



**Dave Collins for UCC SU President
Manifesto
2021/22.**

**DAVE FOR
PRESIDENT.**

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|INTRODUCTION.

Hi, my name is Dave Collins and I want to be your next UCC Students Union President. I'm 22, Cork born and bred and am currently in my final year of an undergrad in BSc Government and Politics.

My classmates have trusted me not once, but twice, to represent them as their class rep which has given me experience working with the structures here in UCC. Across these two years as class rep I have worked tirelessly on any issues brought to my attention, working with my classmates, college departments and the students union to ensure any problems are resolved as quickly as possible with a good resolution. I also have experience with UCC Societies such as 4 years on the committee of the UCC Horse Racing Society where I played a leading role in the organisation of student race day 2019 and in the UCC Government and Politics Society as Ordinary Committee Member and Vice-Ents rep. Now, I want to bring this experience, passion and drive to you, the UCC student body.

If I am elected as your President, I will ensure that I am a President for everyone in UCC and will introduce policies that will always focus on the best interests of students.

The policies outlined below reflect my ambitions and aims but the list is by no means exhaustive and if elected I will work tirelessly with the other elected candidates to provide a Students Union entirely focused and devoted to addressing the challenges faced by students and rising to meet the extra challenges posed by Covid-19 particularly in relation to mental health, a return to campus and large scale social events, and ensuring equitable access for all to a third level education.

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|COMMUNITY & CAMPUS.

As President I want to build on the sense of community in UCC and ensure that campus facilitates the needs of students, which is why I want to introduce the following:

- Running **regular events** for students to meet new people and explore new interests.
- Continue the work of the current SU in developing and **utilising spaces for outdoor events** such as the UCC Garden currently being constructed.
- Secure a commitment from the University to allow more Students Union **events on campus**.
- Provide **more common rooms** with microwaves and tea and coffee making facilities across campus and in particular satellite campuses
- Reopen the **mature student common room and run events specifically targeted at mature students** so that they too are given opportunities to make new friends and get the full university experience.
- **Extended Student centre hours** during Covid-19 as 4 pm is too early. Alternatively the opening of Siopa 2 at 4 pm like was done in semester one.
- **More food options** on campus cafes/restaurants to cater for vegetarians/vegans and people with food allergies.
- Provide more microwaves on main campus and satellite campuses to **allow students to microwave food and reduce costs**.
- Work to **extend opening hours for restaurants** on campus.

ENTERTAINMENT.

- Return of Student Race day and expansion to Race Day Festival
Student race day is an iconic and fun-filled day in the UCC student calendar with over 2000 students attending each year. Having played a leading role in organising student race day 2019 as chairperson of the UCC Horse Racing Society, **I want to bring student race day back bigger and better than ever.** This will include more ticket availability with the ability to purchase online, working with more businesses to offer student discounts on race day clothing. I will work with mallow racecourse to bring live music, DJs and more to the racecourse after the days racing to **turn student race day into a Race Day festival.** To meet the additional safety needs associated with a bigger event I will work closely with UCC, SCS and other stakeholders to ensure a safe but fun event for everybody.
- Graduations
Completing undergraduate and postgraduate courses is a huge achievement that requires hard work and dedication and should be recognised as such. Unfortunately, people who graduated during the pandemic have had their opportunity for an on-campus ceremony taken away from them. As President I will work with UCC to ensure that **any students who missed out on a graduation will receive some form of on-campus ceremony** as soon as public health advice allows. This opportunity will be extended to current undergrad/masters/PhD students if covid-19 precautions prevent graduations from occurring again this Autumn.
- Inter-Course Events
College can be a lonely experience, particularly if you have started your university life online or if you are in a large course. I will work together with the Entertainment rep and college reps to **create new events focused on bringing together different courses,** giving students another opportunity to make new friends across the university.
- UCC farmers market
Farmers markets offer a healthy and exciting selection of fresh foods. I will work with local businesses to **bring a weekly farmers market to UCC campus alongside live music in the amphitheatre** provided by students who are looking to kick off a music career.
- RAG week
RAG week is one of the most anticipated weeks of the year for students whilst generating massive sums for charity off of student donations. As President I want to work with the Entertainment officer to **bring UCC RAG back bigger and better than ever.** Acts and events will be brought in across the entire week to play in Devere Hall and

smaller-scale events will be held in the new bar, amphitheatre and student hub, accessibility for everyone will be a priority for RAG.

- Day time events

I want to **run more day-time events** for students to prevent situations where students feel unsafe and uncomfortable walking home alone at night.

| CURRENT FRESHERS.

