



Community Perspectives on Partnerships with Universities: Survey and Dialogue Report – Cork (Ireland)

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CONTENTS

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
About the SPACE project	4
Community Engagement in University College Cork	4
Survey structure and participants	6
Interviews with community representatives	7
2. UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS SURVEY.....	7
Survey overview	7
Survey results summary	8
3. COMMUNITY DIALOGUES: MAPPING FACTORS THAT SHAPE PARTNERSHIPS ..	11
Factor 1: Individual factors.....	11
Factor 2: Institutional factors – university	13
Factor 3: Institutional factors – community partner.....	14
Factor 4: Broader societal factors	16
4. LESSONS LEARNT AND WAYS FORWARD.....	17
Lessons learnt	17
Ways forward.....	17
ANNEX: SURVEY RESULTS.....	20
Survey results – University College Cork	20

1. INTRODUCTION

About the SPACE project

Community engagement in higher education refers to how universities address societal needs in partnership with their external communities. Community engagement is emerging as a policy priority in higher education, reflecting increased pressures on universities to demonstrate how they deliver public benefits. At the European level, the European Commission's key policy document, *Towards a European Education Area*, features 'service to society' as the 'fourth mission of higher education', and there are growing expectations for universities to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), expectations that are now reflected in a special university ranking for SDGs (The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings).

University College Cork (UCC), one of Ireland's leading universities committed to supporting institutional capacity building for civic and community engagement, is participating in the EU-funded project *Supporting Professionals and Academics for Community Engagement in Higher Education* (SPACE). SPACE is a three-year project (2023-2026) that aims to build the capacities of academics, professional staff, and community partners to strengthen community engagement in higher education across Europe. The SPACE project is a follow-up to the successful projects *Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement in Higher Education* (TEFCE, 2018-2020) and *Steering Higher Education for Community Engagement* (SHEFCE, 2020-2023), whose results are gathered on the European web platform www.community-engagement.eu. The project is led by the Institute for the Development of Education (IDE, Croatia) and involves nine partners from four countries (Belgium, Croatia, Ireland and Spain). The project is also supported by four European-level associations and university alliances, as well as by two university networks from Catalonia and Ireland.

One approach the SPACE project employed to achieve its objectives was gathering insights from community partners on the key success factors and challenges in collaborating with universities, and subsequently formulating recommendations to help universities enhance these partnerships. We therefore invited representatives of 26 organisations that are currently or have previously worked in partnership with UCC to provide us with open and critical reflections on how those partnerships have worked, what their successes and pitfalls were, and how UCC can improve its engagement with organisations in the community for mutual benefit. These reflections were collected via a university-community partnership survey and through discussions in the form of online interviews held in November 2024.

Community Engagement in University College Cork

Civic and community engagement is central to the mission of University College Cork (UCC), with deep historical roots dating back to 1911 through early extension programmes. This commitment was formalised in 2017 with UCC's first comprehensive Civic Engagement Plan *Together With and For Community* (2017-2022) and strengthened in the current 2023-2028 Strategic Plan *Securing Our Future*, which explicitly states that 'UCC's mission is to create

and sustain an inclusive environment and culture to enable transformative research and learning for the enrichment of society and stewardship of our planet.'

Within the Goals of the current Strategic Plan, UCC is committing to 'transform UCC's research culture through the implementation of engaged research and open research, underpinned by academic integrity, and ethical and responsible practice' (Goal 1: Research and Innovation). The Plan calls for greater efforts to 'actively support staff and students to embrace a range of rigorous research approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaborative engaged research 'with' and 'within' society, such as Public Patient Involvement, Inclusion Health, Evidence for Public Policy and Citizen Science.' There is also a call for staff to 'enhance public outreach efforts on our research initiatives, both in collaborative engaged research and otherwise, in the pursuit of improving community engagement with research and its practical applications.' Community engagement is also explicitly referenced within Goal 3 (Global Engagement), which aims to 'internationalise our curriculum and our research through strategic partnerships and mobility.'

UCC positions itself as a 'civically engaged university' connecting knowledge creation with community benefit, guided by the core values represented by the Irish word CAIRDEAS (friendship), reflecting creativity, responsiveness, transparency, scholarship, freedom of expression, integrity, equality, diversity, and respect. The university's approach to civic and community engagement is best described on its [website](#) is as follows:

'Everyone is welcome through the gates of UCC. Everyday a diverse range of people and community groups partner with our staff and students to carry out research on a wide range of challenging issues, or to volunteer together for a good cause, and much more. This website is a place where we share stories about our community partnerships and connect you with ideas and information on how you can engage with UCC. Come on in, we are your university, in, of and for the community.'

