



Sustainability, Solidarity and Social Justice in Social Work:  
Educational Endeavours

World Social Work Day 2021

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University College Cork, Ireland  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

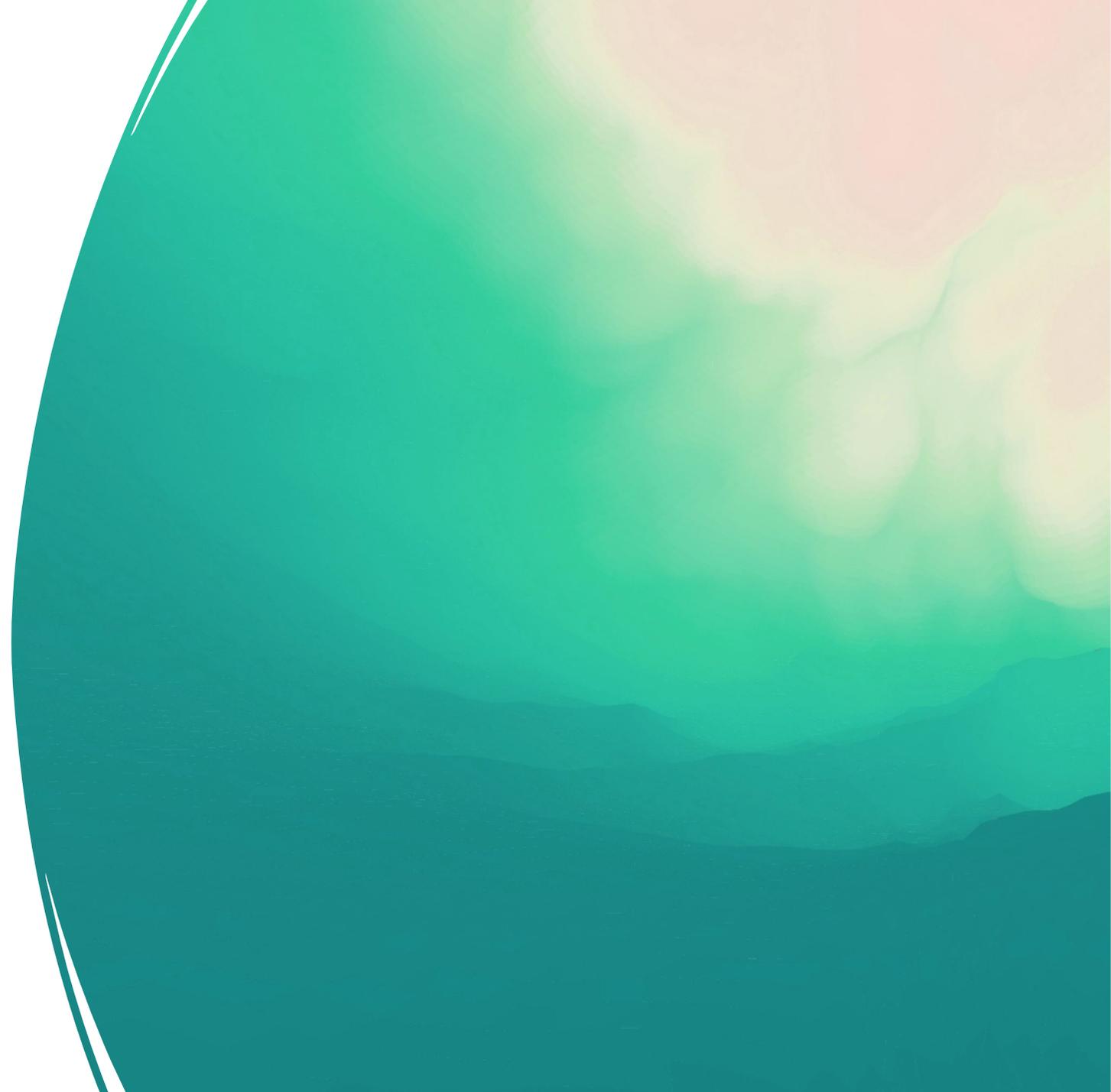
# Where we come from

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Ethics of Care

Activism

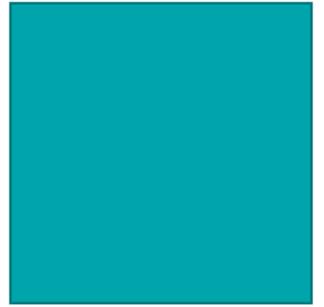
Social and Ecological Justice



## International Federation of Social Work (2021)

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing."

