

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK

EVALUATION REPORT

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Governance and institutional decision-making	8
3.	Quality culture	15
4.	Teaching and learning	18
5.	Research	23
6.	Service to society	25
7.	Internationalisation	27
8.	Conclusion	29
9.	Annex 1: Schedule of Online Meetings	34
10.	Annex 2: Acronyms and abbreviations	37

1. Introduction

This report is the result of the evaluation of University College Cork, Ireland. Because of travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 and the subsequent shutdown of the university, the evaluation visit took place between 11 May and 26 June 2020 as a series of virtual meetings.

1.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) that offers evaluations to support the participating institutions in the continuing development of their strategic management and internal quality culture. IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The distinctive features of IEP are:

- A strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- A support to improvement

The focus of IEP is the institution as a whole and not the individual study programmes or units. It focuses upon:

- Decision-making processes and institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic management
- Relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision-making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.

All aspects of the evaluation are guided by four key questions, which are based on a “fitness for (and of) purpose” approach:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

1.2 University College Cork's profile

University College Cork (UCC) was founded in 1845 as a college. It became a university under the Irish Universities Act of 1908, which formed the National University of Ireland, and included the constituent colleges of Dublin, Cork and Galway. A further evolution occurred under the Universities Act of 1997, which “made the university college a constituent university of the National University of Ireland, being a full university for all purposes except the awarding of degrees and diplomas which remains the sole remit of the National University.” (Self-Evaluation Report, p.8)

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) provides the following key figures about the university:

- Number of students: 22,269 (2019/20), including 18% international students
- Number of academic staff: 913
- Number of research staff: 971
- Number of administrative staff: 1,048
- Annual income: €330m (53% non-exchequer income of which €11m come from industry)

UCC is organised into four colleges: Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences; Business and Law; Medicine and Health; and Science, Engineering and Food Science. Each college is constituted of schools and departments. There are a number of research institutes including five institutes of excellence: APC Microbiome Institute, Environmental Research Institute (ERI), MaREI Research, Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st Century (ISS-21) and Centre Tyndall National Institute (Tyndall).

UCC's strategic plan 2017-2022 includes five goals:

- "Implement an academic strategy to deliver an outstanding, student-centred teaching and learning experience with a renewed, responsive and research-led curriculum at its core."
- "Be a leading university for research, discovery, innovation, entrepreneurship, commercialisation and societal impact."
- "Create value for our community through an international outlook and informed and creative engagement on local and global issues."
- "Attract, develop, support and retain staff of the highest quality, thereby ensuring a diverse staff who are enabled to reach their full potential."
- "Strengthen our infrastructure and resource base."

In 2007, UCC launched a pilot Green Campus programme, at the prompting of students. This initiative received international recognition in the form of a Green Flag from the Foundation for Environmental Education (renewed in 2013 and 2016). UCC published a "Sustainability Strategy" in 2016, which is "student-led, research-informed and practice-focused". The university became the first "in Europe to be awarded a Gold Star from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. UCC is placed 9th in the world by the UI Green Metric Ranking, for the past three years." (SER, p. 11)

UCC is located in the city of Cork (pop. 689,750), the capital of the south-west region, a thriving region: "In excess of 150 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) companies are located in the Cork region, which is set to be the fastest growing city region in the country over the next 20 years. . . . Industry clusters in the south-west are predominantly in pharma/biopharma; manufacturing; ICT; financial services and food." (SER, p. 8) The SER identifies several enduring research strengths at UCC, which are linked to those regional strengths, including food, marine research, microbiome, nanotechnology, and pharmacology. (SER, pp. 9-10) Further commitment to serving the region is demonstrated by UCC's emphasis on Adult and Continuing Education. (SER, p. 10)

On 26 May 2020, the government announced that Munster Technological University (MTU) will be created on January 2021, based on the merger of the two institutes of technology located in the south-west region, Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) and Institute of Technology Tralee (IT Tralee). The creation of technological universities (TU) is perceived as a threat by the Irish university sector for the additional exchequer funding that these will receive: "Government announced in Budget 2020 the provision of €90 million over the next three years under a new TU Transformation Fund to support Institutes of Technology to jointly achieve TU designation and to further the advancement of

established TUs. This dedicated funding is additional to the €31 million in Exchequer funding invested in TU development and progression to date.”¹

The SER identifies several threats and national constraints on Irish universities. These include the emphasis on funding research focused on industry, delivering skills-focused programmes, and relying on performance-based indicators as an accountability mechanism. Furthermore, the current government has been focused on schools rather than higher education and has been a caretaker one since the last elections in February 2020. A new government was installed on the day that the IEP team delivered its oral report. Since then there is a new, dedicated Government Department of Further and Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, with full cabinet Minister.

A 2016 study by EUA determined that the Irish funding model was very fragile and that, while Irish universities scored high on academic autonomy, they scored medium high on both organisational and financial autonomy and medium low on staffing autonomy.² Noteworthy amongst the constraints are the restrictions placed on universities in deciding their academic structures, the composition of their governing body, and their staff salaries and conditions of service. Universities are not allowed to keep a surplus and any deficit must be met within a year.

A major immediate threat is the impact of Covid-19 on the financial sustainability of UCC. On 12 March 2020, the university had six hours to shut down operations and pivot all teaching to an online platform. This was done successfully thanks to a prior investment of €5 million in the IT infrastructure and to excellent coordination and leadership. UCC showed great agility in responding to this crisis by quickly moving all examinations online, dealing with students in placement, graduating students in medicine and generally keeping students and staff informed as processes were being developed.³ Nevertheless, the university estimates a possible €28m budget shortfall (4,6%) for the forthcoming academic year. As such, a deficit could not be eliminated within one year as prescribed by the Universities Act, the Governing Body (GB) has approved a final net deficit budget position of €8m, after application of €20m of savings, with further savings to be delivered over the following two years. Achievement of the savings, though necessary, will be extremely challenging given that (i) 72% of its budget goes to salaries and (ii) there will be an increased cost associated with the further development of online teaching and ensuring a safe campus for students and staff. The University has put in place revised control measures to ensure the GB approved budget position is not compromised. How will UCC ensure its financial sustainability? How will UCC compensate for the potential loss of revenues from two income streams – internationalisation and philanthropy – which were central to its business model? These are now capital questions for the future and will require an agile and coherent response.

1.3 The evaluation process

The UCC President convened a Steering Group to oversee the development of the self-evaluation report (SER). Participants included:

¹ <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-05-26.html>

² <https://www.university-autonomy.eu/countries/ireland/>

³ See for instance the following pages on the UCC website:

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/keep-teaching/>

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/keep-assessing/guidanceonassessment/>

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/emt/covid19/>

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/ask/>

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/keep-learning/>

- Professor John O'Halloran, Deputy President and Registrar (DPR), as chair of the group
- Dr Niamh Connolly, Director of Projects, President's Office
- Ms Elizabeth Noonan, Director, Quality Enhancement Unit
- Mr Diarmuid Collins, Bursar and Chief Financial Officer

The writing of the report was delegated to a drafting group, which included the first three staff members mentioned above, with the addition of Ms Anne Marie Cooney, Business Development and Finance Manager, DPR office.

A SWOT workshop was organised, supported by Professor Thomas Lawton (Cork University Business School) and facilitated by Dr Anne Gannon (Department of Human Resources). The SWOT exercise involved a section of the university: about 55 staff and students were invited and around 30 participated. They were divided into five working groups to discuss the following aspects: learning and teaching, research impact, infrastructure and resources, creating value for the community and globally, and staff. The results of the workshop were reviewed and accepted by the steering group and included as both a brief summary in, and an annex, to the SER.

Although the students were not part of the SER steering group, they participated in the SWOT workshop, and one student led a working group during that session. The SER steering group explained that their lack of participation in the SER group was not representative of their usual involvement in university matters, but that they were at the time engaged in a strike and an occupation of the quadrangle that was triggered by a rent increase.

The SER was mostly descriptive. According to the SER steering group, the report was put together very quickly. The group harvested existing information and conducted a very limited consultation on the draft. The SER group recognised that, in retrospect, it would have been good if more persons would have been involved to ensure greater buy-in.

The SER was written before the university shutdown and the realisation of the likely impact of COVID-19. The SER group observed that, had the report been written after the shutdown, it would have been the same, albeit with more nuances with respect to finance, the implications of remote working on human resources and wellbeing and the future prospect for online delivery and internationalisation.

The self-evaluation report of University College Cork, together with the appendices, was sent to the evaluation team on 21 February 2020. As mentioned earlier, the evaluation visit took place between 11 May and 26 June 2020 as a series of virtual meetings because of travel restrictions and the shutdown of the university.

The evaluation team carefully read the SER and requested supplemental information, including a brief essay on the university shutdown and its future plans in light of the sanitation requirements for the health crisis. It received a number of additional documents during the virtual-meeting period, including an assessment of progress with the academic strategy, which was received after the team had drafted its oral report. The team noted that some of its recommendations coincide with UCC's views of actions that are taken or will be taken in the future.

