

UCD opening Statement on Education and Upskilling in the Agriculture Sector.

We welcome the opportunity to speak to the committee this evening on the UCD role in education and upskilling in the Agriculture sector.

University College Dublin is the only Irish University to offer undergraduate degree programs spanning the entire food supply chain from farm-to-fork. UCD is ranked 79th Globally in the QS World University rankings for Agriculture and Forestry.

Within UCD, the School forms part of the [College of Health and Agricultural Sciences](#), together with the School of Veterinary Medicine, School of Medicine, School of Public Health, Physiotherapy & Sports Science and the School of Nursing and Midwifery.

Education for the agriculture sector is an important part of UCD's educational programmes (7.2% of all UCD registered undergraduates were in Agriculture in 2022) and UCD's aim is to continue to be recognised for its development of leaders to serve the Agriculture and Food sectors.

The School has 84 academic staff and 2600 students – 1992 undergraduate students (649 in China at [Guangzhou Dublin International College of Life Sciences & Technology](#)), 388 Taught Masters students, 154 PhD students and 66 Certificate, Diploma and Occasional students.

UCD's programmes span the food chain from 'farm to fork', with degree specialisations in Animal and Crop Production, Animal Science, Crop Science, Agri-Environmental Sciences, Horticulture, Forestry, Food and Agribusiness Management, Dairy Business, Food Science and Human Nutrition (see Table 1 for full list) with an annual intake of approximately 370 students per year, mainly through the CAO. From September 2024 the School will offer a new undergraduate programme in Sustainable Food Systems. While this degree will give graduates a specific qualification in sustainability, sustainable practices are integrated throughout our degree programmes.

Similar to our undergraduate programmes, taught postgraduate (Masters, Diplomas and Certificates) and PhD programmes span the complete food chain with programmes in Environmental Resource Management, Conservation, Animal Science, Food, Nutrition and Health, Food Business Strategy, and Agriculture, Extension and Innovation among others (see Table 1).

Several areas distinguish our programmes from other offerings in this area:

- All undergraduate students undertake an industry-based placement in their third year. Approximately 35% of students undertake their work placement overseas.
- In their third year, undergraduate students have an opportunity to take a semester of study at a university overseas, at universities in the U.S.A, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Approximately 30% of students avail of this opportunity. We also welcome international students to UCD as part of this exchange programme.

- Integration with the wider Agri-food sector is critical to the success of our education and upskilling for the Agri-Food sector. Academics within the school are active in policy development and engaged in the wider sector, holding key roles in organisations such as the Agricultural Science Association, Irish Grassland Association, Nuffield Ireland, and Agri Aware for example.
- The School has recently constituted an External Advisory Board, chaired by Prof. Nigel Scollan to engage more directly with the sector in terms of current and future challenges and the development of our offering to meet these challenges.
- Practical laboratory, fieldwork training and project work form mandatory parts of our programmes. While the main School teaching and laboratory research facilities are located on the UCD Belfield campus the School, together with the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine, is also the primary user of UCD Lyons Farm, a 250-hectare farm located outside Newcastle, Co. Dublin. The farm supports the teaching needs of the students undertaking our BAgrSc programmes and is also the site for much of the School's research activities. The School, together with the School of Biology and Environmental Sciences, is also the primary user of Rosemount Environmental Research Station on the Belfield campus.
- Programmes offered have evolved to meet the upskilling needs of the sector and the demand for more flexible ways of learning. For example, in collaboration with Teagasc and the Macra na Feirme the Skillnet MSc programmes in Agricultural Extension and Innovation have been developed. Full-time, part-time and distance learning options are offered to students.
- As part of the School's Executive Education offerings, stand-alone modules (Microcredentials) aimed at employees with CPD needs are now offered in areas such as Communication and Agri-Innovation, Sustainable Livestock Systems, Nutrition and Healthy Eating, and Greencare.
- We collaborate closely with Teagasc on some of our programmes. The BAgrSc in Dairy Business commenced in 2007, students spend a semester of their programme at Teagasc Moorepark and many students travel to New Zealand to complete this component of their degree programme.
- The School of Agriculture and Food Science plays a key role in the development and training of scientists through its research Masters and PhD student cohorts.

Future challenges

- The School of Agriculture and Food Science in UCD is unique in the demographic make-up of our student community, as a higher percentage of our students originate from outside Dublin. The shortage of affordable student housing is a particular

challenge for our student cohort, with many students commuting long distances to attend lectures.

- UCD is the only University with its own teaching and research farm. It provides a unique educational offering to our students and supports many of the research staff within the school. We want to maintain and grow the practical aspects of our educational programmes, to which UCD Lyons Farm is key. Unfortunately, the facilities at UCD Lyons farm, in some instances have become dated and are no longer fit for purpose. A detailed plan for upgrading and replacing the teaching and laboratory spaces, the animal housing, and the research facilities, has been developed. UCD has committed significant funds to this development, but it remains underfunded. UCD Lyons Farm is a key national asset in the education and upskilling of future leaders in the Agri-Food sector and delivering the development plan is a priority for the School.

Table 1 Programme Offerings

Undergraduate Programmes	Degree
UCD in Ireland (Belfield and associated facilities)	
1. Agri-Environmental Sciences	BAgrSc
2. Agricultural Systems Technology	BAgrSc
3. Animal and Crop Production	BAgrSc
4. Animal Science	BAgrSc
5. Crop Science	BAgrSc
6. Animal Science - Equine	BAgrSc
7. Dairy Business	BAgrSc
8. Food and Agribusiness Management	BAgrSc
9. Food Business with Chinese	BAgrSc
10. Forestry	BAgrSc
11. Horticulture	BAgrSc
12. Food Science	BSc
13. Sustainable Food Systems (from 2023/24)	BSc
14. Human Nutrition	BSc

UCD in China (Guangzhou Dublin International College)	
15. Biological Science	BSc
16. Food Quality and Safety	BSc
17. Horticulture	BSc
Graduate Taught Programmes	Degree
1. Environmental Resource Management	MSc (Agr)
2. Wildlife Conservation & Management	MSc
3. Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development	MSc (Agr)
4. Agriculture Extension & Innovation (distance learning option)	MAgrSc
5. Horticulture	MSc
6. Animal Science (online)	MSc
7. Food Business Strategy	MSc
8. Food, Nutrition and Health (online)	MSc
9. Sustainable Food Processing (online)	MSc
10. Food Safety (online)	MSc
11. Humanitarian Action	MSc
12. Food Regulatory Affairs (online)	MScon
13. Food Safety & Regulatory Science	ProfDip