# Social Work as Agitators



'Every social worker is almost certain to be  
also an agitator'

(Clement Atlee, 1920, p. 237).

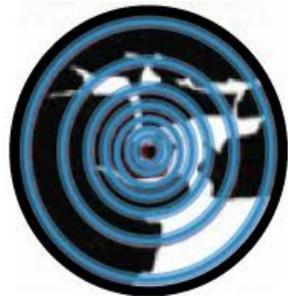


# #NOINCINERATOR

CHASECORKHARBOUR.COM



**DOUGLAS**  
CREDIT UNION



# CHASE

Cork Harbour Alliance for a Safe Environment



empowering people in care

# GAY PROJECT

GAY | BI+ | QUEER | MSM | TRANS

**HELP  
WANTED**

**Revolutionaries!**

# Pushing Social Justice through the Classroom Door

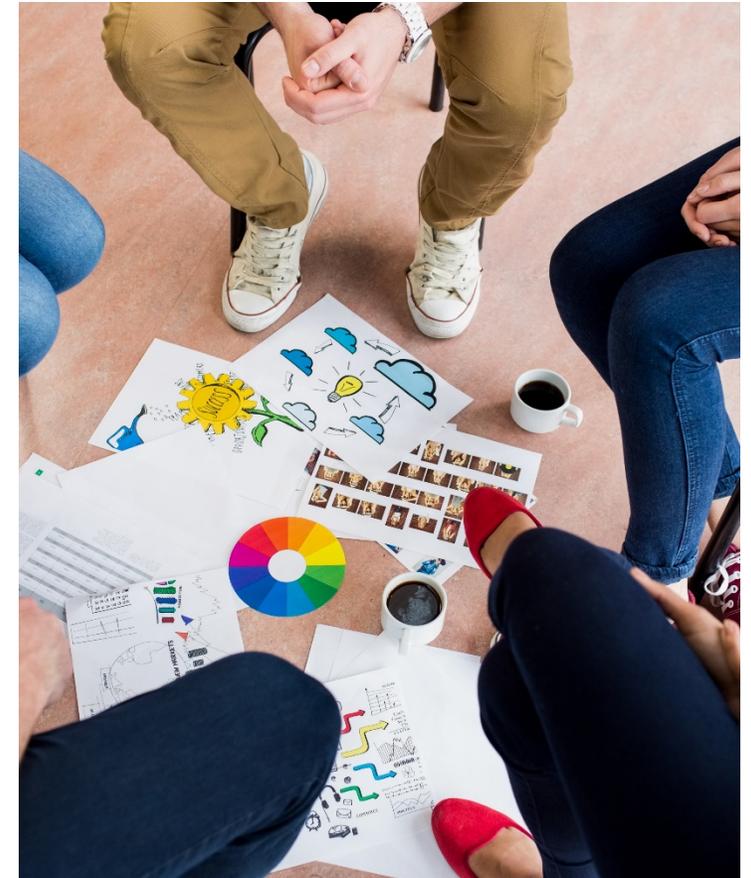
- "Most students come into social work education motivated by a desire to "help people". But their understanding of how to do this is all too often defined as "helping" individuals. A very important goal of an anti-oppressive social work educator is to help students "catch" a social justice vision to motivate their practice" (Wehbi and Straka, 2011, p. 46).
- "The classroom becomes a place to live out a practice concern with social justice; leaving social justice at the door no longer becomes a viable option" (Wehbi and Straka, 2011, p.46).



