

Adult Continuing Education

“The kids were very proud”

Starting college with my 17-year-old daughter Page 6

“The difference between a hard life and a good life”

Five benefits of returning to education Page 12

“This is a university aspiring for liberation”

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Adult Continuing Education at UCC

May 2019

Swapping Jerseys: *Is the pen mightier than the hurley?*

Ger Fitzgerald gives out a hearty laugh when asked about the challenge of writing assignments after so long out of education.

For years he spent his time winning All-Irelands with Cork and Middleton, working as a mechanic in the army, retraining as an aircraft engineer with Aer Lingus, then managing a company office and GAA teams. But writing assignments for a college course? The thought may have crossed his mind but he'd always felt too busy to pursue it. That was until he finally decided to contact ACE at UCC.

“If you're anxious about it, ring ACE and ask them,” Ger advises. “They're well used to dealing with people who are apprehensive and nervous about taking that step. They're in the field a long time and I found them very, very good at giving advice and helping me through the process.

“Don't be afraid to take the first step because you'll be glad you did. I got enormous satisfaction and enjoyment and friendships that'll last for a lifetime. Things I would've never imagined I would've got out of the course.”

His course of choice was a Higher Diploma in Safety, Health and Welfare at Work, which led on to a Masters in Occupational Health. Having graduated from both, Ger's been through plenty of assignments since that first one. It may have seemed a culture shock back then but the supports were excellent to help him adjust.

“All of a sudden, you're doing homework and thinking, ‘Good

God, how do I cope with this?’” he chuckles.

“But ACE had it structured in such a way that the first module was geared towards that and there were supports in place on Saturdays if you wanted to turn up for extra support sessions in terms of how to go about doing assignments or research. So, we did a couple of Saturday sessions.

“It takes a little bit of time to get into doing the study again but they're very good and the supports were in place.

“In my position, I wouldn't have done any Leaving Cert so there was always a little bit of nervous apprehension about facing into that, from the academic side of it.

“It's not to say it wasn't challenging or at times difficult, but God, I was delighted I did it.”

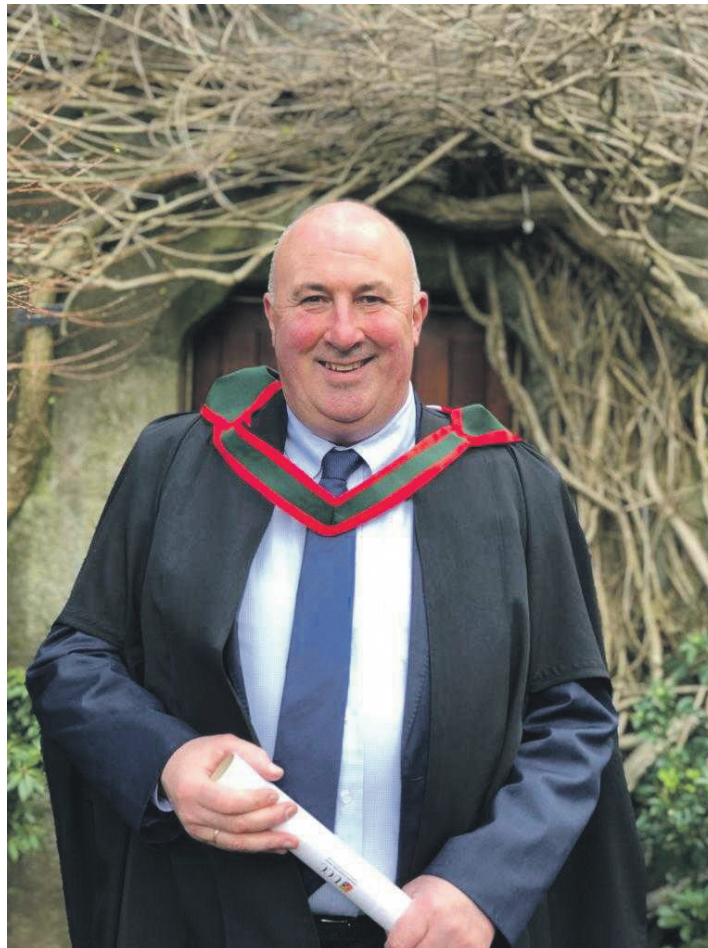
By the end of the course, Ger had no doubt that he'd be able for a Masters.

“It reinforced in me that I had the ability and the commitment, that I could manage the time and the workload, to go on and do the Masters. It'd certainly give you the confidence to say, ‘OK, I'll take this on’.

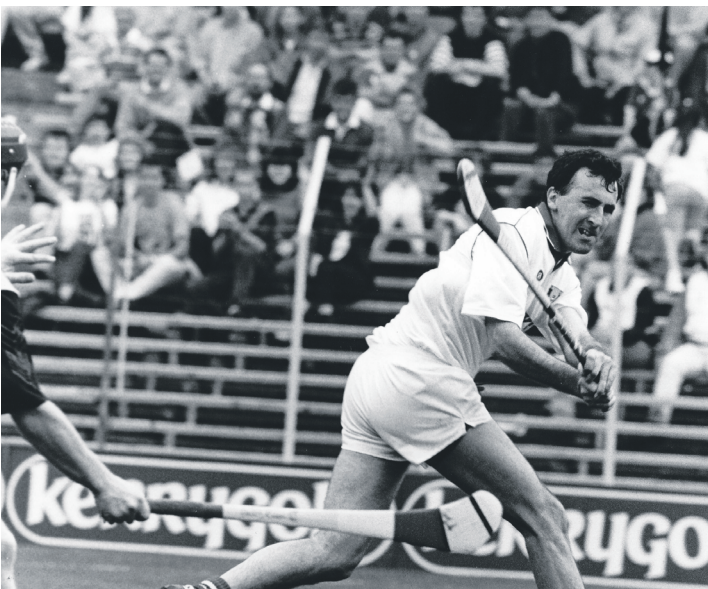
“There's a great sense of personal achievement in it. You're challenging yourself in an area you wouldn't be comfortable.”

When Ger first enrolled, it coincided with a gap in his GAA commitments and his children being grown up. His employer, Pat O'Donnell & Co., where he's a branch manager,

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Above: Graduation Day for Ger Fitzgerald Picture: David Keane.
Below: Playing for Cork. Photo: HoganStand



Education: your route to health and happiness

Education is far from the mere accumulation of knowledge. While most adults enroll in UCC to learn, to boost their career prospects, there are so many more unforeseen benefits that can be unlocked by the learning experience.

Adults who continue in education have increased life satisfaction, health, happiness, and quality of life, according to academic studies. What's more, the effects can rub off on your children, wider family, neighbours, and your community as a whole.

You may be doing a short course on mythology or a PhD in rocket science, but both will expand your horizons and improve your life outcomes across a range of areas. One person who has poured through the research and produced plenty of her own is Dr. Janas Harrington, of UCC's School of Public Health.

A key influencer in the government's obesity policy and action plan, Janas has seen how educational attainment bleeds into wider health issues in society.

“There's a big problem in terms of health inequalities and the key to a lot of that is education.

“We know those who receive lower levels of education have poorer health, poorer diet, poorer lifestyle habits, and lifestyle choices. It tends to be a vicious circle.

“If you've poorer health, you end up down the line in terms of employment, in lower paid jobs, there's an association with increased stress, a higher tendency to absenteeism.

“We know that keeping and retaining people in education from a young age tends to have a protective effect, and you have better lifestyle and health outcomes in the long run.”

So beyond that knowledge of mythology or rocket science or whatever it may be, what life skills can education give you?

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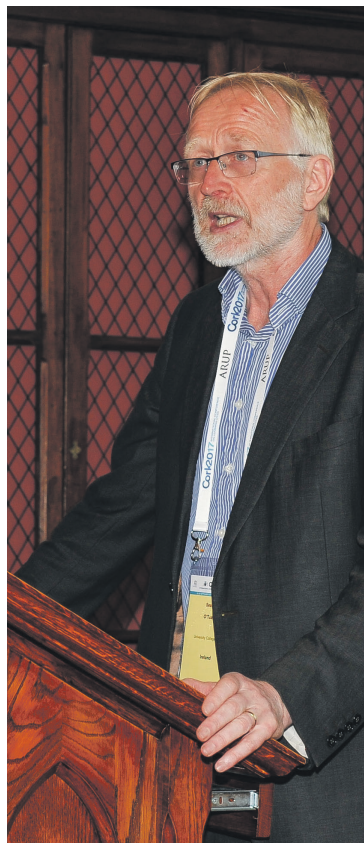
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ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION AT UCC



Historic Year in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning

Séamus Ó Tuama,
ACE at UCC Director

Historic change sometimes happens in slow almost imperceptible ways, other times it comes in seismic moments like the French Revolution or the fall of the Berlin Wall. The years 1789 and 1989 resonate far into the future, will 2019 resonate in the same way, perhaps not. However, it may in time be seen as a moment of significant change in the path of Lifelong Learning. Earlier this year the *Global Commission on the Future of Work* report was published by the International Labour Organisation. This report recommended that there

would be a universal entitlement to lifelong learning. That would enable people to acquire skills and to reskill and to upskill. Lifelong learning encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning, from early childhood and basic education through to adult learning. Framing lifelong learning as a universal entitlement, is potentially a game changing development for adult learners. This after all is coming from a commission jointly chaired by the Swedish Prime Minister and the South African President, it is coming from a United Nations body, that actually preceded the UN itself, having been founded as part of the League of Nations in 1919. What is equally

significant is that it rhymes with other national and international policy shifts. The most significant of which is Sustainable Development Goal 4: *Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All*, which is part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We see similar sentiments in the OECD National Skills Strategies and the European Council 2011 Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning. Here in Ireland the National Skills Strategy 2025 advocates increasing participation in lifelong learning to ensure "Ireland has a flexible, skilled workforce, where individuals can

gain the skills to move between jobs and careers throughout their working lives". There is of course an equally compelling mission in adult education, voiced exactly 100 years ago as: "a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong". That definition, from the British Ministry of Reconstruction's 1919 *Report on Adult Education*, shaped adult education internationally for the rest of the 20th century. Adult education may change focus over time, but it always has a transformative impact on individuals and society. We may all be standing on the threshold of an era of significant development emanating from the sea change of 2019.

Local Impact from Global Connections

Séamus Ó Tuama,
ACE at UCC Director

University College Cork like all modern universities is part of a global network of scholarship. But UCC has two additional advantages in lifelong learning that no other university in the world has. This month UCC will take up the Chair of the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (ASEM LLL Hub). The ASEM

LLL Hub is an official network for university cooperation in Lifelong Learning Research between Asia and Europe. The Hub brings together more than 100 researcher teams in five international research networks, it includes senior representatives of 36 universities in its University Council and Senior Officials from 25 ministries of

education and five flagship international organisations. UCC is also one of the four pillar partners in Cork UNESCO Learning City, with Cork City Council, Cork Institute of Technology and Cork Education and Training Board. This has led to significant partnerships locally in Cork that directly benefit people living in this region. It brings

significant additional benefits too by connecting us to best practice in other learning cities all over the globe. These local to global connections and the significant new policy initiatives for lifelong learning are opening doors of opportunity like never before.

