SECURING
OUR FUTURE

2023
- 2028

UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023–2028
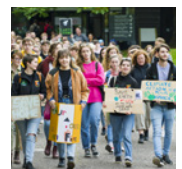
"

Like a flock of starlings, human systems are connected, complex and adaptive, with an extraordinary ability to synchronise with each other. Leadership, in the context of a starling murmuration, is inclusive, distributed, and wholly reliant on effective and multi-directional communication.

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PROFESSOR JOHN O'HALLORAN
President

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President's Foreword

I am excited to present the University College Cork Strategic Plan 2023–2028. This plan is the result of deep stakeholder engagement and an ambitious mindset. It is a truly collaborative effort which has been developed by, and for, us all.

UCC is operating in a challenging national and international environment shaped by political, economic, social, technological, legal, cultural and demographic changes. The pace of societal change is unprecedented and accelerating. *Securing Our Future: UCC Strategic Plan 2023–2028* has been developed to position the University optimally in this environment of rapid change and reflects our commitment to a sustainable future for our people, planet and university.

Since its foundation in 1845, UCC has experienced and responded to many periods of challenge and change. How we respond to the challenges and opportunities ahead must be driven by our core institutional values. This plan identifies eight core values which emerged from broad consultation across our community. These serve as a guide for our actions, behaviours and culture, and I encourage all members of our community to live them and use them to support decisions.

As a leading research university, we are acutely aware of the importance of creativity, ambition and discovery to support innovation. In the coming years, we will implement a step change in research, cultivating a distinctive research reputation in signature areas of excellence to address global grand challenges. We will do this in partnership with stakeholders to maximise our impact at regional, national and international levels. We will also continue to work to shape national policy to ensure that our higher education system can continue to enhance Ireland's international reputation.

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Core to our purpose as a university is the delivery of a relevant, dynamic and inclusive learning experience for all students. As we emerge from the significant challenges of recent years, we will embrace the opportunity to reimagine the work environment and the student experience. We will focus on delivering a comprehensive and research-led *Connected Curriculum,*

with greater specialisation and renowned postgraduate programmes, becoming the university of choice for postgraduate study in signature areas of excellence.
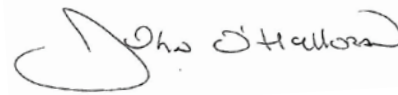
Our staff and students are central to our success. We care about their wellbeing and are committed to providing a safe environment that celebrates diversity and enables our people to grow and flourish. We will embed fairness, inclusivity, equal opportunities and equity for all students and staff. We will develop support frameworks for staff and students as they transition in, through and out of the University. We consider it a priority to attract, support and retain talented staff by continuing to foster a positive working environment, fully aligned with our values.

Our planet is facing the most significant natural resource and environmental challenges of its history. It is incumbent on universities to act, to research, to educate, to lead and to develop leaders to tackle climate change and create a sustainable future for us all. Changes to our campus spaces, both physical and virtual, will offer further opportunity to maximise their flexibility and sustainability and enable us to deliver more inclusive and dynamic learning and teaching. We view UCC's leadership and achievements to date as a strong base from which to build and grow, and we will continue to be responsive and agile.

As an ornithologist, I have always been intrigued by starling murmurations. Like a flock of starlings, human systems are connected, complex and adaptive, with an extraordinary ability to synchronise with each other. Leadership, in the context of a starling murmuration, is inclusive, distributed, and wholly reliant on effective and multi-directional communication. Every bird is afforded the opportunity to lead and to follow when appropriate. For me, this is a fitting metaphor for the UCC community, conjuring the sense of interconnectedness, adaptability, diversity and strength in unison. Collectively, these birds transform the space they occupy, they are a mesmerising wonder, a pulsating, harmonised whole; they seemingly defy the laws of nature while defining nature itself. My vision for UCC is that we are empowered as individuals, but working as a connected collective on a shared mission to deliver transformative research, disseminate knowledge and advance learning for the enrichment of society and stewardship of our planet. I look forward to working together to deliver the goals of this plan and find new ways to achieve collective impact and build a community where everyone has a place.

I am grateful to the many colleagues and stakeholders who so meaningfully engaged in the consultation and feedback processes that informed the development of this plan, ensuring that it reflects our shared vision for the future. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the work of the Strategy Coordination Group who led the process of preparing this plan, which was approved by UCC's Governing Body in December 2022.

PROFESSOR JOHN O'HALLORAN
President

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Introduction

UCC is a comprehensive research-based globally oriented university with over 24,000 students, 3,200 staff and over 200,000 alumni worldwide. Our student body includes 4,000 international students from 138 countries. UCC draws its identity from a diverse spread of community, education, health service, industry, arts and heritage relationships. We have developed an extensive range of partnerships worldwide which continue to inform our curriculum and our research.

This university is a place where every student experiences the transformative effect of higher education, regardless of their life stage or subject of study, to fulfil their potential and pursue their individual vision of success. We nurture talent through supporting, challenging and mentoring our students. Our dedicated Skills Centre strengthens core student learning with the development of transversal skills. We offer a wide range of scholarships and a distinctive Quercus Talented Students' Programme. We are committed to widening participation, equality, diversity and inclusion. Up to a quarter of our incoming students come from underrepresented backgrounds and we have developed pathways from further education into 75% of our undergraduate programmes. In line with our *Student Success Framework*, a range of activities are in place to foster positive outcomes for students under the framework of *Begin, Belong and Become.*

Our success is derived from our staff body of 3,200 whose talent, drive and commitment enables us to be ambitious in our goals and achievements. Over a third of our academic staff are international, bringing a global lens to our research and teaching. We are committed to providing a diverse, inclusive and equitable place of work where all our staff belong and flourish. We are committed to implementing the Athena SWAN principles (2021) and other Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) related frameworks at an institutional level.

