

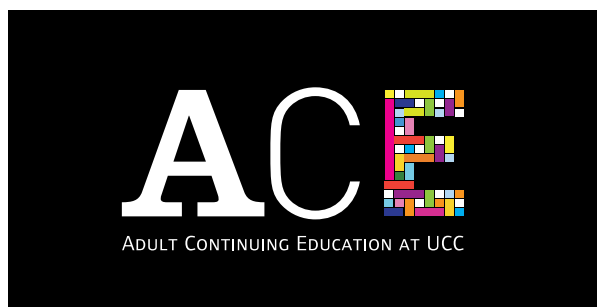
DELIVERING UCC'S ADULT EDUCATION & LIFELONG LEARNING MISSION: 2013-2017

Strategic Plan:
Centre For Adult Continuing
Education (ACE)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Strategic Plan was developed in the context of the historical legacy of ACE as Ireland's longest established Irish university lifelong learning centre and its potential role in a rapidly transforming Irish university sector. It sets out a set of strategies for ACE in line with University College Cork's strategic plan Sustaining Excellence 2013-2017 and in line with international best practice in lifelong learning.

The ACE mission is underpinned by a commitment to engage in international scholarship and research in lifelong learning theory and practice. This approach guides its four domains of activity aimed at delivering to national and international norms of best practice for a university based lifelong learning institute. These four key activity domains are:

- 1. Outward Engagement;**
- 2. Access/Progression;**
- 3. Incubation and Innovation;**
- 4. Executive Education/CPD.**

Focusing on these four domains will enable ACE to operate more efficiently and effectively for the university and also to measure its own development and progress in relation to well-defined objectives and areas of activity.

INTRODUCTION

ACE is the longest established dedicated centre for adult and lifelong learning in the Irish university system. Lifelong learning began at UCC in 1946. Given its long history ACE has a special place in the Irish education system. However, it faces the same challenges as similar university adult and lifelong learning institutions throughout the developed world. It has to be responsive to the needs of learners and society in a fluid modernity, which is presenting new and complex challenges not just for universities, but for the very concepts on which they are premised. In the face of these challenges the European University Association adopted a charter for lifelong learning in 2008. In developing a model for lifelong learning in a university operating in the higher echelons of the university system internationally, that charter can offer a very useful set of principles around which to conceive adult and lifelong learning and on which to develop a model for the delivery of best practice in the contemporary era.

The European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning has ten key points against which it anticipates that European universities benchmark the delivery of their lifelong learning missions:

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES' CHARTER ON LIFELONG LEARNING

- Embedding concepts of widening access and lifelong learning in their institutional strategies
- Providing education and learning to a diversified student population
- Adapting study programmes to ensure that they are designed to widen participation and attract returning adult learners
- Providing appropriate guidance and counselling services
- Recognising prior learning
- Embracing lifelong learning in quality culture
- Strengthening the relationship between research, teaching and innovation in a perspective of lifelong learning
- Consolidating reforms to promote a flexible and creative learning environment for all students
- Developing partnerships at local, regional, national and international level to provide attractive and relevant programmes
- Acting as role models of lifelong learning institutions