To support this mission, UCC has established a number of dedicated organisational structures including the University Civic and Community Engagement Committee, College Civic Engagement Champions, a Community-Academic Research and Learning Committee, and staff roles such as Civic Engagement Officer and CARL (Community Academic Research Links) Coordinator. The university has also created a physical Civic and Community Engagement Hub on campus as a focal point for connecting with communities.

UCC's flagship community engagement initiatives include the Community Academic Research Links (CARL) programme, established in 2011 based on the Science Shop model, which has produced over 150 research projects connecting students with community organisations; UNIC CityLabs, which received €70,000 annually for its second phase (2023-2027) as part of the European University of Post-Industrial Cities alliance; annual UCC Community Week showcasing university-community collaborations; and the University of Sanctuary initiative supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

The university's commitment to community engagement has been recognised internationally, with UCC ranking 8th in the world in 2021 and maintaining a position in the top 4% globally (53rd of 1,963 universities) in the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, which

assess universities' contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In 2023, UCC was named 'Global Sustainability Institution of the Year' at the Green Gown Awards, highlighting its environmental and community sustainability efforts.

Survey structure and participants

The SPACE university-community partnerships survey was developed following a literature review of the key factors influencing inter-institutional collaboration, with a focus on university-community partnerships. The survey contains two sections:

- **Section A: Case study:** this section includes questions relating to the partnership/collaboration that your organisation is currently (or has previously been) involved in with the university, including its goals, activities and results.
- **Section B: Assessment:** this section includes an assessment rubric allowing respondents to provide assessment scores (from level 1 to level 5) to a series of questions relating to 3 dimensions:
 - Dimension 1: Process (the way the partnership is planned and implemented)
 - Dimension 2: Ethos (attitudes and values that characterise the partnership)
 - Dimension 3: Outcomes (results of the partnership)

Respondents were requested to describe and reflect on one specific collaborative initiative/joint project with the university. The surveys were completed by a single member of a community partner organisation with direct experience of the partnership, or as a result of a consultation within the organisation. Based on their experiences in the partnership, respondents were requested to complete an assessment rubric (below), providing scores of 1 to 5 for each dimension/sub-dimension that is assessed. Scores are provided based on level descriptors for levels 1, 3 and 5 (while level 2 and level 4 indicate "in between" levels). After collecting the data, pseudonymised data was used to calculate average scores.

A total of 5 community representatives collaborating with University College Cork completed the survey.

- 3 partners were from NGOs, and 2 were from local government.
- All partners were partners on more than one project.
- About half of the partners contributed to the partnerships through providing knowledge and expertise, organisational support, and networks and contacts, while 2 partners provided funding support.
- All partners noted that UCC provided them with organisational support in the partnership, while 2 partners acknowledged a funding contribution from UCC in the partnership.

Interviews with community representatives

To ensure a more balanced, nuanced and in-depth understanding of the strengths and challenges of university-community partnerships, the survey was followed by a structured dialogue in the form of 1:1 interviews with surveyed community representatives. A total of 3 community representatives collaborating with University College Cork participated in the interviews.

The structured dialogue focused on four questions that were posed to participants, with the aim of identifying both success factors and obstacles to quality partnerships:

1. “How would you assess the quality of **individual interactions** with your contacts at the university? (E.g. to what extent is the communication and cooperation with your university partner contact constructive and fulfilling for all involved?) If it is not purely positive, what aspects are problematic?”
2. “To what extent do you think the scores you gave are a result of institutional factors, rather than just individual ones, i.e. related to what **the university or your organisation as institution** is able or unable to do?”
3. “Are there any **broader factors**, other than relational and institutional, affecting the possibility of setting up high quality university-community partnerships (e.g. social or political climate, economic situation, cultural differences)?”
4. “If you could suggest **the top three actions** that the university could take to improve university-community partnerships, what would they be? (They do not necessarily need to be realistic!)”

This report presents the results of the surveys and interviews held with community representatives. The report concludes with key findings and recommendations for concrete improvements to practices and policies, aimed at University College Cork management staff, to enhance community engagement partnerships.

2. UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS SURVEY

Survey overview

As described in the introduction, a total of 5 community representatives completed the SPACE university-community partnerships survey. In this section of the report, we present a table describing the dimensions and sub-dimensions assessed by community representatives in the survey, followed by a summary of the scores provided.

