UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH
Kemmy Business School

Kemmy Business School Executive Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA)

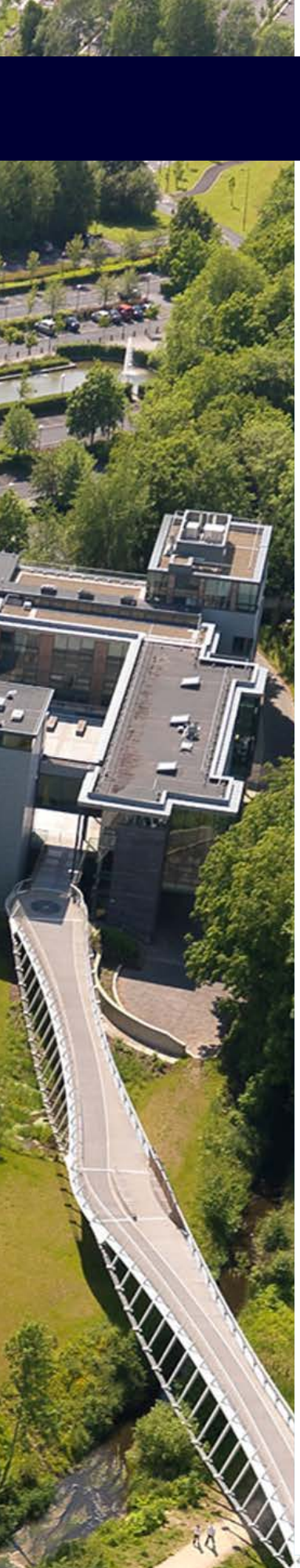
Leadership, Sustainability and Systemic Transformation



EQUIS ACCREDITED
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Athena SWAN Bronze Award GENDER CHARTER

September Entry

A Global First In Executive Doctoral Learning



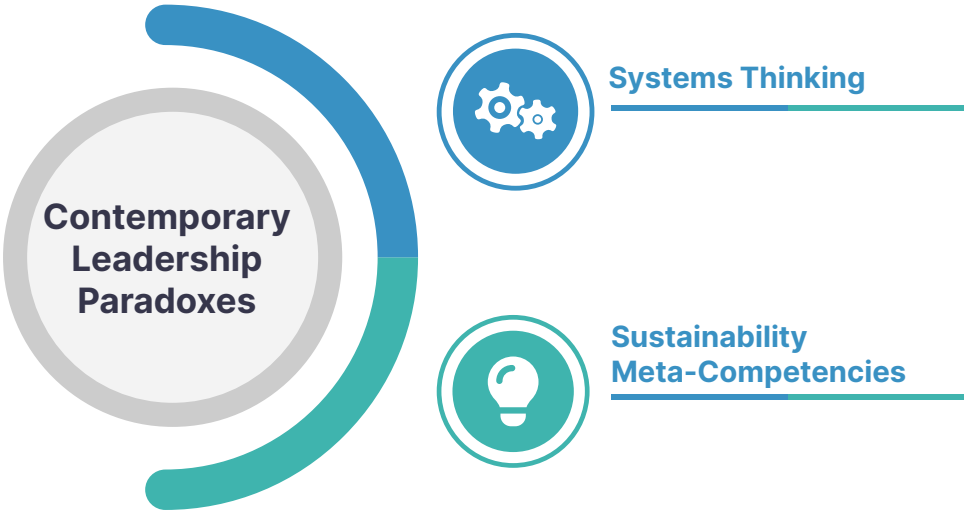
Lead in complexity. Master transformation. Shape futures.

