



UCC

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh
University College Cork, Ireland

UCC People and Culture Plan 2025–2028

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Foreword

As the Governing Authority, we recognise that the strength and success of UCC is inseparable from the culture it fosters. A positive, inclusive, and high-performing culture is not only central to the experience of UCC's staff and students—it is critical to achieving its academic mission, delivering on its strategic priorities, and securing future readiness.

We fully endorse the People and Culture Plan as a strategic enabler of institutional excellence. It is a comprehensive, evidence-informed framework that translates ambition into action. The plan addresses the most critical levers of organisational performance: talent attraction and retention, cultural transformation, wellbeing, leadership, digital capability, and institutional efficiency.

This plan reflects a university that is listening, evolving, and determined to lead. It is grounded in UCC's core values and sets out a clear path to empower its people and create the conditions for success in a rapidly changing world.

The Governing Authority is committed to overseeing its implementation and impact and is confident that this plan will deliver real, measurable value for the university community—and for society.

Sean O'Driscoll

Chair of the UCC Governing Authority



A Message From Our President, Professor John O'Halloran

At University College Cork (UCC), our people are the foundation of our success.

As we navigate a rapidly evolving world, we remain committed to fostering an inclusive, innovative, and future-ready workforce that reflects our university's rich history and ambitious vision. This People & Culture Plan is a bold statement of our commitment to attracting, developing, and retaining world-class talent.

This plan sets out a strategic roadmap for how we will invest in our people, modernise our ways of working, and cultivate a culture of collaboration, inclusion, and continuous growth. It is designed to ensure that every member of our community can thrive, contributing to the university's excellence in teaching, research, and societal impact.

Through this plan, we reaffirm our commitment to creating an environment where our staff are valued, supported, and empowered to belong, achieving their full potential.

I invite you to explore this People & Culture Plan, to which we all have a contribution to make in bringing it to life.

Professor John O'Halloran
President

A handwritten signature of Professor John O'Halloran in black ink. The signature is stylized, with a large, flowing 'J' and 'O' at the beginning, followed by 'Halloran' in a more cursive script.



Responding to the Changing World of Work

At University College Cork (UCC), we know the world of work is changing – and we’re evolving with it. Our focus is on people.

We’re creating a workplace where innovation, creativity, and well-being come together to build a more flexible and future-ready UCC. In recent years, many workplaces have embraced automation and digital tools – with the rise of smart technologies like AI and automation, now workplaces are putting people at the centre of innovation using these tools to support human creativity, values, and purpose.

At UCC, we’re embracing this shift. We’re building an agile workforce that’s supported to grow, lead, and adapt.

Our People & Culture Plan is about creating a workplace that feels like a community – inclusive, flexible, and purpose-driven.

By investing in leadership, skills, and digital capacity, we’re putting people first – and positioning UCC as a leader in people-centred innovation in higher education.

Our people are not just part of the change – they *drive* it.



A Message from Our Chief People and Culture Officer, Ashley Flaherty

At UCC, people are at the heart of everything we do. Whether you're leading ground-breaking research, supporting students, or helping our campus run smoothly – every role and every person matters.

Our People and Culture Plan is about making UCC a place where people are proud to work. We want everyone to feel supported, respected, and inspired to grow – not just as employees, but as part of a thriving community.

This plan is a key part of UCC's broader vision (Securing our Future - UCC Strategic Plan 2023-2028), which connects and empowers people to shape a sustainable and inclusive future through an environment and culture that enables transformative research and learning for the enrichment of society and stewardship of our planet. As a research-intensive university, this plan recognises the vital contributions of all our people – from those

advancing research in labs, classrooms, and the field, to those enabling and supporting discovery, teaching, and innovation across the university. At its core is a simple belief: when our people thrive, so does our university.

The plan sets out our strategic priorities, actions, and values to build a workplace where we belong, where our voices are heard, and where we can do our best work. It's shaped by the ideas and insights of our staff, grounded in best practices, and tailored to UCC's unique strengths and goals.

This is our People and Culture Plan. Everyone has a role to play in creating a culture that reflects who we are – and who we want to become.

Our Mission and Values

Our Mission

UCC's mission is to create and sustain an inclusive environment and culture to enable transformative research and learning for the enrichment of society and stewardship of our planet.

