Information Technology Division Newsletter 2024

Contents

[Welcome to the latest edition of the ITD newsletter 2](#_Toc185328432)

[Digital transformation in action 3](#_Toc185328433)

[TRUST-em evaluation survey success 4](#_Toc185328434)

[Digital App launcher takes flight 4](#_Toc185328435)

[New Research Information System Elsevier Pure launched 5](#_Toc185328436)

[Enhancing UL’s cybersecurity environment 5](#_Toc185328437)

[Upgrading to Windows 11 6](#_Toc185328438)

[Telephony Voice Modernisation project  6](#_Toc185328439)

[ITD shortlisted for two major awards 7](#_Toc185328440)

[It all adds up 8](#_Toc185328441)

[ITD raise a cuppa in aid of Milford 8](#_Toc185328442)

[ITD Staff & Student Survey Results 9](#_Toc185328443)

[End of an era as Sulis bids adieu 10](#_Toc185328444)

[The Student Experience 10](#_Toc185328445)

[What ITD delivered for students in 2024 12](#_Toc185328446)

[Digitally transforming device management 13](#_Toc185328447)

[Teams Meeting Room project success 13](#_Toc185328448)

[Co-Pilot in UL 13](#_Toc185328449)

[ITD impress with Lightning Talks at HEAnet24 14](#_Toc185328450)

[DGSC Sharepoint site launched 14](#_Toc185328451)

[Effective Collaboration in Action: The AHSS PEP (Pilot E-Portfolio Project) 15](#_Toc185328452)

[Into the archives 15](#_Toc185328453)

A white building with flags in front of it

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Figure Plassey House, University of Limerick

# Welcome to the latest edition of the ITD newsletter

As we approach the end of 2024, it is a fitting time to reflect on the achievements and efforts of the past year. The team in the IT Division have continued in our quest to digitally transform the campus through the implementation of the University’s IT strategy, UL Enable.

At any one time, there are between 45 to 50 digital transformation projects in the UL Enable ‘live’ project portfolio. In 2023, the department completed the delivery of 35 digital transformation projects across the University. ITD has continued to build on this volume of work for 2024, as evidenced by the range of digital projects and initiatives featured in this newsletter.

UL Enable has already made a considerable impact on the digital landscape of UL. In particular, it has greatly enhanced the areas of data-driven decision-making, digital governance, innovation and change, the adoption of new cloud-based systems, and the strengthening of UL’s cyber security posture. Specific achievements in the first two years of UL Enable include the implementation of the new Brightspace VLE, Business Intelligence platform initiatives for faculties and departments, the Starters and Leavers Automation Project, a Research Proposal Authorisation System (RPAS), Modern Device Management automation solutions, and supporting the delivery of a new University Research Information System (Elsevier Pure).

Additional projects currently underway include the new institutional Customer Relationship Management system, a new Student Engagement App for students and a new Staff Performance Management system. These projects demonstrate the extensive digital transformation in progress and the positive impact they will have on UL’s teaching, research, and operational activities.

I hope you will enjoy reading about the range of ITD initiatives contained in this newsletter and I wish to thank all of our colleagues and students for their steadfast cooperation and support over the last 12 months. I wish to also thank many of our colleagues across the University community for successfully partnering with ITD on many of the initiatives mentioned above. Finally, I would also like to thank the staff of ITD for their enduring professionalism and dedication as we tirelessly strive to uphold our commitment to service excellence.

Liam O’Reilly

Director, Information Technology Division

# Digital transformation in action

Over the last number of months, ITD has played a pivotal role in the progression of several key projects for the University across multiple faculties and divisions, with the assistance of our colleagues in UL Procurement and EPS.

To the forefront, is the implementation of the Strategic Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The Strategic CRM is a significant cross-functional program of work that is being led by the ITD Project Management team. The delivery of a CRM will facilitate both the retention of students and a significant growth in the total number of student registrations, while also enhancing and maintaining a consistent and seamless student experience across various departments and interactions.

ITD are also supporting the implementation of a mobile digital app for students. The Student Engagement Solution project will provide a central source of information about systems and services in UL, aligning with modern student preferences. The ITD Project Management and Business Engagement team will lead the implementation, and the project will be supported by a cross-functional stakeholder team from across the campus community with a target implementation of the new system for Q4/2025.

Other key initiatives for the University include the Placement Management System, Student Feedback Solution as well as infrastructure-related projects in the Telephony and MS365 Backup space. A busy and exciting period for the University and ITD, where digital transformation continues to be on the rise through the delivery of new technologies.

