ENGAGED LEARNING
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy
2014-18
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Message from the President

I am delighted to present Engaged Learning: University of Limerick Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy 2014–18. UL has built a reputation on the high quality of its student experience, and in keeping with our pioneering spirit, we are further extending our commitment to students through this strategy by involving and empowering them in the process of shaping their own learning experiences.

Research shows that students achieve higher levels of success when they are actively and deeply involved in their education. This does not just relate to academic success – active engagement also contributes to social and personal development. Students who participate actively in the full spectrum of university life achieve better academic results and report higher levels of satisfaction with their university experience.

Engaged Learning will build on our existing strengths, will focus our endeavours on deliberate and measurable activities that enhance student learning outcomes and will further our students’ educational and personal development. Students are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. We have much to learn from one another, and we believe this is best achieved through active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings.

To this end, we have created a broad framework to capture the most pertinent characteristics of an engaged approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The framework, which has been tested against international evidence, will guide our activities and expand our students’ exposure to the world around them. We will continue to seek excellence by applying academic rigour, enhancing support systems and measuring levels of success. In addition, we will continue to drive our employability mission through our Cooperative Education, practice placement and careers programmes and our extensive networks with business and industry.

We know we are working from a strong base; the UL ethos continually inspires us to strive for excellence and to pioneer new ways of supporting our most precious resource – our students. This is evidenced by the fact that our graduate employment rate is consistently higher than the national average. We are therefore confident that with ongoing vigilance, our graduates will leave UL as self-motivated and reflective lifelong learners with the ability to think critically and demonstrate intellectual maturity, both in the workforce and in an increasingly complex and digital society.

I commend this resource and the many staff behind its development, and I look forward to working with all members of the UL community to achieve the strategy’s stated ambitions.

Professor Don Barry
President, University of Limerick
Why Engaged Learning?

At the University of Limerick (UL) we have high ambitions for our students. Each member of the University community, whether academic, practitioner or support staff, wants students to emerge as leaders, critical thinkers and innovators with strong intellectual, ethical, cultural and community-focused values.
Our students and graduates will make a difference: they will contribute to their communities and organisations and will act effectively, creatively and responsibly in a wide range of settings. To achieve these goals, our students must be engaged and motivated and our teachers must create rigorous and imaginative learning contexts in which learning can thrive. Challenging students on the one hand and supporting them on the other are at the heart of our teaching and learning mission.

We realise that meaningful engagement is vital to optimise the student experience and enhance learning outcomes. Engaged Learning: University of Limerick Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy 2014–18 is underpinned by the simple yet powerful proposition that students should be actively and deeply involved in their education. The strategy consciously emphasises the concept of engagement, which we recognise as being clearly associated with educationally purposive activities, academic achievement and broader student success. Moreover, we know that engaged students will graduate to become engaged employees and engaged alumni: “Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates.”

Motivated students acquire a deeper understanding of their disciplines and provide staff with a more rewarding and satisfying teaching experience.

From the student’s point of view, engagement involves “participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes.”

From the institution’s point of view, engagement is “the process whereby institutions and sector bodies make deliberate attempts to involve and empower students in the process of shaping the learning experience.”

Many of the features that support positive student engagement are already in place at UL: teachers who excite students about their learning and who care about their students as individuals; work placement (i.e. Cooperative Education and practice placements); the final year project; and abundant opportunities to become actively involved in extra-curricular activities.
THE FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this strategy is to build on these notable strengths by further developing a learning environment that engages our students in intellectually stimulating activities. The strategy embraces a broad framework for engagement, as depicted below.

ACADEMIC RIGOUR

A disciplined and rigorous approach to learning challenges students by setting high expectations for their academic performance and matches their potential and ability. Equally, a rigorous approach to programme design and continual curriculum development that is characterised by an ethos of research-led teaching and learning will be a defining feature of the strategy.

ENRICHED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Enriched learning opportunities, both inside and outside the formal class setting, cultivate the development of desirable graduate attributes. Learning opportunities include co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and practices.

SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT

A supportive campus promotes student success and positive social and working relationships between students.

ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Intensive and active involvement in their education enhances students’ learning. Different forms of teaching and assessment, including self-directed and long-term exercises, better prepare students for the uncertainty they face during and after university.

