


# Future Ready:

EHS Research  
Implementation  
Strategy: 2015-2020







We encourage cross-disciplinary/international linkages and innovation in both research and teaching. Our staff members represent a friendly and welcoming Faculty.

Professor Alison Perry, Dean, 2015



# Excellence Innovation Impact



**Professor Alison Perry,**  
Dean

Pioneering and Connected, the previous Strategic Plan for the University of Limerick took the Faculty from its inception in 2008 to the present day and that plan served us well. The University's new strategic plan, *Broadening Horizons*, is outward facing with three themes: building on our achievements; accentuating our distinctiveness; and raising our international profile. EHS staff members will be contributing to this strategy and here we outline our research goals and how they will be achieved.

In 2015, The Faculty of Education and Health Sciences (EHS) includes 134 academic staff members and 47 administrative and technical staff, with 2,585 undergraduate students and 609 postgraduate students (taught and research) enrolled.

EHS supports excellent, innovative and impactful research, which advances the wellbeing of people in society. The Faculty brings together six rapidly growing departments across health and education; the Department of Clinical Therapies (subsuming the disciplines of physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy); the Graduate Entry Medical School (GEMS); Nursing and Midwifery; Physical Education and Sport Sciences (PESS); Psychology and Education and Professional Studies (EPS).

EHS has been at the forefront of developing structured PhD (sPhD) programmes, led by staff members who are committed to the highest standards of research supervision and enquiry. The popularity and success of these programmes is demonstrated by our rapidly growing postgraduate student intake (from 15 new student registrations in 2013 to 63 new students in mid-2015).

Reflecting *Broadening Horizons*, the UL Strategic Plan for 2015-2019, EHS will be characterised by:

- / **Placing students at the centre of our educational activities and ensuring that our programs, processes and facilities are responsive to student needs.**
- / **Ensuring that our programmes remain progressive and proactive, addressing the needs of stakeholders in health, social and education sectors.**
- / **Delivering an excellent educational experience that enables students to develop their potential and become influential graduates.**
- / **Building capacity of our inter-disciplinary, cross-Faculty research with activities under four themes Social Inclusion; Optimising Health; Physical Activity & Human Performance and Professional Practice & Education.**
- / **Broadening and deepening our areas of research strength and impact, ensuring we gain international recognition for our studies.**
- / **Growing and enhancing our world-wide engagement.**

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# Mission

Our aim is to advance the wellbeing of people by graduating effective and critically reflective scientists, education and healthcare professionals and creating and disseminating knowledge, through research and scholarship that impacts on the social, educational and healthcare needs of people locally, nationally and globally.

# Vision

By the end of this decade, we will be nationally respected and internationally known as a centre of excellence for our education and health research. We will lead with our distinctive integration of inter-disciplinary health and wellbeing studies and our education research. We will take a person-centred, integrated, community-based approach to address key social issues. We will embrace emergent and connected technologies to meet health and educational needs locally, nationally and internationally.

**Our vision is supported by three pillars: people, excellence, and impact.**

- / People:** We will develop an environment that attracts, develops and nurtures researchers at all career stages, and supports them to produce world-leading research.
- / Excellence:** We will become nationally respected and internationally known for our research, which encompasses a core commitment to excellent inter-disciplinary practices.
- / Impact:** We will embrace emergent technologies, develop our knowledge, and have an impact on policy and practice in Ireland and overseas.



# Values

We are committed to the following core values:

- / We support research that is undertaken and reported using the highest ethical standards, integrity and responsibility.
- / We value and support excellent research that addresses key social issues, advances the wellbeing of people and impacts on healthcare and education needs.
- / We provide a quality workplace where researchers may grow and develop their careers and that acts a source of accessible information and support, open to innovation and new ideas, and a forum for collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- / We support the rights of all students to access an excellent research-led education and to participate in an open, respectful environment to develop their knowledge, research and innovation.
- / We encourage social inclusion and promote diversity and respect for others. As institutional Athena Swan medal awardees, we support equality of opportunity in terms of gender and cultural difference.