The evaluation team (hereinafter named the team) consisted of:

- Sokratis K. Katsikas, Rector, Open University of Cyprus, Cyprus, and Professor, Department of Information Security and Communication Technology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway, IEP team chair
- Aleksandar Šušnjar, PhD student, Department of Philosophy, University in Rijeka, Croatia

- Jordi Villà-Freixa, Vice Rector Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Catalonia, Spain
- David Vincent, Professor of Social History and former Pro Vice Chancellor, Open University, United Kingdom
- Andrée Sursock, Senior Adviser, European University Association (EUA), Belgium, IEP team coordinator

1.4 The online format of the visit

This evaluation was the first experience for IEP of a full online evaluation visit. Initially, the team embarked on the virtual visit hoping that it would be the equivalent of a first visit and that a second, face-to-face visit would take place in the autumn. This prospect was quickly dashed in the face of continued uncertainties due to the Covid-19 sanitation measures and travel restrictions. Therefore, the visit schedule was constructed in stages, taking into account the availability of the IEP team and the UCC participants.

Given the complicated period and the online format, most meetings were held with one person at a time (see Annex 1 for the visit programme). This meant that discussions were unusually frank even if there were limited opportunities to observe the extent of the cohesion, knowledge of one another, and community spirit inherent in group interviews. The team managed to meet only around 55 university representatives vs. the average 120 whom they meet in regular IEP evaluation visits. Specifically, the team could not meet with as many students and staff as usual, nor could it meet with the range of external stakeholders who are usually interviewed during IEP site visits, such as civic leaders, industry representatives, employers, NGOs, etc. About 50 participants attended the oral presentation of the IEP evaluation report, which is a very good turnout. Subsequently, the team received an invitation to present the oral report to the Governing Body.

Despite some of the limitations inherent in the online format, the team feels confident that it was able to triangulate evidence and focus on some of the key features of UCC. The major interest of UCC in inviting IEP was to get a European view on its academic governance. This interest falls within the scope of IEP and is addressed in this report. The report also reflects the broader IEP approach in examining how universities execute their main missions.

1.5 Acknowledgments

The IEP team would like to warmly thank:

- President Patrick O'Shea, Deputy President and Registrar John O'Halloran and their colleagues for inviting IEP and supporting this exercise;
- all participants for the open and productive discussions despite the virtual format;
- Niamh Connolly for her invaluable guidance and commitment to the success of this evaluation; and
- Sarah O'Riordan for her efficient and cheerful response to multiple requests for setting up meetings during the seven-week period.

2. Governance and institutional decision-making

2.1 Decision-making bodies and structures

UCC has two main statutory bodies:

- The Governing Body (GB) exercises oversight over UCC's strategy, performance, resources and key appointments (e.g., President, Deputy President and Registrar, Heads of Colleges). As mandated by the Universities Act, the composition of GB is large (34 members) and comprises elected internal and appointed external members, including students and nominees of local and national authorities. GB is organised into committees. A recent review of GB led to a number of changes such as allowing committees to co-opt members and to meet without the internal members. Effort has been made to improve gender balance, but the university has no control over some of the external nominees and such balance has been challenging to achieve.
- The Academic Council (AC) sets the academic direction of the university by approving academic programmes and academic policies. AC is chaired by the President and includes the Deputy President and Registrar (DPR), the Professors, the Professors (scale 2), the Deans, the Heads of Schools, the Heads of departments/disciplines, a number of officers (Vice Presidents, Bursar, etc.) and students (undergraduates and postgraduates).⁴ AC delegates functions to the Academic Board (AB) and any committees as needed. Several staff noted that the decisions are so well prepared by the Secretariat that it limits dialogue and debate within AC. Attendance is reported to be patchy (on average 40, less than a third of total membership). It is not clear if the average low participation is due to the timing of regular meetings on Friday afternoons or a lack of interest. It should be noted that an online meeting organised during the shutdown of UCC gathered 140 participants.

The President is appointed for ten years and reports annually to the GB. At the moment, the UCC President has 18 direct reports. All are appointed posts and include the Deputy President and Registrar (appointed for five years, renewable), the Vice Presidents, the Heads of Colleges, the Bursar and a number of professional unit directors. A review of the President's Office in 2016 recommended that the President appoints a Chief Operation Officer to reduce the number of reports but the recommendation was not implemented.

The Executive Management Team is organised into two main committees, both chaired by the President:

- University Management Team Operation (UMTO) is responsible for leading the development and implementation of the UCC's strategic plan and any other important university-wide initiatives. It is a decision-making committee.
- University Management Team Strategy (UMTS) is responsible for monitoring progress with the strategic implementation and reports to UMTO.

UMTO and UMTS membership overlaps to an extent. Eleven staff members sit on both committees, including the President (who chairs both committees), the DPR, three Vice Presidents, four Heads of Colleges, the Bursar, the Corporate Secretary, the Director of Projects in the President's Office and the Director of Human Resources. Most of them also sit on the Academic Council.

⁴ UCC, *Principal Statute*, (adopted on 20 October 2009), pp. 12-13.

Two bodies assist the DPR: an Advisory Board of external members and the Academic Leadership Forum (ALF). ALF comprises the two academic Vice Presidents (VP Research and Innovation; VP Learning and Teaching), the four Heads of Colleges, the Librarian and the Academic Secretary, almost all of whom also sit on UMTS and/or UMTO.

ALF was instrumental in leading the pivot to the online platform when UCC was required to shut down on 12 March 2020, while working closely with the Emergency Management Team, a committee established by Governing Body. Upon extraordinary delegation from the Academic Council, ALF set up a number of working groups to deal with Covid-19 such as the International Students Working Group, the Examination Business Continuity Group (35 members), the Placement Working Group, and a group overseeing applications to the Human Capital Initiative (a government funding programme). Students were involved in these processes and the general consensus is that ALF was very successful in managing this crisis.

As mentioned above (Section 1.2), there are four colleges at UCC. Each is led by a Head of College, who is responsible for the management of the college. Heads of Colleges report to the President and must undergo a review after five years by a committee of external peers, chaired by a GB member. They are assisted by an Executive Management Committee. Academic decisions within the colleges are taken by the college councils and the college assemblies and report to the Academic Council.⁵ Each college includes a variable number of schools and departments. Other academic units are research institutes and centres, which hold different statutes depending on their funding streams.

From this very brief snapshot, it is clear that UCC academic governance is complex. Three examples demonstrate this complexity. Firstly, the Heads of Colleges sit on UMTO and UMTS and report to both the President and the Academic Council. Their relationship to the DPR is informal, via ALF, even although the DPR is the chief academic officer of the university. While they are expected to undergo a performance evaluation, none has taken place yet and they have not been given a mandate to make changes or to implement the academic strategy in their respective colleges.

Secondly, another instance of complexity is the coexistence of three different, yet interrelated, committees (UMTO, UMTS and ALF), with overlapping membership. ALF is a forum established with approval of UMTO and AC to ensure that academic decisions are taken collegially and implemented effectively. Yet, it was instrumental in making crucial operational and strategic decisions during the shutdown and demonstrated its capacity to manage change. The team was told that since the establishment of UMTS and UMTO years ago, the university has increased in complexity, diversified its funding streams, etc., and that the contour and membership of these two committees have also changed overtime but without resulting in increased fitness for purpose.

Thirdly, several interlocutors noted the bloated number of committees across the university. A *Thematic Review of Academic Decision-Making in UCC* conducted in October 2018 recommended that the number of committees at UCC be reduced by half (p.9). While committees ensure collegial decision-making and provide opportunities for members to deepen their understanding of the university, there is a sense that their number has been artificially increased by both the weight given to university service in the promotion process (see Section 2.5) and the complexity of the university's *Principal Statute*. That these committees are rarely task-and-finish groups, with a clear sunset clause, compounds the problem.

⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

The recent evolution at UCC has been of a gradual creation of hierarchy. Heads of Colleges manage the Heads of Schools, who manage their academic colleagues. The Academic Council was the forum for decision-making. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and for its duration, this decision making has been delegated to ALF and the Academic Board and there are college decision-management structures. This has become a complex ecosystem and decisions are slower. The team was told that individual staff members now feel more distant, which explains the fallen participation in AC, and that academic decision-making has driven academic staff away from the university and toward their disciplines.

In short, it would be useful if UCC would consider the following questions:

- Is there a joined-up, evidence-based decision-making process? Are academic and administrative leaders together on the right committees?
- Are the different bodies and committees getting the right information about the university?
- Is collegiality functioning adequately and effectively?
- Are all academic heads accountable in delivering the academic strategy?
- Is there value-added in revisiting decisions as they proceed up the UCC hierarchy from department to AC or GB?

2.2 Academic decision-making, between the centre and the academic units

UCC created four colleges, comprising a number of schools in the early 2000s. As discussed in the next section, the “schoolification” process remains an unfinished business in that it was meant to eliminate departments; nevertheless, several have survived. Despite the multi-layered structures, academic decisions with respect to the programme approval and review process proceed in an orderly way and go from the Department/School to the College Executive Committee, the College Council and whence to the Academic Board, and onwards to Academic Council for information. Students, however, are not consistently involved in the review process. While approval is a relatively fast process (a few weeks to three months), the implementation can take 12 to 18 months to ensure that students are informed in a timely fashion. Any modular change must be approved a year in advance. Changing a course takes even longer to complete because it needs to be changed in the centralised Irish admission system, in particular for undergraduate programmes; there is more agility at post-graduate level.

