups from across the campus will improve the social media presence of the event. It will also allow the event to be circulated to all student and staff emails. Reaching out to specific groups, for example, inviting a student cycling club/society to the commuting workshop, can boost the engagement of the entire assembly, but also helps to bring people who the topics are most relevant to into the conversation.

Having engaging graphics for the assembly as well as individual graphics for workshops can be useful. As well as a timetable of all the workshops, which helps to give an overview of the whole assembly.



## Mandating your institution

The purpose of running a climate assembly is to bring about change. However, getting the institutional management to enact the findings and recommendations of your assembly may prove difficult. There are several ways to add more weight to your recommendations.

Include as much of the community as possible.

- The larger and more inclusive you make your climate assembly, the more validity it holds. Include the Students' Union, societies, clubs, staff from different departments.

Be research informed.

- Invite leading experts in a specific field to open the workshops, and help facilitate conversations and answer questions. This gives scientific backing to the findings of the assembly, and helps inform and progress the conversation.

Form high reaching but achievable recommendations.

- Look to other leading universities, and look at their plans. Have other institutions committed to similar goals? Are the timeframes outlined realistic? Be ambitious and optimistic in your recommendations, however if your recommendations are completely out of reach, they may not push for the needed change.

Build on existing data

- UCC has several themes outlined in its sustainability strategy. It made sense for our workshops to therefore be based around these themes. However in your institution, there might be different areas established, and existing goals and data for these categories, so tailor the workshop themes to these.

Start a petition/gather signatures

- This can help to have the community lend their voice to the findings, and mandate the University to enact the recommendations. However, the timing of this is difficult, and lower levels of engagement during the pandemic could make that less effective. Due to UCC's report being released in the summer, we felt that it would be difficult to gather signatures at that time.

## Problems Encountered and Ideas for future assemblies

One of the main issues that was encountered was difficulty in engaging people. This was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of people were burnt-out from online events. There were not as many responses to the survey as we would have hoped. Turnout at the workshops was good but staff engagement was better than student engagement. Staff tend to be more invested in these institutional changes, considering that on average they spend more time in the institution than students. This is why a heavy involvement from student groups is so important.

Discussions in breakout rooms of a workshop can be intimidating for some people, and in person workshops might help to increase the discussion and engagement by participants. The workshops and survey could have been better advertised, with more notice being given for them. Having an established time for the event at least a month beforehand should help encourage participation. Because this was the first time running a climate assembly, and due to clashes with other college events, there was only a week's notice given for the workshops. An email to all students and all staff, announcing the assembly in plenty of time would be useful.

Those that attended really wanted to engage in the conversation, and the hour-long workshop may have benefited from being longer. However, with eight workshops run over two weeks, participation would have been a lot lower if the workshops were longer. If the workshops were run over a longer period, such as 3-4 weeks, longer workshops may be feasible. These longer workshops may also be necessary if there is expected to be a large number of participants.

Most of the problems encountered were due to the fact that the entire assembly was organised in a very short time period, and that there was not a lot of notice given for it. Future assemblies will benefit higher engagement due to both hybrid, online and in person workshops, and more

For more information or advice on running a climate assembly in your own institution, please email [greencampus@ucc.ie](mailto:greencampus@ucc.ie)