University College Cork

UCC University College Cork, Ireland Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

HEA An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas The Higher Education Authority

UCC Response to Early Withdrawal

Overview of Initiative

UCC appointed a First Year Experience (FYE) Coordinator in 2007 to help students adjust academically, socially and personally to university life and to strengthen the retention and progression rates of incoming students. The FYE Coordinator monitors very closely early withdrawals from September – 1 March, conducts Exit Interviews and facilitates students to change course at the beginning of Semester 1.

Analysis of data from 2007–2012 indicated a clear trend that a significant proportion of high-achieving students were withdrawing in Semester 1 because they were registered in degree programmes that did not align with their interests and expectations. These students were struggling to build a sense of belonging and were reluctant to engage fully in university life.

In response to clear evidence that early withdrawals were frequently linked to 'wrong programme choice', a structured pathway to change course enabled students to realign their studies with their interests, strengths and long-term goals, thereby improving overall satisfaction and supporting stronger retention and progression rates.

Cross-campus collaboration in supporting students to change course has shaped institutional responses to early student withdrawal by bridging the gap between data and the lived experience of students.

Since the introduction of the role of FYE Coordinator, progression and retention rates have improved from 87% in 2007 to 93.4% in 2025.

Key Features

- First-year students
- Student wellbeing, experience, & success focus
- Early intervention initiative
- Institution policy

Aims & Objectives

Aim: To provide students who are considering withdrawing early (September/October) with a clear and supportive pathway to change into an academic programme better suited to their interests and abilities. To improve student retention, promote academic success, and ensure that students are enabled to make informed decisions that align with their long-term goals.

Objective 1: To systematically identify the drivers of early withdrawals and implement targeted, evidence-based interventions that improve progression, equity and overall student success.

Objective 2: To ensure students who consider withdrawing are heard, supported, and guided, while using their feedback to shape more responsive support structures

Institutional Context

- First Year Change of Course Policy
- Undergraduate Student Withdrawals Policy

Monitoring & Oversight

Oversight of the First Year Experience is a governance and quality assurance priority in UCC. Recurring reports on first-year withdrawals, withdrawals by programme, profile of students, access route, CAO choice, Leaving Certificate points or equivalent, timing (early / mid / end of semester) and Change of Course are delivered to individual Schools and to Academic Council.

Data & Evidence of Impact

Typically, ~100 students successfully change course each year (~150 register interest). In the period from September 2024 to 1 March 2025, a total of 96 first-year EU students formally withdrew from their degree programmes. This figure represents 2.5% of first-year EU students who had registered by October 2024.

Since the appointment of the FYE Coordinator in 2007, progression and retention rates have improved from 87% in 2005/2006–2006/2007 to 93.4% in 2024/2025–2025/2026.

Additional Information

Withdrawal Policy; Withdrawal Form
Change of Course Policy
First Year Experience Coordinator