Letters

"Our lecturers have all been inspiring – and that's for real."

The course has been designed in such a way as to allow for those who have studied the topic before and for those who are new to the area. There is no stress, except for stress you may wish to place on yourself. It's up to you how much you want to work on any topic.

These people understand that children get sick, childminders fail to turn up. Choices have to be made about attending a Saturday lecture or supporting a family member or relative. I've learned the basics of academic writing – from a science background, this was alien to me.

The last essay I wrote was for my Leaving Cert English. That was 1991. After that it was all science, diagrams and bullet points. It took a while to adjust to writing academically. I found the tutorials very helpful for this. Every assistance is available. There are online resources from ACE at UCC including tutorial and lecture materials.

I'm close to finishing my first year of Autism Studies in ACE at UCC. I discovered the course by accident while I was applying for a course in public health. The most important thing about choosing any course as an older student is that you are passionate about the subject. This course is very manageable, the staff involved in delivering the course know that we all have other lives outside of the course.

When I heard that as adult students we would be "supported" and assisted, I really didn't understand the level of support that would end up being given. Back in the 90's, it was sink or swim and everyone for themselves. My experience of ACE is the complete opposite of my previous third level experience (which was one of pressure, fear of failure and inaccessible

lecturers).

The course is also fun, mixing with other students on the course is very enjoyable. We are all on similar paths for different reasons and we are from many different backgrounds.

I would recommend anyone with a passion for any of the subjects offered on the ACE programmes to give it a go. It's designed for adults, with complicated lives and the support offered by the ACE staff together with state of the art technology is outstanding.

Sheila,
1st year ACE student 2018 studying Autism studies with ACE at UCC

"I would like to highly recommend this recently updated course."

The module materials for the Diploma in Disability Studies are drawn from the latest global approaches to disability and facilitating inclusion with an emphasis upon the practical challenges that individuals, families, professionals and wider communities face on a daily basis. With lecturers from a wide variety of backgrounds, students are exposed to variety of perspectives, experiences and comprehensively supported throughout their studies in an individualised way.

Joe McDonald,
Joe McDonald, Regional Coordinator, An Cuan, Cope Foundation for the DDS and HDFIDS update for the paper

"This year in UCC has restored my faith in myself."

After two years of toying with the idea of not just returning to college but starting college for the first time, I took the plunge in the summer of 2018 and applied for the ACE Youth and Community Work Diploma Course in UCC. An early school leaver but with many years of work and volunteer experience I included this information on my application form hoping it would compensate for my lack of formal education.

When I was accepted the feelings of joy and excitement were matched by feelings of fear and inadequacy. The unknown, the building, the parking! I needn't have worried. From the very first night we received guidance and support from our co-ordinator, tutors, college services and fellow students.

Everyone was there for the same reason and goals, to learn and to enhance the learning experience. The course has opened my mind, reminded me to look around the world. Group work giving me fresh perspectives, challenging my own knowledge, thoughts and experience. This year in UCC has restored my faith in myself. It has reminded me age is positive, life experiences (good and bad) are positive when shared and with the academic knowledge of the younger students in our course combines for interesting and progressive experiences.

Sinead Crowley,
Youth and Community Work Student

'Don't give yourself a destination': How I went from school-leaver to director of ACE at UCC

ACE at UCC Director Séamus Ó Tuama shares how education went from tormenting to transforming his life and why he wants to do the same for all ACE students.

When ACE Director Séamus Ó Tuama talks about people who have endured negative experiences in education, he doesn't have to look far.

He doesn't need to review the literature or examine the research, because he's been that soldier.

He didn't have a good experience in primary or secondary school, so college was never on his mind when he left. He worked as a surveyor on a building site but an engineer, John Waggott, was in his ear every day:

'You should really get on with your education.'

'You're wasting your time here.'

When he decided to make that leap, he went to agricultural college in Rockwell. That proved the stepping stone that encouraged him he could enjoy the classroom. Education could be for him.

"They started giving me back my results and I said, 'wow, I'm actually able to do this stuff no problem'. It was a revelation to me. 'God, you're not completely stupid after all.'"

Arriving into UCC as a mature student, he made one promise to himself on his first day – one he's kept ever since:

'Don't give yourself a destination.'

"That was one of the best decisions I ever made. I didn't say 'I'm going to do this for three years and then I'm going to do that'. I said 'I'm going to take my time to think about where this might lead me to'."

Séamus believes those with unconventional school experiences can often be the most creative learners. He compares them to the superstars who emerge from Brazil's street football tradition. Many of them grow up in poverty without grass pitches to play on, without goalposts to aim at, without boots to protect their feet, without a proper ball with which to play. Yet they ended up producing some of the most beautiful, skillful play the world has ever seen.

Fast-forward Séamus' story 36 years to his office on Western Road and he talks for over 10 minutes straight when asked to sum up ACE at UCC's mission. Fundamentally, it's about "giving people an opportunity to access education that they otherwise might not have".

That can be early school-leavers, those from socio-economically disadvantaged areas or communities, such as travellers or recent migrants, prisoners, people in work who need to upskill or evolve to meet the needs of a changing world, and career changers.

"There's a lot of groups of people who are in those kinds of scenarios. 'The whole landscape around work is changing so dramatically that almost nobody is ever going to



ACE Director Séamus Ó Tuama and Professor Cathal O'Connell, on the 16th of November, 2018
Photo David Keane

leave formal education into a job for life.

"People in the university probably see adult education as a sideshow but for me, it's the main topic now.

"They have to realise that people are learners for their entire lives; that it's not just a case of them coming in and doing a three- or four-year degree, going off out, and then that's all that finished.

"It's never going to be like that again."

That mission also extends into addressing the complex global issues facing our planet, such as climate change or migration, and our inadequate reaction which is too often rooted in ignorance, fear, and a lack of understanding.

"One of the critical things that all education does is create cognitive flexibility – that you're capable of opening your mind to see the world in new and different ways.

"For me, I see our mission as about changing the world. Trying to get people to think and understand the world in different ways, to improve their possibilities in terms of work, but also their social lives, in terms of how their families operate, or how their communities operate."

The positives, for each individual who enrolls, can be enormous and wide-reaching.

Research on ten women from the northside of Cork city who took ACE courses in the 1990s showed the progression. They started with

courses like women's studies, social studies, youth and community work, and all subsequently found employment, including one in academia.

"They all influenced their siblings, their parents, their children, nephews, nieces, neighbours, and so on. In terms of impact, you could see a massive impact for the wider community."

Séamus says, however, the benefits from education are not always predictable, once you don't limit yourself to a set destination.

He cites an example from one of UCC's many industry partnerships, with a company in the pharmaceutical sector.

The programme coordinator said one of his employees came into his office with a message one day:

'My wife and my teenage daughters sent me. They wanted me to tell you that the course has transformed our lives at home. I'm a better listener, I'm more empathetic towards them, I can understand what they're saying. We're all getting on much, much better.'

Not the purpose of the course, certainly, but it was transforming this man's life, making him a happier person coming to work and a more cordial coworker. And were he a football coach, or on a committee, or even playing cards with his friends, he'd be better in all those areas, too.

"It's impacting every part of his

life. That's critical. We need to be very open in recognising that everybody has their own journey... and a lot more open-minded about what learning is."

Séamus recalls interviewing a mature student coming onto an undergraduate course. Her portfolio began with courses like flower arranging, first aid courses, the type of stuff universities at which can sometimes look down their noses.

"You could see she was building a portfolio of learning, building her own confidence around learning, and, from fairly humble origins, she was able to plot her own learning journey.

"She could say, 'I'm ready for this now. I started with all these small things five, six, seven years ago and I've built it up gradually. I've built my own confidence. I feel I'm a learner ready to go to the next step now'."

That progression isn't necessarily a ladder either, with people who have completed Masters and PhD degrees increasingly looping back to follow different interests through Level 6 courses.

Séamus has heard all the excuses in his time:

'Oh, I'm not any good at maths.'

'I could never learn a language.'

'I wouldn't be able to do it.'

'Sure I'm too old for learning now.'

'You can't teach an old dog new tricks.'

Each one makes him despair a lit-

tle. And tell the old-dog line to the 103-year-old Mary McGrath still learning through UCC's Learning Neighbourhoods.

But like everyone in ACE at UCC, he also gets a huge buzz out of the impacts they make on people's lives. They know that first step is often the hardest for people.

"It's like if your New Year's resolution is to get more exercise," Séamus says.

"The hardest part is you say to yourself, 'I'm going to go for a 2km run', and the hardest part of the 2km run on the first day is getting out of bed.

"Once you've put on your runners you've done the really hard part. The running is the easy part.

"It's the same with this. The hardest part is getting it into your head that it's right for you to do it.

"Once the person takes the risk with themselves and gets over the barrier around age or the barrier around what will people think or 'I'd never be able to do this'... Once they immerse themselves in it, they'll discover quite quickly they're better at it than they imagined.

"Sometimes you just have to surprise yourself a little bit and just go for it.

"What we discover here is when somebody takes a risk and does an adult education course, they'll spend the rest of their lives at it. They're doing course after course after course because they get such a buzz out of it and they meet so many interesting people and they learn so much. It becomes almost like an addiction.

"That mightn't be the case for everybody but for a lot of people it's about that leap of faith."

All this Séamus knows from personal experience.

"As somebody who had a lot of negative experiences in the education system, I'm very conscious of not reinforcing bad experiences and I'd want people here to be really, really, really conscious of that.

"One of the benefits of education is it gives you the capacity to see the world in less black and white ways so you don't see the obstacles as such obstacles anymore and you are never going to be the same. Once you discover it, you're in a different place – you can never go back. There's always different and new possibilities.

"For me, it's about people being optimistic, trusting themselves, taking risks, and seeing where it goes."

Breaking down the mental health stigma through conversation and song



David Lawlor performing at the 2019 Life Long Learning Festival in Cork. Photo: Darragh Kane

*What we all need
is a place to breathe
A hand to hold
To be believed and consoled*

Unexpected things can happen from college courses. Just ask David Lawlor.

Coming from a working background of certifying and installing alarm systems, the Ballinspittle man enrolled in the Certificate in Mental Health in the Community having not studied since his Leaving Cert in the late-90s.

That course has opened up many avenues for him, even including an audience for his music. He wrote a song about mental health, inspired by some of the personal experiences shared during the course, and has performed it at some college events since then.

"There was a lot of people on the course who had lived experience of mental illness or had family members [who died by] suicide and things like that.

"The song was basically about some of the approaches that might be a bit better than what they are at present.

"The reaction was quite good. I was happy enough with it. It's funny, in doing the course unexpected things happened really."

The course tackles what David sees as a societal fear in discussing mental health, instead of viewing it as just another aspect of health.

The lived experiences of many of the lecturers and students who'd faced challenging mental health made it all the more beneficial. It helped graduates become more proactive in maintaining their own mental health and more willing to open up conversations on the subject.

