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UL Student Affairs eNews is intended for circulation among staff and students of University of Limerick. Extracts from this newsletter should not be published without the permission of the editor.



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October is a wonderful month. Although the year is ebbing slowly into hibernation mode, it does so in a blaze of colour and often in beautiful sunshine. It is also a fun and active time on campus, as students are finding their feet and their bearings, reconnecting with each other, and with our beautiful surroundings. It is energising to see growing numbers of students and staff back on campus since September, bringing much needed bustle and vibrancy to our day-to-day lives.

All of Students Affairs services are open to our students and

communities every day. It's business as usual for the new academic year although 2022 has also been a year of changes, challenges, achievements and opportunities. We have said goodbye, sincere thanks and best wishes to long-standing colleagues Conor Hartigan and Gabriella Hanrahan, who both contributed enormously to building strong connections with educational partners and community organisations through their outreach work delivering assistive technology training and creating student volunteering opportunities. A Universal Design for Learning (UDL) project, led by the Educational Assistive Technology Centre, was short-listed for the John Kelly Awards in UCD in October. Staff from our Access and Widening Participation Offices have played a pivotal role working with the IUA and other HEIs developing a nationally centralised application and assessment system for the 1916 Bursary Fund which is being piloted in 2022/23.

The new National Access Plan, A Strategic Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher

Education 2022-2028 was launched in August by Minister Simon Harris and sets out the government's ambition for an inclusive, diverse higher education sector. This new Plan will challenge us all in UL to think about how we work with our communities and with our students so that we are supporting equity of access, participation and success for all societal groups who are traditionally under-represented in higher education. The responsibility for embedding diversity and inclusion lies with us all, working together. Our Access and Widening Participation team will lead out on a roadshow with the campus community shortly to consult on how best UL can align our work, services and approaches to delivering equity of access with this new National Access Plan.

On the challenging side, ever growing numbers of students are presenting with mental health concerns; increasing numbers of students are applying for financial support as the cost-of-living rises; the accommodation crisis and the digital divide continue to affect students who cannot attend classes on

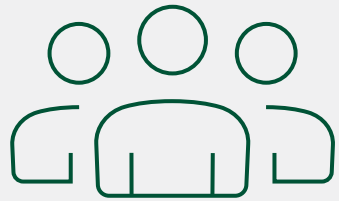
campus every day. It is undoubtedly a difficult time to be a student however all of Student Affairs services, along with our colleagues across the University, are doing everything we can to ensure that students are informed, supported and make the best possible decisions about their engagement in higher education.

Have a look at our infographic overleaf to see a snapshot of the varied activities the Student Affairs Division engages in every year, many of these in partnership with colleagues across UL. Thank you for your continued support and partnership and we wish all our UL colleagues, students, and community partners a healthy and engaging 2022/23 academic year.

Le dea-ghuí agus beannachtaí

Rhona McCormack
Interim Director

Student Affairs Activity



Community groups and numbers attending **AccessCampus** in one week in September 2022

24 groups **331** individuals



Postcard poems issued to Limerick and Clare communities in 2022 to mark Poetry Ireland's National Poetry Day

1,750



Sign-ups to SilverCloud since Dec 2021

431



Sessions attended in Counselling Service in 2021/22

4,845



Consultations in Student Health Centre

4,523



Student volunteer hours in 2021/22 eligible for PVA

27,700



Amount of student financial support administered by Division in 2021/22

€1,934,000



Laptops loaned to students in 2021/22

144



Book chapters published in "Chaplains Ministers of Hope"

One



Student consultations/interactions with First Year Support & Student Support Officers

4,000+

ENTREPRENEUR AND INNOVATION CAMP MAY 2022

Last May, the Access Office in collaboration with the Nexus Innovation Centre and the Kemmy Business School (KBS) ran an Entrepreneur and Innovation Camp for Transition Year Pupils in Thomond Community College, Coláiste Mhichil (CBS Boys School) and Coláiste Nano Nagle (Presentation Girls School). The camp was a great success and learning experience for the transition year pupils and they were enthusiastic to be involved in an on campus experience. The participants gained an understanding of using tools and methods to explore entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and develop innovations. They also engaged in creative problem solving, teamwork skills, project management and conflict management. The camp culminated with the opportunity to pitch a business idea to a board of judges and the winners were presented with vouchers for Supermacs! We received positive feedback from the schools and pupils and the Access Office hopes to continue and develop this collaboration with the Nexus Innovation Centre and KBS.



