**HEA Healthy Campus**  **Case Study**

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| **HEALTHY CAMPUS CASE STUDY** | | |
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| **Name of institution/ organisation** | Maynooth University (MU) |
| **Who led the initiative?** | The Healthy Campus Steering Group Chair (Dr. Ronan Foley) and the Health Promotion Officer/ Healthy Campus Co-ordinator (Orlagh Eustace). |
| **Date and timeframe of the initiative** | Project initiated in Academic year 2023 – 2024 and currently ongoing. |
| **What was the reach of the initiative?** | The trails will be available for use by all staff and students, and the wider Maynooth Town community. |
| **Initiative title** | The Maynooth University Trails Project |
| **Aims / objectives** | The overall aim is to encourage more staff and students to engage in physical activity and nature therapy while on campus for the benefit of their overall health and wellbeing.  In order to achieve this, aim our objectives are to:   * create a categorised system for MU trails that divides them into ‘Information-based’ trails and ‘Wellness-based’ trails. * streamline the existing two trails at MU by upgrading the current trail markers and colour coding all the trail routes. * develop two new wellness-based trails – a ‘Nature Connection’ trail and a ‘Mindfulness’ Trail. * hold a launch event to introduce the new categorised system and the new trails to staff and students, and to provide information and raise awareness of the benefits of movement and spending time in nature. |
| **The rationale for the action, including any identified health needs** | * There are well established relationships between being outdoors in nature and the many physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits associated with that exposure (Hartig et al., 2014). From a campus health perspective, Holt et al. (2019), revealed that students who frequently engage with green spaces in active ways report a higher quality of life, better overall mood, and lower perceived stress. * Additional findings, confirmed in wider research, are that lack of awareness, time and active promotion are factors in the non-use of campus spaces for health and wellbeing. This is especially the case, not just at stressful exam times, but through the year, for student health and wellbeing, while also recognising that stress, anxiety, and heavy workload affect the staff on campus as well. * Identifying routes towards health, aimed at all Campus residents, is a key rationale for the development of campus trails and their promotion in active and guided ways. |
| **Identify all frameworks, policies, or strategies this initiative aligns to**  **(internal, local or national)** | * National Healthy Campus Charter and Framework * National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework * Healthy Ireland Framework 2019-2025 * Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023-2028 |
| **Summary** | The MU Trails Project is a collaborative initiative that aims to encourage and support staff and students to get out into nature, be physically active and practice mindfulness for the benefit of their overall health and wellbeing.  The project provides a framework that divides the trails on campus into two categories (Information-based and Wellness-based) and makes all trail routes easily identifiable. At each stop along the trails there will be a QR code to scan. On Information-based trails this will link to interesting facts (e.g. campus history, local folklore, environmental information), and on Wellness-based trails this will link to a calming/grounding meditation, exercise, or reflection. |
| **Did you collaborate with internal and/or external stakeholders to deliver?** | Two trails had already been developed in MU (the *Tairseach Tree* *Trail* by the Froebel School of Education, and a *Biodiversity Trail* by Green Campus). We worked closely with representatives from both departments in addition to:   * MU PHD Psychology Researcher * MU Groundsman * MU Environmental Psychologist * MU Student Services Counselling Representatives |
| **How was the initiative organised?** | * The Healthy Campus Steering Group Chair and Co-ordinator worked in partnership to come up with the initial project idea. It spoke to three key area being explored as part of MU’s Healthy Campus Action Plan - physical activity, mental health and wellbeing, and healthy physical environments, responding to them in an infrastructural way. * To take a collaborative ‘whole campus’ approach a Project Group was formed with key stakeholders. This group met regularly to discuss the project aims, objectives and implementation plan. It was decided to develop a ‘Nature-connection’ and a ‘Mindfulness ‘trail to balance up the Wellness-based trails with the existing Information-based ones. * Meetings were required with the President and Estates Office to gain approval to install new trail markers on the campus grounds. * Consultation was held with the Design Innovation Department for support and advice around design and suppliers for the trail markers. * A pilot walk of the trails was undertaken to get feedback from staff and students about any changes that needed to be made to the provisional routes or to the QR code exercises. * This summer the new, categorized, colour coded trail markers will be installed in addition to some campus signage introducing the trails. * A Launch Event is planned for Semester One of Academic Year 24/25. |
