UCC 2022
Delivering a Connected University

December 1st 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UCC 2022: Delivering a Connected University replaces the final two years of the Strategic Plan 2017-2022 *Independent Thinking – Shared Ambition*. It sets out a thematic prioritisation of our strategy, as well as the transformative changes to our core operations in response to geopolitical challenges, the escalating climate crisis and accelerating societal and economic pressures associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

This strategic pivot identifies our key strategic priorities for the period 2021-2022, clustered within five interconnected thematic pillars: Learning and Teaching; Research and Innovation; Student Success; People and Organisational Culture; and Infrastructure and Resources. Deeply rooted in extensive collaboration both within and outside UCC, this two-year plan builds on our strengths in student focus, sustainability, and community and global engagement, to identify actions to respond to the current crisis and position UCC for long-term success.

We aim to provide a personalised education for every student through the delivery of market-aligned, future-ready programmes. The role of technology will be expanded to enhance flexibility and increase efficiencies and to enable lifelong and life-wide learning. We will prioritise impactful research and innovation that are curiosity driven, seeking breakthroughs that will address global societal grand challenges including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Focusing on key research strengths we will emphasise collaboration as well as inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches to differentiate UCC and to strengthen the integration of research and learning. We will deliver an inclusive, connected and responsive experience for all students. Student health and wellbeing will be prioritised in response to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. We will provide an inclusive and respectful environment that provides staff with opportunities for growth and for undertaking quality work and creating impact which connects with our strategic goals. We will promote operational excellence, implement an organisational development plan, complete key strategic ICT projects, implement change management and optimise the use of data to support decision making. We will review space utilisation practices to optimise the provision of digital and physical space to support the delivery of our strategic objectives.

UCC 2022 will position us to gain efficiencies and maximise revenue as we respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftereffects. Over the next two years, we will initiate the process to develop our new Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2028. In the meantime, we have adopted, and we will continuously adapt, the *UCC 2022* priorities as elaborated below, during this period of uncertainty and transition.

CONTEXT

UCC's strategic plan *Independent Thinking - Shared Ambition*, launched in 2017, reached its mid-term review as the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the world, giving rise to significant societal and economic disruptions, compounded by existing geopolitical challenges and the escalating climate crisis. Covid-19 has resulted in many challenges for higher education, including disruption to the mode of delivery of academic programmes and research, financial challenges, as well as impacting on the health and wellbeing of staff and students. While higher education in Ireland faces many disruptors including funding uncertainty, we also have new opportunities arising from significant technological advancement and a new national agenda for higher education.

In light of the fundamental changes to the landscape in which higher education operates, it is timely and appropriate to review and update UCC's strategic priorities for the next two years[1], making the necessary adjustments to ensure our agility and sustainability in this new and very different context. To this end, a series of internal and external consultations informed our discussions on UCC's strategic trajectory, within our two-year timeline.

The outcome - *UCC 2022* - identifies the key strategic priorities for the University during the period 2021-2022, clustered within five interconnected thematic pillars. Four of these pillars are clearly aligned with four of our existing Strategic Goals. A fifth pillar – Student Success – addresses pressing challenges for our students. Our existing Strategic Goal 3 – *Create value for our community through an international outlook and informed and creative engagement on local and global issues* – is now woven into and across each of the five pillars of *UCC 2022*, affirming our commitment to our local, regional and national communities, and to human societies across the globe.

As well as challenges for our student body, our graduates face the challenge of a constrained labour market aggravated by the pandemic. With these factors in mind, *UCC 2022* represents a strategic pivot, reprioritising our activities to best position UCC for a secure and sustainable future, underpinned by our values of creativity, respect, transparency, responsiveness, integrity, equality, diversity and scholarship. We will build on our 175-year history and our core strengths to increase agility and resilience to meet emerging needs and safeguard our future. We are committed to sustainability and the green agenda, to community and international engagement (both via networks of domain excellence and via our alumni), and to being connected and student-focussed as we deliver our mission to create and share knowledge and apply it for the good of all.

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[1] Which are the final two years of the Strategic Plan adopted in 2017; *UCC 2022: Delivering a Connected University* replaces the final two years of the 2017 plan.