UCC is a leading research institution and is recognised as world-leading in many areas including food and the microbiome, sustainability and climate action, digital technologies, photonics and quantum physics. Several of Ireland's leading research centres are embedded in UCC. These include the Tyndall National Institute (microsystems, photonics, quantum computing, nanotechnology), APC Microbiome Ireland (gastrointestinal health, functional foods) and the Environmental Research Institute (climate action, sustainable society and circular economy). We promote excellence in all research areas and work to have a positive local and global impact through our research, teaching and engagement with society.

UCC is a connected university and during the implementation of our Academic Strategy (2018–2022), we introduced a *Connected Curriculum and Graduate Attributes Programme* with a view to engaging students in a distinctive education, where the curriculum is visibly linked to research, employability, civic engagement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), other disciplines and the wider world.

UCC is located at the second largest natural harbour in the world and in the heartland of Ireland's energy, food, pharmaceutical and information and communications technology industries. Over 25% of national energy needs are produced in Cork and seven out of ten of the world's top pharmaceutical companies and Ireland's top four food companies are located in Munster.

Our regional affinity is particularly crystallised in a mutual engagement with the diverse Irish-speaking districts in the region. We recognise the importance of the *Gaeltacht* districts of counties Waterford, Cork and Kerry in the University's heritage, and in constituting an integral part of the identity that it seeks to develop through creative partnerships. We recognise our Irish-language heritage as a critical element of the University's unique identity. We are committed to our obligations under the Official Languages Act (2003 and amendment, 2021) and to the promotion of the Irish language and the Gaeltacht as set out in the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030.*

We recognise that the 'third mission of universities', engagement, is at the heart of the future vision and policy direction for higher education in Ireland and Europe. Engaged research and innovation is central to addressing Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges as set out in *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy.* We promote this mission of collaboration and co-creation with society, embedding a university-wide culture where staff, students and external partners feel valued and supported to deliver engaged research, community-engaged learning and public engagement.

As the world's first Green Flag university, we are proud of our leadership in sustainability, and UCC is consistently

24k students from **138 countries** across the world

3.2k **staff** across the university

7th most **sustainable** university in the world (UI GreenMetric)

over **200k** UCC **alumni** worldwide

ranked in the top 10 most sustainable universities in the world in the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings.

This plan is aligned with the Universities Act (1997) and it is informed by international trends, national policy, the University's quality enhancement ethos, and by the implementation of best practice in governance, information compliance and risk management processes. It is also informed and developed on the basis of an extensive internal and external consultation process.

In setting out our goals, strategic approaches and priority actions to 2028, there is a necessary interdependence and complementarity across the goals, which are of equal priority. To achieve the successes envisaged by this plan, it will be fundamental to work collaboratively as one university community.

Our Vision

UCC connects and empowers people to create knowledge that shapes a sustainable and inclusive world.

Our Mission

UCC's mission is to 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

It is important to have distinct values for our organisation, so that they can guide everyday behaviours and decision-making. The core UCC values are:

C ompassion

A gility

I ntegrity

R espect

D iscovery

E quity

A ccountability

S ustainability

Our values are represented in the mnemonic *CAIRDEAS*, the Irish for 'friendship', as they underpin our relationships and engagement with the local and global UCC community and all our partners.

Strategic Goals

Goal One:
Research and Innovation

Deliver impactful research and innovation that addresses global grand challenges in signature areas of excellence through the *UCC Futures* framework, resulting in a distinctive research reputation.

Goal Two:
Student Success

Provide a student-centred, inclusive and digitally enhanced learning environment, a *Connected Curriculum* and an outstanding student experience, to prepare UCC graduates to make a positive impact.

Goal Three:
Global Engagement

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

Goal Four:
Our Staff, Our Culture

Implement a progressive and inclusive People and Culture Plan to attract, develop and retain our talent.

Goal Five:
Our Place, Our Footprint

Radically reform our practices and use of space and technology to meet our ambitious sustainability and climate action goals.

Strategic Approaches to Achieve our Goals

Goal One: Research and Innovation

1.1 Implement the *UCC Futures* framework, informed by smart specialisation and the UN SDGs.

1.2 Improve strategic hiring, retention and development of our people at all career stages, supported by a research ecosystem and career framework.

1.3 Increase PhD enrolment numbers, enhance the research student experience, and embed research and innovation into our curriculum.

1.4 Transform UCC's research culture through the implementation of engaged research and open research, underpinned by academic integrity, and ethical and responsible practice.

1.5 Create an innovation culture and entrepreneurial campus, underpinned by an ethos of creativity and discovery.

Goal Two: Student Success

2.1 Implement an academic plan to further embed the *Connected Curriculum* and lifelong learning, enabling educational and professional success for all students.

2.2 Be the university of choice for postgraduate study in signature areas of excellence and develop pathways to widen access into programmes at all levels.

2.3 Develop and provide excellent equipment, facilities, services and accommodation.

2.4 Support student success, health and wellbeing, informed by the student voice.

2.5 Provide a digitally enabled learning and teaching experience, equitable to all, which incorporates Universal Design[1] principles.

Goal Three: Global Engagement

3.1 Develop a Global Engagement Plan that drives a strategic approach to internationalisation and strengthens our global profile.

3.2 Significantly improve UCC's external reputation and brand impact, including the acceleration of UCC's improved position in the global university rankings.

3.3 Internationalise our curriculum and our research through strategic partnerships and mobility.

3.4 Promote greater diversity among our staff and students in line with our values, including through UCC's role as a University of Sanctuary.

3.5 Inform, empower and mobilise alumni, friends and partners in support of our ambitions.

Goal Four:
Our Staff, Our Culture

4.1 Create and implement a People and Culture Plan to attract, develop and retain global talent.

4.2 Embed a culture of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging in UCC, embracing our differences as a key institutional strength.

4.3 Implement a *Future of Work* model, which is driven by a culture of high performance, professional development, excellence and effective communications.

4.4 Establish career development frameworks and structured programmes to support all categories of staff on their career journey.

4.5 Develop leaders and deliver enhanced and effective performance management that recognises, promotes and rewards strong performance, and that addresses gaps.

Goal Five:
Our Place, Our Footprint

5.1 Develop innovative sustainability solutions for local, national, regional and global impact, and embed sustainability into education, research, operations and recognition initiatives for staff and students.

