



# Students being 'future-proofed' by online courses

Inspired by the vision of George Boole,  
**UCC** future-proofs its students through  
technology-enhanced learning

**I**t is fitting that in the year that University College Cork (**UCC**) commemorates the bicentenary of George Boole, forefather of the information age and first Professor of Mathematics, that the university has embarked on broadening and deepening its online offering to students, both locally and globally.

Professor John O'Halloran, vice president for teaching and learning, **UCC**, reported that research which had been conducted in the university showed a strong demand for online courses and support for such innovative forms of teaching and learning across the campus.

"There is huge enthusiasm in **UCC** for advancing digital literacy among staff and students," said O'Halloran.

"Over 93 per cent of respondents to our recent survey said that technology enhanced learning will be an essential part of teaching in the future."

"Over 90 per cent of **UCC** staff are involved, or aspire to being involved in technology enhanced learning. As part of a major initiative to enhance digital learning, **UCC** has embarked on an ambitious programme of online course development. Our aim is to future-proof our students, working professionals and employees by giving them flexible access to learning and development opportunities in a format that fits around their

work and life.

"**UCC** has a diverse range of online programmes underway or in development to cater for a broad array of learning needs, from more vocational subjects, such as nursing and public health medicine, to industrial disciplines such as chemistry, to areas of broad societal importance, for example, an online masters in autism studies. Our ambition is to connect our region to the globe."

**UCC's** offerings include online programmes such as postgraduate certificates in Health Protection, Masters in Public Health Medicine, and Masters in Occupational Health through to Nursing. More information is available at [ucc.ie/en/online/](http://ucc.ie/en/online/).

Other programmes are delivered on a blended learning basis. For example, the School of Nursing and Midwifery, offers the MSc/Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate in Gerontological Nursing as an online blended-learning programme.

In this instance, course content is delivered in **UCC** through lectures, workshops, seminars and tutorials in combination with online content delivery using its virtual learning environment, known as Blackboard.

Teaching and learning strategies on Blackboard include module study guides, discussion boards, audio/

visual resources and online assessments/activities. The programme is both innovative and responsive to the needs of local, national and international healthcare sectors.

In September 2015, the School of Nursing and Midwifery will offer two new postgraduate programmes as online blended learning programmes: MSc/Postgraduate Medical and Surgical Nursing and MSc/Postgraduate Oncology Nursing.

O'Halloran reported that online and blended learning at the School of Nursing and Midwifery **UCC** had proved very successful in reaching out to the profession of nursing, especially those wishing to engage in continuing education to advance their careers.

The flexibility of the online and blended approach to learning allows nurses to engage with further study, while at the same time balancing full-time work and family commitments.

"Online programmes completed at the have been evaluated very favourably by our students, with reference to excellence in the quality of learning, online course materials, and the support provided to them by a dynamic and highly qualified lecturing team and learning technologists," said O'Halloran.

**UCC** has developed many innovative and inclusive on-

line programmes, including the development of a new online certificate in Autism Studies to be launched in September 2015, which presents a unique opportunity for people in Ireland to learn about the spectrum of autism.

"The course is currently run on campus and will be online in September, open to anyone with an interest in autism and Asperger's syndrome, it explores various aspects of what it means to have autism, how best to support a person with autism and how a person with autism may contribute positively to society. The different perceptions and conceptualisations of autism will also be explored," said O'Halloran.

Professor Ivan Perry, head of the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health said: "Over the last decade we have invested a considerable amount of time and effort to the development of our off-campus based Master's in Public Health programme and MSc in Occupational Health.

Online learning provides an exciting opportunity to offer these programmes to a much wider range of students, including students in full-time employment who now have the option of studying for a Master's degree in a format that fits around their work and lifestyle.

"We have found that the online experience is greatly enriched by participation of



students with a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives.”

Ugandan student Fatia Ki-yange recently graduated from the online post graduate certificate in Health Protection and is currently undertaking the online Masters in Public Health.

A professional who is pursuing a life career in the field of health, her reasons for undertaking a Post Graduate certificate course in Health Protection were clear.

“The course strengthened my professional qualifications in the field; enhanced my leadership role at the African Palliative Care Association and enabled me to speak more confidently with policy-makers, healthcare workers and other stakeholders of the organisation on issues of health, especially the importance of disease prevention as part of any health intervention.

“I am also using the skills I acquired through e-learning to provide oversight and contribute to one of our new projects focusing on testing the effectiveness of e-learning for pain relief.”

UCC offers a comprehensive range of blended programmes, those where there is a mix of online course work, together with face-to-face practical class and tutorial time on campus.

UCC has very strong links with industry in both research and in co-constructing curriculum through research-in-

formed teaching and practice.

Blended learning opportunities are as diverse as marine renewable energy to supply chain management, to co-operative and social enterprise.

O’Halloran observed that students really appreciate the flexibility and the possibility of taking courses where, when and how they wish. He believes that industry benefits greatly by up-skilling its workforces in a cost-effective and time-efficient way. It also enhances the technical skills and competence of students through participation in online programmes.

“We plan on continuing to broaden UCC’s portfolio with the launch of further programmes later this year to include a certificate in Autism Studies, MA in Digital Music and Media Composition and a certificate in Analytical Chemistry, to name just a few.

“The way our current and future students are learning is different from the last generation, with more emphasis on digital learning.

“Our ambition is for every student at UCC to have the opportunity to take an on-line course during their studies to equip them to continue their journey in lifelong learning.”

For more details about online courses at UCC, see <http://online.ucc.ie> or e-mail [online@ucc.ie](mailto:online@ucc.ie)