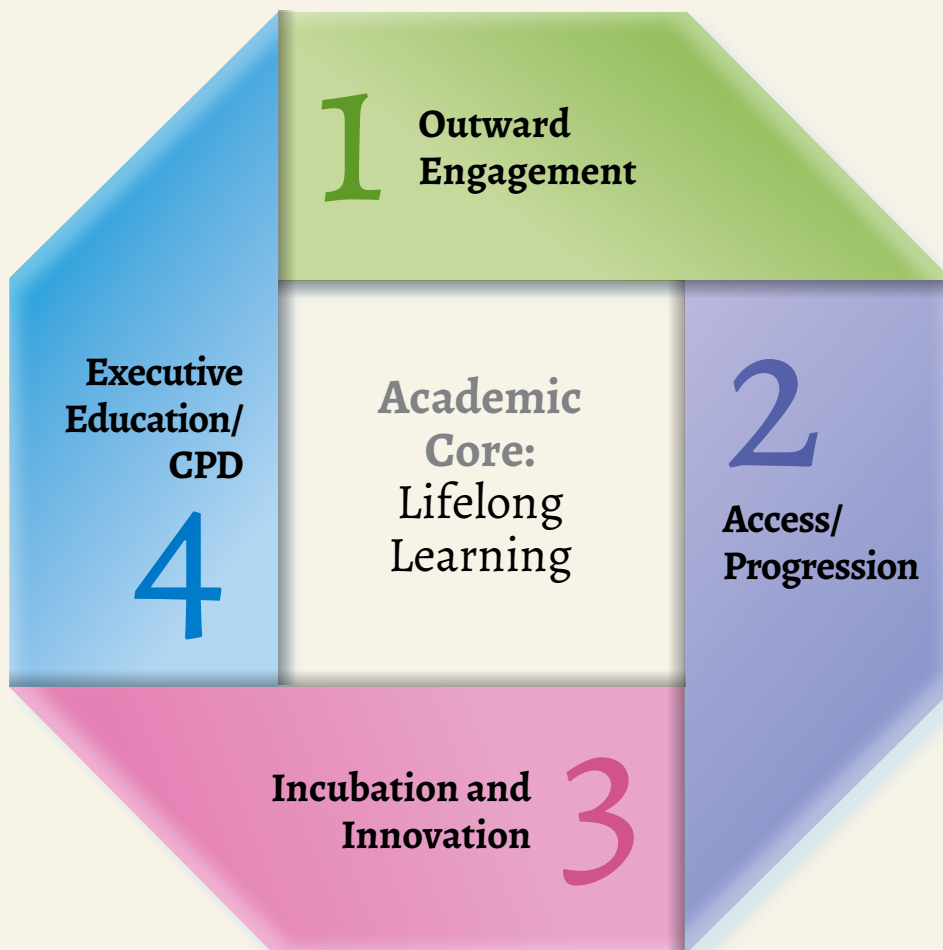
It is the ambition of this strategic plan to outline ways in which ACE can deliver on this charter for UCC to ensure that the adult and lifelong learning mission at the university is conceived, understood, and delivered in line with best international practice. The mission for ACE will revolve around four key pillars of activity, contextualised in scholarship and best practice in lifelong learning. This mission fits with its traditional role, the emerging needs in the sector and the strategic direction of the university and is in line with the reports of both external and internal reviews on ACE conducted in 2012 (Gaetz; Peer Group Report (Quality); Ó Tuama, Séamus (2012) *Internal Review of the Centre for Adult Continuing Education (ACE)* [June 2012].

The four key activity domains are:

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2. Access/Progression;
3. Incubation and Innovation;
4. Executive Education/CPD.

Focusing on these four core missions will enable ACE to operate more efficiently and effectively for the university and also to measure its own development and progress in relation to well-defined objectives and areas of activity.

The Four Key Activity Domains



ACADEMIC CORE: LIFELONG LEARNING

The ACE mission must be contextualised within international scholarship and research in lifelong learning and best practice. This is distinct from the four domains of activity, but is a key element for ensuring that ACE delivers its mission to the national and international norms of a university based lifelong learning institute.

In addition, we share this view that ‘a focus on lifelong learning also helps the University meet some of its other needs, including a) external engagement with the community, b) access and c) revenue generation.’ (PRG 2012: 7)

It also fits closely with the university’s strategic plan *Sustaining Excellence: 2013-2017*, which privileges the highest levels of scholarship: teaching, learning and research as the fundamentals of its first two strategic goals.

As a university based adult education and lifelong learning centre it is essential for ACE to operate in the context of the wider teaching, research and general scholarship appropriate to a university which is ‘now ranked in the top 2% of universities worldwide based on the quality of our research output and peer esteem’ (*Sustaining Excellence: 8*). This means that ACE’s mission must be premised on engagement with international scholarship in adult education, adult learning and lifelong learning.

While ACE holds a unique place in the history of lifelong learning, it has slipped significantly in the national pecking order in terms of scholarship around adult learning. Its contribution to academic literature has diminished significantly in the post-2005 period. This is understandable given the context, but it has to re-emerge as a significant part of ACE’s role in the future. The lifelong learning field is well serviced by non-university level

providers. It is not in the strategic interests of UCC to engage at levels inappropriate for a university. To do so, would ultimately damage its brand and would not lead to a sustainable model for growth and development in line with international norms.

The principle mark of university engagement in adult and lifelong learning is that it draws on the excellence of its academic units, it delivers programmes based on best practice in the field and it contributes to the development of both scholarship and practice around adult and lifelong learning. At present UCC is only partially reaching these benchmarks.