5.2 Work with local and national bodies to optimise and improve infrastructure, space and unique assets to generate value for UCC and Cork as a destination.

5.3 Enhance our digitally connected campus to enable greater innovation, agility and excellence, transforming how we work and learn.

5.4 Develop our capital programme informed by the *UCC Campus Masterplan* and our carbon-neutral goals, where existing buildings and grounds are optimised.

5.5 Reimagine ways of working by capitalising on opportunities in our physical and digital environments.

1. Universal Design (UD) is a framework to improve and optimise, and ensure inclusion in the learning environment.

Goal One:
Research and Innovation

Deliver impactful research and innovation that addresses global grand challenges in signature areas of excellence through the *UCC Futures* framework, resulting in a distinctive research reputation.

Our ambition is to be the leading university in Ireland for research and innovation, based on a reputation for discovery, research integrity and sustainability. We will prioritise addressing global grand challenges through the lens of the UN SDGs and the *UCC Futures* framework.

The *UCC Futures* framework is an ambitious programme that aims to radically transform how we carry out research at UCC. To drive change, we must also embrace it by transforming our methodologies and work practices. Focusing on ten interdisciplinary themes drawing on expertise in the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities, we will adopt a holistic approach, linking education, research and knowledge exchange, to develop solutions focused on global grand challenges. The imperative to translate research and knowledge into innovative, equitable and sustainable solutions that deliver value and impact in real-world contexts has never been greater. Reflecting this, we will prioritise *engaged* and open research practices, set in a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Transformation of the research ecosystem under *UCC Futures* will be complemented by strategies to attract and retain the talent to augment our expertise and capacity to deliver research excellence. We will focus on increasing the number of research active staff and doctoral candidates in the key thematic areas of *UCC Futures*, and implementing a research-informed curriculum. Establishing cohesion between research and innovation and our curriculum will foster UCC's reputation for excellence in strategic areas.

Our Research and Innovation measures of success will include securing €130 million from Horizon Europe funding programmes by 2028, and an additional 20 European Research Council (ERC) awards. We will work with government in their review and reform of supports for PhD students, with a view to significantly increasing the number of doctoral candidates we enrol each year. We will focus on increasing overall scholarly output across all publication types by 10% per annum and where more than 65% of all publications are open access by 2028. A priority will be the achievement of our research commercialisation targets under the Knowledge Transfer Ireland framework. We will have further measures of success which will be developed over the course of the implementation of this plan and will be informed by evolving national strategy and our own ambition.

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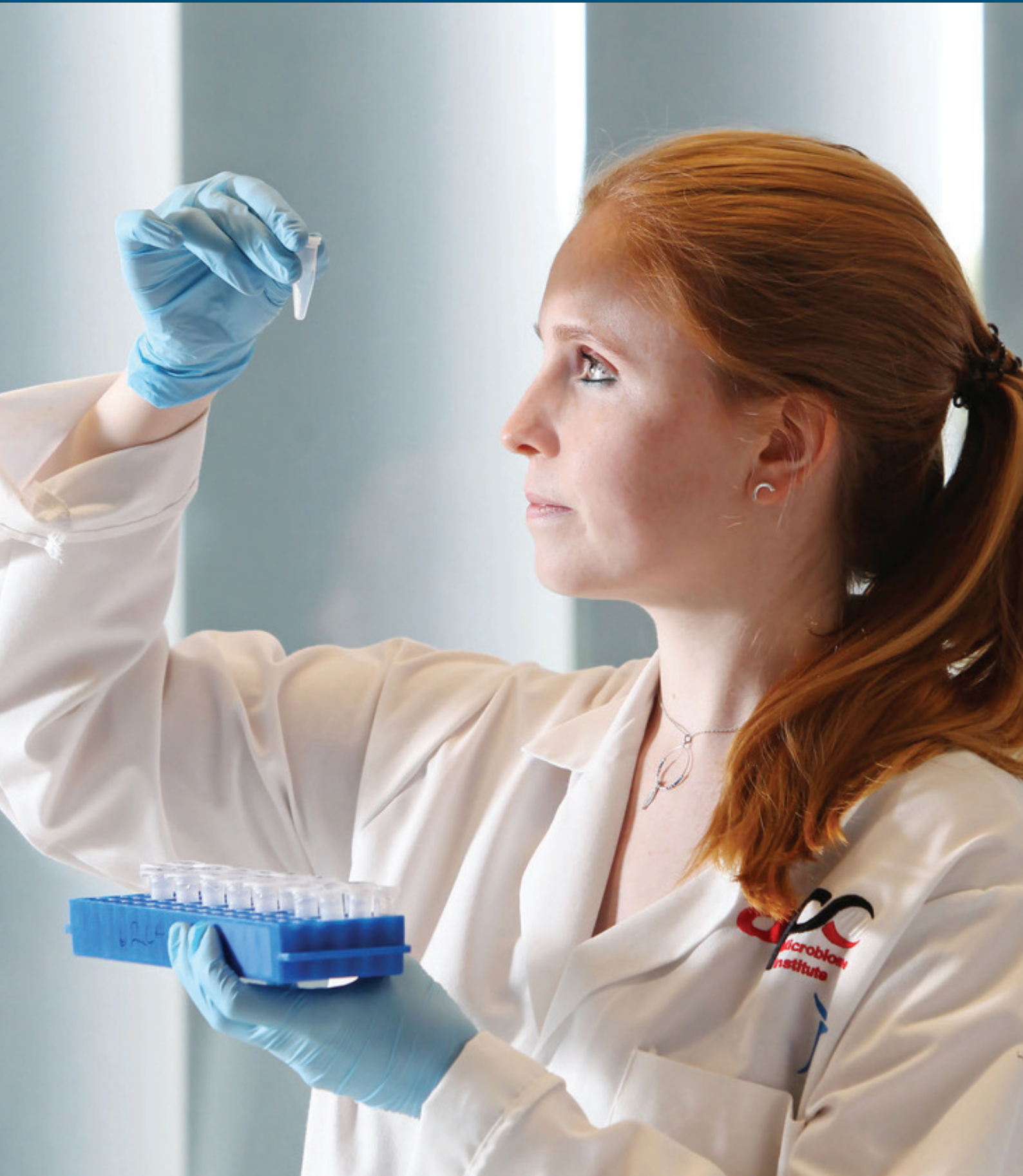
Research and Innovation
Strategic Approaches and Priority Actions

