

University College Cork



European Policy Statement 2021-2027

Overall Strategy

University College Cork is a comprehensive research-intensive, student-centred, and international institution located in Cork, Ireland's second city, near the south coast of Ireland. UCC provides the full range of disciplines to serve regional, national and international needs. There are over 21,000 students including 2,800 Adult Continuing Education students, 15,000 in undergraduate programmes and 4,400 engaged in postgraduate study and research. UCC's diverse student body includes 3,300 international students representing over 100 countries worldwide. UCC's educational outreach extends across over 40 locations nationwide. The university is one of the larger employers in the region with a staff of 2,800.

Since 2012 the four policy objectives of UCC's internationalisation efforts have been:

1. To become a pluralist, multicultural, yet Irish campus community
2. To strengthen our strategic alliances and partnerships
3. To enhance the bi-directional mobility of our campus community
4. To create an international, intercultural educational ethos

The commitment to internationalisation is set out in the university's strategic plan. In the current plan, *Independent Thinking, Shared Ambition*, (2017-2022), the institution committed itself:

- To embed internationalisation more deeply and sustainably into the university's identity by increasing the quantity, quality and diversity of international students, enabling the increased internationalisation of the curriculum and strengthening the culture of global mobility, inbound and outbound, for students and staff.
- To increase the number of students studying abroad in the EU Erasmus programme and with exchange partners outside the EU in UCC's wide range of partner institutions worldwide.

In addition, under UCC's first Academic Strategy (2018-2022) the connected curriculum framework identifies 'Global Reach' as one of its components. The emphasis on global reach recognises that deep understanding emerges from learning experiences that bring transnational perspectives to our curriculum and that internationalisation is embedded in the UCC learning environment.

UCC has been actively engaged in the various iterations of the Erasmus programme since the late 1980s. Participation in the programme and commitment to the wider objectives of EU policy in relation to the field of education have been key factors in internationalising the university and contributing to its modernisation.

Erasmus contributes to UCC's strategic internationalisation objectives by expanding our multicultural diversity, by increasing our international reach, and by expanding mobility opportunities.

High-achieving, comprehensive universities like UCC, recognise the need for students and staff to engage with peers from different cultures and academic systems. In the current context, the strength and unity of the European Union, and collaboration between states and citizens within the EU and the EEA, remains of paramount importance. Thus, by bringing European students and staff to UCC, and reciprocally sending UCC students and staff abroad, we boost the range of cultural/national perspectives that are essential for critical enquiry and cross-cultural competency. By reducing the costs and the complexity of mobility, the Erasmus programme enables access to a greater number of participants, including those from socio-economic groups who may not otherwise have the opportunity to study abroad.

Fostering collaboration between like-minded institutions remains a key element of maintaining UCC's reputation and reach globally. With a large, structured network of institutions, the Erasmus programme provides opportunities and incentives to cooperate with a range of quality universities across the European Union, and with a range of institutions in countries outside the EU under International Credit Mobility (ICM) and through Key Action 2 (KA2) activities. Across multiple dimensions — research, mobility, and shared practices, among others — cooperation with Erasmus network partners strengthens UCC's breadth, reach, and scope.

Particularly for institutions on the island of Ireland, inclusion in initiatives that bring together the resources and strengths of the much larger EU, increases our potential. Erasmus actions encourage UCC to think and act in larger, regional contexts. Furthermore, UCC's participation in a number of Erasmus projects has assisted in bolstering the reputation of UCC amongst many institutions, and activities under KA2, have given the university the capacity for informed and creative engagement on global issues and challenges. All competitive universities must continuously reinforce their brand and cultivate familiarity with their strengths. Both directly and indirectly, the Erasmus programme is of value to UCC in this effort.

The Erasmus programme has been a key component in contributing to the emergence of a European Education Area and participation in the programme has supported the modernisation agenda at UCC:

- ECTS is the credit accumulation system used by the university. Its adoption has facilitated the implementation of a semesterised system at UCC and the mutual recognition of diplomas.
- Many of the university's existing programmes incorporate either a compulsory or optional study period or work placement abroad.
- The university is committed to increasing the proportion of the student cohort studying a foreign language, in any capacity, as part of their programme, to 20% by 2026.
- UCC's commitment to access and widening participation in higher education has been a central feature of UCC's strategic plans to date. By 2022 UCC aims to achieve 26% of its student intake through access admission routes (from 23% in 2018).
- The university's Graduate Attributes programme reflects key aspects of the 'Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning': personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion.
- European Universities Alliances are a key pillar of the European Education Area initiative and UCC's application under the 2nd call, indicates the university's commitment to the concept and reality of the EEA.
- UCC has implemented a digital education action plan which has seen the procurement of a new Virtual Learning Environment and the development of a Digital Hub for students. The former will enhance the university's ability to deliver online learning and teaching and to provide blended learning opportunities under the new programme. The latter was established during 2019 to meet an ever increasing expectation of 'anytime, anywhere' online services for students, applicants and graduates. The university has also been to the forefront in utilising the tools developed to administer the Erasmus programme, such as the online mobility tool.
- The participation by UCC in Erasmus since the establishment of the programme has, along with involvement in other EU programmes such as HORIZON 2020, and the wider benefits of EU membership, helped inculcate amongst our students and staff, a strong sense of their identity as Europeans and of the continent's heritage and culture. In the context of the current political and socio-economic challenges facing the EU, the commitment to European values is more important than ever.

In participating in the new Erasmus programme, which will run from 2021 to 2027, UCC will pursue the following objectives:

Under Key Action 1 (KA1) 'Learning Mobility':

- To increase the number of students and staff mobilising within Europe and in partner countries

Under Key Action 2 (KA2) 'Cooperation among Organisations and Institutions':

- To support innovative practice and joint initiatives to promote cooperation, peer learning, and exchanges of experiences
- To support the sustainable development of partner countries in the field of higher education
- To contribute to the development of joint long-term strategies for top-quality education, research and innovation, based on a common vision and shared values
- To foster excellence and world-wide internationalisation of higher education institutions via study programmes, at master course level, jointly delivered and jointly recognised by HEIs
- To contribute to social cohesion across Europe

Under Key Action 3 ‘Support for Policy Reform’:

- To support and participate, where appropriate, in activities in relation to policy reform

The Erasmus Commission has identified a number of key priorities, which will be implemented as part of the new Erasmus programme. These priorities are:

- To undertake the necessary steps to implement digital mobility management in line with the technical standards of the European Student Card Initiative.
- To implement and promote environmentally friendly practices in all activities relating to the programme
- To encourage the participation of individuals with fewer opportunities in the programme
- To promote civic engagement and encourage staff to get involved as active citizens, before, during and after their participation in a mobility or project.

These types of practices/actions are already part of our educational, digital and social capital, and UCC will continue to champion them as the university fully subscribes to the EU Commission’s view that ‘higher education institutions are not ivory towers, but civic minded learning communities connected to their communities’.