Wehbi, S. and Straka, S. (2011) 'Revaluing Student Knowledge through Reflective Practice on Involvement in Social Justice Efforts', *Social Work Education*, 30 (1), pp. 45-54.

# Our Workshop and Research

- We developed a pilot workshop with the support of the Course Management team for first year postgraduate social work students in term 3, following their first academic term and their first placement (31 attended).
- It was a reflective class - asking students to consider and discuss the external and internal barriers to, and benefits of, social work activism.
- At the end of the class, 24 students participated in a research questionnaire about:
  - their participation in activism;
  - their views about the inclusion of activism, social justice and sustainability in the social work curriculum;
  - their views about our pedagogical approach.



# What constitutes Social Work Activism?

## Students' Descriptions

- Sharing on social media
- Donating
- Fundraising
- Presentations/Education to inform others
- Doing research
- Signing a petition
- Voting
- Writing Letters
- Joining a union
- Joining together as a group to promoting social change
- Lobbying
- Going to a public meeting
- Going on a march
- Protesting/Direct Action



Internal barriers

External Barriers

**STATUS**

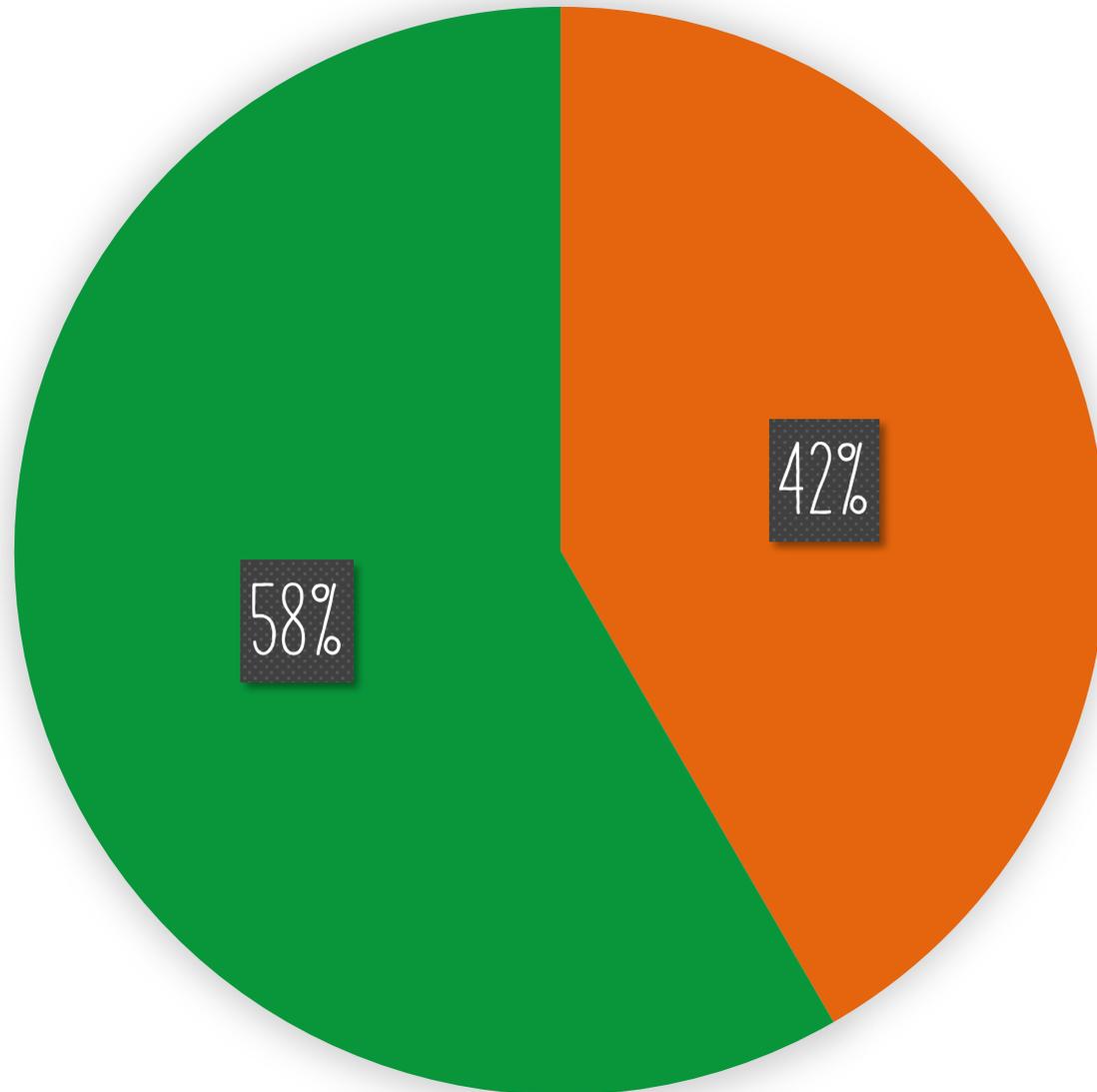
Agency in Activism

**TIME**

Internal Benefits

External Benefits

# Student Self-Declaration of Engagement in Activism



Active

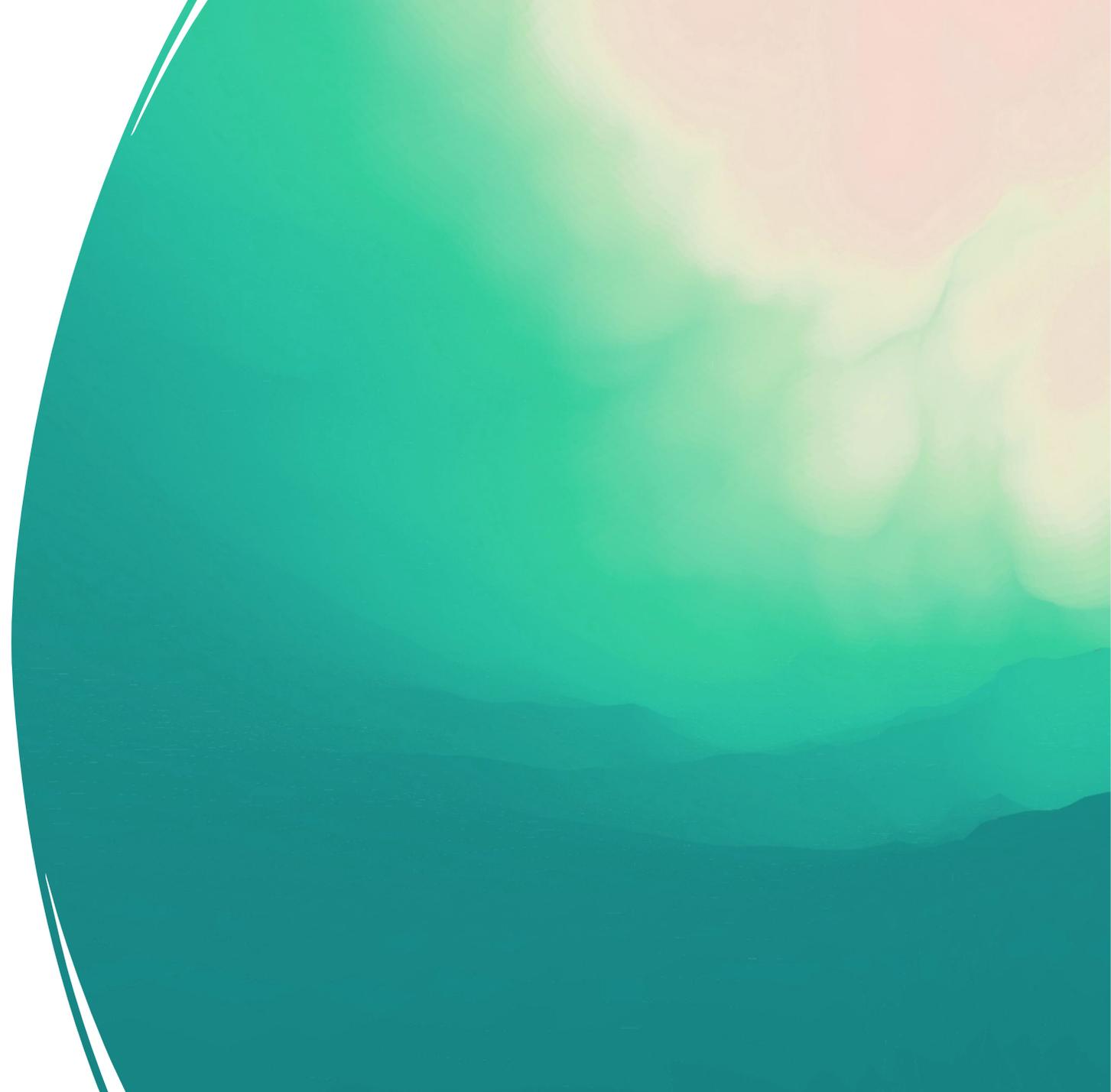
Non-active



# So What?

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Where did we take this?





## An Ethic of Responsibility

"When the profession remains at the margins of environmental efforts, it both neglects its ethical responsibilities to vulnerable populations and loses its vital opportunities to participate in shaping contemporary responses to environmental challenges, particularly around the interconnections between environmental and social issues"

(Kemp, 2011) .

# Social Work and Climate Change

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Dominelli, Lena (2011) Climate change: Social workers' roles and contributions to policy debates and interventions, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 20 (4), pp.430–438.

