



UCC

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



DIGITAL EDUCATION PRINCIPLES

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Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to introduce UCC's first set of Digital Education Principles. These Principles while timely, have taken a while for us to create as we sought to incorporate student and staff input going back to 2014 and learn from practices we were forced to adopt during the emergency pivot to on-line teaching during the pandemic.

The Principles will inform a live Digital Education Plan, which comes at a time when it is hard to imagine a future when educators are not, at least in part, digital educators. Technology has become an increasing aspect of how we deliver education, engage with students and integrate contemporary life and employment skills and knowledge into every discipline.

As humankind evolved from symbols to words, as words became print, as print became transparencies, as overhead transparencies became PowerPoint, so we are today using virtual learning environments, online assessment, video, virtual reality and online meetings and classes to flexibly engage today's learners.

But it's important that we as educators define ourselves how we wish to use technology and are led by discipline-specific pedagogy in the first instance and ensuring education as a social, in-person experience remains at the core of education. UCC is – and will remain – fundamentally a campus-based university and this plan envisages digital education supplementing the face-to-face experience, rather than replacing it – at least in most cases.

These Principles champion the upskilling of staff so that we are aware of the possibilities offered by digital education, but are not close-minded to the challenges it also presents. Importantly, “digital” doesn't always mean online. “Digital” doesn't mean we ignore academic integrity. “Digital” doesn't mean we slavishly use technology because it's there. But I believe we all live in an increasingly digital world and our students rightly expect to be able to engage with UCC through technology where sensible. As students transition through UCC, it's important we ensure that they not only move on with academic skills and knowledge, but that they develop real-world digital skills that will help them make an impact on our world and succeed in their career choices. We can help to do this by seeking out ways to integrate digital into what we teach and how we assess.

Sustainability has long been a critical influence on our thinking in UCC. As a Green Campus, it's important we seek to harness technology where possible in support of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In the context of digital education, these Principles will be implemented through a number of actions which I believe will help to guide the application of technology to education to have a positive impact on education quality, access to education, sustainable communities, reducing inequality and climate action in particular.

Once live, I encourage you to continue to engage with our office and help us grow and evolve as an educational institution.

PROFESSOR PAUL MCSWEENEY
Vice-President for Learning and Teaching

Introduction

This, UCC's first set of Digital Education Principles, explains the reasons why Digital Education (DE) has become so important to us and provides some guidance as to how we intend to employ technology in support of our academic mission, which remains to deliver education principally as a campus-based university.

Digital Education in UCC is defined as ... both the delivery and facilitation of learning with technology and also the education and training of people to use technology effectively.

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/digital-ed/about/>

It is important to note that 'digital' does not just refer to content that is completely online. It also refers to courses which are almost entirely on-campus but that have online elements, such as VLE content.

These Principles have been developed by the Centre for Digital Education, overseen by the Digital Education Leadership Forum (DELFF), established in late 2021 as part of the Office of Vice-President for Learning and Teaching's Quality Enhancement Plan following the Thematic Review of Teaching and Assessing with Technology final report.'

The live Digital Education Plan will incorporate these Principles and include specific underpinning actions for each.

Following initial development work under Actions 1.3.1 and 1.3.3 of UCC 2022, a Digital Education Plan is included specifically as a deliverable under Goal 2 of UCC's ***Securing our Future - Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028***:

Goal 2: *Provide a student-centred, inclusive, and digitally enhanced learning environment, a Connected Curriculum, and an outstanding student experience, to prepare UCC graduates to make a positive impact.*

Action 2.5: *Provide a digitally enabled learning and teaching experience, equitable to all, which incorporates Universal Design principles.*

Action ii: *Implement the Digital Education Plan to provide an enhanced learning experience for all.*

The Principles have been developed following an extensive consultation, research and benchmarking process during 2022, as outlined in the Digital Education Plan website

The Principles are visionary in nature, setting out the context and challenges facing us and providing four principles to guide future digital education initiatives.

UCC Digital Education Principles



UCC's Digital Education Principles are:



1. UCC promotes digital education approaches to enhance pedagogy-informed, largely campus-based learning, teaching and assessment experiences.



2. UCC encourages the use of digital education tools and resources to support the delivery of student-centred, equitable education, incorporating Universal Design Principles.



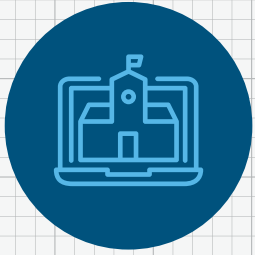
3. UCC encourages the adoption of appropriate digital education approaches to address learning and teaching challenges posed by new technologies.



