Pioneering & Connected

Strategic Plan

2011-2015
Message from the President

As President of the University of Limerick, I am delighted to present our strategic plan for the period 2011 to 2015.

Professor Don Barry
President of the University of Limerick
The title of the plan, **Pioneering & Connected**, reflects both the history of this wonderful institution and my ambition for its future.

The plan commits the University to forging new ways of teaching and learning for our students and to seeking innovations in research that will advance the economic, educational and social development of our region and the world. At a time of severe strain on state funding, the plan also commits us to finding new ways of funding our activities by applying our characteristic entrepreneurial approach to what we do.

The plan seeks to create a university that is both locally and globally connected. One of the great strengths of the University of Limerick is its commitment to collaboration. I see collaboration as a multi-level concept. It involves working together across disciplines, departments and faculties within the University as well as collaborating with other universities, research bodies, institutes of education, corporations and public institutions, nationally and internationally.

A strong sense of local connection to our communities is a defining feature of the University of Limerick, and I fully appreciate that we have a responsibility to promote economic, educational, social and cultural development, particularly in the Shannon region. I recognise that a modern university must be connected to the global research and learning environment to fully realise its ambitions. Internationalisation, both as a way of thinking and in the implementation of specific actions, will form a central component of our strategic activities. It will be reflected in both our programme content and our research activities, and we will continue to internationalise our student body and staff.

One of my core beliefs is that universities exist for the benefit of their students, and I am particularly pleased that this Strategic Plan stresses the provision of an experience that challenges students and inspires them to reach their full potential. We seek to educate graduates who are prepared for pioneering roles in society as leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs – I want our graduates to be connected through involvement in community-based activities, exposure to diverse cultural experiences, and awareness and involvement in internationally relevant research.

I see a future for the University of Limerick that builds on the past in a way that is strategically focused and preserves our reputation as a pioneer in higher education. At a time when universities are driven towards uniformity, I have a deeply felt desire to retain our originality in what we do and how we do it. Our distinctive style ensures that we will continue to transcend the borders of the academy by connecting to the outside world.
We seek to educate graduates who are prepared for pioneering roles in society as leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs.
Executive Summary

The Context
The University of Limerick’s Strategic Plan 2011–2015 is written at a time when rapid social change and a fast-moving policy agenda pose new challenges to universities. It is increasingly recognised that universities are accountable for the conduct of their affairs and are subject to scrutiny by a variety of parties and the general public. External trends that impinge on third-level education, such as participation rates, the commercialisation of research, fourth-level education, the social and cultural role of universities, the European and international dimensions of higher education, collaboration, competition, resources, governance, risk management, quality assurance and emerging national strategy, will all shape the future of Irish universities and will inform the delivery of this Strategic Plan.

Considerable progress has been made in implementing the University’s Strategic Plan 2006–2011. In relation to academic developments, the six colleges have been reconfigured into four faculties, new academic units have been established, new academic programmes have been launched and practice-orientated learning facilities have been put in place. In terms of research, the key areas that reflect our expertise and differentiate us as an entrepreneurial institution have been refined, priority research areas have been identified and our research ethos has been characterised as focusing on convergent translational research. In the area of collaboration, a strategic alliance between the University of Limerick and NUI Galway was formed in January 2010, and the work of the Shannon Consortium has resulted in a range of specific
collaborative innovations in teaching and learning. In addition, collaboration with other agencies has resulted in the creation of Tusnua, which aims to enable people in the region who are unemployed to gain access to education and business development programmes. Key collaborations with the other Irish universities have been advanced through participation in Science Foundation Ireland, IDA and Enterprise Ireland initiatives. At the international level, the University has been very successful at securing EU Framework 7 programme funding.

Mission, Vision, Values
The mission of the University of Limerick is to be a distinctive, pioneering and connected university that shapes the future through educating and empowering people to meet the real challenges of tomorrow. Our vision is to be internationally known as a distinctive, pioneering and connected institution that provides outstanding student experiences, actively engages in research and is globally and locally connected in terms of its contribution to economic, social and cultural life. Our vision is underpinned by a number of core values.

Strategic Goals
Four strategic goals have been identified to drive the implementation of our Strategic Plan 2011-15. The goals focus on (i) the student experience; (ii) our research profile; (iii) our international focus; and (iv) our contribution to the development of the nation and the region.

Goal 1
Our first strategic goal is to provide an outstanding and distinctive experience for every one of our students to enable them to become knowledgeable, skilled and confident graduates. We seek to produce critical-thinking, creative, innovative and entrepreneurial graduates who will be leaders in society and will exhibit strong ethical, cultural and community-focused values. This will be achieved through excellent pedagogy and curricula, cooperative education, an increasingly diverse undergraduate population, specialised supports for first-year students, wider access to and greater flexibility in the delivery of programmes, and co-curricular and extra-curricular learning.

Specifically, we will implement a new undergraduate teaching and learning development programme that offers students wider choice, includes generic and transferable skills and
experiential learning opportunities and strengthens links between teaching and research. We will work with NUI Galway on joint initiatives at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, put in place a programme to facilitate the transition to third level and maintain learning resources and services and access and lifelong learning programmes through the Strategic Innovation Fund. We will provide high-quality learning space and technology, flexible programme entry and exit routes and environmental leadership. We will also establish a centre of excellence in teaching and teacher education.

In terms of targets, first-year undergraduate retention rates will increase to 95% and the number of taught postgraduate students will increase by 30%. As a percentage of the total student population, the number of mature students will increase to at least 15%, students with a disability to at least 5% and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to at least 7%.

**Goal 2**
The second strategic goal is to further enhance our research profile and strengthen the impact of our research, both nationally and internationally. By focusing on convergent translational research, fertile new fields of knowledge will emerge and the application of research outputs will be accelerated. We will achieve this goal by publishing and disseminating high-quality research; developing research capability through recruitment, mentoring, secondment and exchange programmes; creating synergies and academic support through research institutes and centres; collaborating with strategic partners; contributing to social and economic development through the rapid translation of research; clearly aligning research and teaching; and promoting a culture of entrepreneurship.

