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D2.3 Annual student engagement report 2017-18: Ireland

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1. Introduction

The SAVES 2 project (www.saves-project.eu) brings together the Student Switch Off (SSO) and Student Switch Off + (SSO+) campaigns ([USI - IRELAND](#)) in fourteen different universities across seven European countries; Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Romania and the United Kingdom. This report provides a detailed overview of the student engagement activities performed as part of the Student Switch Off campaign in Ireland. SSO+ activities will start in Ireland from the 2018-19 academic year, therefore they are not part of this report.

The SSO campaign is an inter-dormitory energy-saving competition, that focuses on a predefined set of activities, encouraging students to save energy in their dormitories. The dormitory that saves the most energy on each campus, is announced winner and rewarded for their efforts. Energy savings are determined by comparing pre-intervention electricity consumption, with post intervention electricity consumption, in each dormitory.

The SSO+ campaign (in which USI was not engaged in 2017-2018 but will join in 2018-19) aims to raise awareness amongst students in the private rented sector helping them reduce their energy costs. It focuses on making students aware of energy performance certificates (EPC), smart meters and energy efficiency, thus helping reduce their exposure to energy poverty.

Each of the seven countries has a dedicated dormitory coordinator to deliver the SSO engagement activities and country manager to oversee the SSO+ activities.

Chapter 2 describes in detail the activities undertaken as part of SSO.

2. The Student Switch Off campaign in Ireland

2.1 Universities taking part

In Ireland, four universities took part in the Student Switch Off campaign in the 2017-18 academic year. The coordination of the campaign, promotion, and collection of relevant data were undertaken by a dedicated member of the staff of the Union of Students in Ireland. In total there were 4,486 students living in dormitories that were taking part in Student Switch Off in Ireland.

It is to be noted that the universities in Ireland have been particularly sensitive to engagement in the project and a period of friendship and ally-building have been necessary in this first year to properly engage with them. This appears to be paying off, and it is to be expected that the four universities will more fully participate in years 2 (2018-19) and 3 (2019-20) of the campaign.

Name of University	Number of dormitories	Number of dormitories taking part in SAVES 2	Number of students living in dormitories taking part in SAVES 2
National University of Ireland Galway	1	1	1,000
Maynooth University	4	2 (will become 4)	986
University College, Cork	4	4	1,100
Dublin City University	8	2	1,400
TOTAL	17	9	4,486

Table 1. Irish universities taking part in SAVES 2



2.2 Engagement activities

Throughout the 2017-18 academic year, a number of activities took place, in the dormitories of the four universities in Ireland, to raise awareness about energy saving. These included photo competitions, climate quizzes, dormitory visits, ambassador training sessions, beginning of year events (fresher's fairs/arrival events), and end of year events. The section below describes these in more detail and what engagement levels were reached.

2.2.1 Launch of the campaign

USI launched the Student Switch Off campaign with a media event and partner briefing day held at their headquarters in Dublin, Ireland in May 2017. The Irish Government sent a key advisor on energy to the event. Staff working on energy at the four participating universities, and their students' union officers gave joining statements and photographs were distributed to the media. A photocall was undertaken with student representatives from the participating universities.

2.2.2 Ambassador training sessions and ambassador engagement

Student Switch Off ambassadors can play a key role in making the SSO campaign a success. Their role is to engage their peers in the dormitories, by raising awareness on SSO and encouraging them to save energy.

The approach taken at USI was to have a small number of ambassadors at each university, making them the key point of contact; since the dormitory coordinator was very active on each university campus regularly, USI decided to keep the numbers low and direct contact with students high. This approach may be reviewed in the future.

Each of the training sessions delivered was an hour long. Participating students were given a SSO t-shirt and an Ambassador Challenge card, so they could keep a record of their actions throughout the year (these included: attending the training session, posting five energy saving photos, signing up ten friends to the campaign, getting flatmates involved in a photo competition, sharing Snapchat photo competitions, encouraging ten friends to take the climate quiz, joining the dormitory coordinator on a dormitory visit, running stands and encouraging students to engage with the campaign).

USI is investigating alternatives to the ambassador system in Ireland, since there are significant differences relating to the work of students' unions in Ireland in the life of the university.

Name of University	Number of training sessions ran	Number of students attending
National University of Ireland Galway	1	1
Maynooth University	1	2
University College, Cork	1	3
Dublin City University	1	1

Table 2. Number of students attending ambassador training sessions at Irish SAVES 2 universities

2.2.3 Dormitory visits/on campus face-to-face activities

The dormitory co-ordinator made seven visits to each campus in each semester (28 visits in total throughout the 2017-18 academic year), engaging with student representatives and supporting them to produce promotional videos and photographs for the whole campaign. Visits were primarily geared to engaging students' union officers to undertake promotions, and to meeting students engaged in the SSO campaign and other energy saving activity.



