



Institute
for Social
Science in the
21st Century

The central logo features the letters 'ISS21' in a large, white, stylized font. The letters are interconnected and have a modern, geometric feel. To the right of this logo, the text 'Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century' is written in a clean, sans-serif font, arranged in four lines.

STRATEGIC PLAN
2019-2024



Imaginative, interdisciplinary,
impactful social science

The background of the entire page is a blurred, low-angle photograph of a busy street. People are seen walking away from the camera, their figures softened by a shallow depth of field. The lighting suggests a bright, sunny day, with long shadows cast on the pavement. The overall color palette is dominated by the teal and blue tones of the background.



CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

4

DEVELOPING THE INSTITUTE

5

WHAT PREOCCUPIES US

8

OUR ROLE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

10

OUR VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

12

OUR PRIORITIES (2019-2024)

14

OVERVIEW

The Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century (ISS21) was established in 2008 under the PRTL14 initiative to develop, sustain and enhance research on the social, economic and cultural transformations shaping Ireland in a global world. As an Institute, we provide a focal point for building and integrating UCC's interdisciplinary social science research capacity and expertise, and promoting the value of social science research in addressing key issues in contemporary society. Since 2008, ISS21 has attracted over €6 million in nationally and internationally funded research projects on topics including youth migration, gender in/equality, children's participation, and environmental citizenship. Affiliated to the all-island Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP), we seek to be a key voice advancing the social science research agenda in Ireland.

ISS21 is built around dynamic, bottom-up, collaborations between over 150 staff across 19 Departments and four Colleges in the University. Through our 10 interdisciplinary thematic research clusters and funded research projects, we address key questions facing Irish, European and global societies in the 21st century: How do we envisage and create just, inclusive and liveable societies? How can we understand the lived experience of difference and identity in contemporary society? What does it mean to be a citizen, to participate, and to be affected by, and affect, policy? How can we develop innovative research methods that are responsive to social life?

ISS21 engages in research that traverses a range of approaches, from knowledge creation concerned with theoretical innovation, to applied policy research, and we have forged significant relationships with international research communities, policymakers, community and voluntary sector organisations and other stakeholders through co-created research that contributes to broader policy environments. As an Institute, we have established a reputation for particular strengths in qualitative, engaged research approaches, and we aspire to push the boundaries of creative research practice, through methodological innovations that help illuminate the complexities of 21st century society, develop inquiry-led research, and address demands for new types of knowledge.

Our aim over the next five year period is to continue to grow and consolidate our work as an Institute with a reputation for excellent, imaginative, interdisciplinary and impactful social science research. By attracting research income, and supporting our members and research clusters, we will continue to build UCC's social science research capacity, forge creative interdisciplinary collaborations, and, working with a range of stakeholders external to the university, further develop our strengths in connected and engaged research approaches. Allied to UCC's Strategic Plan 2017-2022, our aim is to place creative thinking at the centre of what we do, whether by facilitating creative intellectual debate around fundamental, critical concepts, or demonstrating

the role of methodological innovation and creativity in social science research praxis. A key ambition of the next five years is to raise the profile, visibility, and reach of ISS21 nationally and internationally, by communicating what we do, producing and promoting access to our range of diverse knowledge outputs, and illuminating the insights and impacts of ISS21 research for the academy, communities and society.



DEVELOPING THE INSTITUTE: WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Since 2008, ISS21 has established itself as a dynamic entity which has developed research capacity and expertise in the social sciences in UCC, attracted significant research funding, and has accelerated 'bottom up' interdisciplinary collaboration around key research specialisms. The Institute's work was recognised in the University's 2015 Research Quality Review exercise, which drew attention to the "excellent standard" of our research funding activity, and our "impressive achievements" (p. 145) in building collaborative research networks, dialogue and activities across the University.

The Institute has attracted over €6 million in research funding from a range of organisations, including, for example, the European Union, Irish Research Council, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, National Disability Authority, Wellcome Trust and Cork City Council. We have hosted over 30 major projects, and have proven our capacity to host large scale European-funded, multi-partner projects, as well as numerous smaller and medium sized grants, some of which are aimed at networking and capacity-building. In the past five years, for example, the Institute has hosted three large scale EU consortia on the themes of gender equality

(GENOVATE), environmental citizenship (ENTRUST), and youth mobility (Y-MOBILITY). We are currently involved in two other Horizon 2020 initiatives on the themes of integration of migrant children in schools (IMMERSE) and research integrity (RRING), and are hosting a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA) Fellow on the theme of gender equality.