To achieve these objectives, we will establish research and knowledge translation performance indicators, put in place faculty and institute research strategies, align research activities into institutes and centres and foster interactions between researchers, industry and professional practice. We will collaborate strategically in joint ventures with other institutions, adopt a knowledge transfer and commercialisation strategy that enhances our contribution to economic and social development and provide incentives for convergent research initiatives.

We will advance the Shannon Energy Valley initiative to create a national hub for energy research and development and will establish a joint Translational Research Institute with our partners. We will also strive to diversify our sources of funding for research.

Our targets for the achievement of this goal include increasing the enrolment of doctoral students by 40%, implementing a structured doctorate model and personal development plans for research students by the end of 2010/11, increasing the number of publications in the ISI Web of Knowledge and the number of books with prestigious publishers by 20%, increasing the number of publication citations by 50%, increasing the number of patents awarded per €1 million of research expenditure by at least 20% and increasing research income from EU sources by 50%.
Goal 3
Our third strategic goal is to sharpen our international focus in all areas of activity. We will do this by connecting to the global environment in ways that allow us to compete internationally for the best students and staff and develop our research and teaching programmes to the highest international standards. We will provide students with experiences that instil the spirit of European and global citizenship. We will expand the internationalisation of our curricula and our network of international partners and will benchmark our research activities against the highest international standards. We will draw on international experience and best practice as we contribute to the development of the region and the nation.

To achieve the objectives of Goal 3, we will devise an international education business plan that focuses on key markets and on recruiting more international students, postdoctoral fellows and researcher/teachers; increase the number of undergraduate programmes that have an explicit international dimension; expand our involvement in Erasmus and widen our non-EU
exchange schemes and cooperative education placements. We will acquire international accreditation and recognition for our programmes, schools and faculties; develop a student language policy; engage with EU higher education initiatives; and participate in international research consortia and scholarly societies. We will review our memoranda of understanding with universities abroad with a view to strengthening our research priorities.

Goal 3 targets include adopting the business plan by March 2011, increasing by 50% the number of international students and increasing by 30% the number of students who spend time abroad on their programme.

**Goal 4**

Our fourth strategic goal is to be renowned for the excellence of our contribution to the economic, educational, social and cultural life of Ireland in general and the Shannon region in particular. We will continue to lead collaboration among educational institutions in the region and contribute to stimulating growth in indigenous enterprises and foreign direct investment. To do this, we will enhance relationships with strategic partners and will deepen our relationship with the community, thereby establishing ourselves as a fulcrum of life in the greater Limerick area. To promote job creation and economic development, we will collaborate with industry, engage in incubation activities, enhance skill levels and create spin-out companies. We will improve the level of interaction between our students and community groups, develop a culture of lifelong learning in our communities and extend the presence of the University in Limerick city. We will promote the city and region by providing community access to our campus and all its excellent amenities, and we will encourage environmental and social responsibility within and beyond the campus.

To achieve these objectives, we will contribute to Limerick regeneration and will continue to be involved in educational initiatives for unemployed people. We will increase the use of the campus as a social and cultural amenity, sustain and extend the range of successful collaborations within the Shannon Consortium and NUI Galway and develop a continuing professional development and consultancy programme that enhances regional and national competitiveness. We will support the development of a “smarter travel area” and will promote the use of Irish on campus.

Our targets for the achievement of Goal 4 will include increasing by 200% the number of students participating in the President’s Volunteer Programme, increasing by 300% the volume of teaching and research collaborations with Mary Immaculate College, doubling by 2015 the number of international conferences hosted on campus and tripling by 2015 the number of staff who have completed Irish language courses.
Enabling Themes
We have identified four cross-cutting themes to enable the implementation of the Strategic Plan: People, Resources, Quality and Communication. These four enabling themes will direct the work of faculties and support divisions in achieving our goals. Implementation plans will be put in place to identify the operational actions required to meet the targets of the plan.

People
People are central to this plan, and the recruitment of staff will focus on key areas of strategic importance. We will identify the personal skills and perspectives required to make the University a centre of teaching and research excellence. We will promote a working culture that emphasises ethical practices, honesty, integrity, diversity, equity and respect for all and an organisational culture that values, motivates and supports staff. We will develop management systems that are innovative, empowering and efficient, and we will create an organisational structure that balances autonomy with accountability.

Resources
Prudent management of our resources is especially important in a challenging economic climate. We will balance budgetary outturns and maintain an appropriate balance between pay and non-pay expenditure. We will devolve responsibility to budget-holders, seek alternative sources of revenue and endeavour to reduce our costs. While we are conscious of the requirement to embed risk management throughout the organisation, we are also aware that innovation demands a degree of flexibility. We will therefore try to maintain a careful balance between regulation and flexibility. We will strive to meet the challenge of maintaining our excellent physical campus and virtual facilities and will endeavour to provide our staff and students with a working and learning environment that reaches our high standards.

Quality
Adopting the highest standards of quality assurance and quality improvement is crucial to the achievement of our goals. We will strengthen our quality assurance policies and procedures and ensure they are implemented. We recognise that the national regime of quality assurance is complemented by developments at European level, and we fully support both the Bologna process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area. To this end we will prioritise the inclusion of a truly European dimension in our quality assurance processes.

Communication
In the competitive international environment of higher education, effective communication is of vital strategic importance to the development of the University. We are aware of the need to enhance our internal and external communications programmes and will embrace new media and information technologies to reach the global community of potential students, research partners, employers, alumni and benefactors. We are also acutely aware of the importance of strong internal communications as a means of enhancing both staff morale and their sense of ownership in the delivery of our strategic priorities.

Our distinctive style ensures that we will continue to transcend the borders of the academy by connecting to the outside world.
Implementing the Strategy
The University’s Executive Committee has overall responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy Plan. Task-specific sub-groups of Management Council will devise implementation plans to achieve the actions and targets specified by the plan.

Progress on the plan’s implementation will be monitored by the Executive Committee. The President will present a twice-yearly update to the Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee and an annual update to the Governing Authority.

In conjunction with the Executive Committee and the Governing Authority, the President will undertake a formal review of the Strategic Plan at the end of 2012. The review will examine the current list of actions and targets in terms of their relevance and their achievability in the context pertaining at that time.
People are central to making this plan a reality, and all staff will share in the achievement of our goals.
The External Context

This Strategic Plan is formulated in the context of a university environment that is very different from that of previous generations.