MEANINGFUL STUDENT/STAFF INTERACTION

Academics act as mentors and role models for students through their interaction with them inside and outside the classroom. The interaction deepens students’ learning by allowing them to witness at close quarters how experts deal with complex problems and difficult material.
Engaged Learning sets out how we will continue to develop our approach in a way that aligns with our institutional strategy and embraces the principles of broader national priorities. In particular, the strategy focuses on the achievement of our strategic objectives in a manner that preserves our reputation as a pioneer in Irish higher education. This is deeply rooted in Pioneering & Connected, the University of Limerick Strategic Plan 2011–2015\textsuperscript{*} and the University of Limerick Graduate Attributes Statement\textsuperscript{**} (adopted by the UL Academic Council in 2013). The strategy is also informed by the UL Broadening Strategy, the UL Institutional Review and our Mission-Based Compact with the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

Engaged Learning demonstrates the importance that the University of Limerick places on excellence in terms of the quality of education that we offer our students. In adopting this strategy, we are confident that our graduates will leave UL as self-motivated and reflective lifelong learners with the ability to process information, think critically and demonstrate intellectual maturity both in the workforce and in an increasingly complex and digital society.
THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Pioneering & Connected commits us to providing our students with a distinctive experience through which they are challenged and inspired to reach their full potential. Pioneering & Connected identifies the following key objectives through which this strategic commitment is being achieved:

— Fostering excellence and innovation in pedagogy with an emphasis on encouraging small-group and self-directed learning experiences
— A balance of breadth and depth in the curriculum that develops our students’ independent lifelong learning capacity so that our graduates are versatile and adaptable
— Continued commitment to Cooperative Education as an intrinsic and distinctive part of the UL student experience
— The provision of a specific and coordinated series of supports and experiences for first-year students during their transition to third level
— Increased access to and flexible delivery of programmes of study that are relevant to the needs of students and society
— Nurturing of co-curricular and extra-curricular learning through community-living on a vibrant campus of outstanding quality supported by an unequalled range of sporting and cultural facilities and opportunities
— Strong alignment between research and teaching
— The provision of experiences that instil the spirit of European and global citizenship in our students through increased internationalisation of the UL student experience
— Continued internationalisation of our curricula
— Fostering the development of a culture of lifelong learning in our communities and enhancing skill levels to attract investment and economic development

Engaged Learning builds on commitments in Pioneering & Connected and represents a more detailed articulation of our stated commitment to provide an outstanding and distinctive learning experience to every one of our students.

UL has always been a pioneer of effective approaches to teaching, learning and learner support.

In framing this strategy, we have also taken cognisance of the external policy environment, with particular reference to the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, the Report to the Minister for Education and Skills on System Reconfiguration, Inter-Institutional Collaboration and System Governance in Higher Education, and Supporting a Better Transition from Second Level to Higher Education: Directions for Change.

UL is committed to meeting and exceeding the ambitions expressed in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, where “a commitment to specific improvements in the teaching and learning environment in respect of the breadth of curriculum and skills assessed as well as in the quality of teaching itself” is identified as being vital to a high-quality student experience. The long-term vision for higher education in Ireland outlined in the National Strategy is that all students will have access to teaching “that has been kept up to date and relevant through scholarship, research and professional development”. It also suggests that “academic staff should make full use of the range of pedagogical methodologies available to them and be qualified as teachers as well as in their chosen discipline” and that “all research and scholarship in higher education institutions should enhance the quality of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching”. We will continue to ensure that these qualities form an inherent part of the student experience, and we will foster creative approaches to teaching and learning with engagement as a major overarching goal.
**GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES**

*Engaged Learning* articulates the pedagogical values and curricular foundations to which UL is committed; it emphasises that while academic rigour and discipline-specific excellence are at the very core of our purpose, we build on that base to promote cross-disciplinary fluency. We are committed to further developing teaching and learning across all programmes in order to ensure that every one of our students will, through their engagement with the curriculum, acquire and display particular key attributes – the UL graduate attributes. These graduate attributes form an intrinsic part of both *Engaged Learning* and the University’s framework for broadening the curriculum, as depicted below.
These are the key graduate attributes that will continue to guide our institutional policies, our learning environment and our commitment to broadening the curriculum. By providing a strong disciplinary learning experience combined with a broad curriculum, we will ensure that our students are strongly positioned to:

— Think and communicate excellently both within and across disciplinary fields
— Commit to effective analysis of issues, combined with the capacity to articulate their ideas verbally and in writing and through the effective use of ICT

By ensuring a strong, well-designed, regularly reviewed and dynamically delivered curricular base, we aim to ensure that UL students become knowledgeable, proactive, creative, responsible, collaborative and articulate.
EMPLOYABILITY: THE UL EDGE

Since the establishment of the University in 1972, employability has been at the core of our teaching mission and continues to be central to our distinctive approach to higher education in Ireland. The inclusion of Cooperative Education and work placement in our programmes is one of the specific strengths of UL and is, for many students, an incentive to choose UL over other Irish universities and colleges. The result of these sustained efforts means that we occupy a position of immense strength with respect to graduate employability compared to other institutions in Ireland. This is what is meant by the UL Edge: the employment record of our graduates is intimately linked to their UL student experience and stems from our conscious efforts to ensure that we never lose sight of this vital goal.