PRAXIS: COMBINING THEORY AND PRACTICE

ACE has developed adult learning practices that are of a very high standard and some of the centre’s approaches have been recognised as state-of-the-art both within Ireland and in the international context. Aligning this high level of practice with the wider theoretical discussions within the field could bring significant gains to delivery and practice within the centre itself, but it would also proactively inform best practice across the university in a field that will continue to grow significantly over the next two decades. UCC is significantly behind other Irish universities in this field. We need to begin a process where the academic and research dimensions of scholarship around adult learning is driven from within ACE, for the wider benefit of UCC. This needs to be framed and understood in the same way as scholarship in all other disciplines operating in the university is promoted and developed. In ACE’s case we are beginning from a considerably lower baseline.

ACADEMIC CORE: LIFELONG LEARNING

In order to achieve its scholarship agenda ACE will need to address both its practices and underlying philosophy. Firstly there has to be an explicit commitment to incorporating adult and lifelong education scholarship into the core business of ACE. This must include staff development for existing staff and more explicit scholarship related criteria in recruitment statements for new staff. There will have to be greater engagement with national and international scholarship networks, including other Irish universities, but also through active engagement with ESREA (European Society for Research on the Education of Adults) and EUCEN (European Universities Continuing Education Network) and other international organisations and networks.

Through research leadership, capacity building, engagement and recruitment ACE will begin to contribute to the literature nationally and ultimately internationally in a manner similar to mainstream university academic units. The role of the Director has consistently been framed as one with 'an academic and research background' (Buckley Report: 6) and offering leadership for research within ACE 'there is a need to develop and nurture the scholarship of lifelong learning, and the leadership of a professorship will enhance and enable this' (Gaetz Report: 12). This is further underlined in the recent quality report, which outlined a role for the Director, which includes research leadership: ***'We recommend that the role of Director is refocused to embrace a senior university advocacy role, a regional ambassadorial role and a research leadership role' (PRG Report 2012: 16)***

ACE is well positioned to develop and disseminate theoretical and empirical research on adult and lifelong learning based on its long tradition of delivering adult education in line with best practice. It also has a diversity of programmes, which gives it a deeper set of experiences than many university based adult education and lifelong learning institutes.

Building on an enhanced emphasis on scholarship will help inform the philosophy, practice and delivery of adult and continuing education programmes at UCC. Internal collaboration between ACE and academics in the four Colleges, could enhance the richness of the scholarship at ACE and also bring important knowledge and insights back to the collaborating units and infuse practice across the university with learning from the theory and practices of the education of adults and adult learning. This enriching of practice through closer engagement with scholarship must also extend to the extensive network of lecturers engaged by ACE in the delivery of its mission, including those operating in outreach centres.

1

GOAL

Establish ACE as a centre with a mission to engage in scholarship on adult education and learning.

2

STRATEGIES

- 1 Implementation of the Research Leadership role of the Director.
- 2 Progress towards a new paradigm for Coordinators.
- 3 Engage with other Irish universities to develop a national, EUCEN supported ULL Network (University Lifelong Learning Network).
- 4 Explicit recognition of the value of scholarship within ACE and acceptance of this function by the University.

3

PROJECTS

- 1 Initiate staff in-service development and appropriate recruitment statements for new posts.
- 2 Create university-wide adult education and learning forum to build research capacity and research collaboration.
- 3 Collaborate with NUIM on developing the research and scholarship agenda on adult education and learning.
- 4 Develop and implement an ACE research and publications strategy.
- 5 Link with EUCEN and ESREA partnerships to gain inclusion on pan-European research consortia.

4

TARGET

To make ACE the unit responsible for driving scholarship on adult education and learning at UCC, with a national reputation for excellence.

ACCESS & PROGRESSION

ACCESS AND PROGRESSION

Adult education, then termed extramural education, began at UCC in 1946. In its original mission it was not focused on access and progression as it would be understood today. However, in establishing a new paradigm within the Irish university sector, UCC demonstrated that it was more innovative and responsive to societal needs than any other Irish university. Adult and lifelong learning have increased in importance as the educational needs of the 21st century require us to constantly recreate our mission to meet complex and rapid changes.

The context in which we will operate in the coming two decades is one where there will be a greater need to mobilise all of society to meet the sorts of challenges that have been identified by the European Union in its vision for Horizon 2020:

... to help address major concerns shared by all Europeans such as climate change, developing sustainable transport and mobility, making renewable energy more affordable, ensuring food safety and security, or coping with the challenge of an ageing population (Horizon 2020).