Through the actions identified in *UCC 2022* we will align with and adopt the recommendations of the EUA-IEP[2] report of 2020, as well as strategic issues emanating from the quality review process. Our ambition, at all times, is to streamline our systems and processes, thereby reducing duplication and fragmentation, while enhancing efficiency and effectiveness, ultimately releasing time and effort towards the delivery of the core academic mission of the University. Timelines are categorised as Q1-Q8, to represent each quarter year during the period 2021-2022. Each pillar will be operationalised in Q1 2021 via the establishment of a dedicated sub-committee of the University Management Team (UMT), which will develop individual implementation plans. Over the next two years UCC will develop and implement an over-arching organisational development plan for the University as a whole. We will continue to prioritise good governance including the implementation of the University Code of Governance.
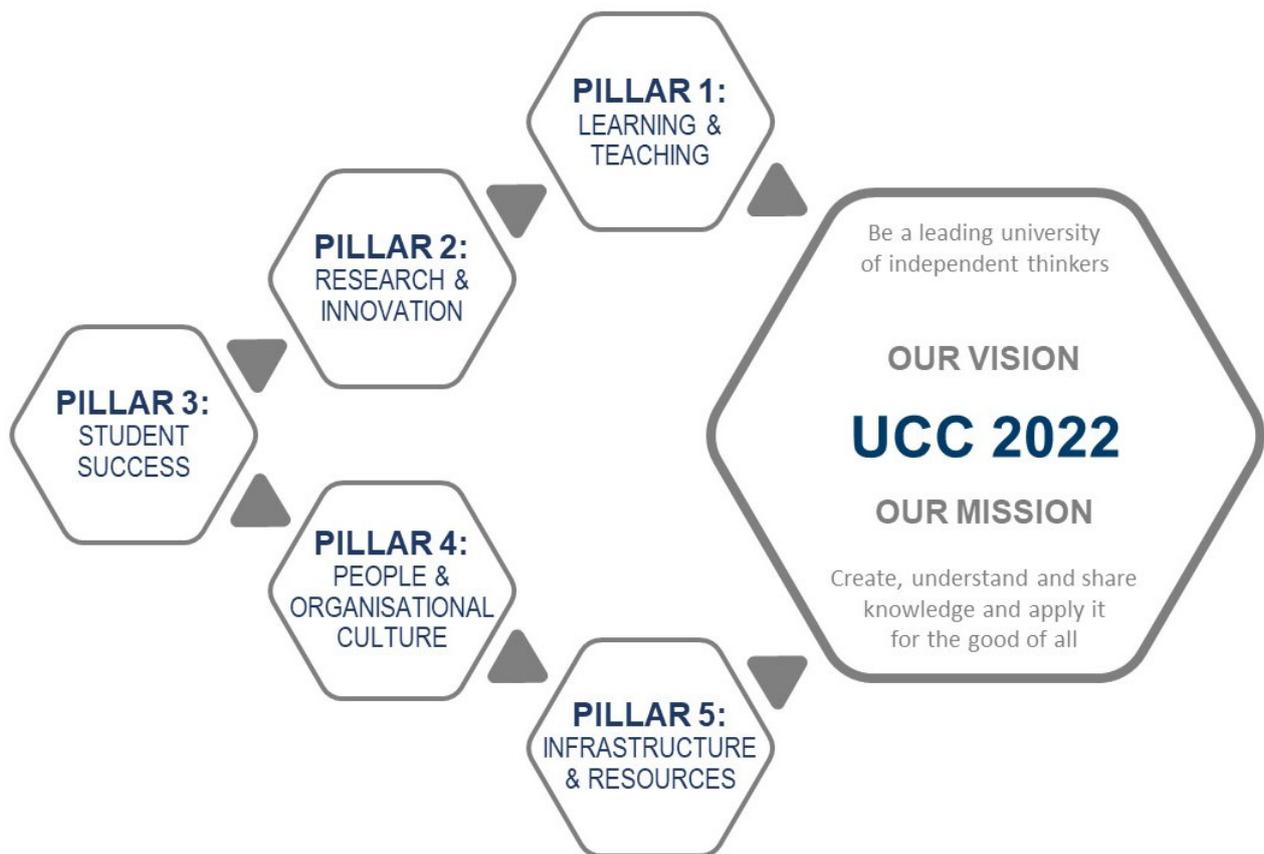
1. PILLAR ONE: LEARNING AND TEACHING

Learning and teaching are the defining characteristics of every university. What is taught, how it is taught, and the overall ethos of the university's teaching mission are the characteristics that define an institution's offering to its students. To optimise UCC's relevance to potential and existing students and to ensure our students are enabled to study and learn in the most efficient

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[2] European Universities Association – Institutional Evaluation Programme.

and effective ways, it is vital that UCC regularly reflects on *what* and *how* it teaches. That reflection is even more critical in the current environment.