The strategic reality

We live in an era defined by a polycrisis; a constellation of interconnected disruptions that amplify one another in unpredictable ways. Pandemics, planetary boundaries, geopolitical tensions, technological acceleration, and social fragmentation create shocks that no single discipline or sector can solve alone. Traditional leadership models, built for stability and predictability, are no longer fit for purpose. For organisations, this is not abstract theory; it is already reshaping boards, operations, and strategy:

- Climate mandates are reengineering value chains and finance
- Digitalisation is transforming operating models faster than leadership capacity can adapt
- Work and talent dynamics are flattening hierarchies and redrawing cultures
- Geopolitical shocks are fragmenting supply chains and markets
- Regulatory and societal pressures are forcing businesses to deliver purpose and profit in tandem

Against this backdrop, senior leaders require a different calibre of personal and professional development - one that combines intellectual depth, systemic insight, and strategic impact



An executive doctoral programme built for the age of the polycrisis and disruption

The Kemmy Business School Executive DBA is a Level 10 specialist doctoral programme for senior leaders who must create original, actionable knowledge and shape systemic futures. It is a global first, explicitly integrating systems thinking with an underlying philosophy of inquiry, deep reflexivity, and praxis into its design and delivery. This is coupled with cutting-edge research on sustainability meta-competencies, which is essential for addressing complex organisational and societal challenges and enabling sustainable growth. At its heart lies Relational Engaged Scholarship: knowledge co-created with practice, for practice, and in context. The programme moves decisively toward new modes of knowledge production, bringing multiple knowledge systems together to address complex organisational and societal problems..



Leadership At The Edge Of Transformation



Are you leading at the edge of transformation?

The Executive DBA is designed for senior leaders operating in the world's most dynamic and uncertain contexts where digitalisation, sustainability transition, and organisational transformation converge.

You will work alongside world-class supervisors whose expertise aligns with our Knowledge Frontiers: the evolving domains where leadership, systemic transformation and sustainability meet. If you see your own context reflected in these frontiers, this programme is designed for you.

Our knowledge frontiers

Each Knowledge Frontier represents an emerging domain of leadership inquiry. A space we are actively shaping through cutting-edge research and practice, together with senior leaders who are advancing new forms of knowledge in their own contexts. These are the spaces where new ways of seeing, strategising, transforming, and innovating are being defined. These frontiers mirror the supervisory expertise of our faculty and the real-world arenas where our candidates are generating impact and insight. They include:

- **Systems Thinking, Reflexive Futures and Systemic Intervention**
  Developing the capacity to see whole systems, anticipate emergent futures, and intervene reflexively to shape transformative change.
- **Responsible Leadership**
  Cultivating value-based, stakeholder-focused leadership grounded in moral courage and adaptive integrity, enabling ethical, accountable decisions that create shared value and trust in times of change.
- **Responsible and Social Innovation**
  Designing and scaling innovations that generate social and environmental value, embedding ethics, inclusion, and sustainability at the heart of transformation.
- **Sustainable Production, Consumption and the Circular Economy**
  Reimagining value creation through regenerative design, responsible supply chains, and circular economic principles that balance prosperity with planetary boundaries.
- **Sustainable Development Policy, Governance and Accountability**
  Advancing systemic approaches to governance and policy that align economic, social, and environmental priorities through transparent and accountable leadership.
- **Responsible Digitalisation, Datafication and AI**
  Navigating the technological frontier with wisdom and purpose, ensuring digital transformation, data ethics, and AI innovation serve human and planetary wellbeing.

Who this programme is for

The Executive DBA convenes a global cohort of senior leaders, change agents, and system innovators working across private, public, and civil society sectors.

Our candidates are people who recognise that today's challenges cannot be solved with yesterday's logic. They are ready to deepen their practice through inquiry; learning to navigate complexity, paradox, and transformation systemically and sustainably.

- Current and aspiring C-suite executives, directors and VPs redefining strategy and stewardship.
- Senior leaders driving transformation, governance, and sustainability agendas
- Policymakers and public leaders shaping systemic interventions
- Social innovators and entrepreneurs scaling responsible and regenerative impact
- Senior consultants and industry disruptor's leading cross-sectoral change
- Change agents and systems thinkers working within complexity to reimagine the future

