

UCC Single-Use Plastics Policy

Single Use Plastics (SUPs) are a significant source of environmental pollution. By 2050, it is expected that global plastic production will be responsible for up to 13% of our planet's total carbon budget – the equivalent of 615 power stations.¹ Every day approximately 8 million pieces of plastic find their way into our oceans. While we can make efforts to increase our recycling rates, recent studies have determined that only about 14% of all plastic is actually recycled². As a material, plastic also degrades over time it is not infinitely recyclable like aluminium. In 2019, **UCC generated 817 tonnes of waste**, over half of which was recyclable i.e. paper and plastic waste.

UCC prides itself on being Ireland's "Green University"; Action 2.2 of UCC 2022 specifically calls on the University to "Maintain our position within the top 10 in the UI Green Metric World University Ranking and improve our position at the top of the THE World Impact Ranking, reflecting our prioritisation of sustainability and the Green Agenda." In 2018, we received national and international acclaim for launching Ireland's first single-use plastic free café (see Fig 1.). That same year, over **8,000 of our students signed a petition** calling for the removal of single-use plastics from campus shops, cafes and restaurants. The petition was also signed by the then President, Patrick O'Shea, and Deputy President, John O'Halloran.



Fig. 1. SUP savings after 1 year's operation at UCC Biocafe

On 15th October 2021 the EU's Single Use Plastic Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/904/EC) was transposed into Irish legislation³. This banned the ten most polluting SUPs and paved the way for a levy to be placed on single use beverage containers.

Policy Owner

Mark Poland, Director of Buildings and Estates

Policy Approver

University Management Team

Policy Objectives

The objectives of this policy are

- To realise the ambition of UCC becoming a single-use plastic free campus.

¹ <https://www.wwf.org.au/news/blogs/plastic-waste-and-climate-change-whats-the-connection>

² <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/the-new-plastics-economy-rethinking-the-future-of-plastics-and-catalysing>

³ <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2021/si/516/made/en/print>

- To ensure that UCC continues to be a leader in the transition to more sustainable campuses and societies.
- To define the scope, roles and responsibilities in relation to UCC's single-use plastic free ambitions.

Scope of Policy

This policy covers SUPs sold by UCC's suppliers and subsidiary companies and any market stalls permitted to trade on UCC campus. Laboratory SUPs are being addressed through the UCC Green Labs programme. The items covered by this policy include:

- Single-Use beverage containers i.e. coffee cups, drinks cups etc.
- Single-Use salad containers/lunch boxes
- Single-Use plastic cutlery
- Single-Use plastic bottles (e.g. for water/ soft drinks)
- Further SUP items may be added to this list at a later date by the SUP Action Group, and it will be clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders where applicable

A SUP or disposable item is defined as one that is designed to be used by the consumer once and disposed of thereafter. Given the current situation regarding postconsumer management of compostable/biodegradable waste, the policy **includes** compostable and biodegradable cups as an SUP.

It is proposed that:

- **By the 1st September 2022, SUPS will have been completely phased out of all UCC Restaurants and Catering Services.**
- **By the 1st January 2023, SUPs will have been completely phased out of UCC shops and vending services.**

Roles and Responsibilities

An SUP Action Group will be established to ensure the sale of SUPs on campus ends on 31st August 2022. The group will comprise representatives of the Buildings and Estates Office, Student Union, Finance Office, OCLA, KSG and Aras Na MacLeinn.

It is the responsibility of UCC suppliers and subsidiary companies to identify the most appropriate alternatives to the above-mentioned SUPs.

It is the responsibility of UCC Buildings and Estates Office to ensure that infrastructure in the form of water fountains and washing facilities are available where required.

It is the responsibility of the Student Union and Green Campus to ensure that the policy is communicated to all students and staff and to ensure access to reusable containers is provided. The Student Union will also ensure that any third-party suppliers to UCC SU events will be made aware of the policy and comply with same.

UCC will seek support for this initiative through grants from relevant bodies for example the EPA Green Enterprise grants.