Attending university is an important and exciting milestone in a young person's life. Unfortunately freshers this year have not had the opportunity to get the full university experience. **As President I will ensure that you are not forgotten about.**

- The **opportunity for a full re-orientation day** will be given to current freshers as well as incoming first years. This will include a tour of campus for those who have not had such an opportunity and may not be familiar with campus and will give students the opportunity to make friends within their course in person. **Class parties** will also be held for the current freshers as well as next years to allow further opportunities to make friends within the course.
- Freshers events
Events aimed at freshers such as the **Freshers Ball will be upscaled and targeted at both current and incoming freshers** to ensure everyone gets the full fresher experience in their university experience.

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY.

- Office hours
It's important to me that people feel I am an easily accessible President which is why alongside the usual forms of contact, I will **introduce dedicated office hours each week** where students can come in and talk in full confidentiality about any problems or issues that they are facing.
- Publishing of minutes
I will ensure that the **minutes of UCCSU Executive meetings are posted quickly and regularly** following fortnightly meetings as mandated in the UCCSU constitution. Publishing of the minutes will be posted on social media for any students wishing to look through them.
- Work closely with class reps
I want to work closely with class reps and make it widely known that I am **accessible at any time** and that I work for the students.
- Improve engagement and visibility
I will work with the Communications Officer to **increase engagement** with the students and the visibility of the Students Union and our work.

| WELFARE.

| MENTAL HEALTH.

Students' mental health is of the utmost importance. While always a central focus of the SU, Covid-19 has had a negative mental health effect on many students' health. Studies show that university students are at high risk for depression and anxiety symptoms with one study finding that the average prevalence rates of depression in university students is 30.6%, which is considerably higher than the rate in the general population. **I want to tackle this issue head-on** by building on the work the current SU has done.

- Keeping **waiting times** for counselling sessions to **a matter of days**
- Fight to **keep the additional funding** that has been secured by the current SU in order to keep waiting lists down.
- In a situation where there is no availability I want to **connect with external counsellors** near UCC who will provide their services to students
- Push for the option of **on-campus counselling to be prioritised** in the phased return to campus
- Remove departments policies that give an automatic 0 for missed deadlines and ensure deadlines are spaced out better.
- **Increase the promotion of the services available** to students suffering from depression, anxiety and other mental health issues including Niteline, 50808 and participate.
- Work with student health, guest speakers and societies such as Sámh and Psych Soc to **run workshops centred around understanding and managing anxiety** and practicing tools such as cognitive behavioural therapy to help reduce stress and anxiety levels.
- Work closely with the welfare officer to explore every possible avenue to **tackle loneliness and isolation** by running events specifically designed with meeting people in mind such as coffee mornings, speed-dating and randomized quiz teams.
- Also outlined within my Entertainment Policy section, events such as inter-course events, re-orientation days and class parties will be aimed at **reducing the loneliness and isolation felt by students.**

Loneliness and Isolation is an area that was already important and has been wildly exacerbated by Covid-19. While the advice often given is to get involved with societies or clubs, it can be hard to take that first leap and it's harder again to make friends with online events which is what these policies are designed to address..

| DRUG & ALCOHOL.

Illegal drugs and alcohol misuse is a reality in some students' lives and I stand firm that it is better to accept this reality and create safety nets for students rather than pretending the problem doesn't exist or condemning it. Building on my previous point of loneliness and isolation, studies have shown that loneliness has been found to be associated with poor health status, substance use and addictive behaviours, aggression, and other risk behaviours and this can become a self-reinforcing loop where students feel trapped and with nobody to turn to. In response to this, as President I want to:

- **Lead a campaign fighting stigma around substance misuse** and encouraging people who are worried they have substance misuse issues to come forward and talk to us freely and confidentially with no risk of judgement and allow us to point them in the direction of organisations that can help.
- Use the platform given to the SU to push for the Portuguese model of **decriminalisation**. Drug consumption will no longer be treated as a criminal issue but instead framed as a health problem.
- Work with the SSDP to encourage safe drug consumption if students choose to do so by **making drug testing kits available to students**.
- **Promote the work of the chaplaincy** in facilitating support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.
- Ensure that the UCC SU runs **events that are specifically alcohol-free** and provide a space for those who want to socialise without alcohol.

| STUDENT HEALTH.

- Build on the idea of the Covid-19 testing centre on campus in the run-up to Christmas and work with the university and HSE to examine the possibility of a **Covid-19 vaccination hub on campus** for students without a GP or who are not from cork and may otherwise have to travel to and from home to get vaccinated.
- Promote the wide variety of services available at student health.
- **Provide condoms free of charge** to students.
- Promote awareness of the importance of regular STI checks, of STI symptoms and awareness of free STI testing at student health on an ongoing basis and not just during SHAG week.
- Tackle period poverty by **making sanitary products freely available for UCC students**.

|STUDENT SAFETY.