UCC is committed to the personalised education of every member of its student community. We prioritise the provision of quality of education to equip students with the skills, discipline and intellectual rigour that can be adapted to their requirements and challenges throughout their lifetime. UCC is committed to delivering future-ready education programmes, adopting a systems approach underpinned by the philosophy of lifelong and life-wide learning.

UCC will continue to honour its responsibility to secure students' progression towards employment by providing relevant and practice-oriented degree programmes, while also strengthening opportunities for entrepreneurship. We commit to providing high quality learning by delivering on the following priorities during the period 2021-2022.

1.1. Unique, Individualised and Connected Learning

UCC's *Academic Strategy (2018 – 2022)* continues to guide our academic direction as we respond to a changing world, society and labour market. The central characteristic of the UCC learning experience is the delivery of a *Connected Curriculum*, which emphasises the holistic development of students, from a variety of pathways and access points, and staff through research-based, collaborative enquiry, with a commitment to excellence and disciplinary integrity.

ACTION

1.1.1.   Accelerate the actions in the Academic Strategy innovative assessment and further integration of research, sustainability, global reach and community engagement in the curriculum.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; 80% complete Q5; ongoing thereafter.

1.2. Invigorate and Innovate our Programme Offerings to Enhance Learning

The range of disciplines encompassed within UCC is one of our distinguishing features and is characteristic of a comprehensive university. Nevertheless, we need to consider our subject spread and the long-term commitments that the *status quo* implies.

ACTIONS

1.2.1.   Conclude the process of schoolification, and review programmes in each School with a view to invigorating and innovating the programme offerings.
Timeline: Review programmes complete Q3.
Timeline: Schoolification complete Q5.

> 1.2.2. Resource and support all programmes via Schools.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.
>
> 1.2.3. Develop at least *two joint degrees* (both online and face-to-face) in each College, with external partners, globally and/or nationally.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; complete Q7.

1.3. Invest in Digital Education

Digital technology has revolutionised the way we teach, as experienced when the entire University went online in March 2020 with only a few hours' notice. While we commit to being a largely campus-based undergraduate university, we will increase our blended delivery and our postgraduate online offering. This will be done in tandem with supporting the necessary digital skills and expertise of our academic staff. We will support our academics to work with learning designers to bring a richness of resources to the delivery of all courses. This has the potential to enhance educational experience, as an effective blended course will include access to digital resources and activities that help students learn specific concepts and test understanding. Online learning portals will use learning analytics to track student progress, while predictive modelling will alert staff to additional support requirements. As society is in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution, business and industry are increasingly integrating virtual and online work into their operations; at UCC we are ensuring that our graduates will be work ready for this rapidly changing environment.

> ACTIONS
> 1.3.1. Enhance the digital learning experience for on-campus and off-campus learners, by upskilling including via micro-credentials, through investment in simulation, virtual resources and flexible learning and assessment using technology.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.
>
> 1.3.2. Further enable *remote learning* through unique online programmes.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.
>
> 1.3.3. Prioritise investment in digital education through expanding our range of infrastructural resources to staff, deploy Instructional Design expertise in Colleges and Schools.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.

2. PILLAR TWO: RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

As a research-intensive university, we pursue truth and knowledge in both basic and applied research domains. We enable, expect and support our academic staff to conduct research of acknowledged quality. In so doing, we deliver benefits to society and promote the transfer of knowledge, making research and teaching accessible to others, including through open access. Our excellent research base at UCC is characterised by intensive pan-European cooperation.