Table 1: Overview of the university-community partnerships survey

Dimension / Sub-dimension	Description of topic of assessment
1. Process	
1.1. Strategy/goal setting	Extent to which the goals of the partnership are jointly defined by the university and community partners.
1.2. Decision-making	Degree of shared influence in defining roles and making decisions across the partnership.
1.3. Communication and interaction	Frequency and quality of communication and interaction between all partners.
1.4. Resources (time, expertise, funds)	Fairness and balance in resource contributions relative to the benefits received.
1.5. Disagreements in the partnership	Presence and quality of mechanisms to acknowledge and manage disagreements constructively.
1.6. Partner responsibilities	Clarity and mutual agreement on the division of roles and responsibilities.
2. Ethos	
2.1. Mutual trust	Level of trust that exists and is maintained between university and community partners.
2.2. Openness and participation	Degree to which community partners are actively involved in shaping decisions and processes.
2.3. Acknowledgement of difference	Extent to which differences in resources, needs, and motivations are recognised and addressed.
2.4. Recognition	Visibility and appropriateness of recognition given to community partners for their contributions.
2.5. Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty	Flexibility and openness to navigate ambiguity and adapt during the partnership.
2.6. Commitment and responsibility	Strength of mutual commitment and shared responsibility for the success of the partnership.
3. Outcomes	
3.1. Mutual benefits for partners	Extent to which the partnership provides benefits to both the university and the community partners.
3.2. Value for beneficiaries and/or society	Degree to which the partnership generates value for intended beneficiaries and broader society.
3.3. Institutional sustainability	Extent to which the partnership is embedded in institutional structures and supported over time.
3.4. Overall satisfaction	Overall satisfaction of all partners with the functioning and results of the partnership.