Our Values

Having clear values is important as they help guide our everyday actions and decisions. Our values make us unique and are captured in the word CAIRDEAS, which means 'friendship' in Irish. At UCC, these values guide how we connect with our community and partners both locally and globally.

The UCC values are:

Compassion

Agility

Integrity

Respect

Discovery

Equity

Accountability

Sustainability







Introduction to Our People & Culture Plan

Our People and Culture Plan exists to support our University achieve its strategic plan. It supports the delivery of Goal 4 of the UCC Strategic Plan – Our People and Our Culture (*Securing our Future - UCC Strategic Plan 2023-2028*) and places our people, our culture, and our values at the core of everything we do.

Our People and Culture Plan is centred around five strategic priorities:



At UCC we are proud of our talented people and all our activities will support our people to be happy and successful in achieving their career aspirations.

We will inspire, prepare, and engage our leadership community to create the environment in which *everyone thrives*.

We will focus on support for career development and the creation of progression and promotion pathways that enable all our people to experience professional growth and high performance.

We will ensure that UCC remains a great place to work and study by aligning our people and culture activities with our **Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** as we continue to develop and build on our foundations of celebrating diversity, fostering innovation, and encouraging collaboration. Organisational efficiency is at the core of our plan ensuring that our university is ready and able to respond to changing business needs and that our people have the best employee experience at every stage of their career.

Over the next three years we will deliver on our five key strategic priorities.



Priority 1.

Attraction and Retention

At UCC, we recognise that our people are at the heart of our success.

To attract and retain world-class talent, we will implement a global talent strategy that positions us as a leading employer in higher education. Our goal is to ensure that UCC offers an inclusive, rewarding, and engaging experience for all employees, fostering a thriving workforce that supports academic excellence.

Attracting and retaining top talent is vital in a competitive Higher Education landscape. We will enhance our employer brand to appeal to diverse and high-calibre candidates. Retention strategies will focus on career development, promotion pathways, recognition, and creating an inclusive culture where all staff can thrive. Additionally, we will ensure that our talent is effectively utilised by aligning individual strengths with institutional needs and providing opportunities for professional growth.

Key Initiatives:

- **Global Talent Recruitment Strategy**
Strengthening our approach to identifying and securing top talent worldwide.
- **Development of an Employee Value Proposition (EVP)**
Defining and communicating what makes UCC a great place to work.
- **Streamlined, Technology-Enabled Hiring Processes**
Leveraging digital tools to create a more efficient and user-friendly recruitment experience.
- **Job Families & Competency Frameworks**
Clearly defining career pathways and skills development.

What this means for our people and our University:

- The development of **our reputation** as a great employer both locally and globally.
- An **improved candidate experience** through faster, more simple recruitment and selection processes.
- A **reduction in workload** for hiring managers through the adoption of automated tools.
- **Improved data analysis** to enable targeted recruitment activities and aligned to strategic workforce plans.
- Having **well developed people** ready to accept career opportunities.



Priority 2.



Culture and Wellbeing

A strong and inclusive culture is essential to fostering a sense of community and belonging at UCC. We aim to transform our workplace culture by embedding values of collaboration, inclusion, and continuous learning.

The shift towards remote and flexible working models requires us to reimagine how we collaborate, operate, and belong as a UCC community. Our strategy will enhance digital engaged collaboration tools, provide clear guidelines on remote working best practices, and ensure that technology supports productivity and engagement. This includes optimising how we use our physical space for hybrid interactions and fostering inclusion for all staff.

Sustained engagement is essential for a motivated and high-performing workforce. We will enhance internal communication channels, create more opportunities for our people to provide feedback, and introduce initiatives that celebrate achievements and contributions. Strengthening employee voice through structured forums and continuous dialogue will ensure that all our people feel heard, valued, and invested in the university's mission.

Key Initiatives:

- **Cultural Transformation**
Fostering adaptability, innovation, global perspective, and inclusivity.
- **Wellbeing Frameworks**
Enhancing staff wellbeing and ensuring equitable opportunities for all.
- **Staff Engagement & Voice**
Creating opportunities for meaningful staff participation in university life and decision-making.
- **Diversity & Inclusion Accountability**
Addressing inconsistencies where they arise.
- **Career Pathways & Internal Mobility**
Ensuring clear development opportunities within UCC.
- **Reimagine how we use our physical space**
as an enablement of our people, institutional culture and identity.