The relatively clear path of the bottom-up academic decision process is not always matched when initiatives come from the top, particularly in the case of new regulations and policies, which can be approved and implemented haphazardly (see Section 4.2, on the doctorate for a particular example). There is a sense that decisions must remain in the hands of as large a group of academic staff as possible and that consultation must be exhaustive. This led some interviewees to note that an academic decision that has been taken at the university or college level can continue to be discussed locally as if it had not been taken at all.

The path of academic decisions is further challenged by both the lack of coordination of administrative staff and some colleges’ culture that devalue administrative staff (even those who are trained up to the doctorate). School administrators do not report to college administrators but to their school heads; similarly, college administrators do not report to university administrators but to their college heads. Although some of the central administrators make an effort to coordinate college and school staff in their functional areas, partly through involvement in appointing committees, this is done

informally and without any formal accountability. The lack of both a university chief operation officer and a systematic performance appraisal system for both the academic and administrative lines contribute to the centrifugal tendency.

2.3 The “schoolification” process

The goal of merging departments into schools was to enable a more strategic approach to disciplines, including protecting the smaller ones, increasing interdisciplinarity and making a more impactful use of resources.

Twenty years later, “schoolification” is still an unfinished process despite subsequent reviews and strategic commitments. There remain departments across the university. Several explanations were provided to explain their survival: sometimes these departments are very large and could not be merged effectively into a school; in other cases, the departments are very small and feel that their exceptionalism warrants their stand-alone status; in still other cases, developing new (inter)disciplinary areas should merit a special transitory status.

The team was told that the “schoolification” process was hampered from the start by the lack of a common template that could have been enforced (e.g., through strategic resourcing). The financial crisis of 2008 impeded the reform further. As a result, according to the information provided by UCC,

School structures have not fully embedded as part of the University infrastructure and operations, such that within Schools the disciplinary structures accommodate themselves variably (from strong to weak) in alignment with the concept of a School. Some Schools operate meaningfully as mature academic units with multiple disciplines, others operate Schools as an administrative concept with well-defined disciplinary boundaries and within some Schools disciplinary based administrative structures are still in operation. (Supplemental information to SER)

Some academic staff complained that, by comparison to the colleagues in schools, the survival of their department results in overburdening them with committee responsibilities (that would have been taken up by their school had it been created). Others, whose discipline is part of a school, complain that the existence of their school reduces the visibility of their discipline. Some college heads complain that UCC has allowed individual staff members to decide whether or not to implement these changes and that small departments are unable to leverage their strengths and work strategically. Others argue that enforcing the “schoolification” process today would backfire by generating too much negative energy, without bringing much value. Some are advocating a reform centred on colleges (reducing their numbers), others a reform centred on schools (making them central or eliminating them), and still others on programmes or disciplines.

In other words, there is no consensus on “schoolification” and on whether to end it and how. Importantly, the differences across the colleges have been left to last for a very long time, thus increasing the challenge of addressing this issue effectively. The comprehensive internal quality enhancement approach could have been used as a lever for completing “schoolification”, but it lacks a solid embedding in the university’s decision-making process. (See Chapter 3 for further details).

2.4 The students’ involvement in governance

UCC prides itself on being student-centred and involving students in governance to a much larger extent than other Irish universities. Students are represented in governing bodies at all levels of the university (except in UMTO) and in the quality reviews, where they receive special training and

attention. Student officers are on sabbatical for the duration of their mandate (one year) and are being paid by the university during the same period. There is a vibrant student life, with a relatively good participation in student elections (about 25%) and “more than 3,000 students in leadership positions across 107 student societies, 59 sports clubs, peer support and student representatives”. (SER, p. 43)

Despite the vibrant student life, there are some clouds of discontent. The Presidents of clubs and societies are sometimes considered as legitimate a student voice as the student union representatives, whose leadership is seen by some as being too political. The team was told that although students sit on university committees that are focused on finance, they tend to be naïve about finance matters and somewhat unrealistic in their demands. The students recognise that they are involved in committees and university bodies but complain that, although they are free to speak, they are not always heard. Recent tensions between the students and the university over a rent increase led to the occupation of the quadrangle. Doctoral students are not represented as a distinct group of students in most university bodies but by the primarily undergraduate Student Union (albeit there is a part-time postgraduate officer in the Student Union). Therefore, they do not feel that this representation is adequate.

Thus, the picture is mixed and requires attention. The university has embarked on a project to review the structure of student representation and streamline its functioning. This project has been welcomed by students.

2.5 Staffing

In the administrative line, grades follow the civil servant structure. Most administrative staff have at least a first degree. UCC prides itself on a very robust promotion process, based on a competency-based model rather than on the specific job. The team was told that this has been welcomed by staff and that there is a very strong development programme for administrative staff.

In the academic line, all academic staff are civil servants, with the associated job security. Pay rises are set by the government in negotiation with the staff union and covered by a national pension scheme.

The academic recruitment process was reported to be clear and objective and laid out in the university's *Principal Statute*⁶. For very senior posts (heads of colleges and institutes), UCC conducts a worldwide search by a head-hunting firm. The university offers what was described as modest packages to recruit new full professors.

UCC provides staff development for academics: around 75% of staff have availed themselves of the postgraduate certificate in teaching and learning, (with emphasis on higher education). Some colleges identify training needs and mentoring for aspiring leaders and for those coming into leadership positions. Training for aspiring leaders and other leadership programmes are provided at university level by the department of Human Resources.

UCC pays attention to gender issues. It conducted an external review of promotion schemes and implemented international standards for calculating all personal leaves (maternity, adoption, etc.). Every interview board is gender balanced (40/60) and focused on promoting gender equality. At the moment, gender balance is satisfactory up to professor scale 2 level and UCC is working on ensuring better balance at full professor level.

⁶ Ibid

UCC's attention to its staff resources and development has been recognised by a bronze award from Athena Swan for achievement in gender equality, the European HR Excellence in Research Award (HRS4R) and a gold award from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. There is an extremely slow attrition rate (less than 2%, mostly in the research community). UCC leadership reports good collaboration with the two staff unions (for academic and administrative staff). Although the team had no opportunity to speak to staff union leaders, several interviewees mentioned that the relationship with the two staff unions is based on a proactive, consultative approach that works well.

The team, however, identified several points of vigilance.

Firstly, although there is a university-wide common workload model that 90% of staff have filled out, rumours abound about imbalanced workloads across the colleges. This is related to a deficit in internal communication about this issue.

Secondly, the promotion process was reported to be creating a great deal of frustration because there are no regular calls for promotion. There was no senior lecturer promotion round between 2012/13 and 2018/19. Furthermore, prior to a promotion round, a decision is taken on how many promotions the university can afford. Because of limited financial resources, staff could be denied promotion even if they attain the benchmark. Some colleges were reluctant or resistant to recruiting at senior lecturer level because of this process and the promotion backlog in this category. This can have detrimental, long-term consequences for the age pyramid.

Promotions are based on an examination of teaching, research and university service activities: the first two are equally weighted at 40% each. Anecdotal evidence collected by the team demonstrated the effect of a model that is applied in the same way to everyone. Thus, the team was told that good teachers or good researchers have been turned down because of deficits in other areas, including in university service. Promotions are also university-wide and that creates tensions because it leads to comparing disciplines that are not comparable.

Thirdly, as far as the team could ascertain, performance appraisal of academic staff and academic leadership has not been taking place systematically. Heads of units are not uniformly skilled at conducting performance appraisal, and the central Human Resource Department does not monitor the system. The team was told that the promotion system has taken the place of a performance management system. Individual staff will work toward these criteria or opt out.

Despite these reservations, as was noted earlier, there is a very slow attrition rate, less than 2%, mostly in the research community where fixed-term contracts are frequent. There is also a retention practice to match the job offer of a university of equal standing, which constitutes a back-door alternative to the blocked promotion process.

The team was told that UCC is regional and has a tendency to recruit from within. As a result, the cohort of teaching staff is not very diverse, although researchers are more international. The lack of staff diversity was identified in the SWOT, and UCC has been working on this aspect for the past few years.

2.6 Recommendations

1. UCC can no longer afford to continue to debate the "schoolification" process, which has been under review for the past 20 years, particularly given the need to focus attention on negotiating the Covid-19 crisis. Should UCC decide that some departments can survive, it should ensure that

their existence is supported by rigorous evidence and that they are reviewed at regular intervals (e.g., every five years) by an international committee.

