

POSTGRADUATE ORIENTATION SPEECH

4 September 2015

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the University of Limerick this morning. I wish to congratulate each of you on having secured your postgraduate place.

This week we welcome 1,200 new postgraduate students across our four faculties. Approximately two thirds of you are new to UL, having pursued your undergraduate studies elsewhere, and I welcome you to UL. I also wish to welcome back the one third of you who are UL graduates.

Approximately 12% of you come from other European Union countries and over 25% of you hail from outside the EU. I especially welcome our overseas students to Limerick and to Ireland.

But by whatever route you came to be here you have made a wise choice in selecting UL as your place for postgraduate studies. The University of Limerick puts the student at the centre of everything it does; your experience here at UL and your success is important to each and every member of staff who works here. And that is as true in the case of our postgraduate students as it is of our undergraduates.

One of the great things about being a postgraduate student is that you have already experienced and successfully managed the transition to university life and all that goes with that. You know what is expected of you and you have managed the self-reliance that is demanded of university students. Therefore, I feel that I do not have to share with you the advice I gave to our incoming undergraduate students earlier this week.

What I will say to you, though, is that you should make the most of your time here at UL. As postgraduate students you have mastered the demands of university learning and you now have the opportunity to deepen your knowledge while at the same time encountering new bodies of knowledge to which you were not exposed during your undergraduate studies. I also exhort you to use the time to refine the skills that will enhance your employability. The University of Limerick has the best employment rate of all the Irish universities and that is something we are proud to boast about: we call it the “UL Edge”.

I also wish briefly to mention the supports that we offer our students. There are learning centres on campus – Mathematics, Science, Writing, IT – that are there to provide specialist support if you find you require it. And don’t forget the vital pastoral support is provided by the Student Health Centre, the Counselling Services and the Chaplaincy.

The University boast splendid sports and cultural amenities – amongst the finest in Europe. There is something to cater for every taste – the Sports Arena, the Olympic Swimming pool, the all-weather pitches, the rowing tank in the Boathouse, this Concert Hall, and the art collections that are dotted throughout the campus. Avail of them, enjoy them. And while you are at it you might wish to walk the flora and fauna trails that are mapped out on campus – download the UL Trails app. I also encourage you to join one or more of the many clubs and societies on campus – why not try something you haven't had the opportunity to do before. You have the chance now.

You will also have the opportunity to give back to the community, to assist those less fortunate than yourself. The Presidents' Volunteer Award programme is a regular part of UL life and I hope that as many of you as possible get involved in it. Our students' contribution to their communities is a credit to us as an institution.

The University is a melting pot. You have come from different backgrounds, institutions and communities to pursue your ambitions as students. In a large institution it can be tempting to stick with the familiar and that is especially true with respect to the people with whom you associate. But it

would be a lost opportunity to stick with your own all the time – embrace difference. Get to know people who are different to you. It could be someone from a different part of the country, or from another country, of a different race or ethnicity, a different religion, who has different views to you, or who has different interests and perspectives. You might or might not change as a person by embracing difference but you will get a better understanding both of yourself and of those who are different to you.

To conclude, I wish you every success at the University of Limerick and I am confident that you will find it an immensely rewarding experience.