The certainties of the past have been replaced by a more fluid external world in which rapid social change and a fast-moving policy agenda pose new challenges to universities. It is increasingly recognised that, as public bodies, universities are accountable for the conduct of their affairs and are subject to scrutiny by a variety of parties, including the Oireachtas, government agencies, quality assurance bodies and professional associations, and to close attention from the court of public opinion.

The widely held expectation that universities play a key role in achieving national and EU objectives is shared by the universities themselves. At the same time, universities see autonomy and academic freedom as core values that are vital to the creation and transmission of knowledge and to the personal development of students.

The result is a tension between autonomy and accountability – universities enjoy freedom of action but are answerable for the choices they make. By the same token, the natural desire of each institution to retain its distinctiveness – a perspective that is shared by policy makers – is potentially compromised by forces that drive institutions towards uniformity.

Participation by school leavers in higher education in Ireland has risen from approximately 10% in the 1970s to greater than 60% today. This increase is matched by more recent increases in the numbers of mature students and learners returning to education. Taken together, these developments represent a fundamental change over the course of one generation. The growth in higher education is at least as significant as the
The vast increase in participation is complemented by the enriched ethnic and cultural mosaic that has been brought about by the inflow of immigrants into Ireland during the recent period of prosperity. The welcome diversity that flows from these demographic changes presents the challenge of adapting programmes, pedagogical practices and modes of delivery to accommodate a broader range of learning styles, interests and ambitions without compromising the high standards that are rightly demanded of and by universities.

To a large extent, the research agenda is now shaped by external forces, in particular national policy and funding arrangements. While universities value the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake — so-called curiosity research — the modern expectation is that research should yield tangible and direct dividends. It is imperative for Ireland, and the EU in general, to achieve greater economic growth. This needs to include the creation of a deep knowledge infrastructure and human capital base that will attract investment and stimulate the development of high-end industry and services at the core of a revitalised economy.

The place of universities in supporting economic development has assumed centre stage and has led to the development of fourth-level education, which aims to double the number of doctoral graduates and the funding of large-scale internationally competitive and industrially relevant research projects. The economic dimension of these activities has raised the importance of the commercialisation of universities’ research. Universities are now expected to complement traditional research outputs, such as publications and conference participation, with translational activities that have a more immediate economic impact: intellectual property disclosures, campus companies and other spin-out activities. This expectation is matched by a renewed realisation of the attractiveness of university campuses as sites for incubation activities, typically carried out in partnership with industry sponsors.

The social and cultural role of universities cannot be ignored. At an individual level, universities play a key role in the development of students as imaginative critical thinkers and socially responsible citizens. Apart from being catalysts for economic progress, universities are key players in social and cultural development. This wider responsibility ranges from acting as repositories and chroniclers of the nation’s heritage to participating in social transformation and regeneration activities. Universities are in a position to contribute their resources and expertise to the general improvement of social and cultural life. Such activities are mutually beneficial, and universities are enriched by this engagement with their communities.
The international dimension of the work of universities becomes more significant as they are benchmarked against global standards. One manifestation of this phenomenon is the global competition for students. The ability to attract foreign students is a reflection of a university’s competitiveness and the esteem in which it is held by the international community. It must also be recognised that there is an economic attraction to the enrolment of fee-paying students from outside the EU. That said, the principal benefit that stems from enrolling international students is the enrichment of a university’s cultural fabric and the positive contribution these students make to the experience of all students.

Internationalisation also informs universities’ research activities. Good research involves working with international partners, competing for international funding, being judged by international peers and publishing in the best international outlets. In short, researchers must participate and compete at the highest international level.

The European dimension to higher education cannot be ignored. The drive towards developing a European higher education space is seen as vital to EU economic development and to the EU’s ability to compete with the other major world economies. Student mobility through the Erasmus scheme has characterised the student experience for the better part of 20 years. The Bologna agenda, comparability of awards and qualifications, enhanced mechanisms of student mobility – such as the widespread adoption of ECTS – and Europe-wide quality assurance standards ensure that the European dimension is ever present in higher education. Europe has assumed a crucial role in the research environment, particularly through the strategically vital EU Framework 7 research programme, which offers rich potential for the research community.

Universities cannot conduct their activities in isolation. Collaboration is vital to the realisation of strategic priorities and national objectives. Such collaboration takes many forms. The student experience is enriched and an element of internationalisation is achieved by exchange programmes with other higher education institutes. The development and delivery of joint programmes in partnership with other institutions, nationally and internationally, offers rich opportunities for students and academic staff alike. While the tradition of the individual researcher is highly prized in university culture, more research is now conducted collaboratively – large externally funded teams of researchers work on projects that are conducted in conjunction with a myriad of partners in other institutions, research bodies and industry. In addition, it is now recognised that universities can reap financial dividends through shared service agreements and joint procurement exercises. The collective bargaining power that results from such collaboration outweighs that of any individual institution.
Inter-institutional competition is an equal and opposite force to collaboration. Universities that collaborate closely in specific endeavours frequently compete vigorously in others. Thus, institutions that collaborate closely in research projects might well compete aggressively when it comes to undergraduate recruitment. The challenge for each institution is to find the appropriate balance between competition and collaboration, a matter that is not necessarily helped by the rising significance of national and international league tables that measure various elements of universities’ performance. However, despite reservations that are held about such tables, it must be acknowledged that they are important in reflecting how an institution is perceived. Consequently, it is understandable that an institution should seek to achieve as high a ranking as possible without that becoming an end in itself.

The question of resources is of fundamental importance, especially in the current economic climate. Universities receive significant public funding, which in turn raises the expectation of accountability for the manner in which those monies are expended. As it happens, the Irish university system is recognised as being the second most efficient in the developed world. Moreover, while Irish universities are publicly funded, an increasingly large proportion – currently approaching 40% – of their annual running costs is derived from non-state sources. In addition, a significant amount of capital development has been funded from commercial and philanthropic sources.