"I did that course two years ago and

we still have a WhatsApp group to keep in touch. There's a real closeness there between us all still.

"Certainly, doing a course like that, you can learn an awful lot from a book and the things that you read, but I don't think there's anything really [like] somebody's lived experience and their willingness to share that with other people.

"For me, that brought the course into a different dimension. It was phenomenal and opened my eyes really because of that aspect.

"For instance, there was a woman that did the course and two weeks before the course started one of her children died by suicide. You could imagine, she came on that course two weeks later and you're with that person through a very difficult process.

"A lot of the lecturers themselves had their own personal experiences with mental health, which was very refreshing... There was a lot of support as well. Everybody was only a phone call or an email away. Everybody was on your side. It was a very friendly atmosphere."

The balance between the academic side of the study and maintaining people's emotional wellness was well struck. In terms of the academics, David faced his own challenge when he was diagnosed with dyslexia.

"That diagnosis clearly states I have the reading ability of a 10-year-old and the spelling ability of an eight-year-old.

"So, it shows you... I've done quite well in that course and subsequently in the Diploma in Autism that I'm doing.

"I'm getting pretty high marks in the assignments and stuff like that. I realise now [it's no barrier] but I didn't previous to that."

Having completed his first course, and now doing his Diploma in Autism Studies, David has realised he can handle further education as he pursues a career in the social work sector. It's quite the turnaround for someone who closed the door to education after his Leaving Cert.

"I always felt education wasn't for me and the job I worked in, I'd worked in since school. But I thought to myself, is this really what I want to be doing for the rest of my life?

"So, I actually went to the ACE office on Western Road looking to see what courses they had available and mental health was a good fit."

David's motto is: 'If you change nothing, nothing ever changes'.

"It's okay to be afraid of anything but I'd just tell people it's a very supportive course and very much tailored to an individual's needs.

"Wherever you are as a person, that's where they want to meet you and help you to improve from there."

Course Spotlight

Certificate in Mental Health in the Community

Duration : 1 Year

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
NFQ Level: 6

Aim: This course explores how individuals and communities can enhance mental and emotional well-being through best practice in mental health promotion and suicide prevention.

Apply now at:

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-cmh>

'The two years just flew': Driving from Cavan to Cork in pursuit of a dream job

The journey from Cavan to Cork is a long one, but it's not even the furthest someone has travelled for UCC's Psychology of Criminal Behaviour Diploma.

It took Julie Brady four hours, door-to-door, from her house to UCC for her classes, one week-end per month, but it's a course worth travelling for.

In the group before hers, somebody travelled from Belfast every month. So Cavan to Cork? Sure it's no distance at all.

"It's definitely worth the journey," says Julie. And worth all the more when you're pursuing your dream job with the Irish Prison Service.

Julie was working in a deli at the time and the scheduling enabled her to continue working full-time, which was a huge financial help.

"I only needed to take off one Friday every month. The course would definitely suit somebody who wanted to get back into college and had children or other

commitments.

"Two years sounded like a long time but it wasn't really. It just flew. I didn't know where that time went. It was only 16 weekends when you look at it that way.

"Doing the course in UCC definitely helped open some doors for me."

The decision to sign up came as Julie was re-evaluating what she wanted to do – what career path she wanted to step onto.

The leap back into education was a daunting one, but only briefly. All she needed was a push to get over that hardest step – the first one.

"I was getting ready for the flight or fight syndrome. I'm either going to face this or say something's come up and I can't do it.

"But I just gave myself a push. I did see I was becoming a lot more mature in myself and I did want to get a career on the go.

"Sitting around the house and waiting for things to happen isn't the way to go so you really just need to bite the bullet and get on with it.

"I just persuaded myself to go and I

'It's like a shower for the head one night of the week'

For a class who has their first assignment due in three days' time, the Local and Regional Studies students show no signs of stress on their tea break.

They may only be nine weeks into their new routine of Thursday-night lectures, but they all pack closely round one of the wide tables in UCC's Main Rest, alongside lecturer Dr Stiofán Ó Cadhla, to share a laugh and catch up on the week's news.

They'll grow even closer as time goes on over the two-year part-time course, and especially after their day trip to Ardmore in May – a scene they're predicting to go something along the lines of Trotters' day out to Margate in Only Fools and Horses – but the class already share a bond from their studies and shared stories in the Quad's West Wing.

From those with new families to those minding grandchildren, from documentary-makers to taxi drivers, from Tralee to Tipperary, and with plenty of Cork locals too, they all bring different life experiences and historic tales to the classroom.

Tim O'Sullivan is from Killarney but travels from his work in Tralee to pursue a long-held interest in history.

Students of the Diploma in Local & Regional Studies on a fieldtrip to Ardmore, Co. Waterford



"I hadn't been in education in a long time and I'm loving it," he says.

"There's no documentary or anything else at all like that. It's like a shower for the head on one night of the week.

"You're tied up with so much of the mundanity of the normal stuff you do in work, I look forward to this.

"Thursday morning I'm like: I'm going to Cork tonight – brilliant! I can't wait to get there!

"It's the first time a Kerryman has ever said I can't wait to go to Cork!"

There may be a documentary or two in it yet for Matt Sullivan, a filmmaker from Kenmare, but now

'The kids were very proud': Starting college with my 17-year-old daughter

When Deirdre O'Regan took her first steps back to education after 32 years, little did she know it'd lead to her starting college alongside her daughter Amy. Having left school at 16 for work, the college experience was something Deirdre never thought would happen for her. Sure, she hadn't written an essay in decades. Her engagement in her local community centre in Knocknaheeny, however, brought her down that pathway. "I was involved up in my community centre volunteering and I was doing small, little taster courses. Community participation, voter education, and all that kind of stuff. "Then they said they were going to start the diploma, and I said, 'Do you know what, I'll give it a go'. "As I say, 32 years since I was in school, I didn't know what to expect. Would I be able for it or whatever? I was delighted I gave it a go." That Diploma in Women's Studies, run as an outreach programme in Knocknaheeny in partnership with ACE at UCC, spanned a range of ages from mid-20s to late-60s, and created lasting friendships. "I enjoyed it. Loved the whole thing of graduating and the class was great, all the girls that did it and we had one man. It was great. "Myself and another girl out of the

class then went on to do our degree. "The tutors were great. They were very understanding. "There was two women in the group, one was about 68 and the other was about 63, and it was fantastic for them. They actually loved it. It's a couple of years down the line and they still meet up every Friday morning." What Deirdre learned from the course even had knock-on benefits for her family and those around her. "Because I was talking about it, my son, who was only 12 or 13 at the time, he was noticing stuff as well. "Even for the GAA, Cork won the camogie All-Ireland and they [RTÉ] cut them off in the middle of their speech to go into an ad. They wouldn't do that for the men. "Everyone was becoming more aware, even myself." The course gave Deirdre the confidence to progress into a degree in Youth and Community Work, fulfilling a long-time ambition of hers. "I was always saying I'd like to go back to college but I wouldn't have tried it. I wouldn't have said, 'I'm going back to college today'. "But because I did the course, it gave me the opportunity to go back to college. I saw then I was able to do an assignment. I was able to do what was expected of me, even though I had a busy family life with

the two kids. "Myself and my daughter started college together so she was only 15 when I started to do [the ACE diploma], and Robert was only maybe 11. "The kids were very proud and they were excited to say, 'My mam's gone back to college'. "Having completed her degree, Deirdre's currently working part-time for Matt Talbot Services, having started out there on her college placement. She works on providing treatment services for young males with addiction issues or on probation, plus she's doing another part-time community course on mental health. She strongly advocates that those with a young family can follow their ambitions to return to study. The supports are available in college, after all, if you can just match that with your support system at home for those occasions when college work and life need to be carefully juggled. "All I would say is if you can do it, go for it. "If it's your time, and if you've good family support, somebody to collect the kids or something like that... My mam and dad were very good to me, and then John, my husband, would have to take over because I was going to the library. 'Sorry I can't clean up there because I have to do an assignment', or whatever. "You could put it off for too long so if you can do it, go for it, because you'll enjoy it, [even] the experience alone of sitting on campus... I didn't go out on a Thursday night though!"

Deirdre O'Regan was conferred with a Bachelor of Youth and Community Work from UCC. Photo: Provision

Course Spotlight

Diploma in Women's Studies
Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
NFQ Level: 6/7
Aim: This course focuses on the changed and changing roles of women, delving into areas of knowledge relevant to women's lives today
Apply now at:
<https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-dws>



Short courses: 'I've done so many they even gave me a couple of free ones'

ACE at UCC offers a wide range of short courses each term, attended by a mix of students who return every spring and autumn, and those who dip in and out of specific subjects of interest.

While the autumn/winter calendar will be finalised in July, last spring's offering of 40 courses gives a flavour of what you can expect.

Want to improve your public speaking? Try the 'Creative Communication' course. Interested in history? There were courses on Cork, the Crusades, and 'Irish Folklore and Mythology'. Want to make it more personal? How about 'Genealogy: How to Trace your Family Tree'? More of a literature lover? There was 'Ghosts, Vampires and Inner Demons: An Introduction to Gothic Fiction' or courses on Jane Austen, Elena Ferrante, and the Brontës. Art admirers had a choice of 'Art Therapy', 'Vincent van Gogh', 'War in Art', and Renaissance courses, among others.

There were courses to develop your leadership skills, like 'Activating the People Factor' and 'An Introduction to Coaching'. Plus, you could look after yourself and your loved ones with 'Brain Health', 'Mindful Parenting', or 'Sugar, Fat and Fad Diets'.

Want to understand humanity's darker impulses? Select from 'Cyber Psychology', 'Philosophy, Crime and the Criminal Mind', and 'Why they Kill: Examining Human Violence'.

And that's not even touching on a range of music and dance courses, 'Creative Writing', 'The Science of Gardening', 'Understanding Gender Equality', 'Wine Studies', or many more.

We spoke to three short-course regulars on why they're so enthusiastic about lifelong learning.



Course lecturer **Professor Emeritus Éamonn Ó Carragáin** leading a group to students on a tour to Venice with the short course, **Venice: An Introduction to the City and its History**





Ger Fitzgerald Playing for Cork.
Photo: HoganStand

Cover Story Continued

was another support to rely on.

As his studies progressed, he was surprised by his capacity to balance and even benefit from his involvement as a selector with his club Middleton, who reached the Cork Senior Hurling final last year.

"I thought I shouldn't continue being involved with team management but I found it was a good distraction.

"I felt I wouldn't have the time, but what I found was when I went to the training session, it was like a downtime from the study and it was good for the head. It helped clear the mind.

"If you were struggling with an assignment or struggling with an idea, you'd go off, do the training, come back, and you'd have a fresh approach to it.

"I found they complemented one another once you got them into

their respective spaces."

But the best unexpected benefit of all was the lasting friendships he gained from those study groups with his class, who helped each other through any assignments. They may have come to ACE at UCC from different backgrounds, be it nursing, PhDs, various industries, but they remain only a phone call away when any advice or chat is needed.

"Besides getting the qualification and the sense of achievement, I would put down the friendships I made as the biggest gain I got. It was brilliant."