We will focus on enhancing research, supporting innovation and breakthroughs and fostering start-ups - via our accelerators - that make a fundamental difference. UCC will continue to champion curiosity-driven research, including through enhancement of our research infrastructure. In tandem, we will seek research breakthroughs that will address some of the global societal grand challenges of our time. We will emphasise collaboration as well as inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches to addressing global challenges, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We will make our research output accessible and will secure financial returns through licensing intellectual property rights where appropriate. We will secure a sustainable research portfolio. Our areas of research excellence will be embedded in our taught programmes, while the configuration of the relationship between our research centres and the wider UCC community will be enhanced. The following strategic decisions will inform and guide engagement with colleagues across UCC in the period 2021-2022.

2.1. Research Prioritisation

We have expertise in a rich and diverse range of disciplines within UCC; this diversity is one of our core strengths. A distinctive characteristic of high performing universities globally is regular and responsive priority setting, enabling the enhancement of key areas of strength, while also identifying and empowering emerging areas. We will continue the process that was initiated in our *Strategic Plan 2017-2022*, within which research priorities were identified. In continuing to differentiate UCC as a research-intensive university, strengthening research engagement will be actively encouraged across the institution, with emphasis on research-informed learning.

ACTIONS

2.1.1. Develop a methodology to prioritise areas of existing and emerging research strengths and identify research themes where we can have global impact.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; complete Q3.

2.1.2. Map our research onto the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; complete Q2.

2.1.3. Prioritise research through investment in PhD and postdoctoral scholarships.
Timeline: Initiate Q1: ongoing throughout.

2.2. Promoting Research Excellence

UCC will reward and incentivise excellent research performance. We will finalise our incentivisation policy to recognise publication in world-leading journals and with publishers of global renown, in accordance with disciplinary norms. The weighting accorded to research, teaching and service in promotion and progression will be reviewed to ensure that it aligns with our stated ambitions to be a world-leading research university. We will invest in promotion and progression and increase the consideration of research in the evaluation of performance.

ACTIONS

2.2.1. Ensure that research and scholarship are appropriately recognised in the evaluation of performance and promotions.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; complete Q3; implement Q3.

2.2.2. Initiate a President's Strategic Research Fund to support doctoral and postdoctoral research, enabled by philanthropic funds.
Timeline: Initiate Q3; ongoing throughout.

2.3. Innovation

Innovation is at the core of all that we do at UCC. The culture of innovation that we engender is overarching, transcending teaching, professional services, research and practice. We are committed to driving research and innovation and to embedding innovatory practice in all our activities.

UCC has a pivotal role in leveraging the societal and economic benefits to be gained from our academic, industry and service partnerships. We are committed to supporting the Cork region to flourish, while looking beyond the region to engage our global community with our work. The development of innovation districts in association with HEIs is underway in Dublin and Galway. In the Cork region, the City and County authorities have expressed their interest in the concept of an innovation corridor along the line of the planned light rail system. UCC will work with national and regional authorities to secure the necessary investment to develop an innovation corridor in this region – our key contribution to an Innovation Island. This will be a driver of knowledge-based development, as well as a platform for harnessing innovative output from UCC, and a learning opportunity for our students. We are also working with TCD and NUI Galway to call for the concept of a National Innovation District Strategy to be incorporated into upcoming Government proposals and strategies.

ACTIONS

2.3.1. Ensure that all research students are supported through a dedicated programme and are inspired to develop, innovate, think and behave entrepreneurially, including through the Graduate Attributes Programme.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.

2.3.2. Formalise and embed both innovation and entrepreneurship activities throughout the University.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.

2.3.3. Build innovation capabilities through joint development and networking with leading innovation practitioners and representatives from the innovation community.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.

2.3.4. Engage nationally with Government and other agencies to help activate Cork as an innovation city (corridor).
Timeline: Initiate Q1; ongoing throughout.

2.4. Our Ambition for Global Rankings[3]

Rankings contribute positively to our global reputation, profiling the University, enhancing our visibility and our ability to attract talent. Rankings support our ability to engage in cutting edge research partnerships, and to leverage increased resources from agencies and investors. While we will not be slavish to rankings systems, we will ensure that our factual data on our configuration and output is summarised to best address the descriptive metrics of the rankings bodies.