The case for further reducing universities’ reliance on the public purse has a certain appeal, whether this is seen as a matter of social justice or straightforward fiscal prudence. This is not to say that the state’s role in funding universities will diminish to the point of insignificance, but the way that the state funds higher education is liable to change. In the foreseeable future, a greater proportion of state funding will be explicitly directed at achieving key policy objectives, thus aligning financial reward with the attainment of specified objectives. It is also probable that a larger proportion of state funding will be awarded on a competitive basis rather than on foot of predetermined formulae that are characteristic of the block-grant mechanism. Competitive funding is already the norm for state-funded research programmes and the Strategic Innovation Fund.

Diversification of resources, in particular a reduced reliance on state funds, reinforces and protects universities’ autonomy. Nevertheless, this will not dilute the demands of accountability, which impose a welcome discipline in the form of good governance practices, an embedded culture of risk management and exacting standards of quality assurance. Each of these has had a lasting impact on the way that universities organise and manage their affairs.

The foregoing external trends, along with emerging national strategy, will shape the future of Irish universities and will inform the delivery of the University of Limerick’s Strategic Plan 2011–2015, Pioneering and Connected.
The Institutional Context

The anniversaries of two major events in the life of the University of Limerick will occur during the period covered by this Strategic Plan.

We will celebrate the 40th anniversary in 2012 of the admission of our first students and will celebrate the 25th anniversary in 2014 of the granting of university status. The growth experienced by the institution since its foundation in 1972 has been extraordinary. From 1972 to 2009, our staff complement grew from 20 to over 1,300 and our student population grew from 100 to over 11,500. Postgraduate research student numbers have grown from a handful in the first 10 years of the institution’s life to 840 in 2009.

We have long realised that the provision of an outstanding physical environment enhances our academic activities. The University has expanded from a single building comprising 1,600 square metres on a 28-hectare site in 1972 to over 40 buildings comprising more than 203,000 square metres on a 137-hectare campus that flanks both banks of the River Shannon. This extraordinary expansion has been financed through a combination of state, philanthropic and commercial funding as well as student contributions. As a result of this investment, the University of Limerick is now recognised as possessing one of the most spectacular and environmentally sympathetic university campuses in the world. The campus is adorned by unrivalled sports and cultural facilities, including Ireland’s first Olympic-size swimming pool, an indoor sports arena, a boathouse with a state-of-the-art indoor rowing tank, the 1,100-seat University Concert Hall, the Irish Chamber Orchestra Building with its performance and recording facilities, the Irish World Academy Building and an impressive range of visual art that includes outdoor sculptures, the National Self Portrait Collection of...
Ireland, the Water Colour Society of Ireland Collection and the Medical Art Collection.

Since our foundation, the needs of the communities we serve have been to the forefront of our activities and have shaped our research and teaching programmes. The realisation that we have a responsibility to promote economic, educational and social development unites us with the community and demands that we remain closely connected to the cultural, economic, professional and business worlds in ways that distinguish us as an institution of higher learning.

Thus, cooperative education is an integral part of all University of Limerick undergraduate programmes and reflects our philosophy of education for employability – placing our students in a professional setting as part of their studies uniquely prepares them as “work ready” graduates. We are alive to the needs of the employment market when planning our study programmes – it is no accident that the University is the first in Ireland to have launched a specialist Bachelor of Science programme in energy, a graduate-entry medical degree and a wide range of workplace-compatible postgraduate courses. Furthermore, the University is the largest provider of post-primary teacher education in the state, embracing both initial teacher education students and those undertaking continuing professional development.

Our research is characterised by distinctive connections between the academy and the external environment, and our ethos of translational research is ideally geared to reap speedy social and economic benefits.

The University of Limerick has pioneered the establishment of connections between Ireland and Europe in the higher education arena. At the time of our founding in 1972, Ireland was about to become a member of the European Communities. The new institution adopted Europe as one of its central themes and soon launched Ireland’s first European Studies undergraduate programme and, in time, one of the first European Integration postgraduate programmes in this part of Europe. We have been active players in the Erasmus student exchange programme. The quality of our engagement was recognised by the European Commission when, in 2009 and again in 2010, the University of Limerick was the only Irish university to be selected as one of 10 EU institutions to be designated as an “Erasmus Success Story”.

Our desire to connect is further realised in our distinctive capacity to collaborate regionally, nationally and internationally. This is evidenced by our ongoing development of the Shannon Consortium, our new and enhanced relationship with NUI Galway, our international student exchanges both within the EU and beyond, our research clusters with academic, industrial and commercial partners and our campus companies that have been funded by private investors.

Considerable progress has been made in implementing the University’s Strategic Plan 2006–2011, particularly in relation to academic developments, research and collaboration. The following are some of our key achievements.
Academic Developments
The University’s academic structures have been reconfigured from six colleges to four faculties, with each faculty being led by an executive dean. New academic units have been established, including the Graduate Entry Medical School, the School of Architecture and the Department of Psychology. New academic programmes have been launched in civil engineering, energy and journalism. The learning environment has been enhanced through the construction of practice-orientated learning facilities such as a financial services trading floor for business students, a purpose-built courtroom for law students, a newsroom for journalism students and pedagogy laboratories for education students.

Research
In 2008, we undertook a strategic review of our research priorities to refine the key areas that reflect our expertise and differentiate us as an entrepreneurial institution. An internal strategic process that culminated in an international review led to the characterisation of our research ethos as one that creates a focus on convergent translational research. The review also led to the identification of the following priority research areas where the University has internationally recognised strengths:

1. Materials and Surface Science: Composite materials; nano-materials; solid-state pharmaceutical materials; catalysis and clean technologies; and bio-mimetic materials.

2. Information and Communication Technologies: Software engineering; telecommunications and networks; and energy efficiency and thermal energy systems.


4. Culture, Diversity and Social Change: Social identities; class, ethnicity and gender inequalities; historical processes; applied languages; comparative literatures; law-in-action; and public policy and democratic performance.

5. Energy: Biomass and biofuels; materials for energy; energy storage and generation; and evaluation and support of energy systems.