| **What resources did you need?** | * A mix of staff from the Project Group and MU’s Counselling Service worked together to design the new trail routes and exercises. * A pilot event was organised by the Healthy Campus Team and attended by approx. 30 staff and students who provided feedback. * The financial cost of installing the new trail markers and signage will be covered by the Healthy Campus Team. * Installation will be organised by the Estates Office. |
| **Has it been evaluated? How successful has it been?** | * Phase 1 of evaluation was the Pilot Walks this April/May. Feedback was gained from staff/students via a written reflection and QR code survey, and used to inform final changes to routes/exercises. Within academic departments (Geography, Biology, Education) students also used the trails for academic projects. Feedback has been positive. * Phase 2 is for the trail routes to be continually tested, in particular by different staff/student groups using a gender and accessibility lens, and then for further enhancements to be made to the existing routes and exercises in the coming year(s) based on this feedback. |
| **Any future plans, including the sustainability of the initiative?** | * Material for the trail markers will be 100% recycled plastic which is maintenance free and comes with a lifetime guarantee. * The trails will be open for use differently by different people and departments, and hopefully in time staff/students will develop additional trails under both the information and wellness categories. * We hope to build guided walks along the trails into the induction process for new students/staff to foster a sense of belonging and connection to campus, and to promote the trails as a self-care and stress management tool that can be used throughout the year. * We plan to organize annual themed walks for staff/students (e.g. Green Ribbon Month, World Mental Health Month, Green Week, Walktober, Marchathon, Employee Wellbeing Month), but also to build them into regular pedagogic design and teaching and research. In essence the aim is to create an open infrastructure for such work. * We plan to create a shareable story map illustrating the trails and develop an MU Trails App to make engagement easy and dynamic. |
| **Key Learning Points** | * + - * The importance and value of a partnership approach to health and wellbeing – without collaboration between the founders of the original MU trails, the Project Group and the staff/students who engaged in our pilot this project would not be possible. Working in partnership has been good for team building across administrative and academic departments and speaks to a holistic cross-campus approach in planning something that would benefit all; finding a way to connect cross-themes in terms of specific Healthy Campus strategic work and open it up to wider communities of interest.       * The importance of evaluation – the piloting event produced valuable feedback and had a genuine buzz; a discovery of potential and a low-cost, potentially wide-impact initiative, but also a meaningful natural resource and asset for students and staff alike, as well as potentially visitors and the town community. We are excited to build on this by engaging in more evaluation to ensure MU Trails are as safe, inclusive, and accessible as possible for our campus community and beyond. |

**Healthy Campus Framework Categories (please tick all that apply)**

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| **Healthy Campus Process** | **Whole Campus Approach** | **Topic** | **Population Group** |
| Commit | Leadership, Strategy & Governance | Alcohol | Students |
| Coordinate | Campus Environment (Facilities & Services) | Substance Misuse | Staff |
| Consult | Campus Culture & Communications | Healthy Eating / Food | Wider community |
| Create | Personal & Professional Development | Mental Health & Wellbeing | Other |
| Celebrate & Continue |  | Sexual Health & Wellbeing |  |
|  |  | Tobacco Free Campus |  |
|  |  | Physical Activity / Active Transport |  |
|  |  | Wellbeing on the Curriculum (can also fall under ‘Personal & Professional Development) |  |
|  |  | Health & Sustainability |  |
|  |  | Other |  |

**Contact Details**

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| **Links** | A group of people standing in a circle  Description automatically generated A group of people standing in a grassy area  Description automatically generated  A group of people standing in a line next to a pond  Description automatically generated A group of clipboards with maps on them  Description automatically generated |