# TRUST-em evaluation survey success

In November 2024, the Quality Support unit, in collaboration with the ITD Business Engagement (IT BE) and Education Technology (Ed Tech) teams, successfully launched the pilot for the new module evaluation survey TRUST-em (Time to Reflect and Understand Students - Evaluation of Modules), with participants from the School of Law and Department of Economics.

The pilot included almost 600 students with 900 module registrations, with an impressive 36% response rate after one week. This project was funded under the UL Enable IT Strategy and went through all stages of digital project methodology, from ideation to implementation, under the Digital Governance Steering Committee (DGSC). Phase 2 of the project, launching in 2025, will incorporate all students.

Sinead O’Sullivan, Director of Quality says: “This has been a successful collaboration between Quality Support Unit(QSU) and colleagues in the IT BE and Ed Tech Teams in ITD and I am very grateful to everyone involved for getting it over the line, particularly given our aggressive timelines. Everyone's 'can do' approach certainly helped us reach today's milestone.”

# Digital App launcher takes flight

Earlier this year ITD launched its new Digital App Launcher on UL Connect. This new centralised hub provides a streamlined access point to the most commonly used digital applications and resources, making it easier and quicker for staff to access information.

Apps and resources including Agresso, Core HR, Brightspace, RPAS, Microsoft Office, SharePoint Information Hubs, TOPdesk and many more are now easily available in a ‘one-stop shop’ and the App Launcher has been very positively received by staff across the campus. Using this resource to access UL apps ensures staff always have access to the most up-to-date versions with the added benefit of freeing up space on your bookmark and favourite bars.

This project was an initiative under the [UL Enable IT Strategy](https://www.ul.ie/itd/ul-enable-it-strategy) in collaboration between ITD and Internal Communications Manager Eoin Brady.

# New Research Information System Elsevier Pure launched

On September 26, UL launched a new Research Information System - Elsevier Pure, replacing the existing ULRIS system. Elsevier Pure, is a market leader in Research Information Systems, adopted by over 400 institutions globally. Phase 1 of the system deployment focuses on CV profiles and the establishment of an enhanced research expertise search portal [pure.ul.ie](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpure.ul.ie%2F&data=05%7C02%7CNiamh.C.Dillon%40ul.ie%7C1d99fabd0e49454b022908dd03033561%7C0084b9243ab4411692519939f695e54c%7C0%7C0%7C638670034499885409%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=hjEnQ7OCsYrYOZWsEcEb9VmluFr5S5OBPt4k%2BH13cUc%3D&reserved=0). Benefits of the new system include researcher profiles with improved global visibility, integration of UN SDGS, improved search functionality and improved IT security using a cloud-based solution.

Speaking about the project, Professor Norelee Kennedy said: “I am delighted to see this important digital transformation project for research completed. The excellent collaboration between OVPR and ITD was key to the success of the project. Enhancing supports for research is a key part of the UL research Strategy, Wisdom for Action 2022-2027.”

This project is a partnership between Office of the Vice President Research (OVPR) and ITD. The project team included Richard Cotterell, Frederica Clohessy, Christine Brennan, Eileen O’Connor and Sean Ryan (OVPR), Timo Shinnors, Tina Cadogan, Jeremy Quaid (ITD), Michael Gleeson (Web Team) and Ashling Hayes (Library). This project is an initiative under the [research strategy Wisdom for Action 2022-2027](https://www.ul.ie/research/about/research-innovation-strategy)and was funded under the[UL Enable IT Strategy.](https://www.ul.ie/itd/ul-enable-it-strategy)

# Enhancing UL’s cybersecurity environment

In today’s digital landscape, universities face increasing cybersecurity threats that can compromise sensitive data and disrupt operations. As part of the UL Enable IT Strategy, ITD has set about improving UL’s IT security posture and defences to mitigate the risk of a successful cyber attack on UL. Central to this has been the implementation of a Security Operations Centre (SOC) combined with a Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) system.

The SIEM solution aggregates and analyses security data from various sources, helping to identify patterns and anomalies indicative of cyber-attacks. Our SOC provides 24/7 monitoring and incident response, enabling timely detection and mitigation of threats. In tandem, ITD has also implemented a cloud-based vulnerability scanning solution to uncover weaknesses within the University’s IT infrastructure. By identifying unpatched software and misconfigured systems, we can proactively address vulnerabilities before they are exploited by malicious actors. Investing in these technologies is crucial for safeguarding the integrity of our systems and data. IT Security training for staff can be accessed via the [HR website](https://www.ul.ie/hr/it-security-awareness-training).