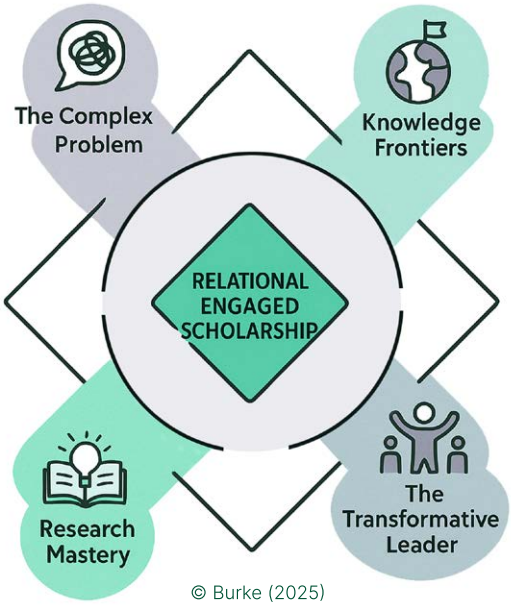
This programme meets you where you already lead and takes you further.



Programme Architecture

A systemic programme by design

This programme is intentionally designed to mirror the complexity it foregrounds. Its architecture is a complex adaptive and living system that both mirrors the world you lead in and scaffolds your journey while allowing emergence, iteration, and transformation. It revolves around four interacting tenets, each active throughout your journey, guided by an epistemic stance of Relational Engaged Scholarship and structured over two narrative phases. This is knowledge co-created with practice, for practice, and in context, where your leadership becomes the laboratory for new understanding and transformation.



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"Learning at this level is not linear—it's systemic. Each insight reshapes the whole."

Dr. Catriona Burke, Academic Director

The complex problem — the catalyst for inquiry

Your journey begins not with a research question, but with a real-world paradox, a high-stakes, "wicked problem" deeply embedded in your organisational or societal context. You will map systems, challenge boundaries, surface assumptions, and trace interdependencies to reveal the dynamics, both visible and hidden, shaping your phenomenon of interest. Through this process, you'll move beyond cause and effect into the art of systemic inquiry. Learning to see complexity as a source of insight, creativity, and transformation rather than constraint.

Wicked problems are those that cannot be definitively described, and for which no single solution exists. (adapted from Rittel and Webber, 1973)

Knowledge frontiers — the evolving scholarship of practice

The Knowledge Frontiers form the intellectual and research arenas that anchor your inquiry. In a traditional DBA, these might be called disciplines or modules. Here, they are cutting-edge and ever-evolving domains of advanced scholarship and practice, representing the leading edge of thought and action at the intersection of leadership, sustainability, and systemic transformation. You will align your complex problem with one (or, where relevant, two) of these evolving frontiers: Systems Thinking, Reflexive Futures & Systemic Intervention, Responsible Leadership, Responsible & Social Innovation, Sustainable Production, Consumption & the Circular Economy, Sustainable Development Policy, Governance & Accountability and Responsible Digitalisation, Datafication & AI. Through this engagement, you move beyond applying existing theory and become part of shaping it. Each frontier provides a locus for inquiry where your research advances both practice and scholarship, guided by a systemic worldview and sustainability meta-competencies that connect insight to action and leadership to transformation.

The Knowledge Frontiers are not subjects to be studied — they are cutting-edge, ever-evolving spaces of scholarship you join, extend, and help redefine through your engagement with the Executive DBA.

Research mastery — from insight to impact

You will develop the rigour and agility of a scholar-practitioner, mastering the methods that transform insight into actionable knowledge. Our design privileges Evidence-Based Management (EBM) principles, delivered in partnership with the renowned Centre for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMA). It integrates practice-based research, engaged scholarship, and generative literature inquiry, positioning your professional expertise at the forefront of contemporary scholarship. The outcome is research mastery that produces level 10 knowledge; academically robust, methodologically rigorous, and strategically consequential for your organisation and for the systems in which it operates.

The transformative leader — reflexivity in action

At the heart of this doctorate lies the transformation of the self as leader. You will cultivate deep reflexive capacity, the ability to question assumptions, reconcile paradoxes, and navigate uncertainty with clarity, courage, and integrity. Through guided inquiry and critical reflection, you will evolve from accomplished senior executive to systemic actor, responsible change-maker, and knowledge broker - a leader capable of shaping the very systems in which you act.