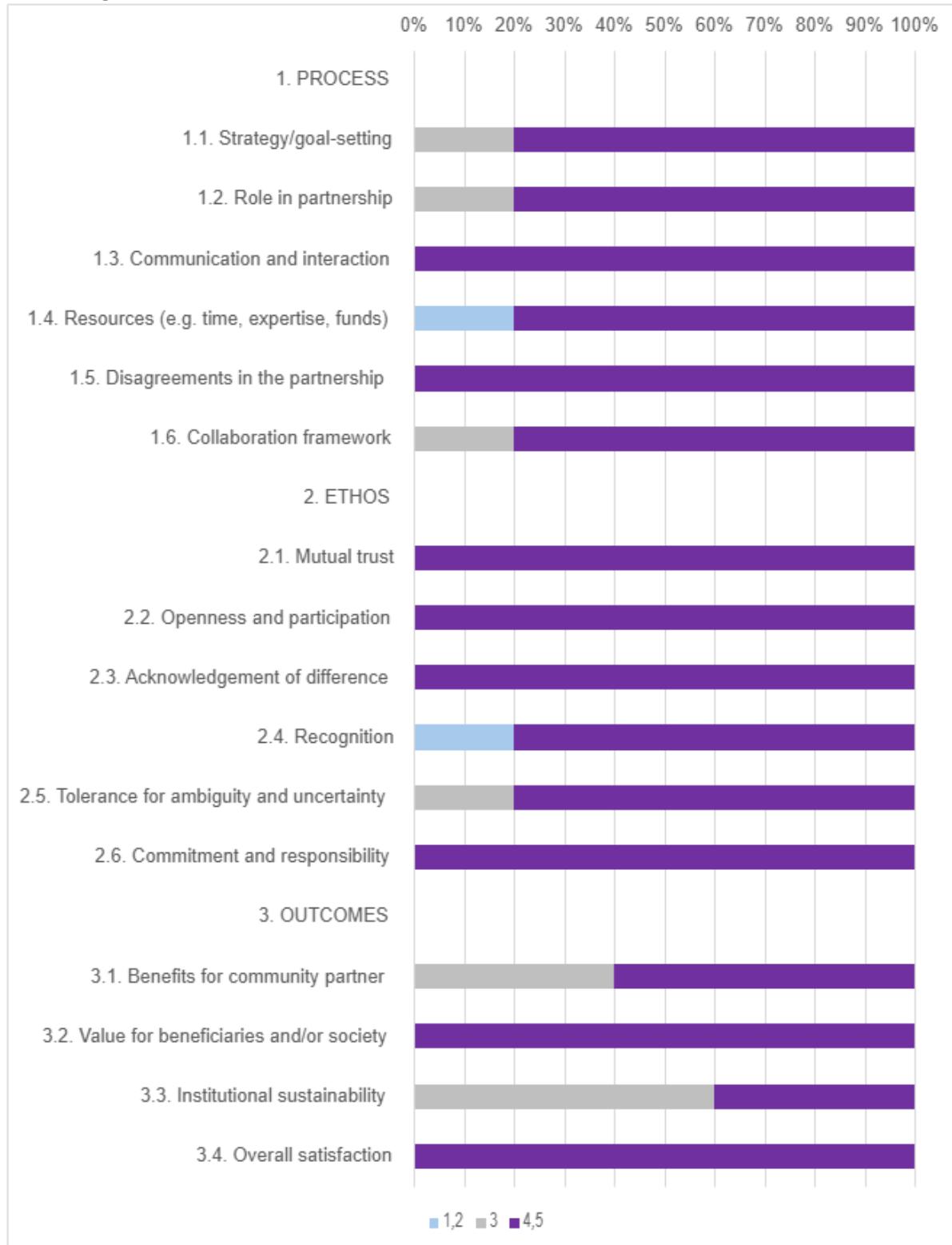
Survey results summary

The chart below presents a summary of the average scores for each of the sub-dimensions of the university-community partnerships survey, showing the proportion of respondents providing low, middle or top scores.

The full survey framework, including level descriptors and average scores received for each sub-dimension, is available as an annex to this report, and can provide more context on what each score represents in terms of success and/or challenges.



Chart 1: Survey results – University College Cork (proportion of respondents providing low, middle or top scores – n = 5



On average, the survey results suggest that partnerships between University College Cork and external organisations within communities are **very satisfactory**, and the following findings are of particular significance:

- The **strongest areas** are Communication and Interaction (5.0), Disagreements in the Partnership (5.0), Mutual Trust (5.0) and Openness and Participation (5.0), indicating that partnerships are characterised by open and useful communication, trust within the partnership and little to no disagreements between UCC and community partners.
- The **weaker areas** include Benefits for Community Partner (4.2), highlighting a possible imbalance of benefits, Collaboration Framework (4.2), indicating a lack of formal acknowledgements of the partnership, Role in Partnership (4.2), demonstrating a lack of clarity for all involved, and Institutional Sustainability (3.6), which was the lowest score, highlighting a major issue of sustaining community engagement into the future.
- Other **notable findings include** moderate scores for Resources (4.4) and Acknowledgement of Difference (4.6) which do reflect positive responses but perhaps show the differences between organisational types (a large university and a resource limited community group).

3. COMMUNITY DIALOGUES: MAPPING FACTORS THAT SHAPE PARTNERSHIPS

Three 1:1 interviews were organised throughout November 2024, using the structured dialogue framework. The conclusions below provide an overview of the feedback received from 3 participants.

Factor 1: Individual factors

"How would you assess the quality of **individual interactions** with your contacts at the university? (E.g. to what extent is the communication and cooperation with your university partner contact constructive and fulfilling for all involved?) If it is not purely positive, what aspects are problematic?"

Challenges:

- **Language barrier:** A challenge mentioned was the fact that there is often too much academic language used, which can be a major barrier for community organisations. It is important not to let academic agendas take over in these partnerships. Often, the organisation felt they had to translate academic language so that others could understand what it meant 'on the ground'.

Interviewee 2:

'Sometimes it's translating what is meant .. [it's] quite academic and sometimes you need to translate that in terms of what does that mean for us here on the ground?

How can we move this forward? How can we work ... in a collaborative way to ensure that our needs remain front and centre and they don't get subsumed by academic or personal agendas or other reasons?'

- **Relationship building:** One organisation mentioned that without a pre-established relationship with UCC, the partnership could have been at risk and might not have happened at all.

Good practices:

- **Capacity building mindset:** One organisation remarked they had only one funded role at the time and the partnership helped them to secure additional funding, thanks to gaining access to UCC's skill set. It was '**totally engaged research**' and everyone was members of the same team.

Interviewee 1:

'We made a lot of advances while that partnership was in place. We were a very fledgling organisation ... We had very ambitious objectives, but without, I suppose, the partnership with the university, it would have been very, very difficult to build any level of momentum and the initiatives that we have undertaken.

For example, we had absolutely minimal funding. It was through this partnership that we got some of our 1st funding ... which a small community group would never have accessed without partnership with the University ... I suppose, more than that, even it was the access to the skill set.'

- **Participative methods:** Many organisations noted that the university and the community organisation had an equal footing in the partnership.

Interviewee 1:

'It was truly engaged research. They were working side by side with me, almost as though [we] were the members of the same team ... it was a huge resource for us that they were working, they were helping us to design activities that would engage people.'

- **Communication:** Organisations had very regular meetings with UCC, individual interactions were rated very positively. There was a strong transfer of skills through a mutually beneficial partnership, marked by excellent collaborative thinking.

Interviewee 1:

'In this particular case it was extremely constructive, and we made a lot of advances while that partnership was in place.'