# Upgrading to Windows 11

A major project is currently underway by ITD to upgrade all UL staff devices to Windows 11 before Microsoft ends technical support to the Windows 10 operating system in October 2025. This work, which is being implemented over three phases, has already commenced with the ITD Service Delivery team successfully upgrading computer lab and lecture theatre devices to the new operating system.

Since July 2024, any new devices ordered through Dell have Windows 11 pre-installed. From January 2025, ITD will begin upgrading all staff devices to Windows 11. To help everyone get familiar with the new features, ITD will also be running drop-in clinics to raise awareness about what’s new in Windows 11.

# Telephony Voice Modernisation project

ITD is currently advancing the Telephony Voice Modernisation project, which aims to update UL’s telephone system to enhance service quality and meet the University's future needs.

This project is part of the IT Infrastructure and Digital System Integration programme of work under the UL Enable IT Strategy. Several drivers identified the requirement for an updated phone system in line with the rise in hybrid working. Additionally, this project will enable ITD to leverage existing technologies already in use in UL.

Once complete, project outcomes include:

* Enhanced user and service experience
* Integration of existing software already in use in UL
* Increased digital literacy for staff
* Greater staff engagement and opportunities for collaboration across teams
* Alignment with UL’s sustainability objectives

Benefits of the Telephony Voice Modernisation Project

* Greater efficiency
* More flexibility for hybrid working
* Improvements to the cyber security posture of UL

# ITD shortlisted for two major awards

ITD were thrilled to have been shortlisted in the Best Use of Educational Technology/ ICT initiative category at this year’s Irish Education awards. This was the first time ITD were nominated at the awards, which was held at a gala ceremony in Killashee Hotel, Co. Kildare.

ITD were shortlisted for their work in the ICT category for implementing the University’s new Virtual Learning Environment, Brightspace. This project involved digitally migrating all existing learning materials (online lectures, videos, quizzes, case studies, forums, module outlines, exam structures and documentation) from existing VLE’s (equating to six terabytes of data) to the new platform. ITD were also shortlisted in the Most Innovative Transformation category at the Digital Transformation Awards.



Figure 2Eamonn Fitzgerald and Siobhan Gleeson Hayes from the Education Technology team in ITD at the Digital Transformation Awards in July

# It all adds up

ITD in numbers over the last 12 months

It’s been an extremely busy academic year for the Information Technology Division. Here we examine a snapshot of the activities ITD staff have been involved in over the last 12 months.

* 30,000 – Total calls received
* 4.7 – Customer feedback rating (average)
* 96% SLA achieved (service-level agreement)
* 1.3 million – WIFI connections
* 52 - DGSC projects in progress
* 655 – Technical Changes implemented
* 6 million plus – Brightspace logins
* 29 million plus – Emails processed
* 250,604 – Microsoft Teams meetings

# ITD raise a cuppa in aid of Milford

Thank you to everyone who supported the ITD coffee morning in aid of Milford Care Centre, raising a phenomenal €1,681 earlier this year. This fundraiser has been a mainstay of ITD for many years, so we were delighted to bring the event back once more.

A group of women holding a large check

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Figure 3 Pictured: L-R Sharon Aherne, ITD, Melissa Purcell Milford Care Centre, Mary O’Donoghue and Tara Charnley, ITD.

# ITD Staff & Student Survey Results

ITD held another highly successful Student Satisfaction Survey in 2024 open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students. This survey is an extremely valuable exercise for providing key feedback to help ITD understand how best to support students' IT needs. Our survey findings showed that 81% of respondents are satisfied with IT at UL overall.

Results also showed an increase in WIFI satisfaction with a 77.22% satisfaction rating for WIFI services in 2024, an increase of almost 8 percent (69.59% in 2022) compared to the previous survey.

A group of women holding a pink jacket

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Figure Congratulations to Deirbhile, Heather and Katie who won prizes after taking part in ITD’s 2024 Student Satisfaction Survey

You said, we listened: ITD activities based on survey results

* We created an IT Cybersecurity Awareness Toolkit to promote best practice and make IT security advice easily accessible to students.
* Continued promotion of our Self Service Password Reset (SSPR) facility via email and social media campaigns.
* Moved print services to the cloud making them more accessible and reliable.
* Student Engagement App project is in progress.

