

## Case for Resources

**This document makes a reasoned case for investment in the development of Film & Screen Media at University College Cork, on the basis of the opportunity of important sectoral developments and a concomitant skills gap identified in Ireland.**

**This is the revised version of a proforma document submitted in response to the President's call for a Major Fundraising Campaign at UCC in 2022.**



<p><b>1. Title of Project:</b> <b>UCC Film Academy</b></p>
<p><b>2. Project Leader/Champions:</b> <b>Ciara Chambers; Laura Rascaroli; Barry Reilly; Dan O'Connell</b></p>
<p><b>3. Vision:</b></p> <p>In February 2022 Screen Ireland, the organization tasked with supporting and growing the national creative industries, released record-breaking production figures, showing that local Irish film activity had increased by 52% from 2019, with local television drama production increasing by 40% in the same period. 2021 saw a production spend of €500 million across the screen sector, demonstrating the burgeoning contribution of the creative industries to the local economy. The sector is flourishing, but the educational provision to prepare young people for work is underdeveloped. According to a recent study of Irish employers, policy makers and graduates of film and screen media programmes, there is a disconnect between the various stakeholders leading to skills gaps.<sup>1</sup> There is a clear need to reconsider the pathways open to students wishing to enter the creative industries. While this has been done successfully in Northern Ireland (with focussed film educational initiatives from primary level through to professional upskilling) the landscape in Ireland is more challenging due to a lack of resources.</p> <p>In February 2022 Ulster University also launched the Ulster Screen Academy, its £1.6 million virtual studio, boasting cutting edge production and VFX facilities that are unavailable anywhere else in Northern Ireland. This will attract undergraduate and postgraduate students wishing to study courses in film, television, animation, games and immersive technologies. There is no similar facility in the Republic of Ireland.</p> <p>Since the studio was opened, it has significantly enhanced UU's reputation as a centre of excellence, and a consortium led by the university was recently selected by the UK government to host one of four new labs specialising in the future of virtual production. This is part of a strategy to maximise the potential of the UK's creative industries, tapping into the potential to generate an extra 50 billion for the economy, while generating a million more jobs. The new state-of-the-art facility is aimed at <b>filmmakers, animators and theatre directors:</b> <a href="https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2023/june/uu-led-consortium-secures-new-movie-magic-lab-in-belfast">https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2023/june/uu-led-consortium-secures-new-movie-magic-lab-in-belfast</a></p> <p>UCC could be at the forefront of leading a similar strategy in the Republic of Ireland, particularly given our position as a project partner in Purple XR, a Creative-Ireland</p>

<sup>1</sup> *Media Graduates at Work: Irish Narratives on Policy, Education and Industry* by Anne O'Brien, Sarah Arnold and Paraic Kerrigan (Palgrave MacMillan, 2021).

funded initiative to investigate the educational and commercial potential of embedding new immersive technologies in the local creative landscape.

UCC currently hosts a vibrant Film & Screen Media provision at BA, MA and PhD level. While there is a growing demand for increased practical tuition, there are limitations placed on curriculum development due to a lack of resources. The establishment of a dedicated studio would secure UCC as a centre of excellence in Ireland and help us to build on our current connections with Screen Ireland, Northern Ireland Screen, Atticus Education and a range of local and international festivals, broadcasters and independent production companies.

**4. Rationale:** *The argument for the proposed investment, its fit with long term, strategic objectives at an institutional, national and international level; and the extent to which it builds upon existing expertise and/or prior investment. (15-20 lines)*

The studio will complement the University's Digital Master plan by providing access to cutting-edge training in digital and immersive technologies at undergraduate and Masters level, as well as making microcredentials available for industry practitioners wishing to upskill. The creative industries are rapidly expanding and it is not possible to sustain a career without regular upskilling. The virtual studio would offer the chance to provide microcredentials in editing, post-production, the green agenda in filmmaking, diversity in the creative industries, immersive technologies and virtual reality. The Creative Futures Academy, a partnership between NCAD, UCD and IADT due to launch later this year, was recently awarded 10 million to address the growing skills gap in Ireland, but its courses are offered across three universities in Dublin and none are directly associated with a studio space. There is no similar provision offered anywhere else in the Republic of Ireland, leaving Munster underserved in this area of essential growth. The establishment of this studio in UCC would facilitate a similar, much-needed provision for the Munster region.