4. UCC supports the enhancement of students' digital literacy.

Each of these Principles is expanded upon in the next section.

1



UCC promotes digital education approaches to enhance pedagogy-informed, largely campus-based learning, teaching & assessment experiences.



UCC will remain primarily a campus-based university, as set out in UCC's Academic Roadmap. The particular approach to teaching in each discipline, its pedagogy, will continue to be used to determine how technology is applied to specific contexts. Under the principle of subsidiarity, the exact details of how those who teach deliver learning will be determined by the local academic team considering a number of factors:

- **The nature of the content to be taught;**
- **The characteristics of the specific student body;**
- **Consideration of the five pillars of UCC Student Feedback identified in the Enhancing Digital Teaching and Learning project;**
- **The campus facilities available at the time of teaching;**
- **The evolving digital skills of staff; and**
- **Any additional supports required and available.**

Blended and online learning, along with smaller and more flexible microcredentials will however become an increasing aspect of UCC's academic offerings, and it is difficult to imagine any discipline not having at least some digital element.

In many cases, it may well be as simple as course notes and supplemental reading being hosted online on a virtual learning environment (e.g Canvas) while teaching happens in-class and on-campus. At the other side of the spectrum, teaching staff may decide to flip classrooms, pre-record video content, use online tools to engage students and then use on campus time for applied learning activities.

2



UCC encourages the use of digital education tools and resources to support the delivery of student-centred, equitable education, incorporating Universal Design Principles.

Technology offers UCC a means to widen and maintain access for its growing student body. Principle 2 is about supporting staff to use technology to augment the campus experience and to ‘support the implementation of Universal Design principles, ensure an equitable experience for all, so that our campus becomes an inclusive and respectful environment for students and staff.’ (Securing Our Future, UCC Strategic Plan 2023 - 2028, Goal 2, Approach 4).

This Principle is about how to engage students in ways that were not possible using more traditional approaches to education alone, or at least not in any sustainable way. Scribes and note takers for instance are not economically practical as the number of students registered with Disability Support grows year-on-year. The smart application of technology to education practice will allow UCC to support not just DS-registered students but also those students who have not registered with the service.

3



UCC encourages the adoption of appropriate digital education approaches to address learning and teaching challenges posed by new technologies.



Principles 1 and 2 lay out how digital education approaches will be used to support an inclusive campus-based university. Principle 3 is intended to address learning and teaching issues that may arise through the advent of new technology. At the time of writing for instance, the emergence of large language model artificial intelligence technology has posed a challenge around the academic integrity of some assessment types. UCC will adopt considered, pedagogy-informed approaches to address these challenges as they arise through the Office of Vice-President for Learning and Teaching. Where these approaches indicate the judicious use of digital education, this office will lead with appropriate information, training and supports for staff and students.

4



UCC supports the enhancement of students' digital literacy.

Principles 1 to 3 are intended to improve the digital education experience of all students by addressing policy and training needs around this area.

Principle 4 seeks to address the digital skills required by students to engage in education in the first instance but also the practical digital skills they will need as they progress to employment and greater participation in society. Superb work has been undertaken

by various UCC teams, including the Library, the Graduate Attributes team and also the Skills Centre to recognise and support students to date and it is anticipated this will grow into the future. This principle doesn't seek to repeat this work but rather to look at how the institution could embed the requirements for digital skills across its academic offerings.



Conclusion

The potential of digital education to address a wide range of challenges is clear but is only achievable through the judicious application of technology and informed leadership. We believe the four principles outlined provide the basis for ensuring that UCC staff are optimally supported to improve our staff and student experience.

It is important that the aspirations outlined in these Principles are realised through transparent and concrete actions through a Digital Education Plan. These actions will demonstrate the transparent, tangible and practical means of ensuring the Principles become a reality. As circumstances arise, we anticipate additional actions arising. To keep stakeholders informed on progress, the CDE will maintain a live Digital Education Plan website governed by DELF, with regular progress reports on implementation of this Digital Education Plan.

The Principles restate our position that predominantly campus-based and entirely pedagogy-led education is where our future lies, but this experience can be enhanced by learning about and integrating digital education approaches.

Thank you to all the stakeholders, staff and students who have contributed to the development of these Principles. We hope we have fully captured and addressed the challenges and opportunities you presented to us. We now encourage all staff to become part of this living plan, to continue to engage with the Office of Vice-President for Learning and Teaching and to help us harness the power of digital to make UCC an inclusive, connected and digital university.

**For more information on our Digital Education Plan,
click the QR code or visit the URL below:**

<https://www.ucc.ie/en/digital-ed/>