In all of these thematic fields and in the additional challenges of developing a resilient and sustainable society in which all citizens play a role, the educational systems will be called on to be increasingly innovative, flexible and responsive. We have all the building blocks to ensure that UCC remains at the forefront in meeting these challenges, but it will require greater coherence in terms of driving that mission, using ACE's experience and expertise in conjunction with the resources of an internationally significant multidisciplinary university. UCC is still the national leader in university led lifelong learning:

SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE 2013-2017

- *continue commitment to enhancing accessibility for all students and widening participation through an inclusive environment that embraces diversity and equality (15).*
- *create further opportunities for increasing participation in outreach, lifelong learning and continuing professional development (16).*
- *forge stronger relationships with employers, professional bodies, industry and the community to anticipate their future needs in relevant courses, programmes and expertise (21).*

We continue to exceed national targets for the provision of part-time education primarily through the strengths of our Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE), and in 2012 over 20% of new undergraduate entrants were enrolled on part-time courses, successful outreach and access programmes (Sustaining Excellence: 6).

The UCC strategic plan for Sustaining Excellence: 2013-17 incorporates this vision:

The advent of the Bologna process presents universities with possibilities for innovation through such tools as credit accumulation, the recognition of prior learning, non-formal and informal learning, continuity and progression pathways and enhanced opportunities for interdisciplinarity to help them re-tool for the changing dynamics of the 21st century.

While the top European universities are placing greater emphasis on lifelong learning, Ireland is better placed than most European countries as it has already developed the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which provides a way to compare qualifications in line with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). This presents Ireland with a competitive advantage vis-à-vis other European countries and provides UCC with a significant opportunity to become not just a national leader in lifelong learning, but an exemplar for innovation in lifelong education and training internationally.

The challenges for ACE and UCC as an institution are to engage a more proactive commitment to recognizing prior learning, to continue to develop more flexible delivery options (both in terms of the use of technology and blended learning and how credits are accumulated) and to renew its commitment to access for mature learners, especially for those seeking second chance access.

ACE's mission as one of UCC's chief access routes is not always acknowledged or recognised, this needs to be made far more visible, both to aid entry by prospective students and also to raise awareness in all academic units about ACE's capacity and role in this area. The lack of targeted funds for access is also a major problem as it means ACE programmes are very often not viable in the areas of most need and potential highest benefit for adult learners, the wider community and UCC.

At present ACE's access and outreach missions are not as extensive geographically and socio-economically as they were in the past. Significant reasons for this decline are external ones like changed economic and funding conditions, but some are also due to internal factors. The loss of both the Assistant Director (Academic) and Course Administrator removed two key figures in the development, promotion and delivery of access through ACE.

1

GOAL

Enhance UCC's reach regionally and socio-economically, through new and existing programmes and in cooperation with external partners.

2

STRATEGIES

- 1 Develop stronger networks with other educational providers to build bridges from NFQ Level 5 programmes.
- 2 Collaborate with other providers and internal partners to develop progression pathways from NFQ Level 6 upwards.
- 3 Enhance access for non-traditional students and increase the diversity of the student cohort by developing and adapting targeted initiatives.
- 4 Develop more responsive funding mechanisms and deepen links with other educational providers and community groups/agencies.
- 5 Offer opportunities for academics to engage with adult learning for cross-university learning.

3

PROJECTS

- 1 Identify sources of funding to enable greater access.
- 2 Repopulate the senior staff layer of ACE to build capacity to deliver on access and progression.
- 3 Create targetted initiatives to reach specific populations e.g. Autism Spectrum, Mental Health, Women's Studies (Knocknaheeny), new Certificate/Diploma to enhance access for non-English mother tongue groups.
- 4 Develop exemplar progression routes into full-time and part-time programmes e.g. Certs in Arts, Diploma in European Art History, B. Soc Science/Youth and Community Work.
- 5 Develop new outreach undergraduate degrees e.g. BA General Studies (Limerick); BA Applied Studies (Dunhill).

4

TARGET

Increase the visibility of ACE's access function, develop external progression routes to ACE programmes and develop a more coherent and vibrant set of progression routes within UCC for ACE graduates.

