UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK EMPLOYABILITY STATEMENT

EMPLOYABILITY – CHALLENGING, LEADING, ENGAGING

Introduction

The principle of employability is a cornerstone of the University of Limerick’s educational philosophy and a defining feature of the student experience. Since its establishment in 1972, the University has been committed to bringing the world of work into the learning environment and to maintaining our connectedness with the external world. For UL, employability is about much more than employment or even preparing students for their future careers. Rather we see it as a set of achievements – skills, knowledge and understandings– that make UL graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen careers, to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

The University of Limerick’s institutional concern for employability is reflected in Broadening Horizons and Engaged Learning, which reaffirm the University’s commitment to Cooperative Education, graduate employability and responsiveness to the changing expectations of employers regionally and globally.

Cooperative Education and Careers programmes

At UL, we believe that the worlds of academia and work offer complementary opportunities for learning. The Cooperative Education (Coop) work placement programme is a core element of the UL student experience and exposes students to the world of work, with its differing environments, demands and expectations. Coop is a formal, academically accredited and compulsory programme and is offered to students across all faculties. With over 1,700 placements secured annually, Coop at UL is one of the largest placement programmes in Europe. The reach of the programme is also significant, involving a network of 4,000 employers, both national and international. The compulsory and inclusive nature of Coop makes it unique in the Irish and European contexts, with students eligible for placement, regardless of discipline and vocational orientation, academic standing and skills profile. It is a tangible manifestation of the value of switching the locus of learning and knowledge between the classroom and the workplace. As such, students have the opportunity to develop and apply a range of understandings and competences that they could not acquire in either single context. We welcome the challenge of testing academic learning in the work environment and of transferring work-based learning into the classroom context. This is reflected at postgraduate level with postgraduate research students undertaking industry-based PhDs. It is this reinforcement of dual learning that enables UL graduates to transition successfully into the world of work and to experience the highest level of graduate employment nationally. It provides our graduates with “the UL edge”.

University of Limerick Employability Statement
We believe that the world is the students’ learning zone. A shrinking world means that business, industry and services now reach beyond traditional borders. Alive to the reality of tightly linked economies, we have developed an extensive international placement programme which enables students to develop the cross-cultural capabilities and global perspectives sought by employers. The reach of the international programme is significant: 20% of students undertake their Coop placements internationally within a worldwide employer network that spans five continents. The sectoral spread of international placements is also broad, with placements spanning a broad range of international sectors including aerospace, financial services, manufacturing, biotechnology, education, public service and professional services.

In addition, UL has other programmes that provide opportunities for work-based learning. Under the School Placement programme, 800 students are placed within UL’s network of 550 post-primary schools annually. Likewise, students on medical, nursing and clinical therapy programmes undertake placements in clinical settings nationally. UL also collaborates closely with professional communities of practice in programmes which integrate on-campus learning and professional practice, for example the Garda College and Revenue Commissioners. These programmes are delivered to some 1000 professionals annually.

Our career development programme equips students with career management skills for life, not just for their graduate role. This progressive programme is predicated on engaging with students from the first year of their degree. Specifically, it supports students in developing an understanding of their abilities, interests, preferences and motivations and impact on career-related decision making. Over 15,000 students and employers visit the careers service annually. As well as one-to-one careers consultations, the Careers Service offers targeted employability programmes (accredited and non-accredited) on topics such as professional development; building a career; skills and competences for the world of work; development of e-portfolios and CVs; and planning for postgraduate study. There is also an extensive graduate recruitment programme, advertising over 1,500 graduate vacancies annually and hosting the largest graduate recruitment fair nationally. At postgraduate level, UL provides a suite of accredited sector-specific professional development programmes, co-delivered with employers.

Our institutional commitment to employability has made us the University of Choice for employers. UL graduates consistently enjoy the highest level of graduate employment nationally. At 72%, the employment rate for UL graduates trends at more than 20% above the average for the university sector. For doctoral graduates, graduate employment stands at 94%. In recent years, UL’s clear positioning in the employability domain has been endorsed by a number of awards, both national and international including the National Employability Challenge, the Graduate of the Year and the World Association for Cooperative Education Roll of Honour.

**Employer and Academic Engagement – A Partnership Approach?**

The University of Limerick’s partnership approach to employer engagement plays a key role in developing graduate talent, supporting knowledge exchange, and driving innovation and economic growth. A key to UL’s success in employability is our commitment to building knowledge alliances between employers and the academic community. We view employer engagement as a business-as-usual component of our innovative educational ecosystem. UL’s leadership in the domains of employability and engagement is now reflected by external policy shifts towards graduate readiness and responsiveness to employer needs across the higher education sector. By working
closely with the employer community, we have access to insights and knowledge that maximise our responsiveness to the changing needs and expectations of the national and global economies. An extensive programme of collaboration involving over 1,300 visits annually underpins UL’s relationships with employers. Such engagement ensures high levels of graduate work-readiness and skills relevance. UL’s capacity to develop highly skilled, work-ready graduate talent has been a key instrument in attracting industry to the region and in driving innovation and economic growth. Reflecting this, more than one third of new graduates go directly into employment in the Midwest. In this context, we engage productively with state development agencies and policy bodies to stimulate foreign direct investment, indigenous job creation and innovation. This model of dual capacity-building has contributed to the creation of 1,500 high-skill jobs in the Midwest region in the past two years. At programme level, we recognise the role that employers can play in the skills and knowledge transfer process and actively encourage employer involvement across a range of employability activities. Employers provide input into programme design and review processes to ensure alignment with future business and industry needs. In addition, explicit employability-related learning outcomes are articulated in respect of all programmes.

Graduates are facing a future shaped by continuous and accelerating change. We cannot definitively predict those changes but we can prepare our students for them. Our institutional commitment to building students’ employability credentials and supporting their academic mastery means that future graduates will be equipped to compete in and meet the challenges of the new world of work.