

Self-Evaluation Report 2025 Template

Template Guidance Note

- All sections of this template should be completed in full.
- The format of the template should not be altered.
- The template has been pre-populated with the agreed Performance Objectives, indicators, and targets. Pre-populated elements of the template reflect the Performance Agreement, and these entries should not be amended. Queries relating to pre-populated information should be submitted to systemperformance@hea.ie.
- Where word count limits apply, these limits should not be exceeded.
- Appendices are not permitted.
- Reporting should be clear, concise, and evidence based.
- Narrative or bullet point formats may be used, and the use of plain English is encouraged.
- Reporting should be cognisant of the information provided in the [System Performance Framework 2023–2028](#) and [System Performance Framework Glossary](#).
- Where institutional strategies, policies, or other institutional documents are referenced, these should be hyperlinked where possible.
- Data presented in the report should be the most recent data available to the institution (timeframe should be specified).
- It is the responsibility of higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that the information provided in the report is accurate.
- Redaction may be agreed with the HEA prior to publication, as appropriate.
- The report must be signed by the head of the institution prior to submission.
- The report should be submitted to systemperformance@hea.ie by the stated deadline.

Data Protection

The HEA as data controller will process personal data received via this form in compliance with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. We will only process the data received via this form for the purposes of reviewing, evaluating, and reporting on the System Performance Framework 2023–2028 and data will be retained in line with our Records Management Policy only as long as is necessary to meet this purpose. For more information, please see the HEA's [Data Privacy Notice](#).

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University College Cork Self-Evaluation Report 2025

Introduction

This Self-Evaluation Report will form the basis of the HEA’s assessment of the strategic performance of the institution with respect to the objectives and targets set in the Performance Agreement established between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and University College Cork (UCC) in accordance with the System Performance Framework 2023–2028.

In line with the HEA’s mandate to measure and assess institutions’ strategic performance with a view to strengthening the performance of the higher education system and of designated institutions, and to ensure institutions’ accountability, this Self-Evaluation Report will be published on the HEA website. The HEA will engage with institutions regarding any required redactions prior to publication.

It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that the information presented in the submitted report (including qualitative and quantitative data) is accurate.

Part A: Performance Indicators

Text should be added to the white boxes in each of the tables below. Text in the shaded boxes reflects entries in the Performance Agreement and should not be amended.

The most up-to-date data available should be reported in the ‘**Benchmark data**’ and ‘**2024/25 result**’ columns.

The year or range of years to which the reported data relates should be added after the data source in the ‘**Data source and timeframe**’ column.

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Performance Objective 1

To achieve a Student Survey Student–Faculty Interaction Indicator Score of 13.5 for 2028.

Transversal areas of impact: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
1.1	Student Survey Student–Faculty Interaction Score	Student Survey.ie 2023 UCC Voices Student Survey 2024 and 2025	11.5 in StudentSurvey.ie 2023 12.05 in UCC Student Voices Survey 2024	Attain university sector average (12.6 in StudentSurvey.ie 2023)	12.6	12.5	12.5	12.5	13.0	13.5	13.5 (+2.0 on baseline)

Technical note on indicator data for PO 1:

Data Source and Methodology: The data presented in the table above was sourced from institutional records extracted via the Student Information System (ITS) and pre-loaded into Qualtrics, capturing the values, opinions, and perspectives of our students during the reporting period.

The UCC Voices Student Survey was conducted in April 2024 and February 2025 among First-Year and Final-Year undergraduate students and Taught Postgraduate students. Aligned with the national StudentSurvey.ie instrument, the survey supports comparability with national benchmarks and complements key national initiatives. It also aligns with National Performance Indicators, UCC's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and institutional priorities for student engagement. The full set of survey questions is available at: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/studentsurveys/ucc-results/uccvoices2024/>

Data collection and analysis adhered to established institutional protocols, ensuring consistency, comparability, and accuracy across reporting cycles. Metrics were calculated using standard institutional definitions, in alignment with national guidelines where applicable. Any anomalies or discrepancies identified during the verification process were resolved prior to final submission to maintain data integrity. StudentSurvey.ie paused its taught student survey in 2024 and 2025 to undertake a Strategic Review. Reporting on indicators that draw on StudentSurvey.ie results will recommence in 2026. Where the relevant survey questions have changed, indicators will be updated accordingly.

Contextual interpretation of performance against targets is provided in Part B of this report.

Performance Objective 2

To achieve a student-staff ratio of 17:1 by 2028 in accordance with the University’s Strategic Plan.

Transversal areas of impact: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Enterprise; International; Digital Transformation.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
2.1	Student-Staff Ratio Total Student FTE (March 1st) divided by Academic FTE (Sept 30th)	Student Data: HEA SRS and System Performance Dashboard, June 2025 Staff Data: HRIS	2021/22: 21.85:1 2022/23: 20.49:1 2023/24: 20.45:1	Sector Average based on HEA System Performance Dashboard (18:1 in 2022/23 23:1 in 2024/25)	23:1 at time of self-evaluation.	20	20.64	19	18	17	17:1

Technical note on indicator data for PO 2:

UCC Student Staff Ratio 14-15 to 24-25

	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	Trend	10 Year Average
Overall UCC	20.50	20.43	20.27	19.82	19.61	19.60	21.34	21.85	20.49	20.45	20.64		20.45

Total Academic Staff in full-time equivalent (FTE) - including part-time hourly occasional estimate - is 1,096.36. Total student population in FTE is 22,632.12, resulting in SSR of 20.64:1. In the year 2023-24 to 2024-25 staff FTE grew by 1.2% while student FTE grew by 2.2%, resulting in the marginal increase in overall university SSR.

Pillar: Research & Innovation

Performance Objective 3

To achieve twenty (20) new European Research Council (ERC) awards by 2028.

Transversal areas of impact: Society; International; Institutional Leadership & Culture.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
3.1	Number of ERC grants - at all levels - achieved	ERC dashboard ¹ 2024/25	2022: 2 6% of Irish successes were attributed to UCC. 2023: 1 4.5% of Irish successes were attributed to UCC	Match or exceed the average number of ERC awards for comparable HEIs in Ireland/ Europe	3.5 (Ireland) 2.8 (Europe)	3 in 2024	4 in 2024	4 in 2025	6 in 2026	7 in 2027	20 grants over 4 years of ERC Work programmes Average of 5 awards p.a. Average success rate across all ERC programmes of 20%
3.2	Number of ERC grant submissions for: Starter (Stg)	Centralised institutional Strategic Plan reporting	2022: 3 2023: 10	Not available	N/A	10 in 2024	20 in 2024	10 in 2025	10 in 2026	10 in 2027	ERC Stg: 40 submissions over 4 years

¹ Does not include awards secured by UCC but which were subsequently moved to another institution

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
		repository									
3.3	Number of ERC grant successes (success rate %): Starter (Stg)	ERC dashboard 2024/25	2022: 0 (0%) 2023: 1 (10%)	Match or exceed the ERC Starter Grant success rate (%) for comparable HEIs in Ireland/ Europe	1.5 (Ireland)	2 in 2024 (20%)	1 in 2024 (5%)	2 in 2025 (20%)	2 in 2026 (20%)	2 in 2027 (20%)	8 ERC Stg grants over 4 years 20% success rate
3.4	Number of ERC grant submissions for: Consolidator/ Advanced/Synergy (CoG, Adv, Syn)	Centralised institutional Strategic Plan reporting repository	2022: 19 2023: 16	Not available	N/A	6 in 2024	18 in 2024	10 in 2025	20 in 2026	24 in 2027	ERC CoG/ Adv/ Syn: 60 submissions over 4 years
3.5	Number of ERC grant successes (success rate %): Consolidator/ Advanced/Synergy (CoG, Adv, Syn)	ERC dashboard 2024/25	2022: 2 (11%) 2023: 0 (0%)	Match or exceed the combined ERC Consolidator/ Advanced/ Synergy Grant	2.6 (Ireland)	1 in 2024 (17%)	1 Consolidator in 2024 (5.5%)	2 in 2025 (20%)	4 in 2026 (20%)	5 in 2027 (21%)	12 ERC CoG/ Adv/ Syn grants over 4 years 20% success rate

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
				success rate (%) for comparable HEIs in Ireland/ Europe							

Technical note on indicator data for PO 3:

Overview on Metrics and reporting: UCC is using the *ERC dashboard* as its reference point, in line with the specific request from the HEA. The ERC dashboard uses work programme years as a reference point therefore this data source and its structures are those used across all metrics and reflections. i.e. Reference to '2024' is not the calendar year, but the 2024 ERC work programme year which may not align with the calendar period. These benchmark data presented are calculated from the data available on the ERC dashboard of funded projects and evaluated proposals (Dashboard of ERC funded projects and evaluated proposals - Dashboard of ERC funded projects and evaluated proposals | Sheet - Qlik Sense) which provide data as to results and success rates by country, panels (areas of disciplinary focus), funding scheme, year, funding level, etc. UCC's success rate is calculated against these data.

Performance Objective 4

To increase annual intake of new doctoral students by 100 students by 2028.

