



UL Engage Reports

2021, No. 9

UL Consultation Review Group Report from the UL@50 Consultation Process

Maura Adshead
Rabiya Ali
Ursel Bangert
Eoin Brady
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UL Engage

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Notwithstanding all the help, the responsibility for any errors or omissions in this report remains our own.

Consultation Review Group






Maura Adshead, Department of Politics & Public Administration / UL Engage; Rabiya Ali, Academic Registry; Ursel Bangert, Bernal Institute; Eoin Brady, Internal Communications; Peadar Collins, Student Life nominee; Helena Fitzgerald, Department of Economics/+CityxChange ; Tracey Gleeson, UL Engage; Emma Hofler, Finance Division, Sandra Joyce, Irish World Academy, Andrea La Touche, PostGraduate Student Union nominee; Anne MacFarlane, School of Medicine; Ann MacPhail, Education and Health Sciences; Muireann McMahon, School of Design; Martin Ryan, Student Life; Jacinta Shanahan, Office of the President; Ger Slattery, School of Education, David Williamson, Graduate and Postgraduate Studies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A clear and consistent message from all the consultations is that UL has many strengths, but that these strengths are not always known or appreciated within the UL campus community. Equally notable is the consensus of concerns regarding UL's capacity to deliver on its ambition: over and over again examples were given of how UL operating systems frustrate and delay the work of UL staff. The breadth of opinions in the consultations made it clear that there is no single fix to enable the delivery of UL's strategic goals: there are a plethora of fixes to be considered.

This report proposes that in order to capitalise on existing strengths and mitigate the challenges we face, there needs to be a strategic consideration of how all parts of the University operate and (potentially) interconnect and impact on each other. The Executive Committee is now tasked with considering what combination of actions will provide the optimum return.

We hope that this report provides much of the detail necessary to inform that process. The report is divided into eight topics. Five of the topics speak directly to the five goals outlined in the *UL@50 Strategic Plan*, three additional topics emerged as recurrent themes in all of the consultations, such that they deserved sections on their own.

Transforming Learning	Research Excellence	Internationalisation	City and Region	Operating Model	Communications	Valuing Staff	Talent Pipeline
							

Transforming Learning

UL has many strengths in education: UL student supports, UL student placements, creative and innovative pedagogies. The focus in this report is on how these strengths can be better acknowledged and sustained, and evolve into the future.

Research Excellence

Across all areas researchers believe that their research is not sufficiently valued, supported or acknowledged by the University. A range of suggestions to address this are detailed and there is crossover in the impact of actions outlined for the other topics on research.

Internationalisation

UL has many strengths in this area but the broader understanding of how we support and integrate internationalisation into all aspects of campus life needs to be promoted. Specific issues around cultural integration and awareness in UL need to be addressed.

City and Region

UL's significant impact in this area is insufficiently acknowledged both within the University and at a wider level, and is an asset that needs to be promoted and supported in a unified fashion to help address the physical and conceptual sense of disconnection between the University, the city and the Mid-West Region, and its people.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Operating Model

An area that manifested few strengths, consultations found that UL systems are typically overly cumbersome, labour intensive and unresponsive to user needs. Participants came up with a wide range of suggestions to address this.

Communications

There was general agreement that many of the strengths of UL are not championed from a communications perspective: internally in relation to opportunities for synergy or collaboration; and externally, in relation to promoting UL research, programmes, activities and successes.

Valuing Staff

Staff do not feel valued. This is due to a lack of acknowledged ways and definitions of how to value staff and also to weaknesses outlined in the other topics that hinder effective and supportive work practises.

Talent Pipeline and Career Development

UL does have training and support strengths in this area but due to the lack of a systematic approach, there are the institutional and sectoral barriers and enablers that can either block or facilitate a strong talent pipeline and career development for all staff.

A note on how the proposed actions are categorised

The proposed actions are colour coded according to a traffic light system indicating the anticipated level of time, resources and consultation required to progress a decision. The CRG recognises that some actions may already be available or in train, in which case there is a communication deficit that needs to be addressed.

Concerns based on uncertainty or informational deficits. Many of these are relatively swift and straightforward to address: either by an Executive decision for action; or by clarifying existing policy and/or addressing informational deficits. Some actions are simple to execute but hold resource and/or 'knock on' implications which preclude them from being pursued. Whilst the investment is variable, the proposal is typically not complex.

Seemingly 'intractable problems' requiring longer-term, focused attention and designated leadership. Typically actions in this field require a longer-term investment of time and/or resources.

There are some widely supported systems level changes, which are by their nature more complex to address. Typically actions in this field involve multiple stakeholders and significant investment in addition to long-term planning and focus. Identifying and prioritising the changes that are possible and those that are not is a worthwhile exercise.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UL@50 ACTIONS

- ⇒ **Treat this report as a resource for repeated attention for the duration of the *UL@50 Strategic Plan 2019-2024***
- ⇒ **Identify Executive Committee member ownership for each of the eight UL@50 topics**
- ⇒ **Identify a designated Project/Change Manager to work with Executive Committee to implement actions on the 8 UL@50 topics**
- ⇒ **Identify resources to support change management for each of the 8 UL@50 topics**
- ⇒ **Task Executive Committee owners with responsibility for regular action and feedback reports: to senior university management; and to the wider campus community**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UL@50 FEEDBACK

- ⇒ **Allocate a standing agenda item in Executive Committee on UL@50 report**
- ⇒ **Allocate Executive Committee responsibility for communicating progress to campus community**
- ⇒ **Work with Internal Communications Manager to ensure regular, routine communication on UL@50 progress to campus community**
- ⇒ **Invite on-going feedback via the UL@50 Consultation Review Group.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UL@50 CONSULTATION PROCESS

- ⇒ **Develop a long term plan for two-way communication and engagement with campus community with the Internal Communications Manager**
- ⇒ **Formalize the role of the Consultation Review Group, roles within the CRG, and the group and process developed during the UL@50 consultations.**
- ⇒ **Consider a bespoke consultation process with students about UL strategic priorities**

“There are many issues where there is agreement that something should change and/or be fixed, but still this doesn’t happen”
UL@50 Consultation participant

INTRODUCTION

In September 2020, following the unexpected retirement of Dr Des Fitzgerald, Professor Kerstin Mey was appointed Interim President of UL. In early October, President Mey appointed a working group (Professor Maura Adshead, Eoin Brady, Internal Communications Manager and Professor Anne MacFarlane) to consult on a mechanism to engage with staff about the University's UL@50 Strategic Plan.

The primary driver for this initiative was the feedback from the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) CINNTE report on UL. Through its CINNTE cycle of reviews, QQI assesses and reports on how effectively publicly regulated higher education institutions (HEIs) maintain and enhance quality in education. The reviews explore how institutions have improved their teaching, learning and research systems, and how well institutions have aligned with their own mission, quality indicators and benchmarks.

While the *Institutional Review Report (Cinnte, 2020)* highlighted aspects of UL for praise such as its innovative approach to teaching and learning, and response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were areas of concern. In particular, it found that the *UL@50 Strategic Plan 2019-2024* lacked well-defined goals and associated clear timelines, to enable the progress and impact of the plan to be monitored and measured. Furthermore, the report stressed the need to improve internal communications from senior management to staff *and* from staff to senior management — the need to enable cross-campus feedback from staff and students was also highlighted.

These concerns should be seen in the context of poor staff morale because of a number of legacy issues, including:

- ⇒ a perceived lack of consultation about the UL@50 Strategic Plan;
- ⇒ concerns about transparency, appropriate consultation and communication in relation to operational and other decisions taken at senior level;
- ⇒ the ongoing focus on UL by the national media and Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in relation to a series of damaging allegations;
- ⇒ and the impact of COVID-19 on all aspects of university life.

In order to add granularity and greater detail on how the objectives of the Strategic Plan might be achieved, the Working Group recommended that the University establish a Consultation Review Group comprised of a cross-section of UL staff and students who together could identify and oversee a series of consultative methods to engage with colleagues, and to facilitate the feedback of information from consultations both to the Executive Committee and to the campus community.

The UL@50 Consultation Review Group (CRG) was appointed from expressions of interest in response to an open invitation to all staff from the President. In appointing members, a balance was sought between early and advanced career staff, professional administrative, support and academic roles, across faculties and between disciplines, while always having an eye on gender balance, diversity and inclusivity.

UL@50 CONSULTATIONS RATIONALE

CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

Throughout the academic year 2020/21 the University of Limerick was beset by momentous changes to its internal and external environment. The unexpected departure of President Des Fitzgerald and publication of the *Institutional Review Report* (Cinnté, 2020) pointed to a need to reinvigorate staff morale and attend to the recommendations of the Cinnté Report, which proposed that the university should strengthen the role of bottom-up feedback and give greater focus as to how the goals of the plan could be delivered. Externally, the University of Limerick was faced with increasingly urgent challenges posed by the climate crisis and sustainability, the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and the drive to find equilibrium between ecological, economic and social concerns in the face of digital transition and shifting political forces at home and abroad.

The world order is changing and universities, in their role as engines for research, innovation and education, are at the epicentre of these shifts. Irish universities face these challenges in a time of unprecedented underfunding. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a loss of vital income from international students, commercial revenues and accommodation, as well as accelerating the pace of change in digital transition and demands for research capacity to solve societal challenges.

It is in this context that the UL@50 consultations are intended to harvest as much tacit knowledge from as wide a range of sources within the university as possible to address the challenges we face.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To develop a process by which all UL staff are given the opportunity to feedback and contribute to looking at the emphasis and detail of what we do well, what we could do better and how this can be achieved in relation to the UL@50 Strategic Plan goals.

METHOD

In order to achieve this, following a call from the President for expressions of interest, the University established a Consultation Review Group (CRG) to recommend and oversee a series of consultative methods to engage with colleagues, and to facilitate the feedback of information from consultations both to the Executive Committee and to the campus community.

The CRG membership reflects a balance: between early and advanced career staff; between administrative, support and academic roles; across faculties; and between disciplines. Insofar as possible, its composition tries to ensure diversity, inclusion and gender balance.

The time period for consultation design, implementation, analysis of feedback, draft and final reports ran from September 2020 to August 2021.

A full and transparent documentation of all meetings, decisions, data and feedback is available for all University staff on the university's internal Sharepoint system:

<https://ulcampus.sharepoint.com/sites/UL50StrategicPlan>

DESIGN

Aim: To give all UL staff and students the opportunity to share their opinion about the organisational culture in UL through either a) Group Consultations and / or b) Individual Consultation Forms.

The CRG agreed the terms of reference for their work, identified and appointed CRG roles and responsibilities and adopted a charter of principles to govern their work.

UL@50 Consultation Review Group Team Charter

1. *All voices are equal.*
2. *The CRG will be guided by a spirit of generosity in objective listening, challenging respectfully and interrogating ideas not people. Jargon is to be avoided.*
3. *All meetings are confidential to create a safe space for critically constructive dialogue.*
4. *The CRG wants to influence change in the culture of staff-engagement within UL and expects transparency and support from the institution as it devises, manages and reports on the UL@50 consultation process, and will reciprocate in kind.*
5. *The CRG will consider all parts of the University throughout the process, maintaining an emphasis on fair representation from all areas with members being kept informed about the process with regular progress updates.*
6. *The group will keep sight of the overall objectives of the consultation process, their role in achieving these, the commitment required and the timeframe involved.*
7. *CRG members will try to prioritise attendance at all plenary meetings. The CRG respects that individual members will self-regulate their contributions to any working groups or other activities according to individual workloads and circumstances at the time.*
8. *CRG members will advocate for their colleagues in a fair and transparent manner and share with colleagues how this has been maintained within agreed procedures and infrastructure.*

3rd December 2020

Between October and December 2020 the CRG discussed and agreed the implementation of the consultation. An EU higher education survey questionnaire was piloted, but ultimately rejected as not fit for purpose, following feedback concerning its suitability.

The CRG determined that a more consultative dialogue focus was most appropriate and agreed a phased and iterative approach to consultations in order to create a real-time feedback loop in the consultation process.

UL@50 PROCESS

GOVERNANCE

The Terms of Reference specified specific roles within the group, namely: Project Chair, Consultant, and Project Co-ordinator, these were assigned to the members of the original Working Group, and they held weekly meetings to monitor and discuss progress.