The Institute's interdisciplinary research clusters have continued to grow and develop their work in ways that reflect the research interests of staff, and the demands for different types of knowledge in response to social issues and societal change; new clusters have also been established, including most recently a cluster on the theme of Society, Health and Political Economy (SHAPE), which includes staff from the disciplines of Public Health, Social Policy, Philosophy, Economics, Business, Clinical Therapies, Nursing and Midwifery, and Government. Through an internal ISS21 Small Grants Scheme, we continue to support the clusters, which bring interdisciplinary researchers together to host events, disseminate research, develop grant activity, and stimulate academic and policy debate around key thematic areas. In 2018 alone, ISS21 clusters hosted some 20 events across the University, many of which involved international academics, and engaged external audiences and stakeholders including community and voluntary organisations, policymakers, and school children.

Our members have made significant and wide-ranging contributions to excellent

social science knowledge at a national and international scale. Outputs include books and edited collections, research reports and international peer-reviewed journal articles across the social sciences. ISS21 researchers have led the development of commissioned reports for government departments and bodies, including the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Cork City Council, and the National Disability Authority, and have advanced knowledge exchange through hosted events and international conference papers and presentations. In recognition of research excellence, ISS21-affiliated projects have received the University's Research Team of the Year award for two consecutive years, for the Child Care Proceedings in the District Court research team in 2016, and the GENOVATE research team in 2017.

ISS21 members engage with policymakers and community, voluntary and advocacy sectors through commissioned co-created research which contributes to broader policy environments. Members of the Children and Young People research cluster, for example, have conducted extensive investigations in areas such as children's participation, the sexualisation of childhood, and children's involvement in urban regeneration. This work has brought innovative and creative research methodologies into the children's policy arena and directly informed the National Children and Young People's Participation Strategy, 2015-2020. Findings from the GENOVATE project informed the Higher

Education Authority's National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions, 2016, which provided an in-depth analysis of gender imbalances in staffing, governance and management in higher education along with evidence-based recommendations for change. The Institute has developed as a space which attracts international academics and scholars. The Institute operates a Visiting Scholarship programme, and since 2008, we have hosted six scholars from countries including Australia, Italy, Spain, and the United States, including one Fulbright Scholar. We will host another two Visiting Scholars from New Zealand in September 2019. The scholars play a vital role in stimulating and building a vibrant research culture within the Institute, fostering the development of networks and

future collaborative relationships, and raising our international scholarly standing.

As the Institute has grown, so has our infrastructure and staffing. In 2016, the Institute acquired dedicated office space within the University, which provides space for four researchers, a meeting room, and Institute staff (the part time Director, Deputy Director, and ISS21 Research Coordinator). Our membership continues to grow; we currently have 150 members across the University from 19 Schools/Departments in each of UCC's four Colleges. Ensuring that the Institute's spatial infrastructure keeps pace with the demands of a growing, vibrant, research community represents an on-going challenge as we move into the future.



WHAT PREOCCUPIES US

ISS21 research coalesces around a number of thematic specialisms reflected in its 10 interdisciplinary research clusters, including: Migration and Integration; Research for Civil Society and Social Action (REACT); Genders, Sexualities and Families; Disability and Mental Health; Children and Young People; Ageing; Caring; Educating for the Professions; and Poverties, Social Justice and Inequalities. In addition, the Institute acts as a dynamic space to host or co-host individual research projects and collaborations which may emerge independently of the clusters. Through a process of consultation with ISS21 members and other stakeholders, we have identified four 'preoccupations' that unify the work of ISS21 projects, research clusters and members, and which will guide and shape our priorities over the period of this Strategic Plan (2019-2024).

COLLECTIVE FUTURES: TOWARDS JUST AND LIVEABLE SOCIETIES

We are concerned with exploring societal change, and asking critical questions about the kind of future societies we want to live in. Whether in the context of healthcare or housing provision, the future of our environment, the integration of migrant children in schools, or indeed, how Ireland treats its dead, ISS21 researchers reflect on the past and envision the future by exploring what makes a more just and liveable society. Drawing on diverse theoretical approaches and engagement with multiple publics, we ask critical, value-based questions about some of the contemporary challenges facing our society: What are the implications of new technologies for society and human relations? What does a gender equitable society look like? How can we foster political participation in democratic societies?