Transformation here is not only something you lead — it is something you become.

The Learning Ecosystem

Translating systemic insight into strategic action

Doctoral-level insight creates distinction. You stand at the nexus of contemporary leadership paradoxes: delivering growth while ensuring sustainability; driving innovation while maintaining responsibility; pursuing efficiency while building resilience. The Executive DBA provides the framework to transcend these tensions, not by choosing between them but by redesigning the strategic frame itself. The learning ecosystem is a global, blended environment designed for senior leaders with purposeful feedback loops. As candidates progress through the Executive DBA, the learning ecosystem becomes both their scaffold and their stage, with each element playing a critical, interrelated role in the doctoral journey.

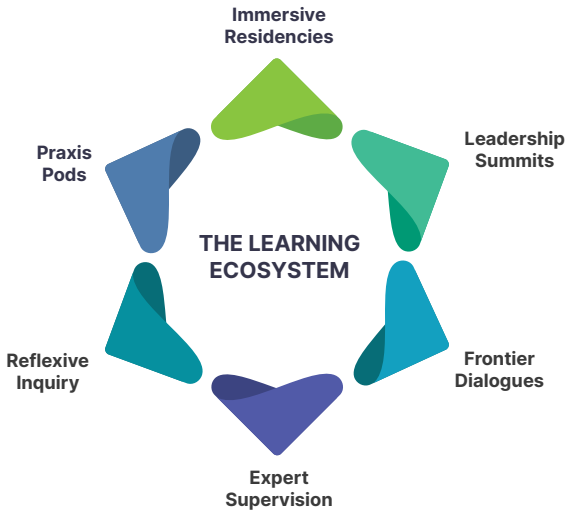
"This very carefully designed learning ecosystem sustains momentum without overwhelming schedules, a rhythmic interplay between immersion and reflection, inquiry and action."

Dr. Finbarr Murphy, Executive Dean, Kemmy Business School

Learning architecture — how senior leaders learn best

Our learning design reflects the way senior leaders think, decide, and create impact; strategically, autonomously, and through experience. It is intentionally crafted to balance intellectual stretch with relevance, enabling transformative learning that is both rigorous and immediately applicable. It is anchored in the following principles:

1. Strategic Relevance: Every engagement connects directly to live organisational and societal challenges
2. Autonomy & Ownership: Structured flexibility empowers participants to steer their journey through purposeful choice and reflection
3. Experience as Strategic Capital: Participants' lived expertise becomes the foundation for inquiry, innovation, and contribution
4. Readiness & Timing: Sequenced touchpoints align with each stage of research and progression, ensuring relevance and momentum
5. Phenomenon-Centred Inquiry: Learning begins and ends with the problem in practice, anchoring theory in real-world complexity
6. Intrinsic Motivation: Driven by purpose and impact rather than compliance, learning becomes a catalyst for systemic transformation



Immersive residencies — Deep learning, global insight, lasting connection

The Immersive Residencies are the intellectual and social anchor points of the Kemmy Business School Executive DBA. Intensive, week-long experiences that accelerate learning, deepen inquiry, and build a global community of practice. Held twice annually in Years 1 and 2, they create dedicated space for senior leaders to think beyond operational pressures, engage directly with leading scholars, and experience powerful peer learning through challenge and dialogue. Each residency strengthens the four core programme tenets; Complex Problem, Knowledge Frontiers, Research Mastery, and the Transformative Leader, ensuring that insight, reflexivity, and capability advance together.

Five days. Global minds. One shared pursuit: new knowledge for desirable futures at the intersection of wicked problems, systems, complexity and leadership.

Executive dba leadership summits — strategic inflection, collective intelligence, lasting impact

The Leadership Summits are pivotal moments within the Executive DBA. They are high-intensity, two-day forums where doctoral inquiry meets strategic leadership, ideas are sharpened into action, and research trajectories accelerate. Convened annually for each of the first three years, each summit brings together candidates, faculty, and invited thought leaders for rigorous dialogue, constructive challenge, and knowledge co-creation. These sessions blend doctoral-level intellectual depth with real-world impact, serving as inflection points that refine inquiry, build confidence, and strengthen the four programme tenets while sustaining momentum across the journey.