- **Social networks:** In another case, one interview participant used to work in UCC and later began working in the community organisation. They had prior relationships in UCC, so this helped the partnership and understanding it. Interactions have been very professional, collaborative and in most respects, very positive.

Interviewee 1:

'If a community group is starting out and they don't have ... the network to reach into their local ... research performing organisations... How do those relationships get established?'

- **Valuing collaboration and engagement:** In one organisation, the participant outlined that they and UCC have a shared culture and understanding of the importance of community engagement. They are supported from the top down and bottom up in their organisation. This particular organisation worked with one person in UCC who really supported them and helped the organisation see the value of engaged research.

Interviewee 2:

'With the right support and mentorship from our university colleagues in this project ... [it] has supported us to develop engaged research, the research advisory group in the living lab, and so on.'

'But it's also helped us to develop our research governance, so there's a lot of good work happening on the ground. But to really add depth, breadth and just integrity to the research that's coming out of here requires really strong quality governance.'

'So while there's work to be done within the university, there was also work to be done here on the ground to make that collaboration mutually beneficial.'

- **Bridging differences in values:** One interviewee mentioned how community engagement involves both organisations actively participating and actively working towards a successful partnership.

Interviewee 2:

'I think both organisations ... where we meet in the middle is we have that shared culture and shared understanding of the importance of engaged research.'

'The institutional factors, because we have a community partnership in place with UCC, we're supported from the top down and the bottom up, so that gives us a real leverage within the university.'

'And then individually, like the people that we work with are fantastic individuals ... they're also a reflection of the institution they work with and the culture that that they embody. It's where we found that common ground, that common space and have been able to collaborate.'

Factor 2: Institutional factors – university

"To what extent do you think the scores you gave are a result of institutional factors, rather than just individual ones, i.e. related to what **the university or your organisation as institution** is able or unable to do?"

Challenges:

- **Grant mechanisms** – one organisation noted that it can be hard to work with university finance departments. The channelling of resources to communities needs to improve as there are logistical problems which need to be addressed.

There is often a lack of trust and fear that resources will be misused. The community organisation in this case spent too much time trying to work within UCC's financial structures – these proved difficult for resource strapped small organisations. There needs to be more clarity on budgets at the outset of a partnership, and there should be a review of finance mechanisms and how they can best support community organisations, instead of burdening them.

Interviewee 1:

'We spent an inordinate amount of time trying to work within UCC's financial ... structures. But to make it work with communities there has to be a sense of ... what are the budgets that are really needed? And how do you channel those resources effectively and with due diligence, and all to a community, but in a way that that makes sense for everyone. Because we did spend an inordinate amount of time trying to manage grants and getting the right buckets in the right places.'

- **Data on current university-community partnerships:** One organisation noted that UCC and their organisation are likely to be already working on many projects together but there is no awareness/knowledge of this. Community groups need information on what projects are happening – maybe creating a dashboard where people can see all the projects UCC is working on with the community would help – who is working on it, contact details, what it is about. This would assist long term sustainability.

Interviewee 3:

'It would be good if there was a bit more ... access to what projects are happening between UCC and [local organisations] ... some dashboard or some way we could see like what's going on because then you'll be able to

see the opportunities [to work together on existing initiatives]. And I think that would help with the sustainability piece because it's kind of like an ongoing platform where you can kind of see the work that's going on and [who you can reach out to].'

- **Recognition and acknowledgment:** Partnerships need to be acknowledged and recognised.

Interviewee 2:

'There's a lot of acknowledgements within the university for KPIs and publications and so on and so forth and not enough acknowledgement or recognition of the time and effort that goes into quality community partnerships. So, recognition and acknowledgement and endorsement of this as the approach is really important.'

- **Barriers to community engagement:** Often, community organisations are looking for keynote speakers, panellists etc. for events, but they are relying on their networks and people they know to fill these roles. It is sometimes hard to reach people in UCC, as mentioned by one community organisation. They would like UCC to present people who are happy to speak – there is so much expertise in UCC, and they want to access it and showcase it to the community.

Good practices:

- **Bridging differences in institutional values and principles:** UCC and its community partners are very different institutions in how they operate, how they are governed and funded etc. It was noted by an interviewee that finding common ground is vital for successful partnerships.

Interviewee 2:

'It's about finding the fit or the common ground. We're not going to agree on everything, but it's where do our values and our principles align so that we can find that commonality to develop those high-quality partnerships.'

Factor 3: Institutional factors – community partner

"To what extent do you think the scores you gave are a result of institutional factors, rather than just individual ones, i.e. related to what the university or your organisation as **institution** is able or unable to do?"