CONTEMPORARY SOCIALITIES: IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE AND EVERYDAY LIVES

ISS21 researchers are concerned with exploring the dynamics and complexities of human relations and contemporary socialities, whether in relation to the lifecourse, gender, family and sexuality, disability and mental health, or migration and mobility. Our research explores everyday subjectivities, identities, and interdependencies, from living as a carer in Irish society, to the experiences of people with disabilities, and the lived experience of energy consumption. We recognise the ways in which social difference becomes a marker for in/equality and marginalisation, and seek to connect individuals' lives with broader social, political and economic structures and dynamics happening at local, national and international scales.

POLICY, PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

ISS21's research focuses on exploring what it means to be a citizen, on processes of civic and political participation, and policy impacts and processes. Our research exposes the consequences of policy on society and people's everyday lives, engages with different voices, and has pioneered approaches to the participation of different groups in policy-making processes, including children and young people. ISS21 researchers work closely with government policymakers, NGOs and community and voluntary organisations in analysing the impacts of policy and contributing to research which evaluates and changes policy landscapes.

INNOVATIVE, CREATIVE RESEARCH PRAXIS

Drawing on our interdisciplinary expertise and collaboration, ISS21 researchers are committed to exploring innovative methodological approaches in the social sciences, and fostering engaged research approaches with multiple publics and research partners, including creative and inclusive approaches. The Institute has particular strengths in qualitative, creative and participatory research approaches, and we strive to develop a culture of reflexivity and methodological imagination in our research praxis.



OUR ROLE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

As a research institute, ISS21's work fulfils a vital role in addressing some key strategic goals of University College Cork, as they are expressed in both the University Strategic Plan 2017-2022 and the Research and Innovation Strategic Plan (2017-2022). By creating an enabling, energising and connecting space for social science research within the University, and a platform for attracting research funding, ISS21 has a key role to play in establishing

UCC as 'Ireland's leading research-performing institution', which prioritises research excellence and societal impact. Our research preoccupations speak directly to many of the Strategic Research Priorities highlighted by the University, including Culture, Society, Rights and Identities, Health and Well-being and Sustainability and Climate Action. Through projects such as GENOVATE, and Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

(IHREC)-funded research which considers the implications of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in the context of Deaf awareness, for example, we also conduct research which seeks to build the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda. We are involved in initiatives to develop and critically evaluate research excellence, integrity, and impact, and have particular strengths in integrating gender equality and diversity in the design and conduct of research. Through our co-produced research with multiple stakeholders, including national and local community organisations and

groups, our work actively contributes towards UCC's strategic goal to 'create value for our community', and to develop imaginative forms of civic engagement. Through collaborative research processes, the impacts of Institute research have been felt in multiple spheres, including changes to, and development of, policy and/or legislation, support for community advocacy, and processes of community-building. Our research has been cited in the Dáil, in policy documents, and in the media, and we are committed to making our research accessible to different audiences. To that end, our research outputs are many

and varied: from research reports, to research summaries, policy briefings, academic journal articles, books and short films. Through our research clusters, hosting of events, workshops and Masterclasses, we also contribute to UCC's academic strategy that places research-led teaching at its core, and seeks to build synergies between the University's research centres and Schools and Departments. Over the past ten years, the Institute has made a significant contribution to postgraduate and doctoral education in the social sciences, and we continue to develop these opportunities. Through our engagement with students, we seek to elucidate the value of research-based thinking in the social sciences, expose students to novel and creative research approaches, and contribute to building the next generation of social science researchers.



OUR VISION

To be a leading centre in Ireland for imaginative, interdisciplinary and impactful social science research, responsive to the challenges and practices of life in 21st century society.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to generate imaginative, interdisciplinary, impactful social science research knowledge/s and methodologies to illuminate and respond to the complexities and challenges of 21st century society. By acting as a platform for attracting external grant funding, and providing an enabling, energising and connecting space for social science researchers that fosters and accelerates the development of interdisciplinary research networks and collaborations, ISS21 builds UCC's social science research capacity to respond to demands for reflexive forms of knowledge, innovative research practices, critical intellectual debate, and public engagement.