1.1 Implement the UCC Futures framework, informed by smart specialisation and the UN SDGs.

i. Position UCC's research activities within the ten inclusive and interdisciplinary themes of the UCC Futures framework. This will support researchers to compete successfully for funding and drive innovative, solution-focused research.

ii. Embed impact mapping in our research ecosystem so that all researchers can articulate the links between their research and global grand challenges via the framework of the UN SDGs. Prioritise research where UCC can have maximum impact.

iii. Develop enabling structures for academic staff to prioritise research and dissemination of quality research publication outputs in high-impact peer-reviewed journals.

iv. Develop research and innovation excellence criteria that reflect the diversity of research outputs, providing for discipline-specific articulation of achievement and success.

v. Ensure maximum societal, cultural and economic impact through active cross-disciplinary collaboration with our communities, across the city and region, nationally and internationally.

1.2 Improve strategic hiring, retention and development of our people at all career stages, supported by a research ecosystem and career framework.

i. Use a strategic hiring approach under the UCC Futures thematic areas where all new academic hires demonstrate the potential to achieve prestigious funding awards such as European Research Council (ERC) or equivalent.

ii. Supporting the enhanced excellence agenda, increase the number of ERC awards secured by UCC researchers.

iii. Collaborate closely with key stakeholders to inform and shape national/EU research funding ecosystem policy and strategy.

iv. Revise the Research Overhead Allocation policy and establish a Strategic Research Fund.

v. Deliver a Digital Enablement programme to leverage better data and infrastructure that supports institutional strategic objectives across the research lifecycle.

1.3 Increase PhD enrolment numbers, enhance the research student experience, and embed research and innovation into our curriculum.

i. Inform and influence the reform of state supports for PhD researchers.

ii. Develop and execute an action plan to grow the number of doctoral students and fellowships.

iii. Prioritise structured PhD programmes in signature areas of excellence that can be developed at scale.

iv. Enhance the experience of PhD students through structured programmes, enhanced support of supervisors and increased opportunity for practice-based PhDs. Mentoring and supervision programmes, tracked and informed by the Research Administration Project (RAP), will be embedded and aligned with our Graduate Attributes Programme (GAP).

v. Ensure research excellence, particularly that demonstrated through UCC Futures, is embedded within our curriculum offerings, enabling UCC students to experience a comprehensive, research-informed education.

1.4 Transform UCC's research culture through the implementation of engaged research and open research, underpinned by academic integrity, and ethical and responsible practice.

i. Launch UCC's first Research Charter, driving research culture change to develop and implement a holistic research and innovation environment.

ii. Develop policies and mechanisms to support the effective dissemination of research expertise and maximise impact by taking a coordinated, holistic approach to embedding principles and practices of open research.

iii. Actively support staff and students to embrace a range of rigorous research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engaged research 'with' and 'within' society, such as *Public Patient Involvement*, *Inclusion Health*, *Evidence for Public Policy* and *Citizen Science*. Enhance public outreach efforts on our research initiatives, both in collaborative engaged research and otherwise, in the pursuit of improving community engagement with research and its practical applications.

iv. Provide supports to ensure FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) data stewardship.

v. Ensure that the environment in UCC supports the conduct of research to the highest ethical standards, and that UCC researchers are appropriately trained.

vi. Enhance research excellence and impact by integrating equality, diversity and inclusion into the design, execution and monitoring of research activity.

1.5 Create an innovation culture and entrepreneurial campus, underpinned by an ethos of creativity and discovery.

i. Increase our knowledge exchange measures through strategic alignment with the *UCC Futures* framework. Significantly increase the number of spin-out companies arising from UCC research, creating employment, engaging enterprise and driving investment in the university sector.

ii. Create an Entrepreneur in Residence programme to enhance the impact of our research and innovation, as well as the creation of new ventures, products and services for societal benefit. Create a new student Entrepreneurship/Start-up Hub within the existing university infrastructure.

iii. Establish an externally facing business engagement unit to strengthen engagement with key sectors and enhance commercial activity, particularly with indigenous enterprise.

iv. Be inclusive of a broad range of creative contributions from performance and composition to discovery and invention, strengthening knowledge exchange and cross-disciplinary research collaboration.

v. Align the south/southwest hospitals research framework with that of the University to support the development of an Academic Health Sciences System.

vi. Work with external stakeholders, including local authorities, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, to play a leading role in the economic development of Cork as an innovation region, including through the development of UCC's city centre campus, Cork Science and Innovation Park, and the embedding of the Cork Innovation Corridor concept into national plans as they develop for innovative cities.

Goal Two:
Student Success

Provide a student-centred, inclusive and digitally enhanced learning environment, a *Connected Curriculum* and an outstanding student experience, to prepare UCC graduates to make a positive impact.

UCC is committed to delivering a high-quality and flexible student experience to support students to achieve their desired career and personal development outcomes. The touchstone for enhancing the student experience will be the broadening and deeper embedding of the *Connected Curriculum*, which aims to deliver curricular coherence to students focused on research-based teaching, employability, sustainability, inter- and transdisciplinarity, global reach and civic and community engagement.

In delivering this goal, we will work with our partners in further and higher education to extend and diversify the pathways into the University to offer increased access and an equitable educational experience to students at all levels, as enabled by national policy and support. Our transformative *Graduate Attributes Programme*, which identifies the core attributes required of our graduates, will underpin our efforts to assist students as they transition in, through and out of the University. 'From Acorn to Mighty Oak' represents the journey that each student completes while attending UCC, as they experience significant academic, personal and social growth. We nurture talent by supporting, challenging and mentoring our

students and through the provision of an extensive range of scholarships. At postgraduate level, we will become the university of choice for graduates in our signature research areas and we will continue to work with government agencies and employers to develop policy and funding enablers to facilitate flexible and part-time postgraduate options.

