



**ISSU**  
IRISH SECOND-LEVEL  
STUDENTS' UNION

# Taking Action on Sustainability and Making It Part of Your Student Council

## ***Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU)***

The Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) is the national representative body for second-level school students in the Republic of Ireland. The ISSU aims to work towards an education system in which the views, opinions and contributions of students are respected and in which students are recognised as an official partner in creating an education that is centered around and caters best for students.

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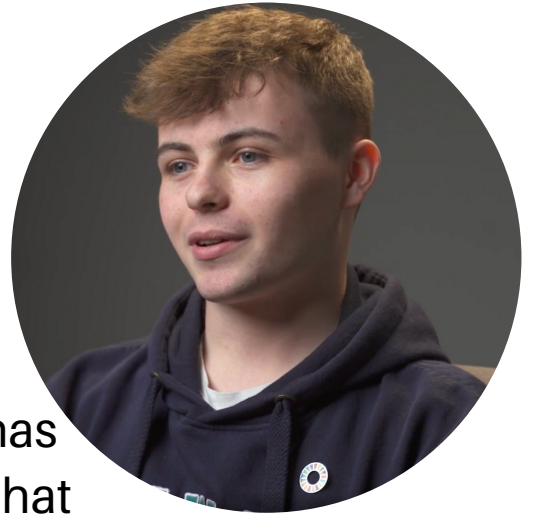
For more Sustainability Resources and information, check out <https://linktr.ee/issusustainability>

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## ***Foreword by the Sustainability Officer***

The 'Taking Action on Sustainability' Resource is a grassroots publication that breaks your student council into the vast and complex yet rewarding and necessary world of sustainable development. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the voice of young people has been amplified to a change-making level that has never been seen before. In a society that values the voices of students and young people more than ever, it is important to take sustainable development (and other key ideas that matter in the current and future lives of our generation) and project them to the forefront of our education system both home and abroad. A sustainable economic, social and environmental society is a human right in this day and age, and by introducing this resource into second-level schools across the country, we are preserving and prolonging this right for our youth, not only the leaders of today, but the founders of tomorrow.



*Jamie Mac Giolla Bháin*

Jamie Mac Giolla Bháin  
Sustainability Officer 2022/23  
Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU)

## ***Chapter 1: What sustainability means***

Sustainability is the process of balancing the social, economic and environmental systems for the wellbeing of individuals now and in the future. In short, it is the way in which we meet our needs today while preserving resources for future generations to also meet their needs.

### **The SDGs**

In 2015 the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nation Member States. This provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At the heart of this are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - to combat global issues in a united way. The SDGs recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.



Every year, the UN Secretary General presents an annual SDG Progress report and every 4 years the Global Sustainable Development Report is written by Scientists. Both of these reports ensure that work is being done to achieve the SDGs.

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



*The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

These SDGs can then be broken down into 5 categories which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines. People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership.

## Global Context

The SDGs provide worldwide guidance for addressing the global challenges facing the international community, which means all countries have to work together to achieve what the goals outline.

Campaigns and Events to achieve the SDGs have occurred all over the world with over 6400 actions being made since 2015.

All 193 Member States of the United Nations General Assembly adopted and pledged to try achieve the SDGs by 2030 in a way which will benefit all countries.

## Intersectionality

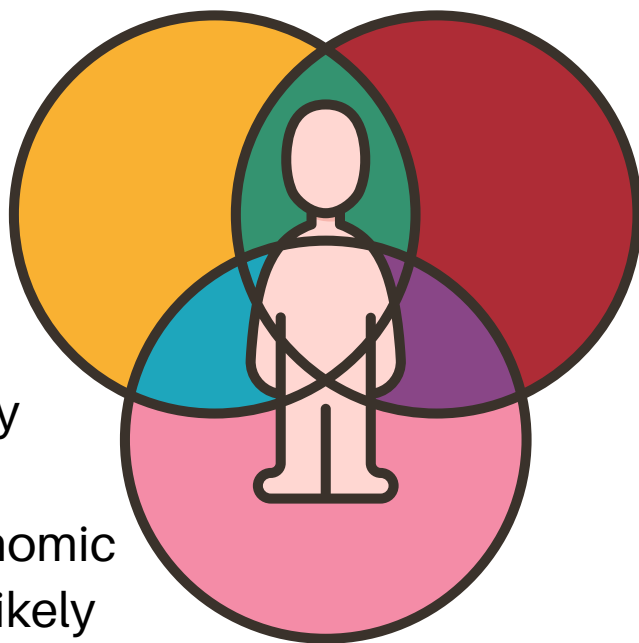
Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989 to describe how systems of oppression overlap. The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects.