Name of University	Number of onsite engagement visits	Description of Activities
National University of Ireland Galway	7	Running quizzes, running treasure-hunt for Ben & Jerry's prizes, encourage students and officers to undertake energy and sustainability actions then and there on campus. Created videos, took part in green weeks, provided advice to SU officers about sustainability practices in general with particular reference to the SAVES 2 principles.
Dublin City University	7	Running quizzes, running treasure-hunt for Ben & Jerry's prizes, encourage students and officers to undertake energy and sustainability actions then and there on campus. Created videos, took part in green weeks, provided advice to SU officers about sustainability practices in general with particular reference to the SAVES 2 principles.
Maynooth University	7	Running quizzes, running treasure-hunt for Ben & Jerry's prizes, encourage students and officers to undertake energy and sustainability actions then and there on campus. Created videos, took part in green weeks, provided advice to SU officers about sustainability practices in general with particular reference to the SAVES 2 principles.
University College Cork	7	Running quizzes, running treasure-hunt for Ben & Jerry's prizes, encourage students and officers to undertake energy and sustainability actions then and there on campus. Created videos, took part in green weeks, took part and presented at a conference on sustainability and energy saving, provided advice to SU officers about sustainability practices in general with particular reference to the SAVES 2 principles.

Table 3. Face-to-face engagement activities on Irish university campuses

2.2.4 Social media competitions

Throughout the year a set number of social media competitions was carried out at each of the four universities to raise awareness about energy saving actions. The competitions were launched either by Snapchat or Facebook. The aim of the competitions was to raise awareness and normalise energy-saving behaviours in a visual way. Competition posts had significant reach on social media, appearing in many people's social feeds. Prizes included vouchers for Ben and Jerry's ice cream and return train tickets through Irish Rail. In total there were 98 entries into the competitions, which is a very good result.

Table 4 describes the competitions carried out, the platforms used to host them, and how many entries there were.

Name of University	Competition type and theme	Number of entries	Social media platform used
National University of Ireland Galway	Reducing Energy Photo Competition launched through Snapchat. One per campus visit (7 in total) and one during the extreme weather event in March.	29	Snapchat & Facebook
Maynooth University	Reducing Energy Photo Competition launched through Snapchat. One per campus visit (7 in total) and one during the extreme weather event in March.	8	Snapchat & Facebook



University College, Cork	Reducing Energy Photo Competition launched through Snapchat. One per campus visit (7 in total) and one during the extreme weather event in March.	20	Snapchat & Facebook
Dublin City University	Reducing Energy Photo Competition through Snapchat. One per campus visit (7) and one during the extreme weather event in March.	41	Snapchat & Facebook
	Total entries	98	

Table 4. Social media competitions at the four Irish SAVES 2 universities

2.2.5 Climate change quizzes

Two climate quizzes were run at each university during 2017-18 to raise awareness about climate change and energy saving. The quizzes were launched by an email to all students living in dormitories, in addition to being launched through Facebook. We were aiming for 10% uptake at each university; this was surpassed at each of the four universities.

Table 5 shows student participation in climate quizzes at the four Irish SAVES 2 universities.

Name of University	Number of students that took part	Proportion of students that took part in the quiz
National University of Ireland Galway	235	23.4%
Maynooth University	250	23.5%
University College, Cork	235	16.7%
Dublin City University	235	21.3%

Table 5. Student participation in climate quizzes at the four Irish SAVES 2 universities

2.2.6 End of year event

The end of year Student Switch Off events are a great opportunity to celebrate student involvement in the campaign. The end of year celebrations organised by USI were informal events, taking place between May and June 2018, with food and a fun quiz in some locations. On campuses where there was more student engagement, there was an end of year dinner with climate / sustainability quiz to thank participants and more opportunities to win prizes supplied by sponsors such as Ben & Jerrys ice-cream and Irish Rail.

2.2.7 Summary of SSO engagement statistics

Table 6 below gives an overview of the SSO engagement achievements in the four Irish universities participating in Student Switch Off.

It is important to note that in each case, universities laid down limits on the dormitories USI could carry out events in, in order to limit their impact on workload. It is likely that these limits will be relieved for the 2018-19 year.

Name of University	No. students living in dormitories	No. students signed up to the campaign	% students signed up to the campaign	Number attending the Ambassador training	Online climate quiz entries	Photo/online competition entries	Number of social media followers
Maynooth University	986	259	26.	2	250	8	74
National University of Ireland Galway	1,100	71	6.5	1	235	29	64
University College Cork	1,000	218	21.8	3	235	20	98
Dublin City University	1,400	1,400	100	1	235	41	81
TOTAL	4,486	1,948	43.4	7	955	98	317

Table 6. Overall student engagement statistics

2.3 Communication with students

There were multiple channels that USI used to communicate with students at the four Irish universities. USI sent emails to all students who had been contacted through sign-up activities, and University College Cork also sent all-student emails to all students on campus (the other three universities felt they could not send all student emails). DCU used their proprietary 'Browser' system to send a message to all students.