We will leverage a digitally enhanced learning environment, following Universal Design principles, and a dynamic and flexible range of pedagogies. Responding to the rapidly evolving fifth industrial revolution, we will continue to equip our students with competencies and transversal skills for the digital age, including complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity. UCC will also focus on developing programmes in strategic areas of excellence to optimise students' capacity for professional success and maximise their positive contribution to society.

Delivering an outstanding student experience, steeped in our values of compassion, respect, equity and sustainability, is fundamental to student success, as is preparing UCC students to be effective global citizens, who make a positive societal impact. We will continue to cultivate a community which reflects the diversity of society, and which recognises the inherent

value of including, surfacing and celebrating differing perspectives through which to view, experience and shape our world. By embracing students as partners and experts in their university experience, we will ensure that the student voice informs UCC's activities and decision making. In line with our *Student Success Framework*, a wide range of initiatives will be implemented to support the health and wellbeing of our students, which will underpin their success in UCC and beyond.

Recognising that each student has different needs, we will take a holistic, responsive approach to support the physical, social and mental health of all UCC students. We will ensure that we understand and address the needs of all our students and that we deliver best practice in the provision of an inclusive, safe and supportive environment which promotes a sense of belonging.

As well as ambitious retention targets, our measures of success will be focused on positive student outcomes in education and employability. We will expand connections with key industrial partners to inform our curriculum and widen student placement activity. We will widen participation in line with the *National Access Plan 2022–2028*, and target a student:staff ratio of 17:1 by 2028.

Student Success
Strategic Approaches and Priority Actions

2.1 Implement an academic plan to further embed the *Connected Curriculum* and lifelong learning, enabling educational and professional success for all students.

i. Offer an inclusive and responsive *Connected Curriculum*, evidenced in our *Curriculum Management System*, that connects students with research, Sustainable Development Goals, employers, community, entrepreneurship and the world, underpinned by an organisational culture of equality, diversity and inclusion, along with intercultural and linguistic competency.

ii. Complete a comprehensive review of the *UCC Assessment Framework* and implement approved actions to enhance the quality of the student experience.

iii. Empower students and stakeholders to be active participants in co-creating education pathways, further enabling educational success, underpinned by academic integrity and professional excellence for all.

iv. Create an externally focused Lifelong Learning Hub 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.

v. Connect staff with the scholarship of teaching and learning through developments in teaching, assessment and curriculum design. Support staff to engage with opportunities to deliver inclusive and engaged learning and teaching including flipped classroom, problem-based learning, competence-based learning and experiential learning.

2.2 Be the university of choice for postgraduate study in signature areas of excellence and develop pathways to widen access into programmes at all levels.

i. Develop signature postgraduate programmes in distinct areas of research excellence, aligned with the *UCC Futures* framework.

ii. Further develop collaborative pathways embedding routes from further education through to higher education in collaboration with partner institutions in line with national funding and policy developments.

2.3 Develop and provide excellent equipment, facilities, services and accommodation.

i. Optimise the time students spend on campus and augment this with effective online engagement in a manner that will minimise the impact on the environment and allow us to flexibly engage non-traditional students.

ii. Continue to prioritise plans for upgrading campus accommodation and building sports infrastructure.

iii. Work with policy makers and government stakeholders in their objectives to provide increased campus-based student accommodation and to address the cost of living for students.

iv. Develop a capital lifecycle plan to review and enhance our equipment needs.

v. Create sustainable, accessible, inclusive and connected learning spaces, both physically and digitally, to support all students and staff to achieve their goals.

vi. Protect and grow UCC Library services to support learning, teaching and research. Continue to acquire printed and digital collections, digitising, preserving and making publicly accessible unique and distinct collections to facilitate local and remote scholarship.

vii. Continue to develop partnerships, including with the Academic Health Sciences System, to support learning and research opportunities.

2.4 Support student success, health and wellbeing, informed by the student voice.

i. Embed the Student Forum as a representative assembly of students enabling constructive consultation and participation, and continue to connect with students through structured surveys.

ii. Attract and retain a diverse community of students in line with the *National Access Plan (2022–2028)* targets using a data-informed approach.

iii. Ensure support and recognition for informal learning, volunteering and skills development to enable lifelong, life-wide and life-deep opportunities for learning and engagement to provide a high-quality university experience as students transition in, through and out of UCC.

iv. Increase accessibility and inclusivity of student services and supports.

v. Support the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of students by implementing action plans aligned with the *Healthy Campus Charter* and the *Student Success Framework, Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*, and *Sports Strategy*.

vi. Enhance the overall student experience by implementing targeted programmes in both curricular (e.g. *Connected Curriculum*) and extra-curricular areas (e.g. improving resources, engaging students in structured surveys, and implementing wellbeing charters and initiatives).

vii. Implement targeted initiatives to ensure that UCC is a safe place for all students, including the *Sexual Violence Framework*.

2.5 Provide a digitally enabled learning and teaching experience, equitable to all, which incorporates Universal Design principles.

i. Through the implementation of Universal Design (UD) principles, ensure an equitable experience for all, so that our campus provides an inclusive and respectful environment for students and staff.

ii. Implement the *Digital Education Plan*.

iii. Develop a portfolio of flexible, blended and online programmes for professional development, lifelong learning and executive education.

iv. Embed a digitally progressive learning and teaching environment and enhance the digital literacy of staff and students.

Goal Three:
Global Engagement

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

UCC is a globally oriented university with an ambition to extend our reach and amplify our global impact. We value our partnerships and connections with individuals, alumni and organisations in Ireland and across the world. Our partnerships offer opportunities for mobility inwards and outwards and ensure that we maintain an international perspective in all that we do. They also provide the opportunity for us to bring Ireland's unique culture and heritage to the world. Our research and our curriculum are informed by our global partnerships and support our ambition to extend our reach to like-minded institutions around the world.