A COMMITMENT TO QUALITY IN ALL OUR ACTIVITIES

The University of Limerick supports the view that the ‘quality of teaching, scholarship and external engagement of academic staff must be continuously reviewed as part of a robust performance management framework’ and that ‘reliable and consistent data on the outcomes of higher education from the perspective of both students and employers should be publicly available and feed into a process of continual development’. This strategy demonstrates the importance that UL places on the quality of the education it offers to students. By prioritising teaching and learning at the University, we are confident that our graduates can leave this institution as self-motivated and reflective lifelong learners with the ability to process information, think critically and demonstrate intellectual maturity in the workforce and society. This approach will significantly contribute to our growing reputation for excellence in teaching, learning and scholarship, both nationally and internationally.
Articulating the Strategy

The University of Limerick philosophy emphasises the empowerment of teachers and students to innovate, enhance and transform the learning environment in a manner that builds on current excellence across all faculties of the University and ensures the highest standards of quality on our programmes.

To this end, we are committed to providing strong support and development for staff and students, who, together, make the learning environment come alive. The range of staff and student supports that focus on continual professional development informed by regular feedback and assessment is crucial to the values that we espouse.

**Engaged Learning comprises the following three key streams:**

— **Stream 1:** Engagement through *Broadening*

— **Stream 2:** Engagement for *Excellence*

— **Stream 3:** Engagement towards *Employability*

Each stream has specific aims, objectives, targets and timeframes and is supplemented by a detailed implementation plan.
STREAM 1

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH BROADENING

A comprehensive range of actions will define the UL student experience. We will implement an undergraduate teaching and learning development programme that offers students wider choice and new modes of provision through strategic developments in technology-enhanced learning and continuing professional education (CPE). The programme will focus on generic and transferable skills and experiential learning opportunities that are achieved through regular programme review and the conscious adoption into programme planning of our Graduate Attributes Statement. This will be achieved through an institution-wide approach that focuses on broadening learning outcomes, broadening the curriculum and broadening delivery modes across all disciplines.

The variety of broadening mechanisms offers rich potential and will allow each programme to fulfil its broadening requirements in a manner that best suits that programme’s particular needs.

BROADENING LEARNING OUTCOMES

Meaningful and coherent third-level education programmes reflect an alignment of learning outcomes with the teaching, learning and assessment practices that provide students with the opportunities to achieve success.

Programme review and enhancement:

Each programme should (i) demonstrate an alignment between what students are intended to know and are able to do (curriculum); (ii) provide opportunities for learning and practice (teaching and learning); and (iii) specify new modes of assessment that support learning. The systematic and formal review of programmes for the purposes of enhanced and relevant offerings is a key commitment within this element of the strategy.

Structured reviews will specifically focus on evidence-based alignment of programme content with current research and each programme’s international dimension.

Other key aspects of the review will be conducted around specific criteria such as subject content knowledge, learning outcomes, graduate attributes, employability/employer feedback on programme content, generic and transferable skills, teaching and learning resources on programmes (space, technology, etc.) and alignment with professional accreditation requirements, where appropriate.

It is anticipated that this new initiative will ensure that all programmes at UL are subject to a rigorous five-year cyclical programme review process that meets the standards specified in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.\(^{\text{xii}}\)
BROADENING THE CURRICULUM
The variety of broadening mechanisms offers rich potential and will allow each programme to fulfill its broadening requirements in a manner that best suits that programme's particular needs.

Broadening entry routes: A key element of our approach to broadening the curriculum will be the development of broader programme entry routes for students while ensuring disciplinary excellence within each learner's specialism. For a number of revised programmes, the focus of the first part will be on the acquisition of general competencies with specialisation being deferred until later years. This reform will support students' transition from second to third level. Students will be enabled to make better-informed choices in relation to specialisation.

Broadening module offerings: UL has identified a range of mechanisms to broaden the curriculum, such as institutionalising flexible choices, offering sustained study options and new interdisciplinary modules (broadening modules) that often reflect interdisciplinary research being undertaken in UL, leveraging the Cooperative Education experience, aligning a substantial piece of work in final year with the broadened curriculum strategy (e.g. the UL Practicum) and broadening assessment.