The CRG met on average every 3-4 weeks throughout the consultation process, minutes and other documentation were hosted in a members folder on the UL@50 SharePoint site.

An update was given by the Project Co-ordinator on any communications or items that arose from the weekly meetings.

It was agreed that the work of the CRG would be guided by an ethos of transparency and openness in terms of process, but that participants would be assured anonymity and a 'safe space' regarding their participation in the consultations.

DATA COLLECTION

The CRG explicitly wanted to facilitate dialogues that enabled staff to share details of their day to day experiences of the university life and their ideas about what was working well, what could work better. It was determined that UL staff and students would participate most comfortably in consultations with their colleagues . The consultation process was therefore designed to include: stakeholder focused consultation groups; open invitation facilitated consultation groups; closed invitation consultation groups amongst self-identified groups; and individual consultation promoted via individual feedback forms.

In order to ensure a consistency in process, the CRG created the following resources for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 consultations:

- A group consultation facilitator guide
- A facilitator PowerPoint presentation synopsis the consultation process
- Individual consultation feedback form
- Facilitator training meetings

ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK

Following all group consultations, a written summary of the feedback received was circulated by the facilitator(s) to all participants for agreement before being sent to the CRG.

Phase 1 consultation feedback, which was based on open-ended questions to staff about the strategic plan, was synthesised into an aggregate data set and made available the SharePoint site.

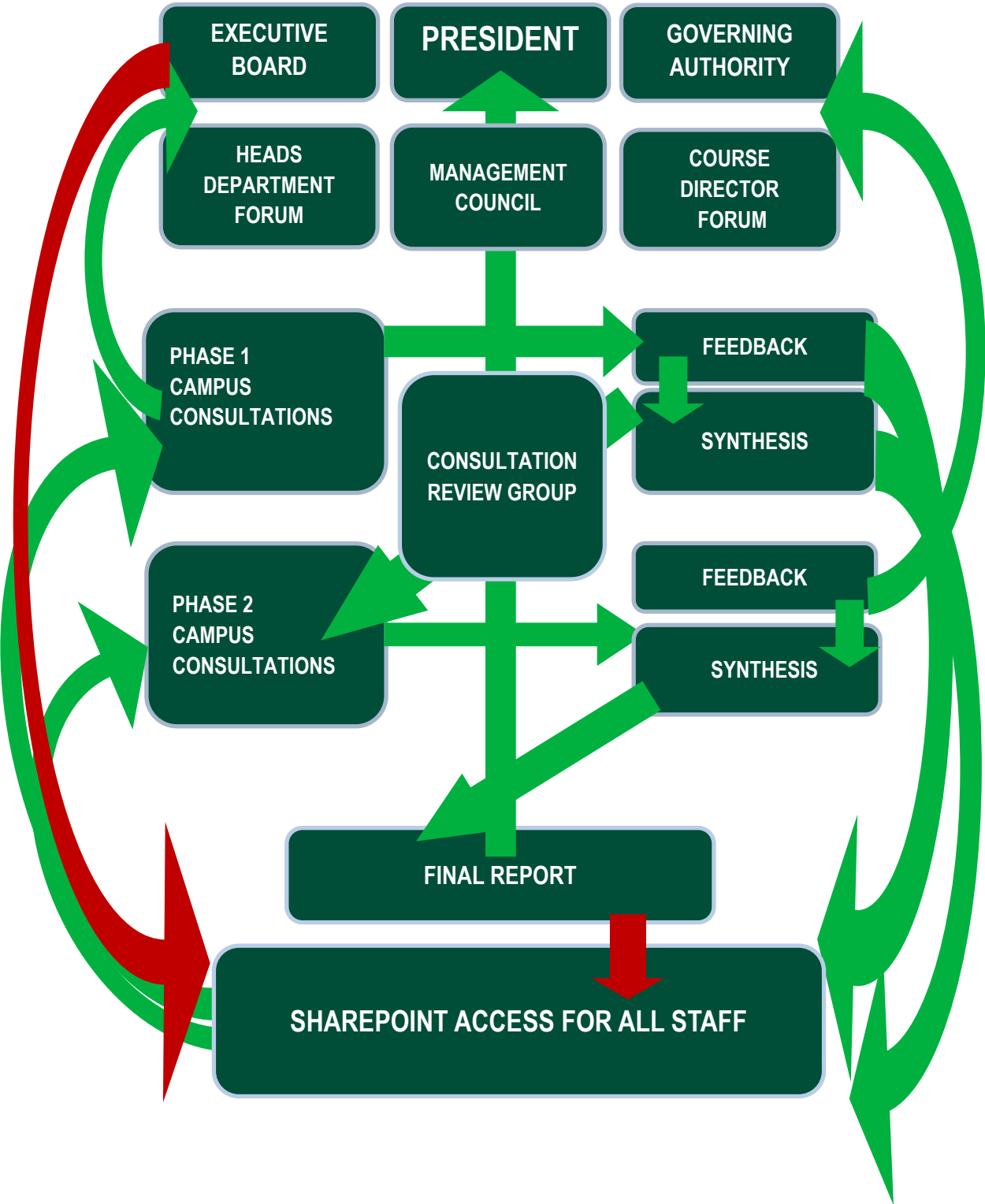
Phase 2 of the consultation process used the feedback from Phase 1 to develop a more focused approach to the topics that arose in the first phase, identifying both strengths and challenges in current university organisation. Participants were encouraged to offer practical suggestions for positive change to enable the delivery of goals in the strategic plan.

A complete synthesis and summary of all responses is offered in this report.

UL@50 PROCESS

UL@50 STAKEHOLDERS AND FEEDBACK LOOPS

Green indicates feedback / reporting already undertaken
Red indicates feedback / reporting outstanding as of September 2021



UL@50 PARTICIPATION

OVERVIEW

The consultation process evidenced a level of positive engagement from UL staff that was truly remarkable. COVID-19 meant that the entire process was conducted remotely, with many UL staff working from kitchens and bedrooms, having re-organised every aspect of their working lives to cope with the pandemic. These were not optimal conditions for campus consultations.

The CRG perspective from across the University indicated that there was significant consultation and survey fatigue across the campus, stemming not just from the number of surveys circulated to staff in the past twenty four months, but also from a perceived lack of feedback and action emerging from these surveys.

In addition, there was significant mistrust around the original consultations that led to the development of the *UL@50 Strategic Plan 2019-2024* and whether or not these reflected a genuine attempt to engage with the UL staff on their opinions about the strategic priorities for the University.

Given these conditions, the level of engagement with the UL@50 Consultation process was better than expected and maintained throughout entire process. An early indication of this came when the number of staff who expressed an interest in joining the CRG far exceeded the places available. It is of note that most of those who could not be accommodated on the CRG stayed involved in the process by facilitating meetings in their area and encouraging colleagues to participate.

Whilst we recognise that many staff did not contribute to the process directly, the fact that there have been over 10,500 engagements with the SharePoint site indicates that more staff were following the process than participating.

ENCOURAGING AND MAINTAINING PARTICIPATION

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that all of the UL@50 consultation meetings occurred virtually on MS Teams. To encourage participation, provide resources for the consultations, enable feedback and keep the staff community engaged in the process in an ongoing manner, a variety of channels were used for communication, including:

- Dedicated [UL@50 SharePoint Site](#)
- UL Town Halls
- PO Notices & HR Notices (emails to all staff)
- Videos
- Progress meetings with various groups
e.g. Management Council,
Heads of Departments,
Course Directors, Governing Authority
- Emails from CRG members to their campus networks.

“The consultation process is not overelaborate - nothing could be overelaborate in trying to tackle staff morale”

UL@50 Consultation participant

To ensure diversity of communication, messages on these platforms were made by a range of stakeholders in the process: UL President, various CRG members, Internal Communication etc.

UL@50 PARTICIPATION

ENGAGEMENT LEVELS

Group consultations in Phase 1 and Phase 2 ranged from 6—25 or more participants. 10500 + engagements overall with UL@50 SharePoint site.

Phase 1 Consultations, February-March 2021

- 37 Group consultations
- 131 Individual responses
- 970 views of interim feedback video from UL President

Phase 2 Consultations, May-June 2021

- 18 Group consultations

In addition, ITD, Research Office, Bernal and Buildings & Estates submitted additional support documentation to the UL@50 Consultations.

Consultation Review Group Meetings

- 10 plenary meetings December—June 2021
- 30 weekly meetings (chair, consultant & project co-ordinator)

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

From the outset, the CRG was keen to include and incorporate student participation into the consultation process: the President of the Postgraduate Student Union and Student Welfare Officer from the undergraduate student association, Student Life, both played an active role on the CRG. The manager of Student Life was also a member. However, despite a number of attempts to engage students in the process, channelled through these members, students had no real interest in contributing to the consultations.

This lack of engagement was discussed a number of times by the CRG and it was concluded that a number of factors inhibited student involvement:

- COVID-19 pandemic and pressures of remote and blended learning.
- Students do not perceive relevance of Strategic Plan to their lives in UL.
- Unfamiliarity with the UL Strategic Plan and the language used in talking about the University's long term objectives.
- Consultation / Survey fatigue—students are a prime demographic for surveys by commercial interests operating on a catch them early keep them for life approach.
- Lack of incentives to join the consultations. The approach to consulting with students needs to be more novel, simplified and engaging rather than a one size fits all demographics.

"We could be on the cusp of something really good. We have the capacity"

UL@50 Consultation participant

CONSULTATION FEEDBACK



TRANSFORMING LEARNING



RESEARCH EXCELLENCE



INTERNATIONALISATION



CITY AND REGION



OPERATING MODEL



COMMUNICATIONS



VALUING STAFF



TALENT PIPELINE | CAREER DEVELOPMENT



TRANSFORMING LEARNING

OVERVIEW

All consultation opinions on this topic referred to examples of UL strengths— in UL student supports, UL student placements, plus UL creative and innovative pedagogy. Additionally, however, there was a strong underlying impression that UL natural strengths in this area are not well acknowledged. The adverse impact of short term contracts and current teaching contracts were also noted and are dealt with in the section on Valuing Staff.

STRENGTHS

Employability

Student placements and internships are integral to all UL curricula. Co-Operative Education placements were pioneered in UL: 50 years experience shows UL commitment and expertise. 6-8 month long Co-op placements enable students to gain real employment experience and genuinely contribute to the host employer. This is better than shorter placements that other institutions offer. This is particularly evident in the health services where the placement serves as a bridge between practitioners and students.

Continuous Assessment

UL's modular delivery of programmes and assessment over four years, using a QCA rather than terminal exams in final year, all contribute to the unique student experience.

Cooperative Education Programme

Cooperative Education is a long-standing UL asset, which continues to grow and evolve. During the last year, placements increased from 2,100 to 2,600 and included the development of virtual internships in response to COVID-19.

Unparalleled facilities

The nation's sporting campus, home to the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, the Irish Chamber Orchestra and a regional Concert Hall with full a programme of events. An exceptional campus with on-site accommodation. The Glucksman Library and information resources providing 24/7 access to a digital library.

Innovative pedagogy and Experiential Learning

The contemporaneous curriculum, creative and innovative pedagogies and the work that its maintenance requires, was mentioned as part of the excellence in teaching and learning that UL instils. Problem Based Learning and Community Engaged Learning are methods that are widely used across all UL faculties and departments.

Research skills

UL is one of the few HEIs to maintain final year projects in many programmes—largely dispensed with in many universities, but still a major part of UL student experience.



TRANSFORMING LEARNING

Access, Inclusion and Diversity

UL is a LBGTQIA+ friendly, Sanctuary University, with the highest national percentage of students from lower socioeconomic groups and the highest proportion of outgoing Erasmus students plus study abroad opportunities from the US and Canada. Expertise in Universal Design for Learning.

Student supports and Pastoral care

Five learning centres: 1) *Science Learning Centre*, 2) *Regional Writing Centre*, 3) *Maths Learning Centre*, 4) *ICT Learning Centre* and 5) *Peer Supported Learning Centre*.

Access programme, *Maths Lab*, drop in clinics, collaborative learning spaces, *First 7 Weeks* programme, student advisor system.

A culture of community that is evident as soon as you arrive in UL: accessible faculty and all staff make a huge effort to support students and really care that they do well.

