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Written Statement for the 9th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology & Innovation
for the Sustainable Development Goals 2024

*Thematic Session 2: Strengthening scientific cooperation, technology and knowledge sharing
and accelerating innovation for integrated climate action (SDG13) (3:00 – 4.30pm, EDT)*

Co-Chairs, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

University College Cork's core vision includes empowering people to create knowledge that shapes a sustainable and inclusive world (UCC, 2024a). Indeed, universities and higher education institutes are important actors in sustainable development and climate action globally - as they are centres of research, innovation, education, engagement, mobilisation, and action.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a blueprint for a better future for humanity. Although we have passed the mid-point of their adoption in 2015 and their proposed achievement by 2030, it is worrying that only 15% percent of SDG targets are on track while the remainder are off track or have regressed (United Nations, 2023). Climate action is a critical area and overlaps with most of the SDGs. In order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we urgently need to limit long-term temperature rise to 1.5°C as set out under the Paris Agreement and reach net-zero by 2050 (IPCC, 2023; UNFCCC, 2024). This will require rapid and sustained decarbonisation across of all of society (UNEP, 2023). Science, technology, and innovation offer significant potential for advancing progress in this area.

At University College Cork, we strive to advance science, technology and innovation for a sustainable and better world that does not leave anyone behind. Universities generate knowledge, scientific discoveries, new technologies and new innovations, and translate these for the benefit of all. At University College Cork, we firmly believe that science, technology, and innovation should be openly available and harnessed in a responsible, ethical, and human rights-based manner, to accelerate SDG progress and specifically Goal 13 on climate action.

In order to mobilise the global scientific community to progress the SDGs and climate action worldwide, we need a new vision and model for scientific excellence. One which recognises progress on the SDGs and on climate action as key markers of research quality. Many universities including University College Cork are mapping their research against the SDGs. A new model for scientific excellence includes one which captures scientific quality as well as SDG and climate action impact (Nyhan & Cryan, 2023).

Education is a powerful vehicle for sustainable development and for climate action. It is essential that people are empowered through education which will in turn advance sustainable development and climate action worldwide. New and emerging technologies offer significant potential for rapidly accelerating the delivery of education for sustainability that is scalable, global, inclusive, ethical, and equitable (Nyhan & Marshall, 2023). Sustainable Futures at University College Cork has a core mission of harnessing the transformational power of education for achieving a sustainable, net-zero, climate-resilient and nature-positive future (UCC, 2023b).

It is important to leverage the sphere of influence of universities and their ability to convene diverse stakeholders, and foster solidarity and cooperation on how state-of-the-art science and technology can drive progress on climate action. In response to this, the Sustainable Futures Forum at University College Cork brings together leaders in international development, academia, industry, policy, and civil society to shape solutions to the world's most pressing sustainability and climate challenges (UCC, 2023a). We are committed to strong multi-stakeholder partnerships for ensuring that new and emerging technologies are harnessed to their full potential for fair and equitable climate action globally. True to this commitment, University College Cork co-hosts the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Ireland (SDSN Ireland). This is part of SDSN Global and is dedicated to promoting integrated solutions in research and education for the SDGs and the Paris Agreement (SDSN Ireland, 2024).

At University College Cork, we place sustainability and climate action at the heart of everything we do, as set out in our Sustainability & Climate Action Plan. As one of the foremost sustainable universities in the world and as an innovative living lab for sustainability and climate action, we have pledged to achieve net-zero total GHG emissions by the year 2040, and we are on track to reach this goal (UCC, 2023b). Our whole of university approach to sustainability and climate action is student led, research informed, and practice focused.

Through our research, science, innovation, education, engagement, mobilisation and action, we are committed to positively contributing to fair and just sustainable development and climate action globally.

Thank you.

References

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