USI primarily used <http://ireland.studentswitchoff.org> as the centerpiece for information on the campaign and promotion to universities. USI also developed fun and engaging videos and promoted those through Snapchat, Facebook and Twitter.

USI relied on per-campus group pages on Facebook to make contact with students on each campus and maintained Student Switch Off Facebook fan pages for each university campaign:

- <https://www.facebook.com/DCUSSO/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/SSOMSU/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/UCCSSO/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/nuigsso/>

The Facebook pages were updated regularly with relevant sustainability related articles, relevant environmental initiatives at the university, in addition to launching competitions.

USI pioneered the use of overall and per-campus Snapchat groups (this hadn't been used in the other six countries), which resulted in significantly faster signups to the campaign than anticipated, and facilitated the photo competitions very effectively.

2.4 Engagement materials

A variety of branded marketing materials were created at the start of the academic year to be used throughout the campaign to engage students in the campaign.

Primarily, USI used sustainably produced pens and t-shirts for interested students, in addition to flyers and posters to promote the campaign. One challenge in this regard was the capacity to acquire ethically produced materials at a reasonable price in Ireland.

During dormitory move-in events, USI used quaint and amusing posters to gain students attention of the campaign and then asked students to pledge saving energy by filling in pledge cards. USI developed additional symbols for use in infographics and prepared small numbers of posters for campuses, always with a view to produce of no more materials than necessary.

USI secured sponsorship from Ben & Jerry's ice cream and return train fares from Irish Rail (the state rail transport company).

2.5 The energy dashboard

The [online energy dashboard](#), created and maintained by Ecovisum, is a fantastic tool to engage students, letting them know how much energy they are saving throughout the year in their dormitories. The aim is to link up the energy meters at each of the participating dormitories, to the online dashboard, so students can see how much energy they are saving when compared to a pre-intervention baseline on a regular basis.

Energy monitoring systems in Ireland's universities are in a poor and antiquated state. Of the four universities participating, only Dublin City University had the capacity to supply meaningful data in a timely manner allowing USI to draw students' attention to the dashboard. There absolutely will be good data, but it was not possible for the 2017-18 academic passed in a timely and stimulating way for students.

There is scope to hope that this will improve at least for NUI Galway and Maynooth University for the 2018-19 academic year. It is unlikely that the data for University College Cork will be useful as stimulus material – but this does not reduce the enthusiasm of their participants.

2.6 Embedding SSO into wider university initiatives

SSO is already being embedded into general practices at Dublin City University and NUI Galway has adopted it as part of its sustainable campus initiative. USI are monitoring how this is being rolled out, but there is sincere interest in embedding it into wider university initiatives.

2.7 Successes and challenges

The major success of the campaign in Ireland has been the engagement of students and student leaders in the promotion of the campaign and its links to other areas around sustainability on and off campus.

By engaging so many students and their representatives in the programme, USI's dormitory coordinator ensured a constant buzz about campuses which ensured many students sought to fully engage.

This is reflected in student engagement in the survey and on social media campaigns, which were fully utilized by the programme.

The major challenge is that of arriving at high quality, sustained and timely data to use in the dashboard in order to give an evidence base to the work. It was clear that some universities have no ready access to usable baseline data on energy usage, and it is clear that some have very old-fashioned and extremely slow methods for gathering energy data.

USI have identified the primary shortfalls in data acquisition and will be meeting three of the four universities to resolve access to data as a priority issue for the coming year, before September.

2.8 Photos from the SSO campaign

Please see photos from various events taking place at Irish university campuses.





Figure 1 On launch day, student leaders from Galway, Maynooth and the USI President joined in Dublin, Ireland, to tell students to switch it off. Just outside the shot (and used in all materials) is the EU logo!



Figure 2 NUI Galway Student President and officers promote the Switchoff Campaign (and the sponsorship prizes) on Campus in Galway

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Figure 3 To add value to the campaign, USI produced videos to highlight how a student could save energy in various ways. Here students are demonstrating putting on additional layers.

3 Conclusions

Engaging with students is the strength of USI, and this is notable in the success in getting students in the very atomized environment of Irish universities to engage with, social media campaigns and the production of video content.

The major success of the campaign in Ireland has been the engagement of students and student leaders in the promotion of the campaign and its links to other areas around sustainability on and off campus.

It is clear that the 2017-18 has presented a significant learning curve for the project for USI and for the university participants, but we are certain that issues here presented will be resolved for 2018-19 academic year.

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