6. Applied Mathematical Sciences: Mathematical modelling of fundamental problems in science, engineering and industry; and financial mathematics.
On the basis of their potential for convergence and translation and their capacity to develop critical mass, other areas identified as strong candidates for future prioritisation in the period 2011–2015 include Organisation Science and Public Policy (potentially including work, knowledge and employment; services economy and tourism; entrepreneurship, innovation and marketing; and public policy, enterprise, governance and sustainability) and Food, Health, Sport and Human Performance (potentially including food; behaviour change and health; sport performance; clinical therapies; arts performance and health; and medicine).

The establishment in 2007 of the Graduate Entry Medical School is the catalyst to develop a significant medical research programme. The broad research strategy for the School has been developed and will be organised around the themes of metabolic mediators of chronic disorder, lifestage-specific conditions including all aspects of ageing, and the provision of prophylactic guidance and therapeutic care in community general practice and acute facilities.

Collaboration
We have long recognised the strategic importance of collaboration. Of particular significance was the formation in January 2010 of a major new strategic alliance between the University of Limerick and NUI Galway. The alliance encompasses a broad range of our activities: teaching, research, technology transfer, lifelong learning and the Link-to-Learn student exchange programme.

The Shannon Consortium, formed in the context of the Strategic Innovation Fund and comprising the University of Limerick, the Limerick Institute of Technology, the Institute of Technology Tralee and Mary Immaculate College, has resulted in a range of specific collaborative innovations in teaching and learning, postgraduate training, access and lifelong learning, and shared support services.

Collaboration through the Shannon Consortium with other agencies (Enterprise Ireland, FÁS and Regional Enterprise Boards) has resulted in the creation of Tusnua, a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach to enable those in the region who are facing the challenge of unemployment to gain access to education and business development programmes. The fruits of this collaboration are the Consortium’s success in successive rounds of the Government-sponsored Labour Market Activation programme. Key collaborations with the other Irish universities have been developed through participation in Science Foundation Ireland CSETs and Strategic Research Clusters and the IDA/Enterprise Ireland Competence Centres. At the international level, the University ranks among the most successful Irish universities at securing funding from the EU Framework 7 programme.
Our distinctive style ensures that we transcend the borders of the academy by connecting to the outside world.
Mission, Vision, Values & Strategic Goals

The **mission** of the University of Limerick is to be a distinctive, pioneering and connected university that shapes the future through educating and empowering people to meet the real challenges of tomorrow.

**Vision**
The University of Limerick will be internationally known as a distinctive, pioneering and connected institution that provides outstanding student experiences, actively engages in research and is globally and locally connected in terms of its contribution to economic, social and cultural life.

**Values**
We will be guided by a number of core values in the realisation of our vision. We value:

- Student-centred education that empowers, inspires, develops and sustains productive and enquiring citizens who place a premium on social justice.
- High-quality research that maximises relevance, commercialisation and innovation.
- The uniquely strong *esprit de corps* among our staff, which is characterised by a distinctively bold, entrepreneurial and innovative spirit combined with a clear and unique sense of identity.
» Being connected to our communities by promoting their physical, economic, educational, social and cultural well-being.

» Strong ethical practices that emphasise honesty, integrity, diversity, equity and respect for all.

» The natural environment and the promotion of sustainable development, both within and beyond the campus.

» A quality improvement ethos that is underpinned by strong academic and organisational governance and demanding standards of performance.

» Collaboration with academic institutions, corporations and government agencies in ways that support mutually beneficial activities.
Strategic Goals

Our vision shapes the four goals of our Strategic Plan:

**Goal 1:** We will provide an outstanding and distinctive experience for every one of our students to enable them to become knowledgeable, skilled and confident graduates.

**Goal 2:** We will further enhance our research profile and strengthen the impact of our research, both nationally and internationally.

**Goal 3:** We will sharpen our international focus in all areas of activity.

**Goal 4:** We will be renowned for the excellence of our contribution to the economic, educational, social and cultural life of Ireland in general and the Shannon region in particular.
Empowering people to meet the real challenges of tomorrow.
Goal 1:

» We will provide an outstanding and distinctive experience for every one of our students to enable them to become knowledgeable, skilled and confident graduates.

Rationale
Our fundamental obligation to our students is to provide them with an outstanding and distinctive student experience, one which challenges and inspires them to reach their full potential. We seek to educate students to become knowledgeable, skilled and confident graduates who are prepared for leadership positions in society, who are imbued with strong ethical, cultural and community-focused values and who will exhibit critical thinking, innovation and entrepreneurship throughout their careers. This will be achieved by providing a uniquely attractive student-centred learning environment that builds on current excellence across all faculties and ensures that high-quality standards are reached on all programmes.

Objectives
Goal 1 will be achieved by:

» Fostering excellence and innovation in pedagogy with an emphasis on encouraging small group and self-directed learning experiences.

» Maintaining in the curriculum a balance of breadth and depth that develops our students’ independent lifelong learning capacity so that they become versatile and adaptable graduates.

» Continuing our commitment to the role of cooperative education as an intrinsic and distinctive part of the student experience.

» Increasing the diversity of the undergraduate population.

» Providing a specific and coordinated series of supports and experiences for first-year students during their transition to third-level education.
Broadening access to and offering greater flexibility in the delivery of programmes of study that are relevant to the needs of students and society.

Nurturing co-curricular and extra-curricular learning through community-living on a vibrant campus of outstanding quality.

Continually enhancing the skills base of the workforce.

**Actions**

To achieve the objectives of Goal 1, we will:

1. Implement a comprehensive undergraduate teaching and learning development programme to create an undergraduate student experience that fosters independent thinking, creativity and innovation. This will be done by:

   - Renewing our commitment to breadth in the undergraduate curriculum by offering students a wider choice.

   - Ensuring that our programmes support the development by students of a range of generic and transferable skills, particularly communication, innovation and entrepreneurship.

   - Expanding the range of experiential learning opportunities available to students and developing further opportunities for student involvement in community-based learning and civic engagement activities.

   - Strengthening links between teaching and research at undergraduate level by providing (i) research skills training, (ii) mechanisms for disseminating research findings to the student body and (iii) undergraduate internships with research groups, and by reinforcing the requirement of a substantial piece of independent student-directed work in the final year.

2. Increase the numbers of mature students, students with a disability and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

3. Develop a tailored programme to facilitate the transition to third-level study of an increasingly diverse student body.