Progressive Elaboration — Your Doctoral Journey

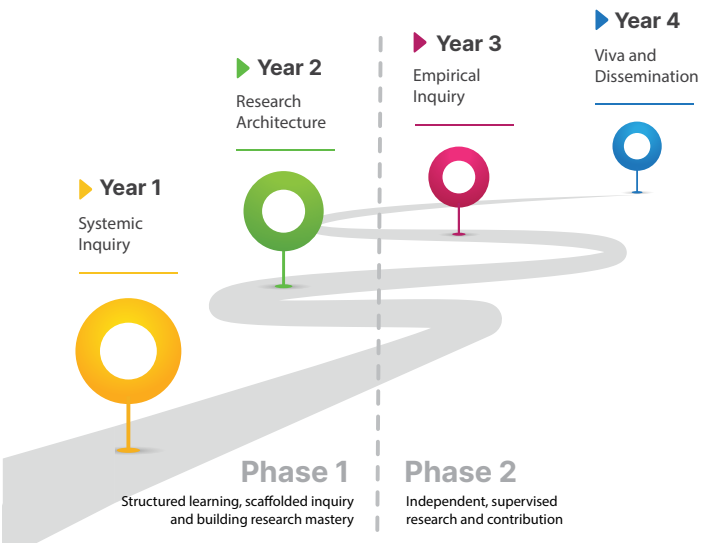
The Executive DBA unfolds over four sequenced years, through a process of progressive elaboration that deepens both scholarship and practice. Your first two years form a structured, taught phase, building conceptual foundations, methodological fluency, and a clear line of inquiry. Your final two years focus on independent, supervised research, translating inquiry into empirical insight and original contribution. Throughout, you move continually among the programme's **four interacting tenets**; the complex problem, the knowledge frontiers, research mastery, and the reflexive practice of transformative leadership, each shaping and reshaping the others as your research evolves.

Year 1 — systemic inquiry and phenomenon framing

Privileging the Complex Problem through a Systemic and Responsible-Leadership Lens
Your journey begins by identifying and interrogating a complex organisational or societal phenomenon that matters to your leadership context. Guided by our two foundational knowledge frontiers of systemic thinking and responsible leadership, you map interdependencies, stakeholders, and underlying dynamics to reveal the deeper architecture of the challenge. Two immersive residencies and the first Leadership Summit build intellectual foundations and shape an inquiry grounded in both practice and scholarship.

Year 2 — research architecture, knowledge frontiers and proposal development

Expanding across the Knowledge Frontiers while Advancing Research Mastery
During the second year, you deepen engagement with the Knowledge Frontiers, situating your problem within the cutting-edge and ever-evolving scholarship. You refine research questions, craft a robust methodological design, and, in collaboration with your expert supervisory team, develop a comprehensive doctoral proposal. Two residencies and the second Leadership Summit mark your transition from structured learning to independent research and from practitioner to scholar-practitioner.



Year 3 — empirical inquiry and emerging insights

Activating Research Mastery and Reflexive Leadership in Practice
Building on your approved proposal, you undertake empirical inquiry that integrates scholarly rigour with real-world relevance. With support from your expert supervisory team, structured milestones, and the third Leadership Summit, you collect and analyse data, surface emerging insights, and reflect on your own leadership as part of the research process. This phase further deepens the interplay between inquiry, reflexivity, and systemic action.

Year 4 — integration, contribution and pathways to impact

Synthesising Across All Four Tenets toward Transformative Impact
In your final year, you integrate findings, discussion, and implications into a coherent, impactful thesis that contributes to both knowledge and practice. Following submission (March) and Viva (June), you refine your work for dissemination and leverage your new research capability as a knowledge broker connecting academic, organisational, and policy spheres. Graduation normally follows the subsequent January.