Unique commitment to teaching and learning

A student-centred approach to learning, teaching and assessment. Semester-based academic calendar and weekly tutorials— not to be found easily elsewhere. UL's Centre for Transformative Learning illustrating a commitment to faculty professional development including, but not limited to, development in areas such as pedagogical approaches, curriculum planning, student engagement and technology enhanced learning.

Staff supports

Established in 1999, the Centre for Transformative Learning promotes excellence and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment by fostering the development and implementation of transformative pedagogies, learning analytics, research led curricula, flexible learning and technology enhanced/enabled learning approaches in line with international best practice and in student partnership. It aims to foster a positive, inclusive environment through mutual respect and co-creation/partnership to enable students to achieve success across their academic, social and personal experience in collaboration with faculty and other support services across the University.

CHALLENGES

- UL has a long standing and pre-eminent record as a natural innovator in Irish higher education, but fails to acknowledge or articulate this obvious strength in current strategy.
- UL does not promote its wide-ranging and internationally acknowledged pedagogic strengths in experimental, academic, creative, laboratory and vocational teaching.
- UL fails to capitalise on its expertise in terms of funding new programme development: the current funding model precludes investment in new programmes and holds back funding until after a programme is in place. This system stymies new programme development.
- As single professional careers become less typical, Life Long Learning is of increasing importance in providing opportunities for upskilling and career pivots. This is a growth area, worth billions, that does not feature highly in UL's Strategic Plan.
- The teaching framework needs to provide for career development / promotions as the current job evaluation process does not align with these roles.



TRANSFORMING LEARNING

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Promote UL Innovation and Excellence in Transformative Learning

Action: Acknowledge, articulate and highlight the USP and distinctive UL student learning experience and related graduate attributes. (See [Communications](#))

Action: Advance the development of the UL Teaching Charter for staff and students, clarifying mutual expectations from staff and students—from registration to graduation

Action: Review and revise the graduate attributes.

New Programme Development

Action: Ring-fence funding for development of programmes and new programme development in order to realise the goals of transformative pedagogy

Sustainability of the curriculum development framework

Action: Prioritise the new UL curriculum development framework under development with a view to ensuring a shared understanding of the curriculum, which aligns to the institutional vision and strategic goals of the University. The goals are to: a) Articulate the distinctiveness of a UL education; b) Define the competencies, knowledge and skills which we wish our students to acquire (graduate capital, attributes or keystones); c) Guide and support programme teams in curriculum design (notably the development of effective learning and student outcomes through clearly defined pedagogic and academic principles) and align with processes for programme design, approval and review.

Career Development Plan for Teaching staff (See [Valuing Staff](#))

Action: Resume job evaluation and progression for staff under Associate/College/University Teachers contracts. Alternative progression process to be developed and offered for above roles rather than job evaluation which does not align with these roles.



OVERVIEW

Consultation opinions in this area evidenced a surprising consensus: a striking number of researchers, from a variety of different research disciplines, believe that their *research is not valued*. An equally commonly held opinion is that the institution needs to do more to support research production in a comprehensive way. These opinions were widespread across all areas of the university.

Allied to this, a number of opinions expressed concern regarding the impact that the selection of themes in the Strategic Plan has had on research. Choosing themes skews research activity and management targets. Themes replicate concentrated interests or opinions in the institution (an Executive Committee preference, or an idea that there is money to support something) and typically reflect short-term gains. On the one hand, it was argued that if we confine ourselves to solving problems that are predefined then we miss the opportunity to define problems that no one else has thought about. On the other hand, many researchers expressed the view that areas of research strength will emerge by themselves if the resources are equally available.

Aside from the opinion that ‘choosing favourites’ causes huge dissatisfaction and skews support against a range of work not considered under the themes, the evidence base for research work performance shows that research is largely self-initiated and self-motivated – creativity and innovation are fostered because of autonomous motivation not the pressure of targets.

STRENGTHS

UL is uniquely positioned in Irish Higher Education for the richness and diversity of research expertise in: fundamental/ blue skies research; applied / participatory research; and creative / performative research and/or non-textual research. In 2020, UL received two of only four Advanced European Research Council (ERC) awards worth approx. €2.5 m each.

Fundamental/ blue skies research;

⇒ ERC Award - Professor Michael Zaworotko, Bernal Chair of Crystal Engineering and SFI Research Professor, Bernal Institute, for his project ‘SYNSORB - SYNergistic SORBents’.

Applied / participatory research

⇒ ERC Award—Professor Orla Muldoon, Founding professor at the Department of Psychology and Director for the Centre for Social Issues Research, for her project ‘SIMTIC - A Social Identity Model of Trauma and Identity Change: A Novel Theory of Post-Traumatic Stress, Resilience and Growth’.

⇒ UL scholars are field leaders in participatory approaches to health research and PPI. There is also a pioneering cohort of scholars focused on arts-based research and health, particularly in relation to singing. Both groups have developed capacity in participatory and arts-based research with specific reference to issues of migration.



RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

- ⇒ UL scholars in Business, Law, Politics and Sociology have impacted on public policy and legislation in a range of areas, including criminal justice, voter education, hate crimes legislation and worker rights and conditions.
- ⇒ In 2020 Physical Education and Sports Sciences (PESS) was ranked in the World top 100 (51-100) in the Shanghai Global Rankings of Sport Science Schools and Departments, reflecting its strong performance in research and publications.

Creative / performative research and/or non-textual research

- ⇒ The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD) is a unique national resource of international standing.
- ⇒ Creative Writing in UL boasts awarding winning writers as part of its permanent faculty and has become associated with writers in residence of international standing.
- ⇒ Award winning designers in Architecture, Production Design and Technology—recent wins include: the Dyson Award, Universal Design Challenge, The IDI Awards, and Enterprise Ireland Entrepreneur.

CHALLENGES

The flip side to UL not fully recognising UL research strengths is that support for research across the university and the availability of research supports for staff is reported to be very uneven. Staff in AHSS noted that 50% of UL's highest ranking depts are in AHSS, but this is not reflected in research supports available to AHSS. Others pointed out that the current emphasis on societal and applied research places blues skies research at a disadvantage, though the shift in focus to UN SDGs may help redress this. Creative and performative researchers, related their struggles in getting the university to even recognise or acknowledge their work at all.

Despite their differences, researchers across UL have one thing in common. They are all dissatisfied with aspects of university support for their research and can see scope for improvement. It was noted that the Office of the Vice President Research has a track record of supporting a huge amount of grants with much success from a small, underfunded team and that the research support team at UL is the smallest in the country. A variety of suggestions were made to improve UL supports for research, but the single concern that was most often repeated in relation to research was staff time for research.

From a research perspective, having academics spend large chunks of time on administrative work that can easily be done by those without specialist academic expertise erodes precious research time and represents very poor value for money. Many felt that this understanding has not fully permeated across the institution—making the design of solutions to support research ever less likely.

Time Making

Academics need more time to think and focus on research. This can be done in a variety of ways: by gifting time in sabbatical and leave policies, or by revising current work arrangements in a way



that makes more time for research. The current teaching scheduling system is aggressively unfriendly to researchers' time in multiple ways. The late delivery of the teaching timetable inhibits researchers from making plans to travel outside UL, or from inviting international colleagues into UL. On a day to day basis, it prevents staff banking research time in their week. The persistent unwillingness of UL management to address this obvious obstacle to research gives the impression that research is not actually valued.

Time Saving

Many academic staff have occasion to use UL operating systems that are not user-friendly on a sporadic basis: engaging with them enough to waste a great deal of time, but not enough to become proficient users. Examples of these include (but are not limited to): online scheduling; APRC programme modifications; financial payments and reimbursements etc. Consultation feedback suggested that UL is drowning its researchers with administrative burdens and that ways need to be found to curtail the increasing amount of time that academics spend doing non-research related parts of their job.

Research Supports

Several opinions referred positively to the 1-2-1 support that they had received from staff in the UL Research office when preparing their grant applications, whilst recognising that there are significant challenges to scaling this level of support. The need for post award administrative support for PIs was highlighted as a key concern.

Recruiting and Retaining Research Excellence

Recruitment in UL, at all levels, is a slow process. This impacts particularly badly on research. Waiting five months to fill a 12 or 18 month contract position means that much research potential is lost. Moving a post-doctoral student to Research Fellow can be very restrictive. UL is losing teams and losing quality by making the barriers to recruitment so high.

Research performance cannot improve without a focus on attracting, growing and developing our early career talent. In addition, to build a succession pipeline in areas of strength a dedicated programme to attract talented mid-career academics is needed in parallel with mechanisms to ensure they can succeed to become research leaders.

Research impact

As the demonstration of research impact becomes more salient to demonstrating research excellence, we are now placing more demands on researchers to evidence their impact in a variety of ways. UL has extensive expertise in impact by design, but this knowledge needs to be shared. There is currently no programme or opportunity to scale up research impact training.

Improving research impact will also require more communications supports and associated training. Despite the expertise that we have in this area, we have not developed the research infrastructure to support this element of research. Extra skills and support are needed to promote proper communications e.g., video or podcasting—once seen as a privilege but now part of how we work. Promotional work for UL researchers and UL research represents another time-sink activity that takes away from research and is insufficiently supported by the centre.



RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

Consultation feedback also noted that communicating research activities and successes is another way of valuing research, in terms of enabling researcher work to be seen and recognised.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Recruiting and Retaining Research Excellence

Action: IUA framework for researcher development which is currently before the UL Executive should be approved and implemented.

Research Supports

Action: Early Career—improve knowledge about, and access to, early career research training.

Action: Advanced Career—provide advanced training on management of research projects for senior academics given the oversight role they play in relation to the approval and management of research projects.

Recruiting and Retaining Research Excellence

Action: Provide scholarships and/or scholarship supports to early researchers to enable them to thoroughly develop a research area.

Action: Establish a fast track process for recruitment concerning small grants and short-term contracts.

Research Supports

Action: Provide for an area/Faculty based system of administrative and project management support (with budgets, HR issues, ethics, GDPR etc.) throughout the university so that all staff have access to equitable levels of research support regardless of whether they work in a Department/Unit/Centre/Institute.

Action: Provide for post-award supports so staff with successful grants can concentrate on the research – these posts can be shared across groups. By creating a virtuous circle of research performance, reinvestment and reward we can stimulate growth and build a culture where research is clearly valued.

Making Time for Research

Action: Provide research leave.

Action: Review the scheduling system and remove the commitment to individual student timetables in order to better plan teaching schedule to facilitate research work.

Saving Time for Research

Action: Regard the improvement of underlying Operating Systems in the university as key enablers for research production ([See Operating Model](#)).



INTERNATIONALISATION

OVERVIEW

The existing internationalisation strategy of UL Global is focused on:

- Enriching the UL community by attracting the best international student talent to campus so that the University further develops its distinctiveness;
- Developing sustainable and mutually beneficial international institutional partnerships and transnational education (TNE) programmes;
- Providing a culturally diverse learning environment with the opportunity for all students to study overseas;
- Supporting academic and administrative staff to effectively engage in international activity;
- Enhancing the University's engagement with its international alumni population.

All consultation opinions in relation to this goal illustrate a strong consensus that UL is highly internationalised on a number of indicators (proportions of staff, students, research networks, partnerships, programmes etc) but that the UL approach to internationalisation does not encompass the spectrum of international activities that we engage in.

There were also a number of specific concerns about the integration of international staff and students. Several examples of UL practice were noted to be disproportionately difficult for international staff and students e.g. access to maternity leave for non-national PhD students; support for sanctuary students; integration into UL administrative systems that typically rely on informal knowledge or personal connections.

In consequence, Phase 2 consultations focused on identifying actions which could support UL Global ambitions and make the UL campus a friendlier place for international staff and students.

STRENGTHS

English Medium Instruction—Summer Institute Programme

UL offers a third level course that has been developed for academics who must shift towards lecturing in English. UL is currently targeting Latin America : in summer 2021, 20 teachers from Brazil came to learn 'English Medium Instruction' (EMI). There are huge opportunities in this area.

Erasmus Students

UL has the highest proportion of Erasmus students of any Irish university and they contribute a huge amount to the educational and social environment in UL.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

In the last 15 years UL faculty have become leaders in the area of English as an additional language. EAL is increasingly important for teachers working with migrant pupils. Given UL strengths in teacher training, this is a significant growth area that offers opportunities to integrates UL strategic goals in Transforming Learning, Internationalisation and our impact on the City and Region.