Challenges:

- **Financial support:** Nearly all respondents noted that community partners needed more time in the day and **more financial backing!** There is a need to allocate funding to those that prioritise engaged research, this needs to be fundamental to all research.

Interviewee 2:

'There's lots of monies within universities [and] they can distribute and allocate money to projects. I think that money needs to also require engagement with

community partners as part of those funding applications. I don't think it should be an additional or a nice to have. I think it needs to be fundamental.'

- **Sustainability:** Some organisations noted that they could not keep the initiative going – there was no sustainability long term. However, other projects emerged from the initial partnership and many members of the original partnership are still involved.
- **Administrative obstacles among community partners:** One organisation mentioned that they are **very hierarchical**, and it can be difficult to work on something without a tender, in an informal way. In this case, they were already working with UCC, so they had a preexisting relationship, which helped. The fact the partnership did not involve funding; meant it was easier with less red tape.
- **Procurement rules as an obstacle to long-term partnerships:** One large community organisation, bound by tight procurement rules, had to publish a tender for a project related to the partnership and while UCC applied, ultimately, they did not win the tender and this ended the partnership. In hindsight, it would have been great for the organisation to continue working with UCC who had been involved from the start. If there was a **SLA (service level agreement)** between UCC and the organisation, it would have been ideal, as they would have been able to continue the partnership. Both organisations were very aligned on values and their approach to the public consultation. However, the community organisation was tied by procurement guidelines for needing a tender.

Interviewee 3:

'It would actually have been great if UCC were able to stay on and maybe ... if there was some kind of like SLA between us and the university, so that we could avoid the tendering process, you know [if] there was ... a predefined relationship, that would be very helpful. We were just tied by procurement.'

Good practices:

- **Use of community spaces:** One organisation mentioned that there is a building owned by UCC that some local organisations are allowed to access and use it, and it is fantastic and much appreciated to have these shared spaces. Organisations would love to see more shared spaces available to the local community.
- One organisation noted how important it was to have **good connections** in order to facilitate the beginning of a community partnership. The importance of social networks across the university and community organisations is vital.

Interviewee 1:

'We had a board member of [our organisation], and [was involved with UCC], who was able to make that connection. So, if there isn't somebody to facilitate those connections for community groups ... are those channels developed enough?'

Factor 4: Broader societal factors

“Are there any **broader factors**, other than relational and institutional, affecting the possibility of setting up high quality university-community partnerships (e.g. social or political climate, economic situation, cultural differences)?”

Challenges:

- **Lack of organisational structure at town and village level** (within town or county councils) can be a barrier to progress. In other EU countries, they often have a town mayor who can connect community groups and is aware of who is doing what in the area – and can facilitate relationship building with industry and universities. However, Ireland does not have such structures and so there is often duplications of work and no joined up thinking. Universities should advocate for proper structures for dealing with communities, as there is currently no mechanism to enable participation in engaged research. There is a need for structures in local councils who can be a connector for the community and university.
- One organisation believes that UCC should **engage more with immediate neighbourhoods** around the college area. There needs to be more meaningful projects to engage locals. There are a lot of parking issues, loud music, anti-social behaviour and some residents feel that UCC do not give back to the community to help solve these issues. UCC should engage more on the ground.

Interviewee 3:

‘UCC has a staff member now who's a Neighbourhood Liaison Officer. And this safety forum was established because of some of the negative impacts of having such a large student population living in a residential area of the city. I would love ... if UCC engaged more with the immediate neighbourhoods around the campus.’

- It was noted by one organisation the safety issues that exist in Cork city and around the University. They suggested that UCC could work with other European university towns and learn from their good practice. There are major issues with waste and bins and the organisation felt that the community needs more tangible things from the university – some engagements are too academic and UCC needs to tackle issues right outside their campus walls.

Good practices:

- **Evidence for policy changes as opportunity for strengthening partnerships:** One organisation noted that DFHERIS (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science) need evidence for policy – this helps the proof-of-concept piece that the organisation is trying to achieve. To effect change, evidence is needed and engaged research can be incredibly helpful in this regard and there is now more of a need for it.