2. Whether in its current structure or in a reformed one, the university is urged to adhere to the following principles:
 - Be consistent in the observance of university rules and regulations regarding the structures;
 - Be consistent in operation of the quality assurance system, including student feedback;
 - Limit the number of committees and reduce the number of iterations around a single policy proposal;
 - Ensure a single structure of administrative support across all the units within a college;
 - Clarify and strengthen the role of colleges, provide a mandate letter to all academic unit heads and hold them to account;
 - Establish clear accountability principles/performance appraisal for the whole chain of heads (departments, schools, colleges) up to the Deputy President and Registrar;
 - Ensure the robustness and timeliness of the internal communication to mitigate the spread of wrong information on campus (e.g., with respect to workloads) and improve the systematic implementation of policies and regulations.
3. Reconsider the balance between the need for swift decision-making and preserving academic collegiality by taking the following actions:
 - Establish a small executive team that will meet weekly and will include key academic and administrative staff;
 - Reconsider the boundaries between UMTO and ALF and the existence of UMTS (the latter could be folded in UMTO). This includes re-examining the number, composition (including student representation), roles and linkages of the different university committees;
 - Establish terms of reference and a sunset clause for all committees.
4. Re-examine resource allocation to support strategic goals. This includes looking at the recruitment and promotion process (e.g., ensuring a regular promotion cycle; revising the criteria for promotion; introducing more flexible academic contracts, with different weights for the criteria, to tailor them to individual development goals over a career).
5. Address students' concerns regarding the impact of student representation (especially focusing on doctoral students' representation in university bodies) as a matter of priority.
6. Ensure the accountability of school administrators who should be reporting to their college administrators.

3. Quality culture

3.1 Key findings

Quality culture at UCC is founded on an enhancement-led approach, while seeking to comply with the requirements of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act of 2012 and the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2015). The university is reviewed periodically by the Irish evaluation agency, Quality & Qualifications Ireland, for its compliance with these requirements and for an examination of the embeddedness of its quality culture.

The review methodologies in operation at UCC include a periodic quality review of academic units, thematic reviews and reviews of collaborative arrangements with third party providers. In addition, UCC has conducted two university-wide reviews of research (2009 and 2015) and is planning the next one. UCC is involved in the Irish survey, which measures student engagement in their learning activities. A Survey Board coordinates the administration of that survey, analyses the results and develops a response.

Standards are secured through several mechanisms including the Academic Development and Standards Committee (a standing committee of Academic Council) and the use of external examiners.

The Quality Enhancement Unit is working to ensure that the UCC internal review process is aligned with the accreditation of regulated professions.

The commitment of the university leadership to the Quality Enhancement Unit is strong. This includes the President, DPR, the Heads of Colleges and the small sample of Heads of Schools met by the team. The current President increased the number of staff in the Quality Enhancement Unit and serves as a direct report to the office director, thus signalling the importance of this role. Students are involved in internally-organised reviews and supported through specific training.

The team was told that academic staff are typically not very enthusiastic when reviews start but in most, albeit not all, cases were brought around to see their usefulness.

The Quality Enhancement Unit works tirelessly with the academic units to embed a quality culture across the university and to ensure the integrity and impact of the internal reviews. It views its role as one of mediation and persuasion rather than sanctions. This approach is commendable in increasing the likelihood of embedding a quality culture.

Professional staff are more engaged than academic staff in these processes: administrative services benchmark themselves; their self-evaluation reports are, by and large, reflective and self-critical. Several examples were given of follow-up actions such as the complete transformation of the Language Centre and of the developing strategy for the Information Services & Library Unit following their review.

In brief, UCC has strong internal quality procedures. The university is now seeking to improve the embedding of these processes in its decision-making rather than having them as an add-on. In the view of the team, for this to happen, the following areas require attention:

- The team was told that the use of institutional data in school reviews is left to the discretion of the schools. Centrally sourced, reliable data are available and accessible, but the schools are left to use them as they wish, leading some self-evaluation reports to argue that some

schools suffer from certain deficits such as staff, space and resources. The self-evaluation reports are not validated centrally or by the higher hierarchical unit.

- Student surveys are not taken seriously by staff and students. The team was told that until 2015, there was a single university-wide module questionnaire, with five questions and three open questions, which was coordinated by the Quality Enhancement Unit. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction among staff because of the potential of over-surveying students, and the desire of staff to use their own instruments. The system for student feedback is now delegated to schools to allow them to develop approaches most suited to their needs, with a requirement to report annually via their College to the Registrar and Academic Council. Evidence gathered through the school reviews, however, show that the conduct and use of student feedback is variable. The Quality Enhancement Unit has identified the need to look at the systematic use of this and find ways to enhance it.
- UCC is missing an exit survey of graduating students. It should be noted, however, that students get 54 survey requests per year. The Survey Board, with student representation, is now setting rules, including identifying periods when students do not receive any such request.
- Feedback loops are not functioning well and follow-up to the internal reviews is not systematic. The reasons for this are the following:
 - There is no process for checking the effectiveness of the implementation of review recommendations by the units.
 - The heads of colleges are not systematically involved in academic unit reviews, whether at the self-evaluation or follow-up phase.
 - The granularity of the reports to UMTO and UMTS, the Governing Body and AC are not optimal. The team formed the view that some of these bodies receive such detailed information that they miss the forest for the trees.
 - Students do not receive information about the student survey results at School level, subsequent actions and follow-up.
- The team questioned whether there was a contradiction in having two separate processes for learning and teaching and research reviews, while espousing a strengthened link between teaching and research as one of the goals of the Connected Curriculum. (For the Connected Curriculum, please see Chapter 4.)
- Benchmarking is used by professional services but, at university level, is limited to tracking how well UCC is doing in international rankings schemes.

3.2 Recommendations

1. UCC is encouraged to pursue its efforts in embedding further its internal quality processes in the university's decision-making processes through:
 - requiring the involvement of the next hierarchical level of any unit being reviewed. For instance, the schools' and colleges' self-evaluation reports should be signed off by the college Heads and the colleges' self-evaluation report by the university (senior executive team or DPR). Similarly, the same hierarchical level should have oversight of the follow up.

- reviewing the granularity of reports that are sent to the executive leadership team, the Governing Body and AC, to ensure that they are receiving the information that they need to make decisions.
2. Consider broadening the focus of the school and college reviews to include a discussion of research (e.g., the research strategy of the unit; its alignment with UCC's strategy, mission and goals; the link between research and teaching for both undergraduate and postgraduate students; the management of research activities and use of research results; and the tools used by the unit to measure its research impact).
 3. Improve the use of student surveys. As a first step, benchmark with other European universities that have managed them successfully. Work with students to develop consistent mechanisms that will ensure that they receive information about the student survey results and subsequent actions taken.
 4. Develop an exit survey of graduating students and ensure the effectiveness of all tracking instruments, such as alumni and graduate destination surveys.
 5. Ensure that benchmarking is undertaken systematically to inform self-evaluation processes and to enhance the quality of activities across the University. The same process could be encouraged at university level where benchmarking could be used thematically, to emulate the specific strengths of selected universities (e.g., internationalisation, research, student-centredness).

4. Teaching and learning

UCC's academic strategy (2018-2022), launched in December 2018, is focused on the following six key priority areas:

1. Develop a "Connected Curriculum", building on existing strengths and best practice globally. This seeks to integrate six key elements across the curriculum: research-based teaching; employability; sustainability; inter- and trans-disciplinarity; global reach; and civic and community engagement.
2. Align curriculum offerings with demand and with teaching and research priorities.
3. Constructively align effective assessment practices with learning outcomes.
4. Facilitate student's development of core values and graduate attributes.
5. Establish a student enrolment plan that aligns with student recruitment targets.
6. Reform academic governance such that innovation is enabled, coherence restored, and risk reduced.

The interim report produced for the Academic Council meeting of 26 June 2020 documents progress with the implementation of this strategy. It notes that all 35 action items associated with the six priorities are on track and 23% have been completed. This report was debated on the afternoon following the team's oral presentation of its findings on the morning of 26 June. Therefore, the conclusions of that debate could not be integrated into this report.

The team lacked time to examine all six priorities in detail, notably Priorities 3 and 5. In addition, Priority 6 includes many different aspects that could not be delved into such as the review of exam appeals and mitigation processes or the review of semesterisation. Instead, the team selected the most important one, academic decision-making, as the focus for Chapter 2. All other priorities are addressed, albeit briefly, in Section 4.1, and Section 4.2 examines the doctoral cycle.

4.1 Undergraduate education: Key findings

In all discussions held with academic staff and students, the team was able to ascertain that the Connected Curriculum and the Graduate Attributes were well understood. There is a shared commitment to implementing these two goals, notably because staff acknowledge that they build on UCC's history and past experience. The team noted that a module was developed to introduce all staff to the Connected Curriculum framework and embed it across the university. The team formed the view, on the basis of the various meetings, that the Connected Curriculum is about to be implemented but is not yet a reality.

