EMPLOYABILITY FRAMEWORK
2025-2028

Essential pillars for enhancing student success: embedding employability

UCC Career Services
Seirbhísí Gairme COC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

About Career Services

UCC Career Services is based within the functional area of the Office of the Vice President for Learning and Teaching. The Career Services team empowers the successful transition of UCC students to the world of work through impactful collaboration with industry and academic partners. UCC students and recent graduates acquire career-relevant knowledge and skills through integrated, experiential learning activities designed to boost employability, self-awareness and work-readiness skills.

The **vision** of UCC Career Services is that registered UCC students will be supported and empowered to create and accomplish their personally meaningful career goals with confidence.

We aim to:

Inspire effective global citizens, who are socially responsible, equipped with career management and employability skills with the ability to create, evaluate and communicate knowledge when embarking on future facing career paths.

Our mission:

To empower students with the knowledge, skills and self-awareness to accomplish and succeed in their career goals. We do this by a professional and integrated service delivery model and by creating meaningful connections and a collaborative partnership with industry.

Message from our Head of Career Services

I am excited to bring you this new revised Employability Framework 2025-2028. Aligning to the **UCC Strategic Plan "Securing our Future" 2023-2028**, we have developed the following five pillars with fifteen actions to support the work of Goal 2- Student Success and its associated actions.

Our priority for the next academic years will be to align with the Connected Curriculum and Lifelong Career Development Learning. We are committed to integrating employability in the curriculum and will collaborate with academic schools to embed employability skills, career development, and industry-relevant projects into the Connected Curriculum. We will promote experiential learning opportunities such as internships, work placements, and research collaborations and will promote and provide career workshops and resources that highlight pathways in all sectors.

We will support wellbeing and belonging by providing career guidance that addresses diverse student needs, including informed career coaching, and support for international students navigating local job markets. In addition, we will recognise informal learning, and strengthen mechanisms to highlight skills gained through volunteering, extracurricular activities, and digital badges.

While we continue to develop industry and community connections and expand work placement opportunities, we will strengthen relationships with various sectors, NGOs, and community partners to increase the availability of work integrated learning and have a continued focus on sectors aligned with UCC's signature research areas and SDGs. In doing so, we will provide strong employer engagement by organising employer forums to co-create curricula that align with industry needs and facilitate employer-student networking events and expand on-campus recruitment drives.

Advancing digital and inclusive career support is important to Career Services. Through digital literacy and universal design, we will support students and staff on the use of our digital tools for career readiness, job search strategies, and professional networking while ensuring that all resources follow Universal Design Principles for accessibility.

In October 2024, Career Services transitioned to the functional area of the Vice President for Learning and Teaching and successfully embedded the Graduate Attributes into our Transition Out initiatives. Our aim is to continue to promote Graduate Attributes and Values and collaborate with academic schools and professional services to link UCC's Graduate Attributes Programme with tangible career outcomes. We will continue to foster transversal skills while offering training in critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and resilience as core components of career readiness.

Metrics and 'Student Voice' integration will be integrated into the Employability Framework while also working to align the Student Success Framework with Goal 2 of the UCC Strategic Plan. Aligning career service goals with institutional metrics for student retention and graduate outcomes and using data to assess the effectiveness of career initiatives will be paramount. By involving students in designing and delivering initiatives, we will ensure our Employability Framework meets evolving needs.

By embedding these actions, Career Services can significantly contribute to achieving the university's broader goals of student success, inclusivity, and employability while preparing students to thrive in an evolving global workforce.

Employability – A Core Component in the Curriculum

THE FIVE PILLARS OF THE EMPLOYABILITY STRATEGY

1 Embedding Employability in the Curriculum

Incorporate career development and employability related activities and Work Integrated Learning in disciplinary appropriate ways within all programmes at UCC.

2 Fulfilling successful student transitions

To provide a student-centered holistic approach to empower students to develop and articulate the skills and attributes needed to make a successful transition from university to the next stage of their career.

3 Building Meaningful Relationships & Networks

Establish, maintain, and expand an eco-system of inter-connected working relationships with our key stakeholders, including employers and alumni to support student career development.

4 Increasing Employment Opportunities

To expand meaningful job opportunities for all students to gain local, national, and global employment opportunities, through placements, internships, work-integrated learning and work-based projects.

5 Communicating and enhancing UCC's role as leader for graduate employability

To actively communicate, promote and enhance student employability as delivered through strategic initiatives

1 Embedding Employability in the Curriculum

Incorporate Career Development and Employability Related Activities and Work Integrated Learning in disciplinary appropriate ways within all programmes UCC.

Actions

1) Co-develop career-focused initiatives: Work closely with academic schools to ensure career development is integrated into the curriculum. This includes offering group career coaching, workshops, and guest speaker sessions that align with academic learning.

