



Waterford Climate Action Plan - Pre Draft Consultation

Submission from South East Technological University

31 May 2023

1. South East Technological University (SETU) is pleased to make this brief submission to the pre-draft stage of consultation on the Waterford Council Climate Action Plan. As well as being one of the largest employers in the city, with a very large footprint across multiple campuses, we suggest that SETU represents a very considerable asset that can be deployed in support of Waterford's Plan. We offer in the remarks below some comments on our own approach to sustainability in the university to inform the plan. We look forward to contributing further to the plan's development at subsequent stages in the process.
2. As our recently-published Strategic Plan indicates, at SETU we see ourselves as a regional "anchor" institution. By "anchor institution" we mean not just a regional employer of significant scale and a regional magnet for talent (regional, national and international), not just a contributor to the development of regional knowledge economy, but also a regional thought and cultural leader with a role to play in social development. The expectations of the university set out in regional policy documents make it clear that we are central to the regional proposition. By extension, SETU will be critical to regional climate action: it will
 - Play a leading role in helping form opinion and develop a culture of sustainability in the south east;
 - Help develop solutions to the challenges of climate change, especially in areas of high technology, for application in the region;
 - Assist with the development of new and more sustainable paradigms in enterprise and industry across the region;
 - Lead by example in developing its own sustainable practices and operations;
 - Validate scientific approaches to understanding climate change and developing the robust evidence base and analysis to inform future regional decision-making in the interests of sustainability;
 - Assist with systematically and consistently mobilising regional actors in support of county and regional climate action plans.

SETU's Approach

3. Inspired by the global momentum to repair and protect the planet, its climate, ecosystems and people, and guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, SETU places focus on the thematic area of sustainability as a strategic element of its recently published Strategic Plan, *Connecting for Impact 2023-2028*. Sustainability and climate action are core to our university and we have committed to being a regional and national exemplar in this domain.
4. At SETU we will consider sustainability/sustainable development in its broadest and most holistic sense and plan to integrate this into everything we do in support of the SDGs. We wish to promote this mindset to inform our decisions, our actions and our engagements, in a whole of university approach, to bring about positive organisational, societal, environmental and economic change. At SETU, our ambition is to lead and inspire sustainability across the region by adopting a values-led approach, embedding a culture of sustainability and sustainable development in our teaching, learning, research and engagements and our environment, strengthening the capacity of individuals and communities to make judgements and choices in favour of creating a sustainable and resource efficient economy, founded on a fair and just society, which respects ecological limits. SETU will lead on embedding a culture of sustainability to drive positive organisational, societal, environmental and economic change.
5. SETU's broad approach involves a number of key pillars for action on sustainability. The first of these involves ensuring that our community of staff and students are sustainably aware and incorporate sustainable practice into their daily University life. This will involve the appointment of new officers of the university with direct responsibility for sustainability and a significant programme of staff training. Moreover, SETU aim to decrease and minimise the impact our educational, research, ancillary operations, and infrastructural developments have on local, regional and global environments, through sustainably developing the use of our lands, buildings and processes. We aim in our strategic plan to exceed obligated targets regarding Scope 1 and 2 emissions and develop an action plan to account for all indirect Scope 3 emissions, with an overarching vision to become resilient through carbon neutrality. We will minimise the impact all of our buildings on the environment by ensuring that all future upgrades and developments are sustainably developed using recognized methodologies. Clearly such a strategy will, given the size and increasing footprint of SETU's operation in the city, have a lasting impact on the city's own plans with regard to carbon neutrality.
6. Secondly, SETU is committed to ensuring that our graduates are equipped with the multi-disciplinary knowledge and skills necessary for addressing sustainability challenges. We plan therefore to ensure that sustainability is embedded in all educational and training programmes at SETU. We note the application of Waterford City for UNESCO Learning City designation and fully support this application. Such designation will be helpful not only in encouraging the creation and accessibility of educational offerings throughout the city and county, but will be a vehicle, through

embedding sustainability into educational offerings, for advancing some of the plans in the Climate Action Plan.

7. Thirdly, we set out in our plan the ambition that SETU will lead sustainable research, development and innovation, through the contribution of interdisciplinary understanding and solutions to key regional and global sustainability challenges. We will also ensure that all our research is informed by and contributes to UN SDGs and that societal aspects of sustainability are addressed and incorporated into research.
8. Finally, SETU is committed to creating an access point for external stakeholders to engage with the university on sustainability issues as a means to access the insights, expertise and contribution of researchers, staff and students to policy and socio-economic challenges. We plan to proactively encourage outreach initiatives to build awareness on regional and global sustainability challenges and generate innovative ways to address them. We will provide training to stakeholders in methodologies that are involved in tackling SDG-related issues and challenges and we will be forthcoming in disseminating and communicating the university's sustainability activity to both internal and external stakeholders.

Some Further Considerations

9. As suggested above, we believe that SETU represents a very considerable asset that can be deployed in support of Waterford's Action Plan. We look forward to further engagement with stakeholders with regard to mobilising that asset. There are a number of areas we suggest should additionally be considered in developing this plan. SETU is ready to partner with Waterford Council in advancing actions in these areas.
10. We suggest it is critical that there is a robust evidence base for the plan and clear performance indicators to monitor progress. This should not be confined to carbon emissions but might adopt a broader range of indicators in order to support a broad range of action, to include perhaps public engagements and consciousness-raising actions, actions in relation to biodiversity, and others. It is important that Ireland's overall target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050 is reflected at local level to ensure clarity on the roles individual organisations and agencies need to play.
11. It is important that the Climate Action Plan is entirely embedded in and aligned with other policies of the city, county and region, including the Southern Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy. Moreover, and perhaps in this context, we suggest there is considerable benefit in aligning Climate Action Plans across the local authorities within the South East and beyond if necessary in order to ensure consistency between plans. The co-ordination of policies within the region and between counties is critical if the ambitious targets in the overall climate action strategy for the country are to be achieved.

12. Waterford Council is in a strong position to act as a co-ordinating agency across multiple domains in support of climate action. In our view it would be useful for the Council to create a cross-sectoral, multi-party body to include private sector representatives (especially from large employers in the county), representatives from key educational providers (including SETU), representatives from across the range of state agencies, and community groups to act as a forum to assist with the further development of climate action strategy, to advise on implementation, and to advocate for climate action planning across various constituencies.
13. We suggest a systematic, sustained, well-resourced public engagement strategy and associated campaigns will be needed in order to deliver on climate change mitigation targets. We suggest the forum indicated above will be in a strong position to lead such engagements.
14. We encourage the Council to bold, ambitious and radical in its planning. Not only will this achieve an acceleration towards the targets that it is necessary to achieve, but it will signal the uniqueness of the county and region and will go towards strengthening the Waterford proposition immeasurably especially with regard to quality of life.