INTERNATIONALISATION

Intercultural Advocate

The recent appointment of an intercultural advocate for the Algerian PhD cohort, whose task is to flag all the campus and/or community events of potential interest to these students has been a great success and offers an exemplar for future integration initiatives. It is worth examining this role with a view to mainstreaming it on an on-going and sustainable financial basis.

Intercultural Summer School

Developed in response to the arrival of a cohort of Algerian PhD students, the Intercultural Summer School has been a significant success and offers a template for further similar initiatives in UL.

International Student supports

- ⇒ English Language supports for undergraduate and postgraduate students, including a drop-in clinic, a writing clinic and a writing retreat, are available to all students free of charge.
- ⇒ Study supports, including a supervisor day, guest lectures from international academics; resilience training.
- ⇒ Limerick / Algeria friendship group.
- ⇒ Intercultural football.
- ⇒ Academic literacy modules available for all UG and PG students.

Sanctuary Status

The University of Limerick is a Sanctuary University.

CHALLENGES

Communications

Information about the supports and services that are available to international students and staff is hard to find and sometimes factually incorrect. For example, the UL website currently suggests that English Language supports are available at a charge, when they are free. Additionally, some suggested that it would be easier to contribute and/or support UL Global ambitions if there was more general awareness about them in the first place.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

UL trains teachers and places student teachers in schools, but finds it harder to place EAL teachers. EAL should be part of all teacher training yet we fail to capitalise on these acknowledged areas of UL strengths via a more co-ordinated internal strategic actions.

Erasmus supports

It was noted that one UL department is host to 13 Erasmus + projects but that there is no recognition for this achievement or awareness of the projects. Some faculty avail of the Erasmus programme for teaching exchanges, but these are not strategically supported or co-ordinated, and consultation feedback suggested that this activity is not particularly encouraged or supported.



INTERNATIONALISATION

International English language

The local Irish version of the English language that we use can sometimes be confusing to students/clients. To support communication with international learners UL staff need to be aware of what international English is and how to help learners by making simple changes like using captions on lecture slides and using more visuals.

Recruitment of international staff

Recruiting international staff requires much more than standard recruitment processes: moving families and attracting talent involves making the move easier, finding schools, accommodation, explaining how to get a PPS number, emergency tax, existing supports etc. Currently these supports are offered on an ad hoc and uneven basis, with the extent of the offering largely contingent on individual line managers.

From a HR perspective, it is not clear that we are doing enough to support new staff joining UL from abroad. UL Global staff are working very hard, but there need to be more resources put into this area. Corporate organisations have whole departments supporting the relocation of staff, but in UL there seems to be no equivalent. The centralisation of supports to help international staff and students would improve the process for those joining us. This support would also encourage faculty to be innovative and bring new ideas to UL. Right now, they feel that if they want to do something new, they will be on their own, and this extra work is a disincentive to innovation. There could be simple things like directing them on how to get a PPS number, helping enrol children in school, and finding their way around campus etc. How can we attract international staff if we are not investing time and resources in helping them move to and settle in Limerick?

Recruitment of international students—fees

UL is a relative newcomer to a very well-established international higher education market. In this context several questioned why UL is charging international (non-EU) students a higher fee than EU students when this discourages bright and capable students without a scholarship from coming to UL? It was suggested that while UL may never be top of the mind for many international students (not being in London or Paris), but that we could capitalise on a reputation for welcoming international students and also improve postgraduate student numbers.

Recruitment of international students—services

UL seems to have an imbalance in student numbers, with more incoming students and fewer outgoing. The financial and reputational advantage this offers UL is not matched with additional supports for international students with existing resources and this is not sustainable. It is great that we have international students coming in, they are just great for learning but 'it's just not sustainable'.



INTERNATIONALISATION

International Student staff supports

Course Directors are inundated with international students but are not being given additional resources to deal with increased volumes sometime having to double teach a course because of room capacity limitations. These issues seem to arise for example in relation to a 2 +2 degree where students come to UL in their 2nd or 3rd year. Course Directors are very much seen as the leader of that programme, with much responsibility from programme design, recruiting, welcoming and helping students, as well as teaching, and there may not be as many ancillary supports as needed. Are there supports that could be put in place that would allow the course leaders to be balance their workload more effectively?

Regional Strategy Required

Limerick needs to be a destination and within Limerick, UL needs to be a destination. We have a beautiful campus, we are English-speaking we need to promote these assets.

Although there is an awareness that Ireland is pushing an agenda to double global footprint through *Global Ireland 2025*, and that some activity is on-going at regional level with LCCC through Global Limerick Advisory Group, it is still too far removed from discussions at strategic or operational level, so it appears invisible, with only those involved in international delegations aware of the genuine level of activity. We need to find ways to increase this visibility as well as opportunities for participation in tangible projects.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Communications

Action: Co-ordinate, harmonise and update all online information for international students and staff and ensure that responsibility for keeping this information updated is assigned.

Action: Consultative process with alumni and current international students to identify informal local information: what would have helped, what was unhelpful?

Action: There is an opportunity to develop promotional material in other languages such as Arabic and Chinese to reach new student markets.

Action: We need to leverage that we are English language speaking in a beautiful location. Work more with Alumni.

Intercultural Summer School

Action: UL Global to engage with relevant UL staff to offer an Annual Intercultural Summer School.

International English

Action: 'What is international English?' - a proposed UL workshop / training programme directed towards lecturers and/or teachers

Action: Include competency in International English in all UL teacher training.

Summer Institute Programme

Action: Examine the existing pilots with different international cohorts with a view to putting together an annual Summer programme.



INTERNATIONALISATION

Recruitment of international staff

Action: UL Global and HR explore the provision of a one-stop shop for incoming international staff providing centralized supports for a whole range of familial, social and professional challenges associated with moving from one country to another.

Action: Welcome ambassador to UL. It was suggested that UL should look at housing this function somewhere centrally in UL.

Action: An allowance for the costs of relocation?

Action: A buddy system – international PhD buddy system could be replicated for staff. A personal induction and introduction to people was very important in the past – now there is greater risk of being left on your own. A buddy system is needed to help people to settle in.



CITY AND REGION

OVERVIEW

All consultations revealed a consensus of opinion that there is a disconnectedness between UL and the City – a narrative trope that has perpetuated since the establishment of the NIHE in the 1970s, despite much evidence to the contrary. Many units and parts of the University claim a strength in relation to this goal, though typically these strengths are not widely known and/or promoted in UL. The consultations also revealed a strong desire for more connections to the city and region with many ideas proffered to enable this.

Overall, the feedback suggested that both the UL campus and UL staff activities do contribute significantly to the region but a lack of internal UL co-ordination and communication has resulted in a failure to rebut the prevailing narrative. A great deal of UL activity in the city and region is unacknowledged, with a subsequent failure to capitalise on the opportunities our engagement offers.

STRENGTHS

ACCESS

- **Academy for Children** – working with primary schools and DEIS schools to raise awareness of ‘third level’ as a realistic option and achievable goal.
- **Access Campus After Schools Club** pairs UL students with local pupils according to subject – based weekly on campus for this purpose.

ARTS AND CULTURE

UL is uniquely distinguished from other Irish Universities in terms of both its support for and contributions to arts and culture in the region and nationally.

- Original host of the Hunt museum.
- Host to the National Self-portrait Collection.
- Host to the National Watercolour Collection.
- Provides excellent physical infrastructure for supporting performance arts including a regional Concert Hall with associated recording and production studios for national broadcast.
- Home to the Irish Chamber Orchestra—a world class chamber ensemble.
- Irish World Academy of Music and Dance (IWAMD) offers a unique range of performance and academic programmes.
- Award winning writers in residence and permanent faculty.

ARTS HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

- Sing Strong for people with respiratory problems and dancing classes for people with Parkinson's disease.
- IWA Music Therapists working with St Gabriel's to deliver dementia care and elder care.
- English as an Additional Language (EAL) contributes to community integration in Limerick.
- CWELL Diploma is unique in Ireland as the curriculum is codesigned with communities for communities, supported by a network of about 30 partner organisations across the city. The programme has been selected as a national exemplar of best practice engagement by Campus Engage / IUA.



CITY AND REGION

- IWAMD is noted for both the quality and the sustained nature of its wide range of local and national diversity and equality initiatives (<https://www.irishworldacademy.ie/community/>). The ethos of engagement is embedded in the Academy and exemplified by the MA Community Music.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH SCIENCES

- Working with Dochas Mid-West Autism Support, the School of Allied Health (SAH) offers a therapy clinic for 80 children, who were not otherwise receiving services.
- Collaborating with Dyspraxia Ireland / MS Ireland / Parkinson's Ireland to offer tele-health services. SAH Occupational Therapy Practice Education team provided placements for 23 students who provided tele-health services to children with Developmental Co-ordination Disorder.

NB: Key to being able to support these innovative community projects was receipt of 200K in COVID-19 funding to engage the necessary staff to support student placements. Partnered organisations are anxious to get funding for this to continue.

- As part of SAH Research activity, Sing Strong Choir Project for people with COPD is now being run nationally, as well as dance classes for people with Parkinson's.
- SAH students regularly complete placements in community projects at Access Campus. These activities could be increased and made sustainable with funding for clinical supervisors.
- HAPPEE—Health Alliances for Practice based Professional Education and Engagement - a project to provide inter-professional placements for Allied Health students in Corpus Christi National School.
- Rapid Innovation Unit research lab, based in St John's Hospital—produces excellent research but also gets enriched engagement and dialogue.

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

GPS is heavily involved in the City and Region, with partnerships and connections including

- Chambers of Commerce in Limerick, Shannon and surrounding regions – Ennis and Tipperary
- Innovate Limerick Board
- Limerick for Engineering
- Limerick for IT
- Limerick Lifelong Learning Festival
- Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan, Steering Committee
- Several local Skillnets

LIBRARY

- Music Pal enables the use of scores by local community choirs but is under utilised because it is not widely known, with choral scores available for people with respiratory problems.

CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

- Consistent and positive engagement in the community.
- Approximately 30% of student placements annually are 'Social Impact placements'.



CITY AND REGION

UL SPORT

UL Sport offers stand-alone, multi-purpose, exceptional and unique facilities open to staff, students and communities. UL Sport facilities and staff have made an immense contribution to the development of sport and exercise in the population of students, staff and the wider community, bringing people together in the common pursuit of health and social interaction, via both team sports and individual training. Its inclusive nature has meant that the facility has been accessible and affordable to all of the community and it is not uncommon to see elite athletes train alongside members of the public. Seven 2020 Hurling 'All Stars' are UL graduates!

UL Sport is home to an incredible diversity of indoor and outdoor sports and activities:

- Active Retirement Groups.
- Amputee football locally hosting national and international games.
- Headways Ireland (gym programmes).
- Homeless soccer tournament in conjunction with local Gardai.
- Hosted Vietnam Special Olympics Team prior to the London Special Olympics.
- Limerick Sports Partnership Activities with various groups including: New Year New Start- intro to gym classes; Adaptive Men on the Move; Women on Wheels; Desk to 5km; Primary/Secondary/Company Marathon relay on athletics track.
- Local Sports clubs— Soccer, GAA, Basketball, Swimming, Athletics, Rowing, Gymnastics.
- Med-ex Group — a class for people recovering from heart problems/operations. Questions re-funding for this programme.
- Med-well Programme - showing student doctors in UL Medical school various types of classes that could be prescribed to patients instead of, or in conjunction with, medicine.
- Munster Rugby.
- Men's Shed groups.
- Multiple Sclerosis Ireland (rehabilitation gym programmes).
- National Learning Network (gym programmes).
- Primary and secondary schools sports - Soccer, GAA Basketball, Swimming, Athletics, Rowing, introduction to the gym.
- Special Olympics hosts - Munster and National finals. (Sports included athletics, badminton, basketball, bocce, football, gymnastics, kayaking, swimming, table tennis, motor activities).
- Various residential care facilities for Bocce (a variation of indoor bowls using bean bag type balls).
- Visually impaired client programmes within the gym environment.
- Wheelchair basketball (local league, national league, and also giving Transition year students an idea of what it is like to play basketball in a wheelchair).
- Wheelchair Hurling.
- Wheelchair soccer (locally and nationally).
- Youth Clubs (indoor activities such as indoor soccer, swimming, gym).