The HDip in Safety, Health and Welfare at Work is currently accepting applications for the 19/20 academic year.

Apply now at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-hdshww/>

Derval Dempsey

Q: How did you get into doing UCC's short courses?

A: I came home in 2008 after working all my life overseas. I'm in my seventies now and I was working in international organisations for at least 30 years.

I'm not a scientist but I worked in the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna for years. I lived in Lebanon and Beirut and I was in Baghdad for a few years with the UN.

When you leave at 18, you come back to another country... Either you go to the golf course or you play bridge, and I hated both of those. I was in there trying to learn this stupid thing [bridge] and I said, 'I'd be better off going to some adult ed courses'.

Q: How many courses have you done?

A: I've done so many they even gave me a couple of free ones. I did it mainly because I was new here at the time, but as well as that it was very interesting. I've had some beautiful courses.

Q: What were your favourites?

A: The last one I did was 'A Compendium of Cork History'. That was fabulous. I did another one, 'Brain Health', with Denis Staunton, and he was very excellent. There was another guy, Anthony Hackett, he did literature and he did music. He was just brilliant. The lecturers are excellent.

For me, it's just perfect. I've done exams and now I just want to enjoy myself.

Ann Enright

Q: When did you start doing short courses?

A: I started doing courses when I retired from teaching 11 years ago. I did a couple of history of art ones and I've been doing two a year since then.

Q: What were your favourites?

A: The history of art would be my main interest but I've done local history ones too. There was one on Vienna one year, and Michael Waldron does a terrific one on Greece - 'Greeks bearing gifts'. It was really wonderful, very uplifting.

Eamonn Ó Carragáin did one on

Rome, one on Venice, one on Paris. He's a terrific lecturer. I've made lots of friends from doing those courses and we've gone on trips.

Q: Will you be checking in with those friends to hear what they're signing up to for the autumn?

A: Yeah, I have a buddy and we usually do the same course. The only trouble is now we've nearly everything done at this stage! We did a new one in spring, the Cork compendium, with different lecturers every week. It was fabulous.

Charlie Hill

Q: How have you found the short courses since first signing up?

A: I've done a few courses and they're a great idea because you go down and get a lecture, and it's only for two hours. It's 200 quid, or something like that, and well worth it. You go to eight lectures in the spring or ten in the autumn. I've gone to mostly history ones. I've done a music one, and when I was in business, I did a leadership one.

They're quite beneficial. You don't have to study that much and you pick up something on every one of them.

Q: What were your favourites?

A: John Ware is an excellent lecturer. He's very entertaining. This is my third one with him.

He did the Vikings, one on empire building, and the last one was the Crusades, which is very, very detailed. You'd eight weeks to do the Crusades, which lasted 200 years, and another 200 years of fighting afterwards when they left. All that was very interesting. James Cronin did art history and empire history, which was very interesting, and there's a good following for him too. He was very, very good. It's very leisurely and all on your own interests.

Apply now for the 19/20 short courses at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace/>

From the high seas to UCC: The safe way to land a job onshore

When Tobi Bashiru decided to make the transition from working at sea to onshore, there was no compass he could look at to decide what direction to take.

His degree was in Nautical Science and since then, he'd worked away from home for up to six months at a time, living in Ghana while sailing his route around the Gulf of Guinea along the West African coast.

That can be tough at the best of times, but especially so when his then-girlfriend, now wife, Mercy, was from Ireland.

"I'd risen through the ranks to become a navigational officer so part of my duty was to be responsible for the safety of people on the ship.

"When I decided to do a transition to work onshore, I started to think about something I'm more comfortable with. What course could I do that was related to something I had done before?

working full-time, studying Tuesdays and Thursdays, and coaching his local football club Carrigaline United on Mondays and Wednesdays, with matches at weekends.

"It was a bit demanding because I was working full-time, coming to classes from work, and volunteering as a football coach. That was the major challenge but it was rewarding as well.

"I tried as much as possible to study while I was free during the week. Just half an hour or an hour a day so it didn't pile up.

"The course and the experience I got on placement opened doors for me."

Those opened doors included his current job, with Danone in Macroom.

While it may have been a busy time, Tobi was able to balance his various responsibilities and interests. He encourages others that it's not as tricky to do as you'd think.



Tobi Bashiru from Carrigaline, H.Dip in safety, health and welfare at work, with his wife Mercy at the Adult Continuing Education Winter conferring ceremony in UCC. Picture: David Keane

"Safety was one of the things where I knew, 'Okay, I've done this before. If I do more studies into this, I can transfer it easily'."

He considered his options and chose UCC's Higher Diploma in Safety, Health and Welfare at Work. The course was highly practical, with group projects including doing a risk assessment of Café Gusto in Cork city and compiling a safety data sheet for chemicals.

Accredited by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, and developed in co-operation with the Health and Safety Authority, the course was tailored to the needs of industry.

Indeed, Tobi got an 18-month placement with ABP Food Group in Cahir within months of starting the course. At his busiest, he was

"It's not as difficult as it looks. Once you get into it, you ride the wave. It's easier as it goes.

"The lecturers are very easy to approach. They would explain if you have any confusion or take their time.

"They're very well aware that it's adult learning and they take that into consideration as well. Some people have been out of study for a long time so they are very helpful.

"You get a lot of information you need to know in the classroom. As you go on into industry, it's all practical knowledge and it will help you.

"I'd say give it a go. It's not as hard as you think it will be, and you will get through the exams and all that. We all came through it."

ACE at UCC courses on offer for 2019/2020 academic year

Level 6 Programmes

Certificate in Arts (History)

Venue: UCC
Duration: 1 year
Delivery: One evening per week

Certificate in Arts (History of Art)

Venue: UCC
Duration: 1 year
Delivery: One evening per week

Certificate in Arts (Psychology)

Venue: UCC
Duration: 1 year
Delivery: One evening per week

Aim: These courses will provide students with a general introduction to the discipline of psychology, history or history of art.

Certificate in Languages

Venue: UCC
Duration: 1 or 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week

Certificate in Mental Health in the Community

Venue: UCC, Dublin, Cavan, Clare
Duration: 1 Year
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
Aim: This course explores how individuals and communities can enhance mental and emotional well-being through best practice in mental health promotion and suicide prevention.

Certificate in Practice Support in Social Farming

Venue: UCC
Duration: 1 year
Delivery: One evening per week
Aim: This unique programme is the first of its kind in Ireland and has been designed for those involved specifically in the Social Farming initiative, both the host farmers and the service providers working with people with a disability

Level 7 Programmes

Certificate in Safety, Health and Welfare at Work

Venue: UCC
Duration: 1 year
Delivery: one evening per week
Aim: This course aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to be competent in the practice of health and safety in the workplace, regardless of the sector

Diploma in Autism Studies

Venue: UCC, Limerick, Kilkenny, Online
Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
Aim: This course explores how people on the autistic spectrum experience the world and spans from the history of autism to the various strengths, challenges, theories and conceptualisations.

Diploma in Development & Global Human Rights

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
Aim: This course aims to provide a critical and theoretical understanding of the issues, processes and institutions central to global poverty, inequality and development

Diploma in Disability Studies

Venue: UCC, Limerick
Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week
Aim: This course explores how disability is understood in our society by examining new research and different educational models.

Diploma in Environmental Science & Social Policy

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays.
Aim: The course is designed to give you a broad knowledge and experience of the key concepts of environmental science, sustainable development, social policy and economics that shape the world we live in

Diploma in European Art History

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week
Aim: This course will survey European art history from the fifth century BC to contemporary practice and will introduce students to the significant work of artists, sculptors and architects in the disciplinary canon examining their work within the broader

social and cultural context of its production

Diploma in Food Manufacturing Management

Venue: UCC
Duration: 11 months
Delivery: 10 two-day modules

Diploma in Food Science and Technology

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 Years
Delivery: Weekend workshops
Aim: This course gives students an understanding of food science, microbiology, food processing technology, nutrition and food business

Diploma in Geology

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 Years
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
Aim: This course introduces students to the history of the earth and its environment over the past 4.6 billion years through exploring how the earth works and how life has evolved

Diploma in Management Practice

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 Years
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
Aim: The programme is designed to introduce participants to key management principles, best practices and practical ready-to-apply tools in order to help students build their own managerial skill-set

Diploma in Process and Chemical Engineering

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 Years
Delivery: One evening per week
Aim: This course introduces students to the fundamentals of process and chemical engineering including key principles and their application

Diploma in Social and Psychological Health Studies

Venue: UCC
Duration: 2 Years
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
Aim: This course introduces students to the key concepts and theoretical frameworks relevant to personal, social and health education.

Diploma in Social Studies

Venue: UCC, Killarney
Duration: 2 Years
Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
Aim: This interdisciplinary programme gives students the opportunity to study sociology, social policy, social psychology, social philosophy and economics in order to develop a critical awareness of the key issues that impact on everyday life in contemporary society

Diploma in the Psychology of Criminal Behaviour

Location: UCC
Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One weekend per month (Oct. to Sept).

“The difference between a hard life and a good life”

Five benefits of a return to education

Dr. Denis Staunton

Are you thinking of taking a new direction in life?

For many, the first step is returning to education. Developing your learning skills is one of the best investments you can make. It will be a decision you will never regret. Returning to education will broaden your knowledge and self-understanding, expand your horizons by offering new career opportunities, as well as providing greater choices in life.

There was a time when it was thought that the adult brain declined with age and older people could not perform as well as those younger than them. This has been proven a myth and we now know that the brain has the same capacity through-

out our lifespan.

We also know the phrase ‘use it or lose it’ applies.

A unique feature of the educational landscape in Ireland during the last 30 years has been the development of a vibrant community-based adult education sector. Without this, many adults may not have taken the first step back into education.

Adult continuing education programmes have many advantages, including the fact that it’s local, more flexible, informal, and friendly. It provides a supportive environment with smaller class sizes, peer support, and teaching which emphasises participation, co-operation, and creativity.

Going back to study as an adult is becoming increasingly popular, with many different reasons behind decisions to return to the classroom. Although many cite the main reason as increasing their employment prospects and earning potential, once they have completed a course, the personal benefits far outweigh the vocational benefits.

1. Increase in self-confidence

The most important benefit many people gain is an increase in self-confidence. Entering a course may be a daunting or scary experience, at first. The system is unfamiliar and some older learners

have bad memories of education in school. As mature students, they may feel their brains might not be so active, that they may not be clever enough to succeed. They soon find this is not the case – indeed many adults surprise themselves with how well they do on courses.

The best part of participating in a course as an adult student is intensely personal: the sense that you are being intellectually stretched, that you are growing as a person, and developing skills and abilities you never knew you possessed. That personal growth helps to build your self-confidence. Over time, many see that they handle situations better, or communicate with others in a different way. Others feel they have found a new identity and, for the first time in their lives, feel comfortable with who they are.

2. Personal growth and development

Whatever the outcome of your studies – whether you graduate with a first-class grade or achieved an honourable pass – you will never regret your time in college.