4. LESSONS LEARNT AND WAYS FORWARD

Lessons learnt

From the surveys and in-depth interviews, it is evident that University College Cork has a long-term commitment to engaged research and community engagement. While the results were very positive overall, there is work to be done in ensuring the success and sustainability of such activities. The main areas for improvement identified in this report include:

- **Sustainability and Communication:** The long-term sustainability of partnerships remains a challenge due to limited resources and a need for greater information sharing about ongoing projects with the community. Improved communication, such as creating a centralised dashboard of ongoing partnerships and projects, could improve awareness and continuity.
- **Collaboration and Relationship Building:** Pre-existing relationships and regular, professional interactions were crucial for successful partnerships. These fostered trust, mutual benefits, and skill transfers, creating positive outcomes for both academic and community stakeholders. Efforts towards building and enhancing relationships with community stakeholders would facilitate greater quality partnerships.
- **Institutional Barriers:** Financial and bureaucratic processes in universities often hinder community organisations, especially small resource-constrained groups. Simplified finance mechanisms and clear agreements, such as SLAs, are needed to support more effective and streamlined collaboration.
- **Societal Structures and Policy Impact:** The lack of local organisational structures in Ireland limits coordination between communities and universities. Engaged research is vital for evidence-based policymaking, highlighting the need for mechanisms that bridge this gap and facilitate broader societal collaboration.

Ways forward

Following the completion of the survey and the interview process, each interviewee was asked to share three recommendations they felt would improve university community partnerships going forward. These recommendations are outlined below, with suggestions for each organisation involved in a university community partnership:

Considerations for university management

- Place **engaged research** at the heart of community collaboration.
Interviewee 1:
'Make engaged research very central to the work with communities; it must be engaged research. It must follow that model where the researchers are embedded within the community. They're working side by side.'
- Adapt **financial structures** to consider what is practical and sustainable for community organisations.
- Ensure adequate and ongoing financial support for community partners and **prioritise funding for projects rooted in engaged research**.

- Address the unintended consequences of **proximity between the university and surrounding communities**, such as noise, parking issues, and anti-social behaviour. Develop mechanisms for active listening and problem-solving in collaboration with local residents.

Considerations for academic staff

- Ensure plain English is used as much as possible when engaging with community organisations to allow **communication** to be clear and inclusive for all involved.
- Adopt a **bottom-up approach to academic development**. Support emerging researchers who are committed to community engagement and strengthen pathways for long-term involvement.
- Enhance research governance and demonstrate how **research benefits both academic and community stakeholders**.

Considerations for community partners

- Advocate for greater **recognition** of the time, effort, and quality contributions they bring to partnerships, beyond standard metrics and KPIs.
- Promote and refer to the Dingle Peninsula initiative as a **lighthouse example** of best practice in engaged research.
- **Network and collaborate** with universities to identify priority areas and support funding applications, particularly in under-resourced neighbourhoods.
- Be active participants in building strong research **governance** by communicating community needs and challenges transparently.

Other recommendations

- Explore cross-European partnerships to address shared **urban challenges** such as **safety, student welfare, and community well-being**.
- Engage with **local authorities/national bodies** to address the gap in organisational structures limiting coordination between communities and universities. The development of a shared dashboard or networking mechanism could support both universities and community organisations in identifying and pursuing collaborative opportunities for engaged research.
- Develop **micro-credential opportunities** for community organisation staff. Many such organisations lack the resources for continuing professional development (CPD), and a partnership with the university could help bridge this gap.

In conclusion, organisations who engaged in this survey and interview process had very positive experiences with University College Cork and its staff. All organisations saw the value of engaged research and how valuable it can be both for the community organisation

and the university. While the experiences noted were all largely positive, there are still improvements to be made, as referenced in the recommendations above.

ANNEX: SURVEY RESULTS

Survey results – University College Cork

DIMENSION 1: PROCESS (The way the partnership is planned and implemented)						
Sub-dimensions	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Achieved level
1.1. Strategy/goal setting	Partnership goals are defined by the university, and do not consider community partner goals.	Partnership goals are jointly defined by both university and community partners.		Partnership goals are defined by the community partners.		4.4
1.2. Role in partnership	Community partners have little influence over how the partnership roles are defined and allocated.	The university and community partners have shared influence over how the partnership roles are defined and allocated.		Community partners take the lead in defining how the partnership roles are defined and allocated.		4.2
1.3. Communication and interaction	Partners do not meet and communicate enough, resulting in disengagement from the partnership.	Partners meet and communicate regularly, resulting in satisfactory cooperation.		Partners meet and communicate regularly and frequently, resulting in a high level of engagement in the partnership.		5.0
1.4. Resources (e.g. time, expertise, funds)	Community partners invest more time and resources than is appropriate considering the benefits of the partnership.	Community partners invest significant time and resources in the partnership, but with a satisfactory level of mutual benefit.		The benefits of the partnership outweigh the resources invested by community partners.		4.4
1.5. Disagreements in the partnership	Disagreements between partners remain unnoticed and/or unacknowledged.	Disagreements between partners are acknowledged and partly managed, but underlying issues remain unresolved.		Disagreements are openly discussed and become a catalyst to generate new possibilities for the partnership.		5.0
1.6. Collaboration framework	The partnership works on an informal basis, with no formal definition of expected tasks of community partners.	The partnership has a basic framework (e.g. written agreement) defining the expected tasks of community partners.		The partnership has a comprehensive framework defining expected tasks of all partners, as well as guidelines and support mechanisms.		4.2