ACTIONS

2.4.1. Focus on the QS World University Rankings and *THE* Rankings, at university level, and the Shanghai Jiao Tong and QS Rankings at subject area and discipline levels, working toward the long-term target of placing UCC within the top 200 globally in both the QS Rankings and the *THE* Rankings.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; ongoing throughout.

2.4.2. Maintain our position within the top 10 in the UI Green Metric World University Ranking and improve our position at the top of the *THE* World Impact Ranking, reflecting our prioritisation of sustainability and the Green Agenda.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; ongoing throughout.

2.4.3. Align our capabilities to our priorities to support disciplines and subjects.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

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[3] It is estimated that there are between 18,000 and 23,000 universities globally, and that most rankings deal with the top 1,500 universities.

3. PILLAR THREE: STUDENT SUCCESS

Student success is a key strategic priority for UCC. We are committed to delivering a high quality and flexible student experience, supporting students to achieve their desired career and personal development outcomes. Being within the rapidly evolving fourth industrial revolution, we are committed to developing competences for the digital age, including complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity.

The Covid-19 crisis has posed unprecedented challenges to student success. The increase in demand for support, coupled with changes in the way that students interact with support services, with university staff and with one another has impacted in different ways across our student community. Financial challenges in families of origin is also increasingly becoming a stress factor for students. It is imperative that we now focus our attention to create an inclusive and responsive experience for all students, taking a holistic view of the student journey so that our students remain at the centre of our responses to a changing world. We must ensure that the needs of every member of our diverse student body are understood and addressed as they move through and out of university.

The transformational student experience at UCC derives from the strong emphasis placed on student engagement and belonging; removal of barriers to education; social, cultural and sporting opportunities; strong support networks; career planning opportunities; and our commitment to working in partnership with students. Our unique student experience is grounded in enabling our students to develop a distinctive set of graduate attributes, including beyond the classroom, to complement their academic studies and equip them to become effective global citizens.

Between now and 2022 we will implement the following priorities to ensure that we deliver an outstanding student experience that is responsive to change and meets the needs of our diverse student community.

3.1. Consistency of Student Experience

Every student, irrespective of their discipline or stage of study, should have an equitable quality student experience encompassing every aspect of student life. UCC must aim to provide high quality physical infrastructure, online facilities and support services for all students. The new Hub building opened its doors to our students in 2020 providing a central place to study, socialise and access supports in a welcoming, accessible and technology-rich environment. The recent student service redesign project has delivered considerable improvements in the efficient and seamless provision of student services including online self-service options. We are committed to building on this work and focussing on providing *all* students with broadly equivalent access to learning opportunities, physical space, support and student services. Social,

cultural and sporting opportunities will allow them to reach their full potential as independent learners and thinkers, to improve their soft-skills and to optimise their employability.

ACTIONS

3.1.1. Offer an equitable experience for all students, via provision of space both online and on campus, including the library.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.1.2. Increase formal and informal face-to-face opportunities for both learning and engagement.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.1.3. Understand and address the needs of students at every level, across all Colleges and use data such as the Irish Student Survey to inform our decision making.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.1.4. Resource and embed the Graduate Attributes Programme across all Colleges.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.1.5. Ensure that staff have the skills to identify and respond to student needs and to provide them with a high-quality university experience.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.2. Invest in Student Wellbeing

Our key strategic priority is student success. Supporting student wellbeing and resilience is fundamental to maximising the opportunity for our students to excel, particularly in a rapidly evolving world. In order to be effective learners, students need a stable and supportive environment, with easy access to appropriate sources of advice and guidance including student health and welfare and mental health services. In order to grow and develop as independent and creative thinkers, students require opportunities to connect socially and collectively, both formally (through clubs, societies and sporting activities) and more informally (through provision of shared social spaces). We recognise that the student community is highly diverse, and a range of appropriate opportunities to connect will be essential to meet the needs of our diverse student community.

ACTIONS

3.2.1. Deliver *universal accessibility* of student support and academic services including enhancement of the digital hub and the library.
Timeline: Initiate Q1: ongoing throughout.