OUTWARD ENGAGEMENT

Given its long history ACE has a unique standing and potential reputational advantage over other similar units in the Irish third level sector. The original mission of the precursor of ACE was to bring the university to communities that did not have access to third level education. Today that mission has additional layers of complexity. However, through ACE, UCC has remained a key player regionally: 'Our outreach and CACE programmes now extend across 23 locations nationwide and graduate over 2,000 students annually.' (Sustaining Excellence: 6)

The next level of opportunity is for ACE to lead the university's outreach mission through contributing to the networked university concept where we drive greater engagement with external partners such as industry, other educational providers, the third/voluntary sector, professional associations, governmental agencies, regional development agencies, social partners, etc. This means we have to shift our thinking in terms of our relationship with others and through this to build mutually beneficial networks that contribute to better outcomes for adult learners, UCC and society in general. There are two key streams in which this must be pursued, firstly in professional development, executive education and economic and workforce oriented initiatives, like those envisaged in the CPD Hub and secondly those with a focus more explicitly on personal development, social capital, community development, access and progression in areas that may or may not have direct career enhancing objectives.

SUSTAINING EXCELLENCE 2013-2017

Goal 3


Pre-Eminence in Internationalisation,
External Engagement and Contribution to
Society



1

GOAL


ACE to proactively lead UCC's outreach engagement as a networking university.



2

STRATEGIES


- 1** Proactively engage with a wide range of partners to develop an outreach arm of a networked university in order to respond in flexible, dynamic and innovative ways to the rapidly changing educational landscape.
- 2** Lead the development of a national, EUCEN supported, ULLL Network (University Lifelong Learning Network) to ensure that UCC remains a leader in lifelong learning nationally in line with best international practice.
- 3** Continue to develop and deliver ways of accessing remote learners and learning communities.
- 4** Continue to engage proactively with internal UCC partners in the development of delivery media and best teaching and learning practice.
- 5** Pursue and develop better approaches to reach socio-economically disadvantaged individuals and communities, to deepen the diversity of the student group and to expand the geographical reach of UCC.



3

PROJECTS

- 1** Lead the development of an Irish ULLL Network.
- 2** Develop MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding) with other education providers.
- 3** Increase the number of outreach centres in the Munster region.
- 4** Respond proactively to public tendering for educational services.
- 5** Collaborate with NUIG on the development of Diploma in Adult Learning Practice and a BA in Adult Learning Practice.



4

TARGET

To make ACE the leading networked outreach centre for third level education in Munster.

INCUBATION AND INNOVATION

ACE has traditionally operated as an incubation site for the university, a potential which was highlighted in the Gaetz Report: 'I foresee the unit becoming an important incubation space within the university, where new programs, models and foci can be explored that may lead to new academic programs' (Gaetz Report: 2). This role needs both greater visibility and a more systematic recognition in the strategic missions of both ACE itself and the university.