Students will be enabled to make better-informed choices in relation to specialisation

BROADENING DELIVERY MODES
Broadening the curriculum, including aspects of assessment and feedback, will also be achieved in part through the pedagogically appropriate use of technology. This approach clearly recognises the changing nature of learning and the learning environment in the digital information age of today. In addition, a dedicated continuing professional education (CPE) unit aimed at increasing the numbers of non-traditional learners (through part-time, distance and e-learning provision) will be developed. The resultant increase in the diversity of the University's student population will be in line with our strategic objectives.

Development of technology-enhanced pedagogy: The use of technology in pedagogically appropriate and beneficial ways is a key component of this strategy. A strategically directed and coordinated approach, including the provision of pedagogic and technical support, is essential to ensure that the use of technology for educational purposes, both on and off campus, continues to grow.

Continuing professional education (CPE): Widening participation and lifelong learning are key elements of Pioneering & Connected, which aims to increase the diversity of the student population. In addition to providing high-class supports for full-time students, UL is expanding its part-time, distance and e-learning provision with a view to enhancing access, widening participation and promoting lifelong learning. This will be managed by a new institution-wide CPE unit, which will offer an integrated service for flexible learners who wish to avail of the University's educational offerings.
### STREAM 1: ENGAGEMENT THROUGH BROADENING

#### 1.1: BROADENING LEARNING OUTCOMES

<table>
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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Targets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1: Programme review and enhancement</td>
<td>To develop a rigorous and cyclical programme review process (5-year continual review cycle)</td>
<td>Empowered course boards within the programme review process</td>
<td>New programme review process in place by 2014 (with all UL programmes having completed a review by 2018)</td>
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<td>To place a greater emphasis on learning outcomes that stimulate innovation in student learning (e.g. problem-based learning, blended learning, peer-assisted tutoring, multi-modal assessment methods)</td>
<td>Increased student-oriented learning outcomes</td>
<td>Establishment of a fully functioning Graduate Attributes Hub (launch September 2014)</td>
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<td>Attainment of graduate attributes</td>
<td>UL graduate attributes embedded in all module descriptors (2018)</td>
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<td>1.1.2: Alignment of teaching with research</td>
<td>To cultivate a teaching environment that is informed by research and scholarship for up-to-date subject content in curricula</td>
<td>Research-led teaching to be a defining feature of UL’s programme offerings</td>
<td>Programme review process in place by end 2014</td>
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<td>To reinforce the emphasis on research skills development and research-based scholarship in undergraduate curricula</td>
<td>All programmes to demonstrate that current research has been incorporated into the curriculum</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Research skills development embedded in learning outcomes for all modules/programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1.3: Internationalisation</td>
<td>To include an international dimension to learning on all programmes</td>
<td>Greater number of programmes that have an explicit international dimension</td>
<td>50% increase in the number of international UG and PG students</td>
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<td>To provide greater learning opportunities overseas for UL students as part of their studies</td>
<td>The availability of applied language training to all students in key languages as an optional supplement to their chosen programme of study</td>
<td>30% increase in the number of students who spend a period abroad as an accredited part of their studies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To enrich language skills amongst all students to positively impact international student experiences and employment opportunities post-graduation</td>
<td>Internationalisation module as part of the Specialist Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship</td>
<td>Adopt the findings of the Language Policy working group in relation to cross-faculty language provision (2015/16)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To offer tailored supports for staff and students</td>
<td>International student support programme</td>
<td>Module on internationalisation offered to staff by 2015/16</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>International student support programme fully operational by 2017</td>
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1.2: BROADENING THE CURRICULUM

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Targets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1: Broadening entry routes (undergraduate course provision)</td>
<td>To develop broader programme entry structures for students while ensuring disciplinary excellence within each learner’s specialism. For a number of revised programmes, the first year will focus on general competencies and specialisation.</td>
<td>A broader programme entry structure in the first year of undergraduate study to enable specialisation to be decided during that year Students thus enabled to make informed choices in relation to specialisation</td>
<td>A revised suite of broad-based entry routes for undergraduates available on CAO for AY 2016/17 intake</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2.2: Broadening module offerings</td>
<td>To enable students to take multidisciplinary and cross-faculty elective modules in addition to core subjects in order to support student engagement across complementary offerings To include multidisciplinary electives on master’s and structured PhD programmes</td>
<td>Modules available as optional elective in undergraduate degree programmes</td>
<td>Multidisciplinary and cross-faculty “broadening” modules available from 2015/16 onwards</td>
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### Stream 1: Engagement Through Broadening