CITY AND REGION

SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

- ARTIST—Action Research to Integrate Science Teaching.
- DISSI—Diversity in Science towards Social Inclusion, a project to develop non-formal education in science.
- ESTA—Educating Science Teachers for All.
- FabLab—A maker space and digital fabrication laboratory run by the School of Architecture, re-opening in October 2021 in UL's City Campus on Sarsfield Street where it is co-located with Limerick City and County Council's Citizen Innovation Lab. This is a space which has as its central ethos a public facing, urban embedded research role.
- RACE—RAw Communications and Engagement—STEM communication and Development — multiple university partners coming together to teach PhD students communication skills for public engagement.
- Science Live.
- TEMI—Teaching Enquiry with Mysteries Incorporated—an EU Framework 7 programme targeting over 500 teachers in 9 countries. 13 project partners in 11 countries.

INTER-FACULTY COLLABORATION

+CityxChange – H2020 Research and Innovation collaboration between Limerick City and County Council; Department of Economics, UL's School of Architecture/Fab Lab Limerick, Department of Computer Science and Information Systems and LERO.

UL ENGAGE

UL Engage serves as the hub for civic engagement activities across the university and works with all divisions and faculties to amplify, incubate and co-ordinate the various ways that UL students and staff can work to make a difference. UL Engage is a member of the UNESCO 'Knowledge for Change' (K4C) global consortium of universities committed to best practice community based learning and research. The K4C training programme has been used to support a re-purposing of existing staff roles to enable UL to build both disciplinary and trans-disciplinary capacity for effective and impactful engagement.

Four thematic hubs have been created to co-ordinate and support engagement within and between the areas of STEMM, Languages and Culture, Health and Well-Being, and Community Learning. Each hub is supported by 2-3 K4C mentors.

The K4C hubs are co-ordinated and supported by the UL Engage office, led by the Head of Community Engagement and supported by a Community Engagement Facilitator; an Impact Officer and a Senior Administrator.

CHALLENGES

Many positive UL engagements/partnerships have been developed at the individual level. Benefits of this approach are that these relationships tend to be strong and based on genuine and authentic engagement. However, there is the risk that once these individuals move on, then these relationships are lost.



CITY AND REGION

Relationship building takes time. Trust is built on an ongoing basis and there needs to be a recognition of the time that is needed to develop and maintain good partnerships.

At the moment, no division in UL has responsibility for communicating UL's contribution to the city and region **as a whole**. The sum of the parts (concerning UL engagement with the city and region) is greater than the whole, but internal and external communication deficits have failed to counter a narrative of disconnectedness that no longer holds.

There is a need for promotion criteria that recognises staff for engagements and partnerships, taking into account that time invested in these impacts on workloads. In order to maintain University / community relationships, it is important that time is spent and attention should be given to ways to supporting continuity and sustainable relationship via a more coordinated approach to engagement.

As a large, complex regionally important organisation, it is not clear to external organisations whom they should contact when trying to connect with UL. We are in need of a system that will help us capture, develop and sustain genuine relationships with our regional partners. The Limerick 2030 spatial plan is cited as an example of the UL failure to provide appropriate connections at an institutional level.

Munster TU could be a threat to the success of UL. LIT and AIT are doing a very good job in colonising the space for third level education in the region. UL activities are not publicly advertised in the city. ([See Communications](#))



PROPOSED ACTIONS

Developing strategic engagement

Action: Establish working group, reporting directly to Executive, to identify and represent all elements of UL with an interest in engaged activities on the city campus, tasked with proposing maximum strategic use of the site for varied and multi-functional forms of UL engagement.

Action: Create a forum for deciding what sustainable projects are pursued.

Action: Provide full-time UL presence in the city centre campus— an ‘open door’ to UL where anyone can ask about what UL has to offer (programmes, projects, partnerships, professional etc). A single point of contact for UL that could also have an online presence.

Action: Engage in community consultation(s)— regular and routinised UL engagement with city and regional stakeholders to sense check UL engagement impact and initiatives.

Opening Access to UL

Action: Improve Library Access: UL / MIC/ LIT use consortium purchasing to broaden visitor access to the library to include e-books and documentation papers that are currently licensed for UL only.

Developing strategic engagement

Action: Map UL external industry and community collaborators, partnerships, programmes and projects to celebrate and strategically communicate UL engagement in the community.

Action: Identify community liaison capability responsible for developing and sustaining long-term community relationships to ensure continuity between various UL projects, initiatives and partnerships in the city and region.

Regional Impact of UL

Action: Refurbish the City Centre campus site to provide a multi-functional, collaborative community / university space bringing all that the university has to offer to the city and the region.

Action: Increase regional impact of Allied Health programmes (speech & language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, dietetics) via a student led Rehab and Therapy Centre.



OPERATING MODEL

OVERVIEW

All consultation opinions revealed widespread and persistent references to UL systems being overly cumbersome, labour intensive and unresponsive to user needs. A number of opinions suggested that the various UL organisational systems do not align either with strategic objectives, or with each other. Despite a generalised and sizeable reporting of dissatisfaction, there was not enough detail in Phase 1 consultations regarding which systems are 'unfit' and which are 'unclear'. In consequence, Phase 2 consultations were focused on seeking out this detail. The result was a shopping list of suggestions to improve existing operations. These suggestions range: from relatively simple and often area-specific ideas to improve current processes; to workarounds to improve current user unfriendly systems; to proposals for a complete overhaul of existing systems, or investment in new ones. We have included a mixture of all three kinds of suggestions in our proposed actions and advise that action on even the simplest of fixes would indicate a level of engagement from management which, our consultations suggest, has been absent in UL for quite some time.

STRENGTHS

UL work on equality and diversity and the Healthy UL framework were the only two strengths recorded on this topic.

CHALLENGES

Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) system

The workflow system used by APRC is cumbersome and difficult to use without prior experience and/or training. Typically, however, academics use the system only intermittently and rarely often enough to gain the experience necessary for ease of use. Faculty find the system difficult to manage.

Added to the practical difficulties in using the online system, the overall process for accreditation is unnecessarily complex. The APRC system is time-consuming and counter-productive: this large centralized body is involved in too many decisions that could be devolved to faculty level, making the process of programme modification slow and inflexible. This level of centralisation is not the norm.

A common concern was that the APRC system is not designed for agility, is not at pace with our needs to meet market demand, and is in need of root and branch reform.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system

Lack of information about key stakeholder relationships was a common concern. Staff gave repeated examples of discovering an existing UL connection to key stakeholders quite by chance. The result is that some external collaborators and/or communities are saturated by UL attention, whilst others are neglected withholding the opportunities that remain unexplored. The consequence is that University community engagement is often uneven, inconsistent and lacking in effective co-ordination.



OPERATING MODEL

This lack of effective co-ordination has knock-on impacts to other areas of UL work. The MarComs division, for example, which is responsible for speaking to a variety of audiences, including the general public, students, staff, as well as maintaining UL social media accounts, is often in receipt of multiple queries – about admissions, courses and research – but is unable to respond. A CRM system that was plugged into social media could help with this.

Digital Signatures

As working from home becomes the norm, UL staff need a quick and smooth way to sign documents digitally. The basic Adobe Reader software that UL computers are furnished with is no longer suitable: staff and students are unable to smoothly sign pdfs, due to limitations imposed by free versions of Adobe. Although there are a number of work-arounds, these slow down multiple processes, are inefficient and can cause faculty and, most importantly, students a great degree of distress; particularly in instances where funding and progression are reliant on these signatures.

Engagement with UL staff

Involving staff in important decisions that will ultimately affect them can help management build trust and buy-in. UL@50 consultations and independent staff reviews note the widespread opinion that UL staff do not feel that they are involved in important decisions.

Financial—resourcing and distribution

A common concern in consultations relates to the lack of clarity regarding the distribution of resources in UL. This causes anxiety in financial planning. Delays in financial allocations and decisions impact negatively on recruitment. Late decisions re. budget mean late decisions re. recruitment and typically lead to a bottleneck in the recruitment processes, further delaying recruitment. This makes us uncompetitive. ([See recruitment](#)).

Financial—supports and budgets

Some areas are seeing growth and predicting growth but still struggle to get the resources required. There is a perception of inequity of resources which is eroding confidence, goodwill and ambition to drive the organisation.

Time is wasted when each academic has to research budgeting costs for every project i.e., cost of tea & biscuits, instead of identifying a way to centralise and make available common costs and themes in project submissions.

Grades Processing

General comment that current systems work for general grade processing but when it comes to trying to make improvements, the systems stop.

Currently, Course Directors spend enormous amounts of time manually inputting decisions on student progress. Many of these are standard, non-controversial, rules-based decisions. Can these straight-forward decisions not be automated?



OPERATING MODEL

Non-alignment of internal systems

Some systems within the university do not talk to each other i.e., Academic Registry does not talk to Agresso.

As UL expands its training provisions for postgraduate and professional upskilling, we need to keep up with this at a systems level, i.e., billing is not set up for modular registration.

We need strong and integrated systems for the support divisions.

Promotions

UL promotions procedures are over-elaborate. Our senior promotions procedures do not compare with other universities. Staff are literally spending weeks preparing materials for promotions boards.

Record Management & Retention Policy/System.

It would be helpful to have a system where users do not have to physically refer to a policy document to determine how long a record needs to be retained. Currently, this is too manual and open to errors. It would be much more efficient if an electronic system were available to input the record type and press “submit” to determine exactly how this record should be managed.

Record Retention – File Deletion on SharePoint.

Despite its many advantages, the SharePoint system can get out of hand over time in relation to record retention. There needs to be more joined-up thinking and alignment regarding SharePoint and UL’s Record Management and Retention Policy. UL/ITD could develop a taxonomy to support staff and make the whole GDPR and Record Management and Retention system more user-friendly, manageable and compliant for UL staff.

Recruitment

In UL, hiring a Postdoctoral student takes approximately three months. In North America and Europe the process can be as quick as a couple of days (hire based on CV in the US) to a couple of weeks. UL needs to speed up this process in order to compete internationally.

Space Management Study

UL space is of a premium and should be managed more efficiently. Office space has no value unless it does something useful. For example, open-plan office space may be cheaper, but if staff performance level reduces, is that offering value? Cost versus value. Both the acknowledged shortage of space and the lack of transparency in its allocation in UL encourages divisions to ‘hoard space’ - leaving some areas underutilised whilst others struggle to accommodate even basic needs.

Timetabling

This process takes up way too much time. It is unfriendly to students and academic staff. Staff cannot plan conference attendance or invite speakers. Planning external events, or events with external visitors, becomes impossible. As it is increasingly the case that students work through college lack of clarity regarding the timetable makes it harder to recruit at graduate level.



OPERATING MODEL

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) system

Action: Where systems are particular and finicky, if the system cannot be replaced, could we not appoint faculty experts, so that everyone does not have to learn or re-learn how to use a non user-friendly system when they need to modify, change a programme.

Digital Signatures

Action: Assess the requirement, cost, priority, existing capabilities and decide necessary protocol to support use of digital signatures.

Grades Processing

Action: Automation of grade inputs for non-controversial rules-based decisions. As above.

Record Management & Retention Policy/System

Action: Identify and agree a systematic, whole of university future-proofed approach to record management and retention.

Engagement with UL staff

Action: (See [Communications](#))

Financial—supports and budgets

Action: Develop centralised, core competencies and resources and make these available to staff making research funding applications.

Promotions

Action: Review of promotions procedures and accompanying portfolio criteria.

Recruitment

Action: HR planning for recruitment to prioritise work on online recruitment processes.

Space Management study

Action: Value Management study of space in UL. VM is a systematic, integrated, innovative, team-based collaborative approach that is concerned with maximising and achieving value for money by analysing function, cost and quality of a product or service desired by a customer at the required quality and optimum cost to perform the desired function. The expertise and enthusiasm for this approach exists in UL.

Timetabling

Action: Remove the UL commitment to individualised timetables and enable advance planning for teaching provision.



OPERATING MODEL

Academic Programme Review Committee (APRC) system

Action: Complete root and branch review.

