SECURING OUR FUTURE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028

STRATEGIC REFRESH OCTOBER 2026

As University College Cork passed the mid-way point of the implementation of its Strategic Plan 2023-2028 *Securing Our Future*, a review was initiated by Governing Authority. In a rapidly changing higher education and research landscape shaped by Artificial Intelligence, changing workforce needs and ongoing funding constraints, it was timely to undertake a refresh of the Plan to ensure agility and relevance to the contemporary landscape.

Since its launch in February 2023, UCC has realised priority milestones under the five Goals of the Strategic Plan 2023-2028 *Securing Our Future* (below). Record research funding has surpassed our Horizon Europe target two years ahead of schedule, including ten new ERC awards and a leadership role in three new Rinn Centres. Fourteen new spin-out companies are translating UCC research to societal impact. Our academic mission has been advanced through the launch of innovative earn-and-learn pathways, as well as research institutes and teaching academies including the Sustainability Institute, Futures Humanities Institute and the AI Academy. Collectively, these have bolstered our international reputation: we have achieved a Silver Athena Swan Award and risen to 220th in the QS and 2nd in the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings and became Europe's first university to achieve STARS Platinum accreditation.

The strategic refresh was developed with significant input from the UCC community through the first half of 2026, which produced updated priorities for each of the Strategic Plan Goals for 2026 to 2028. Our mission and goals are enduring, with the refresh focussing on the priority actions needed to deliver those, incorporating the cross-cutting theme of Artificial Intelligence. The refresh was approved by Governing Authority in October 2026.

OUR VISION

Connect and empower people to create knowledge that shapes a sustainable and inclusive world.

OUR MISSION

Create and sustain an inclusive environment and culture to enable transformative research and learning for the enrichment of society and stewardship of our planet.

OUR VALUES

Compassion; Agility; Integrity; Respect; Discovery; Equity; Accountability; Sustainability.

Strategic Goals

Research and Innovation
Deliver impactful research and innovation.

Student Success
Provide a student-centred, inclusive and digitally enhanced student experience.

Global Engagement
Grow UCC's international reach to amplify our global impact.

Our Staff, Our Culture
Implement a progressive and inclusive People and Culture Plan.

Our Place, Our Footprint
Reform our practices to meet our sustainability and climate action goals.

Strategic Enablers

- People, Wellbeing and EDI
- Effective Communications
- Resources
- Philanthropy and Stakeholder Engagement
- Operational Excellence
- Strategic Partnerships
- Digital Capabilities and Quality Data
- Governance

PRESIDENT'S PRIORITY ACTIONS 2026-2028

As an overarching priority across all Goals and priority actions, we will embed Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a strategic enabler, building institutional capability and leveraging its transformative potential to drive impact, while proactively managing associated risks to ensure responsible, ethical, and secure adoption across all goals in the Strategic Plan. The President's top priority specific actions to 2028 are to:

1. Accelerate improvement in select global rankings by prioritising and actioning key areas for improvement including student:staff ratio, research citation performance and improved academic reputation through strategic research communications and brand campaigns, to achieve top 200 ranking by 2028.
2. Achieve a repeatable minimum of 1% net financial surplus annually by the implementation of measures including increased net income and the launch of a fundraising campaign as well as cost avoidance measures and resource optimisation.
3. Advance the *Capital Development Plan* with a particular focus on the expansion of the Tyndall National Institute, the construction of the Cork University School Building and Clinical Medical School, and the refurbishment of the Kane Building and Granary Theatre.
4. Implement the *Academic Plan 2026-2028*, launch the externally focused 'Lifelong Learning UCC' entity, provide universal student access to an entrepreneurship module and achieve a national leading position in the creation of spin-out companies arising from our research.
5. Reduce organisational complexity through streamlining processes and structures, enabling faster decision-making, achieve greater efficiency and enhanced outcomes for students, staff and partners. This will be delivered by successfully executing on the business transformation programme objectives in 2027 and 2028.