Transversal areas of impact: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Society; Region; International; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
4.1	Number of new doctoral entrants p.a. – excluding visiting PhD students (full/proportion of a year)	ITS (Student record system) and HEA SRS	2022/23: 272	Not available	N/A	297	292	322	347	372	1,338 doctoral students over 4 years 37% increase on baseline in 27/28
4.2	PhD completion rate (%)	New UCC software system	No baseline available – new monitoring system in place from September 2024	Attain a completion rate of 70% for PGR students as a proportion of all students who commenced a PGR programme	N/A	60	Not yet available.	63	66	70	Average completion rate of 70%

Technical note on indicator data for PO 4:

4.2 Data collection commenced in 2024 via the new Graduate Entry Management (GEM) system. Data will update in line with structured completion periods. Baseline data will update in line with structured completion periods (i.e. 2024 will form the baseline data)

Performance Objective 5

To launch 5 spin-out companies annually by 2028.

Transversal areas of impact: Enterprise; Society; Region; Institutional Leadership & Culture; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
5.1	Number of spin-outs established p.a.	Internal databases and KTI Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey (5-year timeframe of 2020 – 2024 inclusive)	2022: 24 (Average of 4 p.a. over the 5-year period, 2018–2022)	Improve performance relative to selected comparator HEIs (See Table 6 in Performance Agreement)	5-year rolling average 3.6	5 in 2024 (5-year rolling average 4.0)	3 in 2024 (5-year rolling average 3.4.	5 in 2025 (5-year rolling average: 4.0)	6 in 2026 (5-year rolling average: 4.24)	6 in 2027 (5-year rolling average: 5.2)	22 newly established spin-out companies by 2028 (2024–2027)

Technical note on indicator data for PO 5:

Data is sourced from the Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey (AKTS) report, published by Knowledge Transfer Ireland ([KTI Reports & Publications - Knowledge Transfer Ireland - Knowledge Transfer Ireland](#)). In 2023, UCC was ranked joint second (with Trinity College Dublin and University of Galway) with 2 spin-outs launched in that year, behind University College Dublin who launched 6. In 2024, UCC dropped to 4th with 3 spin-out companies launched, behind University College Dublin (6), Trinity College Dublin (5), and the University of Galway (4). Given the influence of external factors on the potential and timing of spin-out company launch, it is likely that rankings will fluctuate on an annual basis.

Pillar: Access & Participation

Performance Objective 6

To ensure that the student population (at all levels) is representative of the diversity of the community served by UCC and that students are enabled to succeed through the provision of an accessible and inclusive teaching, learning and support infrastructure.

Transversal areas of impact: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Society; Region; Digital Transformation; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging; Institutional Leadership & Culture; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
6.1	Proportion (%) of undergraduate intake from underrepresented groups (HEAR, DARE, FE & Mature Years Entry)	HEA SRS and Key Facts and Figures Access Data by Entry Basis for 2024/25	2022/23: 22.1%	Exceed average, All HEIs. 17.7% in 2021/22	20.90%	23.5%	22.10%	24%	24.5%	25%	25% (2.9 p.p. increase)
6.2	Proportion (%) of new entrants with a disability	HEA System Performance Dashboard 2024/25	2022/23: 13.2%	Exceed National Average; 3.9% in 2022/23	16.6%	13.5%	13.1%	14%	14.5%	15%	15% (1.8 p.p. increase)
6.3	Proportion (%) of new entrants from socioeconomically	HEA SRS and System Performance	2020/21: 7%	Work towards achieving National	10%	7.5%	6%	7.5%	8%	8.5%	8.5% (1.5 p.p.)

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
	disadvantaged areas	Dashboard 2023/24		Average; 11% in 2022/23							increase)
6.4	Proportion (%) of disadvantaged new entrants who are mature	HEA SRS and System Performance Dashboard 2023/24	2020/21: 17%	Continue to exceed National Average; 10% in 2022/23	9%	17%	18%	17%	17%	17%	17% (Maintain existing %)
6.5	Proportion (%) of new entrants who are Irish Travellers	EAS reported on HEA System Performance Dashboard 2024/25	2022/23: 0.0%	National Average 0.1%; work towards NAP target	0.2%	0.10%	0.10%	0.15%	0.20%	0.20%	0.20% (0.2 p.p. increase)
6.6	Progression rate (%) — all Access categories	HEA SRS UCC Progression Data 23/24	2022/23: 90%	Align with Progression rate for all UCC Students (91% in 2022/23)	92.5%	90%	92.5%	90.5%	91%	91%	91% (1 p.p. increase)
6.7	VLE (Canvas) content accessibility score	Anthology – Ally 2024/25	2022/23: 57.9%	No benchmark data nationally	N/A	62%	60.2%	66%	71%	76%	76% (18.1 p.p. increase)
6.8	VLE (Canvas) structural accessibility score	National Disability	2023: 91.3%	Continue to lead on this	N/A	92%	74.7%	94%	95%	96%	96% (4.7 p.p.)

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
		Authority and Ireland’s Monitoring Report for the EU Web Accessibility Directive, 2024/25		score at the national level							increase)
6.9	Website accessibility score	National Disability Authority and Ireland’s Monitoring Report for the EU Web Accessibility Directive, 2024/25	2022: 19.4%	Achieve score of highest scoring HEI in 2022 (65.7%) by 2028	2024 NDA Report, Average Score of Audited IUA Universities 73%	34%	75%	49%	59%	69%	69% (49.6 p.p. increase)

Technical note on indicator data for PO 6:

6.8 The updated Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), version 2.2 was published in October 2023, just after the first UCC report was issued. The updated guidelines included new requirements: Focus Appearance; Target Size; Dragging Movements; Consistent Help; Accessible Authentication. Many of the new issues identified related to focus and focus appearance. These issues are on the application end and will require us to report back to the vendor Instructure to seek resolution. Additionally, the test that was run in 2025 uploaded and reviewed an assignment. This does not appear to have been done in 2023. This additional screening is welcomed as it has highlighted several issues with the viewer used to display/review uploaded assignments.

Pillar: Engagement

Performance Objective 7

To demonstrate substantive progress on enhancing gender equality within the institution through achieving an institutional Silver Athena Swan Ireland award and five new unit/departmental Bronze awards, and to address barriers that have inhibited engagement to date.

Transversal areas of impact: Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging; Institutional Leadership & Culture.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
7.1	Number of new Athena Swan awards achieved	EDI Unit and Athena Swan Ireland	2022: Institutional Bronze, 16 School level Bronze awards	Achieve AS timelines: HEA 2022	HEA 2023 UCC: 17 School Level Bronze awards, 0 Silver DCU: 8 Bronze, 0 Silver MU: 8 Bronze 1 Silver TCD: 17 Bronze, 2	2 (1 Institutional Silver, 1 first-time Silver School, first-time Bronze School)	3 (1 Institutional Silver awarded to UCC, 1 first-time silver School achieved for School of Food and Nutritional Sciences, 1 Bronze renewals for	1 (1 first-time Bronze School) ²	2 (2 first-time Bronze Schools) ³	1 (1 first-time Bronze School)	6 (1 Institutional Silver and 5 first-time Bronze awards; at least 2 of these to be Schools in humanities disciplines)

² Applied Social Studies, CACSSS

³ Including School of Languages, Literature and Culture, CACSSS

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
					Silver UCD: 18 Bronze, 2 Silver UG: 11 Bronze, 1 Silver UL: 12 Bronze, 4 Silver Institutional Silver: 2 Institutional Bronze: 15 (incl. UCC)		Dental School, 1 first-time Bronze achieved for School of Applied Social Studies)				
7.2	Response rate (%) to UCC Values and Culture/EDIB Staff and Student Surveys⁴	EDI Unit, Staff Values & Culture EDI Survey 2024, and Student Survey 2024	Staff Values & Culture EDI Survey response rate: 2022: 42%; 2024: 46%. Student Survey response	No benchmark available	Staff Survey: UCD 2021: 35%; 2023: 40% TCD 2021: 26%; 2022: 33% No benchmarking available for	N/A	46% response rate (staff) 5% response rate (students)	N/A	50% response rate (staff) 15% response rate(students)	N/A	4 p.p. increase (staff) >10 p.p. increase (students)

⁴ Student survey to issue in Q2 2026 and 2028; Staff survey to issue in Q3 in 2026 and 2028.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
			rate 2022 & 2024: < 5%		student survey						
7.3	Proportion (%) Women at Professor Level & Senior Lecturer Level⁵	DPR/EDI Unit/People & Culture and HEA Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Sex and Gender	2022: 32% of Women at Full Professor Grade 37% of Women at Senior Lecturer Grade	Exceed HEI sector average (32% Full Professor and 43% Senior Lecturer in 2022)	HEA 2023 UCC (% of Headcount): Full Prof: 33.3% SL: 42% HEA avg. (all HEIs contributing data, excl. UCC): Full Prof: 32% SL: 45%	N/A	2025 (May % of Headcount): Full Prof: 34.2% SL: 43.7%	N/A	N/A	N/A	37% Women at Full Professor Level by 2028. 45% Women on Senior Lecturer Level by 2028

⁵ Academic promotions for SL take place every 2 years and for Full Prof. every 3 Years.

Performance Objective 8

To reduce UCC's Carbon Footprint (scope 1 & 2) and to continue to lead and improve on the STARS rating, the most comprehensive assessment of broad sustainability improvement, including scope 3 emissions.

Transversal areas of impact: Climate and Sustainable Development; Society; Institutional Leadership and Culture.

