



Healthy Campus Case Study



HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

The Dirty Dozen

Name of institution and initiative lead

University of Limerick. Physical Activity Subgroup, Healthy UL

Date and timeframe

Annual initiative in May, in lead up to exam period for students

What was the reach?

Over 3000 students in 2021, and 7400 in 2022

Aims and Objectives

The objective of this initiative is to encourage students to use physical activity as a tool to combat academic stress arising during the exam period and take regular breaks from study. The rationale for this is active students are healthier and happier than their inactive peers (Murphy et al., 2018). Although the benefits of sufficient physical activity levels are known, studies have shown that students' physical activity engagement is somewhat lacking, with a decline noted as students progress through university (Dinger et al. 2014; Pengpid et al. 2015).

The Healthy UL framework was developed to improve human and environmental health and wellbeing, which are determinants of learning, productivity and engagement. Physical activity is one of its six thematic areas and UL is widely known as Ireland's Sporting Campus.

Aims and Objectives

The objectives of the Physical Activity subgroup of Healthy UL are to: (i) encourage all staff and students to become regularly physically active, that is, to achieve the recommended amount of physical activity for health; and (ii) to develop existing opportunities for staff and students to ensure that everyone can achieve their optimal health or performance goal through excellent physical activity and sport.

A short questionnaire was administered to staff and students to gauge campus views on the key health issues under consideration which provided guidance for the Healthy UL initiative. Over 90% of respondents reported that physical activity, healthy eating, mental health, drug misuse and sexual health are 'extremely important' or 'very important' in developing a 'Healthy UL' framework. Only 62% of respondents indicated that they felt they were currently 'taking enough physical activity to keep healthy'. In the Student Activity and Sport Study Ireland (Murphy et al, 2018) survey of 8,122 students from 31 third level institutes across Ireland, 36% were insufficiently active to meet the national guidelines and subsequently get the health benefits. In the Healthy UL Survey (2021), 39% were not meeting the national guidelines.

It has been established that there is a significant correlation between academic stress and students mental wellbeing (Barbayannis, 2022). Kandola (2020) reported that exercise has been shown to significantly reduce the symptoms of anxiety. Studies also show that physical activity is very effective at reducing fatigue, improving alertness and concentration, and at enhancing overall cognitive function.

Aligned frameworks, policies, or strategies

This initiative aligns to:

Healthy UL Framework

The Healthy Campus Charter and Framework

The Mental Health Framework and Implementation Plan

Healthy Ireland Strategy

WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour

Project Collaborators

Healthy UL Physical activity subgroup, UL sport, UL staff, alumni, and high-profile UL students volunteered their time to create footage for the campaign. Healthy UL team managed the social media campaign and promotion of same.

Key Learning Points

- 1) Plan early
- 2) Recruit more than 12 individuals as some videos may not work on the day.
- 3) Get support from 'tech' savvy individuals.
- 4) Important to get support from student services, student union.
- 5) Select Dirty Dozen carefully to represent University staff and students.
- 6) Seek support from Senior Management.

| Healthy Campus Process | Whole Campus Approach | Topic | Population Group |
|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Coordinate | Leadership, Strategy & Governance | Mental Health & Wellbeing | Students |
| Create | Campus Environment (Facilities & Services) | Physical Activity / Active Transport | Staff |
| Celebrate & Continue | Campus Culture & Communications | Wellbeing on the Curriculum | |
| | | Health & Sustainability | |