A doctoral journey designed not only for completion, but for capability, confidence, and enduring influence. Leaders emerge as knowledge creators and brokers, shaping decisions, systems, and desirable futures.

Admissions — Readiness For A Doctorate Of Consequence



Admission to the Executive DBA is by competitive selection and reflects the global calibre of the programme. We seek senior leaders who bring strategic influence, reflective depth, and the curiosity to explore complex challenges through doctoral inquiry. This is not a traditional academic route. It is designed for experienced executives, policymakers, and change-makers who are ready to generate actionable, responsible knowledge and shape the systems in which they lead.

Entry requirements

To be considered, applicants should normally have:

- A Master's degree (MBA, MSc, or equivalent)
- At least ten years of senior management experience, demonstrating strategic responsibility and leadership maturity
- A compelling Portfolio of Inquiry evidencing readiness for doctoral-level research and alignment with the programme's Knowledge Frontiers

Admission decisions are based on intellectual fit, leadership experience, and capacity for contribution to the cohort's collective learning community.

Portfolio of inquiry — your first act of doctoral inquiry

The Portfolio of Inquiry (POI) is more than an application requirement; it is the beginning of your doctoral journey. It invites you to frame the complex organisational or societal problem that compels your curiosity and leadership attention. Through a structured, evidence-based submission, you will demonstrate your ability to see systems, synthesise insight, and articulate a question of genuine consequence. The Portfolio forms the basis for your first conversation with faculty and the foundation for your evolving research pathway.

What your portfolio includes

1. Alignment with the Knowledge Frontiers
2. The Complex Problem
3. Research Architecture
4. Interweaving Doctoral Inquiry within Professional Practice
5. Motivation and Legacy

Reflective selection conversation

Following review, shortlisted applicants will be invited to a reflective selection conversation with faculty, an opportunity for both you and the School to explore alignment of purpose, readiness, and supervisory fit. Admission marks your entry into a global learning community of senior leaders constructing actionable and responsible knowledge, shaping systems, organisations, and futures.

If you're ready to generate original knowledge, bridge multiple knowledge systems and lead systemic transformation at the highest level, the Kemmy Executive DBA awaits.

Scan the QR codes below to Download **Portfolio of Inquiry (POI)** and **Appy Online**

Download POI

Appy Online

Our programme team is available to guide you through the application process and answer any questions you may have.

General Enquiries/Application Support: Rebecca Gachet | email: dba@ul.ie
Academic Director: Dr. Catriona Burke | email: catriona.burke@ul.ie

Kemmy Business School: A Central And Connected Location

Award	Executive DBA (Leadership, Sustainability and Systemic Transformation)
Level	Level 10 (Specialist Qualification)
Duration	4 Years (Part-Time)
Delivery	Blended
Fees	Year 1 & 2 (EU-€11,500, Non-EU €15,000) Year 3 & 4 (EU €7,500, Non-EU €11,000) Subject to change
Campus Days	Year 1 & 2: 12 days on campus (then online) Year 3: Two days on campus Year 4: Viva (may be remote or f2f)

With a reputation for excellence in business education, the triple accredited Kemmy Business School at University of Limerick is one of Ireland's leading business schools, providing a first-class education designed to prepare graduates for successful and rewarding careers. Testimony to the schools commitment to operate at the highest standards of international business education is its position among the 1% of international business schools who are holders of three coveted international business school accreditations, namely AACSB, EQUIS & AMBA.

UL occupies a prime position on Ireland's west coast, a vibrant hub connecting Europe, North America, and Asia. Just 25 minutes from Shannon International Airport, with Cork, Kerry, and Dublin also within easy reach, Limerick offers exceptional global accessibility for senior executives. Travel is effortless: under two hours from London or Paris, less than six hours from New York or Boston, and with convenient one-stop connections from major Asian and Middle Eastern cities. Set within Ireland's dynamic, innovation-led business environment, University of Limerick delivers a world-class doctoral experience distinguished by a globally pioneering programme design and learning ecosystem, offering an unparalleled high-end learning experience to global thought leaders intending to make a significant organisational and/or societal impact across multiple levels.



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