No.	Indicator	Data source & timeframe	Baseline	Benchmark	Benchmark data	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
8.1	Proportion (%) reduction in Scope 1 & 2 Greenhouse Gas Emissions from 2016–18 baseline	ISEAI Monitoring & Reporting (M&R) System for calendar year 2024	2023: Total CO2 emissions 13.9 thousand tonnes	National Climate Action Plan target, baseline 2016–18	6.1 thousand tonnes CO2 (59.9%)	4.8%	4.9%	6.5%	8.3%	8.3%	28% reduction on the 2016–18 baseline over 4 years; 59.9% total reduction in 2016–18 baseline by 2028
8.2	AASHE STARS Score	AASHE 2022	2023: 76	AASHE Scoring System, international benchmark, University of Maryland (STARS Benchmarking Tool)	77.3	76	76	76	77	77	77 (+1 on baseline)

Technical note on indicator data for PO 8:

8.1: Final data from SEAI M&R System shows UCC achieved an annual 4.9% reduction in total (Scope 1 + Scope 2) CO2 emissions relative to 2023, exceeding the target for 2024 of 4.8% resulting in a 32% cumulative reduction relative to the 2016-2018 baseline. The SEAI maintain and report these figures for all public bodies.

Part B: Performance Evaluation and Strategic Reflection

Text should be added to the white boxes in each of the tables below. Word count should be recorded as indicated. Guidance on the information required in each table is provided in the shaded boxes. Pre-populated elements of Part B reflect the Performance Agreement, and these entries should not be amended.

Section 1: Context

Provide an update on the context for the implementation of the institution's Performance Agreement in academic year 2024/25. This should include information on the following, as relevant:

- Institutional strategy, including stage of development and/or implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- Changes to the organisation's structure and/or senior leadership.
- Changes to the profile of the institution, i.e. significant changes to the number of staff and/or students or to programme delivery.
- Improvement or development of data collection and evaluation systems and processes, e.g. action taken to address data challenges or gaps, or any new challenges or data gaps that have been identified since the development of the Performance Agreement or submission of the previous SER.
- Any modifications (requested or approved) to the Performance Agreement.

Word limit: 500

- UCC's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 is approaching the end of its second year of implementation (2024-25). Since its launch, the operating context has changed arising from a number of key factors including:
 - the significantly changing global geopolitical environment,
 - a greater focus internally on operating efficiencies and financial cost-savings performance,
 - a greater need to address and improve the staff experience and culture of the organisation.
- The processes for annual planning, quarterly and annual monitoring of implementation and regular horizon scanning enable the implementation of the strategy to be dynamic and responsive to changes in context and the external environment. As set out in the strategy, in anticipation of the need for more effective engagement with the global environment and for an improvement in operating efficiencies and culture, the senior leadership team has seen the creation of, and appointments to, the positions of Vice President for Global Engagement, Chief Financial and Operations Officer and Director of

People and Culture. Arising from changes in the operating environment, UCC has introduced a process of financial quarterly accounting during the course of 2024-25.

- The overall number of students continues to rise, with 25,853 registered by March 1st, 2025, representing a historical high for the university. The proportion of students who have travelled from overseas to study at UCC has reached a historical high of 21.4%, up from 18.5% in 2022-23, while the percentage of undergraduate student intake from underrepresented groups has reached 24%, up from 20.3% in 2022-23.

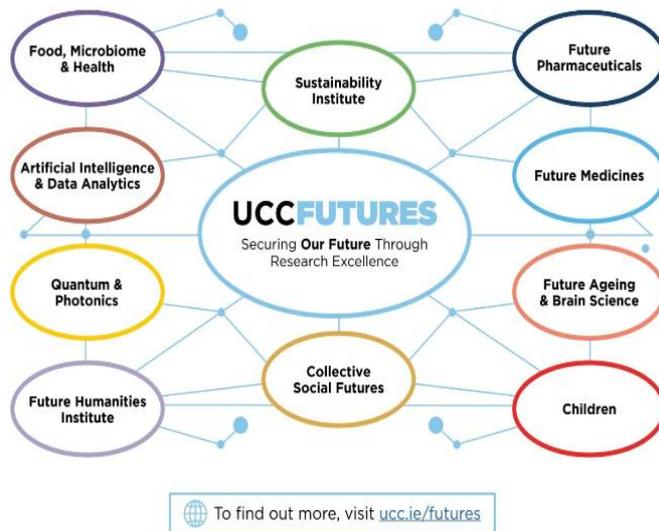


Figure 1: UCC Futures

- The need for increased research impact has seen the prioritisation of the recruitment of research staff into the ten priority areas of UCC's Futures Research Framework.
- In terms of the development of data collection and evaluation systems and processes, UCC is embarking on a process of digital transformation. The UCC Digital Master Plan, 2023–2028 ([UCC Digital Master Plan Webpage | University College Cork](#)) is driving integrated initiatives across research, teaching, learning and data services. This is driving a step change in digital and data services, providing dedicated research infrastructure, research IT Support and Data Services, including CORA Enhancement, Research Information Systems, Enterprise Survey Tools, and a Research Data Management Service.
- In terms of potential modifications to the Performance Agreement, the forthcoming National Survey of Student Engagement (StudentSurvey.ie) 2026 will introduce a redesigned question set with a potential impact on Performance Objective 1. As part of this redesign, the StudentSurvey.ie indicators are being revised. Notably, the Student-Faculty Interaction indicator item appears likely to be replaced. This development has potential implications for the institution's Performance Agreement, as the current indicator may no longer be available or directly comparable. It may therefore be necessary to identify a more appropriate replacement indicator to ensure continued alignment with institutional and national performance frameworks.

[Word count: 455]

Section 2: Evaluation of Performance

Provide an evaluation of the institution's performance in relation to each Performance Objective, with reference to the indicator data provided in Part A. This should include:

- Analysis of the indicator data for this Performance Objective, e.g.:
 - Trend analysis and benchmarking of performance with reference to baselines, benchmarks, and targets. Graphs or charts to illustrate the analysis provided should be labelled and cross-referenced in the commentary.
- Assessment of implementation, e.g.:
 - Effectiveness of the specific actions related to the Performance Objective as demonstrated by the analysis of the indicator data.
 - Internal or external factors that have supported or impeded the achievement of targets.
 - Any additional evidence of performance, e.g. qualitative evidence of outcomes.
- Strategic reflection, e.g.:
 - Any learning from the analysis of the institution's performance.
 - How learning is being applied to maintain and/or enhance implementation and outcomes in future.
 - How learning is being used to inform decision making, strategy development, policy, and/or strategic planning.
 - New or emerging opportunities, challenges, and risks related to the Performance Objective.
 - Priority(s) in relation to this Performance Objective for the year ahead, with reference to any new actions or initiatives to support implementation.

Word limit: 1,000

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Performance Objective 1

To achieve a Student Survey Student–Faculty Interaction Indicator Score of 13.5 for 2028.

Transversal areas of impact:

Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success.

Evaluation of Institutional Performance in Relation to the Performance Objective

Analysis of Indicator Data

The evaluation of institutional performance against this objective indicates a positive overall trajectory, with a 0.96 improvement since the 2023 baseline-driven primarily by gains in career goal discussions and performance feedback. This reflects steady progress toward the stated targets. However, persistent challenges remain in co-curricular engagement and informal academic interaction.

Benchmarking against sectoral data from StudentSurvey.ie (2023) reveals that while UCC achieved a score of 12.46, this remains slightly below the national benchmark of 12.6. The marginal gap suggests near alignment with national performance yet highlights potential for further improvement. Internal data from 2023–2025 reveal modest improvements in academic dialogue and feedback, but consistently low engagement in career planning and co-curricular activities. Key learning from the analysis highlights the need to improve the visibility and accessibility of informal engagement opportunities for students.

A comparative trend analysis of University College Cork (UCC)’s data from the *UCC Voices Student Survey 2024 and 2025* highlights the following:

Engagement Area	2024 Trends	2025 Trends	Observations
Career Goals	High frequency of “Never” responses	Slightly more balanced distribution	Engagement on career planning remains low but shows slight improvement.
Co-curricular	Predominantly “Never”	Some increase is seen in “Sometimes” and “Often” in 2025.	Consistently low involvement in non-course activities (e.g. committees or groups)

Academic Topics	Mix of “Sometimes” and “Often”	Slightly more “Sometimes” and “Often”	There is some improvement here, with a moderate number of students indicating they “sometimes” engage in such discussions. However, overall frequency remains low.
Performance Feedback	“Sometimes” is most common	Moderate year-on-year improvement, particularly in the “Sometimes” and “Often” categories.	Feedback engagement is relatively stable across years.

This comparative analysis reveals persistent challenges in co-curricular and career-related engagement, while indicating modest improvements in academic dialogue and performance feedback.

Assessment of Implementation

Implementation of key actions under this objective has proven to be partially effective, as evidenced by the quantitative gains observed. Specific student success initiatives such as a [review of assessment framework](#) and creation of [UCC Futures Framework](#) have contributed meaningfully to positive outcomes.

Supporting factors have included:

- Moderate success in performance-related engagement.
- Institutional investment in digital tools and data infrastructure.

Challenges encountered included:

- Barriers include staff availability, student perceptions, and awareness gaps.
- Limited impact on informal and career-related engagement.