AccessCampus Study Club



Here in AccessCampus a special initiative is run to serve the young community in Limerick City South. AccessCampus provides a Study Club for secondary school students from 1st to 6th year. The annual feedback from the students is that the Study Club is a safe environment for students to avail of to study and interact with peers in a relaxed space. Students can further their knowledge and confidence in various subjects through the help of tutors. Learning style assessments are carried out to determine how students should learn which is often not taught in school and can improve the students' grades.

AccessCampus also offers the students a chance to attend STEM tutoring in the University of Limerick. This is an important initiative in AccessCampus as young individuals from Limerick City South are provided the opportunity to engage with the University, an interaction that often seems unattainable to them due to educational inequalities. UL AccessCampus will use volunteers, with the help of UL Global to aid the students in particular subjects out in the Study Club. This will be done by using the Student Optimisation System (SOS) which was developed in AccessCampus in 2008. The success of the SOS is evident as there is a progression

rate of 95% of Club members to higher and further education from AccessCampus. The SOS model is a universal design tool that can be tailored to each individual's needs. As some of the tutors will be UL Global students it provides the Study Club members with the potential to develop knowledge about new cultures.

A partnership between UL AccessCampus and Southill After Schools Club (SASC) has been further developed to create a Study Club specifically for 1st year secondary pupils in the O'Malley Park region. SASC have set this up to further support 1st years as they transition from primary to secondary school. As the students get older, they will be gradually introduced to AccessCampus Study Club so they can continue the path they began and have support for the leaving certificate and beyond. Their target demographic is the traveller community as they experience educational inequalities and are affected by cultural norms resulting in them not finishing their second level education. Fostering aspirations is one of the core missions that UL AccessCampus and SASC have in common. We focus on the students and their goals and provide them with the space and services to achieve their goals.

Volunteering with the Academy for Children

As part of the Academy for Children's Ambassador Programme students were recruited to participate in in-school and on campus work with local DEIS primary schools. The students co-designed and delivered in-schools workshops with content that related to their own educational journeys and life as a UL student. The students acted in a role-modelling capacity which allowed the children to learn about the different subjects on offer in UL, the different pathways to higher education and the diversity of backgrounds of the UL student population. All of the children were given an activity book based around the content of the workshops to bring home to act as a talking point with those they live with.

The Ambassadors were also involved in the on-campus Exploration days. These full day tours of the University allow the pupils to engage in fun and interesting, age-specific activities, designed to raise aspirations and begin to embed the University of Limerick into the lives of the children. The Ambassadors helped the children with the activities and answered their questions about life as a student.

