



EPA/ESAI Grassroots Workshop Report 2026

Building Healthy Futures: Interdisciplinary perspectives from Early Career Researchers on sustainability

Overview

The “Building Healthy Futures” workshop was a collaborative, interdisciplinary event for Early Career Researchers (ECRs) from across University College Dublin (UCD) to connect and network. The workshop invited ECRs, including late-stage PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, research fellows and more, who are actively seeking interdisciplinary collaboration or funding opportunities to share their research interests and background in 3-minute “Flash Talks”. Any ECRs whose research related to the environment, health or sustainability, were welcome to attend the event. The 2-hour workshop was hosted in the UCD Student Centre Clubhouse at the end of the work day (4:00-6:00pm). Refreshments and finger food were provided for attendees. The workshop was designed to be a welcoming space for ECRs interested in developing new research connections and relationships.

Workshop aim

The workshop aimed to create a network where interdisciplinary ECRs from UCD can connect and collaborate. At the early career stage, ECRs transition to becoming more independent researchers but often lack the opportunity to make connections with other ECRs from different research backgrounds. “Building Healthy Futures” sought to bridge this gap and help develop new networks that contribute to future funding applications, publications and other collaborative projects.

Event structure

16:00 -16:10	Welcome
16:10-16:40	Flash talk session 1
16:40-16:50	Comfort Break
16:50-17:25	Flash talk session 2
17:25-17:55	Collaboration activity & Networking
17:55-18:00	Closing remarks

Attendee profile

UCD affiliated late-stage PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, research fellows attended the event. There was representation from 11 schools within UCD, including the School of Agriculture and Food Science, the School of Economics, School of Geography, School of Biology and Environmental Sciences, School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy. Attendees reported a broad range of research themes related to sustainability including sustainable urban development, sustainable food systems, sustainable energy systems, circular economy and waste, water quality and security, social justice and equity, and policy and government. There were 30-35 attendees, including the 13 Flash Talk



presenters. A member of the Vice-President for Sustainability's working group on interdisciplinary research was in attendance to discuss ECR interdisciplinary collaboration with attendees.

Engagement / Collaboration Activity (Poll Everywhere)

To support engagement and discussion, we used Poll Everywhere for the workshop's Collaboration Activity. Attendees were invited to respond to short answer questions in real time using their smartphones. The activity was designed to help participants reflect on the wide range of research presented during the Flash Talks and to identify shared interests, challenges, and opportunities for future collaboration. As stated above, the Flash Talks covered a broad range of topics related to sustainability; therefore, the activity encouraged ECRs to consider how these different areas connect and where opportunities for interdisciplinary work may exist.

Using Poll Everywhere, we asked participants about key sustainability themes in their respective fields, which themes are most relevant to their work, the perceived barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration, and how they would like to engage in future collaboration. The responses were used to generate a word cloud to illustrate that although attendees work in different research disciplines, there are many shared goals and priorities. When asked about barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration, the most common responses were related to funding, lack of time, academic silos, discrepancies in research methods and difficulties identifying potential collaborators. Participants also highlighted challenges related to institutional structures, recognition and communication across disciplines.

In regard to how to overcome these barriers, attendees were interested in increased funding opportunities (bursaries, grant opportunities, seed funding for interdisciplinary workshops and research, etc), more mentorship opportunities, networking opportunities, and the development of a sustained ECR community. There was also strong support for creating opportunities for the ECRs present at the workshop to stay connected through regular events, writing retreats, WhatsApp groups and shared contact networks. Overall, the results showed strong enthusiasm from ECRs and included several practical actions to support more collaborative approaches.

Feedback and response

All attendees were invited to complete an optional feedback survey using Google Forms at the end of the event. The feedback of the event was overall very positive with a mean rating of 9.6/10 (n=10). Those who completed the feedback noted the event was successful in helping attendees make new social/professional contacts, have useful academic discussions, learn about new methodologies and meet potential new collaborators. Several short answer responses relate to the desire for more similar events in the future and other opportunities for ECRs to connect.



Figure 1 (above): Workshop/event organisers (left to right) Dr Ankur Sati (UCD School of Geography), Virginia Morejón (UCD School of Geography), Dr Katie Davies (UCD School of Agriculture and Food Science) and Dr Bob van Rugge (UCD School of Economics).

Figure 2 (below): Group photo from Building Healthy Futures: Interdisciplinary perspectives from Early Career Researchers on sustainability

