



Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



**DCU**  
**Volunteer Strategy**  
2025-2028



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# Foreword

In a world increasingly defined by rapid change and unscripted challenges, Dublin City University (DCU) remains steadfast in its mission to “transform lives and societies.” This Volunteer Strategy comprehensively maps our commitment, establishing active citizenship not merely as an extracurricular activity but as an essential element of the DCU experience for our students and staff.

Building on the success of our inaugural strategy, this document acknowledges the evolving landscape of volunteering in a post-pandemic world, where demands for flexibility and variety are paramount. It is a call to action and a pragmatic commitment to providing the necessary structures to encourage, support, and recognise the significant voluntary effort across our DCU community.

The strategy focuses on robust internal collaboration and deep external partnerships to create adaptable, mutually beneficial opportunities. Opportunities range from the local to national, and even international. Through our commitment to StudentVolunteer.ie, a national partnership between higher education institutions, students will be able to engage in volunteering on a central platform. This facilitates easier engagement with the local community and enables the University to recognise and celebrate all our students’ achievements.

By formalising the recognition and fostering of this critical strand of civic engagement, DCU empowers its community to gain transversal skills, enhance wellbeing, and grow as positive change-makers. By enabling volunteering, DCU equips its students with the tools they need for the future.

We invite you to join us in embracing this strategy. Your time, energy, and commitment are the true engines for realising DCU’s vision of a just, ethical, and sustainable future.

**Laura Mahoney**  
Executive Director for Engagement



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community to gain  
transversal skills,  
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# Vision, Mission and Drivers

## Our Mission

To empower, embolden and equip DCU staff and students to be civically driven and active in responding to local and global challenges, aligning with the University's mission to "transform lives and societies."

## Our Vision

To be a leading innovative university for volunteering, distinguished by the empowerment of its staff and students to effect social change, the quality of its civic engagement, and its collaboration with the community to impact global challenges.

## Our Drivers

Key factors that drive the delivery of this strategy are:

- Collective Leadership
- Collaboration
- Innovation, Creativity and Enterprise (ICE)
- Active Citizenship
- Transversal Skills
- Sustainable Development
- Altruism
- Culture



# Context

## Leading The Way

DCU was the first university in Ireland to publish a volunteer strategy in 2020. DCU has consistently been a driving force for social and economic development in the local and regional community, with voluntary and civic action being a central component of student and staff activities across all of the University's campuses, as well as being one of DCU's strategic priorities. Volunteering is incorporated into many of DCU's established initiatives, such as the President's Award for Engagement and the Uaneen Module. It is also encouraged on campus through DCU People, the Office of Student Life, the Students' Union and through Clubs and Societies.

## Defining Volunteering

DCU defines volunteering as the practice of freely giving one's time and energy in the best interest of people, animals, the environment, or other causes, without financial or material compensation. Whether formal or informal, organised or spontaneous, volunteering is about civic engagement and active participation in shaping the society in which one wants to live. Volunteers are active citizens, civic anchors, and champions for causes in which they believe. DCU acknowledges that volunteering also benefits volunteers, positively influencing health and wellbeing and providing a sense of purpose and personal growth.

## DCU Volunteer

DCU facilitates volunteering through DCU Volunteer, a dedicated unit within the Office of Civic Engagement, under the Office of the Executive Director for Engagement. The unit serves as a vital link, connecting the DCU community with impactful volunteering opportunities and endeavouring to meet the diverse needs of staff, students and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs).

DCU Volunteer offers comprehensive support and guidance to its constituencies, while also organising on-campus events, showcasing a wide range of VIOs and their volunteer opportunities. It actively collaborates with the Students' Union, with VIOs and with other groups across the University, in its efforts to ensure that all volunteers' needs are met and the University community is effectively engaged. It is central to the strategic development and delivery of volunteering initiatives, empowering both staff and students to positively impact their communities.

## Evolving Needs

As the world of volunteering evolves, DCU recognises the need for agility in delivering on this competence. It is evident that both student and staff bodies require increased flexibility, both on and off campus, when it comes to engaging with VIOs, as there are significant barriers to engagement, and ever-increasing competition for their time. There is a need for greater variation in volunteering opportunities as students volunteer for a variety of reasons, including the attainment and application of transversal skills and competencies.

### **National Landscape**

Student volunteering in Ireland is now widespread. It has grown significantly since Studentvolunteer.ie was established in 2016 by a number of third-level institutions as a national online platform to connect students with volunteer opportunities. In 2020, StudentVolunteer.ie found that over 189,800 hours of volunteering were logged by students, while CSO data from 2022 found that over 61,000 students were engaged in volunteering. However, it is likely that the level of volunteering is even higher than those figures suggest and that volunteering hours have not been adequately recorded to date. This volunteer strategy aims to address that deficit in the case of DCU by putting in place new mechanisms to effectively measure its volunteer activity.