4. Promote the Link-to-Learn initiative with NUI Galway by developing joint programmes, sharing modules and facilitating student exchange at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

5. Formalise flexible entry and exit routes in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

6. Build on Strategic Innovation Fund investments to sustain vital learning resources, learner support services, and access and lifelong learning programmes.
7. Reinforce the learning environment by providing high-quality library and information space, services and collections and by facilitating the use of technology in ways that enhance learning.

8. Continue to provide environmental leadership by strengthening our commitment to education for sustainable development through the creation of further associated teaching and learning opportunities.

9. Establish a centre of excellence in teaching and teacher education. The centre will build on the success of the National Centre for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and Learning and will provide a seamless pathway from initial teacher education to high-quality lifelong professional development for teachers.

10. Increase the number of taught postgraduate students.

**Targets**

The targets to measure the achievement of Goal 1 will include the following:

1. First-year undergraduate retention rates will increase to 95%.

2. As a percentage of the total student population, the number of mature students will increase to at least 15%, the number of students with a disability will increase to at least 5% and the number of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds will increase to at least 7%.

3. Specific **Link-to-Learn** activities will be integrated into academic programmes in each faculty by 2011/12.

4. The number of taught postgraduate students will increase by 30%.
We value and support the research efforts of all members of the campus community.
Goal 2: We will further enhance our research profile and strengthen the impact of our research, both nationally and internationally.

Rationale
The University of Limerick places a premium on the independent pursuit of knowledge through critical inquiry and the advancement of new ideas. We expect our academic staff to engage in high-quality research and knowledge transfer activities. Accordingly, we value and support the research efforts of all members of the campus community. At the same time, we recognise that research areas need to be prioritised so that an effective research infrastructure, supported by appropriate human and physical resources, can be developed. In line with our ambition to strengthen our connections with external stakeholders and partners, our research ethos creates a focus on convergent translational research. In this context, convergence refers to the synergistic combination of different disciplines through which fertile new fields of knowledge emerge. Translational research transcends the traditional dichotomy between basic and applied research by accelerating the application of basic research outputs to benefit the economy and society.

Objectives
Goal 2 will be achieved by:

» Publishing and disseminating highly cited research in high-quality, internationally prominent journals and books.

» Developing research capability through the recruitment and retention of staff, comprehensive mentoring, secondment and exchange programmes.

» Creating synergies and academic support from the critical mass achieved through research institutes and centres.

» Engaging in strong collaboration and knowledge exchange with strategic partners.

» Contributing to social and economic development through the rapid translation of research.

» Creating a clear alignment between research and teaching.

» Promoting an entrepreneurial culture at individual and institutional level.
**Actions**

To achieve the objectives of Goal 2, we will:

1. Establish key performance indicators for evaluating research achievement and knowledge translation, and tailor the indicators to suit the diverse types of research that we conduct.

2. Put in place faculty and institute research strategies that are aligned with the University’s research strategy and compatible with the University’s human resource, space and financial plans.

3. Continue to cluster researchers and align research activities into a streamlined, high-profile concentration of research institutes and centres.

4. Develop a comprehensive approach to translational research to include significant and sustained interactions between researchers and industry and/or professional practice by:
   - Building relationships with indigenous and multinational industry to assist them to embed research into their organisations by developing their own research expertise and capacity.
   - Implementing an internship programme involving exchanges between University research groups and external industrial and professional partners.
   - Adapting relevant research outputs to enhance policy and practice in the medical, health, legal, engineering, information technology, accounting, business and education professions and in the wider civil society.

5. Devise a four-year knowledge transfer and commercialisation strategy that clearly enhances our contribution to economic and social development. Specifically, the strategy will focus on:
   - Ensuring that the approach to the commercialisation of our intellectual property delivers optimum benefit to society and the national economy and balances reward and recognition to inventors with reward and recognition to the University and, where appropriate, research sponsors.
   - Promptly identifying the commercial potential of research outputs and supporting new enterprises, both on campus and within the region, through the development of the Industrial Enterprise Centre.
   - Including commercialisation as a reporting criterion for relevant research activities and providing recognition of commercialisation in career development.
6. Provide the necessary incentives for convergent research initiatives.

7. Collaborate strategically in joint ventures with other institutions through links with industry, professional practice and research bodies; joint participation in competitively funded research programmes; and joint commercialisation of research outputs.

8. In partnership with the Irish Technology Leadership Group, Shannon Development and NUI Galway, advance the Shannon Energy Valley initiative to create a national hub for energy research and development.

9. With the Georgia Institute of Technology and NUI Galway, establish a joint Translational Research Institute that focuses on the application in Irish industry of core technologies and expertise within the partner institutions.

10. Diversify our sources of funding for research.

**Targets**

The targets to measure the achievement of Goal 2 will include the following:

1. The enrolment of doctoral students will increase by 40%.

2. The structured doctorate model and personal development plans for all research students will be implemented in full by the end of the 2010/11 academic year.

3. The number of publications in the ISI Web of Knowledge will increase by 20% and the number of books with prestigious publishers will increase by 20%.

4. The number of citations achieved by our publications will increase by 50%.

5. The number of patents awarded per €1 million of research expenditure will increase by at least 20%.

6. The four-year knowledge transfer and commercialisation strategy will be adopted by May 2011.

7. Research income from EU sources will increase by 50%.
Our students’ experiences will be enriched by increased exposure to diverse cultures and learning opportunities.
Goal 3:

» We will sharpen our international focus in all areas of activity.

Rationale
We seek to be judged by the highest international standards and recognise that we must be connected to the global research and learning environment to fully realise our ambitions. By extending our internationally connected research and teaching programmes, our students’ experiences will be enriched by increased exposure to diverse cultures and learning opportunities, and our capacity to foster the lifelong learning skills they will need in a globalised working environment will be enhanced. A sharpened international focus will enable us to recruit the best students, both at home and abroad. In an increasingly competitive environment, research in our priority areas must be shaped by the work of cross-national research communities. We also seek to extend our international reach through teaching exchanges and research leave arrangements with institutions abroad and by hosting international scholars in the University. We will continue to value the European dimension and will actively engage in both EU research endeavours and EU higher education initiatives.