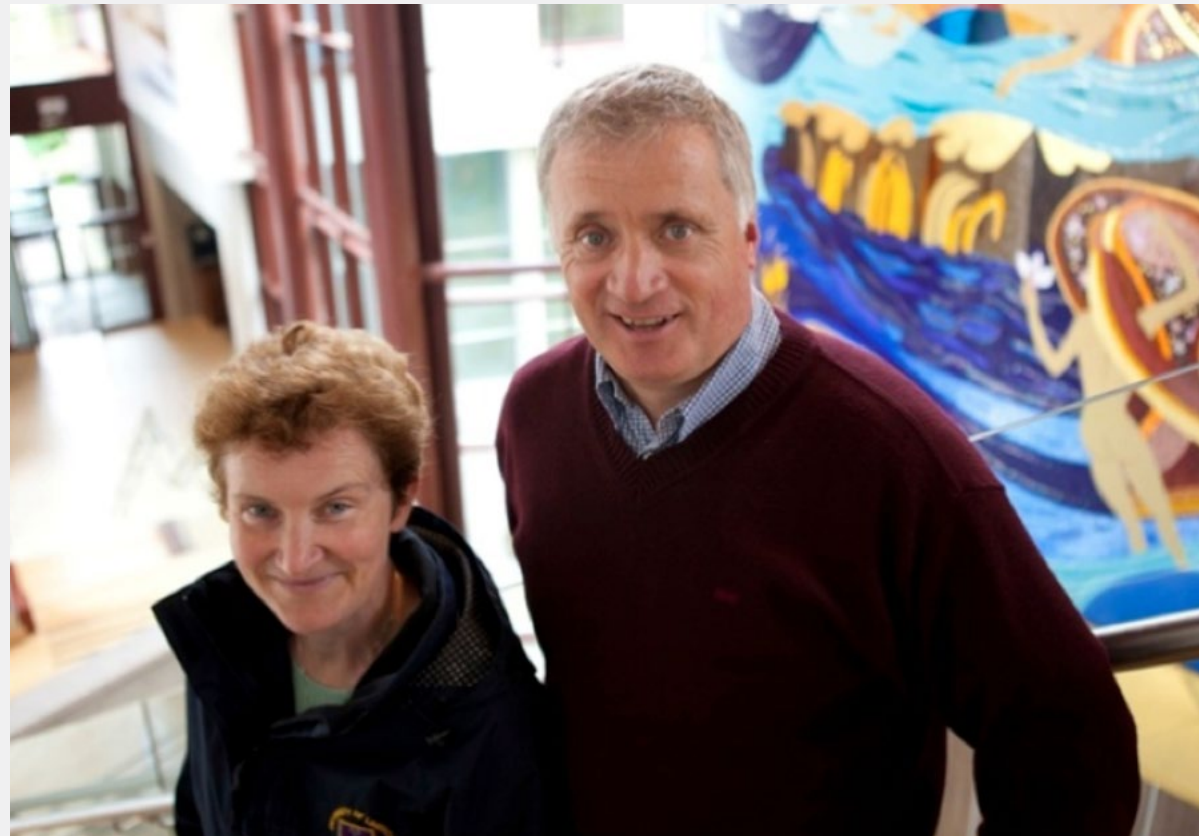
The programme ran in three schools last year and will be expanded to five schools in Limerick city and county in the coming academic year. All of the students who participate in the programme are eligible for the President's Volunteer Award.

"Volunteering as an Ambassador for the Academy for Children has taught me invaluable lessons like communication skills, empathy and patience. It helped me to see the importance of helping children to see the potential that is in them and that sometimes children just want someone to listen to them and answer their questions."



Pictured above: Aisling Ryan current Academy Ambassador pictured with children from CBS Doon.





CHAPLAINS JOHN CAMPION AND SARAH O'ROURKE WELCOME YOU TO UL

Coming to college is a time of transition and brings both opportunities and challenges. Chaplaincy provides a listening service that responds and reacts to the ebb and flow of life whether that is joy and achievement or a tragedy and loss. From experience we know the wisdom of the Gaelic Proverb: "Giorraíonn beirt bóthar", two people shorten the road.

Strategic to the operation of UL Chaplaincy are the intentionally designed Teach Fáilte and Contemplative Centre in the Student Square. These places afford the chaplains space to provide welcome, pastoral care and support, to offer opportunities for worship, to facilitate spiritual engagement and reflection, to encourage social responsibility and volunteerism.

Teach Fáilte, our popular drop in centre is open daily from 11am-12noon and from 1.30pm-3pm. Students are welcome to make a cuppa as boiling water and milk are provided. Students avail of this space to chill out, chat and get to know other students.

Staff and students are encouraged to avail of the Contemplative Centre which is an oasis of peace and tranquility. This is a sacred space for quiet, meditation, prayer or reflection. Throughout the academic year, bespoke interfaith and denominational services are held for special occasions of celebration or tragedy.

If we can support you in any way please feel free to contact us:

John Campion
john.campion@ul.ie
086 2632458
Room CM071

Sarah O'Rourke
sarah.orourke@ul.ie
086 4127485
Teach Fáilte



We wish you well and encourage you to
"Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." (Plato)



Wiktoria Gorczynska



Emily Ryan



Maryanne Browne



Sinead Ryan

THE ROLE OF THE ASSISTANT PSYCHOLOGISTS IN UL ÉIST STUDENT COUNSELLING AND WELLBEING SERVICE

The Assistant Psychologists (APs) are a vital part of the counselling team at the University of Limerick. They are responsible for running the first step of the student counselling and wellbeing stepped care model.