For example, when a Muslim woman wearing the Hijab is being discriminated against, it would be impossible to dissociate her female identity from her Muslim identity and to isolate the dimensions causing her discrimination.

All forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing and must therefore be analysed and addressed simultaneously to prevent one form of inequality from reinforcing another.

For example, tackling the gender pay gap alone – without including other dimensions such as race, socio-economic status and immigration status – will likely reinforce inequalities among women and have a minimal impact on the issue.

The SDGs are a perfect example of intersectionality. They show how the 5 Ps, (People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership) work together to ensure Sustainable Development.



## The Three Pillars of Sustainable Development

The three pillars of sustainability show the complete sustainability problem. They consist of 3 key aspects, social (people), economic (profit) and environmental (planet). If any of the pillars are weak the whole system becomes unsustainable.

The pillars are usually exhibited in two ways;

1. Venn Diagram with all the pillars intersecting
2. A building being supported by three pillars



Each pillar has a different meaning in relation to sustainability

1. Social - Is the ability of society, or any societal system to constantly achieve a good social wellbeing in the long term.
2. Economic - Requires that projects, activities etc, utilise resources efficiently and responsibly so they can be used in a sustainable manner while ensuring operating profits.
3. Environmental - Ensures we are living with the means of your natural resources and not breaching replenishment rates.



The SDGs and three pillars of sustainability relate as we know none of the SDGs aims will be met without taking into account the economy, the environment and society. For example, SDG 6, Clean Water and Sanitation, can not be achieved without taking into consideration how we will fund the resources needed, how we will get them to the people in need and how we will ecologically utilise the natural resources in this case the water. This shows we can not be truly sustainable in our practices unless the three pillars are equally consulted.

## ***Chapter 2: Integrating sustainability into a student council***

Sustainability is not a one-person job, it takes a team effort to see real change, be that globally, nationally or in your Student Council. A main idea is to hold a meeting at the beginning of the Council's term and set out a 'Sustainability Plan'.

In this plan, you can include goals that match up with the SDGs that you hope to see your school achieve by the end of the year. Some sample ideas include:

- Recycling bins throughout the school, decreasing the amount of recyclable waste that would be going into the ground.
- A school garden with natural pollinators and plants, increasing your positive impact on biodiversity and the environment while also making your school grounds look aesthetically pleasing.
- Asking the Board of Management and staff to consider switching some of their single-use items (plastic cups, plastic cutlery in the canteen, non-biodegradable sanitising equipment etc) for more sustainable options.

An option for your council is to collaborate with the Green Schools Committee in your school to achieve this, letting the committee act as a sub-group of the Council will bring more focus to the area of sustainability.

Sustainability doesn't just cover climate action and the environment, it can be split into 16 other SDGs. here are some examples of other sustainability related actions your Student Council could take and the relevant SDGs:

- Organise a campaign/week/day around equality and diversity in your school community, it can be on the basis of gender, sexual orientation etc. have some speakers in to talk about their experience or experts to talk about what we can do. (SDG 5 - Gender Equality and SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities)
- Provide resources such as classroom equipment to students that come from disadvantaged backgrounds like low-income families. (SDG 1 - No Poverty)
- Run a COVID-19 safe campaign, teaching proper mask and hand washing etiquette to ensure your schools safety during the pandemic. (SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being)

### ***Chapter 3: Improving sustainability in a school***

There are many ways in which a school can improve sustainability through student council. Here are some suggestions on how your student council can focus on sustainability.

- The student council has a different function than the Green Schools Committee, the student council can act as a method of communication between the student body and the staff. The student council should utilise the fact that they have representatives from each class, to spread information. The student council should focus on mobilising and informing students about sustainability issues. They can also provide direction for students on how to take action.
- The three pillars of sustainability, the social, economic and environmental pillar should be focused on while studying sustainability and discussing related ideas in the student council.
- Within sustainability there are many areas of focus, which can be looked at in student council and ideas should be discussed on how to sustainably develop these areas in your school. The student council can research and look at how sustainability is taught in your school and how it can be improved.
- The student council should encourage their teachers to introduce a sustainability lens to different subjects for example science or geography. This could allow students to truly understand how sustainability relates to their lives.
- To truly allow students to promote sustainability they should be encouraged to hold campaigns and not be restricted from raising awareness for the issues which they are passionate for.