Consciousness-raising

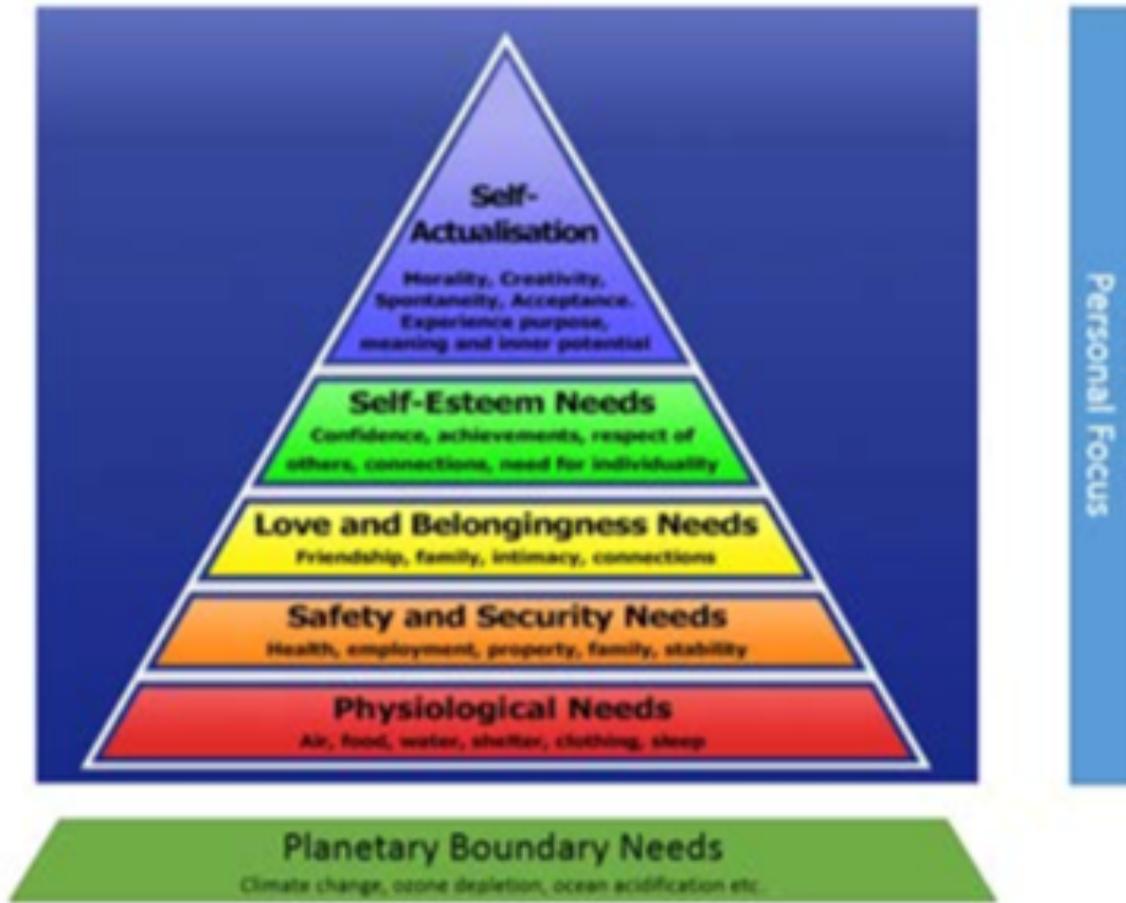
Lobbying for preventative  
measures

Mobilising Communities

Dialoguing with Policy-  
makers and using the  
media

Developing curricula that cover climate change and  
interventions that build individual and community  
resiliences

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy with Environment Added<sup>7</sup>



Maslow's hierarchy of needs with the added knowledge that unless we all support our overall planetary needs, our personal needs at each level will, in the future, no longer be able to be met

Anthropocentrism  
in Caring Disciplines

# Locating Ecology in our Curriculum

- Emphasis on social ecology
- Minimizing or even ignoring the importance of natural ecological systems

## Ecological Theory





# 2019

- Presentation at the All-Ireland Social Work Research and Education Forum
- Established our Environmental Education Group
- Crafted an Interdisciplinary module for BCYW (undergraduate) and MSW (postgraduate) students
- Received seed funding from the CACSSS Interdisciplinary Research Fund
- Made links with Professional Bodies

# 2020

- All-Island Survey of Social Work, Youth Work, Community Development Work and Nursing/Midwifery Educators about Environmental Education
- National Forum for Teaching and Learning fund to seminars
- 6th Nov. 2020 Webinar "Sustainability and the Environment: Developing New Disciplinary Norms in Social Profession Education and Practice"