OUR VALUES

ISS21 is underpinned by core values and beliefs that shape our vision and mission, and our everyday work. **Collaboration** is core to how we work within the Institute and the University - across disciplines, Schools and Departments - but also with our external partners, stakeholders and funders.

We strive to develop supportive, enduring relationships based around an openness that facilitates the sharing and development of ideas and approaches.

We aspire to be **progressive** in the research we conduct, whether in pushing the boundaries of intellectual debate, or developing research methodologies. We are committed to research that sets agendas and is driven by bottom-up, critical questions; **creativity** also lies at the heart of a forward thinking, innovative social science able to address fundamental concepts and conduct basic research, as well as engage with the 'issues of the day'. Through our reflective, theoretical engagement, we seek to carve out a space for slow scholarship, bring a critical eye to the framing of social issues and practices, and ask questions about the normative and ethical assumptions that underpin ways of being and living in the 21st century.

We are committed to pursuing excellence in the research that we carry out and the outputs we produce, cognisant of national

and international research and academic quality benchmarks. As a research institute, we have a commitment to the pursuit of **excellence** in research practice, including ethical principles, and are actively contributing to the development of work around research **integrity** through our funded research.

We strive to be **inclusive** in the research we conduct, and the way that we work. Much of our work emerges from, or directly responds to, issues of equality, diversity and inclusion in Irish, European and global societies. We have pioneered research and enquiry on gender equality in higher education, the rights of people with disabilities, and integration of migrant groups in Irish society, to name but a few.

We strive to place equality, diversity and inclusion issues centre stage in the work that we do, and ways that we do it, for example through collaborations with UCC's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Unit and national agencies concerned with human rights.

OUR PRIORITIES 2019-2024

PRIORITY 1 : COLLABORATE

ISS21's activities have been built on a collaborative dynamic which builds networks within and between disciplines and Colleges in the University, but also crucially with a range of stakeholders outside UCC. The Institute has pioneered co-creative research approaches with community and voluntary organisations, as well as engaged with policymakers and policy-oriented research in many of its thematic specialisms; it has also collaborated with EU and international academic partners on numerous funded research projects. We view collaboration as vital in thinking about the impact that the Institute has in its work, and the role that it seeks to play in the Irish, European and international social sciences research sphere. We aim to strengthen existing collaborations and identify new opportunities for engagement and collaboration within and outside the University, in pioneering creative and impactful social science research knowledge and praxis.

KEY ACTIONS

- Continue to nurture connections between researchers and across disciplines within ISS21 by providing a vibrant space for networking, exchange, dialogue and team-building.
- Continue to evolve and support the collaborative ISS21 research clusters in their work through the ISS21 Small Grants Scheme, publicising cluster work, events and outputs, and supporting cluster members to apply for research funding in their thematic area.
- Identify and develop strategic collaborations with cognate research centres and institutes within and outside UCC, to support interdisciplinary approaches to issues of mutual research concern. Through its membership of the Irish Social Sciences Platform, ISS21 will continue to collaborate with other social sciences institutes in Irish HEIs.
- Continue to develop strong networks and collaborations with community organisations and partners, and to pioneer engaged, co-created social scientific research approaches and methodologies.

- Strengthen the Institute's engagement and collaboration with policymakers and policy-making bodies to ensure ISS21 research contributes to policy debate and change in areas relevant to the Institute's thematic specialisms.
- Through the ISS21 clusters and showcase events, bring together key stakeholders including academics, policymakers, community organisations, and the public in key thematic areas.
- Advocate for and build the collaborative governance structure of the Institute to support the on-going engagement of staff from multiple Schools, Departments and Colleges in the University.
- Contribute to internationalisation by strengthening ISS21's engagement with international research partners.

PRIORITY 2 : CREATE

Core to the vision and mission of ISS21 is a commitment to social science research which fosters innovation, imagination and creativity in exploring some of the key challenges and complexities of 21st century society; our research has demonstrated the benefits and impact of innovative, creative social science methodologies, as well as interdisciplinary theoretical innovation. Following UCC's aim to be a centre for creativity and creative thinking, and cognisant of moves towards inter- and trans- disciplinary in national and international



funding calls, our aim is to continue to develop as a dynamic, creative research space that facilitates and consolidates innovation through our interdisciplinary research clusters, and actively initiates opportunities for everyday creativity in social science research.

