We look at the Springboard+ courses aiming to develop a more sustainable future.

In just a few months, Covid-19 has already reshaped our world, it’s having an impact in many areas, including our personal lives, the economy and our environment. As businesses were disrupted, data showed that where Covid-19 spread, carbon dioxide emissions, air pollution and related transport emissions significantly decreased. But as life resumes, society needs to continue looking at how our actions as individuals, businesses and communities affect the planet. And Springboard+ has a number of courses focused on environmental sustainability, to help shape and protect our future.

“Developing skills for the green economy and for a more sustainable society is critical today,” says Belinda Gascoigne, programme co-ordinator of the newly-Launched Certificate in Environment, Sustainability and Climate at UCC, “Global warming, and the related environmental and social issues, raise serious concerns for the welfare of our current and future generations. Such changing developments requires businesses to be responsive, agile and capable of developing new approaches and solutions to address these key issues, for their businesses to remain sustainable.”

**SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

According to Ireland’s National Skills Strategy 2025, increased employment needs will be in the environmental services sectors, while Cedep, (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) indicated that green sectors will require new skills, as well as needing to retrain many existing job profiles, to meet the green challenge.

“The Certificate in Environment, Sustainability and Climate at UCC seeks to support those challenges and job creation opportunities, by providing a suitably-qualified and educated workforce,” says Belinda. UCC is a global leader in sustainability, celebrating 10 years since it became the first university in the world to be awarded a green flag. This is an award given to those meeting the EU standards of environmental excellence. Belinda has been leading in this subject area for a number of years now, having changed careers from hotel management after the birth of her twin girls. In her previous employment as a General Manager, she had introduced many environmental and sustainable-related practices to her work, “Protecting our environment has always been important to me and shaping the type of world my children are growing up in, is important to me too.”

The fully online, one-year course introduces students to key theories and skills related to environmental, sustainable and societal issues within their organisations and the world around them. Environmental issues such as climate change, sustainable development and planning, use and misuse of natural resources and the protection of human health are now high on the agenda of all governments, resulting in more stringent regulations and standards, says Belinda.

“The certificate assists in career development, while preparing students for employment opportunities in both the public and private sector. It provides them with the knowledge to apply their environmental understanding to communication, consulting, planning, policy, science, Government and information technology. All with the aim to create a more sustainable world. “We envisage that graduates of this course will have a strong advantage in the emerging green economy, says Belinda. “They will be equipped to progress into a wide variety of roles across different industries, social enterprises and local government.”

Belinda says the course can provide upskilling / reskilling for students from many disciplinary backgrounds, in particular construction, retail, agriculture, health and safety, hospitality and bio-pharmas, or for those seeking entry to the ‘green sector’ for the first time.

“Many graduates-to-date have achieved promotions and new career opportunities across different sectors, while others have gone onto further studies.”

**CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES**

Also in the west of Ireland, the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) is continuously looking at ways to address the challenges of climate change. The Mayo Campus was the first third-level Institute to be awarded the FEE Green Campus flag in 2012. It was also the first IOT to be awarded the biodiversity flag in 2014, and the first IOT with an outdoor classroom. The campus has since launched its own sustainability statement, and has been working on developing programmes and strategies that promote climate resilience and sustainability.

John Scallan, programme co-ordinator and chartered engineer, says his relationship with climate change stems from his professional background in the construction industry. Through this, he developed an interest in low-energy and low-environmental impact buildings. “Since joining GMIT in 2005, I have teamed up with other lecturers who are passionate about environmental sustainability and climate change. We have worked together to develop a number of programmes that focus on and address pro-environmental business operations and practices.

“Two of these programmes are currently being funded by Springboard+ 2020, the Certificate in Climate Resilience for Business (CRB) and also the Certificate in Sustainable Building Technology.”

This programme team built from a wide range of academic disciplines, John explains. With a wide variety of practical experience, there is a focus on promoting and developing inter and trans-disciplinary skills. “The CRB programme is designed to foster resilience to the challenges of climate change, by focusing on ways that businesses can reduce emissions and increase energy and operational efficiency.”

“The emphasis is on increasing knowledge and developing skills in key areas where climate change directly affects enterprise operations, such as energy supply, carbon tax, resource usage and waste management.”

John says the CRB programme is suitable for people from a wide range of backgrounds and the entry requirement is a full Level 7 qualification (degree or equivalent) in any area. “The programme is broad in scope and contains material from both hard science (that uses systematic observation and experiments to get knowledge) and the social sciences. It’s suitable for people who are already educated and/or experienced in

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