#### 1.3: Broadening Delivery Modes

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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1.3.1: Development of technology-enhanced pedagogy</strong></td>
<td>To broaden programme delivery modalities (part-time, professional accredited programmes, blended and e-learning, etc.) through a strategic focus on ICT and e-learning. To have an institution-wide learning technology infrastructure in place.</td>
<td>A coherent approach and support framework for technology-enhanced teaching and learning. Information Technology Division (ITD), Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), Library &amp; Information Services Division (LISD) and CPE working with faculties to align UL learner management systems and develop a coherent technology-enhanced learning strategy. A range of appropriate technical and pedagogic supports for those wishing to enhance teaching through the use of technology.</td>
<td>Establish an institution-wide technology-enhanced learning committee (2014). UL technology-enhanced learning strategy jointly led by ITD, CTL, LISD and CPE (2015).</td>
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| **1.3.2: Continuing professional education (CPE)** | To broaden programme delivery modes through the establishment of a new UL CPE unit that will drive the development of UL’s part-time, blended, distance, e-learning and other CPE offerings. To have an institution-wide learning technology infrastructure (as above) that supports CPE. | Existing and new programmes developed and adopted for multi-modal delivery (full-time, part-time, distance, flexible, blended and CPE modes). CPE business plan adopted and operational (2014). A suite of new offerings available from newly established UL CPE unit (2015 onwards). Increased percentage of flexible learners (part-time, distance, e-learning) as a proportion of overall student population (17% of total student population by 2016). UL technology-enhanced learning strategy (as above) (2015). |
STREAM 2
ENGAGEMENT FOR EXCELLENCE

The University of Limerick endorses a range of mechanisms that will enhance the quality of our teaching and learning support services and further formalise a standard set of recommendations in relation to grading, assessment and feedback across the institution.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is a major asset that provides a solid base from which to further improve our teaching quality. During the lifetime of the Engaged Learning strategy, the CTL will expand the range of institution-wide initiatives that promote good teaching and learning practices. Central to this approach will be an initial, independent external review of the CTL and its supporting activities with particular reference to institution-wide practice. In addition, we will review all teaching and learning spaces throughout the campus to assess whether or not the available spaces are fit for purpose and responsive to changing methods of learning. These foregoing actions will be complemented by specific supporting activities that focus on teaching, learning and learner supports; grading, assessment and feedback; and transition, retention and attainment.

TEACHING, LEARNING AND LEARNER SUPPORTS

At UL, we believe that student learning is not just confined to engagement in the classroom but is also promoted by the provision of a comprehensive suite of institution-wide supports for teachers and learners alike.

Preliminary review: We will conduct a review of the CTL to assess its orientation, supporting activities and resources. We will also carry out an internal audit of UL’s teaching and learning infrastructure.

Initial and continuing professional development: The CTL will develop a competency framework for the initial and ongoing training and development of all staff and postgraduate students with teaching responsibilities. The CTL is committed to devising appropriate, accredited training and development programmes to support early-career academics and will align strongly with relevant developments within the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in all of these undertakings. In addition, the CTL will put in place appropriate strategies to support the integration of research into teaching.
**Evaluation of teaching:** The CTL will continue to provide the student evaluation of teaching (SET) service. This service gathers students’ opinions on a range of factors that indicate the quality of the module and provides teachers with detailed quantitative ratings and qualitative information on teaching, module content and delivery and the student learning experience. To augment this process, we are currently piloting a generalised light assessment of the quality of modules. Known as the Module Satisfaction Survey (MSS), this programme will be extended and will focus on the assessment of the module as a whole. The results of the MSS will form a routine and comprehensive part of our commitment to recognising excellence and identifying issues that call for action. This approach will form the basis of a wider commitment to the early identification of teaching and learning challenges and issues.

**Endorsing excellence in teaching:** UL has developed a strong awards system, which is endorsed by the regularity with which institutional award-winners are also recognised at regional and national levels. During the course of this strategy, we will explore how the current awards system can be aligned with institutional goals, graduate attributes and the broadening strategy; in this exercise, we will be guided by comparative data at national level. The engagement of faculty deans in the awards process will help to ensure that award-winners are representative of all disciplinary backgrounds. We will aim to participate actively in the national programme for teaching awards that is being introduced by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

**GRADING, ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK**

Over the lifetime of the Engaged Learning strategy, key innovations in grading and assessment to promote greater engagement across all disciplines will be initiated as part of the broadening strategy and will be supported by the CTL.

**Review grading and assessment policies and procedures:** To promote innovations in assessment, we will identify module grading and assessment mechanisms that can provide more varied and useful forms of feedback to students. In addition, clear frameworks to enhance comparability, fairness and consistency of grading and assessment will be articulated and implemented at faculty level.

**Module evaluation:** Central to the introduction of grading and assessment innovations will be the development of a simple, generalised and mandatory module evaluation system that focuses on module assessment as a whole.