In order to access the UL ÉIST Student Counselling and Wellbeing Service, students have to attend “drop in” which is essentially a short in-take/screening session facilitated by the APs. They are involved in initial risk assessment and psychometric baseline screening.

In addition, a significant number of students are assigned to the APs for low-level online CBT-based work using an online platform called Silvercloud. Importantly, APs produce the Annual Report that provides crucial information about the service.

The APs also promote the wellbeing of students through weekly Mental Health Monday emails and social media posts. They create and update leaflets, posters, intake forms, psycho-educational material, and the mental

health booklet to help reach common presentations such as anxiety, social anxiety, unplanned pregnancy, low mood, and alcohol use awareness.

The APs manage their own caseload of students while also being involved in other projects throughout the year. Such projects include: The National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework, The Body Project, Identifying and Responding to Students in Distress and promotion of Silvercloud.

The APs are available to all students in the counselling waiting room. They represent the counselling service at meetings and conferences. They are highly involved in organisational tasks such as writing emails, letters, completing clients’ files, providing administrative cover when needed, and liaising with other staff and services.

The goal of the majority of APs is to get into counselling or clinical training.

UL Shortlisted for the John Kelly Awards for Universal Design

Staff from the Student Affairs Division have played a pivotal role in introducing and integrating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices across campus. This effort has culminated in UL being shortlisted for the John Kelly Awards for Universal Design. After a review by an international panel of experts, UL's application for UDL in Collaboration was judged worthy of shortlisting, showcasing a range of cross-institutional and innovative approaches to implementing UDL based practices.

The application was submitted to showcase work undertaken as part of the 'UDL at UL' project, which aims to promote and establish curriculum-based practices based on equity and social justice underpinned by the Universal Design for Learning framework. This project work included developing an Inclusive Practice module and resources built on UDL principles and practices, delivering UDL specific events and creating a UDL specific community of practice. This project will also establish a UDL special interest group which will influence policy changes to promote inclusion and reduce educational barriers.

Focusing on a cross-institutional approach, the project is built on close collaboration with professional and academic staff across the University, from the EDI office and Library Support Services to the Centre for Transformative Learning and all academic faculties. This UDL approach additionally supports the strategic goals and inclusive agenda of the University and strengthens our compliance with national policy and legislation (National Access Plan, EU Web Accessibility Directive, Equality Acts).

Initially part of a one year HEA funded project, we are delighted to announce that the project will now exceed its original one year remit as it plans to influence change and practice and provide a more inclusive and accessible environment for everyone.



University of Limerick Students Contribute over 27,000 voluntary hours to more than 150 charities and organisations

“Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.” Elizabeth Andrew

The Community Liaison Office will host its 12th Annual PVA Ceremony on Tuesday 29th November at 2pm in the University Concert Hall. University of Limerick students, who contributed more than 27,000 volunteer hours to more than 150 organisations, charities and clubs both at home and abroad, will be praised and recognised through the PVA Ceremony in November.

The Ceremony will see 580 students receive gold, silver, bronze or COVID President Volunteer Awards based on the hours contributed to the host organisations during the 2021/22 academic year.

A minimum of 20 volunteer hours were required by each registered student to participate in the programme which is run under the auspices of studentvolunteer.ie. UL has awarded

more than 4,660 students for their volunteering since the programme began in 2010.

Organisations who have benefitted from student volunteers include ISPCC/Childline Limerick, Midwest Simon Community, Irish Cancer Society, Irish Red Cross, AWARE, Barnardo's Ireland, Hope Foundation, Scouting Ireland and GAA Clubs across the country to name but a few.