GOAL 1: RESEARCH & INNOVATION

1. Implement the UCC Futures framework to enhance research competitiveness:
   - At least five UCC Futures Institutes launched, including the Boole Institute.
   - Maximise draw-down from the Inspire Research Infrastructure Programme, supporting the establishment of key core facilities with collated infrastructure in dedicated space, technical support and leadership.
   - Roll out of Phase 2 of the Pure Research Information System.
2. Embed cluster hiring as the approach to academic recruitment, with focus across UCC Futures areas and campaigns with strategic focus, including innovation.
3. Develop and mobilise an action plan for the use of AI in research and innovation.
4. Develop and embed guidelines on Research Security and Defence-related research.
5. Develop and formalise the Institutional Engaged Research Strategy.
6. Develop a strategic research communications framework, with an aligned institutional campaign to support brand messaging and ranking outcomes.
7. Increase the number of ERC awards secured to 20.
8. Increase the annual intake of new doctoral students to 383; formalise the Doctoral Institute (Institute in this regard is a physical/virtual hub for the coordination of doctoral education activities and to lead the delivery of strategic actions on doctoral education) and develop the institutional mechanisms for Research Ireland's Empower programme.
9. Create an innovation culture and entrepreneurial campus, underpinned by an ethos of creativity and discovery:
   - Develop the institutional position on Business Engagement and an engagement plan to improve awareness of consultancy supports to grow activity to 35 contracts annually.
   - Increase research collaboration with industry by 10% through fully funded and targeted projects and by aligning with the Horizon Europe FP10 agenda.
   - Launch 12 new spin-out companies in 2027 and 2028 (in addition to those executed in 2026) and deliver the Entrepreneurship Start-up Hub.
   - Deliver a scoping exercise, in collaboration with the Cork City Futures Group, to explore the viability of proposed initiatives.



GOAL 2: STUDENT SUCCESS

1. Create and launch the externally focused 'Lifelong Learning UCC' (LLL UCC) to deliver greater coherence and to integrate the provision of flexible learning, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), digital badges and micro-credentials to meet societal, regional and national development goals for all students. Support LLL UCC with a coherent lifelong learning strategy relevant to regional needs and executive education.
2. Operationalise the ULT-approved Governance Structures for Universal Design (UD) with establishment of the UD Unit and commencement of the Steering Group and Working Groups in the four domains of: Learning & Teaching; Supports Services & Social Engagement; Physical Environment; and Digital Environment. Develop the methodology for mapping UD at UCC and indicators to monitor impact of UD actions in line with international best practice.
3. Strengthen entrepreneurial skills and capabilities by ensuring all students have access to entrepreneurship learning opportunities. Develop a digital "Learning to Learn" capability module focused on building core transversal capabilities, including AI literacies, that support academic success and lifelong learning. Implement the enhanced *Digital Education Plan* inclusive of AI.
4. Lead by the Academic Leadership Forum, review UCC's portfolio of programmes, including rationalising the curriculum at a programme and module level, through analysis of demand data, currency and diversity of programme portfolio in the context of an AI-transformed workplace.
5. Develop innovative new programmes in areas of emerging importance informed by ground-breaking research, including Generative AI.
6. Develop and implement a university-wide evidence-informed approach to embedding AI fluency, employability, and future-focused human skills into curriculum design. Produce a 'heatmap' of AI impact to assess progress across programmes. Begin with a pilot across the College of Business & Law to:
   - Strengthen employer-informed curriculum design.
   - Embed AI literacy and ethical AI capability into graduate outcomes.
   - Assess programme-level exposure and preparedness for AI disruption and transformation.
   - Support Programme Directors in reviewing the curriculum through an AI-readiness lens.
   - Identify and showcase institutional best practice.
   - Create a scalable framework for rollout across all UCC colleges.
7. Establish a university-wide initiative on "Future Skills, AI and human-centred integration Human Capability Initiative" (2026–2028) coordinated through the Office of the Vice President for Learning and Teaching, to embed AI and digital literacies, centring human capabilities such as empathy, artistic and critical thinking human premium capabilities, and enabling lifelong and life-wide learning pathways and skills across curriculum, assessment, and student capability frameworks. This initiative will be aligned to student success, employer demand and measurable graduate outcomes to maintain graduate employability rates above 95%. It will also encourage enhanced engagement of students with the Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Learning Hub and AI Fluency course (20% increase) and 100% staff engagement in AI training in line with the European AI Act.
8. Complete an annual report for the "Securing our Future" *Academic Plan 2026-2028* at the end of each academic year, approved by the Academic Leadership Forum. The annual reports will summarise progress on key actions, achievements and challenges across five priority areas:
   - Widening Access and diversifying student cohorts.
   - Embedding inclusion across our learning and assessment.
   - Enhancing our research and innovation culture.
   - Strengthening and developing curricula and quality assurance systems.
   - Empowering academic excellence and advancement for staff.

GOAL 3: GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

1. Develop and implement a strategic partnership framework, including strategic research partnerships, working with the world's leading universities and networks, including our European University Alliance, to advance our global ambition, including opportunities to enhance our research, reputation and to attract talent.
2. Implement an ambitious programme for Transnational Education (TNE) that delivers excellent education overseas, in line with our key strengths and interests.
3. Accelerate UCC's improved position in select global rankings by prioritising and actioning key areas for improvement including student:staff ratio and research reputation through strategic research communications and brand campaigns to achieve top 200 ranking.
4. Implement a transformative enrolment planning process at an institutional level, adopting a real-time, market-informed, data-led approach that enables UCC to take a strategic approach to student recruitment attracting excellence, achieving diversity and delivering financial sustainability, using innovative and responsible AI-informed approaches to student recruitment and conversion.
5. Implement the refreshed *Arts & Culture Plan*, establishing UCC's reputation as a national leader with distinctive cultural assets, a creative community and signature heritage and artistic strengths.
6. Implement a programme of work to protect the university from geopolitical risk, including research security, political instability, climate change and economic shocks.
7. Develop a strategic global network of distinguished international individuals through honorary appointments, visiting fellowships, advisory groups and other formal affiliations, strengthening UCC's academic, research, cultural and international connections.
8. Implement a funded programme to deliver on our University of Sanctuary commitments in line with University values and our commitment to global citizenship.