3.2.2. Align support for our diverse student body with changing needs.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.2.3. As part of our Sexual Health Framework, roll-out the Bystander Intervention Module[4].
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.2.4. Further implement our Mental Health and Wellbeing Policies, our Sports Strategy and our Arts and Culture Strategy.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

3.3. Students as Partners

UCC will empower students and support their individual needs and goals by working in partnership with them to design their own learning trajectory. Learning and teaching as shared property is an important aspect of the UCC experience and students will be encouraged and supported to engage as partners and co-creators of their university journey. This approach of working in partnership with students to construct personalised pathways supports them to engage better with their learning and offers them more control over what, when and how they study.

ACTIONS

3.3.1. Provide authentic opportunities for partnership between students and staff in the design of student learning and experience, and in student governance.
Timeline: Initiate Q1: ongoing throughout.

3.3.2. Provide appropriate supports for students and staff to co-create their curriculum and learning experience.
Timeline: Initiate Q1: ongoing throughout.

3.3.3. Establish a forum that captures the inclusive student voice, representative of our diverse student population.
Timeline: Initiate Q1: ongoing throughout.

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[4] UCC's Bystander Intervention Module educates students on issues of sexual misconduct and harassment. https://www.ucc.ie/en/bystander

4. PILLAR FOUR: PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

At UCC our people are critical to our success as they drive our responsiveness, innovation and achievement in research, teaching, and community service. The commitment and energy of UCC staff, which defined its ability to respond to the Covid-19 crisis, is reliant on the drive, talent, engagement and collective effort of our community. Our people will continue to be our greatest asset in responding to and engaging with the changing higher education landscape and the challenges and opportunities of the coming years.

UCC strives to deliver an inclusive and respectful environment where staff and students can all progress and develop. We are committed to enhancing our policies and procedures to provide the conditions and opportunities for undertaking quality work and creating impact which connects with our strategic goals. We will facilitate career progression by acknowledging and rewarding staff for their endeavours and creating opportunities for colleagues to enhance their skills to achieve excellence. We are committed to equality, diversity and inclusivity at all career stages and will maintain a strong focus on wellbeing. We will foster a dynamic and inclusive culture by investing in staff to help recognise and maximise their contribution to the collective success of UCC.

In building these conditions for individuals and teams across the institution, UCC is committed to fostering and embedding a culture of respect and institutional honesty throughout the institution. We will create the opportunities for collaboration, collegiality, accountability and innovation to thrive. We will hold each other to account in relation to decision making, honouring our values and practicing institutional honesty.

4.1. Promotion and Progression

UCC will strive to have a regular rhythm of promotion and progression opportunities for staff who demonstrate sustained excellence in their roles. The University is committed to providing an opportunity in the near future for colleagues currently at Lecturer Below the Bar to apply for progression across the Bar.

ACTIONS
- 4.1.1. Conduct a rapid review of the architecture of the existing promotions schemes to ensure that they are aligned appropriately with UCC's strategic goals and priorities, linked to performance. Streamline the processes for applicants and panel members alike.
  Timeline: Initiate Q2: complete Q4.

4.1.2. Develop a clear regular timetable for a new promotions system based on both competitive and threshold progression, for staff who demonstrate sustained excellence.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: complete Q3.

4.1.3. UCC will establish a timeline and budgetary provision for a progression across the Bar programme.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: implement Q4; ongoing throughout.

4.1.4. In tandem with promotional opportunities, we will review and implement provision of academic titles in line with national and international best practice.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: complete Q4.

4.2. Management of Performance and Continuous Professional Development

Connected to investment in opportunities for career progression is our obligation to manage performance effectively. UCC will develop and embed a visible value system which will be at the core of our new performance management system. We will strive to bring this shared value system to life across the university in our leadership, activities and engagement with others.

ACTIONS

4.2.1. Invest in training at all levels in living our values and desired behaviours, to ensure consistency of approach across the University and the maximisation of opportunities to support and enable staff, and to harvest innovative and creative ideas in support of our strategic priorities.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

4.2.2. Implement performance management, recognition and reward and engage with our values to demonstrate our strength as a connected university as we work together to develop and enhance a culture of institutional honesty.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: implement throughout.

4.2.3. Align Continuous Professional Development (CPD) strategy and activity with our strategic priorities. We will develop a strategic and focused approach to the provision of CPD across UCC which will be evidence based and will clearly support the development of talent and career progression and succession.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: implement throughout.