The safety of all students is paramount which is why as President I want to introduce the following to ensure student safety:

- **Bystander intervention training** will be introduced as a compulsory course for students to be done either online or on orientation day.
- Hold workshops focusing on **education around sexual assault and shifting the culture** towards calling out friends and holding them accountable.
- Establish a fully trained **anonymous text/phone line** for students who are victims of sexual assault and unsure of who they can talk to about it and where they can get it.
- With social locations such as pubs and restaurants closed for the majority of the previous year, I want to invest significant resources into **building awareness and reminding people of the Ask For Angela initiative**
- **Introduce an app that will allow focus on the safety of students** by having features such as location sharing, the ability to upload pictures of taxi registrations etc, and provide quick links to phone numbers such as the gardai, campus watch, Samaritans, Niteline, Cork Sexual Violence Centre and more.
- Work with the Cork City Council to **introduce more lighting** on campus, around heavily student populated areas, and areas frequently visited by the student population.
- **First aid training** will be provided to people within the SCS to provide an additional layer of safety to students during large events such as freshers week, RAG week, student race day, society balls etc.

ACCOMMODATION & HOUSING.

Students have a right to safe and affordable housing. As part of my housing policy I will:

- Demand **earlier decisions by the University** to let students know if semester one will be online or not so that deposits on accommodation are not lost.
- If a part-time return to campus is introduced I will **push for the option of paying for the amount of nights you stay in campus accommodation**. A similar scheme has been successfully run by Marino College this year to facilitate students with some elements of on-campus education
- Push for **transparent and easy to read licence agreements** specifying of cost, duration, refund and cancellation policies by accommodation providers.
- The average price of a single bedroom costs €493, a year-on-year increase of nearly 4% according to a daft.ie report. Furthermore, within two kilometres of both UCC and CIT, rent prices per bedroom are averaging at €1,066 (UCC) and €993 (CIT) for one bed to €1,851 (UCC) and €1,617 (CIT) for four-bed accommodation. I will **lobby on behalf of students to ensure that accommodation prices do not rise further out of reach of students and placing another barrier to education**.
- **Lobby the Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Housing** to recognise this situation and take the immediate measures that are needed to alleviate the fears and concerns of students such as realistic and meaningful rent caps, greater protection for students renting on the private rental market and to provide funding for Purpose Build Student Accommodation.
- Run social media campaigns to **educate students about their rights as renters**.
- **Develop a list of landlords and their properties in the areas surrounding UCC that are verified by the Students Union** and subscribe to a code ensuring adequate response times to tenants and that a minimum threshold of cleanliness will be maintained (no mould on walls, heating, constantly warm water, etc.)

|STUDENT FINANCES.

Student finances have always been tight and supports inadequate, this situation has been exacerbated by Covid-19 by removing the opportunity for part-time employment for many students who rely on that income. I want to see changes that take the financial pressure off students and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to avail of an education in UCC. **Budget 2021 announced a full reviewal of SUSI.** This review will take place during the term of the next SU. As the next SU President I will **lobby for the changes** such as:

- Reflect the increasing cost of living by **increasing payments made**
- **Increase the thresholds** needed for qualification so that more lower- and middle-income families can avail of SUSI

I will also:

- Lobby for income received from the pandemic unemployment payment and temporary wage subsidy schemes to not be considered as a change in circumstances for SUSI recipients. Exceptional circumstances should not lead to increased financial pressure once regular circumstances return.
- **Continue the UCC SU Food Bank** and if possible expand it further than the current SU has already done.
- **Enhance student employability** by ensuring more opportunities to upskill are made available to students. This will be done in collaboration with local businesses and entrepreneurs who may provide seminars and by pushing for a university-wide rollout of the Microsoft Lagro Scheme which makes premium LinkedIn education courses available free of charge to university students.

EDUCATION.

- **Maintaining No Academic Disadvantage Policy** into 2021/22: Covid-19 continues to have a large impact on the lives of students, placing strains on mental health and with more frequent deadlines coupled with potential burnout. As SU President I will engage with UCC to **ensure the No Academic Disadvantage Policy is extended into 2021/22** for as long as Covid-19 prevents a return to campus.
- **Extension of library hours:** While UCC has some of the longest library opening hours in the country, the cutting back on them must be reversed in order to give students a quiet and focused environment to complete college work. As President I will work with the library staff in both Boole library and Brookfield to provide a **return to the original opening hours and push for a further extension over weekends and for the fishbowl.**
- **Exams:** As your Students Union President I will push for the **removal of exams towards the end of study week.** This time should be given to students to prepare fully for exams. Furthermore, I will push for the **replacement of Neptune with alternate locations** and a more evenly distributed exam timetable for students.
- **Recorded lectures:** Covid-19 has demonstrated that it is fully possible for **all lectures to be recorded live and made available for students online.** As President I will lobby for the continuation of this policy once campus returns to normal life in order to ensure that students are not punished academically for having commitments outside of college, medical appointments, etc.
- **Placements:** Students are under ever-increasing financial pressure with the costs of rent, fees, and purchasing basic necessities such as food and hygiene products. Unpaid placements are unfair on students, often adding additional costs such as transport etc. No student should be financially affected by the requirements to get their degree which is why I will continue to work with placement managers, businesses and public bodies such as the HSE to **lobby for paid placements for students.** In situations where this is not feasible, I will push for **remote working opportunities and a 3 day week** so students may keep part-time jobs.
- **No charges for repeats:** Failing or deferring exams is stressful enough without the added financial pressure of having to pay for them. As President I will lobby to **ensure that the repeat fee waiver introduced due to Covid-19 will be maintained as a permanent policy.**
- **Workshops:** Writing an academic essay for the first time is a challenge and something often mentioned by students in first year. I want to **work with the UCC skills centre to increase awareness surrounding the courses and lectures** they offer and make workshops available online for those who could not attend.