**Review of student surveys:** The Quality Support Unit (QSU) surveys students to assess their level of satisfaction with programmes and services. The findings of the surveys are presented at institutional level and in individual reports for each programme and department. However, the current approach tends to be retrospective – students do not always see the changes they suggest when it matters to them. The system will be reviewed and updated to ensure that it engages fully with the findings of the Irish Student Survey of Engagement (ISSE). We will also ensure that students are made aware of the results of surveys before they graduate and that they are in a position to observe any actions taken on foot of their feedback.
maximising the retention and academic attainment of our students

TRANSITION AND RETENTION

At the heart of Engaged Learning is the aspiration that each UL student will succeed. We are therefore committed to maximising the retention and academic attainment of our students and will allocate resources and adopt policies to this end. We will increase the range of technological supports that focus on student retention and attainment and will adopt an analytical, evidence-based approach to identifying the most effective strategies and supports for students.

Supporting transition and retention: In 2010, we introduced the First Seven Weeks programme to provide targeted support to first-year students. Coupled with a strong orientation programme, the First Seven Weeks programme was designed to facilitate the transition from second- to third-level education. Nevertheless, difficulties with early student performance and engagement are a global phenomenon in higher education and require additional strategic attention and focus. To further enhance the effects of the good measures already in place, we will undertake an analysis of the entire process of transition, retention and student engagement and adopt a series of new interventions as outlined below.
## STREAM 2: ENGAGEMENT FOR EXCELLENCE

### 2.1 TEACHING, LEARNING AND LEARNER SUPPORTS

<table>
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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Targets</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.1.1 Preliminary review</strong></td>
<td>To conduct an external review of CTL resources and services and an internal audit of UL’s learning infrastructure (library, classrooms, technology, etc.)</td>
<td>An independent review of CTL, its orientation, supporting activities and resources Institution-wide audit/report of teaching and learning space and resources</td>
<td>Review completed by spring semester 2014/15 Audit completed by spring semester 2014/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1.2: Initial and continuing professional development (CPD)</strong></td>
<td>To introduce a mandatory programme for lecturers and postgraduate students who are first-time teachers in higher education To provide flexible CPD opportunities to strengthen the teaching, learning and scholarship skills of academic staff To promote scholarship around teaching and learning in higher education</td>
<td>A short, flexibly delivered accredited programme for new UL teaching staff who do not hold a relevant teaching qualification A draft competency framework to recognise teaching staff competencies and ongoing development needs Annual review and refinement of the UL Specialist Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship</td>
<td>From AY 2016/17 onwards, all new staff with teaching responsibilities to complete introductory-level pedagogical training in advance of teaching at UL Increased number of teaching staff with advanced-level pedagogic qualifications or engaged in highly relevant CPD (including teaching and learning research) activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1.3: Evaluation of teaching</strong></td>
<td>To continue to support and promote increasing levels of staff engagement with the voluntary student evaluation of teaching (SET) process</td>
<td>A comprehensive system for identifying and defining professional development needs through SET</td>
<td>Full implementation of revised SET (end AY 2016/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1.4: Endorsing excellence in teaching</strong></td>
<td>To review and develop UL’s teaching awards system with a view to strategically aligning it more closely with relevant regional and national systems</td>
<td>New routes to recognising and awarding outstanding teaching Best practice disseminated through an award-winners’ forum</td>
<td>Full implementation of the new awards system (AY 2016/17)</td>
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## 2.2 Grading, Assessment and Feedback

<table>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<td><strong>2.2.1:</strong> Review grading and assessment policies and procedures</td>
<td>To promote innovations in assessment&lt;br&gt;To review module assessment mechanisms and to provide useful feedback to students</td>
<td>Innovative assessment as a broadening mechanism&lt;br&gt;An institution-wide approach to assessment, grading and feedback that is clearly communicated to staff and students</td>
<td>Scoping exercise on assessment innovation conducted by CTL by 2015/16&lt;br&gt;Production of a UL grading, assessment and feedback policy by 2016/17</td>
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<td><strong>2.2.2:</strong> Module evaluation</td>
<td>To embed a simple, generalised and mandatory module evaluation system that focuses on module assessment as a whole</td>
<td>The full rollout of the module satisfaction survey (MSS) supported by the QSU</td>
<td>Pilot MSS during 2014/15&lt;br&gt;Fully rolled out MSS by 2015/16</td>
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<td><strong>2.2.3:</strong> Review student surveys</td>
<td>To engage fully with the findings of the Irish Student Survey of Engagement (ISSE) and respond appropriately&lt;br&gt;To evaluate the implementation and response framework around UL surveys</td>
<td>Interventions to respond appropriately to significant findings of the ISSE against national and international benchmarks&lt;br&gt;New survey procedures developed</td>
<td>Fully integrated mechanisms and management systems for responding to the ISSE and UL surveys in place by AY 16/17</td>
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## STREAM 2: ENGAGEMENT FOR EXCELLENCE