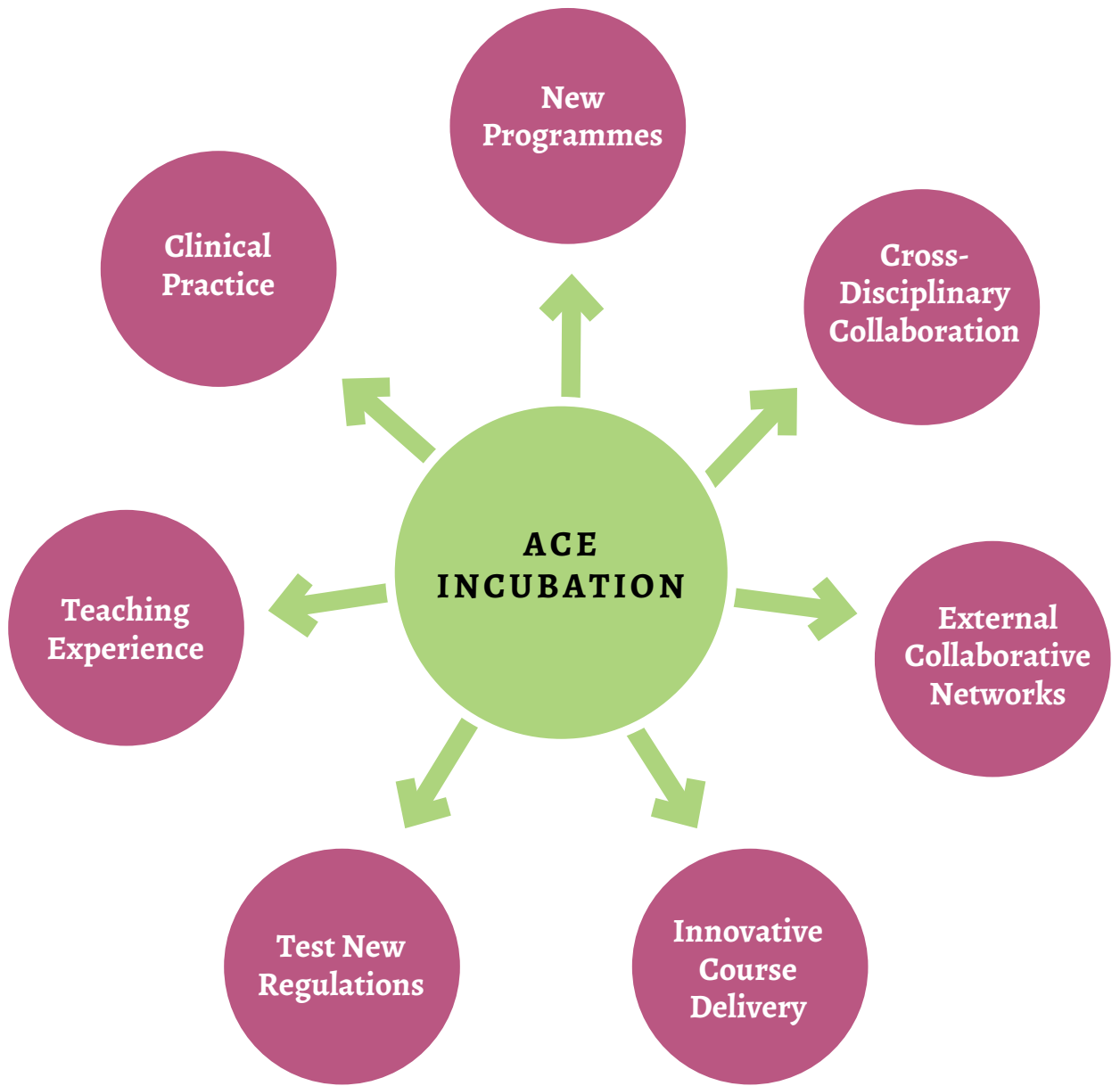
There are a number of key directions in which this incubation mission operates and can further develop:

- 1. the initiation of new programmes in areas not currently covered by the university;**
- 2. the development of new disciplinary or cross-disciplinary programmes;**
- 3. the development of programmes with other institutions regionally, nationally and internationally;**
- 4. the development of new mechanisms and approaches to course delivery;**
- 5. the development of new regulations in all areas of the university's academic mission;**
- 6. the provision of teaching experience for doctoral and post-doctoral students;**
- 7. the provision of clinical practice for academics in new areas, the experience gained could subsequently migrate back into mainstream research and teaching in the university.**

Through the expression of an explicit policy of incubation for new programmes, we can create an environment of true partnership and also set a clear strategic direction for new and innovative ideas, programmes and approaches.

Currently this part of ACE's role is either unstated or not explicitly recognized as one of the key functions of the unit. By making this more explicit it can lead to greater internal UCC partnerships in which each partner's role is recognized and respected. Such an approach would make it much easier to plot the roadmaps for incubation projects, to set targets including moving projects to other parts of the university when they reach a certain level of maturity. The planned end of the incubation period could be marked as a mutually beneficial achievement by all the partners and thus reinforcing the benefits of this approach for the entire university.

ACE through the diversity of its programmes, approaches and the disciplines and partnerships with which it engages provides the university with an excellent locus for introducing new approaches in relation to the spread of its academic mission. This could assist the university to make the most of the Bologna process and make it better placed to deal with new challenges in educational provision. New practices also migrate into ACE programmes through engagement with external partnerships and for instance to meet the accreditation needs of professional bodies. Learning from these innovations could also be harvested in a more systematic way for the benefit of the wider university.



1

GOAL

Make more explicit ACE's role as a site for incubation and innovation for UCC.

2

STRATEGIES

- 1 Develop new programmes that may in time migrate to other parts of the university.
- 2 Develop and pilot new modes of delivery.
- 3 Develop and pilot new approaches to credit accumulation and progression.
- 4 Pilot processes, regulations and practices that may be adopted by the university.
- 5 Offer opportunities for academics to engage with adult learning for cross-university learning.