A Global Engagement Plan, aligned with the refreshed UCC branding and marketing campaign, will work to establish mutually beneficial partnerships based on respect and shared values of global citizens. The central driver for international student recruitment will continue to be our internationalisation ambitions, where we recognise that deep understanding emerges from learning experiences that bring transnational perspectives to our curriculum. The flow of cultures and nationalities that populate our research and learning spaces enhances the development of intercultural communication skills and deepens connections with our alumni globally. By adapting our curriculum and developing a reputation as an institution that welcomes and embraces diversity, we will attract international students and staff to diversify the university community and its curriculum to reflect the international society in which we live.

We will also extend our global reach through an ambitious programme of alumni engagement.

As a research-intensive, globally focused, internationally competitive knowledge institution, our position in global rankings is important to our external reputation and development. In striving to strengthen our global engagement, we aim to continually improve our world ranking position, and aim to increase the proportion of our international staff and students. We will focus on maintaining and enhancing strategic partnerships, and we will align our globalisation efforts with our research and business community priorities.

Achieving the ambitions and priorities of this strategy will enable us to fulfil our potential and take our place as a truly global university, distinctive internationally for the quality and standing of its activities. We will achieve our internationalisation goals in fulfilment of our values and targets in relation to sustainability and climate action objectives. Our measures of success will include an increase in international staff and student numbers and growth in outward and inward mobility, including visiting professorships, PhD students and Fulbright and Sanctuary scholars. The emerging international education, research and innovation strategy being developed nationally will also inform our future direction and measures of success in global engagement.

Global Engagement
Strategic Approaches and Priority Actions

3.1 Develop a Global Engagement Plan that drives a strategic approach to internationalisation and strengthens our global profile.

i. Appoint a Vice President for Global Engagement to lead the development and implementation of a strategic Global Engagement Plan.

ii. Pursue membership of influential global university networks.

3.2 Significantly improve UCC's external reputation and brand impact, including the acceleration of UCC's improved position in the global university rankings.

i. Develop and implement a refreshed marketing and brand campaign to differentiate the University, including systematic processes for storytelling as a medium to enhance our reputation and brand impact nationally and internationally. Engage and involve students and staff in these efforts.

ii. Strengthen the identity and the prominence of the Irish language across the University to ensure the sustainability of our language and heritage.

iii. Implement the *Arts and Culture Plan* to demonstrate UCC's unique contributions to the arts and to our rich culture, and to enhance our reputation nationally and internationally.

iv. Accelerate UCC's improved position in select global rankings by prioritising and actioning key areas for improvement including student:staff ratio and research citation performance.

3.3 Internationalise our curriculum and our research through strategic partnerships and mobility.

i. Further develop a select number of strategic local, regional, national and international partnerships to bring tangible benefits to our research and teaching.

ii. Optimise UCC's strength in civic and community engagement for local and global impact across research, teaching and strategic partnerships, enhancing our reputation internationally as a thought leader.

iii. Optimise UCC's engagement with Erasmus and the European Universities Initiative, deepening our global engagement in collaboration with our partners.

iv. Leverage and commit to participation with regional partners in the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities. Measure and pursue specific strategic objectives from a lifelong learning, economic development, inclusion, and sustainability perspective to meet *National Development Plan 2021–2030* and regional development ambitions.

3.4 Promote greater diversity among our staff and students in line with our values, including through UCC's role as a University of Sanctuary.

i. Increase the inward and outward mobility of students and staff, including through exchange programmes and sabbatical leave.

ii. Grow the number of international students and staff in line with our internationalisation ambitions.

iii. Develop and implement a University of Sanctuary Action Plan.

3.5 Inform, empower and mobilise alumni, friends and partners in support of our ambitions.

i. Sustain and grow philanthropic income.

ii. Identify the top-priority projects for a strategic fundraising campaign.

iii. Increase the focus on donor relations and stewardship to thank and recognise partners and friends of UCC nationally and internationally.

iv. Recruit, support and steward a network of international alumni ambassadors (volunteers) to support philanthropy, brand, reputation, global engagement and international recruitment.

v. Achieve a step change in alumni and stakeholder engagement through new segmented and targeted engagement programmes that deliver clearly articulated mutual benefits.

Goal Four:
Our Staff, Our Culture

Implement a progressive and inclusive People and Culture Plan to attract, develop and retain our talent.

Through our People and Culture Plan, we will create an environment of respect and compassion, where all staff feel valued and feel a sense of belonging to the university community. Our staff will see the potential to grow and have opportunities to work flexibly in a way that recognises the importance of wellbeing and work–life balance. From a people and culture perspective, the key challenges remain the ability to attract, develop and retain quality staff. The collective response to the challenges posed in recent years shows what the University is capable of achieving in extraordinary and difficult circumstances. In the coming years, we have the opportunity to transform UCC and deliver meaningful societal changes in line

with the shared purpose elaborated in this strategic plan. This will be enabled through a collective and coordinated effort, where we evolve practices and policies, embracing strategic change based on agile and lean methodologies. We will develop a *Future of Work* model, which will define how our work, our staff and our workplaces will evolve in the years to come. The model will leverage the latest digital technologies to offer flexible and sustainable work practices to support the health and wellbeing of staff. Transparent communication and change management processes will align our efforts for positive impact from our collective and interconnected actions.

In our approach to staff recruitment and retention, we

are conscious of the demand for talent globally. Actions arising from the people and culture plan will work to enhance UCC's career progression, development, leadership and overall staff experience. We will continue to foster an environment in UCC which is fair, inclusive and diverse, creating a positive workplace and a culture of belonging. We will support staff to grow in their professional and personal lives. We will recognise and reward the contribution and efforts of all staff by implementing professional development and enhanced performance management frameworks across all stages of the career journey.

We will focus on incorporating the Athena SWAN values into our everyday practice and have this recognised by achieving a Silver Institutional award, and five additional awards at unit/departmental level by 2028. We will develop UCC's first Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) Framework (2023–2028) to further embed EDIB across all functions within the University.