A recognised qualification may be a passport to a worthwhile and rewarding career. There is also that special sense of wellbeing that comes from setting yourself a

difficult but attainable target and achieving it.

It is something nobody can ever take away from you.

3. Increased career prospects

People who return to education in the hope of enhancing their career prospects are generally proved correct and find more occupational opportunities available to them.

While everyone improves their lifestyle by completing a qualification, some people’s circumstances change dramatically. The adults whose circumstances improve most significantly include those who have been full-time homemakers or unemployed or living with a disability.

A recognised qualification is a passport to increased occupational status as well as substantial improvements in their job happiness and work satisfaction. As one student put it, ‘it is the difference between a hard life and a good life’.

4. Making new friends and relationships

Making new friends may not be the primary motivation for adults enrolling, but they tend to find it an added bonus.

Even hard work can be enjoyable when you are working alongside other students who may be struggling with notetaking or essay-writ-

ing, just like you.

Learning is essentially a social experience where you share your doubts, confusions, and complexities, as well as your convictions and certainties (preferably over coffee). Many people who have studied together become lifelong friends.

5. Intellectual development

Most people sign-up to study because they expect to develop their intellect in some way. For adults, this is of particular importance.

Intellectual change is often the most positive benefit of education for many. Learning how to read academic books and engage with academic theories and debates changes people.

Mature graduates insist they can’t imagine what they thought before they studied for a qualification. This is what is so great about education. It brings about a new way of interpreting the world and living within it. With education, you see beyond your own narrow viewpoint and it uncovers a different world.

Education has been likened to a child’s experience of fumbling with a kaleidoscope; seeing a jumble of bright bits of glass, and then having someone turn them to the light so that suddenly the colourful but meaningless bits fall into patterns – discernible, orderly, describable, and with an exciting new significance.

Want to Find out More? Get in touch!

Facebook: @ace.ucc Twitter: @ACEUCC Instagram: @ace.ucc
Email: ace@ucc.ie Phone: +353 (0)21 490 4700



Aim: This course explores the workings of the criminal mind and examines what motivates individuals to commit crimes of a deviant nature, as well as how investigators collect psychological clues

Diploma in Speciality Food Production

Venue: UCC

Duration: 1 Year

Delivery: Two days per week every three weeks

Aim: This course is the only one of its kind in Ireland and the UK. It is designed for those who are starting or wish to further develop an artisan or specialty food business and also for those involved in this sector including farmers, producers, retailers, culinary specialists, and those in support agencies.

Diploma in Substance Misuse and Addiction Studies (Special Purpose Award)

Venue: UCC

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays September to May each year

Aim: This course examines how substance misuse and addiction impacts on the health and well-being of individuals, families, communities and the health, social care and criminal justice resources of the state

Diploma in Supply Chain Management

Venue: UCC

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: 6 x 2.5-day workshops

plus - per year

Aim: This course will provide personnel across a range of organisational functions with a holistic understanding of the dynamics of supply chains in order to enhance their ability to continually improve supply chain performance

Diploma in Youth and Community Work

Venue: UCC, Limerick

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week

Aim: This course explores approaches to working with groups in a variety of settings to facilitate dialogue in the community

Diploma in Women's Studies

Venue: UCC

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays

Aim: This course focuses on the changed and changing roles of women, delving into areas of knowledge relevant to women's lives today

Level 8 Programmes

Certificate in Procurement Management

Venue: UCC

Duration: 1 Year

Delivery: Every second Friday

Aim: This unique course aims to upskill procurement personnel in technical, managerial and people skills - the 'holy trinity' of procurement competence

Higher Diploma in Coaching/Coaching Psychology

Venue: UCC

Duration: 1 Year

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays

Aim: The programme provides the student with strong coaching skills and with an insight into self and the psychology of coaching

Higher Diploma in Facilitating Inclusion (Disability Studies)

Venue: UCC, Killarney

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: Every third weekend (Friday 6-10 and Saturday 9-5)

Aim: The programme offers value to those who are already working in the area of disability, enhancing their knowledge, reflexivity and practice

Higher Diploma in Safety, Health and Welfare at Work

Venue: UCC

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: Two evenings per week

Aim: The course provides professional training in the management of safety, health and welfare at work in order to help students to ensure the safety, health and welfare of the Irish workforce.

Level 9 Programmes

Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma in (Bio) Pharma Processing

Venue: UCC

Duration: 1/2 Years

Delivery: One day per week

Aim: This course provides a technical overview of processing in the Pharmaceutical and Biopharma sectors, providing

students with both a theoretical and practical understanding of the processes involved in drug substance and drug product manufacture.

Postgraduate Diploma in Irish Food Culture

Venue: UCC

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional weekend workshops

Aim: This course will explore the development of Irish Food Culture from the past to contemporary times. It will examine Irish food heritage, the contemporary food system, food and the environment and sustainability

Postgraduate Diploma in Mindfulness Based Practice and Research

Venue: UCC

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional weekend workshops

Aim: The programme includes an eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme and provides the student with the platform to develop a strong personal mindfulness practice

Postgraduate Diploma in Trauma Studies

Venue: Online

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional weekend workshops

Aim: This course focuses on both the individual and societal implications of trauma and draws

on examples and experiences from individuals who survived, and societies emerging from, violent political conflict

MSc in Mindfulness Based Wellbeing

Venue: UCC

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional weekend workshops

Aim: This programme trains the student to teach mindfulness in a workplace or educational setting in year one while in year two the student learns to teach a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme

MSc in Personal and Management Coaching

Venue: UCC, Dublin

Duration: 2 Years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional weekend workshops

Aim: The programme provides the student with strong coaching skills and an in-depth insight of how to integrate coaching into life and organisational settings

Located at the heart of UCC, the Skills Centre is chief among the many excellent student supports on offer in UCC.

A dedicated, active learning space, the Skills Centre helps students improve their academic ability and enhance their college work with confidence.

Since opening in the Boole Library in 2017, the Centre has already helped thousands of students navigate the university learning environment and achieve their academic goals.

From first years to postgrads, and from international to mature students, there's a welcoming space for everyone to address their individual learning needs in order to unlock their full potential.

The Centre embraces an interactive, student-centred approach, which is confidential and non-judgmental, so students can work towards improvement in a comfortable environment.

There is dedicated classroom space for both group and individual sessions taught by a team of dedicated tutors comprised of UCC PhD students and staff members. The group sessions allow students to get to know one another as they participate in workshops on a variety of academic skills, such as studying and notetaking, presentations, exams,

UCC Skills Centre: the key to unlocking your potential

by Kathy Bradley, UCC Skills Centre



The UCC Skills Centre Welcoming Team

critical-thinking, and writing.

For those looking for more individualised feedback, the Skills Centre also offers popular one-on-one appointments, including writing clinics and advisor appointments for academic planning. In addition to these, drop-in zones are also offered for students without designated

appointments to have a quick chat about any questions they might have.

All of the services on offer are freely available to UCC students and overlap seamlessly to allow continued support. Students attending advisor appointments may be directed towards the 'Grammar and punctu-

ation' class for further advice, and those attending the 'How to build an argument' class may want to attend a writing clinic to review their work after developing their own argument in an essay.

The tutors understand that these skills are not instantly achieved but developed over time and with practice. Desired results may not always be achieved immediately, of course, but students are encouraged to work through any difficulties and build upon their skills from their own level.

Students' continued attendance at the Skills Centre thus develops their ability not only to strive for excellence but to persevere and solve problems in order to meet their goals.

While the Centre supports students, independent thinking and learning is also a key focus across all of its services.

The range of sessions motivates students to actively think about their academic skills and how best to apply them. The group sessions encourage students to discuss their ideas with one another, consider different approaches, and think about what works best for them. Building upon this in the one-to-one sessions, tutors engage the students

in thinking about solutions to any issues they may be having.

The Skills Centre team are committed to making the UCC experience a positive and rewarding one for each and every student.

At the core of this is the vibrant tutor team, which is as diverse as it is committed to excellence in scholarship. They feed into the design and delivery of the skills sessions and display respect, compassion, and integrity when working with students, ensuring that they are in a positive and safe environment that encourages them to confidently develop their skills.

The tutors' example teaches students how to support one another and offer constructive criticism in a respectful manner.

The supports are developed and delivered in a manner which seeks not only to foster effective academic skills but nurture those principles and attributes which reflect the ethos of UCC as an institution.

From the classroom to the office, and even in your personal life, the skills you learn here at UCC will benefit you long after your graduation day.

For more information, see <http://skillscentre.ucc.ie/>

Direct Provision scholarships: ‘It will always touch me that this is a university aspiring for liberation’

David Yewande fled persecution in South Africa but found himself in direct provision in Cork. He shares how ACE at UCC helped rebuild his shattered hope.

David Yewande came to Ireland with five degrees but wasn’t allowed use any of them. A maths and science teacher, he has qualifications in chemistry, financial management, and various educational leadership degrees. He’s also a whistleblower, who reported fraud and corruption in the South African education system. He suffered persecution, his life was at risk, and he fled – not for the first time.

He had been forced to escape his native Nigeria two decades ago, having fought similar injustices and faced the same threats.

He shares videos of people being stoned to death in public, suffering the most brutal and painful deaths imaginable. There are others of people lying with arms and legs at ninety-degree angles, broken and bleeding out. They haunt him. They could’ve been him.

Thus, David sought refuge in Ireland; the country he visited as an investor in 2007, where his brother has built a life in Clonmel, where he has many Irish relatives, and near his two kids in London.

He came to learn, carrying with him an admission letter and proof of partial payment of fees for a Level 9 Mathematics course in Dublin.

His documents were in order and his South African citizenship allowed him to be here, he says, but upon arrival at Dublin Airport, he was incarcerated for nine hours before being taken into direct provision.

He fought the system in Nigeria, he fought the system in South Africa, and now he’s fighting the system in Ireland.

It was a system which didn’t allow him the right to work, a system which capped his weekly allowance at €21.60, a system which frustrated his efforts to take up his course, a system which rendered his five degrees useless.

“When I ran to Ireland, I didn’t intend to take asylum. I want to be self-funded because I had saved, and I came with that money to educate myself. I don’t feel happy belonging [as an asylum seeker].

“At the airport, rather than treating me with dignity and with respect that human beings deserve to have,



David Yewande, who is progressing to the advanced Process and Chemical Engineering programme at UCC next term. Photo: David Keane

I was maltreated, manhandled, and taken as a criminal. I was treated like a terrorist.

“They decided to bring me to Cork to interfere with my education. They kept on frustrating my life deliberately. I was paralysed. My hope was shattered.”

David asks many questions of the system:

Why am I being incarcerated, despite investigation?

If I have not broken the law, why can’t you set me free?

Why am I being held against my will when everything about me has been fair, honest, and transparent?

Why won’t the Justice Department explain that to me? Why do they keep inflicting pain in my life? What else do you want me to do?

He said as much in a letter to Minister for Justice Charlie Flanagan. But what he repeats most of all is that he never wanted to become a cost to the State. He wanted to learn, to contribute, to be a productive member of society.

“I’ve never lied in everything I’ve said, but they have been denying my rights.