| ACCESSIBILITY.

- Digital Student Cards
With apps such as apple wallet, google wallet and Samsung wallet readily available and apps such as google/apple pay used by students regularly I will **push for the provision of a digital student card**. By providing a digital card students will be less likely to lose the physical card and have to pay a replacement fee and access to buildings such as Boole, Connolly etc will be made easier.
- **Highlighting steps and bollards**
It has been brought to my attention that a number of steps and bollards in and around main campus, buildings and satellite campuses are insufficiently highlighted for those with visual impairments. It is important that UCC is a campus for all and as President I will make sure these are not an impediment to those with visual impairments before the beginning of the 2021/22 academic year.
- Student guide for accessible social locations
I will work with local businesses to **create a guide of easily accessible and disability-friendly social locations**. Businesses that become part of this guide will be marked with a sticker promoting and indicating their accessibility.
- Work with the Disability Support Service (DSS)
I will work with the DSS to expand services offered by them, ensuring that students' needs are met and **work with the DSS to increase student awareness of supports offered** by the DSS and events run by them such as the breakfast club.
- Sensory Areas
Weeks like freshers and RAG week can be difficult for students who find it to be a sensory overload. In previous years the old bar was used for this however this has been closed in recent times. I will work with the DSS and the disability rights representative to open this space again as soon as possible but will also work to **identify, promote and use additional sensory areas** such as the sensory garden and autism-friendly space during particularly busy weeks. I will also work with library staff to open the accessories lab earlier and investigate the possibility of opening it on Saturdays.
- Ensure that **closed captions are provided** for recorded lectures for those with difficulty hearing.

| EQUALITY.

It is important to me that UCC is a university where everyone feels equal and I want to be a President that sends a clear message that I will represent everybody.

- Ensure that an adequate amount of **gender-neutral spaces** such as bathrooms are provided for students in order to provide safe and comfortable areas for gender non-conforming people and those who are early on in their transition.
- I want the University to give the opportunity for **new pictures and names on student IDs** to minimise situations where trans students no longer look like their ID card.
- I will offer all staff and students appropriate **diversity and inclusion training**.
- I want to **work with the UCC Chaplaincy to make students more aware of the services that it provides** and that it welcomes all students regardless of things such as gender, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.
- Ensure that the **Creche Cois Laoi** continues to support students who avail of its services and work to **extend its opening hours from 6 pm to 7 pm**.

| SUSTAINABILITY.

- Satellite campus bike scheme and provision of bike sheds
Cycling is a great way to get around and great for the environment which is why I want to facilitate students getting to and from campus by **providing more bike sheds/rails**. I also want to look into **making bikes accessible between main campus and satellite campuses** such as the Cork Enterprise Center
- Continue work of UCC on Green Campus initiative
- Continue Covid-19 policy of **no hard copies of assignments**
Covid-19 has demonstrated that hard copies can and should be a thing of the past as we strive towards an eco-friendly university.
- More Cigarette Bins
It can take as long as 10 years for a cigarette butt to decompose which is why I want to **introduce cigarette bins** attached to the walls of locations where smokers tend to congregate on main campus and satellite campuses.
- Clothes and fashion
Tackle fast fashion by introducing a **platform where students can swap and sell clothes**.

| CONCLUSION.

If I am your next Students Union President I will create a campus that is back bigger and better than ever before. At the heart of my policies is the desire to create a community-focused campus where it is easy to interact and make friends with other students, combating the isolation and lack of social interaction that so many students have faced in the past year. If I am elected as your President I promise that I will be a President for all, and lead a Students Union that always acts in the interests of, and on behalf of, the student body.

I ask that you lend me your #1 Vote to be the next UCC Students Union President this March 29th - 31st and enable us to follow through on my vision for our campus community and to create an unforgettable student experience for all.



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