Qualitative feedback gathered from stakeholder sources (e.g., staff/student surveys, focus groups) aligns with these findings. Respondents frequently referenced improvements in areas such as accessibility, quality of engagement, and relevance of feedback mechanisms. Student feedback also identified variability across departments, with some units demonstrating high engagement levels.

Strategic Reflection

Key learning from the performance analysis include:

- Low levels of informal and developmental interaction between students and academic staff remain a concern.
- Institutional learning: There is a clear need to create structured opportunities for

students to engage with staff beyond formal instruction.

- Future strategies should seek to embed engagement metrics into programme reviews and staff development plans.

Strategic priorities for the upcoming year include:

- Launching Career Conversations Week in collaboration with the Careers Service.
- Incentivising staff–student partnerships in co-curricular activities.
- Promoting a culture of mentoring, developmental feedback, and informal academic interaction.

Future actions will focus on:

- Strengthening feedback mechanisms and student expectations around feedback.
- Enhancing visibility and accessibility of informal engagement opportunities for students.

These actions reflect the University’s renewed commitment to amplifying the student voice across teaching, learning, and campus life. This initiative builds on the ongoing work of the Quality Enhancement Unit and the Centre for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL). Designed to complement national initiatives, the survey aligns with National Performance Indicators, UCC’s Key Performance Indicator (KPI) focus, and Student Engagement priorities.

[Word count: 608]

Performance Objective 2

To achieve a student–staff ratio of 17:1 by 2028 in accordance with the University’s Strategic Plan.

Transversal areas of impact:

Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Enterprise; International; Digital Transformation.

Background

[Funding the Future](#) (DFHERIS, 2022) states that the ratio of students to academic staff in Irish higher education institutions is now an outlier relative to European counterparts. It notes that current student–staff ratios (SSRs) challenge quality and have contributed to deterioration in the position of Irish institutions in international rankings. The adoption of a sustainable funding model is essential to enable steps to be taken to move back towards the European and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) norms in terms of staffing

ratios.

[Securing Our Future UCC Strategic Plan 2023–2028](#) sets a target of achieving a student to staff ratio of 17:1 by 2028. It is an ambitious target focused on positive student outcomes in education and employability. It would bring UCC into line with some of the quoted SSRs of Irish higher education institutions, and in line with international benchmarks.

Reduction in the student–staff ratio is also widely accepted as integral to a quality learning and teaching environment. It is particularly important in a comprehensive university where many disciplines, such as the health sciences, require significant individual student engagement. As well as its strategic importance to UCC as a measure of success, student–staff ratio is routinely used as an indicator of quality in UCC’s systematic quality enhancement process of academic units. To improve the student–staff ratio to 17:1 aligns our strategic plan, quality enhancement agenda and with our Performance Agreement.

Update

The analysis which is in line with a consistently applied methodology shows that UCC’s SSR increased (dis-improved) marginally, from 20.45:1 in 2023-24 to 20.64:1 in 2024-25.

	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	Trend	10 Year Average
Overall UCC	20.50	20.43	20.27	19.82	19.61	19.60	21.34	21.85	20.49	20.45	20.64		20.45

Table 1: UCC student–staff ratio 2014/15 to 2024/25

Total academic staff in full-time equivalent (including part-time hourly occasional estimate) is 1,096.36. Total student population in full-time equivalent is 22,632.12, resulting in SSR of 20.64:1.

In the year 2023-24 to 2024-25 staff in full-time equivalent grew by 1.2% while student in full-time equivalent grew by 2.2%, resulting in the marginal increase in overall university SSR.

The 10-year average is 20.45:1 and while there were covid-related peaks in 2020-21 and 2021-22, the SSR has been stable since then, albeit not reducing/improving.

UCC Colleges

Applying the same methodology to college staff and student numbers would suggest that there are variations in the SSR across UCC, as one might expect. SSRs are typically higher in the social sciences for example and tend to be lower in life sciences and/or in disciplines where the learning and teaching is primarily of a practiced and applied nature.

2024/25					
	Staff FTE	P/T Staff FTE	Total Staff FTE	Student FTE	SSR
College of Arts Celtic Studies and Social Sciences	312.00	23.55	335.55	6,227.27	18.56
College of Business & Law	168.71	12.28	180.99	5,522.21	30.51
College of Medicine & Health	237.02	30.46	267.48	5,101.97	19.07
College of Science and Engineering	247.20	19.35	266.55	5,707.53	21.41
Other (incl. Central & CIRTLL)	7.40	38.39	45.79	72.14	1.58
Overall UCC SSR	972.33	124.03	1,096.36	22,631.12	20.64

Staff as at Sept 2024, Students as at March 2025 (Finance Data to FYE2024)

Table 2: UCC Overall SSR 2024-25, including colleges.

The range of average SSRs across the UCC colleges range from 18.56:1 to 30.5. While noting that part of the staff numbers is based on an estimate, it would still suggest that there is work to be done to reduce SSR in Business & Law, Science & Engineering as well as in the Medical Sciences in particular, where 15:1 (or lower) is often the norm in the top medical and health science universities.

	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	Trend	10 Year Average
CACCSS	22.05	22.84	22.24	21.07	19.49	19.57	19.56	20.03	18.87	18.47	18.56		20.07
B & L	24.75	24.52	25.94	25.66	27.72	27.73	29.91	29.61	28.88	30.45	30.51		28.09
M & H	15.59	15.15	14.44	15.19	15.39	15.54	18.24	19.37	18.82	18.54	19.07		16.98
SEFS	23.59	23.64	23.89	23.13	22.37	21.78	22.94	23.57	21.34	21.39	21.41		22.55
Overall UCC	20.50	20.43	20.27	19.82	19.61	19.60	21.34	21.85	20.49	20.45	20.64		20.45

Table 3: UCC college-level SSRs and overall university SSR 2014/15 to 2024/25

When we look at the college numbers over time, we can see an improvement for Science & Engineering, albeit not in line with what the University has targeted, an improvement for Arts and Celtic Studies (and social sciences) and slippage for both Business & Law and Medicine & Health.

Benchmarking / Commentary

Many issues exist with regard to benchmarking student-staff ratio, e.g. the non-standard approach taken by the universities, the inability to use ranking agency data as the agencies do not have a set definition, the fact that OECD data often looks at 'tertiary education institutions' (which could include a variety of types of third-level institutions and is not specific to universities, etc.).

Furthermore, looking at (core) 'academic staff' in full-time equivalent versus student in full-time equivalent could be viewed as being over-simplistic as we know cohorts of other academic staff also contribute academically on an ongoing basis.

The non-standard approach to SSR calculation in the Irish sector is reflected in the fact that there are different approaches and definitions applied in the universities. For example, one university counts open vacant posts in its calculation of staff which UCC does not. Other captures part-time academic staff (similar to UCC) but only those where a formal contract is in place with that part-time staff member.

The HEA System Performance Dashboard currently quotes a benchmark SSR of 23:1 for student-teaching ratio from the OECD in 2021 as the source of the benchmark. At the time of developing

the Performance Agreement the dashboard quoted the benchmark SSR for the Irish higher education sector at 18:1. This has been refreshed to the 23:1 benchmark.

Traditionally the Institutes of Technology in Ireland (in general) would have had lower class sizes and SSRs than the universities. The sector in Ireland includes all five technological universities so one would have expected a lower sectoral benchmark. Instead, it has increased by five students from 18:1 to 23:1. UCC compares favourably with the current benchmark at 20.64:1.

The last set of standardised data published by the HEA in December 2022 included SSR data for the system for the academic year 2019-20. [Higher Education System Performance Institutional Profiles 2019/20](#) data included a calculation of student in full-time equivalent to academic staff in full-time equivalent. Selected universities are quoted below showing that UCC trailing University College Dublin (UCD), University of Galway (UoG), and Trinity College Dublin (TCD) in this area.

Student FTE/Academic Staff Ratio	2019/20
UCC	21
TCD	17
UCD	20
NUIG (now UoG)	20
UL	22

Table 4: Student in full-time equivalent to academic staff in full-time equivalent by university 2019-20. Source: HEA Institutional and System Profile Data.

Conclusion / Recommendation

The analysis suggests that the overall university SSR disimproved marginally in 2024-25 when compared with 2023-24 and now stands at 20.64:1. This is in excess of the target of 20:1 which was set for this strategic objective for the year 2024-25 as part of our strategic plan and performance agreement. Maintaining and improving SSRs could be delivered by capping student number growth in certain areas and by adding staff in others. The data suggests that we could strategically target certain parts of the university, in the context of the workforce planning work that is ongoing and the business needs.

UCC discussed and debated this matter to the highest academic level in June 2025, through Academic Council. The Senior Leadership Team thought it appropriate at this juncture to discuss this strategic priority at senior academic level and have sought feedback and additional potential actions that may help deliver the SSR improvement planned over the next three years.

[Word count: 1109]

Pillar: Research & Innovation

Performance Objective 3

To achieve twenty (20) new European Research Council (ERC) awards by 2028.

Transversal areas of impact:

Society; International; Institutional Leadership & Culture.

Overview of Metrics and reporting: UCC is using the Educational Research Centre (ERC) Dashboard as its reference point, in line with the specific request from the HEA. The ERC Dashboard uses work programme years as a reference point therefore this data source and its structures are those used across all metrics and reflections, i.e. reference to '2024' is not the calendar year, but the 2024 ERC work programme year which may not align with the calendar period.