4.2.4. Develop an agile, flexible and responsive CPD plan to address emergent needs, modelling our approach on international best practice and promoting continuous learning and practice improvement.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: complete Q4; implement throughout.

4.2.5. Invest in leadership development training across both our academic and professional staff cohorts, thereby enabling staff to progress and enhance their abilities towards delivering responsibility.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

4.3. Attract and Retain Talent

UCC aims to be the employer of choice for exceptional people and we want to provide a career pathway that is rewarding and fulfilling for all staff. We want our staff to live our values in their actions and behaviours.

ACTIONS
4.3.1. Review interview process, including board size and composition.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: complete Q3.

4.3.2. Conduct an organisational cultural barometer assessment.
Timeline: Initiate Q3: complete Q4.

4.3.3. Implement and resource our Athena SWAN action plan and support diversity and inclusivity across the university.
Timeline: Initiate Q2: ongoing throughout.

5. PILLAR FIVE: INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

UCC will promote operational excellence, complete key strategic ICT projects, continue to implement change management and leaner processes and optimise the use of available data to support agile and responsive decision making.

Future income challenges will include the need for investment in effective online teaching and learning, including investment in digital technologies and staff training, as well as changes to physical infrastructure to accommodate new safety measures. UCC will look at diversifying its range of income options to address these, and other, financial challenges. UCC will develop and implement an over-arching organisational development plan for the University. We will develop an investment plan to address how best to achieve our priorities for improving learning outcomes, and improving economic, environmental and social outcomes.

Tough decisions must be taken but delivering the financial stability of UCC is of paramount importance. It must be delivered inside the budgetary and legal framework within which the University operates. This will serve to safeguard the future of the University and protect the currently challenged financial covenants.

5.1. Finances

ACTIONS

5.1.1. Prioritise the generation of non-exchequer income through commercial sponsorship (including commercialisation of assets), alumni engagement and philanthropic support.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.

5.1.2. Within a three to five-year timeframe, allocate at least 1% operating surplus per annum to an investment plan. This plan will incorporate the increase of discretionary tuition fees for on-site students initially of 1% per annum for five years and latterly for all students once there is a resumption of normalised on-campus activity. It will also involve the marginal increase of the capitation fee for all students as well as charging students (and staff) for certain support services or privileges which are currently free or heavily subsidised.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.

5.1.3. The achievement of a 1% operating surplus per annum will support the creation of a reserve fund (by Q1 2026) driven by the prioritisation of income generation. This fund will build to 3% of institutional income by 2026 in line with the relevant OECD recommended target. This fund will align with a 20-year plan for fiscal assets. It will allow the University to deliver on its strategic objectives while offering the scope to maximise strategic opportunities as they present themselves.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.

5.1.4. Undertake a re-examination and adjustment, where necessary, of the resource allocation model (including any disincentives to improved performance) such that it is appropriately fit for purpose and aligns with the strategic objectives outlined in this plan. This may result in the enhanced application of commercial acumen when dealing with budgetary adjustments and/or that student facing activities will be prioritised.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; complete Q6.

> 5.1.5. Complete an independent (external) review of all subsidiary companies and assets. This may include (but not be confined to) the financial viability of the subsidiary entity, possible recommendations in relation to enhanced governance and centralised control and the strategic options for UCC in respect of the future of the subsidiary entity.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; complete Q6.

5.2. The Digital Estate

Change management and leaner processes, the use and optimisation of data and the reduction of operational waste will help support more responsive and agile decision-making based on simpler, streamlined reporting within the University. It will thus help free-up the scarce resource of time for all staff within the organisation and allow for more time for implementation and execution of the identified priorities.

> ACTIONS
>
> 5.2.1. UCC will remove technical debt while building capacity. We will use artificial intelligence to interrogate big data to aid decision making, solve problems while reducing duplication and costs.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; complete Q8.
>
> 5.2.2. Transform the way we work by building digital capacity and by optimising the technological resources available to us to connect with our students, staff, alumni, stakeholders and global network. This will serve to future-proof the University.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; ongoing throughout.
>
> 5.2.3. Develop a long-term plan for digital assets to be delivered through the operational excellence plan (and detailed operational plans) and combined with a change-focused mind-set.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; complete Q8.
>
> 5.2.4. Expand the Connected University Programme and apply the same principles to all pillars and complete the key strategic ICT projects.
> **Timeline:** Initiate Q2; complete Q7.