“They’ve been denying me my today. They’ve been denying me my future. I’ve never been treated like a human being by the Depart-

Course Spotlight

Diploma in Process and Chemical Engineering

Duration: 2 years

Delivery: One evening per week
NFQ Level: 7

Aim: This course introduces students to the fundamentals of process and chemical engineering including key principles and their application.

Apply now at

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-dpce>

Certificate/Diploma in Management Practice

Duration: 2 years

Delivery: One evening per week plus occasional Saturdays
NFQ Level: 7

Aim: The programme is designed to introduce participants to key management principles, best practices and practical ready-to-apply tools in order to help students build their own managerial skill-set

Apply now at

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-dpm>

ment of Justice.”

There have been some improvements. The ban on asylum seekers working was lifted by the Supreme Court for those who meet a number of criteria, and the weekly allowance almost doubled to €38.80 in Budget 2019.

But the first change for David came with the news that UCC had created a scholarship for asylum seekers and refugees, having been designated University of Sanctuary status.

“UCC champion the cause for students in asylum to be educated rather than sleeping every day of their lives and having their hopes and dreams shattered.

“It will always touch me that this is a university who is aspiring for liberation.

“They advocate for sanctuary. Every student who wants to study as an asylum seeker, they make sure they receive education.

“If not for UCC, do you know what becomes of this society? There will be people who will go and commit crime but they will not look at what the system provided.

“Thank God for UCC. Education is the way to transform this society.” David was among the first to benefit from all these changes.

ACE at UCC could hardly believe his qualifications when he applied for their Certificate in Process and Chemical Engineering.

He also signed up to a course with Cork ETB, meaning he studies from 8am to 10pm every Monday and Tuesday.

At first, he walked from the direct provision centre on Kinsale Road every day without breakfast, as his centre wouldn’t open the canteen until 8am. It was only after he pleaded with management that they brought this forward to 7.30am to accommodate his studies.

Even then, he holds onto his breakfast to get him through the day.

“When others are eating at lunchtime, I don’t go out. I will stay in the classroom the entire day.

“I take my breakfast along and that’s what I eat in the afternoon. When I go to UCC, UCC will provide us with a break at 8pm.

“I’m having the same food, bread with something in between it, butter or jam or whatever. What I eat in the morning is what I eat at night for the entire year. That’s how I’ve been surviving.”

Now, he has access to a car, although he can only afford the €17 he needs for fuel each week thanks

to the generosity of the likes of Lorna Moloney, a course co-ordinator with ACE at UCC, who also helps provide stationery and top-up his student card for printing.

"Nobody knew how I survive. They would just see me driving. They would not know the secret behind the driving, that I'm actually a beggar in disguise.

"They could not see my weakness but I knew I was relying on people to feed me and that's why I'm grateful to God.

"What I am today, God used Lorna for me to be at UCC studying that programme."

His quest for personal improvement continues. He applied for job after job following last year's Supreme Court ruling until he finally got work as a security officer with G4S. He will be based at Cork Port, while also progressing to the advanced Process and Chemical Engineering programme at UCC next term.

"I'm not yet started but I believe my situation has changed. You can see mentally I've changed, physically I've changed. Even my appearance, I've totally transformed.

"You can see the effect of being a

"Every student who wants to study as an asylum seeker, they make sure they receive education"

productive member of the society. Employment is very important. My life has changed. I'm really relieved."

Indeed, while he may be approaching his 50th birthday, David could pass for 30, and certainly looks years younger than photos of him from early 2018.

"When you give me my rights to be free, then I can contribute more. I'm a teacher with five qualifications and I can not use any of the qualifications to support this society.

"I ended up becoming a security officer. But it's better because I can protect society, I can protect lives, I can protect State government resources for Ireland, who have provided me shelter.

"So, I love it. It can be painful, but from this pain there emerges great fortune for me."

Some things improve, others stay the same. A day after this interview, David's appeal against his application for asylum being rejected was postponed indefinitely. His solicitor was told it was due to an outbreak of chickenpox in his centre, although he has not heard anything of the sort.

"You will never know the pains people are going through when they are in asylum unless you

experience it.

"Why do you think people kill themselves when they are in the system? They've no hope. They are today, tomorrow, and every other day seeing the same.

"It's limbo because they don't know what tomorrow holds for them. They cage their tomorrow.

"Every day people are languishing in pain. People are crying but nobody sees any of their crying because they are crying in silence."

He compares the oppression of asylum seekers to Ireland's 800-year oppression under foreign rule. History will not judge the system kindly but he believes Irish people can play their part in another liberation.

"I happened to be a whistleblower, with my life in danger. I have to show that truly I suffered that persecution. In South Africa, they're still killing people. They're still burning people alive.

"Come back and review my case. With all the qualifications I have, professional mathematician, scientist, they did not do the right thing, just because I have dual nationality, Nigeria and South Africa.

"Irish people know what it means to be free. They've gone through it. When they fought for you, they fought for just cause. They can fight for people to be released from that type of incarceration.

"You are a country of refuge so I must not think of the pain I've gone through from the hands of those who are born cruel, those who are born to manhandle people.

"But when we came inside, we see true Irish people who are lamenting to set people free. Those are true Irish people.

"Maybe tomorrow I will find myself going home but, trust me, the joy that you have put in my mind can never be erased. History will thank you on my behalf."

I'd like to make them very happy to say, 'We gave this opportunity to the right person'

Lindita Jaupaj didn't tell her classmates where she was living for the first few months of her Diploma in Management Practice.

It's not that they weren't friendly or interested. They'd ask her how her move from Albania to Cork came about and what she's doing for a living here, but she wouldn't give the full answer.

They were managers and high achievers. How would she explain her circumstances to them?

She did in the end: 'Sorry but look, I'm living in an asylum centre'. The apology wasn't needed and since then she's been inundated with offers of lifts home to Glounthaune.

"They were very friendly with me. Always, they asked to give me a lift after my class because I come in by train."

Those in direct provision can be lost in their bunker. Imprisoned by the cost of transport, their meagre weekly allowance, language barriers, cultural barriers, not knowing the laws or locality.

Lindita had to overcome all of those hurdles since her move here in November 2016. Back then, she and her husband didn't speak a word of English so they brought their teenage daughter everywhere to act as a translator.

The first thing Lindita learned was to kick-start conversations with the weather. 'Oh, lovely weather today', she said that day as the passers-by smiled back. 'Okay, I know now how to start a conversation with people', she thought.

She knew she had to get out of her cramped room, to learn, to make connections, to get involved in the community in this little village. For every helping hand she got, she wanted to return the favour with interest.

She joined the local tidy towns, cleaned the church every week, assisted various projects, both working with people in the community and those in direct provision.

She trains with the Sanctuary Runners club every week and took part in last year's Cork City Marathon Relay.

She wrote two stories, one from Albania and one from Ireland, for a local book project, 'Our Stories'. The common message was: "It's not important



Lindita Jaupaj may be battling the direct provision system, but she's taking every opportunity to make connections and get immersed in the Cork and UCC communities. Photo: David Keane

how much you can do for people, it's important to do what you can. Small things can make a big difference."

She signed up for courses, and not just English-language ones. There was a computer course, a childcare course, a cultural integration course, management and mental health ones too.

So last year, when she saw a poster publicising UCC scholarships for those in direct provision, she was among the first to apply.

"People have told me they lived there for seven or eight years and they never had the right to study. I was lucky. I came exactly at the right time.

"They told me you don't have to pay and I said, 'Oh my God, I have to do that for myself'.

"When I saw this huge area [she beckons towards the Quad and President's Garden], I thought, 'I must come back. I'm young again!'

"I like to make use of this opportunity because I don't want them to say one day, 'We gave to her and she couldn't'.

"I'd like to make them very happy to say, 'Yeah, we did this to the right person'. I work hard for myself and for them.

"If you live in this situation, you have to do things. You can't stay there and wait on miracles.

"You have to take hold of every single opportunity, small or big, because you're lost in a bunker if you don't.

"It's hope. You need hope."

That contrasts with the fear Lindita and her family emerged from with their move out of Albania.

For that book, 'Our Stories', her daughter Arsela, then 16, also contributed a heartbreaking story, 'Leaving Home'. Part of it read:

"Our trip was long, tiring. My mother was crying. I was very sad..."

"Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I think I'm not in my house but far away. I do not have friends to laugh with, tell our secrets to, go to our favourite pastry shop and walk in the street with. How much I miss my home.

Its colours, the feeling your home gives that you can't feel anywhere else...

"There is a gap inside my stomach. There is an empty space that cannot be filled. I feel so sad and lost. I would like the world to be good for people, to live in their homes and never have a reason to stay away from loved ones. I would do anything to make it happen. But the world is very big and I'm too small to change things."

Lindita was born into a repressive communist system in 1974. They couldn't complain, couldn't pray, couldn't live free from pressure. When democracy arrived, she says, the leaders and mentalities remained the same. She studied international relations, worked for a water supply company, but they ultimately had to leave.

"I worked hard but something happened there and we had to leave my country with my family.

"It's such a pity to see people leaving their country, separating with parents,

sisters, brothers, leaving everything, and going where?

"But if you don't find the justice and they're killing your hope, they kill you. Killing people's hope means you kill me.

"So we decide to leave our country, our people, our house, everything, to come here. Where to start? What are we going to do here? How is this process going? We have no idea what's going on.

"The first months when I came here, I just cried every day. It was so hard for me and my daughter.

"We had a nice life in my country. If some people come here for a better life, my life came from here down," Lindita says, gesturing to show a drop in living standards. "I have to go back up again." Some of her friends in direct provision are living in limbo for close to a decade now. Waiting for that letter in the post after another interview is the most agonising and stressful time of all.

There are other daily difficulties too. "The most difficult thing for us, for all asylum seekers here, is to make connections with people. But I like it here because people in Cork are very friendly.

"Irish people have to know more about asylum people. We are 100 people living in the middle of a beautiful village and some people don't know about how we're living there, what we do, nothing.

"If we grow old... I don't like to wait for someone knocking on my door. We have to go and meet these people and share it with them while we're here so they don't look at us as coming from a different planet. We are the same."

The course will help too. She's finishing her first year, and cautiously optimistic for good results. The year's not even over and she can't wait for her second year.

"This course has changed my life. I'm not going to stop doing things here.

"It makes me feel so good. It's the best way of killing stress and not think of negatives. Say to yourself, 'Yes, you can. Yes, you can. Do it. Do it.'

"I can give an example for my daughter in this way. I can give an example to people living in asylum centres.

"Before, they couldn't study, so something is moving. If you invest in students in this way, you're going to profit in the future.

"I'm so happy. I hope I did deserve it."

'This couldn't happen anywhere else': Where Cork leads, cities around the world follow

When Cork set off on the pathway to becoming a city of learning back in 2002, Denis Barrett could never have seen where it'd take the city, or him.

Speaking just off the plane from an international trip to Lowell, outside Boston, he's had the privilege of being part of a team spreading the learnings from Cork's successes far and wide.