The team also notes several strengths of UCC. Firstly, it is characterised by high retention and graduation rates. According to some staff this is associated with the selective (national) admission process, the structured curricula, the excellent welfare services and the fact that students can re-sit examinations. Secondly, the team notes the high commitment of academic staff to the teaching mission of the university and to their students. This is demonstrated by a strong research culture on teaching and learning as well as the uptake of the teaching qualification. About 75% of academic staff have availed themselves of this opportunity. Some interviewees noted that staff take this qualification because it is important for the promotion process; others claim that the qualifications do not result in

as much innovation as one would wish even though UCC recognises good teachers through a teaching award.⁷

Academic staff training in the new learning management system, prior to the onset of Covid-19, helped ensure a very successful pivoting to the online platform during the shutdown. When the shutdown started, three weeks were left in the semester and the examination cycle was about to start. UCC successfully administered 15 000 examination sittings and 22 online vivas. It should be noted that authority was delegated to the schools to come up with suitable solutions to their online examinations while a university-level working group oversaw the issues. This was reported to have worked very well and complaints were received, regarding a single module only. Interestingly, UCC had been discussing the notion of allowing online vivas for the past two years. The shutdown forced the university's hand to the satisfaction of all, including those who were resisting the idea during the pre-Covid-19 period.

UCC is student-centred and promotes a holistic view of its students. This is demonstrated by the fact that extracurricular activities are seen as one mechanism for achieving graduate attributes. However, the level of student autonomy in shaping their own studies and learning paths is fairly low, a consequence of highly structured and inflexible study programmes.

Students are very positive about the high quality of student welfare services, even if they complain that the level of resources is inadequate to meet the rising demands. To address this issue, the welfare services are restructuring their offer, developing a phased response to requests for support. Depending on the need, the student would be provided with access to group support, which can then be elevated to individual support if required.

UCC has a policy for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and the portion focused on prior experiential learning is currently under further development. There is a defined procedure, which can be used for replacing part of the study programme credits, but very few students use it. One possible reason is that the procedure is quite demanding. UCC requires students to demonstrate that they have acquired the learning outcomes prescribed by the course(s).

The importance of teaching is stressed in the recruitment and promotion process. As discussed in Section 2.5, teaching and research received an equal 40% weightage, leaving 20% for university service (participation in committees, etc.). However, research prevails over teaching at the professorial level, and the co-existence of two funding streams – for teaching and for research – provides unequal opportunities for researchers to teach.

Aspects related to the student experience that require attention include the rigidity of the curricula, which limits student autonomy in constructing personalised learning pathways. This is compensated by the bountiful number of study programmes (around 260) but their very abundance can obfuscate the clarity of the teaching offer. The team notes, however, that UCC plans to address this issue by consolidating its educational offer, partly to achieve efficiencies in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

Chapter 2 provides details of the academic decision-making process, including the process of programme approval and review. Given the focus of this chapter, however, the team would like to restate that students' participation in curricular reviews varies across academic units and that the curricular approval is reported to be an onerous process that takes a long time to come to a conclusion.

⁷ However, the argument about the shaping effect on the promotion process is difficult to recognise, given that the promotion process does not actually take place in most years (see Section 2.5).

Finally, given the virtual format of the visit, the team was unable to assess the state of the campus. However, several staff members confirmed a statement in the SER that some of the older buildings are in a state of disrepair. Other buildings are in the planning phase and might be redesigned in light of UCC's Covid-experience with online learning. Such redesign would shift the balance toward seminar rooms and settings that promote active learning rather than the traditional lecture formats. It may also leave UCC with a stock of larger lecture spaces for which it will have no efficient use.

4.2 Doctoral education and training: Key findings

Doctoral education and training in Europe changed drastically when it became integrated into the Bologna Process in 2003. The Salzburg Seminar in 2005 identified several principles for the third cycle⁸, which led to significant and rapid changes. Intended to improve the overall quality of doctoral education in Europe, changes have focused more particularly on the shift from the master-apprentice model to structured doctorates. This was associated with: (i) embedding doctoral programmes at institutional level and optimising critical mass by establishing structures, such as doctoral/research or graduate schools, that nurture a dynamic research environment; (ii) ensuring the quality of supervision; and (iii) introducing more taught courses and transferable-skills provision to prepare doctoral students for both academic and non-academic careers. Elements of these changes are present at UCC.

Good supervision and a well-equipped research environment are two of the most critical factors that determine the quality of doctoral education and training. The team formed the view that, by and large, UCC provides such a supportive supervisory environment to its students and that good resources are available to conduct research, particularly in the research institutes and centres. Furthermore, some students are doing collaborative PhDs in industry, a positive development for all parties involved.

The team noted that the university strives to provide opportunities for doctoral students to pick up life-wide skills, and to make them employable and better citizens. The Odyssey programme, which provides career preparation for doctoral candidates and postdoctoral fellows, was particularly noted. This is supported by one staff member from Human Resources.

Several issues, however, require attention.

The number of doctoral students has been stagnant since 2008, most notably in comparison to UCC's growing undergraduate population. While the stagnation is related, in part, to unsteady national funding streams, it is an issue of concern for a university that prides itself on its research profile. The team was told that UCC has a target for the numbers of doctoral students but no strategy behind it yet.

Students reported that not all the taught modules are at third-cycle level. When queried about the fact that only 15 ECTS are required as taught modules, they noted that they did not wish to see this volume increase if the current teaching level remains unchanged. Some of the students had good ideas for improving these courses, including inviting guest lecturers to teach state-of-the-art modules in their disciplines. However, as in many other European universities, the doctoral students' voice is weak in university affairs as compared to that of undergraduates.

Most importantly, and consistent with many other aspects of UCC's decision-making, the responsibilities for doctoral education and training is multi-layered and distributed. Responsibilities are split between the university, the colleges, the schools, and the research institutes and centres (for

⁸ <https://eua.eu/resources/publications/626:salzburg-2005---conclusions-and-recommendations.html>

details on these, see Section 5.1). As a result, there is widespread consensus among students and the university leadership that both processes and expectations are too diverse. Common principles, when they exist, are sometimes ignored. Examples of this diversity abound: funding conditions; teaching opportunities and associated remuneration; opportunities for socialisation; mechanisms for monitoring doctoral students' progress. Importantly, information to students about expectations is not systematic. UCC is aware of all these issues. For instance, the university is looking into ways of unifying the funding of all students regardless of their primary funding source and is currently piloting a new mechanism for monitoring student progress. It is hoped that this will be implemented systematically across the university.

Responsibility for quality is distributed across several roles: the supervisor, the school (or the department when it still exists), the research centre in some cases, and the college. There are now committees at all levels to ensure quality. The decentralised approach has the merit of taking into account disciplinary differences but lacks oversight. The system relies on the good will of the person in charge and breaks down if that person does not keep up with UCC regulations. Recent workshops have revealed that some staff members were ignorant of some requirements and not aware of Irish trends in doctoral education.

In the team's view, a contributing factor to the diversity of practices can be attributed to the fact that those responsible for graduate studies work part time: at the college level, the associate deans work a single day per week; at the university level, the Dean of Graduate Studies works 50% of the time. The university has had difficulties in filling the latter post full-time because academics want to be able to continue their research and teaching activities. However, the universal use of part-time posts in this specific area means that it is difficult to gather everyone to discuss shared issues. It limits the capacity of staff to identify shared challenges and to develop and implement appropriate policies and processes.

There might be local solutions to the current arrangement regarding associate deans that UCC could explore. Re-establishing a full-time Dean of Graduate Studies would ensure systematic treatment of doctoral students and appropriate oversight. While it is important to have a PhD holder in this post, instead of an active researcher, someone interested in developing the concept of doctoral education and training could be appointed.

Although the team was not able to review the number and functions of doctoral schools across the university, their diversity or number might also contribute to the lack of a systematic approach. UCC might wish to review these structures in order to optimise systematic implementation of processes and policies, the delivery of taught modules, interdisciplinarity and social opportunities for doctoral students. The Quality Enhancement Office is planning a review of research degrees and might want to consider whether the creation of an overarching, university-wide graduate school would help systematise the approach.

Currently, the Vice President for Research and Innovation does not have statutory responsibilities for this area but is kept informed by the Dean of Graduate Studies, who reports directly to the DPR. This might constitute the best possible arrangement for UCC although it is at variance with the usual practice in Europe. It might be opportune to consider if the postholder should not be reporting to the Vice President for Research and Innovation in order to ensure a close link with the university's research strategy.

4.3 Recommendations

1. Conduct benchmarking of doctoral studies to examine and address, inter alia, how other European universities have filled the post of Graduate Studies Dean, their governance arrangements, the number and role of schools across a university, the delivery of taught modules, the funding mechanisms, the teaching and social opportunities provided to students, and the inclusion of students' voices in university affairs.
2. At undergraduate level:
 - It might be beneficial if students were given more autonomy in designing their own learning pathways.
 - As planned, consolidate the educational offer particularly in view of the financial constraints following COVID-19.
 - Promote and embed teaching innovations by sharing them across campus (e.g., via a special day to showcase teaching innovations).
 - Design a framework for the curricular review process and apply it across the institution.
 - Continue to address students' concerns over welfare services and accommodation.

5. Research

5.1 Key findings

Research at UCC is organised in research groups, research centres and research institutes. Some of these are interdisciplinary. In the humanities and social sciences for instance, the team was told that 60-70% of the funding comes from interdisciplinary groups. UCC encourages researchers to cluster where appropriate but this does not occur systematically, and the research strategy values equally the lone researchers.