The establishment of a studio infrastructure at UCC fits with the goals of The Future of Creative Ireland Programme, the only of one its kind in the world, to deliver the vision that "every person in Ireland has the potential to realise their full creative potential" through the "all-of-Government" approach outlined in Culture 2025: The National Cultural Policy Framework. UCC's Arts and Culture Strategy is directly aligned with these cultural policies and Film & Screen Media has the potential to sustain a long-term screen sector training infrastructure which will nurture the education of Ireland's future creatives.

**5. Requirements: What investment is required?***(a) Staffing*

1. The studio will be staffed by existing FSM staff to start with: our Senior Technical Officer Barry Reilly has significant IT and digital technologies experience, including in broadcast production; our Lecturer in Filmmaking, Dan O'Connell is an expert practitioner with awardwinning experience in film production.
2. In addition, extra technical and administrative support would allow us to grow the studio's internal and external activities. A lecturer-practitioner with knowledge in television production would allow us to broaden our curriculum and assist students in becoming industry-ready to take advantage of growing job opportunities, particularly in the Irish-language production sector. This role could be fulfilled part time through hourly paid work, with the potential to secure a full-time role based on revenue generated by studio hire. In addition, the studio could support hourly-paid work in the areas of animation, game design and the rapidly expanding area of immersive technologies.
3. A second Creative Practice Lecturer could subsequently be appointed on the basis of the expanded pool of students at all levels. A scholar/practitioner with specific expertise in filmmaking will allow us to broaden our offering of specialized courses as well as attract increasing numbers of candidates for our practice-based doctorate.

*(b) Equipment*

- 12m x 4m curved main LED wall with 2.6mm pitch Roe Diamond LED panels
- 3.6m x 7.2m height adjustable and tiltable LED ceiling with Carbon 5 panels
- High performance Unreal Engine-based real time rendering system
- Dedicated Unreal Engine environment editing workstation
- Greenscreen backdrop
- iPad Pro and DMX lighting controller for real time adjustment of environment & colour grading
- Mo-Sys "Startracker" camera tracking systems with lens files and encoders for common lenses
- HD-SDI enabled studio cameras
- Automatable dolly and crane

*(c) Accommodation – An indication of any additional accommodation that may be required and an outline of the services to be provided within the accommodation or refurbishment.*

- 1,200m<sup>2</sup> specialised virtual production studio
- Access: Acoustic roller shutter access with 4m width and 5m height and adjacent double acoustic loading doors

- Offices, and other production facilities
- Soundproofing to all walls and roof
- Up to 1400A of 3 Phase Power
- Utility power presented as IRE 13A outlets
- LED high level house lighting and low-level perimeter lighting
- Fibre, CAT6 and Wifi with internet connectivity
- Vesda equipped fire alarm system

*(d) Costs – An indication of the scale of the total costs of the project (this should be at Full Economic Cost) (max 2 sides)*

Owing to the large dimensions of a Virtual Production studio, high ceilings, large open floor space, a purpose-built facility would be ideal, but it may also be possible to use an existing space on campus if necessary and to adjust the spec accordingly. A budget for the technical equipment has been requested from *Street Co. Virtual Production* in the UK and will be provided as an addendum once received. Providing an exact Full Economic Cost at this time is not readily achievable but examining the cost of a similar project in [Ulster University in Northern Ireland](#) suggests a figure of £1.6m or €1.9m but with building inflation would estimate costs @ c.€2.5m.

#### **ADDED VALUE/POTENTIAL REVENUE**

This will enhance our practical provision as we continue to grow the area of creative practice/artistic research. Studio space will offer a provision (currently lacking) for practice-based PhD students, thus making our Department more attractive to practitioners than others. In addition it will grow the pool of practice-based PhDs from industry who will be able to share expertise with undergraduates on our BA in Film & Screen Media, thus enhancing the ecology of the Department. As we have established a Doctoral School in the School of Film, Music & Theatre, this initiative fits within its ambition of providing excellent education and state-of-the-art facilities for doctoral candidates. The project will also support interdisciplinary work and research in the School and will thus enhance the opportunities available to staff.