- To truly engage the student body in the importance of sustainability, the entire school community, this includes not only students and teachers but everyone who is a part of the community in some way, should be involved in campaigns and initiatives to improve and develop their school.

## **Engaging Students in Sustainability**

- Student councils should link sustainability with subjects covered in school to engage students and give them a better understanding of the subject.
- Members of the student council should be encouraged to host assemblies and action days to provide information to the entire student body as well as those on the council.
- An effort should be made to highlight how sustainability impacts the students directly within their personal life, their school and their wider community. This should give students an incentive to care about the topic.
- Student councils should put a focus on empowering each other, themselves and the rest of the student body to action on sustainability.
- Sustainability should be discussed in an accessible way that involves all students and provides a safe space for students to share their thoughts and ideas as well as simply learning about the topic.

## ***Chapter 4: Taking wider community action***

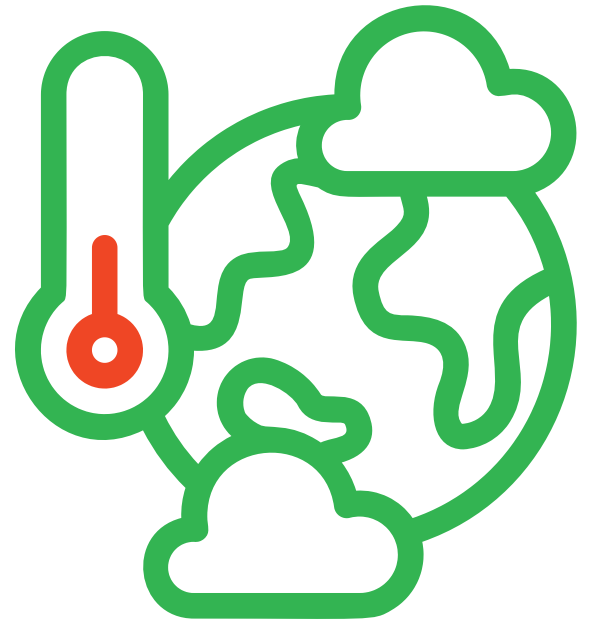
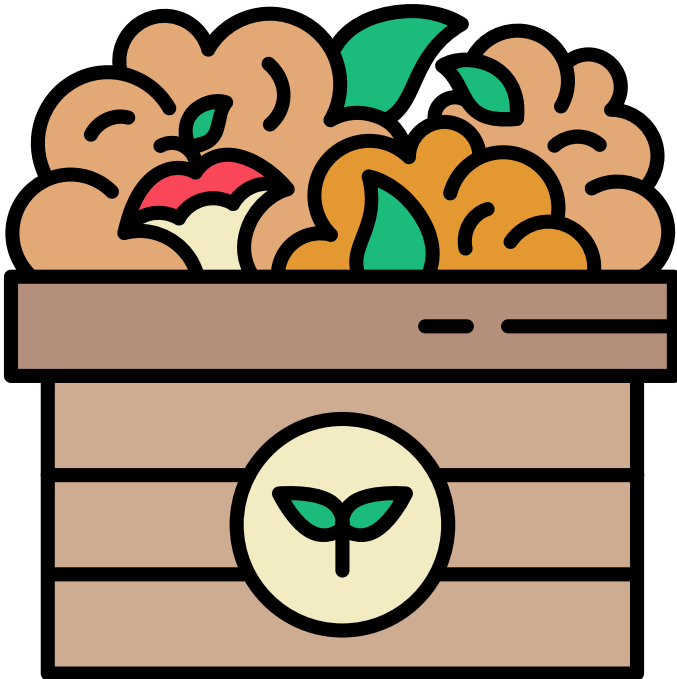
A key method of engaging students with the wider community is encouraging them to link up with other organisations working within the community. Similarly involving parents, teachers, local councillors and even students from other schools can aid in creating considerable momentum for a project or campaign.