Objectives
Goal 3 will be achieved by:

» Providing experiences that instil the spirit of European and global citizenship in our students.

» Promoting cultural diversity through the recruitment of international students and staff.

» Further expanding the internationalisation of our curricula.

» Revising and expanding our network of international partnerships with third-level institutions and research bodies.

» Benchmarking our research activities against the highest international standards.

» Drawing on relevant international experience and best practice to strengthen our contribution to the development of the region and the nation.
**Actions**

To achieve the objectives of Goal 3, we will:

1. Devise a four-year international education business plan that focuses on key markets and on recruiting more international students, postdoctoral fellows and researchers.

2. Increase the number of undergraduate programmes that have an explicit international dimension.

3. Expand our involvement in the Erasmus programme and widen our non-EU exchange schemes and cooperative education placements.

4. Acquire appropriate international accreditation and recognition for our degree programmes, schools and faculties.

5. Develop a language policy that ensures that all students can avail of the opportunity to achieve a level of linguistic competence as part of their university experience.

6. Engage actively with the EU’s higher education initiatives and, in particular, with the Union’s strategies to forge educational links with other parts of the world.

7. Ensure that our staff participate in international research consortia and scholarly societies.

8. Continue to stress the importance of recruiting high-profile international researchers who will also assume an active teaching role.

9. Review our existing memoranda of understanding with universities abroad with a view to identifying institutions with which we can develop staff and student exchanges that strengthen our research priorities.

**Targets**

The targets to measure the achievement of Goal 1 will include the following:

1. The four-year international education business plan will be adopted by March 2011.

2. The number of international undergraduate and postgraduate students will increase by at least 50%.

3. The number of students who spend a period abroad as an accredited part of their programme of studies will increase by 30%.
We will contribute to national and regional economic, educational, social and cultural development.
Goal 4:

» We will be renowned for the excellence of our contribution to the economic, educational, social and cultural life of Ireland in general and the Shannon region in particular.

**Rationale**

A strong and enduring sense of connection to our communities is a defining feature of the University of Limerick. We take pride in being an open and welcoming institution that attracts a broad cross-section of visitors: academics, researchers, industrialists, community leaders and those who wish to enjoy our environmentally sympathetic campus, our cultural amenities and art collections and our sports facilities. We realise that we have a responsibility to promote economic, educational, social and cultural development in Ireland, particularly in the Shannon region, and we recognise the mutual benefit that flows from engagement between the Shannon region and the University. We seek to enable our students, staff and graduates to act as key players in the life of the Shannon region and beyond. By building on regional strengths and addressing regional needs in line with national priorities, we will ensure that we work to the highest international standards.

**Objectives**

Goal 4 will be achieved by:

» Deepening the relationship between the University and the community and establishing ourselves as a fulcrum in the life of the greater Limerick area.

» Improving the level of interaction between our students and community groups.

» Enhancing relationships with strategic partners, informing public debate and influencing policy-makers in the public and private sectors at local, regional, national and international levels.

» Promoting job creation and economic development by collaborating with industry, engaging in effective incubation activities and creating spin-out companies.

» Fostering the development of a culture of lifelong learning in our communities and enhancing skill levels to attract investment and economic development.
Promoting Limerick city and the Shannon region by providing community access to our highly acclaimed academic, sporting and cultural amenities and infrastructure.

Extending the visible presence of the University in Limerick city beyond that already achieved by the Downtown Centre and the Access Campus.

Ensuring that our prominence as a centre of cultural, artistic, festive and sporting activity is an enduring source of pride to the city and region.

Encouraging environmental and social responsibility within and beyond our physical boundaries.

**Actions**

To achieve the objectives of Goal 4, we will:

1. Contribute as partners to Limerick regeneration in those activities where our involvement can add value to the work of the relevant agencies and community groups.

2. Continue our involvement in educational initiatives, such as the Labour Market Activation programme, that are designed for unemployed people.

3. Increase the use of the University campus as a social and cultural amenity in ways that allow wider access by community groups and teams, that target national and international events to showcase the campus as a venue for large-scale events and that maximise our economic, social and cultural contribution to the Shannon region.

4. Sustain and extend the range of successful collaborations within the Shannon Consortium and the strategic alliance with NUI Galway.

5. Enhance regional and national competitiveness by developing a comprehensive continuing professional development and consultancy programme that utilises the extensive expertise of the University.

6. Support the development of a “smarter travel area” in conjunction with local authorities in the Limerick urban area.

7. Promote the use of Irish on campus by implementing the University’s Scheme 2009–2012 under the Official Languages Act.
**Targets**

The targets to measure the achievement of Goal 4 will include the following:

1. The number of students participating in the President’s Volunteer Programme will increase by 200%.

2. The volume of teaching and research collaborations with Mary Immaculate College will increase by 300%.

3. The number of international conferences hosted on campus will double by 2015.

4. The number of staff who have completed Irish language courses and have received a certificate of Irish language proficiency will triple by 2015.

We take pride in being an open and welcoming institution that attracts a broad cross-section of visitors: academics, researchers, industrialists and community teachers.
Emphasising ethical practices, honesty, integrity, diversity, equality and respect for all.
We have identified four major enabling themes – **People, Resources, Quality** and **Communication** – to help us with this work. The themes will be used to direct the activities of faculties and support divisions across the University. Implementation plans that identify the operational actions required to meet the targets of the Strategic Plan will be developed.

**People**

People are central to making this plan a reality, and all staff will share in the achievement of our goals. The recruitment of staff will focus on key areas of strategic importance to the University of Limerick. Developing the quality and potential of our staff accords with our values and will underpin our drive to implement the plan. We will identify the personal skills and perspectives required to make the University of Limerick a centre of teaching and research excellence.

Putting this Strategic Plan into operation will require a range of actions across a number of cross-cutting themes.
We recognise that our staff will best realise their potential in a working culture that emphasises ethical practices, honesty, integrity, diversity, equity and respect for all. With this in mind we will promote an organisational culture in which people are valued and motivated and will support our staff by providing abundant opportunities for personal development. We are conscious of the importance of developing management systems in ways that are innovative, that empower our employees and that allow for prompt decision-making. Therefore, we will create an organisational structure that balances the autonomy necessary for growth with the discipline demanded by a culture of accountability.