Those who helped Cork become one of UNESCO's inaugural 12 Learning Cities in 2015 have been carrying the message to places as far apart as Argentina and Taiwan. When Cork won that award, it was one of only three European cities recognised.

The city's Lifelong Learning Festival, the largest of its kind worldwide, has been copied from Australia to Canada, with Lowell just the latest to follow the trend.

Cork was the chosen venue for the third International Conference on Learning Cities, after Beijing and Mexico City. This autumn, they pass the torch to Medellín, who have transformed a city known for Pablo Escobar and Narcos to building 'library parks' and ensuring no child is left behind by education.

Cork's story has been presented in Larissa, Greece, a city using learning to help deal with the unfolding migrant crisis, while five more cities across Ireland are adopting their ideas too.

The benefits of lifelong learning reach into all areas and Cork's educational leaders have no interest in hiding their models. Quite the



Top: The Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr. Tony Fitzgerald and Mary McGrath in 2017. Photo: Cathal Noonan

Left: Members of the Growing Lifelong Learning in Cork (GLLIC) Committee, in 2019. Photo: Darragh Kane



opposite, really, as they've placed Cork at the centre of an international network of Learning Cities.

"Cork have been centrally involved in formulating policies because of the track-record of partnership, inclusion of learners of all walks of life, of all abilities, and celebrating learning. That's what Cork is known for," says Denis.

"We've been very open with our models. We've created documents and spread them around the world

to let people do the same thing. There's no loss in sharing this. It's better for everybody.

"There's a big knock-on effect for communities, for the wider society. It enables people to upskill in terms of changes in the economy and it's enjoyable. There's a shared solidarity so it helps with social capital, building communities, and connecting the generations."

When UNESCO brought their conference and 600 international

delegates to Cork in 2017, they said Cork's hosting couldn't be replicated in any other city. It dispersed out of City Hall, all across the city, and into the suburbs.

As the delegates returned from an array of community exhibitions of learning - some from Irish dancing or camogie, others from UCC or other educational partners, and more from an equine care project led by young Traveller men or a group of pre-school children and older women coming together to share songs - Denis says they were all abuzz with the lessons from what they'd experienced.

"They were jumping off the buses full of joy and kind of floating. They were full of excitement about what they had seen and the people they'd met.

"They'd witnessed something from the heart of those Learning Neighbourhoods in the city and they were just full of joy.

"UNESCO said that afternoon they couldn't see this happening in any other city. It's to do with the size of the city, our connectedness, our partnerships, and learning is in our DNA."

Yet Denis recalls being somewhat of a cynic when a learning festival was first suggested. He could see how jazz would work, or folk, with the social life around it, but learning?

Well, he was never so glad to be wrong, as it's grown almost tenfold since being piloted in 2004, from 65 events to 600, with no hierarchy in the programme. All events are given equal billing and recognised for the learning they provide.

"The people of the city took to it and community-based groups, schools, colleges, sports clubs, knitting circles, libraries, you name it, saw that they belonged in this

festival and this programme."

Among the partners are UCC, CIT, Cork ETB, Cork City Council, the National Association of Principals and Deputies, and the HSE, as well as a range of environmental, cultural, youth, and business partners. Denis credits ACE with bringing UCC's involvement to another level, saying: "All through both ACE and UCC have been involved in steering committees, taking leadership roles, creating new ideas, and supporting them.

"ACE were a very important door for the festival into UCC. Once ACE created that pathway for the festival, then all the departments and schools and colleges within UCC found a way to connect with it."

An example of the festival's power to touch everyone is 103-year-old Mary McGrath. Described as a legend and an inspirational woman, she was on stage at the UNESCO conference during the closing panel and, more recently, was celebrated by the lord mayor as an ambassador for lifelong learning on her birthday in April.

Denis says when she returned to the day care centre after the UNESCO conference, she was received as if she'd won an Oscar.

While international recognition helps, the real impact of Cork's Learning City is on the ground, in the day-to-day lives of everyone touched by these community initiatives.

"The UNESCO award is a huge recognition factor but this work is worth doing regardless of any award or any conference. The more learning the better. The more that learning can be brought to people who can benefit most from it, that's the best of all."

'I've overcome a self-inflicted barrier I never thought I'd get over'

How beneficial did Paul Cudmore find his time studying with ACE at UCC?

Well, the fact the Rochestown-native, who enrolled without any second-level education to his name, is currently doing his fourth course says it all.

He's overcome plenty of barriers in that time too. The self-inflicted ones from questioning his ability to cope with the demands of a college course, and those inflicted upon him, such as a dyslexia diagnosis he received during his first year back in 2010.

Paul has cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair-user, but he credits his time in UCC with making him more independent. He now commutes to college from his rented flat in Mahon.

"Going to UCC helped me to push myself from a personal point of view into becoming more independent,

and to not be so dependent on other people. That was one of the main things I got out of doing Disability Studies, and Young and Community Work.

"When I graduated from those two, it wasn't necessarily as if I'd arrived, but I'd overcome the self-inflicted barrier of something I never thought I'd get over.

"I've no objection in saying I've just turned 40 and I am willing to, hopefully in the not too distant future, assist other students with disability who may come into UCC."

The leap from primary to third-level education was bridged by a number of FÁS courses until Paul was recommended the Diploma in Disability Studies in UCC.

"When they told me there wasn't another FÁS course for me to do, that's where I took the leap from doing FÁS courses into college. That's why I chose to go down the

route of doing a course with ACE, because it was part-time and it was my first time in college, so I wasn't really aware of how much was expected. It was a great stepping stone."

When Paul got that dyslexia diagnosis during his first year, his immediate thought was that he'd have to drop out.

"I didn't realise that somebody with dyslexia could actually continue with college. When I heard I had it, I thought I'd have to rethink the situation and rethink where it was going to go.

"The Disability Support Service were really helpful. I went straight to them and said, 'Okay, how can I get around this? I need additional supports.'"

They gave him a laptop with literacy and speech-recognition software to help him write essays, as well as somebody to advise him how to structure those assignments.

"I might need help to do such things but the only thing keeping me back sometimes is myself and the lack of enthusiasm to keep going.

"Sometimes if something goes wrong in college and I get a bit of a downer, it might take me a few days to get the energy back to the level of what's required but that's where the support service are very supportive.

"I can go in and say, 'Today I can only do an hour's research', but it



Springboard to success: ‘I got my confidence back after being unemployed for so long’



Dr Séamus Ó Tuama, Director of ACE at UCC and Ms Maeve Ahern O'Neill, Personal Branding Consultant. Image Emmet Curtin.

The expertise on offer from UCC’s Springboard+ adult education courses has the power to transform the working lives of those who enrol. Academic theory is mixed in with an industry focus to produce courses which are as highly rated by graduates as they are sought-after by employers. Springboard+ courses are free for job-seekers and returners to education, while those in employment receive a 90% fee subsidy from the Higher Education Authority. ACE at UCC Director Dr Séamus Ó Tuama says countless people, from all sorts of backgrounds, have restarted or re-energised their careers through the range of Springboard+ courses on offer.

“I have seen graduates who have had their lives transformed, turning their lives around having been stuck in a rut. “They are in a classroom of students and they think ‘I am as good as the person next to me’. “You have homemakers back doing courses where they may have lacked confidence in the past. People in employment use it in certain cases to refocus or re-energise their career. It reaches out to different cohorts of people.” Personal Branding Consultant Maeve Ahern O’Neill was one such case. Having been made redundant during the economic downturn and spending several years as a homemaker to her

two daughters, Orla and Danielle, she found her degree and career in marketing had left her behind the curve in a fast-changing industry. In 2014, Maeve signed up for the Springboard+ Masters in Digital Arts and Humanities. “I had been unemployed for a good while. The marketing community is small and nobody knew me. I knew I had to upskill. “Applicants were going in with digital marketing degrees and here I was having graduated back in 1999! It was a case of unless you had a formal qualification you had no chance. “Suddenly I was doing this course which was completely opened my eyes up to the digital world.

“I got my confidence back after being unemployed for so long. There is nothing wrong with being a mum but doing something for yourself is amazing.” Maeve went from knowing little about online marketing to setting up her own consultancy firm, The Branding of Me, and is now pursuing a PhD in UCC. One of her proudest moments was when her then 11-year-old daughter, Orla, did a project on the person she admired most. “She did it on me saying that ‘mommy had set up her own business’. She brought in my business card. “I am so delighted to show her that you can be a mother and have your own business. This course completely expanded my horizons.” One person currently studying through Springboard+ is Cian O’Mahony. A manager with the Department of Foreign Affairs in Cork, he signed up to the Diploma in Management Practice to address blind spots in his management experience. ‘Practice what you preach’ is his mantra, having worked in third-level education previously. What’s more, his return to education has inspired some of his work colleagues to follow him along that pathway. “We’ve seen people blossom who are pushing themselves forwards for promotion and for courses that they may not have done prior to you helping them along that path and showing them the way.” The modules start with managing yourself, before touching on human relations, problem-solving, and managing finances. As well as the weekly classes on Tuesday evenings, the monthly Saturday workshops focus on group work and practical management challenges. For example, the students were asked

to conduct a performance appraisal with a postgraduate student they’d never met before and an assessor, that both had different briefs on. It’s the type of uncomfortable situation managers must prepare for and adapt to as the full story unfolds. “That’s something I’ve begun using and would have the confidence to use as a result of the course within my own office environment. “It’s employing coaching techniques, not just simply dealing with people’s underperformance but also how to get the best out of people and how to make them want to do things rather than have to do them. “[It’s helped me] get to the root of problems an awful lot quicker than I would’ve been equipped to before I started. “I’ve had more confidence to try more of these techniques and that’s made me a better manager as a result. “His class of around 30 students is “incredibly diverse”, including people with backgrounds in the public sector, biomedical manufacturing, health and safety, finance and banking, businesses owners, and those looking to switch careers. “You’d think there’s a certain demographic a course like this would appeal to but it’s such a broad spectrum of people and everyone seems to be getting something really positive out of it for their own outlook and their own career prospects. “There’s very few people who wouldn’t benefit from a course like this if you’d any aspirations at all to work in any management capacity, whether that’s starting your own business to any concept where you deal with people.” Springboard courses 2019 will be launched in the coming weeks. For further info, see springboardcourses.ie



Paul Cudmore, Mahon and Marlies Walsh, Clonakilty, at the relaunch of the diploma in Social Studies in UCC, at the College of Commerce. Picture: David Keane.

Course Spotlight

Diploma in Disability Studies
Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week
NFQ Level: 6/7
Aim: This course explores how disability is understood in our society by examining new research and different educational models. Apply now at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-dds/>

means I’m still involved. “UCC is such a well-designed facility, it does include all students with disability.” Paul’s second course, a Diploma in Youth and Community Work, was even more beneficial. “It involved working in your local community, which was a chance for me to break down the barriers in terms of disability awareness for young people. Personally, I got a lot out of that.” He’s since completed a Higher Diploma in Facilitating Inclusion [Disability Studies] and is now studying the two-year Social Studies Diploma. He’s particularly encouraged to see more students with a disability taking on courses. “Hopefully, when I’m finished the diploma, depending on results, I can apply to do the degree but go straight into second year. “That’s the aim at the moment. And also, to keep promoting the fact that people with disabilities can do it, that having a disability doesn’t necessarily hinder students from developing more. “To have people like me who have already done four pre-diplomas, and hopefully going on to do a degree, will hopefully enhance the ability of places like UCC and the Disability Support Service.”

