

Mayor, Minister, Public Representatives, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

The launch this morning of *Engaged Learning* is the culmination of a year-long process of reflection, discussion, and debate on teaching, learning and assessment at the University of Limerick and I am delighted that the Minister has honoured us with her presence. I am equally pleased to see so many colleagues from the University and from further afield attending today.

This strategy reflects the ambitions we have for our students and it capitalises on our well established reputation for excellence in teaching and learning. It is underpinned by the simple but powerful proposition that students should be actively and deeply involved in their education. That is why we have adopted the title *Engaged Learning*.

Research has demonstrated that students maximise their educational experience when they are fully engaged in their learning. At the University of Limerick we seek to establish the conditions in which engagement is fostered and in which our students flourish so that they assume responsibility for their own learning and are equipped with the attributes to enable them to be lifelong learners in an ever-changing world.

Moreover, it is well known that engaged students become engaged employees and engaged citizens. The link between what happens on campus and the benefits in the workplace and in society as a whole are clear. As an outward facing University, one which is at the forefront of employability, we are determined to ensure that that link is maintained and strengthened.

Under the new strategy we aim further to develop a learning environment that engages our students in intellectually stimulating activities that challenge them while at the same time providing the

necessary supports to help them meet those challenges. *Engaged Learning* articulates the pedagogical values and curricular foundations to which the University of Limerick is committed; it emphasises that high academic standards and discipline-specific excellence are at the very core of our purpose and that we build on that base to promote cross-disciplinary fluency. We are committed to developing continually teaching and learning across all programmes in order to ensure that every one of our students, through their engagement with the curriculum, will acquire and display the key UL graduate attributes that will carry them through life.

Our strategy is based on a broad framework for engagement. This framework encompasses:

- academic rigour;
- enriched educational experiences;
- a supportive campus environment;
- active and collaborative learning; and
- meaningful staff-student interactions.

The elements of this framework are further explained in *Engaged Learning* and they underpin and inform three, interwoven streams of activity, namely Engagement through Broadening; Engagement for Excellence; and Engagement towards Employability. Each stream prescribes a series of specific activities that are linked to identified outcomes and measurable targets. Amongst the activities are:

- the development of broader programme entry structures;
- the offering of broadening module options;
- the provision of more learning and co-operative education opportunities overseas for our students;

- the closer alignment of programme content with employer needs;
- regular surveying of employers on the work readiness of graduates and their ability to continue to learn; and
- the development of our part-time, blended, distance and e-learning offerings tailored to industry.

Many of the features that support positive student engagement are already in place at the University of Limerick: we have academic staff who excite students about their learning and who care about them as individuals; work placement (in the form of co-operative education and practice placements) is a cardinal feature of all our undergraduate programmes; over 30% of our undergraduates spend at least one semester abroad; the final year project, a substantial piece of work that develops students' research skills and their capacity to work independently ; and abundant opportunities to become involved in extra-curricular activities. We are perfectly positioned to build on these core elements of the University of Limerick experience.

To summarise, *Engaged Learning* sets out how we will continue to develop our approach to teaching, learning and assessment and it reinforces the great importance we place on providing an excellent educational experience to each of our students. I am certain that this strategy will ensure that our students will leave the University as confident, self-reflective and engaged citizens who will make a difference in the way they contribute to their organisations, communities and society at large.

It was very obvious to me when the draft of *Engaged Learning* was presented to the campus community that every member of staff, as well as the student body, was actively interested in ensuring that we do the best to engage, inspire and support our students. They brought insights, ideas and perspectives that have found their way

into *Engaged Learning*. In every sense this document is their document. This is hugely reassuring and it fills me with the assurance that we can achieve the objectives of *Engaged Learning*.

I wish to thank all those involved in its development and I look forward to their continued co-operation so that UL can collectively achieve the great ambitions of *Engaged Learning* in the years ahead.