The team was told that formally this area favours bottom-up processes with steering by the top. A committee – the Centre and Institute Committee (CIC) – was established seven years ago. There is a call each April looking for proposals for new clusters, or a centre that wants to become an institute. The key criteria are the unit's alignment to institutional priorities and their interdisciplinary track record. (SER supplemental information)

In 2014, a policy on the governance of research institutes, centres and units (RICUs) was developed to help integrate RICUs within the university organisation including, among others, RICU representation on college committees. This is still work in progress.

UCC serves as host to five of the seven national research centres funded by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI). SFI centres receive national funding and are based on a relationship with industry. They are under pressure from the government to produce innovation, commercialisation, etc. SFI expects universities to recruit academics for those centres. This can create tension when recruitment decisions have to be driven by teaching considerations. The core staff is funded through SFI, but UCC becomes responsible for them after three years even if the specific research funding stream has ended. This concerns about 1,000 people. It has not been an issue so far but in the current post-Covid context can become a risk.

Most (albeit not all) of the time, the relationship between SFI centres and school-based researchers works harmoniously and there is willingness to share research infrastructure. Furthermore, there are a number of shared technical platforms, including an animal facility and clinical research facilities managed by the university.

Colleges will annually host all their researchers for presentations and discussion about how to grow and strengthen clusters. This encourages interdisciplinarity, which is particularly evident in three institutes (Tyndall National Institute, Environmental Research Institute and APC Microbiome).

A central team of 11 staff supports grant applications and encourages some researchers to apply. Three colleges have an officer with the same role who works with the central office. The central team is responsible for providing oversight of around 850 contracts per year. PRIME is a group in the UCC Academy that can be called upon to manage large-scale research projects.

There is also significant support and mentoring to promote innovations. Anyone, from undergraduate students to postdocs, who is interested in entrepreneurship receives support and mentoring. A director of innovation covers technology transfer; administrative staff identify potential spin-out to capture intellectual property. Spin-out applications go through the Governing Body's Finance Committee. The team was told that the number of successful companies is very high and that a number of UCC spin-outs are maturing. There are several incubation centres and a project for developing a science park that would include a number of university buildings, mature companies and

start-ups. The research environment centred around UCC has drawn the attention of large companies (such as Facebook) who have set up laboratories in Cork.

As mentioned earlier (Chapter 3), UCC has conducted two university-wide research reviews and is planning a third one, which is described in the following terms:

each member of staff is asked to submit 2 articles for review providing a brief explanation as to why these are their most important outputs in the review period. In addition, a new qualitative section has been introduced to the assessment process that focuses on the impact of research via the articulation of case studies, moving away from a sole focus on quantitative metrics such as citations and impact factors. (Supplementation information to SER)

That being said, there are a few points of vigilance.

The team was impressed with the strategic vision laid out by the Vice President for Research and Innovation and her active involvement in national discussions on Irish research, but UCC's research strategy is essentially bottom-up and driven by funding opportunities. A third of UCC's budget is externally funded research, including industry-sponsored research, and the potential Covid-related economic downturn constitutes a major risk ahead.

Regarding the link between research and teaching, the university is aware that there is a lack of systematic connection between research strengths and teaching offers. For instance, there are no teaching programmes associated with the very successful APC Microbiome Institute, and areas of research strengths have not been leveraged into study programmes in a systematic way. This needs to be developed through the Connected Curriculum. In addition, there is an aspiration to extend research opportunities to undergraduate students. This is work in progress.

The team was told that research centres and institutes have had difficulties convincing the university to create specific posts for some of their promising and talented young researchers who are on fixed-term contracts. If finances allow, it would be useful to review the university's position with respect to that issue, with the goal of ensuring an effective talent pipeline, particularly in view of the promotion challenges and the reported reluctance of some colleges to recruit younger academics (Section 2.5).

5.2 Recommendations

1. Develop an institutional research strategy:
 - Identify priorities, building on existing research strengths and new emerging fields.
 - Determine the basic research structures and who is in charge (group, department, schools, institutes, colleges).
 - Develop the use of seed funding and establish targeted support.
2. Manage early researchers' careers to ensure an effective talent pipeline.
3. Continue the implementation of the 2014 RICUs' governance policy.

6. Service to society

6.1 Key findings

Due to the unusual circumstances of this evaluation (Section 1.4), the team was unable to meet with the usual range of stakeholders such as civic and industry leaders, NGOs, etc. Nevertheless, the topic of civic engagement was broached with a number of interviewees and was discussed in various documents that the team reviewed, most notably the SER. The university has a dedicated Civic Engagement Plan.

It is noteworthy that the regional role of UCC is inscribed in the university's overall strategy and that there is a specific strategic plan for this area.

Engagement with industry is strong, as demonstrated by the congruence of the regional economic strengths and UCC's research strengths. (See Section 1.2 for further details) This is particularly true in food, pharmacology and computer science. Covid-19 is already hurting some private companies, and UCC is pro-actively reaching out to them to emphasise the importance of continuity in their partnerships.

Amongst the many different ways that UCC demonstrates its social commitment, the adult continuing education activities and the commitment to a Green Campus and to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are most significant. Adult education is community-based and delivered through 52 outreach centres in 15 towns across Ireland. Since 2001, 16,760 students have graduated from these programmes, with over 1,500 progressing to mainstream programmes within UCC. (SER, p. 36) UCC published a Sustainability Strategy in 2016, which is "student-led, research-informed and practice-focused". (SER, p. 11)

UCC offers digital badges, which are very successful. The university plans to develop a framework enabling the accumulation of badges toward a degree.

Community engagement is encouraged and results in a number of activities that involve students and staff such as:

- staff sitting on the board of NGOs and working with local groups;
- students engaging in social causes (albeit only from some parts of the university);
- significant number of staff invited by ministries or the government to chair national committees and contributing to national policies;
- regular participation of staff in media to comment on public life;
- a number of schools and colleges having external advisory boards;
- UCC's contribution to the cultural life of the region through, inter alia, the Cork University Press, the Glucksman and the Jennings galleries, and the Granary Theatre.

That being said, the team notes four points of vigilance:

- Lifelong learning (LLL), adult education and continuing professional development (CPD) are disconnected from degree programmes. This limits the impact that pedagogy used in these activities (notably the use of distance of learning) can contribute to degree programmes.

- Community engagement is patchy across the university. In particular, some schools do not see LLL as part of their missions.
- There is no consensus yet on the impact that the new Munster Technological University (MTU) will have (see Section 1.2). Some UCC staff feel that nothing will change and that the good cooperation between UCC and CIT will continue and extend to IT Tralee; others feel that, when choosing a university, parents and students will not understand the differences between UCC and the future MTU. In the view of the team, there is no question that MTU and UCC should be working together for the benefit of the region and the country. However, MTU's creation is bound to have a knock-on effect on UCC's regional positioning as, hitherto, the only university in the south west.
- The core principle of UCC's academic strategy is to bring together research, student learning and civic and community engagement. This is very positive, but the level of societal engagement varies with different programmes. It could be integrated more systematically as part of active learning opportunities and targeted research activities.

6.2 Recommendations

1. Integrate community engagement in curricula and research (the Green Campus initiative is a model for such an integrated approach) and ensure that there is one university-wide body looking at the integration of the three missions.
2. Extend advisory boards across the university.
3. Given that UCC's immediate future will involve the further development of hybrid learning, good use should be made of experience gained in LLL programmes.
4. UCC's strategy should be re-examined in the light of the creation of Munster Technological University (MTU) and decisions taken about the shape of further cooperation with that institution.

7. Internationalisation

7.1 Key findings

UCC views internationalisation as a very important dimension of its teaching and research activities. Thus, internationalisation is one of the six elements of the Connected Curriculum and global citizenship that has been identified as one of the graduate attributes that students should attain at university. These would be implemented through a combination of cross-border and “internationalisation at home” activities.

Currently 18% of students are international. This is a good percentage overall, but the team noted that it can reach 100% in some postgraduate programmes.

Recently, UCC joined the international network of port city universities and applied for the European University Initiative as part of the UNIC consortium. After the delivery of the oral report, the team learned that the UNIC proposal has been successful. These two activities have a significant potential for expanding the international network of UCC and providing opportunities for research and educational partnerships, as well as staff and student exchange. Similarly, the Green Campus and the commitment to SDG have the potential to add to UCC’s international attractiveness.

However, the team formed the view that the impact of internationalisation and European engagement is diluted due to two key factors. Firstly, a comprehensive internationalisation strategy is not in place yet. In the past, UCC would allow individual initiatives to flourish. This has led to partnerships that are difficult to justify today (e.g., involvement in the “Future University Europe”, an initiative from Egypt, a country that is not one of the geographical targets of UCC). Secondly, there is a pattern of distributed engagement, with many staff having part of the responsibility for this area, and limited coordination overall. In addition, the recruitment role of UCC Academy is contested in some quarters. UCC has approved the creation of a vice presidency for “Global Relations”, which should be filled in spring 2021.