Course Spotlight

Diploma in Social Enterprises and Community Development Practice

Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week
NFQ Level: 6/7
Aim: Through the development of analytical skills, management strategies and enterprise approaches, this programme will equip students with the skills needed to cultivate entrepreneurship in local communities and establish a ‘can do’ approach to local development.

Diploma in Leadership in the Community

Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week
NFQ Level: 6/7
Aim: This course introduces students to the concepts and processes of community developments which compliment and develop effective leadership skills that reflect current best practice and are appropriate to working in and with the community and voluntary sector.

Diploma in Youth and Community Work

Duration: 2 years
Delivery: One evening per week
NFQ Level: 6/7
Aim: This course explores approaches to working with groups in a variety of settings to facilitate dialogue in the community. Apply now at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-dycw/>



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The ACE at UCC team at their headquarters in The Laurels, Western Road.

Photo: David Keane

ACE at UCC in Cork Prison: Helping generations through art and education

What jumps to mind when you think of UCC? Lectures and libraries? Gowns and graduations? Studying and socialising? What you might not think of is UCC's active role in the community, which extends inside the walls of Cork Prison.

Many of those incarcerated have never enjoyed a positive experience of education in their lives. For them, UCC can seem an unattainable venue in the distance.

That's why the ACE centre approached Cork Prison with a proposal to collaborate on courses which extend the benefits of education to those in jail. And that's equally why Cork Prison jumped at the offer.

Run by UCC lecturer James Cronin and Cork Prison's Thérèse Cooper, what started as three short courses in 2017 – 'Looking at Paintings: Masterpieces from Irish Galleries', 'Masterpieces of Prison Literature', and 'A Little History of Cork' – has expanded to offer a Certificate in Mental Health in the Community.

The art produced following those weekly talks has been used in exhibitions, including an annual exhibition on Spike Island. Some of it goes out to loved ones as gifts. Others produce grave books to help express sadness and remove anger in a positive, therapeutic, and creative environment.

"It's great for the lads to have an outside education provider coming in. For a lot of them, UCC is no longer that unattainable venue in the distance. It's coming into their own community," says Supervising Teacher of Cork Prison Education Unit Edel Cunningham.

"The education unit is optional but more often than not the school is choc-a-bloc. A lot of them would say they enjoy coming to school. It's ironic that the first time a lot of these guys have had any positive engagement with education is in a prison setting."

She lists off the barriers to education prisoners experience from memory:

- *Four in five prisoners (80%) do not complete a Leaving Cert;*
- *More than half (52%) leave school before Junior Cert;*
- *Just over a quarter (26%) never attended secondary school.*

There's plenty of evidence of prisoners struggling with reading and writing owing to the lack of supports at critical stages during their childhood.

Perhaps even more worryingly, Edel says 60% of males with a father in prison end up in prison themselves. That's where education can help break the cycle to create better outcomes for the next generation.

"It has huge significance for

each of the lads that attended the course with UCC. They get their photograph taken with the UCC President. That goes back out to their families and it's a topic of conversation with their kids.

"All of a sudden, the kids are hearing about their father attending lectures from UCC. So, on a subconscious level, you're planting a seed with the next generation. 'Well, dad went to some lectures with UCC, why can't I do it?' 'For a community that would have very little engagement with third-level education, you can change that completely.'"

UCC President Patrick O'Shea also hopes this will be the start of something bigger. He told prisoners: "Your expression through art communicates, refreshes and inspires. You are on a learning journey. May this journey be a lifelong adventure for each of you."

The Mental Health Certificate offers a more challenging, more academic programme, with the potential for a Level 6 qualification. More than 10 prisoners have signed up in recent months.

Edel adds: "The reason we went with that one was because there's such a huge incidence of self-harm, of suicide, of mental health issues in the prison, we felt this would be of huge benefit for them to have."

"The guys felt they learned an awful lot from the weekend courses, what's called the WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Programme). They were very positive about it. It complements very well some of the other work that goes on in the prison."

Indeed, Edel hopes the

prison can deliver some of those modules, through its partner-programme in the community, to female relatives of offenders or ex-offenders. By working with the mothers, sisters, daughters, and partners of prisoners on issues like addiction and mental health, they hope to reinforce the impact on the next generation.

While the partnership with UCC is still in its infancy, the education unit has seen some success stories of graduates using it as a stepping stone towards further courses. Five students this year are studying through Open University. Previous graduates have gone on to sports coaching programmes.

"One of our students a long time ago who did Open University in here wrote a letter back a couple of years later saying he was working full-time in the pharmaceutical industry and has gone on to do further degrees after getting out."

"His educational journey started in the education unit. 'In terms of how life-changing and how family-altering it is for our participants, it's huge that people have beaten the odds, turned it around, and gone on to more education.'"

Edel sees further benefits for UCC and Cork Prison on research and public policy levels too.

"This whole engagement with UCC, from their perspective, allows them to come in and meet our lads and say, 'Why is it that so many guys from the same socio-economic background are in prison?'"

"It's a question that UCC in their research can maybe alter policy and strategies that are being made. It's a win-win for all of us."



Mindfulness Masters responding to demands of modern life and job market

ACE at UCC recently announced the launch of its innovative new Masters in Mindfulness Based Wellbeing.

A panel of leading lecturers, from Ireland and further afield, will deliver the programme, which promises to be a landmark offering for those with an interest in mindfulness and those wishing to teach it.

The demand for mindfulness programmes to train teachers has grown amid expanding evidence of its impact in assisting people to manage stress and self-regulate in their daily lives.

The World Health Organisation says wellbeing is "present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing, and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life."

Mindfulness should not be seen as a miracle cure but as offering a significant contribution in assisting people to build resilience in the workplace, schools, healthcare, sport, social care, relationships, and communities.

ACE's brand-new programme, which has its academic anchor in the School of Psychology, explores concepts such as resilience, self-regulation, and the management of daily stress in contemporary society.

The practice of mindfulness is central to this process so the programme supports students to deepen their own mindfulness practice.

An especially important aspect is training students to teach mindfulness in educational settings, following the new 'Wellbeing Policy' by the Department of Education. That policy encourages all schools to develop wellbeing programmes and initiatives as part of their School Self-Evaluation.

Stress experienced in the workplace is another focus, as the programme provides training for students to deliver mindfulness-based stress reduction interventions for employees. Stress is currently the second-highest cause of workplace absenteeism and, as such, presents a challenge to employers to address its impact and causes.

From an exploration of eastern mindfulness philosophy to a critical examination of western mindfulness psychology, this programme involves research-based scrutiny of academic material relevant to the topic.

A flexible programme, which offers a range of qualifications tailor-made to match the commitment students can give, it received support from experts from Oxford and Bangor Universities on its approval panel.

They encouraged UCC to build on the potential of this programme to develop a centre of excellence in mindfulness that would serve practitioners across Ireland.

Art created by students of the ACE at UCC programs, run in collaboration with Cork Prison. Photos: Claire Keogh





The Faces of learning from Ballyphehane, Knocknaheeny and Mayfield, three of six Learning Neighbourhoods in Cork City. Photos:Eddie Hennessy Design: Coolgreay

Learning Neighbourhoods: spreading the joy of education to all communities

UCC President Patrick O'Shea often speaks about UCC being a university "in the community, of the community, and for the community".

That ideal is perhaps best embodied by the Learning Neighbourhoods initiative, which has been developed in partnership with Cork's educational institutions to reach out into communities to help celebrate, support, and develop their learning initiatives.

This isn't a case of the cavalry coming over the hill, mind you. Much of this work has been done by the communities for decades now and the necessary strengths lie within those neighbourhoods to build upon those successes. But UCC, CIT, Cork ETB, and the City Council can help the local organising groups make connections, provide new opportunities, give their

expertise, and generally respond to the communities' needs across the range of courses and events that each neighbourhood hosts.

The Learning Neighbourhoods concept was born in 2016, with Ballyphehane and Knocknaheeny the chosen neighbourhoods to pilot the scheme. Since then, Mayfield and Togher, and more recently, South Parish and The Glen have been added. The work has touched young and old in the communities, from a few weeks old to 103 years young, with inter-generational learning one of the many aspects facilitated through Learning Neighbourhoods.

"The older people get a huge buzz from interacting with young people, but so do young people. It just completely opens their minds and shows them everybody is a human being," says ACE

at UCC Director Séamus Ó Tuama.

"Learning Neighbourhoods are really, really important in terms of giving people confidence in their own capacity to learn, and also a sense of enjoyment and pleasure. We learn better when we enjoy it." The lecturers involved enjoy it too and that interaction serves to break down barriers around university education, with campus visits for school or adult groups another option offered to neighbourhoods.

"One or two of the adults would live very near, within a mile of here, and they'd say they've never been inside the gates," says Jennifer Walsh, ACE at UCC's Learning Neighbourhoods coordinator. "Even talking to some of the children, [they're saying] 'Oh, I'll come here one day and I'm not going to stand on the grass in case I fail my exams', or 'My brother wants to come

here so I think I might come here too'.

"That can be very powerful. It's about opening the gates." The aim is to serve the needs of all of society, including disadvantaged areas, and avoid excluding anyone from the benefits of learning opportunities.

"The university has been perceived as a middle-class institution and its doors are not open for everybody. Breaking down that perception and saying the university and further education is for everybody is really important," says Siobhan O'Sullivan, who preceded Jennifer in her role.

That further education can come in many forms, formal or informal, in the community or at the city's education institutions, from lectures and workshops to open days and outreach courses, plus the Lifelong Learning Festival.

"Evaluating what's happened

in Knocknaheeny, people really appreciate both having the opportunities in their local centres and then linking into UCC, coming down to the campus, seeing what it's like, having that student experience," continues Siobhan.

"For those initial first steps, it's really important to have something in community settings. That's the first point of access for people and a lot develops out of that then.

"We didn't have a blueprint for it. It's developed over time and each neighbourhood does something a bit different. That's where it gets its strength and vibrancy."

There have been fairs to showcase everything that's on offer in localities and a number of communities have produced 'Faces of Learning' campaigns, to recognise everyday heroes, which have been displayed at City Hall, Cork Airport, and community

centres.

"Celebrating that and recognising that is really valuable. We don't do enough of it," says Siobhan.

"We've come through some very dark times since the recession and cutbacks in education and challenges in people's lives.

"Learning Neighbourhoods has given a focus and a huge lift, and it's been recognised internationally as well through Learning Cities."

"Cork were the first city to do Learning Neighbourhoods," Jennifer adds.

"At international seminars, people are going home to replicate it all over the States, South America, and European countries.

"To see it's influencing others across the world, it's very powerful, but it's what a lot of these areas are doing anyway. It's the regular stuff, just given a different platform."