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'* and the '*University of Galway Sustainability Strategy'* 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*. The 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*. The 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*[1], 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's 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.

[1] Find out more about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/

2. University Climate Action and Sustainability Goals

The 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'*, the 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',* the 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*[2] 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_2), 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_2 emissions. *Carbon management* means, firstly, understanding where the organisations CO_2 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_2 emissions attributable to the University of Galway are fully compensated by CO_2 reductions or removals exclusively claimed by the University of Galway, such that the University of Galway's net contribution to global CO_2 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'.

[2] Find out more about the 17 Global Goals on the United Nations website https://sdgs.un.org/goals

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 NUI 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 1.5°C. The boundary of a net zero target for the University of Galway includes global scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions attributable to the University of Galway, as defined in The Greenhouse Gas Protocol – A Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard[3].

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 the 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 the 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.

[3] https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards/ghg-protocol-revised.pdf

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's Climate Action and Sustainability Policy. Undertake high-level strategic analysis to inform decision-making in the allocation of resources for the implementation of sustainable operations across the 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.
CUSP General Board	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 Unversity Sustainability Advisory Board on all matters relating to Climate Action and Sustainability Policy development and implementation, including governance, resourcing, monitoring and performance.