KEY ACTIONS

- Establish a Creative Social Science Methods Hub within the Institute to develop capacity and expertise around innovative, creative, and participative social science methodologies in UCC and Ireland, and demonstrate the value and significance of these methodologies to a range of stakeholders and audiences.
- Host an annual ISS21 interdisciplinary Masterclass on a critical concept or set of methodologies that attracts international speakers, and may be offered as training for postgraduate researchers and/or for CPD.
- Strategically identify and apply for funding initiatives which seek to foster collaborations between social sciences, arts and STEM disciplines.
- Drawing from ISS21's interdisciplinary membership base and expertise, initiate new (including cross-cluster) responses to grant calls which require inter and trans-disciplinary, creative, approaches in the social sciences.

PRIORITY 3 : CAPACITY BUILD

ISS21 will continue to build and develop UCC's interdisciplinary social science research capacity through its people and infrastructure. The Institute aims to create a dynamic, supportive research culture and environment for its members, PIs, and research staff, by providing ongoing support to staff in applying for research funding, preparing research funding applications, developing research collaborations within and outside the University and fostering knowledge exchange between members. Through its funded research projects and initiatives such as Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, ISS21 will seek to attract excellent, interdisciplinary researchers in areas related to its key thematic specialisms.

Over the next five years, the Institute will also explore the potential for spaces and infrastructure that will make realisable ISS21's vision to be a leader in imaginative,

interdisciplinary social science research in Ireland. Developing and sustaining both our people and infrastructure is predicated upon the Institute's continuing success at research grant capture. Working with our members, we will seek to grow and diversify the Institute's funding base, by strategically identifying and targeting particular research funding programmes, including Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, and training initiatives such as other less well-known funding programmes which speak to the thematic specialisms of the Institute.

KEY ACTIONS

- Identify and strategically target a range of funding programmes, including Horizon 2020 and training initiatives such as Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.
- Through the role of the ISS21 Research Coordinator, and in conjunction with University and College research support services, continue to support ISS21 members to apply for diverse forms of research funding.
- Increase the number of research grant applications made by the Institute, including European research funding applications.
- Recruit excellent researchers with expertise in the Institute's thematic specialisms.
- Explore the potential of the Institute to host training workshops aimed at supporting staff around research grant applications, social science methodologies and theoretical innovation.
- Provide a supportive and enabling environment for research staff.
- Implement a mentoring scheme for ISS21 research staff tied to the Institute.
- Ensure ISS21 has an appropriate, centrally-located and dedicated university space for accommodating Institute staff and activities as it expands.
- Ensure the positions of ISS21 Director and Research Coordinator are sustained and embedded.

PRIORITY 4 : COMMUNICATE

A key goal of this Strategic Plan is to communicate the work of ISS21, in order to significantly increase the internal and external profile and identity of the Institute as a centre for excellence in imaginative, interdisciplinary and impactful social science research. Our goal is to make visible and communicate the relevance of ISS21 research and its impacts to multiple audiences, to raise awareness of our research preoccupations and specialisms, promote access to our research outputs, and position ourselves as a key voice advocating for interdisciplinary social science knowledge and research in Ireland.

KEY ACTIONS

- Increase efforts to collate, make visible and promote access to the Institute's range of high quality knowledge outputs by developing a database of ISS21-related publications that can be accessed via UCC's institutional research repository, CORA, the ISS21 website, and other mechanisms.
- Support Institute staff and members to target and increase their number and range of publications in international peer-review journals and other publication outlets.
- Increase internal and external awareness of ISS21 by ensuring the Institute is cited on relevant research publications and other outputs, and is represented on key University committees/fora, as well as national and international platforms and policy bodies (such as the Irish Social Sciences Platform).
- Develop a targeted external communication and media strategy that raises awareness of the Institute's key research specialisms, contribution and impacts, amongst academic networks, other research centres/institutes, policymakers, funders, community organisations and other stakeholders.
- Host 'open house' events, conferences and workshops within UCC, which aim to promote the work of the Institute both within and outside the University.
- Continue to develop a coherent visual identity for the Institute, through the re-design of the ISS21 logo, website and social media platforms.





Institute
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