Other aspects requiring attention include the tendency for UCC to recruit its academic staff from amongst its students. Although there is a good proportion of international staff in research institutes and centres, it is difficult for them to get permanent positions at the university. (See Sections 2.5 and 5.1)

In addition, outgoing and incoming mobility of undergraduate students causes an imbalance in favour of incoming mobility. This is the usual pattern for English-speaking countries, but the team was told that the situation at UCC is further aggravated by the rigidity of many curricula, which limit the opportunity for students to carve out a period of overseas studies. In addition to challenges in recognition of courses completed abroad, students also reported that information about international opportunities must be sought out.

The future of internationalisation post-Covid (and post-Brexit) is a question, particularly given the overreliance on international postgraduate students in some programmes (the average across the university is 31% but some units reach 100%). Colleges can use international student fees as a source of revenue. It will be incumbent on the university to ensure that the academic quality of recruitment does not decrease in a context where international student exchange will be challenging.

Although there is no accommodation for international graduate students with families, it is not clear to the team if this is a limiting factor for recruiting research students.

7.2 Recommendations

Internationalisation is as important and positive a lever for enhancing the quality of universities as are quality enhancement processes. They allow universities to open up to alternative approaches and to benchmark their activities. It is in this spirit that the following recommendations are provided:

1. Develop an institutional internationalisation strategy; use the Green Campus as a central feature for increasing the international attractiveness of the university.
2. Review the responsibilities for internationalisation across the university and ensure a better coordination amongst staff.
3. Reduce obstacles to outgoing mobility by:
 - addressing the rigidity of the curriculum and recognition challenges;
 - informing students better about international opportunities;
 - ensuring optimal recognition, which requires finding the appropriate balance between what is decided centrally and locally.
4. Intensify efforts to recruit academic staff internationally (e.g., by providing more attractive packages and, when possible and appropriate, tenure posts to international researchers).

8. Conclusion

8.1 Concluding remarks

This report provides a range of recommendations on all the aspects that are central to the IEP approach. This section synthesises them, highlighting some important concepts to contribute to UCC's view of its future.

In the team's view, the first step for UCC is to come to a shared view about the profile of the university, particularly as it seeks to balance:

- specialisation and comprehensiveness;
- research, teaching and service to society;
- numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students and an equal concern with both categories;
- centralisation and decentralisation of academic decision-making processes;
- the university's regional roots and its international aspirations.

In the team's view, the Green Campus holds great potential to sharpen the profile of UCC in providing opportunities to integrate all three missions of universities – research, teaching and learning, and service to society – within both a local and international dimension.

Regardless of the strategic choices that UCC will make, future success will be determined by the university's capacity to build a stronger sense of affiliation by harmonising practices across the university and addressing the resistance to cross-subsidies from some quarters. This will require developing a sense of shared destiny, ensuring that funding is secure and promoting transparency, accountability and responsibility across all functions and units.

The scale of the current Covid-19 crisis demands rapid change. This is now a question of survival for many universities around the world. Commenting on the current situation, the Canadian researcher Alex Usher noted that institutional “plans predicated on stability are now disrupted with some pretty massive instability. There is space here for radical positive change. There is also space for potentially significant losses as well.” He adds that, at the very least, all universities will have to re-examine their strategies without necessarily re-doing them. Specifically, they should:

stress-test existing strategies against higher income volatility and gauge the appetite internally for conservative vs. aggressive strategies to respond to the new situation. Institutions can either do it explicitly, separately from the budget process. Or they can just do it implicitly through the kinds of cuts they make. The former is tiring . . . but I would argue infinitely preferable as it keeps strategy as a public object, subject to norms of collegiality.⁹

This re-examination requires, as a first step, confronting the obstacles to change. The team was told that major obstacles to changes at UCC include the university's *Principal Statute*, which inhibit change by providing too many checks and balances for effective and nimble decision-making;¹⁰ a culture of both risk averseness and conflict avoidance; and low expectations about the role of academic heads

⁹ <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/One-Thought-to-Start-Your-Day--Re-Setting-Strategy-After-a-Punch-in-the-Mouth.html?soid=1103080520043&aid=ajAymqORr1U>

¹⁰ UCC, *Principal Statute*, (adopted on 20 October 2009)

(colleges, schools, departments) in bringing about change by implementing strategic priorities and making recommendations based on internal and external reviews. The lack of funding reserve further curtails the capacity to strategically steer the university. Changing these aspects is challenging but the team suggests that the following actions would put UCC on a good trajectory:

- Investing in people: ensuring a gender-balanced and suitable talent pipeline, and empowering staff by conducting performance appraisals and recognising change agents;
- Developing a rolling strategy and action plan, ensuring that goals are realistic, and reviewing the location of the strategic planning office in the organisation chart to ensure its effectiveness and centrality;
- Using the results from the quality enhancement reviews and improving the use of KPIs and of the institutional dashboard;
- Leveraging internationalisation for change through:
 - benchmarking at different levels (e.g. university, disciplines, administrative functions);
 - setting up a university international advisory board.¹¹

The team is convinced that UCC has the capacity to move quickly and make appropriate change as its response to the Covid shutdown illustrates. Through this experience, UCC gained in confidence, focus and determination to respond to change and to learn about effective subsidiarity and accountability, as demonstrated in the 2020 Interim Status Report on UCC's academic strategy. The team notes positively that the status report envisages that some of the adjustments, modifications and innovations developed in response to the Covid-19 will be integrated into the strategy.

The team wishes UCC well and looks forward to receiving in one year's time a brief progress report on whether and how the recommendations contained in this report, and recapitulated below, have been addressed.

8.2 Summary of the recommendations

1. UCC can no longer afford to continue to debate the "schoolification" process, which has been under review for the past 20 years, particularly given the need to focus attention on negotiating the Covid-19 crisis. Should UCC decide that some departments can survive, it should ensure that their existence is supported by rigorous evidence and that they are reviewed at regular intervals (e.g., every five years) by an international committee.
2. Whether in its current structure or in a reformed one, the university is urged to adhere to the following principles:
 - Be consistent in the observance of university rules and regulations regarding the structures;
 - Be consistent in operation of the quality assurance system, including student feedback;
 - Limit the number of committees and reduce the number of iterations around a single policy proposal;

¹¹ UCC could draw on the Irish diaspora to populate this Board.

- Ensure a single structure of administrative support across all the units within a college;
 - Clarify and strengthen the role of colleges, provide a mandate letter to all academic unit heads and hold them to account;
 - Establish clear accountability principles/performance appraisal for the whole chain of heads (departments, schools, colleges) up to the Deputy President and Registrar;
 - Ensure the robustness and timeliness of the internal communication to mitigate the spread of wrong information on campus (e.g., with respect to workloads) and improve the systematic implementation of policies and regulations.
3. Reconsider the balance between the need for swift decision-making and preserving academic collegiality by taking the following actions:
 - Establish a small executive team that will meet weekly and will include key academic and administrative staff;
 - Reconsider the boundaries between UMTO and ALF and the existence of UMTS (the latter could be folded in UMTO). This includes re-examining the number, composition (including student representation), roles and linkages of the different university committees;
 - Establish terms of reference and a sunset clause for all committees.
 4. Re-examine resource allocation to support strategic goals. This includes looking at the recruitment and promotion process (e.g., ensuring a regular promotion cycle; revising the criteria for promotion; introducing more flexible academic contracts, with different weights for the criteria, to tailor them to individual development goals over a career).
 5. Address students' concerns regarding the impact of student representation (especially focusing on doctoral students' representation in university bodies) as a matter of priority.
 6. Ensure the accountability of school administrators who should be reporting to their college administrators.
 7. UCC is encouraged to pursue its efforts in embedding further its internal quality processes in the university's decision-making processes through:
 - requiring the involvement of the next hierarchical level of any unit being reviewed. For instance, the schools' and colleges' self-evaluation reports should be signed off by the college heads and the colleges' self-evaluation report by the university (senior executive team or DPR). Similarly, the same hierarchical level should have oversight of the follow up;
 - reviewing the granularity of reports that are sent to the executive leadership team, the Governing Body and AC, to ensure that they are receiving the information that they need to make decisions.
 8. Consider broadening the focus of the school and college reviews to include a discussion of research (e.g., the research strategy of the unit; its alignment with UCC's strategy, mission and goals; the link between research and teaching for both undergraduate and postgraduate students; the management of research activities and use of research results; and the tools used by the unit to measure its research impact).

