

HackUCD 2026

Your society's spreadsheet chaos. A café's unsold lunch. That task your friends keep complaining about.

Pick a frustration you recognise and find the people who share it. You have an afternoon to turn that insight into a working prototype. Use AI, test your hunches, and give your first users a reason to try what you've built.

1. Themes

Choose **one primary theme**. Crossovers are welcome—follow the problem wherever it takes you. AI is a tool you can apply across all three themes.

- **Everyday Frustrations:** Help people overcome recurring problems in studying, organising, finding information or getting things done. Find a task that wastes their time or causes confusion, and make it easier.
- **Sustainability:** Spot value in what gets wasted. Help people save energy, keep useful things in circulation, or turn leftovers into someone else's next meal.
- **FinTech & Quantitative Analysis:** Take the headache out of money, or turn messy data into a decision someone can act on.

2. Expectations

- **Know your first users.** Explain who they are, their problem, their current workaround, why they would choose your solution, and how you would reach them. Distinguish evidence from assumptions.
- **Build a working prototype.** Deliver one working workflow as an app, API, analysis tool or automation. Local execution is sufficient.
- **Use OpenRouter meaningfully.** Add a useful feature through [OpenRouter APIs](#). AI coding assistance alone does not count towards the AI usage criterion.
- **Test and learn.** Investigate a user assumption through feedback, observation or public evidence. Test ordinary, boundary and failure inputs in your prototype; explain what you learned or changed.

- **Use suitable data.** Use public or synthetic data and state its source and assumptions. For any claimed savings, explain what you are comparing against.

Public data to get you started

A small downloaded dataset is enough to build a compelling prototype. You can combine public data with clearly labelled fictional users, transactions or journeys.

Source	What you could use it for
CSO Open Data	Irish statistics on population, commuting, transport, income and spending. Use aggregate patterns to explore a user problem or choose an area to focus on.
Ireland's Open Data Portal and Smart Dublin	Find local transport, environment and other datasets relevant to your idea. Choose a small, documented dataset you can understand during the event.
NTA public transport data	Download static timetables, routes and stops to build a scheduled public-transport comparison. These are schedules, rather than live travel-time predictions.
SEAI conversion factors	Convert fuel use into energy and estimated emissions. Supply vehicle efficiency and fuel prices separately as clearly stated inputs.
NASA FIRMS and the USGS earthquake catalogue	Explore public fire and earthquake observations for environmental monitoring or risk simulations.

Check the dataset's date, units and reuse terms. For ideas involving private records, such as shop transactions or individual journeys, a small synthetic dataset is welcome. Live data feeds are optional.

3. Judging criteria

Our rubric draws on four of [Stripe's operating principles](#), alongside AI usage. Each criterion is equally weighted.

Criterion	What judges look for	Score
Users first	A specific user group, a meaningful problem, a reason to adopt and a credible way to reach those users. Support your case with user insight and evidence.	/10
Create with craft and beauty	A clear, coherent experience with correct results, thoughtful details and useful error handling. This includes API and analysis design.	/10
Move with urgency and focus	Sensible priorities and scope choices, delivering a useful workflow within the available time.	/10
Stay curious	Testing an assumption, exploring an alternative or investigating a limitation, then using what you learned.	/10
AI usage	Effective use of OpenRouter to improve the solution, with demonstrated output quality and understanding of its limitations.	/10

Judges assess the evidence in your prototype and at in-person judging. Existing customers or revenue are not required. A small, carefully executed project can score highly.

4. Final scoring

Each judge awards **0–10 points per criterion**, for a base total out of **50**. Your final score is the **average of your judges' base totals, plus the [Stripe bonus of 0 or 5 points](#)**. The maximum is **55 points**.

For example, judge totals of 40 and 44 give a base score of 42. Completing the Stripe bonus brings this to **47/55**. The bonus is added once per team, regardless of the number of judges, purchases or subscriptions.

There is one judging round. Teams are ranked by their final score out of 55.

A project without a demonstrated OpenRouter feature receives zero for AI usage; the other criteria are assessed normally. Teams can enter without attempting the Stripe bonus.

5. Sample ideas

These starting points draw on UCD's sample themes. Your team chooses the problem, potential users and solution; the suggested audiences are yours to investigate. Focus on one workflow you can demonstrate during the event.

Everyday Frustrations

Direction	What you could explore	Might be useful for
Less repetitive administration	Automate routine tasks, summarise information, coordinate plans or help people make sense of documents.	People managing busy schedules, projects or paperwork.
Learning and revision	Explore personalised tutoring, study planning, quizzes or ways to turn notes into useful practice.	People studying, teaching or learning a new skill.
Accessibility and navigation	Use images or video to interpret surroundings, recognise objects or help people find their way.	People with accessibility needs, visitors or communities.

Sustainability

Direction	What you could explore	Might be useful for
Energy and renewables	Explore energy consumption, renewable generation, smart grids or ways to make energy use easier to understand.	Households, campuses or energy users.
Reuse and surplus	Explore reuse or swap marketplaces, surplus food,	People with spare goods, local businesses or communities.

Direction	What you could explore	Might be useful for
	repair, recycling or other ways to keep things in use.	
Travel and carpooling	Explore shared rides, cycling or public-transport tools. Compare time, cost and energy; carpooling could also help drivers share costs.	Commuters or people making similar journeys.

FinTech & Quantitative Analysis

Direction	What you could explore	Might be useful for
Market analysis	Explore market data, strategy backtesting, portfolios or sentiment in financial news.	Researchers or people learning about financial markets.
Payment workflows	Explore payment collection, cross-border payments, open banking, settlement or reconciliation; help people understand where money goes.	Businesses, sellers or people managing payments.
Fraud and risk	Look for unusual transactions, explore credit or lending risk, or build early-warning tools using public or synthetic data.	People or organisations managing financial risk.

BONUS

Give a potential customer a way to buy or subscribe to your tool. This optional bonus is available under every theme.

Use Stripe's sandbox only. Do not collect real payments. A successful sandbox purchase or subscription payment counts for this bonus.

To earn the full **5 points**:

1. **Choose a pricing model.** Offer a weekly, monthly or yearly subscription, or a one-time purchase. Show a non-zero test price, currency and what the customer gets. You only need one working option; explain why it suits your potential customers.
2. **Add a Buy or Subscribe button using Stripe's APIs.** Connect it to the purchase flow for your product. Stripe-hosted Checkout created through the Checkout Sessions API is a suitable option.
3. **Complete a customer checkout in the sandbox.** Demonstrate at least one successful test purchase. For a subscription, demonstrate the first successful test payment as well as subscription creation.
4. **Recognise the purchase in your product.** Use Stripe's payment confirmation to activate the purchased access or record the order. Show the completed test transaction and outcome to the judges, and explain the pricing model and integration.

Judges verify these requirements and award **either 0 or 5 bonus points**, added once to the team's average base score. A pricing page or button on its own does not qualify.

Get started with [Stripe Checkout](#), [products and prices](#), and [sandbox testing](#).