Change Management

Action: Identify a Change Manager responsible for working with the Executive Committee on identifying and actioning systemic change within UL.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system

Action: Identify and introduce a CRM system on a one-UL basis

Financial—resourcing and distribution

Action: Communicate budgetary and other resource decisions on a more systematic and transparent fashion. Improve Finance website as a resource for all finance related processes and procedures.

Non-alignment of internal systems

Action: Review internal systems on a future proof basis, with the ultimate aim of ensuring alignment on a one-UL basis.



COMMUNICATIONS

OVERVIEW

Two key communication deficits were repeatedly noted: first, communicating UL externally, in terms of who we are, what we do and what we stand for; and second, communicating internally, both from the top down in terms of senior management's engagement with staff; and across the institution in terms of the information and ideas that we share with each other. Across all of the consultations and in all of the topics, concerns about communications were consistently raised. There was an overall consensus of opinion that UL communications are at an all-time low.

On a more positive note, several opinions suggested that UL has a strong history of engagement with local industry and that this history has helped to create an identity for the university. It was noted that the core identity of NIHE was Science and Engineering. As the institution has expanded and evolved, however, its core identity has not. A number of opinions noted that UL struggles to articulate its identity. Others noted constraints to communications: internally to share information and ideas; or externally to promote and publicise UL activities. The search for 'grand narratives' was discussed in relation to UL's recent focus on the UN SDGs, though other opinions cautioned against the idea of an over-arching narrative when, it was suggested, the point of a university is that we do many different things.

Overall, the impression from consultations was that UL expanded quickly, but is constrained by a communication infrastructure built for a previous era: we are struggling to keep up with growth in terms of managerial structures, communication, transparency, and governance. New structures are not yet fully in place, and in many respects, communications have fared the worst in these transitions. All consultation feedback suggests that a lot of work needs to be done.

STRENGTHS

The 2020 Ruepoint Media Insight Report provides a voice analysis of all print, broadcast and online media coverage for the University sector in Ireland for the year 2020. The report bases its analysis on the following criteria for all Irish universities: the volume of media coverage; the reach into audience(s); the cost; the sentiment (positive, negative or neutral commentary); and the prominence. In this analysis, for 2020, UL produced a total of 659 national print items, generated €7.22m in media cost, reached a potential audience of 35.04 million people. Print items occurred primarily in *The Irish Times*, *Irish Examiner* and *The Irish Independent*, averaging at about 12 national print articles per week.

UL's comparative media score of 80 compares well to the other Irish universities. Maynooth University scored the highest with 86, followed by DCU (84), with TCD and NUI Galway sharing a score of 81. UCC scored 77. UCD scored 73. This score is all the more impressive with a UL Comms staff of four, compared to nine in Maynooth, 11 in DCU, 12 in TCD and 15 in UCD.

UL MarComms staff note that whilst they do their best to honour the UL reputation externally, internally they disappoint UL staff on a daily basis. They have worked without a director for almost 3 years.



CHALLENGES

UL External Communications

Given its limited resources, Marketing and Communications focus is typically on the high-impact UL stories of national significance. The preoccupation of MarComms with high-level communications makes it all the more important for UL staff to know how to approach publicity for our smaller initiatives/events. There is currently no support for this at all.

Several opinions reported that it is almost impossible to get in contact with anyone from the comms office. E-mails looking for advice/guidance on press coverage for events are rarely, if ever, either acknowledged and/or answered.

UL involvement with local communities should be recognised and publicised. It is very important for us to celebrate our work with community partners and students, especially where we are able to raise the profile of lesser heard voices for an agenda of inclusion and impact. Through this publicity, we can add value to both UL and community experience and encourage further involvement in the future.

UL External Engagement

Engagement with our external partners and collaborators requires a different kind of communication, one that is as much focused on knowledge exchange and co-production as it is on communication. At present, communication with our community partners is not consistent and stakeholders are often the last to get information. They need to be part of UL decision making to contribute and explore the sustainability of services to decide what we can do.

The MarComms division, for example, engages with a variety of audiences, including the general public, students, staff and UL social media accounts and is often in receipt of multiple queries – about admissions, about courses, about research—but is unable to respond. This illustrates a lack of UL engagement with key stakeholders. A MarComms auto response outlining a policy of non-response and re-directing stakeholders to the UL website represents very poor engagement. With only one MarComms member of staff responsible for social media customer relations there is an evident lack of capacity to do anything more. A CRM system that was plugged into social media could help with this. There is currently no synergy in the operation.

UL Internal Engagement

A substantial set of opinions pointed to the difference between internal communication and internal engagement. With regard to the former: communication across the institution is poor. Much of the feedback reported that people do not know what's going on. There is much work to be done on internal communications and sharing appropriate content from meetings. In terms of engagement, it was suggested that weekly emails from Deans/HR do not constitute engagement – they are updates. Some internal reflection regarding the various forms of communication, their uses and their limits would be useful. Creating space, somewhere in UL for discussions and debates would be a positive contribution in an academic institution.



COMMUNICATIONS

It was suggested that if communications were better, staff might feel more valued and that a different style of communication is required to value staff which moves beyond informing them about policy, initiatives etc.. A communication that explains: 'we've listened; here's the context; this is why we responded the way we did'.

UL Internal Communications – information sharing across the Institution

Consultation feedback suggested that it is often difficult to get answers to straight-forward questions. We need to be better at handling our information. A staff intranet may help with this.

Overall, the consultations reveal a lack of consistency between different faculties, divisions and departments regarding the mechanisms for sharing information. It was suggested that good communication requires information to be shared from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

It was suggested that UL communications need to differentiate between interesting and useful information when communicating with staff and that there is a need to find a balance when dispensing information. Information overload causes important messaging to get lost. What is interesting for staff to know and what is useful for them to know needs to be discriminated.

UL Internal Communications - Senior Management / UL staff

Overall, there was a consensus view that UL needs to promote a culture of transparent, open, and accessible lines of communication from the top down. Current communication is regarded as poor and regular updates from management were recommended. While the town halls are welcome, they are not an effective means of communication as the flow is one way, top down.

Several consultation opinions reported a lack of transparency regarding decision making at all levels (for example, who gets to do committee work, course directorships), which might impact careers and the fact that routine departmental meetings are not happening everywhere.

UL Internal Communications - key operational decisions

A certain level of frustration was felt in not knowing where UL stands in certain aspects, i.e., budgets, a general indication of how we are doing budget wise, as happens in any company, would be useful for staff to know.

Communicating UL in the news

Many staff expressed a weariness with defending UL following negative news reports. This was especially the case in relation to UL management appearances before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). It was suggested that staff should have prior notice when UL is likely to be in the news, rather than learning it from the national media. Many staff expressed frustration that they had found out about events in UL through the media, leading them to feel further demoralised — not only by the bad publicity, but also by the feeling that UL staff are not trusted with certain information.



COMMUNICATIONS

UL Internal Communications—constraints to capacity

Much of the work of MarComms at present revolves around ‘fire-fighting negative stories’ (e.g. behaviour by a minority of students during COVID dominating the UL narrative in our Public representatives minds and in the media). MarComms lacks the capacity to carry out fire-fighting and to simultaneously promote and communicate positive UL stories regarding what we do well. The result is that often times, the negative stories outweigh the positive stories.

UL constraints to effective communication

Social media has led to a massive increase in incoming communications with less resource for proactive media stories. Capacity has to be part of this story.

UL communications are typically limited to one medium: emails. Emails are not up to the range of different kinds of communication that are required to address the communications deficit.

A UL intranet may help, but we still do not have all the tools we need.

Communications from Academic Registry are exemplary. Visually good and easy to follow.

UL Branding and Marketing

The re-branding of UL Marketing and Comms place a renewed emphasis on the use of UL branding guidelines. Many staff reported difficulties accessing information and support regarding UL branding and publicity protocols.

Other opinions reported that the new logo has not been universally accepted, suggesting that colleagues from within and outside the institution, as well as students and alumni, have commented on how distasteful it is. There is a lack of connection with the logo.



COMMUNICATIONS

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Information sharing across the Institution

Action: EC to consider what should be communicated to staff as part of every meeting.
EC to consider how to best ensure that the views of staff are being heard and respected.

Action: Identify a system or pulse check for assessing how well UL is performing overall.

Action: Identify a system for sharing news and information that is unrelated to management and policy information (one that removes unnecessary emails from staff inboxes).

UL Branding and Marketing

Action: Recognise and publicise university / community events.

MarComms support

Action: It would be very helpful if there was a section on the Comms website that gave:

- ⇒ guidelines on how to put together a press release and tips for distribution;
- ⇒ ideas for other forms of promotion;
- ⇒ a contact person to deal with queries;
- ⇒ clarification on what promotional work staff can and cannot do – i.e. can we work away ourselves re. publicity or are there UL protocols to follow and map these out.

Senior Management / UL staff

Action: Identify on an ongoing basis what can be communicated to staff:

- ⇒ GA / EC activities should be more transparent. Either minutes or revised summaries of meetings should be made available.
- ⇒ Where information is available, this needs to be communicated.
- ⇒ Feedback from staff should be encouraged enabling open, transparent and accountable decision making.

MarComms support

Action: Recruit a designated person to deal with internal communications supports and queries.



VALUING STAFF

OVERVIEW

In the first round of consultations, a repeated concern reported by many staff across the university and in academic, administrative, professional and support roles, was that the work that they do is not valued. In response to this, Phase 2 of the consultations included a specific focus on 'Valuing Staff' as part of a wider consideration of the 'UL Operating Model'. Although this focus did draw out a number of practical suggestions, it also drew an equal amount of criticism in relation to its absence from the strategic plan in the first place. Many opined that university staff are the institution's most valuable resource but that there is a prevailing feeling of disconnect between the staff and the institution. The fact that the UL strategic plan does not give any consideration about how it can value 'its most important asset' was regarded by many as indication of on-going mismanagement.

In considering the strategic goals, a strong consensus emerged that the valuation of staff should not be buried under the operating model, but should be a strategic goal in itself.

STRENGTHS

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, throughout the period of consultations UL staff were working from home. By the end of the consultations, UL staff had coped with almost 18 months of crisis management and it was suggested that staff had turned themselves 'inside out' in order to continue their work. The consultations reflected a widespread feeling of real accomplishment tinged with a feeling that there was scant recognition for the huge transition that all staff had enabled.

CHALLENGES

Whilst it is reasonable to assume that UL management had ongoing operational priorities in the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, consultation opinions referred to a never-ending charge from management 'to do more with less'. For many, the pandemic provided proof of UL staff resilience in adversity and a devotion to the university which management fails to acknowledge. Interestingly, consultation opinions repeatedly referred to not feeling valued, they did not refer to not being rewarded. The issue, it seems is with the recognition of service — not the reward.

Feedback in the consultations pointed to the absence of references to UL staff in the Strategic Plan and the failure to articulate the 'core values' of the institution. Perhaps, it was suggested, people might feel more valued if they could see their values reflected in the UL mission.

"You cannot ask people to pull from themselves something that they've already given and not had acknowledgement of"

UL@50 Consultation participant



VALUING STAFF

CHALLENGES

Attitudes and Behaviours

The University aims to provide a welcoming, supportive and inclusive working environment and to foster respective values, attitudes and behaviours. It has taken proactive steps to address reports of bullying, intimidation and micro-aggressions at work. However, there is a perception that these were not always effectively dealt with in spite of existing policies and procedures. More work needs to be done in the area of communications, training and support services to identify and eradicate such behaviour. The university has committed to undertake a cultural audit.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The majority of bullying reports were from female staff and this suggests that there is some work to be done concerning the institutional culture of UL. Female academics reported disparities in their ability to access research awards and funding when compared with their male colleagues. It was suggested that maternity leave considerations are not in line with IRC/ERC criteria. A recent funding call in EHS, for example, applied UK criteria to maternity/carers leave consideration, suggesting an absence of clear guidance regarding the EU/Irish criteria that pertain in UL.

The Athena Swan framework has helped to address some academic gender inequalities, but in doing so has caused a division between academic versus professional and support roles. Thus far, it was argued, the Athena Swan framework is only interested in protecting the equality of female cis-gendered academics and high-level decision-making teams around the university continue to be predominantly white/Irish/male/female. Feedback suggests that UL still does not have full representation of our communities. The EDI agenda was welcomed, and also the establishment of the EDI office, though feedback suggests that there is still much work to be done.