Our vision for the University of Limerick is to provide an outstanding student experience, to actively serve our communities and to contribute to the civil, social and cultural life of the Shannon Region and beyond. The President's Volunteer Award (PVA) at the University of Limerick draws on a long-established student volunteering culture. The primary goals of the PVA

is to harness, acknowledge, support and grow the contribution that our students make to their communities both on and off-campus through their volunteering. The PVA is a unique higher education student volunteer award. In addition to academic achievements, the PVA is included on the UL student transcript. As such, the PVA's robust criteria ensures that UL student volunteers commit to their chosen club, society, organisation and communities for a period of time as well as reflecting on this commitment and volunteer practice.

Volunteering is deeply valued by University of Limerick students. Volunteers report significant social and personal development gains accrued from volunteering, a sense of 'making a difference to others', of being part of the community, meeting

new people and making new friends, all positively impacting their own lives. It is also valued as a means of career development, through gaining work experience and related skills.

The Community Liaison Office (CLO) at the University of Limerick supports and promotes strong and meaningful links with internal and external clubs, societies, organisations and communities. The CLO is committed to enhancing the experience of Higher Education (HE) students and our internal and external communities through emancipatory based civic engagement principles, activities and practices.

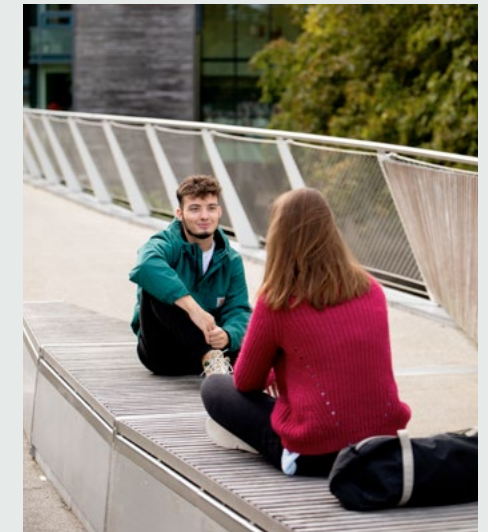
For further information contact: pva@ul.ie or check out www.studentvolunteer.ie/ul

'In UL, and indeed in Ireland, we have an unwavering spirit and commitment to volunteerism with our student volunteers being a major force underpinning Irish higher education institutions' (HEIs) civic role and driving Ireland's agenda to create an island of inclusion and engagement.'

President of UL Prof Kerstin Mey.



STUDENT HEALTH CENTRE



START OF TERM

In preparation for the start of the new academic year the Student Health Centre has undergone some refurbishments in a few of our clinical spaces and we hope that this will enhance the overall student experience with us.

Full details regarding our services are available on our website at www.ul.ie/medical but we would like to remind you of a few key points:

- **All appointments must be booked in advance** and can be made by telephoning **061 202 534**. A mixture of telephone and face-to-face appointments will be available. There will be no walk in appointments.
- Students who are having a face to face appointment with one of our medical team **must wear a face mask**. This is in line with current guidelines for health care settings.
- We aim to arrange consultations for students with urgent issues within 24 hours. Consultations for students with non-urgent issues will be arranged as quickly as possible.

PILOT INITIATIVES

In response to feedback received, 2 pilot initiatives involving rapid testing are being undertaken for a limited period this semester:

- **Rapid HIV and Syphilis Testing:** Recognising the anxiety some students have in relation to having blood tests done, the Student Health Centre is trialling finger prick rapid blood testing as part of our sexual health screens for HIV and Syphilis. It is hoped this trial will have a positive impact and will increase the uptake in STI screens.
- **Strep A/Strep Throat - Swab Testing:** Aligned with Public Health and World Health Organisation (WHO) advice to try to decrease the amount of antibiotics prescribed, the Student Health Centre will be piloting the use of Strep A throat swabs. These rapid tests will quickly distinguish between a viral sore throat infection (which does not require antibiotic treatment) and a bacterial sore throat infection (which does require antibiotic treatment). The hope is to decrease antibiotic prescribing and to provide greater clarity as to why antibiotics are not always prescribed.