What this means for our people and our University:

- The development of more **tailored resources** that support and contribute to wellbeing.
- **A great experience** for all our people at every stage of their time in UCC.
- Greater **access to learning and development** opportunities aligned to career aspirations and the university's needs.
- Greater **engagement with our people** with a commitment to listening to colleagues and acting on their feedback.
- A work environment that supports **hybrid working**, connectivity and collaboration.



Priority 3.



Inspiring Leadership

Strong leadership is at the heart of cultural enhancement and transformation.

We will invest in leadership development programs that equip managers and senior leaders with the skills needed to inspire, guide, and support their teams.

We will reimagine our offering in terms of tailored and targeted development pathways and opportunities which not just centre on competency and skills but provide exposure and experience that will stand to our current and future leadership cohorts. A Leadership Framework will underpin UCC's core values and define the expectations for leadership and management roles across all levels.

Key Initiatives:

- **Leadership Competency Framework**
which is strategically aligned.
- **Embracing our Leadership Coaching & Mentoring Programs**
Equipping leaders with the tools to support and inspire teams.
- **Succession Planning & Leadership Pipelines**
Ensuring continuity and progression in key roles.
- **Capability-Building Workshops**
Strengthening leadership competencies across all levels.
- **Introduction of a Leadership Framework**
Defining expectations and standards for UCC's leaders.

What this means for our people and our University:

- Consistent expectations and **measures of performance** and feedback.
- Regular and **ongoing development** undertaken by leaders and managers as common practice.
- **Empowering leaders** and managers to take full accountability for all aspects of their team's delivery.
- **Developing critical skills** in our leaders and managers for the future success of UCC.
- A **strong talent pipeline** for succession planning.



Priority 4.

Performance Through Contribution & Growth

To support UCC's long-term ambitions, we must ensure that our organisational structures, systems, and policies are effective and future ready. Effective resourcing is fundamental to achieving our university's mission and strategic objectives. Aligning our workforce planning with the university's goals is essential. We will implement robust resourcing strategies that anticipate future needs, identify critical roles, and develop talent pipelines. This includes comprehensive succession planning to prepare for key position vacancies and ensure leadership continuity.

We recognize the need to proactively address both opportunities and challenges in this area to ensure we have the right people in the right roles at the right time. Balancing workloads is crucial for maintaining staff well-being and productivity. We will assess current workload distributions and implement strategies to manage and optimise them. This may involve process improvements, resource allocation adjustments, and support mechanisms to prevent well-being impacts and promote a healthy work environment.

To remain competitive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape, we must equip our people with the necessary digital skills. Our strategy includes training and development programs focused on digital literacy, data analytics, and AI adoption. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, we will ensure our people are prepared to leverage emerging technologies effectively. Through these initiatives, we aim to create a digitally empowered workforce that is agile, innovative, and secure.

Technology and digital transformation will continue to be a cornerstone of our people strategy, ensuring that our university remains at the forefront of digital excellence. Change management initiatives will provide structured training and ongoing support to help our people navigate and embrace new digital ways of working. By focusing on behavioural and process transformation alongside technology implementation, we will create a workplace that is not only digitally enabled but also more agile, collaborative, and future ready.

The shift towards remote working has created opportunities for greater autonomy and productivity, but it has also introduced challenges in collaboration, team cohesion, and workplace culture. Our strategy will refine remote working policies to ensure they support both the university needs and individual preferences. This includes investing in digital tools to enhance remote collaboration, establishing clear expectations for in-person versus virtual engagement, and ensuring fairness in access to remote working arrangements across different roles.



Key Initiatives:

- **Workforce Planning & Resourcing**
Aligning staffing needs with institutional goals.
- **Flexible & Agile Workforce Models**
Adapting to evolving academic and professional service needs.
- **Workload Management**
Ensuring a balanced approach that is healthy, productive and affords opportunity to access activities that stretch and develop.
- **Succession Planning**
to ensure our people are organisation ready for our future needs and their future ambitions.
- **Technology & Digital Transformation**
Enhancing digital skills and digital first thinking, AI, and future of work readiness.
- **Work-Life Balance & Wellbeing**
Promoting sustainable working practices that support staff wellbeing.