Staff survey results - what did we learn

* Overall satisfaction with ITD services is greater than 84% with respondents rating ITD 7 or higher out of 10
* 87% of respondents rated UL’s Lecture Theatre support as Good or Great
* 94% satisfaction levels with UL WiFi service among respondents
* Blended working has not negatively impacted user experience/accessibility of IT services (91% better or the same). Not only does this reflect the significant on-going investment being made in IT services and infrastructure, but also the commitment and dedication of ITD staff to our customers

# End of an era as Sulis bids adieu

Since UL’s inception, the university’s learning management platforms have continually evolved and changed to meet demands. However, this October marked the end of an era as the university officially bid a fond farewell to its former learning management system Sulis. While the platform entered read-only status last year, access to the system remained available until October 31, 2024.

# The Student Experience

Written by Co-Op student Aoife Cahill

As a new student to University of Limerick in 2022, I was excited to get immersed in college life. It wasn’t long before the months turned into semesters, and before I knew it I had completed my second year. With the third year of my course consisting of an eight-month Co-op placement followed by Erasmus, I thought I would have to say goodbye to my beloved campus for the foreseeable future. Little did I know I would not be parting ways with UL just yet as I’d landed a position with ITD’s Service Desk.

Although my degree is a dual qualification in Journalism and Digital Communications, I was apprehensive of being thrown into the deep end of the technology pool. As someone who would normally go to ITD for assistance myself, I was sympathetic to whoever would be on the receiving end of my first call. A role reversal that would end in tears for both parties…however, I was wrong (thankfully).

From my very first day with ITD, I have felt both welcomed and encouraged. Each day I acquire more accessories for my metaphorical tech toolkit. As well as now being a self-proclaimed junior expert in all things Microsoft, I also have the role of being the mastermind behind our social media pages. While I have you here check out our Instagram: itd.ul (the hustle for new followers never stops).

Apart from the professional benefits of my role on the Service Desk, I was fortunate enough to strike up great friendships during my time here too. With our core working group consisting of students from a plethora of courses, ranging from journalists like myself, to engineers and business students.

Those who study the computing courses are to be commended for their willingness to help the rest of us newbies out when it comes to issues that are out of our depth. I admittedly am always pestering them with questions, but the upbeat work atmosphere overshadows any embarrassment I feel about asking for a little help every now and then. I’ve tried to offer my social media advice as a trade off but I’m yet to give the boy’s accounts a makeover.

The main lesson I will take away from my co-op, other than asking a user to ‘turn their laptop on and off again’, is to embrace the new challenges that come your way. Resetting passwords and authenticator apps are second nature, and I have finally navigated my way around the Glucksman basement.

A person sitting at a desk with a computer

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Figure 5 Journalism and Digital Communications student Aoife Cahill

# What ITD delivered for students in 2024

Written by Co-Op student Aoife Cahill

From the beginning of summer right up to the days before the campus closes for Christmas break, the IT Division is a hive of activity. From upgrading computer labs and lecture theatres, to implementing a new printing service for students, ITD staff are constantly busy implementing new digital services to improve the student experience in UL.

At the start of semester one, the transition to a new cloud printing service Uniflow kicked off the first of these projects. This service was largely introduced to students via digital signage, communication updates, social media and through a drop-in clinic. We were also on hand to acquaint almost 3,500 students with all the tech basics they would need to begin their UL journeys during Orientation week. An undeniably successful, (and busy) time! Next up, ITD made a special guest appearance at a drop-in clinic for students at the First Seven Weeks hub to share information about IT supports.

September also saw us launch our hugely successful ‘Tech Tuesday’ campaign, allowing students to expand their IT knowledge as well as enter online surveys and draws for great prizes. This was followed by a flurry of activity across social media promoting Cybersecurity Awareness month in October. Students had a chance to brush up on their cyber knowledge in our Trick or Tweet quiz and awareness slogans and tips were broadcast on digital screens across the entire campus. Activity continued across November and December as we launched our IT Advent calendar info campaign and the ITD ‘elf’ made a triumphant return to campus to share more IT knowledge on the ITD Instagram account.

A group of people standing in front of a podium

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Figure 6L-R: Kyle Mullane Ndu, Aoife Cahill, Mark Mills, Alannah Meaney and Colm Butler Carney from the ITD Service Desk Level 1 support team during Orientation at the start of semester one

# Digitally transforming device management

A significant digital transformation project by ITD is changing the way UL devices are managed for staff in line with the needs of a hybrid work environment**.**

Over the last year, ITD has implemented several changes to make device set-up easier, quicker and more efficient for staff through a ‘modern device management’ (MDM) approach.

What this means for the end user:

* When you receive a new UL device, it can be set up from any location once there is a secure internet connection.
* The set-up is seamless – a configuration profile is automatically deployed during set-up using UL-approved software.
* Security patches and policies are deployed during the set-up process.