Our measures of success will include having 75% of academic staff with formal teaching and learning qualifications, recorded on our human resources information system. We will commit to growing professional development for all staff led by UCC leaders and people managers as role models, towards embedding a strong culture of CPD.

Our Staff, Our Culture
Strategic Approaches and Priority Actions

4.1 Create and implement a People and Culture Plan to attract, develop and retain global talent.

i. Deliver an enhanced approach to the recruitment of global talent, the nurturing of existing talent and the development of leadership with key positions, such as Head of School.

ii. Work with government to address the issue of soft-funded[2] contracts, especially as it relates to the sustainability of research at UCC.

iii. Work with strategic partners to support the development of flexible employment arrangements.

4.2 Embed a culture of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging in UCC, embracing our differences as a key institutional strength.

i. Develop and implement UCC's first Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) Framework (2023–2028) including targeting a silver institutional Athena SWAN award, and other equality frameworks, including the Public Sector Duty.

ii. Undertake a UCC Values and Culture/EDIB consultation process every two years to measure progress, ensure accountability, share feedback with the UCC community and to inform action under an agreed governance and accountability framework.

4.3 Implement a *Future of Work* model, which is driven by a culture of high-performance, professional development, excellence and effective communications.

i. Implement a hybrid and agile way of working in a new *Future of Work* model with appropriate working and space utilisation practices that take account of the changing nature of work and learning in an increasingly digital and hybrid world.

ii. Implement an improved Continuing Professional Development (CPD) model, and offerings, to ensure staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to succeed in a hybrid and digital university.

iii. Implement initiatives to embed HR excellence in research and achieve a third renewal of our HR Excellence in Research award.

iv. Review and improve the staff support model for safety, health and wellbeing by seeking feedback from, and engaging with, staff on improved and more streamlined approaches.

4.4 Establish career development frameworks and structured programmes to support all categories of staff on their career journey.

i. Develop and implement a dedicated programme to support staff in their transition in, through and out of the University.

ii. Informed by benchmarking with comparator universities, review and implement improvements to staff promotion processes including a consideration of the frequency of staff promotion calls.

4.5 Develop university leaders and deliver enhanced and effective performance management that recognises, promotes and rewards strong performance, and that can address gaps.

i. Develop communities of practice and enhance staff recognition initiatives.

ii. Implement improved performance development and management systems and mechanisms to acknowledge and reward strong performance and address gaps in performance.

iii. Introduce an intentional approach to succession planning and talent retention, where staff are supported to reach their maximum potential. Nurture and develop future leaders.

2. Soft-funded contracts of employment are only supported by short-term external research funding which does not provide progression for research staff. This contributes to unnecessarily high levels of staff turnover and a staff environment that is at odds with the research ambitions of the University.

Goal Five:
Our Place, Our Footprint

Radically reform our practices and use of space and technology to meet our ambitious sustainability and climate action goals.

UCC's physical campus provides a unique environment of historic and modern buildings and landscapes which inspire and support our students, staff and visitors. Our digital campus provides the space, tools and technology to work, research, teach and learn in sustainable, agile and inclusive ways. Together, our physical and digital spaces create opportunities for local, national and international community-building, communication and collaboration, which are central to all of our goals and core values.

We aim to provide world-class facilities to support the academic mission of our 21st-century campus, which provides flexible and inclusive teaching, learning and research facilities. We will build on our digital capability and excellence to enable a more agile, responsive institution that is ready for the rapid pace of change in the digital age. New, refurbished and revitalised physical facilities and services will enhance the working and learning environment for staff and students and attract visitors and guests to engage with the University.

The new Office of Sustainability and Climate Action will ensure that the imperative of sustainability underpins all plans and actions to reimagine and reform our work practices and physical and digital spaces by 2028. We will continue our journey of carbon reduction to achieve our public sector 2030 target and move towards a net zero carbon impact by 2040. This will involve an ambitious, targeted programme of capital development and refurbishment of the existing physical and digital estate, complemented by new or reformed working, learning and teaching practices and recognition initiatives and supports. We will set the standard for developing and implementing innovative sustainability solutions and will exemplify the behaviours and values we want to instil in wider society.

Key measures of success for this goal will include achieving the STARS platinum accreditation from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. We will achieve 51% absolute carbon reduction by 2030, an annual net finance surplus of 3% and we will grow net assets by 1% annually. Additional measures of success will be developed in the early stages of implementation.

Our Place, Our Footprint
Strategic Approaches and Priority Actions

5.1 Develop innovative sustainability solutions for local, national, regional and global impact, and embed sustainability into education, research, operations and recognition initiatives for staff and students.

i. Adopt and implement *UCC's Sustainability and Climate Action Plan*, supported by a new Office of Sustainability and Climate Action, to deliver our zero-waste and carbon-neutral targets and to ensure our learning, teaching, research and operations lead and inspire the transition to a more sustainable future.

ii. Provide leadership and innovative solutions in our region for more globally sustainable industry, enterprise and healthcare systems (Pharma, Chemical, Food, Fintech, Information Technology and Life Sciences).

iii. Develop our position as thought leaders for sustainability internationally.

iv. Develop a sustainability module for all staff and students and make it available nationally and internationally.

5.2 Work with local and national bodies to optimise and improve infrastructure, space and unique assets to generate value for UCC and Cork as a destination.

i. Position UCC as a tourism and cultural heritage destination for the region. A new campus visitor engagement model and the development of the UCC Treasures Gallery will maximise the availability of UCC's assets to the public.

ii. Revitalise the Granary Theatre and its immediate environment to advance our vision for a Creative Hub.

5.3 Enhance our digitally connected campus to enable greater innovation, agility and excellence, transforming how we work and learn.

i. Develop a smart, connected and sustainable campus, including services that enable the future of work and learning, by enhancing the unique on-campus and hybrid experience of staff, students and visitors.

ii. Deliver the University's *Digital Masterplan* and associated project commitments across our strategic goals and enablers.

iii. Support the digital transformation of administration processes across the professional services by automating processes, reducing duplication and enhancing efficiency.

