

Fostering community wellbeing: Higher Education Institutions and parkrun partnerships in Ireland



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Background: Cross-sector partnerships for health promotion are recommended by the Okanagan Charter for health-promoting universities (International Conference on Health Promoting Universities & Colleges, 2015). In line with the University of Galway's strategic plan, there are examples of initiatives between third-level institutions and the local community, such as the Galway International Arts Festival and the University of Galway Hygiene Hub. However, there is an evidence gap in the area of cross-sector collaborations where participants from both the university community and the wider community gain wellbeing benefits. The proposed research aims to explore the collaboration between Irish higher education institutions (including universities) and the community through the running, walking and volunteering initiative parkrun.

parkrun, usually branded with a lower-case p, takes place in over 100 sites around Ireland and 22 other countries worldwide (parkrun, 2025). Research suggests that parkrun can support physical and mental wellbeing (Dunne et al., 2024; Quirk et al., 2021). Preliminary research has found five parkrun sites based on the campus of third-level institutions in Limerick, Dundalk, Waterford, Carlow and Galway (Dunne & Sheils, 2025).

Aim: This study will explore the barriers and facilitators to participation in parkrun in higher education institutions for the purpose of staff, student and community wellbeing.

Objectives:

- Detail the similarities and differences between parkrun events which take place in higher education institutions in Ireland.
- Understand the barriers and facilitators to parkrun participation at higher education institutions as a runner, walker or volunteer.
- Consider how any barriers could be overcome to maximise the wellbeing benefits for staff, students and community members when embedding parkruns in higher education settings.

Methods: This study will collect data using individual interviews with adults who participate in parkrun. The interviewees will be people of any gender, aged 18 years and over, who are runners, walkers or volunteers at parkrun events sited in one of the five higher education institution parkruns in Ireland; Limerick, Dundalk, Waterford, Carlow and Galway. Each interviewee will have run, walked or volunteered at least one of the five parkruns at least one time.

As this is a qualitative study, information power has been used to estimate sample size (Malterud et al, 2016). This strategy has since been recommended by Braun and Clarke (2022) for studies using reflexive thematic analysis. It is estimated that between 10 and 20 adults will be interviewed, using purposive recruitment with at least one interviewee from each of the five parkrun sites.

What the work is expected to establish: The results of this study will be used to develop a set of guidelines for parkrun and higher education institutions in Ireland who wish to collaborate for current and future events.

References

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