#### **6. Potential Leverage:**

*(a) Indicate any sources of support that might contribute, financially or in kind, to the proposed project and any constraints on that support. (15-20 lines)*

##### **SCREEN IRELAND**

The government has recently identified a 1.5 billion underfund in the state training fund. A significant proportion of this will be allocated to improving digital skills. Submissions have been requested from employers and education providers on how this money could be spent.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/education/2023/05/29/government-eyes-up-colossal-surplus-in-state-training-fund-to-boost-green-and-digital->

[skills/?utm\\_source=Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=RSS%3AITEM%3ATI%3ATLE&utm\\_campaign=evening\\_update\\_digest](https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=RSS%3AITEM%3ATI%3ATLE&utm_campaign=evening_update_digest)

A recent OECD skills report has outlined lifelong learning and professional upskilling as a priority. While we have already begun to provide microcredentials for professionals in the screen sector in collaboration with ACE, increased resources will allow us to develop a strategy around the ongoing provision of professional upskilling. This offers significant potential for revenue generation for the department. In addition: “The digital transformation has been reshaping Ireland’s society and economy. Digital skills are fast becoming a prerequisite to actively participate in more complex, interconnected societies and are needed in most professions” (p. 15).

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/256184/c6e02dad-0790-4a53-8fda-cfe74cd0a7f4.pdf#page=null>

Screen Ireland’s recent skills report (March 2023) identified the following gaps:

- More CPD needed for professionals
- Not enough investment in training by industry
- More information need to be circulated on the opportunities of screen careers for TY, second and third level students
- REGIONAL incentives are required

While there are currently “Talent Academies” in Wicklow, Dublin, Galway and Limerick, there is no such facility in Cork. We could fill this gap, in partnership with Screen Ireland, if UCC was willing to support expansion of the current FSM facilities. In addition, our students are currently making a promotional film for the new West Cork Studios, based in Skibbereen, which will provide support for production in West Cork. We are building a strong relationship with the studio management, in the hope that we could partner with them in providing complementary studio space in Cork city. Offering crews the opportunity to have location support in West Cork, as well as access to urban infrastructure, greatly enhances the possibility of inward investment to the region.

It may also be possible to partner with a broadcaster on this initiative, particularly as there with remit to enhance training and production provision outside Dublin across film and media platforms.

The hire of our UCC facilities to independent production companies during the summer months will offer ample revenue to support the studio during the academic year.

There is also potential to deepen our relationship with **Screen Ireland**, already a partner on two microcredentials and the recent *Screen Careers for Transition-Year Students* programme in terms of implementing the values of diversity and sustainability through practical, hands-on studio experience of immersive technologies, unavailable at any other educational institution in the Republic of Ireland. As Screen Ireland has already

invested funding in three of our initiatives, it is hoped that they will continue to invest in our larger curricular provision for professionals on diversity and sustainability. An on-site studio would make this an even more attractive partnership for Screen Ireland.

*(b) Dependencies*

The initiative is dependent on the availability of accommodation for the additional students taking places on our courses, and the support of local industry (from mainstream broadcasters to independent production companies). Our strong national network and good relationships with industry providers will offer a starting point for the success of the project.

*(c) Alignment with UN sustainable goals: does the project align with any of the UN SDGs? (15-20 lines)*

Two areas of curricular expansion in Film & Screen Media, which affect not only our BA, MA and PhD students, but also our lifelong learners, are greening of the film industry and neurodiversity. We are currently partnering with ACE in the provision of an accredited Certificate in Neurodiversity in the Screen Industry, sponsored by Screen Ireland. The course, coordinated by Eleanor McSherry, with Ciara Chambers as academic director, is delivered online and has attracted top-ranking professionals from film, broadcasting and animation. It is the only course of its kind in the world. Our second microcredential sponsored by Screen Ireland and delivered with partnership with ACE and the School of Nursing, Wellbeing Coordination in the Creative Sector, will go through accreditation later this year. In addition, Ciara Chambers, Eleanor McSherry and Johnny Goodwin, will publish an interdisciplinary study on the course and broader conditions in the screen sector early in 2024. The provision of a studio facility would allow us to build on the significant reputation we have already garnered in the creative sector and increase our potential to develop ongoing professional development courses in diversity, sustainability and XR. These aims align with **4. Quality of Education** and **5. Gender Equality** in both in their upskilling potential and their curricular focus on diversity.