5.3. The Physical Estate

Lack of investment in facilities over previous decades remains evident in parts of our campus. Some activities are currently accommodated in poor quality space that is not fit for purpose.

UCC now has the opportunity to reimagine the physical campus, where our operations will increasingly be configured for a virtual world. UCC will be ready for a world where digital learning models have increasing presence, while not diminishing the importance of the physical space and place, an acknowledged unique characteristic of UCC. This may involve reimagining our physical footprint and infrastructures, with opportunities to use them in new ways. It also affords us the opportunity to expand the reach of the University, to those who may not have the opportunity to be physically present on campus, which also increases the opportunities for flexible access and participation in courses and learning.

ACTIONS

5.3.1. Complete a campus masterplan of all Building and Estates assets. Explore the potential for sale / sale and lease back options for certain campus assets.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; complete Q4.

5.3.2. Review the pipeline of capital projects to reassess their viability in the context of a post-Covid-19 world. UCC must identify the non-negotiable (must do) new build and renovation projects over the coming two years. Where there is sufficient existing demand and immediate enhancement of reputational benefits emanating from a project and reduced risk to cash flow and ability to repay, then the projects should proceed, subject to formal approval and support from credit partners.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; complete Q6.

5.3.3. Prioritise the completion of the key commenced, strategic capital expenditure projects. Pause and re-assess projects at key decision points where the immediate demand and related reputation enhancement is not visible and /or where there are significant risks to cash flow and repayment capacity.
Timeline: Initiate Q1; complete Q8.

5.3.4. Review our space use considering the future of work, learning from our experience of remote working during the pandemic.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; complete Q6.

5.3.5. Maintain our commitment to UCC library services including the identification and creation of emerging and innovative opportunities and content within its physical and virtual space.
Timeline: Initiate Q2; complete Q7.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The outlook for universities worldwide is unprecedently challenging, not least financially. As we face the coming two years, we are aware that exchequer funding will not match the increasing costs of providing higher education. Combined with increasing student numbers, associated expectations, and realities of Covid-19 related changes to life and work, our prioritisation of activities is timely.

Throughout 2021 and 2022 we will ensure that students remain at the core of our academic mission, connecting with them both online and on campus. We will provide them with quality educational content, as well as support and opportunities to engage in diverse activities. Our future success will build on our distinctive character, founded on our mix of a comprehensive curriculum, research strengths, and commitment to our region while being globally facing and internationally connected via a range of delivery interfaces.

Implementation

Through *UCC 2022: Delivering a Connected University*, we commit to a robust and collaborative approach to delivering our priorities in the coming two years. Our *modus operandi* will be one of adopt and adapt, as part of the iterative process of delivering on our actions. On adoption of *UCC 2022* by Governing Body, a sub-committee of UMT will be established for each pillar, with responsibility to draw up implementation and operational plans aligned with budgets from Q1 2021 and oversee progress. Each committee will address target setting, and will report accountabilities to UMT and Interim President, who will have oversight. The committees will engage with the Schools, Colleges and Functional Areas relevant to each pillar domain, from Q1. The plans they develop will give effect to each of the actions set out above, and the timelines for their delivery; the progress of the actions will be evaluated along these agreed timelines, and will be continuously reviewed and assessed to ensure that they adapt and evolve in response to the ever changing dynamics in the provision of higher education and research in Ireland and throughout Europe. Governing Body will review progress at least three times during 2021 and 2022 to enable UCC to update and adapt each operational plan during the two-year period.

During 2022, the University will initiate the process to develop a new Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2028.

APPENDIX I

Consultations

Discussions with staff and students were facilitated through a range of workshops, thematic discussions, individual submissions, presentations to Academic Council, Governing Body, Heads of Units, External Advisory Board to the Interim President, Strategic Research and Innovation Committee (of GB), University Management Team, etc. External bodies including American Chamber of Commerce, Cork Chamber of Commerce, IBEC, IDA and Microsoft Corporation were also consulted.