To date, 210 Windows staff devices and 106 Apple staff devices have been commissioned using MDM technology. This zero-touch deployment using MDM has significantly enhanced the user experience.

# Teams Meeting Room project success

A significant upgrade project to enable Microsoft Teams across 61 meeting rooms on campus has been completed. The Teams Meeting Rooms project was developed in line with UL’s hybrid working policy by integrating physical meeting rooms with Microsoft Teams online to accommodate staff working remotely. As part of the upgrade, all rooms were enabled with a video camera, microphone, speakers and display screen. All meeting room owners were also provided one-on-one training by members of ITD’s Ed Tech team on the newly installed technology.

# Co-Pilot in UL

Generative AI has surged in popularity, becoming a transformative tool across industries and shaping how we work, communicate, and solve problems. In line with the rise of AI usage, ITD carried out research on different gen AI tools and identified Microsoft’s AI assistant Copilot as the most suitable platform for staff and students to use within the University due to the security and data protection features it offers when logged in with our UL accounts. Further guidelines for [staff](https://ul.topdesk.net/tas/public/ssp/content/detail/knowledgeitem?unid=a4da539b70124890a6bbcf91cafd1639) and [students](https://ul.topdesk.net/tas/public/ssp/content/detail/service?unid=aa3ab816096c4952b6a1bf30fe3122d8) on using Copilot are available on Topdesk.

Staff from ITD also collaborated with colleagues from the Library, Centre for Transformative Learning and the Academic Integrity Unit for an Introduction to Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) for staff, as well as two in-person events for UL students during the academic year to discuss use of AI within the University.

# ITD impress with Lightning Talks at HEAnet24

Congratulations to Mark Twomey and Josephine Lynch who did an excellent job representing ITD at the HEAnet Conference held at the Great Southern Hotel in Killarney in November. Both speakers were featured as part of the event’s Lightning Talks series with Mark sharing valuable insights on UL’s ‘cloud first’ approach to device management, followed by Josephine who delivered a comprehensive overview of the development of a Research IT Competency model on behalf of RESIN. It was fantastic to see ITD and UL so well represented at this event.

A person and person standing in front of a large screen

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Figure 7 Mark Twomey, Cloud Architect, and Josephine Lynch, IT Business Engagement Partner at the HEAnet Conference

# DGSC Sharepoint site launched

A new online hub has been launched to inform staff about UL’s Digital Governance Steering Committee (DGSC) and raise awareness of ongoing digital projects within the University. As well as advising on the management of digital platforms, DGSC reviews IT and digital project initiatives and reports on progress to the Executive Committee. It also provides ongoing recommendations for critical issues and risks related to cyber security and ensures current and future projects are aligned with UL’s strategic goals. To access the DGSC Sharepoint site please [click here](https://ulcampus.sharepoint.com/:u:/r/sites/DGSCComms/SitePages/Home.aspx?csf=1&web=1&e=DeBEzf).

# Effective Collaboration in Action: The AHSS PEP (Pilot E-Portfolio Project)

Case study

In March 2024, the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) began to explore the option of piloting an E-Portfolio for use in module delivery and to enable students to record and showcase their transferable skills.

AHSS worked with an IT Business Engagement Partner and the Education Technology team in ITD to examine E-Portfolio options, including existing tools in Brightspace. Following the analysis and subsequent procurement process, the system was implemented and rolled out to students as part of phase one.

Speaking about the process, Dr. Chris McInerney, Director, AHSS Transferable Skills Unit says: “At all stages, we received excellent support from ITD colleagues. In terms of advice for others, should anybody want it, my main suggestion would be to ask lots of early questions to clarify the process, and then keep asking them as needed. There was never a time that we asked a question and didn’t get a helpful response. From our side, I think it helped that we were very clear about the product we wanted to buy and could easily justify its selection. All in all, we have been enabled to roll out what we think will be a very interesting and innovative pilot project. It's been a most effective collaboration.”

# Into the archives

We delve into the ITD archives to take a look at what was happening in UL in 1992. The following article is taken from the ITD newsletter, Issue 10, March 1992.

A new service – Internet

The University has now established connection to what is known as ‘The Internet’ - a worldwide computer network linking many thousands of computers together using the network protocol known as TCP/IP. This means that computers connected to the University network (such as a PC, workstation or Macintosh) can establish a connection to thousands of computers throughout the world and in particular the US for interactive access, file transfer and Mail (the mail service was readily available). At present ITD is ‘BETA’ testing this service with a small number of users with a view to determining the necessary operational standards before making this new service generally available to all users - (Colman Collins)