GOAL 4: OUR STAFF, OUR CULTURE

1. Implement a modern, accessible, and integrated performance and development framework that aligns individual contribution and growth with UCC's strategic priorities, supports high performance, and enables meaningful career and professional development discussions.
2. Strengthen organisational effectiveness through a strategic review of UCC's organisational structures, implementing organisational design approaches that simplify ways of working, enhance cross-college and cross-school collaboration, and support a more agile, connected, and future ready university.
3. Develop and embed a university-wide workforce planning and resourcing framework that aligns talent, capability, and succession planning with institutional priorities and future workforce needs, supporting a flexible, diverse, and sustainable workforce.
4. Develop and deliver an integrated learning and development framework that builds leadership, management, professional, digital, AI, and organisational capabilities, enabling our people to contribute, grow and thrive in a changing higher education environment.
5. Work with the Business Transformation Office to deliver the Business Optimisation Programme to modernise People & Culture (and Finance) operations through streamlined processes, digital enablement, service excellence and continuous improvement, enhancing organisational effectiveness, user experience, and value delivery across the University.



GOAL 5: OUR PLACE, OUR FOOTPRINT

1. Achieve a repeatable minimum of 1% net financial surplus annually. Develop a 5-year forecast for the University to support the achievement of the 1% surplus.
2. Deliver on the Roadmap of Digital Investments for 2026/27 and 2027/28, funded by the investment of €30m for the *Digital Strategy Capital Plan 2025/26 – 2029/30*:
   - Research Digital Transformation Programme (the PURE Research IT system, Research Infrastructure, Library System).
   - Student Digital Services Programme.
   - AI Roadmap, application modernisation, Data Services Programme.
   - Cyber Security Programme including Cy Fundamental Certification by September 2027.
   - Critical Infrastructure and Lifecycle Programme (Network, Wi-Fi, Datacentre, Web, Classroom technology.
3. Advance delivery of the five-year *Capital Development Plan* including the new Tyndall National Institute building on the North Mall Campus, a new on-campus Cork University Business School (CUBS) building, refurbishment of the Kane Building, modernisation of Cork University Dental School and Hospital (including a location for the Dental Outreach facility), new outdoor sports facilities including commencement of the Sports Park at Curraheen Road and a new Clinical Medical School on the CUH campus. Improve space utilisation, identify property for divestiture where appropriate, and consider the revitalisation of the Granary Theatre, a related Creative Hub and support emerging initiatives from the Cork City Futures Group where additional funding is made available in advance. Work with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on increasing our supply of affordable student beds by at least 500.
4. Implement UCC's *Sustainability & Climate Action Plan*, led by the Office of Sustainability & Climate Action, to deliver our zero-waste and carbon-neutral targets, including developing an action plan for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from international travel, commuting and procurement (scope 3) and ensuring we are on track to meet our carbon emissions reduction target of 51% by 2030 relative to 2018 levels. Significantly increase UCC's contributions to thought leadership in sustainability locally, nationally and internationally, led by the Associate Vice-President of Sustainability, by publishing 100 media articles on sustainability, 20 keynote addresses to national and international sustainability conferences and delivering 10 high profile sustainability showcase events.



ENABLING THE STRATEGY

1. Achieve a step change in alumni and stakeholder engagement through new segmented and targeted engagement programmes that deliver clearly articulated mutual benefits, including updating the Alumni database, considering a UCC Passport to encourage further engagement with alumni, and developing a strategic plan for the involvement of internationally recognised experts in UCC events and projects.
2. Sustain and grow philanthropic income and identify the top-priority projects for a strategic fundraising campaign and launch that campaign by 2028.
3. Recruit, support and steward a network of international alumni ambassadors (volunteers) to support philanthropy, brand, reputation, global engagement and international recruitment.
4. Embed a culture of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging in UCC, embracing our differences as a key institutional strength by:
   - Delivering the *Belonging at UCC: Equality Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2025-2028* to achieve full compliance with Public Sector Duty and meet 70% of Athena Swan Silver targets by 2028.
   - Delivering the 2028 Values & Culture EDI Staff Survey to achieve a 46% response rate and 80% Values Lived Score.