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# Goals

To realise our vision, four key research goals have been established:

**1. We will develop our national and international research reputation by both building on our existing areas of research strength and by identifying and nurturing emerging capability.**

Objectives: We will;

- / Increase research capability and critical mass across our research priorities
- / Provide an explicit research focus (both external and international) for EHS staff and students
- / Support proactive and principled research, based on capacity and capability

**2. We will conduct collaborative research that addresses key societal challenges and social issues, in order to meet global health care and education needs.**

Objectives. We will;

- / Foster multi-disciplinary synergies and collaboration
- / Rapidly translate our research to inform international practice Inform policy changes, based on research evidence

**3. We will continue to increase the excellence and impact of our research.**

Objectives. We will;

- / Publish and disseminate our high quality research in eminent journals;
- / Document our research excellence using accepted metrics
- / Maximise the wider impact of our research through publicity, web sites, etc

**4. We will attract, develop and nurture researchers at all career stages and support them to produce world leading research.**

Objectives. We will;

- / Prioritise applicants with excellent research track records when recruiting
- / Enhance research productivity in academic staff members at all career stages
- / Encourage staff members to be 'research aware,' to embrace a research culture and communicate this to students whom they supervise/teach
- / Support the principles of the Athena Swan charter

## Key Targets

- Increase annual ISI publications by 35% and 5-year citation count by 40%
- Increase EHS ISI top quartile publication share to 50%
- Increase the number of sPhD enrolments by 25%
- Increase ratio of PhD graduations per 10 academic staff by 60%, in-line with 4-year FT completion
- To increase H2020 and other external research income per member of academic staff
- To ensure that all departments produce case studies to demonstrate research/ practice impact
- All academic staff will have clear plans to enhance research impact



# Research Strengths

EHS has identified four key areas of research strength and capability, each of which has associated research centres. Research centres are inter-disciplinary, cross-Faculty research groupings that align with one or more of the following themes;

## 1. Physical Activity and Human Performance.

Researchers in this theme explore the use of physical activity to improve health, wellbeing, activity, participation and performance across the life course.

*Research areas include:* assessing sedentary behaviour, enhancing physical activity, diet and health; improving physical activity in people with chronic conditions; human performance in sport; biomechanics; physiology and psychology of human performance. Research centres are;

- / PE PAYS (Physical Education, Physical Activity and Youth Sport Research Centre)
- / C-PAHR (Centre for Physical Activity & Health Research)

## 2. Social Inclusion.

The aim of research in this theme is to promote societal and health equality across the life course, supporting inclusion, participation and resilience within communities.

*Research areas include:* psycho-social population issues; inclusion, participation, collaboration, community relations and social change; public and patient involvement; health and wellbeing at individual and social levels. This Research centre is

- / The Centre for Social Issues Research

## 3. Professional Practice and Education.

Researchers in this theme investigate the needs of learners in classrooms and health-care settings; the use of evidence-based pedagogies and practices; and they develop and evaluate innovations in teaching, learning and assessment for the health and education sectors.

*Research areas include:* initial and continuing teacher education; evidence-based pedagogies; teaching innovations; teachers' professional contexts; practitioner education; clinical decision making; and the development of health practices and professions. Research centres are the;

- / Research Centre for Education and Professional Practice
- / National Centre for STEM Education

## 4. Optimising Health.

The focus of this theme is to improve patient /client outcomes through innovation-driven, 'value-added' research studies.

*Research areas include:* clinical audit; assessment of client access to services; engagement with stakeholders to improve intervention; interrogation of dedicated databases of population health and illness; improving asset utilisation, facility and patient management to deliver evidence-based advances in health processes, technologies and devices; evaluation of public health through inter-disciplinary models; engagement with population health promotion. Research centres are:

- / 4i (Interventions in Infection, Inflammation and Immunity)
- / Centre for Pre-Hospital Research

# The Health Research Institute

EHS researchers are key members of the Health Research Institute (HRI). This Institute brings together researchers across the University of Limerick with those at partner institutions who are interested in studying health and wellbeing.

The mission of the HRI is to conduct outstanding transformative research to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, patients, communities and populations. The HRI is structured around three thematic areas that complement EHS research strengths.

Themes include;

- / Technology Enhanced Health Outcomes
- / Lifestyle and Health
- / Health Service Delivery

HRI-registered studies are supported by staff with expertise in biostatistics, health informatics and health economics and they are facilitated by the Clinical Research Support Unit. The HRI provides a rich, collaborative environment that fosters discovery and innovation across health sciences to encourage better health, improved care and a healthier society.