Family friendly

In the past UL was viewed as a family-friendly place to work by many; however, there has been a move away from family events (e.g., Party on the Plaza, Christmas at UL) on campus. It would be a positive step to have some family-friendly events and benefits (subsidised fees, transparent flexible working process for all staff etc.) as these bring a sense of campus community and boost morale.

Management Culture

Over the last number of years, staff have not been included in, or informed about, decisions being made in relation to the University. Several opinions noted that there is now a trust issue between staff and senior management.

At lower management levels, the Performance Development and Review System (PDRS) was noted as only being as good as the manager who implements it: for some PDRS provides a welcome review of work and the opportunity to gain support; for others it offers a further opportunity for bullying and humiliation.



VALUING STAFF

More generally, these opinions suggest the need for a more focused effort on management training to ensure consistency in the application of UL procedures that are designed to provide positive supportive framework in which all staff have the chance to flourish.

Promotions

Promotion experiences are relevant to feeling valued and UL promotions procedures were the focus of a number of opinions, drawing attention to different elements of the system.

⇒ **Academic promotions**—A significant set of opinions suggested that the UL promotions system is cumbersome and unwieldy, that when UL wants to incentivise behaviour, there is a tendency to add the desired behaviour into promotion criteria (whilst never taking anything out). Academics seeking promotions literally spend weeks preparing their portfolios for submission.

It was noted that other HEI systems (in Australia, for example) operate a slider scale where academic staff can help determine the proportionate values of different dimensions to their role specification. This system was briefly used in UL but was discontinued.

⇒ **Teaching promotions** - UL staff employed on teaching contracts have no means to develop their career progression. A significant set of opinions suggested that there should be a career pipeline for teaching staff who do not focus on research. These staff can be core to the teaching agenda of faculties. It was suggested that the mismatch between the day to day requirements of the job versus career progression and rewards has led many teaching staff to feelings of angst and demoralisation.

Professional, Administrative and Support Staff—the route for promotions in all of these areas is unclear and this is a continuing source of anxiety. UL provides more clarity in relation to academic promotions than it does for professional and support staff. There are clear career development paths in industry which UL could explore. UL has suspended promotions for admin staff for some time due to IUA/ governance issues.

Role definitions

For many staff, their sense of value and recognition is closely tied to a “professional label” in their role definition. Professional staff, while not active teachers and/or researchers, nevertheless identify closely with these missions in their roles, take on the responsibility of their part in the big picture of university work. Recognition of that support and professional contribution provides an important means of valuing staff who provide such support. It was also noted that—without changing their job, administration and support staff may want to contribute to the university’s teaching and research agenda. This, it was suggested, should be facilitated in order for the university to both respect and avail of the experience and tacit knowledge that many support staff have.

Time is its own reward

Although a number of challenges were noted in the consultations, there was one over-arching issue that relates to all staff across the institution, regardless of their role. Time. For many UL staff in a variety of roles, time is the most precious commodity.



VALUING STAFF

⇒ **Saving Time**

Minor modifications to systems that could save time or more major modification to systems so that they work in harmony with their users and do not unnecessarily frustrate, upset and annoy them would present a significant gesture of appreciation to UL staff.

For many academics, creating time for them to carry out their academic work, or providing support for their academic activity, is a concrete sign that their work is valued. The ‘scatter gun impact’ of the current academic timetabling system was frequently cited as making it hard to save time for academic work. Other suggestions included the availability of more professional support structures for Course Directors and programme managers who must deal with complicated UL systems.

⇒ **Making Time**

Many pointed to the withdrawal of HR practices that used to make them feel valued. Removing the ‘Party on the Plaza’ at the end of the academic year was given as an example. Staff noted that such an event could easily be down-sized and made less costly — what they really missed was a communal expression of solidarity in acknowledging work that is being done and celebrating achievements and success.

⇒ **Giving Time**

UL used to offer two days holiday to support staff in recognition for 25 years service: the rescinding of this policy was hurtful to many of UL’s less visible but nonetheless essential staff.



VALUING STAFF

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Bullying, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Action: Management training concerning dignity and respect, HR supports and employee rights etc. to improve and promote consistency in these areas. Part of the managerial role should be to make people feel valued so that they can work in a safe and supportive environment that enables them to flourish in their work.

Core Values

Action: UL to develop a strong, clear statement concerning the core values of the institution (who we are, what we value, how we ensure that these are included in everything we do). People want to work for a company they are proud of.

Family Friendly events

Action: HR to explore the opportunities for family-friendly policies and/or events.

Management Culture

Action: UL Senior Management need to make sufficient changes to current operating systems to demonstrate that they have listened to UL staff.

Action: Don't need to 'over-think' valuing staff. Show them respect by communicating clearly what is happening in UL. ([See Communications](#))

Action: Create a space for staff reflection and feedback. Then listen. At the moment, there is no time to reflect – just the continual drive of 'what do we do next', which in the end is counterproductive to real creativity and innovation.

Promotions and Role Definitions

Action: Enabling staff to seek promotion and career progression is a way to value them. UL Executive to establish a working group to explore the internal and external constraints to UL staff development and advise on suitable recommendations for change. The distinction between academic staff and the rest needs to be addressed, promoting diversity in the institution.

Action: Reintroduce job-sizing for non-academic staff.

Time – saving

Action: Identify and prioritise the changes that can be made to operating procedures to enable staff to spend their working time more productively. ([See Operating Model](#)).

Time – making

Action: Make time to stop and acknowledge what people do.

Time – giving

Action: Reinstate HR policies to acknowledge long-service for support staff.



TALENT PIPELINE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

OVERVIEW

There is resonance between this topic and the earlier one on Research Excellence but there is value in having a distinct section for early career staff and their needs as they can so easily 'get lost' in the more general discussion and analysis of research excellence.

The strategic plan references "Supporting our people – Enabling our staff to achieve their ambition" but provides no clear implementation plan for how this is to occur. Our consultations sought clarification on the institutional barriers and enablers that can either block or facilitate a strong talent pipeline and career development. Whilst the feedback gave many instances of enabling supports, the overall picture was that the availability of these supports can vary widely across the University, depending on the line manager in charge: some are supportive whilst some, it was suggested, almost seem to stifle development. In light of this, the access to supports identified as strengths is very much contingent on the management approach in any given part of the university.

STRENGTHS

Consultation feedback suggests that UL offers many excellent training and development courses but that these often clash with other commitments, leading to the suggestion that more training offerings should be recorded in order to offer more flexible learning options. Those singled out for praise include:

- Centre for Transformative Learning – SETs, 1:1 support, peer observation, diploma/MA, training and workshops.
- EMerge Network: gives staff at different levels/different types of contracts confidence in themselves and their work.
- Internationalisation: Learning Lunch Series.
- Interview workshop by Mary Harris.
- Library Supports are excellent (including workshops).
- Mentoring scheme.
- PhD Supervisor Training – provided useful knowledge and networking opportunities.
- Unconscious bias training.

A further notable UL strength is the social support and social capital provided by colleagues, research groups, labs and research centres. These give inspiration, advice and access to tacit knowledge, which is particularly important when some UL systems or processes are unclear. It was suggested that being located in a collegial, ambitious departmental environment normalises the kinds of academic activity that is required for progression, making it much easier to apply for big/prestigious opportunities/grants/progressions, and much easier to not feel stupid if you don't get them.



TALENT PIPELINE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES

Career Framework

Whilst the promotion of equality in UL via the Athena Swan agenda and the newly created Human Rights, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion office was widely welcomed, a number of opinions suggested that such initiatives were only 'window dressing' given the inequality between different types of UL employees. A large number of opinions suggested that it is not acceptable to have some cohorts of staff treated as 'second-class' because they have no career development prospects in their role. This opinion was voiced by different staff cohorts in all areas of UL work.

Career Framework—Academic

In terms of developing an academic career, many post-doctoral scholars on research contracts noted that they were not afforded the opportunity to teach due to differing interpretations of the IUA Framework. Sometimes teaching is not available in the role specifications or because they are unable to be paid for additional teaching. Given that the career trajectory of many post-doctoral scholars is an academic one, the absence of opportunities to develop teaching experience and a teaching profile acts as an effective barrier to career progression. More generally, consultation feedback evidenced a perception that post-doctoral scholars are often overlooked. Despite being highly qualified academics who should be regarded as assets to the university, there was a widespread perception that they are undervalued when allocating office space, remuneration or status in the institution.

Career Framework—Teacher

Much the opposite case holds for those on Associate/College/University Teaching contracts where, it was suggested, there is essentially no career progression available for those on the Teacher Career Framework. This is particularly detrimental to University staff who do research. The profile of these people is often PhD holders/qualified researchers but they are not given the adequate means/time to pursue their career advancement – current Work Allocation Models do not officially allow for it. As a consequence they find themselves constrained to their current positions and cannot expand/develop their expertise within the remit of their job. They can only do it in addition to their workload.

This is especially true for those on the lower echelons of the teaching ladder who often hold PhDs and who perform duties that are arguably on the same level of expertise and competence as their colleagues on the lecturer path, including lecturing undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as advancing UL's national and international profile through their research activities. This situation prevents them from upskilling in order to become eligible for lecturer positions. It is a demoralising situation for the employee and a loss for the Faculty/University as a whole.

Career Framework—Professional/Administrative/Support staff

There is no career progression available for those on the Administrative Career Framework as job evaluation has been stopped. These staff need a career path. There is availability of promotion pathways for some staff but not for others and this is demoralising and demotivating for many UL staff and should be addressed.



TALENT PIPELINE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Career Framework—Progression

A number of opinions referred to a perceived lack of fairness, transparency or consistency with progression decisions and expressed a desire for clearer communication of feedback. A number of early career academics raised concerns about the equity of the process in relation, for example, to the role played by referees, or the insider/outsider status of applicants. There was a strong perception that there are 'differentiated opportunities for progression' depending on the contract status. The role of line managers and Deans in offering comprehensive feedback on progression decisions was regarded as crucially important but often inadequate.

Communications—external

Early career researchers referred to the common perception that researchers need to fight to get their work 'out there' in the public domain. The drive for research impact makes the acquisition of communications skills critical for early-career researchers, yet there is very limited support offered (this opinion was also offered by a range of staff from all parts of the University). It was suggested that UL needs to look at ways to highlight and promote early career research successes and projects, as well as raising the standards of media and public engagement training and supports. Research impact, including media, policy or governmental impact is now part and parcel of the professional skillset expected from research active academics: expecting early career researchers to acquire these skills on their own, or absorb them from senior colleagues is not adequate. UL should be proactive in helping staff to have research impact.

Communications—internal

A commonly voiced opinion across all consultations was the importance of tacit or implicit knowledge about processes, systems or 'ways of doing things' in UL. In the absence of clear internal communications systems, not knowing 'how things work in UL' was regarded as a particular issue for staff who are new to UL or are early in their career.

Isolation

Several early career staff noted that working in UL can be an isolating experience if your role/research does not align with an established group or senior colleague. Some early career researchers noted that they were not invited to Department/School meetings and therefore missed opportunities to build social networks and capital to support their work.

Mentoring

Mentoring featured highly in the consultation feedback. It was suggested that a supportive environment makes all the difference to career development. In this respect the role of the line manager was singled out: directly, in terms of their role as coach and, indirectly, in terms of creating a supportive and inclusive working environment. The existing UL Mentoring Scheme was regarded as providing good but limited support. Staff believe that the Scheme does not offer support for Associate/College/University Teachers and Teaching Fellows (these roles are not listed in the scheme application form). Although there is currently no job evaluation, a mentoring programme for Associate/College/University Teachers and Teaching Fellows would be helpful and would certainly help many in their professional development. For those who are eligible, feedback suggests that many are not aware of the scheme.



TALENT PIPELINE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Time — making

Early career is a critical time for academic staff trying to develop their research area, whilst still inexperienced in academic administration and associated systems. Consultation feedback suggested that line managers could be more considerate in terms of workload allocation and some leadership responsibilities that early career staff are asked to assume (e.g. course directorships) which could perhaps be carried by more senior staff. Whether or not this consideration occurs is very much contingent on individual managers. One department reported that extra workload points were allocated to teaching modules when they were being delivered by staff for the first time, enabling recognition of the extra time this takes for new teachers. On the whole, however, the tendency was to 'load up' teaching on new staff and many early career faculty reported feeling overburdened with academic administration which eats up their time for research.