9. Improve the use of student surveys. As a first step, benchmark with other European universities that have managed them successfully. Work with students to develop consistent mechanisms that will ensure that they receive information about the student survey results and subsequent actions taken.
10. Develop an exit survey of graduating students and ensure the effectiveness of all tracking instruments, such as alumni and graduate destination surveys.
11. Ensure that benchmarking is undertaken systematically to inform self-evaluation processes and to enhance the quality of activities across the University. The same process could be encouraged at university level where benchmarking could be used thematically, to emulate the specific strengths of selected universities (e.g., internationalisation, research, student-centredness).
12. Conduct benchmarking of doctoral studies to examine and address, inter alia, how other European universities have filled the post of Graduate Studies Dean, their governance arrangements, the number and role of schools across a university, the delivery of taught modules, the funding mechanisms, the teaching and social opportunities provided to students, and the inclusion of students' voices in university affairs.
13. At undergraduate level:
 - It might be beneficial if students were given more autonomy in designing their own learning pathways.
 - As planned, consolidate the educational offer, particularly in view of the financial constraints following COVID-19.
 - Promote and embed teaching innovations by sharing them across campus (e.g., via a special day to showcase teaching innovations).
 - Design a framework for the curricular review process and apply it across the institution.
 - Continue to address students' concerns over welfare services and accommodation.
14. Develop an institutional research strategy:
 - Identify priorities, building on existing research strengths and new emerging fields;
 - Determine the basic research structures and who is in charge (group, department, schools, institutes, colleges);
 - Develop the use of seed funding and establish targeted support.
15. Manage early researchers' careers to ensure an effective talent pipeline.
16. Continue the implementation of the 2014 RICUs' governance policy.
17. Integrate community engagement in curricula and research (the Green Campus initiative is a model for such an integrated approach), and ensure that there is one university-wide body looking at the integration of the three missions.
18. Extend advisory boards across the university.
19. Given that UCC's immediate future will involve the further development of hybrid learning, good use should be made of experience gained in LLL programmes.

20. UCC's strategy should be re-examined in the light of the creation of Munster Technological University (MTU) and decisions taken about the shape of further cooperation with that institution.
21. Develop an institutional internationalisation strategy; use the Green Campus as a central feature for increasing the international attractiveness of the university.
22. Review the responsibilities for internationalisation across the university and ensure a better coordination amongst staff.
23. Reduce obstacles to outgoing mobility by:
 - addressing the rigidity of the curriculum and recognition challenges;
 - informing students better about international opportunities;
 - ensuring optimal recognition, which requires finding the appropriate balance between what is decided centrally and locally.
24. Intensify efforts to recruit academic staff internationally (e.g., by providing more attractive packages and, when possible and appropriate, tenure posts to international researchers).

9. Annex 1: Schedule of Online Meetings

28 April	
17.00 – 18.30	IEP Team internal meeting
11 May	
10.00 – 10.30	IEP Team internal meeting
11.00 – 12:30	President, Patrick O’Shea
14.00 – 15.30	IEP Team internal meeting
15.00 – 16.30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. President, Patrick O’Shea 2. Deputy President and Registrar, John O’Halloran 3. Vice President for Research and Innovation, Anita Maguire
13 May	
10.00 – 10.30	IEP Team internal meeting
11.00 – 12.30	SER steering committee <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deputy President and Registrar, John O’Halloran (SC Chair) 2. Bursar and Chief Financial Officer, Diarmuid Collins 3. Director of Projects, Niamh Connolly 4. Director, Quality Enhancement Unit, Elizabeth Noonan
14.00 – 15.30	Vice-President for Learning and Teaching, Paul McSweeney
18 May	
08.00 – 08.30	IEP Team internal meeting
14.00 – 15.00	Interim Head of College, Science, Engineering & Food Science Sarah Culloty
15.30 – 16.30	Head of College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences Chris Williams
21 May	
09.00 – 10.00	Head of College, Business and Law, Ursula Kilkelly
10.30 – 11.30	Head of College, Medicine and Health, Helen Whelton
16.00 – 17.30	President, Patrick O’Shea
22 May	
16.30 – 17.00	IEP Team internal meeting
25 May	
08.30 – 09.00	IEP Team internal meeting
09.30 – 10.30	Meeting with University Liaison, Niamh Connolly and Sarah O’Riordan (logistics)
11.00 – 12.00	Corporate Secretary, Nora Geary
12.30 – 13.30	Director, Quality Enhancement Unit, Elizabeth Noonan
14.00 – 14.50	Director, Human Resources, Barry O’Brien
26 May	
09.00 – 09.30	Director, Information Services & University Librarian, John FitzGerald
10.30 – 11.30	Bursar and Chief Financial Officer, Diarmuid Collins
15.00 – 16.00	Director, Buildings and Estates, Mark Poland
27 May	
13.00 – 14.00	Director, Recruitment & Admissions (with responsibility for internationalisation), Jennifer Murphy
15.00 – 16.00	Vice President for Research and Innovation, Anita Maguire
16.10 – 17.00	Vice President (acting) for External Relations, Paul McSweeney

1 June	
15.00 – 15.30	IEP Team internal meeting
2 June	
09.30 – 10.30	Dean, Graduate Studies, Ruth Ramsey
14.00 – 15.00	Associate Vice President, Director of European Relations and Public Affairs, Jean van Sinderen-Law
15.30 – 16.30	Student representatives (with specific responsibilities/roles/portfolios) President of UCC Student's Union, Ben Dunlea Education Officer of UCC Student's Union, Catherine Dawson President of UCC Societies 2019/20, Kayla Maher President of UCC Societies 2020/21, Adam Burke President of UCC Clubs, Daniel Moloney
3 June	
14.00 – 15.00	CASSS and SEFS students Nicola Dineen, CACSSS (undergraduate) Marcus Gerard Hogan, CACSSS (undergraduate) Lauren Andrews, SEFS (undergraduate) Stephen O'Riordan, SEFS (undergraduate) Assif Ferrao SEFS, (postgraduate)
4 June	
09.00 – 10.00	Chair, Governing Body Finance Committee, Dermot O'Mahoney
12.00 – 13.00	SEFS PhD candidates Vlad Ionescu SEFS Alison O'Shea SEFS
14.30 – 15.30	Director of Student Experience, Paul Moriarty
15.30 – 16.30	Director of Tyndall National Institute, William Scanlon
5 June	
09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with University Liaison, Niamh Connolly and Sarah O'Riordan (logistics)
9 June	
09.30 – 10.30	Chair, Governing Body, Catherine Day
15.30 – 16.30	Stephen Byrne, Head of the School of Pharmacy Andrew Wheeler, Head of the School of Biological, Earth & Environmental Sciences Don Ross, Head of the School of Society, Politics, and Ethics
16.45 – 18.15	Deputy President and Registrar, John O'Halloran
15 June	
12.00 – 13.00	PhD candidates Niamh O'Mahoney (SEFS) Michael Hofer-Robinson (CACSSS) Michael B Vaughan (CoMH)
14.00 – 15.00	CACSSS & SEFS Academics Billy O'Brien – Vice Head (Teaching and Learning), CACSSS; School of Human Environment: Geography, Archaeology and Classics (Department of Archaeology)

	<p>Helena Buffery – Vice Head (Research), CACSSS; School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures (Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies)</p> <p>Martin Howard – Associate Dean (Global), CACSSS; School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures (Department of French)</p> <p>Mairead Kiely – HoS Food and Nutritional Sciences, SEFS</p> <p>Brian O’Gallachoir – Energy Engineering, SEFS, and Co-Director of SFI MaREI Centre</p> <p>Kellie Dean – Biochemistry, SEFS</p> <p>Bryan Kelleher – Physics, SEFS</p> <p>Orla Lynch – Associate Dean (Graduate Studies), CACSSS; School of Society, Politics and Ethics (Department of Sociology and Criminology)</p>
15.30 – 16.30	<p>UCC Business & Law & CoMH Academics</p> <p>Mark Hutchinson, Chair of Finance, Cork University Business School</p> <p>Thomas Lawton, Strategy and International Business and Director of the Global Competitiveness Institute, Cork University Business School</p> <p>Nicole Müller, Head of Speech and Hearing Sciences, CoMH</p> <p>Frank Burke, Vice Dean for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, CoMH</p> <p>Paula O’Leary, Dean, School of Medicine, CoMH</p>
16 June	
14.30 – 15.30	<p>Directors of Research Centres</p> <p>Jerry Murphy, Co-Director, MaREI Centre</p> <p>Geraldine Boylan, Director, INFANT Centre</p>
16.00 – 17.00	UCC Assistant Registrar & Academic Secretary, Paul O’Donovan
18 June	
09.00 – 10.00	SWOT Facilitator for UCC quality reviews, Human Resources dept, Anne Gannon
13.30 – 14.00	IEP Team internal meeting
19 June	
10.00 – 11.15	UCC Liaison, Niamh Connolly
22 June	
13.30 – 17.30	IEP Team prepares oral report
25 June	
12.30 – 14.30	IEP Team prepares oral report
26 June	
09.00 – 10.00	Deputy President and Registrar, John O’Halloran, substituting for President Patrick O’Shea (on leave)
10.00 – 10.30	IEP Team internal meeting
10.30 – 12.00	Presentation of the oral report to UCC

10. Annex 2: Acronyms and abbreviations

AC	Academic Council
ALF	Academic Leadership Forum
B&L	College of Business and Law
CACSSC	College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences
CIC	Centres & Institutes Committee
CIT	Cork Institute of Technology
DPR	Deputy President and Registrar
GB	Governing Body
HRS4R	Human Resources Excellence in Research Award
IoT	Institute of Technology
IT Tralee	Institute of Technology, Tralee
M&H	College of Medicine and Health
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
QQI	Quality Qualifications Ireland
RICU	Research institutes/centres/units
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SEFS	College of Science, Engineering & Food Science
SFI	Science Foundation Ireland
TU	Technological University
UCC	University College Cork
UMTO	University Management Team Operations
UMTS	University Management Team Strategy