Institution's performance and assessment of implementation, strategic learnings, and reflections.

From 2017–2022, UCC researchers were awarded 12 ERC grants across the Advanced, Consolidator and Starting programmes, ranking us third nationally for success in this prestigious programme, after TCD (36) and UCD (23) and marginally ahead of the University of Galway (10).

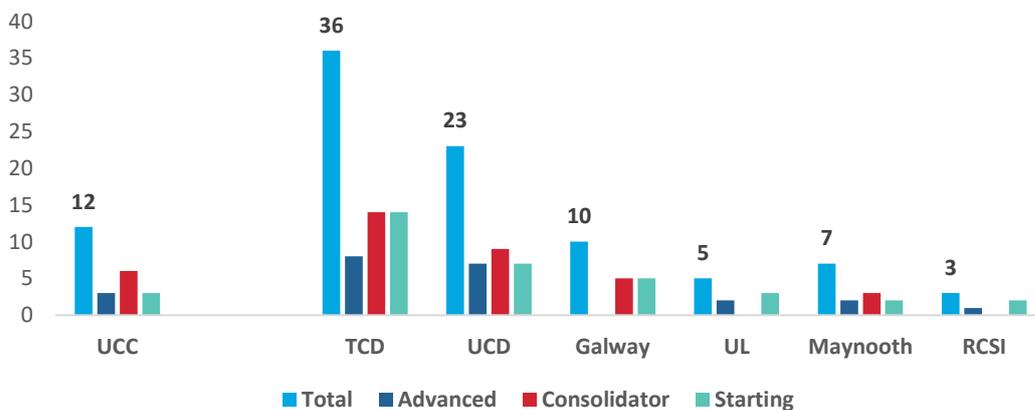


Figure 2: ERC grants by HEI

Since that time, there has been a significant investment in target supports (people, programmes, initiatives) in a concerted effort to increase the number of ERC awards. These have proven effective in increasing UCC's engagement with the ERC programme. The focus has been on actively changing UCC's research culture, whereby submission to ERC is an identified element of a researchers' trajectory. New entrants are asked to present their ERC idea at the recruitment stage and a candidate's demonstration of ERC potential is part of the evaluation criteria. For

current staff, ERC-linked promotion and retention opportunities, in addition to increased supports, provide an ecosystem whereby focus on ERC success become inherent. Strategic efforts also include encouraging applications to under-subscribed domains for example, initiatives such as idea generation workshops for Life Science starting grant candidates, Synergy training, and peer learning and knowledge exchange with panel members and successful awardees.

Engagement has increased significantly:

Starting Grant: In 2024 for the Starting Grant for instance, UCC doubled its submissions (20) from 2023 (10). In 2024, five Starting Grant applicants progressed to stage 2, compared to three in 2023. In 2024, one candidate (a 2022 resubmission) was funded. In 2023, two (both 2021 resubmissions) were funded. While increased engagement with the 2024 call did not result in an increased number of awards, it provides a foundation for experience, growth, and future resubmissions where there is clear evidence of potential for greater success.

Consolidator Grant: Applications to the 2024 Consolidator call increased from seven (2023) to 11. Five progressed to stage 2. One was funded – a second resubmission. Another application received an ‘A’ at stage 2, however budgetary restrictions denied the opportunity for funding.

Advanced Grant: Applications to the 2024 Advanced call increased from four (2023) to five applicants. None progressed to stage 2.

Synergy Grant: In 2024, there were two UCC applicants to this programme, however they did not progress beyond stage 2.

Proof of Concept: ERC awardees have been actively encouraged to apply for Proof of Concept grants this year. Of the three applications, two were funded and the third will be resubmitted in 2025/26.

There is a clear pattern emerging that resubmission can be part of the journey to ERC success. For this reason, unsuccessful applicants are encouraged to reapply where possible. Supports are tailored with previous results in mind. For applicants who did not progress to interview, there is significant investment in developing their B1. For those who were not funded at stage 2, the focus is on their B2. Where there is uncertainty as to the most appropriate programme to target, dedicated support is provided to determine which is most suitable.

It was noted that globally there was an increase in applicants to the 2024 calls (most notably 38.5% to the Advanced Grant programme). It is speculated that this is due to Britain now being included as an associated country. This year external factors in the US are driving researchers to seek ERC funding for their research in Europe. UCC is actively supporting five such applicants to the Advanced call in 2025.

It is clear that the suite of dedicated ERC supports for UCC’s researchers is driving an increase in applications, which is translating to greater levels of success. For those that are unsuccessful, the

application process builds experience and expertise that builds capacity for future success. UCC will continue to focus its support on the development of the UCC research community to increase attainment of these prestigious awards.

[Word count: 706]

Performance Objective 4

To increase annual intake of new doctoral students by 100 students by 2028.

Transversal areas of impact:

Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Society; Region; International; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

Of the four leading Irish HEIs, UCC has the second highest number of students, behind UCD who have approximately 32% more. UCC has comparable, almost equal, numbers of students to TCD, with undergraduate (UG) student numbers at approximately 19% lower. Interestingly, in tandem with UG, UCC has the lowest proportion of international students at 20% of the student body. UCD leads the way at 31%.

Unsurprisingly, given its total student numbers, UCD, at 1,855, also has the highest annual numbers of PhD students conferred. With directly comparable numbers of students, TCD has a much higher proportion of international students at 28% and confers almost 600 more PhD students than UCC each year, even with lower numbers of academic staff. Proportionally, UG, with the same level of international students also has comparable numbers of PhD graduates annually.

Institution	Student numbers (FTE)*	International Students (%) *	PhD Students (Annual PhD Conferrals)
UG	15,109	20	1,045
TCD	17,765	28	1,810
UCD	23,361	31	1,855
UCC	17,925	20	1,235

*THE 2023

Key: Red = lowest number; Green = highest number

Table 5: Student numbers by HEI

UCC falls at the lower end of the level of annual PhD conferrals at 7% (of total conferrals, with TCD, at 10%, the highest), with numbers remaining effectively static since 2008.

In 2023–2024, PhD intake to UCC was 292 — just short of the 310 enrolments target. UCC is committed to increasing these numbers, rising to an additional 100 PhD students enrolled annually, by 2028 (Strategic Plan, Goal 1.3 – *Increase PhD enrolment numbers, enhance the research student experience and embed research and innovation into our curriculum*).

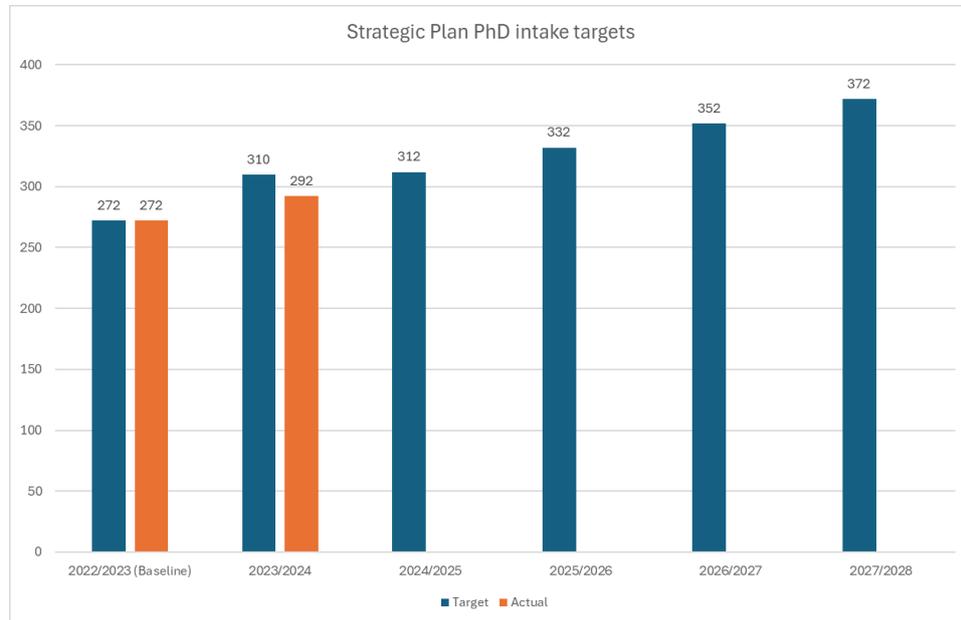


Figure 3: PhD intake targets 2022/23 – 2027/28

PhD researchers provide the foundation for a sustainable and vibrant research ecosystem; their potential and beneficial impact cannot be understated. There are, however, many challenges facing PhD researchers in Ireland which directly impact on their engagement, educational experience, graduate outcomes, and ability to reach their full potential. Not unique to UCC, these challenges lead to inequity and exclusion, damaging Ireland’s reputation, competitiveness, and potential as an island of talent, research excellence, and impact. The lack of a living wage, poor leave entitlements, inability to undertake joint international PhDs, residency and visa challenges that impede family life all reduce Ireland’s potential to attract national and international researchers of excellence.