2) Collaborate with Programme Directors to strategically provide support for students at key stages before and throughout each cycle of Work-Integrated Learning activities including Work Placement within UCC programmes. This approach ensures that support is seamlessly integrated and aligned with the academic structure and objectives of the programmes.

3) Develop and deliver a comprehensive "PhD Career Transition Programme" tailored to equip PhD students with the knowledge and skills needed for non-academic career pathways and will enhance transferable skills that align with industry requirements.

2 Fulfilling successful student transitions

To provide a student-centered holistic approach to empower students to develop and articulate the skills and attributes needed to make a successful transition from university to the next stage of their career.
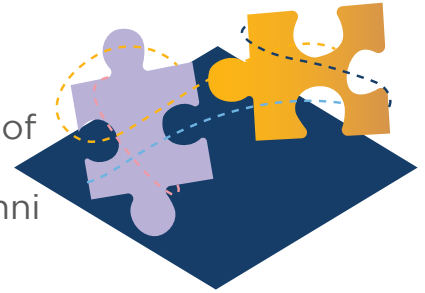
Actions

4) Provide students with numerous opportunities to engage with all aspects of Career Services for both personal and professional growth. This should be accomplished through a variety of interventions that enhance their skills, self-efficacy, and self-confidence, ultimately supporting effective career development planning.

5) Empower students to take ownership of their skills development by providing a broad range of opportunities, including extracurricular options such as short internships, entrepreneurial activities, and volunteering through participation in the skills awards programme, "The UCC EmployAgility Award".

6) Fully leverage AI and digital tools to enhance the teaching and learning of employability-related skills and attributes to accelerate skills acquisition in the age of intelligent technologies and align fully with the Graduate Attributes Programme objectives.

3 Building Meaningful Relationships & Networks

Establish, maintain, and expand an eco-system of inter-connected working relationships with our key stakeholders, including employers and alumni to support student career development.

Actions

7) Establish strong communication channels: Career Services will proactively reach out to employers, industry leaders, and recruiters to understand their needs and expectations for graduates. Regular communication through emails, phone calls, and in-person meetings helps build trust and demonstrate commitment to the partnership.

8) Industry advisory boards: Create advisory boards made up of employers, alumni, and industry professionals who can provide insights into industry trends and offer guidance on curriculum development, ensuring that students are equipped with the skills employers are seeking in early careers talent.

9) Strengthen the partnership with Alumni and Development by expanding and co-developing the current Career Services/Alumni and Development Mentorship Programme. This will ensure students have enhanced access to mentors in their relevant fields, fostering meaningful connections and support for their career growth.

4 **Increasing Employment Opportunities**

To expand meaningful job opportunities for all students to gain local, national, and global employment opportunities, through placements, internships, work-integrated learning and work-based projects.

Actions

10) Building employer partnerships: Establish and maintain relationships with a wide range of employers, including SMEs, multinational companies, non-profit organizations, and public service bodies. These partnerships provide a pipeline of job opportunities for students through placements, internships, and work-based projects.

11) Work-Integrated Learning (WIL): Develop and promote work-integrated learning opportunities that align with students' academic studies and career aspirations. These programmes might include placements, industry collaborations, and projects that allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings.

12) Career Fairs, Networking Events, and Employer Engagement: Organise career fairs, networking events, and employer engagement activities where students can interact directly with recruiters, hiring managers, and alumni. These events allow students to explore potential job opportunities, gain industry insights, and connect with prospective employers.

5 Communicating and enhancing UCC's role as leader for graduate employability

To actively communicate, promote and enhance student employability as delivered through strategic initiatives

Actions

13) Develop a comprehensive Career Communication Strategy: Establish a strong re-brand identity for the Career Services that communicates its role in student success. This involves clearly articulating the value proposition of career services and the impact it has on employability, particularly through events, social media, and other promotional activities.

14) Feedback loops: After each engagement (workshop, placement, etc.), career services should collect feedback from both students and employers. This feedback can help strengthen the relationship, improve services, and ensure that the university meets the evolving needs of the labour market.

15) Data-driven career support: Use data analytics to track student progress, employment trends, and the success of career programs. Analysing this data and Graduate Outcomes Survey data can help tailor support and services to the needs of students and employers, ensuring the employability initiatives remain relevant and effective.

STRATEGIC ENABLERS

1. **Institutional Collaboration:** Partnering with academic and administrative units to embed employability in teaching and learning.
2. **Digital Innovation:** Providing accessible, inclusive, and technologically enhanced services.
3. **External Engagement:** Building strong connections with employers, community partners, and global networks.
4. **Data-Driven Strategies:** Using evidence-based insights to enhance services and demonstrate impact.
5. **Equity, Diversity, and Sustainability:** Aligning with UCC's values to create inclusive opportunities and sustainable futures for all students.

By aligning these enablers with UCC's strategic goals, Career Services can deliver a high-impact contribution to student success, employability, and lifelong learning outcomes.

