

Monday, 25th January, 2021 (25/01/21)



Trinity College Dublin Students' Union
House 6,
Trinity College Dublin,
Dublin 2.

Press Release on Environmental Petition

Today TCDSU, alongside Trinity Environmental Society, launch a petition aimed at the candidates of the upcoming Provost elections.

The petition urges the next Provost to place the climate crisis at the forefront of their work over the next 10 years. We need a Provost who understands that the current environmental emergency is not just one of many other pressing issues, but an existential threat to humanity and intertwined with all the challenges we face, including global pandemics, economic shocks, wealth inequality and racism.

The text of the petition is as follows:

The scientific consensus is clear: unless decisive action is taken, we will pass a point of no return in one decade, beyond which lies the eventual collapse of the biosphere and potentially of civilisation itself. We, as students and members of the College community, want to look back in 10 years' time and say we did everything we could to collectively tackle the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. The Provost election of 2021 is the starting point in this process.

We all have a part to play in addressing the environmental emergency, and we are more than willing. We believe that a majority of staff and students in College care deeply and sincerely about the planet, but are overwhelmed and unsure as to how they can translate this reality into their daily roles. We need a Provost who recognises the scale and scope of the changes required to respond at a level commensurate with the scientific evidence. We need a Provost who understands that the environmental emergency is not just one of many other pressing issues, but an existential threat to humanity and intertwined with all the challenges we face, including global pandemics, economic shocks, wealth inequality and racism. We need a Provost who will translate our platform and intellectual capital into climate action and regeneration of our ecosystem. Regeneration of the ecosystem, and regeneration of the very idea of the university go hand in hand. The majority of students recognise this, and want the leadership of our college community to act in accordance with our wants.

Some might protest that a profound transition needs to be balanced against other imperatives such as our finances or our disciplinary investments. However, given the scale and urgency of the issue such trade-offs are moot. Some might protest that profound changes will cause curriculum and operational disruption, risk reputational capital, and immiserate staff and students with yet more instability after Covid-19. The reality is that such experimentation may be the best way to strengthen community and collegiality with a sense of profound purpose.



We recognise and are indebted to those spearheading sustainability in operations and curricula in College, without whom a document like this could not even be articulated. However, a fundamental contradiction exists between the university's sustainability ambitions to green the campus and institutional imperatives that reinforce and contribute to climate change. The current global pandemic has exposed the over-dependence of third-level institutions on international mobility, flawed ranking systems and narrow promotion incentives which treat education and research as individualistic endeavours. The recovery from this period provides a unique opportunity to reimagine an educational model which serves our planet.

To address these challenges, a future Provost would:

1. Create a joint Office of Sustainability and Civic Engagement of at least ten full-time staff to merge their mutual goals and produce cost savings through the full implementation of the College's Sustainability Strategy. The office should include a dedicated, central space for students to meet for sustainability initiatives. We recommend the space in the Berkeley Library foyer previously occupied by Tangent.
2. Make Uni-Eco climate change and sustainability training modules mandatory for all staff across campus. Bringing all staff to the same level of knowledge about the reality of climate change is key to achieving a truly sustainable campus. This will benefit personal skill sets, teaching and research as well as benefiting Trinity's standing in international rankings.
3. Expand existing sustainability training resources for staff. Timetable annual online half-hour 'refresher' sessions for all current and incoming personnel.

In the face of this emergency, College has two options: 1) continue with the status quo and further incorporate environmental sustainability into teaching, research and operations in an incremental manner, or 2) become an institutional leader by taking ambitious and positive actions in a manner commensurate with climate and biodiversity science. We believe this shift would in fact attract many prospective students to study here, since younger generations are highly conscious of the impact of organisations on the environment. The shift needed to act commensurate is breath-taking but is well within the capacity of a world-leading university under the leadership of a strong visionary. In the words of David Attenborough, "we cannot be radical enough".

The students of Trinity College Dublin welcome a Provost debate that is devoted to this statement.

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Kind Regards,

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On Behalf of TCDSU

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