UCC has initiated a planned framework for the attraction, retention, and development of our PhD community:

- UCC’s first Dean of Doctoral Studies, appointed in June 2023, is specifically tasked with the strategic development of Doctoral Education. This is a joint position between the offices of the Deputy President and Registrar and the Vice President for Research and Innovation.
- In October 2024, UCC launched a new PhD aimed at facilitating Technological Universities (TU) staff (professional staff, research fellows, and academic staff) to achieve a Doctoral Degree — the “*PhD in Research for Higher Education Professionals*”. The second intake for this programme will enrol in October 2025.
- A thematic review of the Doctoral Learning Experience has completed (March 2025), with

considered implementation of recommendations arising underway.

- School level PhD targets have been introduced across the institution.
- Two new cohort PhD programmes developed to attract larger numbers of PhD students.
- A Student Retention Plan has been developed.
- The Global Engagement Plan recognises the need for focus on international student cohorts.
- Staff supervision information and training events are held regularly, with good engagement.
- For the first time, there is postgraduate student representation on the Students' Union.
- A revision of policies has been undertaken to ensure they best meet the needs of postgraduate researchers.
- The new Graduate Entry Management (GEM) system was launched in the first semester of the 2024–25 academic year, with a full suite of reporting tools, including research student progression. Data collection has begun, aligned with structure graduation periods, with retrospective data report available once these graduation periods have been realised.
- There is continuous engagement with funding bodies and philanthropic donors with regards to sustainable financing of PhD programmes.

While UCC has an overarching ambition to increase PhD numbers and there are specific year-on-year target numbers identified, there is flexibility inbuilt, with ultimate success measured across the entirety of the timeframe. There are internal and external factors that may influence the successful achievement of targets, including availability of bursaries, staffing profiles, national employment rates, geopolitical instability, industry needs, funding opportunities, and availability of philanthropic funds. UCC continually works to identify, influence and explore all potential funding instruments, to maximise the number of students undertaking a PhD at UCC and to ensure their experience — as a place where students are taught by research leaders — lays the foundation for the individual to reach their full potential while delivering impacts of value and benefit to society.

[Word count: 771]

Performance Objective 5

To launch 5 spin-out companies annually by 2028.

Transversal areas of impact:

Enterprise; Society; Region; Institutional Leadership & Culture; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

UCC is one of the highest performing HEIs for research funding acquisition from a broad spectrum of national and international funding instruments and industry. Our ambition is to fully translate the potential of this research funding success into robust commercialisation outputs and

ultimately societal and economic impacts for all.

UCC aims to maximise its potential to realise impacts of economic, environmental, cultural, and societal value. While there are many success stories across the institution, UCC is currently lagging with entrepreneurship metrics. For example (2018–2022), UCC was ranked 3rd behind TCD and UCD for spin-outs — UCC averaged 3.8 spin-outs annually, in comparison to 5.4 each for TCD and UCD (Table 6).

Number of spin-outs	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	5-yr total/ HEI	Average/ yr/ HEI
UCC	3	5	5	4	2	19	3.8
UCD	5	5	6	5	6	27	5.4
TCD	6	6	5	5	5	27	5.4
UoG	2	1	4	5	4	16	3.2
UL	2	2	2	1	0	7	1.4
Total spin-outs for all 23 Irish HEIs	30	26	30	32	24	142	1.23

Table 6: Spin out creation by university, 2018–2022.

The 2023 spin-out figures from universities are shown below in Table 7 — data is from the [Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey](#) (AKTS) of Irish HEIs. UCC created four spin-outs in 2023, ranked jointly 2nd with UoG and TCD, but behind UCD which had six. UCC is ranked 3rd for the number of active spin-outs (19), behind TCD (40) and UCD (21). UCC had four staff or student start-ups in 2023 — these start-ups are supported by UCC’s IGNITE programme and add significantly to the UCC entrepreneurial ecosystem.

RPO	Number of spin-outs established during the year	Number of staff or student start-ups established during the year	Number of Active spin-outs in existence at the end of the year	Number of spin-outs merged or acquired during the year
University				
Dublin City University	1	0	14	0
Maynooth University	0	0	4	0
University of Galway	4	0	19	0
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	1	0	1	0
Trinity College Dublin	4	5	40	2
University College Cork	4	4	19	0
University College Dublin	6	0	21	0
University of Limerick	0	0	17	0
Total	20	9	135	2

Table 7: 2023 Spin out creation by universities, from AKTS.

AKTS data is not yet available for 2024 or 2025; UCC’s data is provided, below. In 2024, UCC created three spin-outs — ArrayPatch, BarraLake and HyperPath — against a target of five. In this

period, one UCC spin-out (Metabolomics Diagnostics) was acquired (Trinity Biotech). In 2025 UCC has, to date, spun-out one company (Q1 - Vivid Photonics). We are actively working on four additional spin-outs that we aim to realise in 2025; two have University approval (Q3 - PulpoSEMI and Juvant) and execution agreements are being finalised. Two further projects which have developed technology from EI-funded Commercialisation Projects are expected to realise spin-outs by year end (Q4 – CommPal and Endurance). There are two other projects that we are actively supporting, with potential to realise spin-outs in 2025.

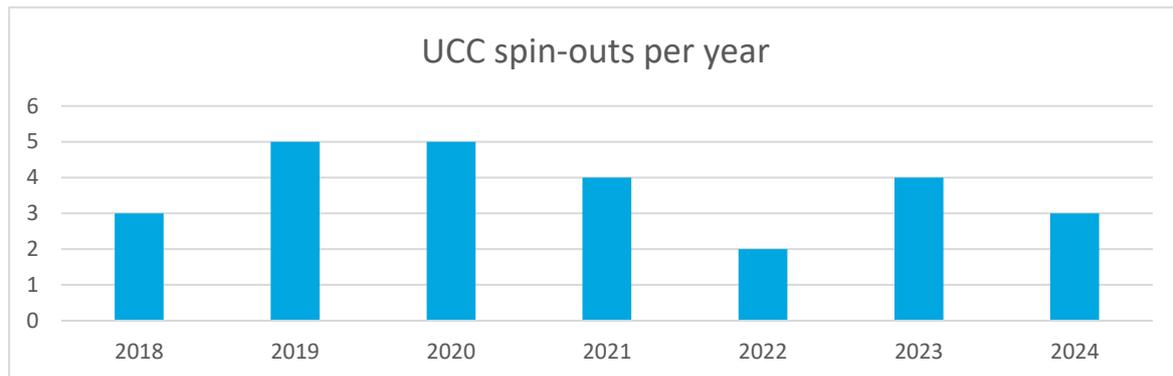


Figure 4: UCC spin-outs 2018-2024

As outlined in our strategic plan, UCC has the vision to be the leading Irish entrepreneurial university. To meet our spin-out creation goals we have implemented institutional initiatives that will support an increased number of spin-out companies arising from UCC research. These include:

- Strategic alignment of innovation and commercialisation supports with the UCC Futures framework, consolidating inter, multi and trans-disciplinary talent and potential in ten areas of strategic priority.
- VPRI and Director of Innovation are working with Colleges and Schools to develop annual innovation and commercialisation targets for their research areas, to drive a greater sense of responsibility and ownership for commercialisation.
- A new Innovation Advisory Board is being established by the President, comprising external members with significant entrepreneurial and innovation expertise.
- In order to encourage more academic innovation, innovation is explored at interviews for academic posts and is now included in the criteria for academic promotions.
- In February 2024, an [Entrepreneur in Residence](#) programme was created, with five entrepreneurs across a broad range of sectors (sustainability, life sciences, software, deep-tech, social enterprise). We also have a new VC in Residence (June 2025).
- Creation of Innovation week in UCC in April 2024 (now in its second year).
- Introduction of annual [Innovation Impact Reports](#) and [UCC Research and Innovation Annual awards](#) in 2023, clearly spotlights and celebrates commercialisation and spin-out activity.
- Restructuring of the [SPRINT accelerator programme](#) has specifically aligned training to support researchers to secure with Enterprise Ireland Commercialisation Funding

(Feasibility, Proof-of Concept and Commercialisation Funds), thus creating a pathway of UCC supports from idea to spin-out formation.

- The [IGNITE programme](#), which supports recent graduates developing start-up companies to develop enterprises that have economic, social, and environmental impact, was restructured to enhance programme effectiveness and agility by aligning supports with specific founder needs. Such is the success of IGNITE that it was chosen by UCC for the 2025 HEA Impact Assessment Case Study.
- UCC has committed to creating Start-up Central on campus, a vibrant, centrally located student, graduate, and staff start-up hub. A location has been identified and fundraising to refurbish the space is underway.
- Broader reach into SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) disciplines, and the promotion of social enterprises, is another key area of development to strengthening knowledge transfer. This has led to a licence from the Department of Religious Studies and an ERC Proof of Concept Grants (POC) and EI Feasibility Grant in the School of Music. SHAPE disciplines had been untapped previously.
- UCC has increased focus on student innovation and entrepreneurship, providing supports and clear pathways for progression that seed an entrepreneurial mindset from an early career stage. Participation has increased to >1,300 students in each of 2023 and 2024. In addition to the pre-existing student activities such as Start-up Lab, Inspiring Entrepreneur talks and Ideas for Impact Hackathon, UCC introduced:
 - New University Wide Module on the Entrepreneurial Mindset (2023).
 - New Student Entrepreneurship Community with monthly meet-ups, start-up clinics (launched in September 2023) for which students self-register.
 - New UCC Student Entrepreneur competition for under and post-graduate students (May-June 2025).
- Establishment of an externally facing [business engagement portal](#) (October 2024) to strengthen engagement with key sectors and enhance commercial activity, particularly with indigenous enterprise.