NURSE PRESCRIBING

At the Student Health Centre we are conscious of keeping training and skills up to date and targeted specifically towards the student population. Our Nurse Practice Manager is now a trained nurse prescriber allowing her role to be expanded to include issuing of prescriptions.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICE

The Student Health Centre offers a physiotherapy service to all UL registered students. Appointments are available on Monday to Thursday mornings. Assessment, diagnosis and treatment is provided by a highly skilled and experienced physiotherapist whose specialties include: sports injuries, musculoskeletal injuries/disorders, post operative rehabilitation, back and neck pain.

THE ALPHABET OF BIRDS

University of Limerick Arts Office aims to provide many different experiences of the arts to our student, campus and broader communities through large-scale productions or one off pop up events. In 2022 we achieved two firsts: the only complete artists' performance of acclaimed show **The Alphabet of Birds** and the visit of the outdoor exhibition and festival **#GenderJusticeNow** to UL. Both presentations were collaborations with the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL) and STAND Global Citizenship respectively.

Sunday Mass and sea swimming; bird alphabets and stone collecting; Goya and Monet; the Stations of the Cross and the Sacred Heart of Jesus; bedrooms and bedsits; insomnia and parental love.

In the theatrical production **The Alphabet of Birds** writer and artist Sara Baume covers wide ground in a spellbinding

audio-visual essay with musicians Howlix (Elaine Howley and Irene Buckley) Sara has been shortlisted for the 2022 prestigious literary Goldsmith's Prize for her novel *Seven Steeples*.

Performed in the Belltable on July 26th and produced by UL Arts Office in association with The Holy Show the event was a huge success. Many of the conference delegates considered the almost sold out performance to be the cultural highlight of the annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL).

UL Arts Office continues to facilitate and support cultural initiatives of the UL and wider communities. One of the highlights of the autumn 2022 events programme was the outdoor exhibition by the student advocacy group STAND. STAND is the Global Citizenship Education programme of **Suas Educational Development**, supported by Irish Aid.

This year's theme was: **#GenderJusticeNow: From the Grassroots to the Global**

The STAND Student Festival spotlights just a small selection of collective actions around the world, which have contributed to combatting gender injustice, discrimination and inequality - from grassroots campaigns to global movements.

From the fight for sexual and reproductive rights, to the end of gender-based violence and the achievement of economic justice for women and gender minorities, this year's exhibition celebrates the power of solidarity in bringing about change, and calls on us to continue to challenge inequality where we see it.

This weeklong outdoor exhibition was located in the Plaza from October 10th. Student volunteers from the President's Volunteer Award scheme were present at the information stand and encouraged members



of the student and wider community to sign up as Gender Advocates. UL EDI's Sexual Harassment and Violence Officer Tracey Keogh provided free Active Consent workshops.

A Global Goals Jam workshop was delivered by Concern on Wednesday October 12th, a 90-minute creative

workshops/ design sprint with a particular focus on gender equality.

Student societies organised their own satellite events around the themes of the festival.

UL Arts Office welcomes enquiries to: **patricia.moriarty@ul.ie**

ACCESS OFFICE

The Access Office is pleased to announce the development of a dedicated Traveller Programme at the University of Limerick. The programme, which is one of our Access at 20 goals, flows directly from the University of Limerick's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024 which states that: *"equality of opportunity for access to university education and training, is a huge part of who we are. We will continue to accommodate non-traditional learners, students with disabilities, those who are socially disadvantaged, and those from the Travelling community."* It is also in line with the **National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028** which was published recently.

This is an important development for the university and is being funded through our successful submission to the HEA as part of the Mid-West Cluster PATH 3. The Mid-West Cluster PATH 3 is a partnership between the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, and the Technological University of the Shannon, and is led by the University of Limerick.

The programme will have a dedicated co-ordinator and a particular focus on Limerick City and County. Our ambition is to co-create, with the Traveller Community, a dedicated suite of pre and post entry supports to further increase the participation and retention of Travellers in UL. These supports will be

designed and developed from the perspective of Travellers, in a culturally inclusive and accessible manner.

I look forward to sharing more with you as the programme develops, however, if you have any queries in the meantime, please feel free to get in touch, Deirdre O'Connor, Access Officer.



Pictured above: Graduates of the Mature Student Access Certificate (MSAC).





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