Time — saving

In the absence of clear internal communications, feedback from across the university noted that many UL procedures and policies are relatively complex and difficult to navigate. This is especially problematic for new staff and early career staff who reported difficulties navigating the Research Office, Finance Office and HR. In all cases, consultation feedback suggested that staff were unclear about who to contact with which queries and many reported a feeling of being 'moved from pillar to post'. Early career academics found this especially frustrating and suggested the need to streamline UL processes in general, so as to minimise the time spent on academic administration and maximise the time available for research, teaching and grant writing.

Recruitment

A number of senior academics noted that UL attracts talented people on contract but then loses them due to slow recruitment processes. While it is recognised that that are legislative, sectoral and other external constraints to recruitment, HR processes for hiring staff are cumbersome and slow: the example of trying to hire a research assistant for a 12 month contract, when the hiring process is taking nearly seven months was repeatedly offered.

In strategic and/or growth areas, UL often loses out to other research institutions with much swifter recruitment processes. Allied to this, increasing use of short-term, specific purpose contracts creates a climate of uncertainty, stress and competition. Precarious work contracts present a barrier to staying in academia and were offered as the reason for people leaving UL. Some consultation opinions suggested that there is an opportunity for UL to establish its reputation for talent promotion by offering ethical academic pathways to employment and transparency in this area.

Some opinions suggested that the standard for getting above the bar or gaining permanent employment in UL is too high, ever-increasing and out of sync with other institutions.



TALENT PIPELINE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Research supports

The absence of post-award research support was raised by a variety of staff. Early career staff, however, noted that they found it particularly hard to figure out procedures and know who to contact in the Research Office, Finance Office etc. after they had accessed funding. This lack of knowledge can result in issues with project administration and delays (e.g., in relation to vouchers and POs) which can be detrimental to the study.

Research barriers

Early career staff cannot always apply for funding (due to contract status) and by the time they have a more stable contract they are no longer eligible for early-career calls. Some internal funding opportunities and membership of research institutes do not include temporary contract staff.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Career Progression

Action: Resume job evaluation and progression for staff under Associate/College/University Teachers contracts.

Action: Make available CPD training for Associate / College / University Teachers.

Action: Review of promotion procedures and accompanying portfolio criteria.

Action: Management training concerning early career barriers, available opportunities and supportive actions to improve and promote consistency in these areas. Part of the managerial role should be to make people feel valued, so that they can work in a safe and supportive environment that enables them to flourish in their work.

Communications—internal

Action: Prioritise improving internal communications for early career staff — consider an online handbook as the first point of contact.

Mentoring

Action: Broaden eligibility and access to current system.

Research supports

Action: Develop centralised accessible 'how to' resources for UL operating procedures (budgeting, procurement, finance, accounts etc).

Action: Create a dedicated suite of supports for early career researchers to provide guidance about opportunities for open access funding, support for writing and an induction programme.

Action: Incentivise inclusion of ECAs in funding pots for senior colleagues by making them contingent on inclusion of ECAs (i.e. develop an apprentice model for academic training and building a future talent pipeline of excellent researchers and project managers).

Action: Registry of ECAs based on areas of interest to highlight their strengths and encourage inclusion in projects by senior academics across the university.



TALENT PIPELINE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Training and Development supports

Action: Improved and more specific (e.g. department or faculty specific) inductions for new staff that are transparent about the structures at each level in UL and how everything works (research, teaching SOPs).

Action: Targeted training and genuine support on how to increase research impact, sci-comms, media and public engagement; step-by-step supports for how to create and sustain a project to maximise research impact.

Action: Allocate responsibility to support ECA in each faculty — somebody who would promote and be an advocate for ECAs.

Action: Develop centralised accessible 'how to' resources for UL operating procedures for core academic business (course directorship, module leader, moderating, grading, external examiner processes etc.)

Action: Ring fence HR funding for talent pipeline and career development.

CONCLUSIONS

This report aims to give a full account of

- the UL@50 consultation process, conducted between October 2020 and June 2021; and
- the feedback received, giving as much detail as possible on ‘what we do well, what we could do better, and how this can be achieved in relation to the UL@50 Strategic Plan goals’ (UL@50 Consultation Review Group Terms of Reference).

The relationship of this report to the UL@50 Strategic Plan

The report is framed around the five goals in the UL Strategic Plan: 1) Transforming Learning; 2) Research Excellence; 3) Internationalization; 4) City and Region; and 5) Operating Model; plus three cross-cutting topics which emerged as recurrent themes in all of the consultations: Communication; Valuing Staff; and Talent Pipeline. This report addresses some of the recommendations made in the 2020 Institutional Review of UL. The *Institutional Review Report* (Cinnte, 2020 p.18) recommended the adaptation of the existing Strategic Plan in a manner that is ‘considerably less high level and more detailed than the present one’ enabling the university to ‘reconsider the Strategic Plan and adapt it in light of present circumstances’ (*ibid*, p.45).

In response to the *Cinnte Report*, a supplement based on the executive summary of the *UL Consultation Review Group Report from the UL@50 Consultation Process* should be considered for the UL@50 Strategic Plan 2019-2024 with information as to where and how this report may be accessed. This would serve to show that the University has sought to address the *Cinnte Report* recommendation that ‘the university strengthen the role of bottom-up feedback by using staff and student feedback, and that the university give this feedback a more prominent position in the quality architecture’ (*Institutional Review Report 2020*, p.34).

The relationship of this report to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

UL is has adopted the UN SDGs and is committed to embedding them into UL systems and processes. Much of the information contained in this report provides the information necessary to assist with mapping existing UL activities on to the UN SDGs and the UL sustainability framework. Furthermore, many of the actions for change identified by staff resonate with the SDGs and have the potential to strengthen the University’s strategic, system wide approach to embed the SDGs across every facet of University life.



A consultation process for UL

To arrive at this report, the Consultation Review Group had to develop a process for engaging with staff in meaningful, sustainable and transparent manner, and in a way that was both iterative and reflective (see p8-14 for detail). There is much to commend in this report and the CRG believes that the process it has developed could be used as a template for further consultations with staff

CONCLUSIONS

in a considered, formalised and biennial fashion. Before this should occur, it is important to acknowledge the shortcomings of this report in order to mitigate against the risk of a) diluting the impact of the recommendations herein and / or b) devaluing the process that led to these recommendations.

Report Validation

The process underpinning this report was iterative and reflective. Initial survey methods were discarded following feedback that they were inappropriate and that the overriding preference was for meaningful and inclusive dialogue based approaches to UL staff feedback. While the level of participation was sustained and substantial (p.14), this report does not detail all UL strengths, nor does it purport to address all UL opinions. And it must be emphasised that this report does not claim to be derived from a statistically representative sample of UL staff. Indeed, there is no single, representative UL voice. Staff participation in this consultation was invited in order to elicit a sample of staff feedback and perspectives. Although we did not expect staff to speak with 'one homogenous voice' we were surprised at the similarity in concerns and the consensus about what is important. The extent of the convergence of views across the topics discussed in these consultations merits serious consideration.

Despite our best efforts to engage with UL students, supported by UL student representatives in the CRG, still the engagement was superficial. We believe that there is a need to distinguish between student representation on University committees and student engagement. UL students were represented on the CRG by nominated members but the student body did not engage with the consultation process. Clearly, the latter requires a tailored, student focused process and a one size fits all approach for staff and students is not conducive to full engagement and participation.

Culture Audit

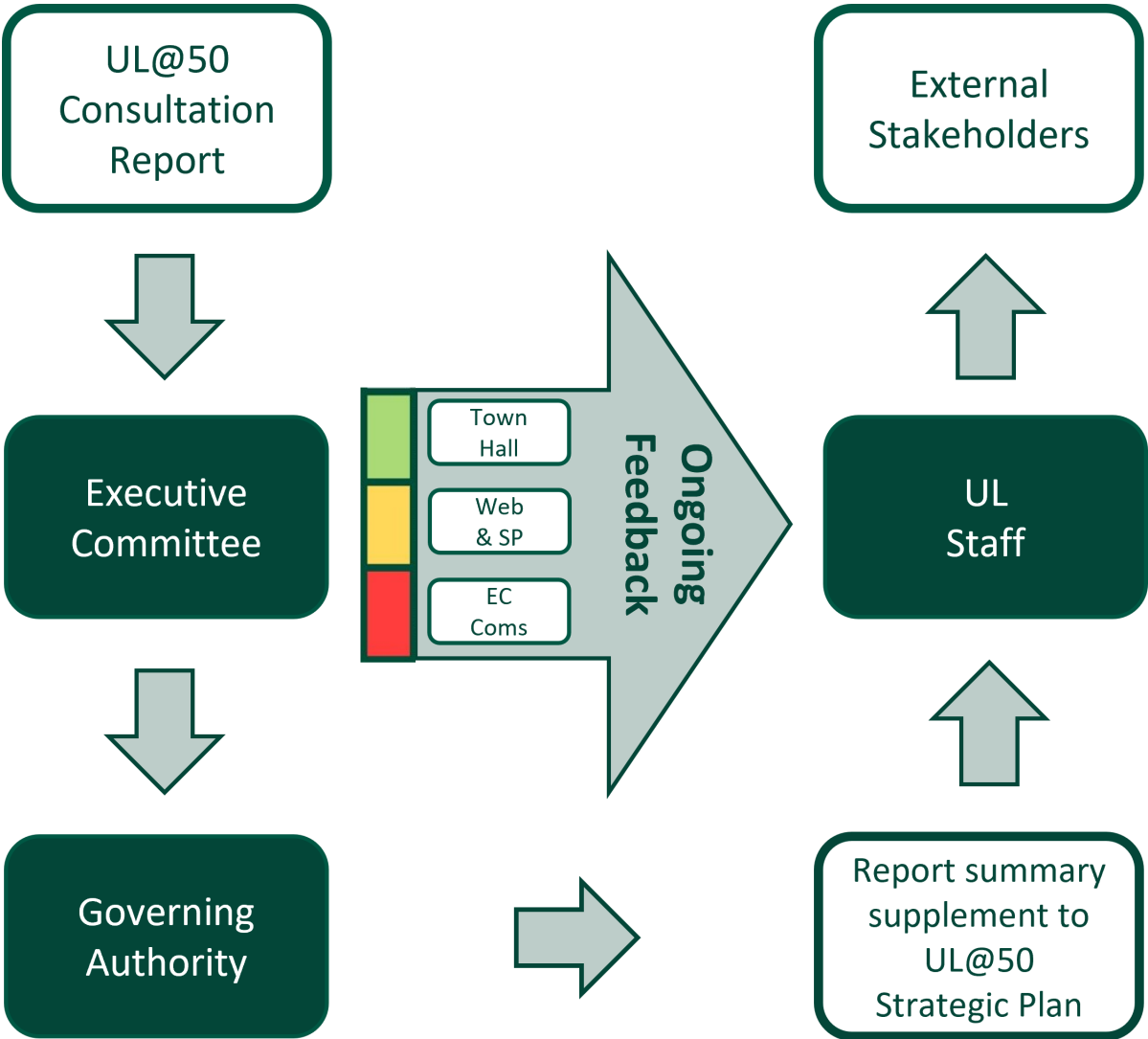
It could be argued that this report fulfils many of the requirements of a culture audit in that it gives many insights into the strengths and weaknesses of UL's operating model, organisational and management cultures, systems and processes, with the added benefit of including some actions for change. Plans for a Culture Audit are currently underway at the instigation of the Governing Authority, and using an external body to pursue this would complement the internal consultation process on which this report is based.

The CRG recommends that this report is taken into account when scoping the Culture Audit and that a review or assessment of the UL@50 Consultation Process is included within the final Culture Audit brief.

CONCLUSIONS

Next Steps

A central commitment to staff throughout the process was that on-going feedback would be provided back to them from the Executive Committee.



Follow through on this is vital to ensure that the participation by UL staff in the UL@50 Consultation and degree of trust that emerged during the process continues to grow. This nascent trust is based on the anticipation of changes for the better within UL.



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