### 2.3 TRANSITION AND RETENTION

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<th>Activity</th>
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| 2.3.1: Supporting transition | To support all aspects of student transition by promoting full engagement at the very initial stages | A coherent and integrated supportive framework around all aspects of the first-year experience  
Dedicated resources/interventions to support transitions from second to third level | A revised and enhanced First Seven Weeks programme (2016/17)  
Fully revised student advisor system (2016)  
Revised management structure for all learner support units (2015) |
| 2.3.2: Encouraging retention | To target initiatives related to pastoral supports and academic practice in first year and beyond | Improved use of data analytics to support retention activities | Revised student advisor system (2016)  
and learner support unit management structure (2015) (as above)  
Retention officer appointed by 2015  
Data-driven indicators of students at risk developed (2016) |
STREAM 3
ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY

Our pioneering focus on learning that is intrinsically linked to the world of work has placed us in a pre-eminent position in terms of employability: the UL Edge. Our traditional attention to employability is now matched by external policy shifts towards graduate work-readiness across the entire higher education sector.

The Bologna Expert Colloquium, Leuven Communiqué, Expert Group for Future Skills Needs and HEA have all identified the need for meaningful partnerships between higher education and the world of employment; work placements, employer input into the curriculum and embedded employability modules have been widely cited as mechanisms to achieve these goals. While the objectives and actions outlined in streams 1 and 2 are key to improving the quality of our graduates, we will put in place specific employment-focused initiatives to ensure that UL graduates stand apart from others in terms of their confidence and work-readiness.

Bringing the world of work into the learning environment is a defining feature of the UL student experience. We understand that there is significant confluence between what academics value and what employers seek. A key to our success in employability is our commitment to building knowledge alliances between employers and the academic community and to maintaining our economic and social connectedness.

These close linkages have placed us in a position of considerable strength with respect to the work-readiness and employability of UL students and graduates. Tangible manifestations of the University’s employability strategy include:

- Responsiveness to employer feedback in programme provision
- Cooperative Education and practice placement
- The careers and employability programme

During the lifetime of this strategy, the work of the Cooperative Education and Careers Division will become even more closely integrated with the academic units of UL. This will not only apply to undergraduate placements and graduate opportunities but also to further aligning programme content with employer needs; continuing to enhance and incorporate online accredited careers development training; articulating a UL employability statement; developing generic and transferable skills, careers advice and information; and strengthening formal employer links to academic leadership throughout the University.
EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT
The two significant independent indicators of graduate employability are participation in work placement and employer input into programme design and review. Our commitment to being connected reflects the importance of the higher education sector to sustainable economic growth. Key activities, including research, CPD, student recruitment and course development, require broad partnership with employers in order to be successful and connected. Extensive links with industry and business provide an effective conduit for exchange around current and future graduate labour market requirements and accordant programme design. Under this employability theme, the University reaffirms its long-standing commitment to responding to labour market intelligence in terms of programme review and development. Employer input and targeted employer/academic skills colloquia, together with the embedding of clearly defined employability-related learning outcomes as part of the programme review process, will be central to the way we design and review our programmes. The newly established CPE unit will focus on the development of programmes that will attract increasing numbers of non-traditional work-based learners/professionals as well as those who are out of work and wish to retrain or upskill in order to re-engage with the labour market.

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION
We believe that academia and work provide complementary modes of learning. Our Cooperative Education programme testifies to our commitment to employer-engaged scholarship as a valid form of pedagogy. The Cooperative Education placement exposes students to the world of work and its differing environments, demands and expectations and allows students to see the connections between acquired subject knowledge, associated skills and their wider applications. This planned, accredited, work-based learning, which commences in first year with a comprehensive preparatory programme, allows students to engage with employability and the world of work. As part of the process of reflecting on employability skills, students are required to self-assess key transferable skills (such as IT literacy, problem-solving and organisational awareness) prior to and following their placement. This allows the students to measure their skills development and focus on this learning as a formal element of their placement. This dual learning model facilitates a smoother transition from learning to work, the evidence for which is our consistently high graduate employment rate, currently trending well above the national average for the university sector.
The need for students to develop employability skills as a formal component of their learning experience has long been recognised; the University delivers a range of academically accredited career development modules to undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts. Our careers and employability programme helps students to develop skills and knowledge that will make them more likely to be successful in their chosen occupations for the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. The programme is predicated on engaging with students from the first year of their academic programme and aims to give them a noticeable advantage when making informed career choices, accessing the graduate employment market and becoming employees of choice. We seek to support students in gaining an understanding of the world of work and competence-based reflective learning and to showcase their experiences and employability skills to employers. Relevant activities include individual consultations, universal events and targeted sessions, including a programme that is co-delivered with employers.
## 3.1 Employer Engagement