While the foundation is being laid for a brighter future, challenges remain as to the widespread engagement of researchers in their commercialisation of research and entrepreneurship. An entrepreneurial culture will take time to embed and grow. We will continue to develop structures to raise awareness of supports amongst researchers and identify and encourage researchers with an interest in entrepreneurship to progress their ideas. Enabling a culture of entrepreneurship through embedding an entrepreneurial focus in institutional processes, targeting relevant funding instruments, developing programmes that enhance innovative and entrepreneurial thinking and protecting time for researchers to be innovative and entrepreneurial, will support the creation of an increased number of spin-outs.

UCC will continue to implement its initiatives and support its talented innovation community throughout 2026.

[Word count: 999]

Pillar: Access & Participation

Performance Objective 6

To ensure that the student population (at all levels) is representative of the diversity of the community served by UCC and that students are enabled to succeed through the provision of an accessible and inclusive teaching, learning, and support infrastructure.

Transversal areas of impact:

Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Society; Region; Digital Transformation; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging; Institutional Leadership & Culture; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

Overview of Indicator Data and Trends

Access intake in 2024–25 increased to 22.10% of first-year undergraduate students. The most significant growth was among students with disabilities, contributing substantially to progress toward the institutional target of 25%. However, intake through the HEAR, QQI/FET, and Mature Student pathways has been slower, and these groups remain underrepresented.

Data from the Higher Education Authority indicates that only 6% of UCC's student population meets the Deprivation Index Score (DIS) indicator. While this reflects the demographic profile of the region in which UCC operates, there are fewer DIS-designated areas in the Cork and Kerry region, UCC is actively reviewing its outreach strategy to better target geographic areas that meet the DIS metric. This includes developing tailored outreach and access initiatives aimed at these communities.

The increasing intersectionality within UCC's Access student population illustrates the success of targeted outreach and inclusive admission routes. Over 10% of students entering through HEAR, QQI, or Mature Student pathways also disclose a disability, highlighting the growing complexity of student needs and the importance of coordinated, student-centred support across the institution. Encouragingly, progression rates for Access students remain closely aligned with those of the overall student population, signalling the effectiveness of UCC's robust student support infrastructure.

In terms of digital accessibility, institutional web accessibility scores have improved due to targeted efforts by UCC's web team. Staff engagement and awareness have increased, and continued work in this area is expected to yield further gains. While significant progress has been made within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) we have not achieved the target set. Initial improvements achieved through initiatives like the Inclusive UCC Interns scheme have demonstrated the potential of targeted efforts. The 2025 Student Partners Enhancing Access and Digital Education (SPEADE) project is working with 100 courses for structured collaboration

between academic staff, student partners, and instructional designers. This model promotes inclusive digital practices and supports sustained improvement in VLE accessibility, which is in alignment with UCC's digital inclusion goals.

Analysis of Implementation

In 2024–25, UCC continued to prioritise the embedding of Universal Design (UD) as part of its longstanding strategic commitment to equity, inclusion, and student success. A key development was the initiation of a strategic review of UD implementation using the ALTITUDE Charter framework, led by the University Leadership Team. This process will inform a targeted action plan aligned with the Charter's four pillars: Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Student Supports; Physical Environment; and Digital Environment.

Strong staff engagement is evident, with 88 staff enrolling in the Digital Badge in Universal Design Beyond the Classroom — demonstrating a university-wide appetite to adapt to the evolving needs of the student population. Under the Physical and Digital Environment pillars, significant investments are underway, including the installation of ceiling-mounted, hands-free audio systems in teaching spaces to improve sound quality and support greater classroom inclusivity. These systems will enhance in-room communication, facilitate high-quality audio capture, and promote greater participation, particularly for students with hearing difficulties. Simultaneously, the laptop loan scheme is being upgraded to support digital equity for low-income students.

Under the Teaching, Learning and Assessment pillar, the PATH 4-funded Inclusive Assessment Project is advancing a whole-of-institution approach to inclusive assessment. Activities include mapping first-year undergraduate assessment, collecting staff and student insights, leading college and university-wide discussions, and delivering workshops to co-develop resources for inclusive assessment practice. Meanwhile, work under the Student Supports pillar is evolving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and intersectional student population. These actions collectively represent a critical step in embedding Universal Design as a core institutional value. The ongoing ALTITUDE review will guide the next phase of implementation.

By strengthening the pipeline from disadvantaged communities through early and sustained family engagement, UCC aims to foster greater equity in access and increase the number of students who meet the Deprivation Index Score (DIS) indicator. Among a suite of initiatives supporting this goal, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) primary school outreach programme is particularly noteworthy. In 2024–25, 13 DEIS-designated schools participated in the Professor Fluffy initiative, which supports teachers to deliver a structured programme designed to raise awareness of higher education over a six-week period. The initiative culminated in June with campus visits involving 145 parents, 356 students, and 51 teachers, highlighting the importance of ensuring parents are informed and equipped to support their children's educational journey. The programme encourages early engagement and sustained aspiration by demystifying university and providing direct access to information.

Strategic Reflection and Future Priorities

A key learning from 2024–25 is the demonstrable value of co-created student-informed initiatives in fostering an inclusive university environment. The ongoing development of the Access Ambassador programme has empowered students to collaborate closely with staff, influencing the growth of inclusive practices and policies across UCC. This collaborative model has supported the delivery of key initiatives such as the CIRTL Inclusive Summer School, the SPEADE project, and the Inclusive UCC Interns scheme. A case study⁶ published in January 2025 highlights the importance of the Access Ambassador programme in ‘*revealing the complex and often hidden issues affecting students from diverse backgrounds*’ and ‘*enabling student voice to play a meaningful part in shaping the university learning environment*’.

Another key focus has been on embedding data-informed decision-making. A cross-functional project is underway to enhance the capture, sharing, and utilisation of access-related data across the university. This work is essential to enabling timely, evidence-based interventions tailored to the evolving needs of UCC’s student population.

Digital accessibility continues to be a strategic priority. Website compliance has improved, and work is ongoing in ensuring accessibility within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Building on the SPEADE project referenced above, UCC will evaluate its impact in 2025 and develop a strategy to more systematically embed digital accessibility across all courses, with a particular focus on low-scoring modules.

UCC is also committed to consolidating and evolving key regional inclusion initiatives delivered under the PATH 3 SOAR project. Our active involvement in the newly formed Cork Traveller Education Unit exemplifies this work, combining direct engagement with Traveller children alongside collaborative support for teachers within schools and return to learning opportunities for parents. The development of a new module for the MEd “*undoing Traveller Exclusion*” along with the restructuring of the Traveller mentoring programme reflects a multi-level strategy that engages both system-level and community-based practice to support meaningful and lasting change.

To further address low participation among students from areas designated under the Deprivation Index Score (DIS) metric, UCC will launch a new three-year initiative in 2025 based on its Nurturing Bright Futures programme. Targeting eight DEIS-designated second-level schools in Cork City, the initiative will support aspiration-raising and improved preparedness for higher education. Through a blend of school-based and on-campus activities, students will gain early exposure to higher education environments and practical, career-readiness supports. The programme is designed to guide students in making informed decisions about their future education and career pathways, while also addressing the unique barriers faced by those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. In doing so, it will strengthen the pipeline into higher education for students from areas aligned with the DIS indicator.

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⁶ Ní Laoire, C., Bilson, J., Byrne, O., Dorrity, C., Edwards, C., Honohan, C., MacÉinrí, P. and O’Brien, S. (2025) Enabling Diverse Student Voice in the University: A Case Study of the Access UCC Ambassador Programme. Cork: UCC Access & ISS21, UCC

Pillar: Engagement

Performance Objective 7

To demonstrate substantive progress on enhancing gender equality within the institution through achieving an institutional Silver Athena Swan Ireland award and five new unit/departmental Bronze awards, and to address barriers that have inhibited engagement to date.

Transversal areas of impact:

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging; Institutional Leadership & Culture.

Analysis of the Indicator Data for this Performance Objective

Number of Athena Swan Awards Achieved

UCC was awarded the Institutional Athena Swan Silver Award in March 2025. The School of Food and Nutritional Sciences also achieved the first Athena Swan Silver School level award. This is beyond the target set to achieve one Silver Institutional award and school level award by 2025. Two first time bronze Athena Swan applications were also submitted in June 2025.

Following a review of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) governance in 2024, a new EDI governance structure was established in January 2025 to support the implementation of *Belonging at UCC: EDI Framework 2025-2028*. This includes a dedicated dashboard to support implementation and monitoring of the Athena Swan Action Plan 2025–2030.

Response rate (%) to UCC Values and Culture/EDIB Staff and Student Surveys

The next Values and Culture EDI Staff Survey is scheduled to take place in 2026. Ethics and Data Protection applications will be submitted in Q4 2025.

Proportion (%) Women at Professor Level & Senior Lecturer Level

Based on headcount data UCC has exceeded the HEI sector average (32% Full Professor and 43% Senior Lecturer in 2022) and as of May 2025 the % headcount of women at Full Professor grade is 34.2%, while Senior Lecturer grade is 43.7%.

A new academic promotions process was introduced in 2023 which significantly improved engagement and staff experience of the process. Dedicated EDI training and designated EDI champions on assessment panels was provided, and assessors were not allowed to join panels until completed.