DIMENSION 2: ETHOS (Attitudes and values that characterise the partnership)					Achieved level
Sub-dimensions	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
2.1. Mutual trust	There is insufficient trust between the university and community partners.	There is sufficient trust between the university and community partners.	There is full trust between the university and community partners.		5.0
2.2. Openness and participation	The partnership is led in a top-down manner by the university, with little space for community partners to take part in decision-making.	The partnership is led by the university, but community partners are regularly consulted to influence its development.	The partnership works on a participatory basis, with community partners playing an equal role in decision-making.		5.0
2.3. Acknowledgement of difference	There is no specific acknowledgement in the partnership that community partners have different resources, needs and motivations compared to the university.	Differences in community partner resources, needs and motivations are acknowledged, but not enough is done to address identified challenges.	The partnership critically discusses differences in partner resources, needs and motivations, and takes steps to mitigate those differences.		4.6
2.4. Recognition	Community partners are not provided with adequate recognition (formally or informally) for their role in the partnership	Community partners are provided with informal recognition for their role in the partnership, and with some degree of formal recognition.	The partnership is provided with high-level, formal recognition for its achievements, and community partners are highlighted in this recognition.		4.4
2.5. Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty	Uncertain situations and ambiguous processes are the source of dissatisfaction and disagreement among partners.	The partnership shows some flexibility and adaptability in handling uncertainty, but there is preference for predictable and well-defined processes.	The partnership works intentionally in a flexible and exploratory way, embracing ambiguity and uncertainty as a basis for defining new solutions.		4.6
2.6. Commitment and responsibility	Most partners do not demonstrate sufficient commitment and responsibility, which damages the partnership.	Some partners do not demonstrate sufficient commitment and responsibility, but the partnership remains stable.	All demonstrate clear commitment and responsibility, making the partnership highly cohesive.		4.5

DIMENSION 3: OUTCOMES (Results of the partnership)						
Sub-dimensions	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Achieved level
3.1. Benefits for community partner	The partnership brings significantly more benefits to the university than to the community partners.	Both the university and community partners share certain benefits.	Community partners have significant benefits thanks to the partnership.			4.2
3.2. Value for beneficiaries and/or society	The results of the partnership are not of great value to beneficiaries and/or society.	The results of the partnership are of some value to beneficiaries and/or society.	The results of the partnership are of great value to beneficiaries and/or society.			4.8
3.3. Institutional sustainability	The partnership is a one-off initiative and there is no indication of its continuation and sustainability.	The partnership is sustaining its activities, but primarily due to individual drive rather than institutional support.	The partnership is long-standing and there is institutional commitment by all partners to ensure resources to sustain it for the foreseeable future.			3.6
3.4. Overall satisfaction	Community partners are dissatisfied with this partnership.	Community partners are satisfied with this partnership, but improvements could be made.	Community partners are completely satisfied with the partnership.			4.6

Are there any other challenges or strengths of the partnership that have not been covered in the topics above?

Please describe these below.

This partnership is particularly strong for engagement at community level. The approach taken by the Project Lead has been community centred and adaptable to community set up – effectively meeting people on their terms and in their setting, flexible to changes. The approach has been exemplary in my experience – a best practice and community centred approach that is rare. The lead researcher has adapted a community development approach to the research, working with local communities, proactively doing outreach, engaging in a meaningful way using accessible language and listening and responding to the priorities set out by participants. This is community engagement and partnership working that is easy for me to facilitate and feel confident to reach out to others to collaborate with. - Community Organisation 1

The partnership between [our organisation] and UCC is built on complementary strengths that drive impactful change. [Our organisation] brings deep expertise in providing innovative, person-centred care to individuals and families with disabilities, while UCC contributes academic rigor and research excellence. UCC's involvement in the Research Advisory Board, along with their pro bono support in Living Labs, co-creation practices, and research ethics, ensures that the research is both practical and scientifically robust. Together, [our



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organisation] and UCC creates a collaborative environment that fosters real-world solutions, enhances research integrity, and drives meaningful, evidence-based change in the disability sector for both Ireland and beyond. - Community Organisation 4