# Strategic Framework

## **Transformation for an Unscripted Future**

The DCU Strategy 2023-2028, Transformation for an Unscripted Future, states that its mission is to “transform lives and societies”. This volunteer strategy aims to underpin that mission through the strategic development of student and staff volunteering ventures. These ventures are designed to broaden the knowledge and experience base of the staff and student body, embedding the essential skills to thrive, while also offering opportunities for personal development, where the University community can make connections both on and off campus.

Student and staff volunteering aligns with DCU’s strategic pillars as follows:

### **Pioneering a Transformative Student Experience**

- Offering students opportunities to positively impact and make a difference in their community and internationally, as well as facilitating experiential learning, skill development, networking and career development in the charity and voluntary sector.

### **Valuing and Developing Staff and Community**

- Recognising and rewarding staff voluntary contributions, as well as developing mechanisms to encourage staff to engage in activities which positively impact the community.
- Working with the community, learning how to better support each other to impact and transform society for the better.

- Aligning with the DCU People Wellbeing strategy and providing staff with opportunities to improve social and mental wellbeing by coming together, connecting, networking, and socialising through volunteering and fundraising.

### **Advancing Research Reputation and Impact**

- Building on increased dialogue with the community and voluntary sector to inform, and further research, policymaking for a better society for all.

### **Enhancing Local and International Engagement**

- Recognising the needs of local, regional, national, and international communities, and highlighting where student and staff volunteering can add value.

### **Optimising Organisational Resilience and Readiness**

- Collaborating with staff and students to ensure that the University is ready for unexpected events within the volunteering space in an unpredictable and rapidly changing world.





# DCU Volunteer Strategy 2025 - 2028

## Strategic Goals

- To support DCU staff and students to engage in volunteering opportunities both on and off campus.
- To drive volunteering across the University, harnessing collaboration between university units and departments to develop and deliver DCU's mission to transform lives and societies through volunteering.
- To facilitate all types of volunteering to meet the diverse needs of staff and students (including remote, once-off, and micro volunteering) in addition to in-person and long-term volunteering opportunities.
- To explore the use of StudentVolunteer.ie as a mechanism to record and manage both on-campus volunteering (e.g. involvement with Clubs and Societies) and off-campus volunteering (e.g. involvement with local sports clubs), as is done at other higher education institutions across Ireland.
- To establish a baseline for student volunteering at DCU and to accurately record students' contributions:
  - To ensure that the efforts of both DCU and its students are recognised and acknowledged.
  - To equip the University to provide the appropriate opportunities and support to students and staff.
- To effectively engage and manage relationships with VIOs, establishing a baseline of engagement and, as a result, offering staff and students increased diversity of volunteer opportunities.
- To maintain continuous engagement with VIOs to promote accessible, adaptable, rewarding and mutually beneficial volunteering opportunities for staff and students.
- To strengthen the University's engagement with the local community by making active efforts to meet its volunteering needs and by nurturing community-university partnerships.
- To consistently engage with DCU staff and students regarding their volunteering needs to ensure that they receive the support and guidance required to become civically active.
- To acknowledge and reward students' volunteer efforts, both on and off campus, reinforcing the importance of volunteering in personal and professional development.

## Specific Actions

### DCU Volunteer

- Explore StudentVolunteer.ie as a central platform and mechanism to facilitate volunteering:
  - To improve the signposting of volunteering opportunities to the student body.
  - To offer VIOs a single access point to engage with the DCU student body.
  - To record and manage data relating to volunteering.
  - To provide staff and students with the opportunity to engage with VIOs, gain valuable experience and be acknowledged and rewarded.
- Establish a Volunteer Forum:
  - Facilitate cross-university collaboration and cooperation around DCU volunteering activities.
  - Ensure the Volunteer Forum is representative and includes the relevant university units, the Students' Union and students with diverse needs and volunteering interests.
  - Provide the forum with the wherewithal to play an advisory role in volunteer events and workshops (e.g. the Volunteer Fair, Raise and Give Week).
  - Use the Volunteer Forum to ensure a student-centred approach is followed when organising volunteering and fundraising events.
- Highlight DCU's civic engagement and student volunteering through:
  - Celebrations, such as International Volunteer Day.
  - Award systems, particularly the President's Award for Engagement.
  - Testimonials from VIOs highlighting DCU volunteers' contributions to their organisation.
  - Student testimonials emphasising the contribution of volunteering to their personal and professional development.
  - DCU Volunteer, DCU in the Community and DCU Students' Union's website and social media, as well as other platforms and relevant events.
- Communicate criteria and eligibility for awards available to staff and students based on their commitment to civic engagement (e.g., President's Award for Engagement, Gaisce).
- Utilise new relationships with VIOs and data related to student volunteering to expand volunteer events and activities on campus (e.g. The Volunteer Fair), offering relevant and timely opportunities to students and staff.