Ciara Chambers is currently researching the green agenda in filmmaking, directly linked to **12. Responsible Consumption and Production** and has had meetings with Maria Kirrane, UCC Sustainability Officer, and Adrian Wooton, Chief Executive of Film London and Danijela Kircher, Chief Operating Officer about their pioneering green film policies, including the carbon calculator, now a prerequisite on all Screen Ireland funding applications. This work is being carried out in partnership with Lord Puttnam, a well-known advocate for environmental issues. There is great potential for us to provide a microcredential aimed at training sustainability managers in the screen sector, a role that has become an essential part of modern crew.

The UCC studio will be built using sustainable technologies in order to fit with our green campus remit. Its practices will also be designed with the embedding of sustainability in our curriculum and with a focus on training students for the new role of green

consultant on set, thus increasing employability as well as embedding the core values and lifelong practice of greening in production. In training new entrants to industry, the initiative aligns with **9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** and in **10. Reduced Inequalities**, by providing new entrants from diverse regions and capabilities.

**7. Impact:**

*What will be the top principal impacts (between 3 and 5) of this investment upon the user community – the university, Cork City/Munster region, Ireland, international?*

1. The fulfilment of a crisis-level training gap in the provision of practical skills for diversifying content production, at both a national level as well as in the Munster region
2. The establishment of a centre for excellence in the Cork region, which offers a significant stimulus for the local creative industries, thus directly impacting the economy
3. Will raise the visibility of Film & Screen Media at UCC as the site of the only virtual production studio in any university in the Republic of Ireland with significant reputational impact for UCC

**8. Impact:**

*Research: How would this project link to UCC's Clusters of Excellence Initiative 2021 or other UCC Research Cluster (existing/potential)? (30-50 words)*

The new Futures of Humanities Institute includes a Creative and Arts Practice research cluster as one of its key areas of expansion, and this initiative will support the Institute in addressing this goal.

**9. Sustainability:** *How will the investment be sustained at the end of the 4-5 years "pump priming" support?*

*(a) External Funders – refer to their strategic plans or other sources of income and provide an estimate of total amount of additional research/other income expected.*

There is the significant potential for monetization of the studio space through hire to external production companies, particularly during the summer months, with an agreement to provide internships for our students. Studio space is at a premium, with a lack of availability for local companies given the increased activity of international streamers using facilities like Troy studios to make series such as *Nightflyers*, *Foundation* and countless others. The provision of a Cork-based facility to develop and sustain local production offers the opportunity to provide ample revenue to support the running of the studio for the academic year and offers a much-needed stimulus to ensure a vibrant and sustainable Irish film culture.

*(b) Staff numbers – How many staff will external funding support once the pump priming investment ends? Are there any requirements to support staff from*



*university sourced funds?*

The studio can be run by existing practical and technical staff (and our current technician, Barry Reilly, and lecture-practitioner Dan O’Connell are champions of the project, however extra technical support would be useful and administrative support would be required to deal with bookings. Extra part-time or hourly appointments would allow us to expand our current curriculum in film to include other areas of interest such as television production and virtual and immersive technologies. This would be self-sustaining through an increase in student numbers due to the ability to study areas which are not covered in other institutions and also the revenue generated by hiring the studio to production companies.

*(c) Student numbers – How many additional undergraduate, postgraduate, PhD students will the investment support when project is complete/pump priming ends.*

The potential for undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD recruitment is limitless, but of course, our ability to increase numbers is dependent on staff and resources. As this facility would establish UCC as the leading academic provider of screen education in Ireland, we could realistically accommodate twenty more places at undergraduate level per year to begin with, ten more places at postgraduate level and five PhD candidates, if we are supported by the revenue generated from studio hire in order to ensure enough access to equipment and specialist tuition for all students. This has the potential to increase significantly after three to five years once the studio is an established production centre. UCC graduates would be better equipped to enter a wide variety of roles in the screen industry, addressing the crisis-skills gap in the fastest growing sector in Ireland.

**11. Contact Details**

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