Strategic Enablers for University College Cork Career Services

To align with UCC's broader strategy, Career Services will adopt and implement the following **strategic enablers**:

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1. Institutional Collaboration and Integration

- **Alignment with the Connected Curriculum:**
  Career Services will work closely with academic schools, research units, and the UCC Lifelong Learning Hub to integrate employability, research, and societal impact into the curriculum.
  - Co-develop programmes emphasising Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and employability.
  - Collaborate on experiential learning and interdisciplinary initiatives that align with societal and economic priorities.
- **Support for Strategic Frameworks:**
  Actively contribute to initiatives such as the UCC Assessment Framework, the Healthy Campus Charter, and the Student Success Framework by offering insights on graduate employability and co-curricular skills development.

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2. Digital Transformation and Accessibility

- **Digital Career Services:**
  Career Services will fully adopt the principles of Universal Design (UD) to ensure accessible and inclusive services. This includes digital platforms, virtual career events, and online mentorship programmes. We will leverage the Digital Education Plan to provide equitable digital career resources to all students, including non-traditional, part-time, and remote learners.
- **Flexible Learning Support:**
  Contribute expertise for lifelong career learning, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), micro-credentials, and digital badges that align with UCC's Lifelong Learning Hub.

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3. Partnership Development

- **Employer and Industry Collaboration:**
  Expand employer networks to ensure placement opportunities and real-world projects align with signature areas of research and the UCC Futures framework, and build partnerships in emerging fields such as sustainability, AI, technology, and entrepreneurship.

- **Community Engagement:**
  Partner with local and regional stakeholders to foster community engagement and civic learning opportunities that enhance employability and develop transferrable skills.

4. Data-Driven Insights and Impact Assessment

- **Career Outcomes as Success Metrics:**
  Career Services will contribute to UCC's institutional goals by tracking graduate employability metrics, placement rates, and skills development outcomes and use data analytics to inform services, programmes, and engagement strategies aligned with national and institutional objectives.

- **Student Voice in Career Design:**
  Regularly engage with students through surveys and forums, incorporating their input into service enhancements and aligning offerings with evolving workforce demands.

5. Inclusive and Sustainable Practices

- **Focus on Equity and Diversity:**
  Career Services will actively support all cohorts, aligning with UCC's equality, diversity, and inclusion goals.
- **Sustainability and Future-Proofing Careers:**
  Embed sustainability into career guidance by promoting green skills and sustainable career pathways. Align initiatives with UCC's commitments to climate action and the SDGs.

Constraints and Limiting Factors

Implementing the above initiatives within UCC Career Services might face several constraints at times, which can broadly be categorized as **resource-based, structural and external** challenges. Understanding these constraints is essential to develop strategies to overcome them effectively.

Resource-Based Constraints

- o Funding Limitations: Budget challenges may limit the development of digital platforms, employer network events, and new initiatives.
- o Staffing Levels: Low staff-to-student ratios could hinder personalised support.
- o Technology Infrastructure: Robust IT systems are essential for digital transformation, but limitations in technology and IT support may slow progress.
- o Data Collection: Effective tracking of outcomes and engagement requires additional systems and expertise.
- o Diverse Needs: Tailored resources are needed to support students with disabilities, international students, and part-time learners.

Structural and Process Constraints

- o Cross-University Collaboration: Challenges in aligning priorities and overcoming siloed operations may hinder effective partnerships.
- o Time and Administrative Burden: Maintaining current services while implementing new initiatives can impact staff.
- o Scalability Challenges: Expanding services for a diverse and growing student population, including non-traditional students is complex.
- o Defining Metrics: Establishing actionable and aligned success metrics can be complex and time-consuming.

External Constraints

- o Labour Market Dynamics: Rapid job market changes may outpace Career Services' ability to adapt.
- o Policy and Regulatory Factors: External policies and regulations may hinder speed with innovation.
- o Employer Engagement: Building strong employer relationships is resource-intensive and influenced by external economic factors.

Strategies to Overcome Constraints

1. Resource Advocacy: Lobby for the required staffing by demonstrating the alignment of Career Services initiatives with UCC's strategic goals and the potential return on investment in terms of student success and employability.

2. Technology Partnerships: Collaborate with IT and external vendors to develop cost-effective, scalable digital solutions that enhance service delivery.

3. Building Relationships: Strengthen communication with academic schools and external partners to align priorities and foster buy-in for collaborative efforts.

4. Incremental Implementation: Prioritise initiatives for phased implementation to manage workload and resource demands effectively.

5. Targeted Communication: Increase awareness of Career Services offerings through tailored outreach campaigns, highlighting their relevance to students' career success.

6. Continuous Professional Development: Provide training for staff to enhance their skills in emerging areas like data analytics, digital transformation, and Universal Design.

By addressing these constraints proactively, UCC Career Services can position itself as a key enabler of student success, aligned with the university's broader strategic vision.

Employability Framework 2025-2028, UCC Career Services, Office of Vice President for Learning and Teaching. January 2025

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