What this means for our people and our University:

- **Workforce planning systems** that embed strategic workforce planning into our forward planning.
- **Working practices** that are not only digitally enabled but also more agile, collaborative, and future ready.
- **Balanced workloads** so that our people can maintain their well-being and productivity.



Priority 5.

Organisational Efficiency

Through our People & Culture Plan we will enable greater efficiency across the university by embedding a culture of collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement; driven by purpose and values-led leadership. Organisational efficiency is not just about process improvement, it is about creating the conditions for our people to thrive and contribute meaningfully to the university's mission. As the world of work transforms through digital innovation, artificial intelligence, and evolving models of collaboration, our approach must be strategic and adaptive. We will support the strengthening of our organisational agility by fostering a workforce culture that is digitally ready, future-focused, and empowered to deliver high performance with clarity and purpose.

Our People & Culture team will play a pivotal role in driving this shift—supporting leaders, managers, and teams in rethinking how they work, how they lead, and how they make decisions.

This includes building leadership capability, cultivating a mindset of evidence-based decision-making, and reinforcing our institutional values in every aspect of how we operate.

Key Initiatives:

- **Values-Driven Leadership Enablement**
empowering leaders at all levels to foster cultures of efficiency, trust, and strategic alignment.
- **Workforce Analytics for Decision-Making**
delivering accurate, timely, and insightful data to support informed and agile planning.
- **Digital Empowerment & Self-Service Tools**
enabling staff to work and use space more effectively through accessible and user-friendly platforms.
- **Process and Workflow Optimisation**
Streamlining and automating key processes to reduce administrative load and unlock strategic capacity.

What this means for our people and our University:

- A more cohesive, **high-performing workforce** aligned with UCC's strategic priorities.
- **Leadership and decision-making** that are data informed and grounded in institutional values.
- **Simplified, accessible digital tools** that enable staff to focus more time on meaningful work and less on administrative tasks.
- **A modernised organisational culture** where efficiency, flexibility, and innovation are embedded in daily practice.



Measures Of Our Success

To ensure that the ambitions of the People & Culture Plan are realised, we will track a set of clear, outcome-oriented measures aligned to each of our five priorities.

These measures will reflect our ability to attract and retain talent, foster an inclusive and engaging culture, develop leadership, support growth and performance, and enable a more efficient and agile organisation. Together, they represent our commitment to building a university where our people thrive and contribute to institutional excellence.

Among other measures, these include:

- **Participation and engagement scores** through a dedicated employee engagement measure, highlighting staff experiences of fair access to opportunities and respectful ways of working across the University.
- **Our talent acquisition and employee engagement** activities are inclusive and attract potential colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds.
- **Our recruitment practices deliver the diverse people we need**; our processes feel inclusive and welcoming to all candidates.
- **Annual people planning exercises at a local level** identify future improvement opportunities, succession planning and talent development.
- **A leadership framework** that underpins our core values and sets out the expectations of those in leadership and management roles.
- **A Wellbeing Strategy** that provides for flexible working arrangements for all our people and wellbeing support when it is needed.
- **Support for the development of workload models** to ensure fairness in allocation.
- **Online technologies** have increased efficiency for administrative processes across the university.
- Most posts are **filled first time** with the right talented people.
- Positive relationships with our **recognised trade unions** and other employee representatives nurtured and encouraged.





Plan of Activity

To deliver these outcomes, we will implement a structured programme of activity across the lifespan of the plan, engaging all our stakeholders to enable success of the plan:

- **Year 1 (2025): Foundation**
rollout of frameworks, systems, and leadership capacity-building.
- **Year 2 (2026): Acceleration**
targeted development pathways, data-informed planning and optimisation.
- **Year 3 (2027): Embedding**
sustainability of initiatives, maturity in digital and leadership capability.

Through our annual operational planning process, we will bring our People & Culture Plan to life. Progress on the delivery of our People & Culture Plan will be monitored through quarterly reviews and annual reporting to the University Leadership Team and Governing Authority. This ensures accountability and alignment with the broader institutional strategy.

Together, these measures and activities will support our vision for UCC to be a university where people flourish, leadership inspires, and innovation drives a vibrant academic and professional community.



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