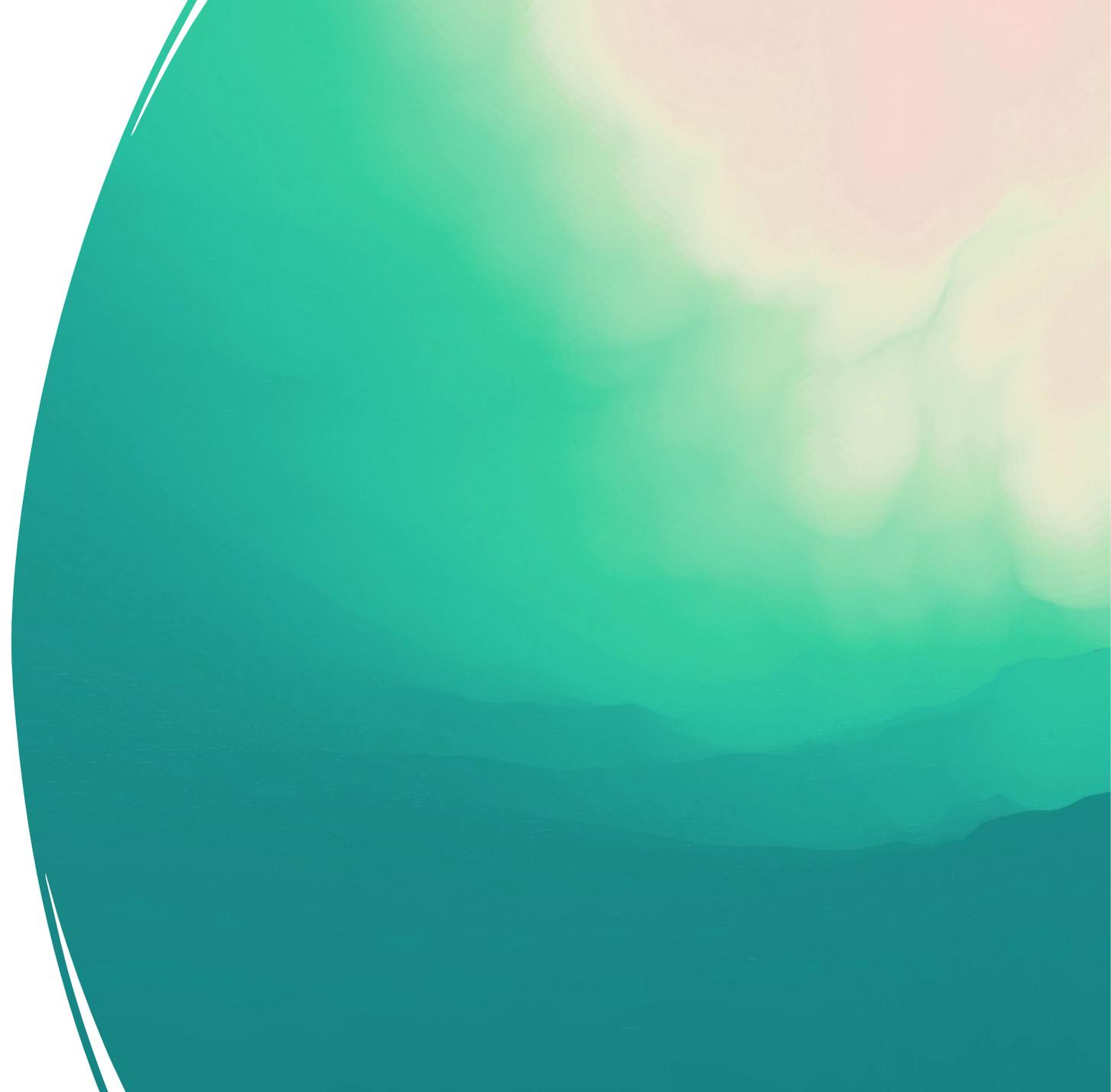
# 2021

- Optional Module Launch
- 2nd webinar 10 March 2021 "Sustainability and the Environment: Developing New Disciplinary Norms in Social Profession Education and Practice"
- Publication of Survey Findings (forthcoming)

# So What now?

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Where are we heading?





TRANSFORMING OUR  
WORLD:  
THE 2030 AGENDA FOR  
SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT

**1** NO  
POVERTY



**2** ZERO  
HUNGER



**3** GOOD HEALTH  
AND WELL-BEING



**4** QUALITY  
EDUCATION



**5** GENDER  
EQUALITY



**6** CLEAN WATER  
AND SANITATION



**7** AFFORDABLE AND  
CLEAN ENERGY



**8** DECENT WORK AND  
ECONOMIC GROWTH



**9** INDUSTRY, INNOVATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



**10** REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES



**11** SUSTAINABLE CITIES  
AND COMMUNITIES



**12** RESPONSIBLE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND PRODUCTION



**13** CLIMATE  
ACTION



**14** LIFE  
BELOW WATER



**15** LIFE  
ON LAND



**16** PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS



**17** PARTNERSHIPS  
FOR THE GOALS





Building Back  
Better

# Embedding Sustainability into the Ecology of the MSW Programme



Time-tabling and Delivery of Programme  
Placement Visits,  
Handbooks and Reading Lists  
Assessment Types, Formats and Submissions.