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| **3.1.1: Employer input to programme design** | To align undergraduate programme content more closely with employer needs  
To maximise employability learning and stimulate entrepreneurship on appropriate programmes | Structured employer engagement central to UL programme design and review process (Stream 1)  
Explicit employability-related learning outcomes on all programmes  
A regional employability forum to include employers, state development agencies and policy bodies to inform UL’s teaching, learning and research mission  
New policy in relation to work-based doctoral programme development and co-supervision arrangements | All programmes to have explicit employability-related outcomes (embedded within the 5-year cyclical programme review process in 2014/15)  
Employer forum established by September 2015  
Formal industry/academic research policy adopted by 2016 |
| **3.1.2: Employer feedback** | To design a biennial employer survey on the work readiness of graduates and their ability to continue to learn (subject to funding) | Feedback from employers regarding UL graduate preparedness | Biennial survey of employers |
### STREAM 3: ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY

#### 3.2 COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

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<tr>
<td><strong>3.2.1: Cooperative Education programme development</strong></td>
<td>To reinforce UL’s commitment to the role of Cooperative Education (“Co-op”) as an intrinsic and distinctive part of the student experience and to maintain UL’s leading position nationally and internationally</td>
<td>Effective placement programme with strong balance across discipline, industry sector and geographic location (national and international)</td>
<td>1,600+ placements annually (2014-18)</td>
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<td>To expand the international placement programme</td>
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<td>Placement rate of 90%+ (2014-18)</td>
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<td>Employer input into all Co-op preparatory programmes in both delivery and content</td>
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<td>20% of all Co-op placements to be international (2014-18)</td>
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<td><strong>3.2.2: Enabling greater access to work-based learning, retraining and upskilling</strong></td>
<td>To drive the development of UL’s part-time, blended, distance, e-learning and other CPE offerings tailored to industry needs and delivered flexibly for work-based learning, retraining and upskilling</td>
<td>Existing and new programmes developed and adopted for multi-modal delivery (full-time, part-time, distance, flexible, blended and CPE modes) to attract more work-based/in-company/professional learners</td>
<td>CPE business plan adopted and operational (2014)</td>
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<td>Annual retraining and upskilling programmes designed and delivered (Springboard/ICT Upskilling)</td>
<td>A suite of new offerings available from newly established UL CPE Unit (2015 onwards)</td>
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<td>Increased percentage of flexible learners (part-time, distance, e-learning) as a proportion of overall student population (17% of total student population by 2016)</td>
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### STREAM 3: ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY

#### 3.3 CAREERS AND EMPLOYABILITY

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| **3.3.1:** Careers and employability programme development | To maintain UL’s leading position as the top Irish university for graduate employment  
Tod develop, with employers, a range of targeted employability (accredited and non-accredited) programmes for undergraduates and postgraduates  
To address, with employers, the generic skills required for effective engagement in society and the workplace on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes  
To initiate a Professional Development module for postgraduate students, co-led with employers | Targeted employability programmes, which will include topics such as professional development, building a career portfolio, identifying skills needs, interests and preferences, skills and competences for the world of work, development of e-portfolios and CVs, and planning for undergraduate and postgraduate study  
Further refine and embed the Career Development module for research students into the structured PhD model  
Career Development programme for Springboard students  
Compulsory employability skills self-assessment and reflection for all Co-op students  
Accredited preparatory element of the Cooperative Education programme | Increased participation in accredited and non-accredited employability programmes by undergraduate and postgraduate students  
Graduate employment levels at least 12% above the national average for university sector (annually measured from 2014–18)  
Expansion of the number of postgraduate students undertaking accredited employability modules  
Generic skills personal development plan provided for all research postgraduate students (AY 2015/16)  
Sharing of Co-op skills-development data with faculties and departments (AY 2016/17)  
Accreditation for Cooperative Education preparatory programme (AY 2017/18) |
| **3.3.2:** UL employability statement | To outline UL’s distinctive approach to employability, reflecting a commitment to achieving maximum knowledge exchange from the classroom to the workplace | Completed UL employability statement outlining the supports provided to develop students’ employability skills and assist their transition into future careers | UL employability statement adopted by January 2015 |
REFERENCES


ii  Gallup/Purdue University (2014) Great Jobs, Great Lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University.


x  Ibid. Page 11

xi  National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030; Page 11