5.4 Develop our capital programme informed by the *UCC Campus Masterplan* and our carbon-neutral goals, where existing buildings and grounds are optimised.

i. Deliver on key capital development projects including the Cork University Business School building, a new Dental School and Hospital, a new Clinical Medical School, clinical facilities on partner clinical sites, the expansion of the Tyndall National Institute, the refurbishment of the Kane Science Building and enhanced infrastructure for the North Mall campus.

ii. Advance UCC's overall targeted capital development programme, focusing on improved sports facilities, student accommodation and priority projects in line with the *UCC Campus Masterplan*.

iii. Continue to invest in the university estate in a systematic manner to improve the overall condition of our buildings and supporting infrastructure. Sub-standard facilities will be prioritised.

5.5 Reimagine ways of working by capitalising on opportunities in our physical and digital environments.

i. Proactively manage a blended working environment.

ii. Provide innovative and inclusive teaching spaces to meet the evolving learning and teaching expectations of students and staff.

iii. Optimise the use of UCC facilities across the year. This will include a space audit to identify how space can be reconfigured for better use and improved student-facing services.

Strategic Enablers

The success of this strategic plan will be dependent on a number of enablers working and interacting across goals, approaches and actions. Some of the enablers are referenced in the goals to ensure accountability and indicate measures of success while others span across the entire strategy.

The key enablers include:

- **People, Wellbeing and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**
- **Effective Communications**
- **Resources**
- **Philanthropy and Stakeholder Engagement**
- **Operational Excellence**
- **Strategic Partnerships**
- **Digital Capabilities and Quality Data**
- **Governance**

Constraints and Limiting Factors

We operate in a very challenging national higher education funding environment where there is inadequate exchequer funding to support our infrastructural needs, where state investment per student has dropped by 65% since 2008 and where 80% of our income currently funds a fixed cost. Our future ambition will be constrained by the level of state investment in higher education, and our diversification of funding sources as well as continued growth of non-exchequer income will remain of critical importance for UCC. We will work in partnership with the higher education sector and government to deliver the ambitious reform agenda and a fit-for-purpose, high-performing, unified education, research and training system as set out in *Funding the Future*, the government's funding and reform framework for higher education. Our ability to fully deliver our ambitious strategic plan will be dependent on government's implementation of *Funding the Future* in restoring a sustainable funding model for higher education and in beginning to address the recognised shortfall in funding and the scale of the investment required to deliver enhanced performance and strengthened quality of outcomes.

Strategic Enablers
Key Priority Actions

People, Wellbeing and EDI

i.   Embed a culture of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging into the organisation, embracing our differences as a key institutional strength.

ii. Enhance excellence and impact by integrating equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging into the design, execution and monitoring of university activities.

iii. Adopt the *Healthy Campus Charter* and implement the *Student Success Strategy* to deliver student success and to enhance the staff experience.

iv. Foster staff wellbeing to support employees and create a positive work environment.

Effective Communications

i.   Develop and implement an improved approach to internal and external communications.

Resources

i.   Conduct a comprehensive market assessment and benchmarking of all fees and charges to ensure alignment with our peers.

ii. Consider alternative financing models.

iii. Support the implementation of the recommendations from the 2022 review of UCC's subsidiaries.

iv. Support the implementation of the actions arising from the review of UCC's professional services.

Philanthropy and Stakeholder Engagement

i.   Deliver a fundraising campaign for agreed priorities in collaboration with Cork University Foundation.

ii. Introduce a programme of engagement for all stakeholders (alumni, parents, students, staff, honorary graduates and donors) in the life and philanthropic health of the University in collaboration with volunteer boards.

Operational Excellence

i. Invest in operational excellence to simplify and connect our processes, systems and services. Embed continuous improvement, change management and data governance methodologies across all areas of UCC. Deliver a comprehensive training and support programme for staff to support these actions.

Strategic Partnerships

i. Develop a select number of strategic local and international partnerships that support our goals, based on data-driven decisions and systematically gathered information. These will include partnerships with academic and research institutions, the business and wider community, and policy makers nationally and internationally.

ii. Focus on partnerships that bring tangible benefits to our research, teaching and learning, and to our students and staff.

Digital Capabilities and Quality Data

i. Deliver a Data Plan enabling a culture where data is valued and used as an asset to generate strategic value and insights to identify opportunities and to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of decision-making.

ii. Build governance tools and platforms to drive greater strategic value from data.

Governance

i. Implement new legislation and codes of governance relevant to the sector and update our governance and policy frameworks accordingly.

ii. Implement the new student governance structures.

iii. Develop legal and information-compliance processes that are effective and lean.

iv. Implement an Enterprise Risk Management helpdesk and system to provide agile, solution-focused support to the university community.

From Strategy to Implementation

This strategic plan outlines the path we will take to *Secure Our Future* in the next five years. This shared purpose will be delivered through achievement of our five goals, which will be supported by a number of strategic enablers. Each goal will be achieved through a number of strategic approaches and specific actions. These approaches, together with our values, will give direction to the choices and decisions we all make during the lifetime of this plan. Design thinking will inform our approach, supporting us in our commitment to address the global grand challenges.

Impact generation is a key concept and driver in this plan. Generating impact takes many different forms, for example high-quality academic publications, impactful, globally orientated staff and graduates, independent voices on matters of public importance. Impact is thus aligned with UCC's core mission and our role in society.

The extent of our success in realising the goals depends on internal and external developments. During the implementation of this plan, we will remain dynamic, and responsive to emerging opportunities. Despite the operational challenges of constraints on financial, space, personnel and other resources, there will be a strong focus on the implementation of the priorities in this plan.

The goals and strategic approaches differ in terms of their starting positions and level of development. To move from the strategic framework to execution in practice, we will develop annual operational plans for each goal with clearly defined actions and measurable outcomes. A lean reporting framework will outline progress towards measures of success.

To ensure coherent and efficient reporting, these plans and measures will also be closely aligned with our performance compact with the Higher Education Authority. Internal and external developments will influence and shape the actions we take. As we work steadily towards delivering on our measures of success we will work collaboratively together as one university community.