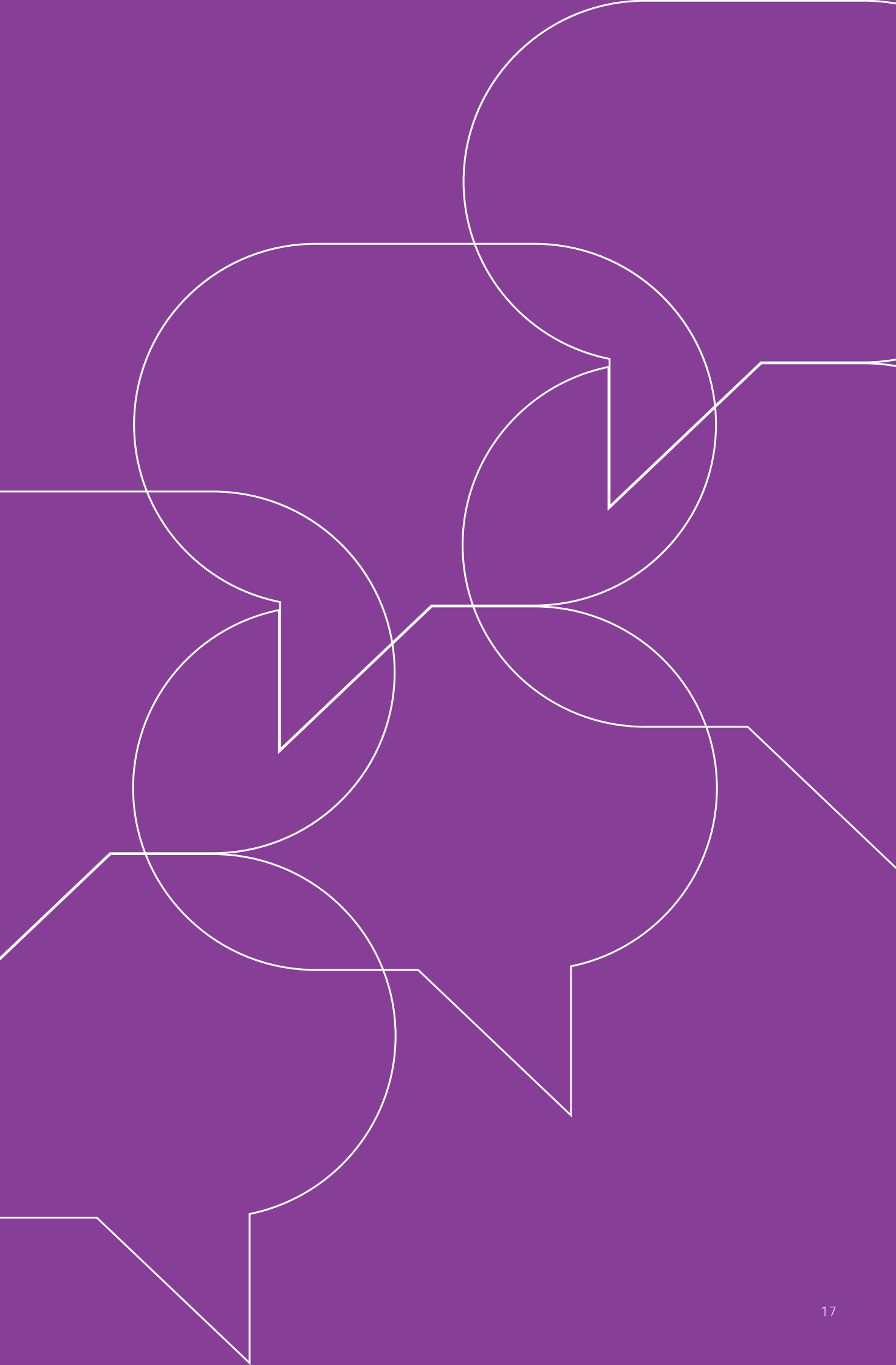


**Internal Partnerships:**

- Deepen the relationship between DCU Volunteer, Student Support and Development and the Office of Student Life to:
  - Support students' integration into, and engagement in, university life.
  - Further develop the relationship with the Students' Union, particularly with the VP for Community and Citizenship.
  - Promote and support internal volunteering opportunities, (e.g. student and staff peer mentoring programmes.)
- Increase collaboration with the DCU Students' Union to:
  - Empower the Students' Union to promote opportunities for civic and community engagement among the student body.
  - Boost engagement with VIOs and participate in local and national civic events.
  - Include the Students' Union in the University's designated charity partner decision-making process.
  - Enhance the visibility of DCU Volunteer and volunteer opportunities within the student community.
- Work towards building connections with DCU Careers, leveraging its expertise to increase student volunteering across the University.
- Endeavour to create a relationship with DCU Alumni to collaborate on and promote volunteering opportunities relevant to, and related to, alumni.
- Draw upon the expertise of the University community to further strengthen the culture of active citizenship across DCU.
  - Support models that work with those in need, improving employability, transversal skills, emotional resilience, and social inclusion.
  - Encourage collaboration across the University to offer increased opportunities for civic engagement.

**External Partnerships:**

- Explore how becoming a member of StudentVolunteer.ie can drive volunteering at DCU, as it can assist the University to:
  - Effectively signpost volunteer opportunities on and off campus.
  - Facilitate direct and secure engagement between volunteers and VIOs.
  - Manage and record volunteering data.
  - Best fulfil its reporting obligations to the Higher Education Authority.
- Ensure that all volunteering and civic engagement activities align with Volunteer Ireland's Volunteer Charter, of which DCU is a signatory. This charter prioritises mutually beneficial volunteering for volunteers and VIOs alike.
- Align with Comhlámh's mission of supporting and promoting responsible overseas volunteering and international development by:
  - Informing all students and staff of Comhlámh's Code of Good Practice, which ensures sustainable and beneficial international volunteering experiences.
  - Inviting Comhlámh to deliver workshops and information sessions to students and staff who are considering volunteering overseas.
  - Encouraging staff and students interested in volunteering overseas to complete Comhlámh's Ethical Communications online course before volunteering.
