

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND

# Careers Impact Strategy



National College of Ireland is one of Ireland's most innovative third-level institutions with 6,500 students across its key areas of human relations, business, computing, education and psychology. Located at the crossroads of the IFSC and Silicon Docklands, NCI delivers access to education and lifelong learning, with a focus on entrepreneurship and employability. A warmly supportive HEI, NCI facilitates self-realisation and critical thinking.

National College of Ireland's mission is to change lives through education. A reflection of the success of this mission is the increase of student numbers by 54% in the past 4 years. NCI's award-winning Careers Team is a vital support service for students.



NCI Spencer Dock Campus



NCI Mayor Square Campus



Caroline Kennedy, Head of Career Development & Employability

## Background

Over half of our undergraduate students are first-generation college students, many Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME), while over two-thirds of full-time postgraduates are Non-EU students. These groups face particular disadvantage in the Irish labour market. Without professional networks, students have limited access to the informal advice, referrals, and introductions that shape many career opportunities. International students encounter further obstacles, with many employers reluctant to engage with visa processes. The result is that talented graduates risk exclusion – not through lack of ability, but through lack of access.

## Challenge

While student numbers grew, staffing remained static: the Careers Team had to think outside the box to address one of the most pressing barriers facing our students in achieving this mission: the lack of a professional network.

## Response

informed by global models, the Careers Team innovated by making employers and alumni active participants in career initiatives—turning them into a key resource for student success and graduate outcomes.



### Global Models

- Farouk Dey's career everywhere model (Johns Hopkins University), which ensures equitable access to career connections.
- University of Denver's Career and Professional Development strategy, leveraging alumni networks to enhance career readiness.
- The 'Friend Raising' approach (Myran, Baker III, Simone, & Zeiss, 2003), which prioritises long-term engagement over transactional networking. students, alumni, and employers.



Together with weekly career workshops that are open to all students every programme includes:

- Employer networking events with a targeted ratio of one employer for every 12 students.
- Alumni-student mixer events with a 1:3 alumni-to-student ratio to foster meaningful connections.
- Employer led mock interviews with personalised feedback

While AI is reshaping recruitment, human connections remain vital. One conversation or one introduction can change a life and with this in mind we have moved away from passive presentation-based events. All events are interactive, focusing on networking and relationship-building to ensure students develop career confidence and social capital.

By using alumni and employer networks, we transformed a resource-limited challenge into a sustainable, scalable model that personalises career support and improves graduate outcomes. This approach ensures students gain not just degrees, but meaningful career opportunities.





### Key Features:

- Alumni as mentors, providing guidance and support to current students and fostering a cycle of continuous engagement.
- Employers engaging in meaningful interactions with students, ensuring career events are not just branding exercises but valuable networking opportunities.
- Integrated collaborations, such as Citi Upstart and Fidelity's 'Finance for Good' competition, woven into academic programmes.

### Example of key events over a two-month period:

- Festival of Data: Vhi, OpenSky, Storm Technologies, Fastnet Underwriting, Dogpatch.
- Festival of AI: VHI, Laya, SmartVendr, OpenSky Data, OpenZeppelin, Fiserv, ICL
- Festival of Business: AIB, ArthurCox, Azets, Cronin, DBFL, Enterprise Mobility, ESB, Grant Thornton, Hays, HLB, OCA, Peter McVerry, Ryanair, SAP, Takeda, Trane, Tundra, Unipharm, WDA
- Festival of Marketing: Enterprise Mobility, Jameson, IAPI, Vodafone, Richmond Marketing, Kaseya.
- Hays mock interviewed 230 business students providing personalised feedback.
- Cyber Alumni Student Mixer: 40 alumni; 120 students

### Impact

This relationship-driven model goes well beyond standard careers provision and provides students, especially those who may not progress through traditional CV screening, with direct access to hiring managers and industry experts. This level of engagement has had a tangible, measurable impact on students, alumni, employers and on the reputation of the college.

### Every programme now integrates:

- Alumni-student mixers, with 163 alumni returning in 2025.
- Employer-led networking events, with 83 employers participating.
- Employer-led mock interviews, giving students personalised feedback at scale.
- Graduate success stories, showcasing different career pathways taken by NCI graduates, the challenges and wins. 28 stories published to date and growing monthly.

### The results in 2024/2025 demonstrate the impact:

- 71% of students planned to connect on LinkedIn with alumni and employers they met.
- 67% reported improved networking confidence.
- 91% said they were more likely to apply for roles with employers they had engaged with.
- 57% of companies who came on campus last year recruited at least one NCI student



## Feedback

### EMPLOYERS HAVE EXPRESSED GREAT APPRECIATION OF THIS INITIATIVE:

*"A fantastic event—well-organised and engaging. We met so many enthusiastic students who had done their research and were keen to connect."*

*"It was great to meet so many students, and you certainly created a buzz. Your ability to introduce students personally is a marvel."*

### STUDENT FEEDBACK ECHOES THIS POSITIVE RESPONSE:

*"The Careers Team was one of the major benefits of NCI, the events were so helpful. Prior to the first event I hadn't heard of the company I now work for. Following a careers event I applied for an internship and still work here now."*

*"Everything was awesome. Please arrange these events more often so every student can get proper guidance."*

Alumni play a pivotal role. Research shows alumni networks expand social capital, giving disadvantaged students access to opportunities that might otherwise remain closed (Willmott, 2011). Their professional success reflects positively on NCI and provides students with visible examples of what is possible. As role models and contacts, they create a virtuous cycle in which today's students become tomorrow's professionals who return to support NCI, strengthen its community, and open pathways for future graduates.



### Future plans

What began as a response to structural challenges has become a sustainable and scalable model. By engaging both employers and alumni, the Careers Team has strengthened NCI's leadership in inclusive innovation, aligned with institutional strategy, and embedded EDI values in practice.

This is NCI's values in action: inclusive, community-centred, learner-focused, and dynamic. It ensures that background does not limit future, and that every student has the opportunity to leave NCI with networks that open doors to opportunity.

Collaboration underpins this initiative, both within NCI and across the sector: we have shared this model and insight with AHECS member services and contributed to national & global career discussions.

