

### **EU Future Plans to Drive Recycling**

The challenges of expanding supply to meet future demand is unprecedented. Our current linear economy which is based on a 'take-make-dispose' approach results in massive waste and harm to the environment we live in. A new EU initiative termed the 'Circular Economy' aims to provide an alternative based on credible and quantified perspectives.

The European Commission wishes to drive recycling with the following new targets:

- Recycling and preparing for re-use of municipal waste increased to 70% by 2030
- Recycling and preparing for re-use of packaging waste increased to 80% by 2030
- Ban on landfilling recyclable waste (including plastics, paper, metals, glass and biodegradable waste) by 2025
- Measures aimed at reducing food waste by 30% by 2025

Recycling is just part of the Circular Economy solution to the planet's resource challenges but it is clear that significant changes are ahead and we all need to look much closer at the extent of our waste production and how to recycle more of our waste. This concentration on reduction of waste and landfill sites is not new in Ireland, in 1995 there were 87 local authority landfill sites and by 2013 only 25 remained (EPA, 2013) largely due to Government policy.

### **NUI Galway – The Current Reality**

Campus wide perceptions of our waste production and recycling performance varies but the reality is that we produced an average of 35 tonnes of waste every month for the past 12 months and our recycling rate averaged out at 51% to September 2016. If you were to consider that ten years ago 0% of our waste was recycled and just two years ago the recycling rate was 45% there has been significant improvement but there is still a great deal we can all do to improve significantly on our current environmental performance. In order to understand our waste profile better and identify what types of waste are being channelled through the general (landfill) waste stream the Buildings Office arranged Waste Characterisation Surveys in June 2013, April 2014 and July 2014 respectively. The results highlight just how inefficient our approach to waste segregation and recycling is. Across the three surveys an average of 67% of waste in the general waste stream was in fact waste which could have been diverted from landfill. This included in part an average of; 28.6% Plastics, 13.6% Papers and 15.5% Organic waste.

### **Future Strategy**

The University Strategic Plan 2009-2014 under 5.2.2 'Environment' encouraged 'staff and students to take a proactive role in reducing waste' as one of its goals and targets. Our Binless office recycling drive entitled 'Bin the Bin' will enable us all to contribute to a more sustainable campus and will be rolled out on a phased basis. Indeed it has already contributed to a 6% increase in recycling since it was first introduced two years ago. See our guide to Bin the Bin for more information.

We only need to look to nature to be inspired. Just consider the resilience and longevity of forests: ecosystems in which the seasons are perfectly harmonized with the lifecycle of all species. Waste does not exist in nature, because ecosystems reuse everything that grows in a never-ending cycle of efficiency and purpose.