- Strengthen the relationship between the University and its charity partner(s) to:
  - Promote and raise funds through various initiatives and events.
  - Increase awareness of partnered charities among DCU staff and students, alumni, retired staff members and DCU's local community.
  - Further offer DCU students an opportunity to engage and feel a part of partnerships, through volunteering activities and events.
  - Encourage a cohesive effort across DCU to support partnered charities.
- Enrich civic engagement efforts by continuously strengthening relationships with social enterprises, community groups, local schools, and civil society organisations by:
  - Preserving existing grassroots social projects.
  - Continuing to host Volunteer Helpdesks on campus.
  - Publicising external volunteering opportunities across DCU Volunteer social media accounts.
  - Promoting the Volunteer Hub as a centre for local public engagement.



# Key Performance Indicators

## Year One

2025 - 2026

- Introduce StudentVolunteer.ie, on a trial basis, to explore how DCU can facilitate student volunteering more effectively and to manage and record volunteering data.
- In accordance with reporting requirements, and in consultation with DCU's Quality and Institutional Insights Office, establish new baselines and key performance indicators for student volunteering and VIO engagement at DCU.
- Host four student-focused volunteer events.
- Support DCU People, where necessary, in progressing the DCU People Staff Volunteering Policy.
- Host one staff-focused volunteering/fundraising event.
- Establish the Volunteer Forum and hold a meeting each semester, to ensure its consistent activity.

# Year Two

2026 - 2027

- Review StudentVolunteer.ie Year One trial and investigate DCU becoming a full member of it on a long-term basis, and joining the platform's executive board.
- Utilise volunteer data to establish a new, or reinforce a current, mechanism to acknowledge and reward volunteers for their volunteering activities .
- Build on data collected in 2025/2026 to increase student volunteering as per the KPIs established in Year One.
- Host four student-focused volunteer events.
- Host two staff-focused volunteering/fundraising events.

# Year Three

2027 - 2028

- Review the data collected and provided by StudentVolunteer.ie during the three-year period (2025-2028), and establish a new benchmark for volunteering activity at the University.
- Further develop and embed mechanisms to acknowledge and reward staff and students for volunteering activities.
- Host four student-focused volunteer events.
- Host two staff-focused volunteering/fundraising events.
- Expand the Volunteer Fair to become the largest to date, with significantly increased numbers of registered students and VIOs in attendance.



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