



University of Limerick

ERASMUS CHARTER POLICY STATEMENT

The University of Limerick's 2011 to 2015 Strategic Plan specifies internationalisation as a strategic goal: "the third strategic goal is to sharpen the University's 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 increasing by 50% the number of international students and increasing by 30% the number of students who spend time abroad on their programme. Within the context of the UL strategic plan, the University is active in establishing and nurturing strategic linkages worldwide in the areas of research, teaching and student mobility."

This represents a powerful endorsement of UL's commitment to EU and non-EU educational cooperation across a range of key activities, internally and externally. Within the context of the UL strategic plan, implementation of University policy for internationalisation rests on a number of key activities. The University's strategy for selection of partners functions according to the requirements of the academic Faculty or Department which proposes the partnership outlining the primary aim of the relation between institutions, be it for the purpose of research collaboration, teaching, student mobility, EU supported projects, whether Erasmus or non-EU.

As a general rule, proposed exchanges are interdepartmental, that is, the students being exchanged originate from an identified faculty, department, or degree programme, or area of study or training

in UL and a corresponding faculty, department, programme or area of study or training, in the proposed partner. Institution-wide exchange agreements are arranged only in exceptional cases. The initiation of new agreements or the continuation of existing agreements is proposed by the Academic Coordinator for the degree or subject area with prior approval by the relevant Deans and Heads of Department. Before the signing of an agreement, preparatory visits take place by academic coordinators in the subject area, to ensure academic compatibility, the existence of reciprocal support systems, shared quality criteria, issue of transcript of results and balance in mobility numbers. All exchange agreements are reviewed every two years.

Target groups for mobility activities are students from first, second and third cycles and members of academic, technical and administrative staff. The most important objectives are excellence in academic study or training through broadening of the student or staff experience in an institution situated in a different geographical and cultural milieu. This leads, in the case of the student, to an enhanced learning experience, and, in the case of the staff member, to innovative and improved teaching practices and the creation of valuable academic contacts and networks. The economic benefits of language learning and cultural awareness skills are well documented in the Irish and European contexts. Indeed the skills deficit in these areas in particular in combination with technical, marketing, IT, and entrepreneurial skills poses a particular challenge for Ireland's export-dependent economy. Alive to this challenge and the economic imperative to respond to this, the University of Limerick has leveraged the potential of the Erasmus programme to equip students with many of these skills combinations.

The development of double degrees forms part of UL's internationalisation policy. UL is working on the development of a number of 2+2 undergraduate degrees with Chinese partner universities. These programmes have been approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

UL's strategy for participation in international cooperation projects is underpinned by a commitment to expand mobility globally and to attract high calibre students. Strategically targeted geographical areas are identified by existing strong academic partnerships, which lead to a functioning consortium. The University is a partner currently in four such projects with coordination provided by the International Education Division. Continued focussed participation will lead to sustained future development of UL's internationalisation. Specifically, cooperation projects enable students and staff to acquire a specialised educational experience in an international context. The University could be seen as a pioneering institution in this context. The ICI – ECP mobility programme between 3 EU and 2 New Zealand Universities, entitled "Novel Sensing Technologies and Instrumentation in Environmental Climate Change Monitoring", led by UL, facilitated successful mobility in the field of Engineering for a total of 66 students and 8 staff in a ground-breaking initiative which has increased and enhanced mobility in Science and Engineering. Internationalisation at UL is characterised by significant momentum and achievement. The strategy has not been one of change for change's sake but rather the result of focused reflection in terms of "connectedness", relevance and best practice. It is a top-down, bottom-up priority and is a guiding principle across teaching, research and all third mission activities. At an operational level, successful participation in international cooperation requires a commitment to detail in terms of preparation and monitoring of students and staff, institutional agreements, recording, reporting and financial management. The "devil is in the detail"

approach underpins all successful programmes. These support systems ensure the best outcomes for mobility and allow for the successful cascading of the positive international experience for future beneficiaries.

The University expects that its participation in the Programme will impact considerably on the modernisation of the institution through achievement of the following policy objectives:

1) To increase the quantity of higher education graduates at all levels: with the stated policy aim of increasing the diversity of the student population, UL will continue its efforts to attract applications from all strata of society through the activities of the Access Office, the Mature Student Office, the Disability Office and the First 7 Weeks initiative. These provide support to students, including a foundation course, which will increase the quantity and diversity of students in the future. As a percentage of the total student population, mature students will increase to 15%, students with a disability to 5% and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds will increase to 7%.

2) To enhance the quality and relevance of human capital development: innovative learning approaches such as flexible and blended learning are available on degrees programmes, such as the BBS; the SULIS teaching and learning support system is in use across all programmes; employer consultation is practised, linking degrees to market demands and employability; structured PhDs are offered by all 4 Faculties; work placements are part of a formal, academically accredited, compulsory element of the student experience. These have a positive effect, with employment levels of UL graduates consistently 8% above the national average. In 2011, the international university rating agency QS Stars awarded the maximum 5-star rating to UL for the employability of its graduates. A culture of lifelong learning is fostered among staff by investing in knowledge and professional skills development.

3) To create effective governance and funding mechanisms in support of excellence: prudent management of resources is especially important in a challenging economic climate. The University will pursue new, innovative and pioneering approaches to seek alternative and sustainable sources of revenue and to reduce costs. This policy will balance greater autonomy with accountability to all stakeholders.

4) To strengthen the knowledge triangle between education, research and business: UL will incorporate a comprehensive approach to translational research, with interactions between researchers and industry, adaptation of research outputs to enhance policy and practice, commercialisation of intellectual property and recognition to inventors through the Industrial Enterprise Centre. The new NEXUS Innovation Centre will support the formation of 35 new start-up companies.

5) To grow mobility of students, researchers and staff: UL will continue to build learning mobility into curricula, ensuring credit recognition through quality assurance, lobby for improved conditions for the best students, academics and researchers from all countries and support staff mobility through recognition for progression.