Students can use a town hall or even their own school gym as a space to hold sustainability focused events for the wider community. When students are empowered with key skills of organising, then arranging a meeting with other student councils or their local town council doesn't seem as daunting. A student council may also amplify any action taken by the school's Green School initiative to the wider student body.

Examples of wider community action include:

- litter-picking campaigns
- a clothes-swap event
- a composting initiative for businesses
- encouraging a local shop or community space to become a public drop off point for Terracycle waste collection, an initiative in which the students can involve all the local schools and businesses
- Organise a school group to attend a climate strike

SHOP  
Local



*Composting, clothes-swaps and climate striking (also known as direct action) can be some great ways of getting started in wider community action.*

## ***Chapter 5: Campaign and action ideas***

In this chapter you can find a few ideas and examples about campaigns and actions your student council can carry out to increase action and awareness around sustainability! Directly carry these out, use them for inspiration, or get in touch for more advice!

### **School Action**

These are actions to change how your school operates in relation to sustainability, with regards to policy, teaching and general!

1. Organise meetings with your board of management or teachers and advocate for increased presence of sustainability throughout lessons and school activities.
2. As a student council, develop a 'sustainability policy' for your school about how it can make sure it takes action around all three pillars: social, economic and environmental.
3. Put together a list of ways your school could incorporate sustainability into classes and subjects- think about the subjects students do in your school, and how all the elements could be brought into teaching methods and classes.
4. Work to make your school zero-plastic- find some examples [here](#).
5. Advocate for an anti-racism policy in your school to ensure your school stands against racism, and develop this with your principal/board of management.
6. Advocate for an anti-homophobia policy, to address homophobic bullying and other areas, and develop this with your school
7. Develop ideas within your student council or with classes and bring them to management e.g. schoolwide showing of a documentary or a junior school project/competition.

## **Whole-School/Student Body Awareness**

These are actions to gather the opinions of the students you represent, to inform them about sustainability and to give them a space to develop their perspectives!

- Conduct a survey to gather the student body's feelings on different areas of sustainability and present this to the school to inform action.
- Organise talks and workshops on sustainability with relevant local people or organisations.
- Hold an event for your student body to hear speakers or develop their own ideas about sustainability, you could then present this to your school or local council.

## **Wider Community**

These are actions to take action with other schools in your area, for students in your school to take action in the community and to take action with local decision-makers!

- Organise opportunities for your student council to meet with other councils in your area to discuss relevant issues to you all. You can find their emails online or get in touch with your ISSU Regional Officer.
- Get in touch with your local council and organise a meeting with them- you can find their emails here, and remember they're your representatives.
- Connect with Green Schools in your school or area, or Tidy Towns to act on shared goals and issues.



## **Useful Resources**

### **ClimateScience**

ClimateScience is an international non-profit organisation that works to improve climate education through understandable and accessible content. They have an informative instagram account (@climate\_science) and an incredible app which contains courses and quizzes about all the topics that relate to the environment and climate. They also have communities in different countries which are groups of young people that help to spread the word about the organisation within their areas and schools. For more information check out [Climate-science.com](https://www.climate-science.com) or the Instagram page and get involved if you are interested!

### **Netflix Documentaries**

- 'Kiss the Ground' is an incredible and hopeful documentary to watch. It showcases an achievable solution to the climate catastrophe.
- 'Patriot Act' is a political comedy packed with info on important topics (watch especially the episodes "Amazon" (S1), "Ugly Truth of Fast Fashion" (S5), "The Real Cost of Cruises" (S4), "Billionaires won't save us" (S5), "Brazil, corruption and the rainforest" (S3 and "Dark Side of Video Games" (S4)
- 'Cowspiracy' is a documentary about environmental destruction of agriculture industry
- Similarly, 'Seaspiracy' is about Environmental destruction of the fishing industry.
- 'Before the Flood' is good for people who don't know much about the climate crisis yet.

Here are some YouTube videos that you may find interesting:

- Patriarchy, racism and colonialism caused the climate crisis | Jamie Margolin |
- Important TEDx youth talk that addresses roots of this crisis

Finally, here are some further (really interesting) links!

- <https://www.natgeokids.com/ie/discover/geography/general-geography/what-is-climate-change/>
- <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/climate-change-meaning/>
- <https://climate.nasa.gov/>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/global-warming/>
- <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/monitoring-references/faq/global-warming.php>
- <https://www.epa.ie/climate/communicatingclimatescience/whatisclimatechange/>



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