3

PROJECTS

- 1 Pilot the letter grade marking scheme.
- 2 Create teaching opportunities for PhDs and Post-Docs, with potential links to Ionad Baire.
- 3 Develop new programmes that challenge existing paradigms for UCC.
- 4 Develop an explicit policy for ACE's role as a centre for innovation and incubation for UCC.

4

TARGET

Make ACE a leading site for innovation and incubation for UCC and potentially for the region.

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION/ CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The University Management Team (UMT) adopted a recommendation from the Income Generation Group (IGG) that ACE would be designated the Continuing Professional Development Hub for UCC. This decision followed an extensive process, the details of which are contained in a number of documents that fed into the IGG consultation process. This is a brief overview of the rationale for the CPD Hub.

CPD programmes delivered by the university have to be of the highest quality as they are part of the university's portfolio and must thus enhance the overall strength of the UCC brand. They must be designed in response to market needs and should be focused on specific needs rather than trying to capture too wide a range of clients. Marketing of the programmes has to be targeted, accurate and clear. Given that a very high percentage of CPD business comes from direct referral and recommendation, every CPD programme should aim to exceed expectation. It is critically important that all UCC CPD offerings are consistently of a high quality, as weaker programmes will damage the university's reputation across all sectors of CPD and executive education.

The marketing strategy has to take a differentiated approach, developing a unique marketing mix for each CPD sector. Crosscutting experience across sectors will offer important lessons for honing the marketing strategy, but it should avoid the pitfall of taking an undifferentiated approach. The marketing approach will have to focus not just on the sector but on key decision makers and influencers, it would have to take on board the reasons for

selecting specific providers and/or specific CPD courses, it would have to be cognisant of how to tailor approaches to specific markets and specific decision makers. It would also need to be aware of the factors that would give UCC an advantage, like its brand strength, accreditation, price competitiveness and quality. Different CPD sectors have different needs, so the marketing and promotional strategies will have to be designed for each market area. In each segment the strategy will have to be aware of issues like market needs, key decision-makers and influencers, the relevant fee structure, funding opportunities, and delivery methods.

The CPD Hub will be able to offer a range of services to academic units in developing and delivering CPD programmes in an increasingly competitive environment. It will be able to directly help in the design of programmes and assist with the internal approval process in UCC and also advise in terms of meeting the needs of external accrediting agencies like professional bodies. It will be able to develop marketing strategies in collaboration with the academic unit(s) and also devise advertising and promotional strategies. It will deal with enquiries, registration, fee collection, organise venues, handle examinations, deal with online and technology assisted learning. It will also be able to offer the recognised ACE support systems that have been developed in lifelong learning. The CPD hub would systematically evaluate all CPD programmes offered in a bid to enhance quality and meet market needs. It would also develop a customer database, which would be critical for the development of new business and in defending UCC's market share.

1

GOAL

Establish a vibrant CPD Hub for UCC at ACE in order to expand its outreach missions and contribute to income generation for the university.

2

STRATEGIES

- 1** Appointment of key staff, including a Business Development Officer, as outlined in the Income Generation Group report.
- 2** Formal convening of CPD Executive Committee.
- 3** Proactive engagement with all academics, Departments, Schools, Colleges and administrative support offices to develop CPD capacity.
- 4** Explicit recognition of the value of scholarship within ACE and acceptance of this function by the university.

3

PROJECTS

- 1** Recruit key personnel including the Business Development Officer.
- 2** Establishment of a high level CPD Advisory Board, with members predominantly from the CPD end-user community: industry, public sector, third sector, professional associations.
- 3** Full assessment of current and potential CPD delivery at UCC.
- 4** Creation of a professional web presence for the CPD Hub, which would contain an easily navigable listing of all available CPD offerings.
- 5** Establishment of an online system to better manage engagement with external partners.
- 6** Establishment of a directory to capture CPD expertise of UCC staff.
- 7** Establishment of a Virtual Learning Environment and appointment of personnel to support online CPD course content creation and delivery.

4

TARGET

To create a dynamic and responsive CPD Hub at ACE for the delivery of CPD and Executive Education programmes at UCC.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The successful achievement of this strategic plan is premised on **key commitments** at university level and cultural and systems shifts within ACE itself in order to take it forward in a dynamic way such that it contributes to the overall mission of UCC, in line with the expectations of a unit of this type in a leading international university.



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