Identify

Sustainable Operational Mechanisms



Intersectional Opportunities across Modules  
Global & Postcolonial Reading Lists  
Placement Opportunities  
Synergies with IFSW & IASW Definitions of SW

Develop

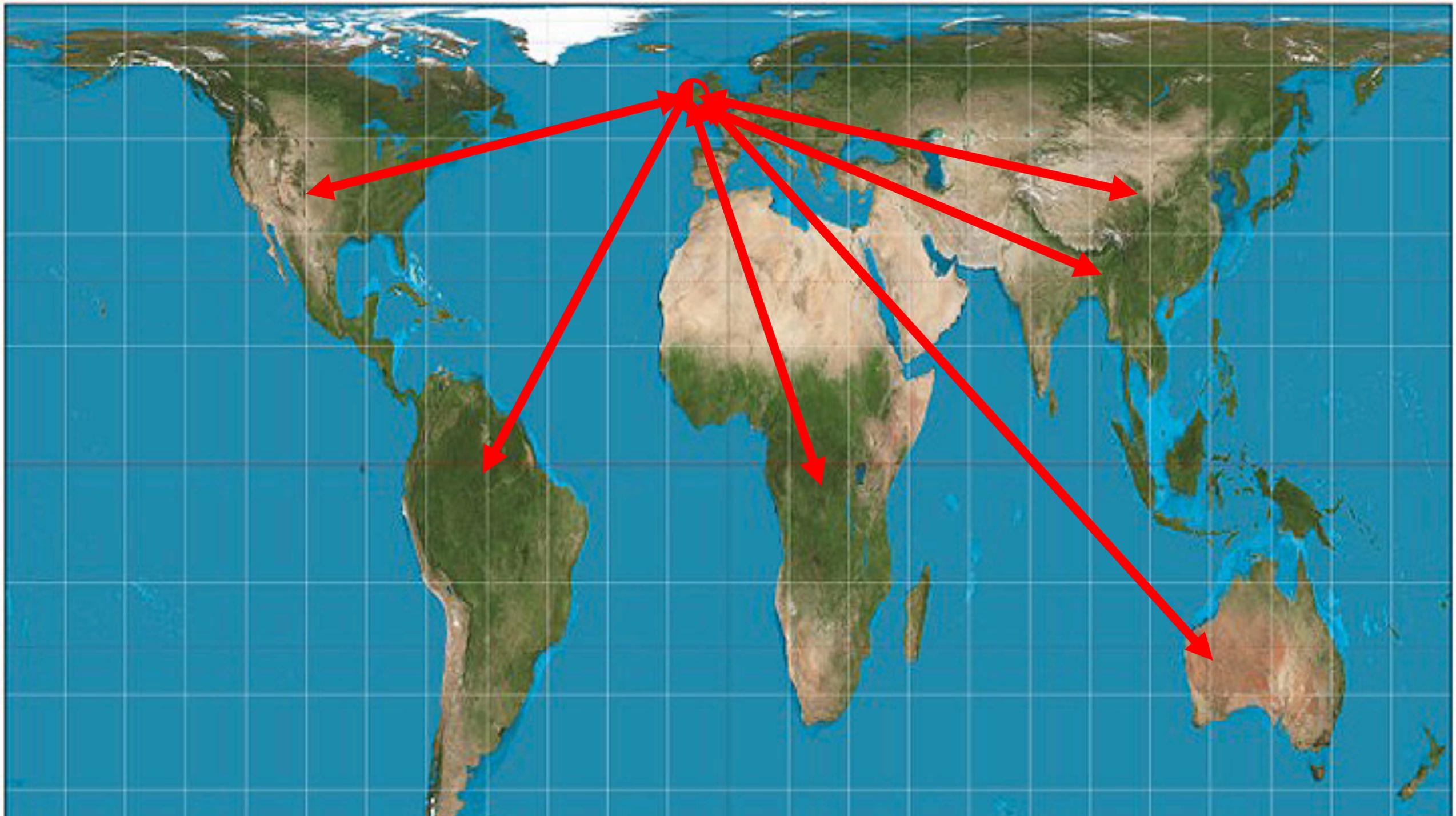
Synergies across the Curriculum / Modules.



Connected Curriculum with Eco-Social Work  
Graduate Attributes: Civic Engagement and Leadership  
Institutional, National and Multilateral Strategies  
External Stakeholder Priorities

Nourish

Sustainable Growth by Aligning with  
Stakeholders



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Thank  
You!