Assessment of implementation:

The inclusion of dedicated section on *Statutory Leave Submitted & Considered for Personal Circumstance/ Covid-19 Impact Statement* made a considerable difference in terms of outcomes for women applicants in the latest academic promotions rounds.

For the first time, there was a 50% male: 50% female success rate at Full Professor promotions round in May 2025.

Strategic Reflection:**New or emerging opportunities, challenges, and risks related to the Performance Objective:**

Need for coordinated sector wide approach given uncertainty of international climate around EDI.

Priorities for the Year Ahead:

Implementation of the EDI Framework and Silver Action Plan. Development of a dedicated UCC Race Equality Action Plan, LGBT+ Action Plan, and appointment of a dedicated Staff Disability Officer. Launch of an EDI Micro-Credential (EDI funded) Launch of *Pregnancy Loss Support Policy for Staff* – first in an Irish University.

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Performance Objective 8

To reduce UCC's Carbon Footprint (scope 1 & 2) and to continue to lead and improve on the STARS rating, the most comprehensive assessment of broad sustainability improvement, including scope 3 emissions.

Transversal areas of impact:

Climate and Sustainable Development; Society; Institutional Leadership and Culture.

Analysis of the indicator

UCC's Scope 1 and 2 greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions continue to decline, though 2024 saw a slightly smaller reduction when compared to previous years. The University has achieved its energy efficiency target of 50% six years before the 2030 deadline.

In 2024, fossil CO₂ emissions were 31.7% below the baseline. To achieve our 2030 target, a further 28.2% reduction is required. If the planned energy projects are implemented over the next six years, a reduction of 55.3% will be achieved by 2030 (figure 5).

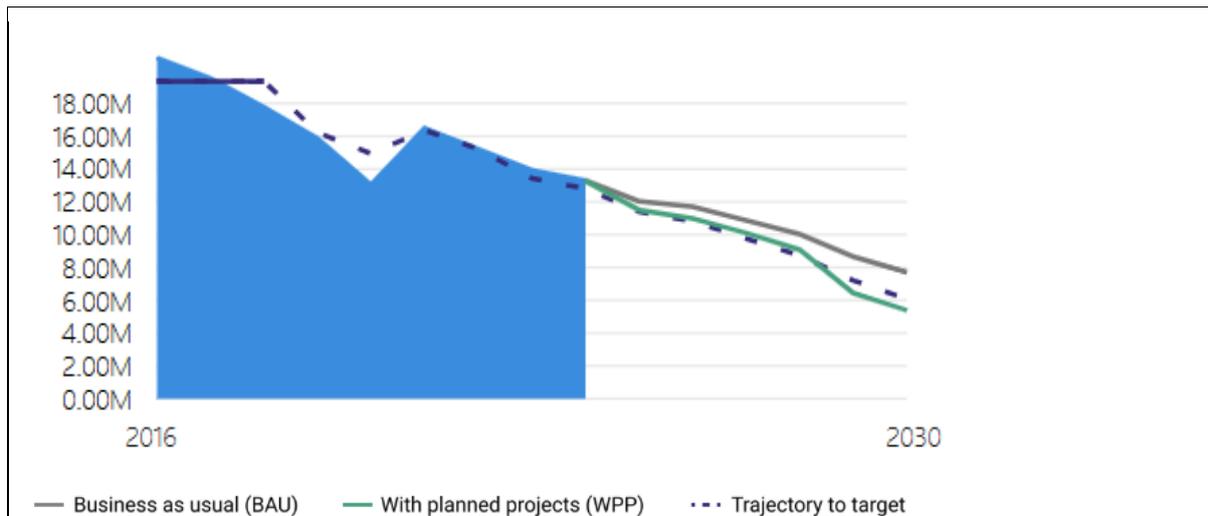


Figure 5: Total CO2 target

In 2024, the University's total CO2 emissions were 31.3% below the baseline, meaning the required reduction to achieve our 2030 target is 54%. If the planned energy saving projects are implemented, the University will achieve a total CO2 emissions reduction of 59.4% by 2030 (figure 5). The Year-to-Date figures for 2025 show a 10% reduction in total energy consumption. UCC have a published Climate Action Roadmap which is in line with the 2024 CAP requirements. The 2025 CAP was issued in April 2025 and so a revised UCC Climate Action Roadmap will be issued before October 2025.

UCC's next STARS submission is due in November 2025, and work has begun to gather the relevant data.

Assessment of Implementation

A number of highly significant projects have been completed in the past 12 months. The installation of a 4-pipe heat pump at the Tyndall National Institute has resulted in the complete elimination of Scope 1 emissions from the building, without increasing electricity usage. An air source heat pump installed at the Pharmacy Building is expected to reduce total energy load of that building by 60% (on 2016–18) levels.

UCC continues to show leadership in Sustainability and Climate Action. 2025 saw UCC officially launch its [Sustainability Academy](#), the first university sustainability training and education unit of its kind in Ireland which uses a unique model for sustainability education delivery, and [Sustainability Institute](#), which uses a global challenge-based approach to respond to, and find research solutions for, the three core environmental challenges of Climate Action, Circular Economy, and Healthy Environment.

UCC continues to lead in relation to Green Public Procurement (GPP). In 2024 alone, full GPP criteria were included in the documentation for 13 new tenders. For example, low carbon cement is now specified in all capital projects. In April 2025, a UCC Corporate Procurement Plan was approved which underlines UCC Procurement's commitment to Sustainability and includes

defined goals under Sustainable Procurement, links to national strategy, and establishes KPI deliverables on the use of GPP in tenders and GPP training.

UCC aims to be a Zero Waste campus by 2030. The elimination of single use plastics is a central component to achieving this goal. In January 2023, UCC eliminated single use plastic in its operations throughout the campus dining, shops, and vending machines. Since the policy's implementation, the University has avoided over 3,000,000 single-use cups and over 200,000 plastic bottles while overall waste levels, across all waste streams, and contamination rates have decreased significantly. A working group meets periodically to review the effectiveness of the policy and to identify opportunities to broaden the policy to prohibit the purchasing of other single-use products. One example is the recent ban of the sale of single use vapes on campus. A number of infrastructure improvements were implemented across campus to support the move to reuse, namely:

- Installation/upgrading of 34 water refill stations.
- Installation of FreshCup mini dishwashers for staff and students to sanitise their own individual reusable cups.
- Implementation of a cup deposit return scheme in outlets across campus, with a deposit of €2 on each cup.
- Installation of a soft drinks refill machine in the main restaurant.

2024–25 has seen the majority of main campus buildings move to a “bin-less” system, which aims to reduce overall waste volume and improve recycling rates.

Reflections:

UCC maintained its momentum on delivering climate action in 2024. The pathfinder Enterprise Centre retrofit project was completed cutting over 50% of operational emissions to 2030 in that building alone. The University has maintained its position as a high performer across international metrics for sustainability in higher education. Placing 4th in the 2024 UI Green Metric rankings and 67th in the Times Higher Education Impact rankings. In the Spring of 2024, UCC was awarded its fifth consecutive green flag from An Taisce. UCC has continued progressing to its 2030 targets.

UCC Buildings and Estates (B&E) have a planned pipeline of projects to decarbonise heating systems and targeted retrofits of SEUs and look forward to implementing them via both state support and Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs). The University has a vibrant community of students and staff who are critical to advocating for and reinforcing the university's sustainability ambitions and organising bottom-up action in their own departments and service areas. Sustainability training opportunities are available in-house for staff via the CPD1640 Sustainability and Carbon Literacy Training. The ULT completed dedicated climate action leadership training, and this has begun to be rolled out to leadership of the university's colleges and schools.

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Section 3: System Learning and Policy Development

Comment on any learning or insights arising from the institution's self-evaluation of performance in relation to the Performance Agreement that may contribute to system learning and/or national policy development and implementation.

Word limit: 300

The experience of completing the self-evaluation of performance provided assurance to the university in the processes it employs to monitor and assess progress towards achieving its strategic priorities. The alignment of the timing and duration of the Strategic Plan and the Performance Agreement enabled coherence between the processes of monitoring, review and progress-tracking and a resulting efficiency in reporting.

Given the history and experience over almost twenty years of reporting on institutional performance, there was no evident additional major points of learning or new insights arising from the institution's self-evaluation of performance in relation to the Performance Agreement.

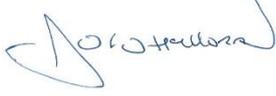
From this years' experience of compiling the first self-evaluation report of this new cycle of Performance Agreement, some points of feedback are as follows:

- There is a case for HEA merging Part A and Part B of the template, i.e. having the data table followed by commentary for each performance objective. In the experience of some colleagues, it is not an easy document to read flicking between parts A and B.
- The baseline year was predominantly 2022-23 when the PA was developed and agreed and the first year being reported is 2024-25. Thus, there was no apparent place to report 2023-24 data.
- The engagement from HEA has been excellent through-out and it was positive to have HEA staff available to join the initial meeting on Self-Evaluation.

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Section 4: Signature of the Head of the Institution

The SER should be signed by the Head of the Institution prior to submission.

On behalf of University College Cork , I declare that the particulars supplied in this report are true and correct.	
Signature:	
Print Name:	Professor John O'Halloran, President
Date:	2 nd October 2025