The implementation of the People enabling theme will:

1. Ensure effective recruitment policies, planning and practices that strengthen our staff profile.
2. Foster a culture of lifelong learning among our staff and nurture that culture by investing in knowledge and professional skills development.
3. Promote an organisational culture in which people are valued and motivated.
4. Recognise the diversity of our staff, promote equality of opportunity and identify relevant targets.
I was the wind
She was the smoke
I was the earth
And she
The moon
Resources
We recognise that prudent management of resources is especially important in a challenging economic climate. A number of fundamental tenets underpin our approach to financial management. We will maintain balanced budgetary outturns and an appropriate balance between pay and non-pay expenditure. We will devolve responsibility to budget-holders. It is imperative that we pursue new, innovative and pioneering approaches to seek alternative and sustainable sources of revenue and to reduce our costs.

Financial prudence goes hand-in-hand with a regime of good governance and risk management practices. To this end the University has adopted a code of governance that is modelled on the HEA/IUA Governance of Irish Universities: A Governance Code of Legislation, Principles, Best Practice and Guidelines. We recognise that universities must be cognisant of the requirement to embed a risk management philosophy and framework throughout the organisation. Nevertheless, the necessity to innovate demands a degree of flexibility that facilitates appropriate levels of risk. Therefore, it is important that a careful balance between regulation and flexibility be maintained.

We also understand the need to provide our staff and students with a working and learning environment that does not compromise the high standards we set ourselves. The desire to maintain our excellent physical campus and virtual facilities will pose increasing demands on our ingenuity.

The implementation of the Resources enabling theme will:

1. Strengthen the alignment between resource allocation and strategic priorities.
2. Address how to diversify our sources of income to maximise non-state revenue.
3. Ensure balanced budget outturns and payroll costs that are below 70% of total expenditure.
4. Specify a revised annual budget process to improve completeness and transparency.
5. Address how to develop shared service opportunities with collaborating institutions.
6. Support the role of the University of Limerick Foundation in seeking philanthropic donations to facilitate the achievement of our goals.
7. Include strong governance practices, comply rigorously with regulatory requirements and embed risk management in all our activities.
8. Ensure that the physical and virtual campus continues to contribute to the strategic development of the University.
9. Preserve the natural environment by working to ensure that the high quality of our campus is protected and enhanced.
10. Develop sustainable energy strategies for all aspects of campus activity.
Quality
Crucial to the achievement of our goals is the adoption of the highest standards of quality assurance and quality improvement. We will focus on strengthening our related policies and procedures and ensuring they are implemented. We recognise that the national regime of quality assurance is complemented by developments at European level, and we fully support both the Bologna process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area. To this end we will prioritise the inclusion of a truly European dimension in our quality assurance processes.

The implementation of the Quality enabling theme will:

1. Formalise procedures for the continual enhancement of quality in line with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education’s Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

2. Ensure a culture of continual quality improvement.

3. Implement new mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of programmes and awards in line with national policy developments and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

4. Benchmark the quality of our performance across all areas of activity against leading international universities.
Communication
In the competitive international environment of higher education, effective communication is of vital strategic importance to the development of the University. To achieve our institutional mission, we need to enhance our internal and external communications programmes. To that end we will embrace the rich potential offered by new media and information technologies to reach the global community of potential students, research partners, employers, alumni and benefactors.

We are also acutely aware of the importance of strong internal communications as a means of enhancing both staff morale and their sense of ownership in the delivery of our strategic priorities.

The implementation of the Communication enabling theme will:

1. Strengthen the University of Limerick brand identity through a comprehensive brand development plan.

2. Include a coordinated structure to encompass our communications, public relations and marketing programmes.

3. Optimise our use of the web and social media as essential instruments of communication.

4. Adopt a campus communication strategy to enhance internal communications among staff and students.

5. Maintain an enduring and mutually sustaining connection with our alumni to enhance University, regional and national development.
Qualitative actions with target dates for completion will advance the strategic development of the University on a continual basis.
Implementation, Monitoring & Review

Implementation
Overall responsibility for the implementation of this Strategic Plan lies with the Executive Committee, whose members are the President (Chair), the Vice President Academic & Registrar, the Vice President Research, the faculty deans, the Director of Finance and the Director of Human Resources.

Task-specific sub-groups of Management Council will be charged with devising implementation plans to achieve the actions and targets specified by the Strategic Plan. The implementation plans will be focused, action-orientated and integrated across the goals and enabling themes. We will ensure that we support the key directions and quality improvements demanded by the implementation plans, and we will address the individual and collective capacity to manage implementation.
Monitoring
Progress on the plan’s implementation will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Executive Committee. The President will present a twice-yearly update to the Governing Authority Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Committee and an annual update to the Governing Authority.

The plan contains a broad range of actions and targets and so will require a broad range of monitoring methods. There are quantitative targets, such as “Research income from EU sources will increase by 50%”, which can be tracked over time. There are also qualitative actions with target dates for completion, such as “Devise a four-year knowledge transfer and commercialisation strategy that clearly enhances our contribution to economic and social development” (to be adopted by May 2011), which will require monitoring based on the assessment of progress towards completion of the action by the target date. Finally, there are qualitative actions that have no target dates for completion, such as “Reinforce the learning environment by providing high-quality library and information space, services and collections and by facilitating the use of technology in ways that enhance learning”, which are presented as actions that will advance the strategic development of the University on a continual basis. These actions will require a different form of monitoring, one that is based on an evaluation of institutional commitment supported by examples of the working out of that commitment. Where relevant, we will use 2009–2010 data as benchmarks against which progress towards achieving our targets is evaluated.
Review

In conjunction with the Executive Committee and the Governing Authority, the President will undertake a formal review of the Strategic Plan at the end of 2012. The review will examine the current list of actions and targets both in terms of their relevance and their achievability in the context pertaining at that time.
We seek to educate graduates who are prepared for **pioneering** roles in society as leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs – we want our graduates to be **connected** through involvement in community-based activities, exposure to diverse cultural experiences, and awareness and involvement in internationally relevant research.
Forging new ways of learning for our students and seeking innovations in research that will advance the economic and social development of our region and the world.