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## Partners and Community Collaborators

EHS researchers work collaboratively with a number of key community and healthcare partners to ensure that our research addresses key social issues and meets healthcare and education needs. Our partners include:

- / Families
- / Patients, clients
- / Members of the public
- / Community groups
- / Service providers
- / Voluntary organisations
- / Professional bodies
- / Policy makers

## Our Institutional Partners include:

- / Acquired Brain Injury, Ireland
- / Arthritis Ireland
- / Department of Education and Skills
- / The Carer's Association
- / The Cope Foundation
- / DEBRA Ireland
- / Focus Ireland
- / Housing First
- / The HRB
- / The HSE
- / Limerick Prison and the Child Development Initiative
- / The Multiple Sclerosis Society
- / National Centre for Curriculum and Assessment
- / Parkinson's Association of Ireland
- / Pieta House



## Example collaborative projects include:

- / Studies with *Pieta House* to examine the impact of opening new Pieta Centres to enhance community support for those affected by suicide and deliberate self-harm.
- / The *Research Active Programme* (RAP) provides innovative training designed to build research capacity with, and for, adults with a disability. People with a disability are enabled through this programme to become effective co-researchers within university and community organisations.
- / Studies with *Acquired Brain Injury, Ireland* to improve community reintegration and rehabilitation of those affected by brain injury.
- / *The Cope Foundation* - Studies with COPE foundation examine the impact of transition from mainstream to segregated education for children living with learning disabilities.
- / The *UL GEMS Teddy Bear Hospital* project's aim is to alleviate childhood anxiety about the medical environment, its procedures and the professionals that work within it.

Studies with *Acquired Brain Injury, Ireland* to improve community reintegration and rehabilitation of those affected by brain injury.





# Postgraduate student research

Postgraduate research programmes in EHS are characterised by a commitment to provide the highest standards of Masters and Doctoral education to prepare students for careers, both inside and outside academia.

Our sPhD programmes consist of core and are elective taught modules and a significant research component carried out under academic supervision, enabling postgraduate students to develop intellectual, academic and technical rigour, personal and professional competencies and leadership skills.

Research projects at a doctoral standard involve a significant body of study that contributes new knowledge that is of publishable standard. Our sPhD graduates receive an education that prepares them to be an independent researcher, to think critically, and to lead on a broad range of professional issues.

All candidates are assigned two supervisors to support them in planning their research and their programme of study. Candidates form a cohort of students undertaking sPhD programmes across EHS and are encouraged to participate in our vibrant postgraduate researcher community. The programmes below are supported by a dedicated Course Director (CD) and an administrative team:

- / Structured PhD (sPhD) in Education and Health Sciences
- / Structured PhD (sPhD) in Education Practice



# Graduate Attributes

Postgraduate students develop technical skills and disciplinary knowledge during their research programmes, as well as a number of attributes. They are able to:

- / Think and communicate excellently, both within and across disciplinary fields.
- / Commit to effective analysis of issues and combine this with a capacity to articulate their ideas verbally, in written form, and through effective use of ICT.
- / Have a confidence to state their positions, to think for themselves and commit to responsible collaboration.
- / Engage in critical thinking and be positively engaged in ethical and responsible actions.

EHS graduates are knowledgeable, proactive, creative, responsible, collaborative and articulate. These qualities ensure that our research postgraduates are well qualified and positioned to undertake leadership positions in any health and education sector.

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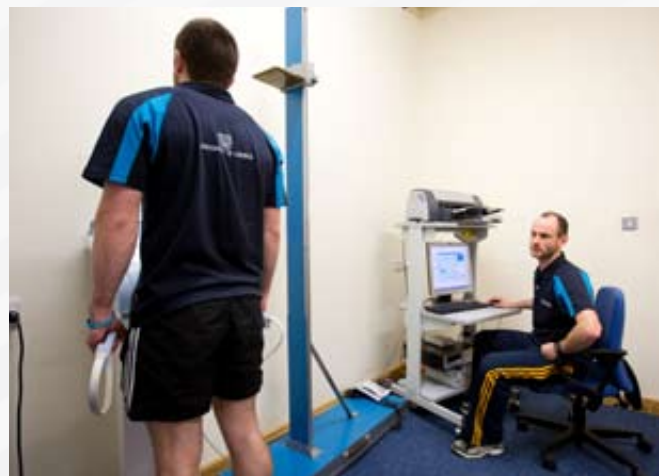


# The Future

In an inter-connected world, developments in health and education research must move rapidly to keep pace with the challenges that face today's societies. Our strategy is well aligned to these challenges.

We will achieve the highest standards in research excellence, impact and integrity. We embrace emergent and connected technologies and have a person-centred approach to health, education and wellbeing research, working with partners and stakeholders in projects that are sustainable and 'make a positive difference.'

We have a research environment which supports the development of EHS researchers at all career stages, and provides an excellent, research-led education for all our students. EHS has an ambitious, but achievable, vision of being known and respected for our contribution to education and health research, nationally and internationally. In order to realise this ambition and focus our work, it is imperative that we set out an overt implementation strategy and establish research targets.



The targets in Appendices are achievable for several reasons;

- / EHS research metrics have a clear positive growth trajectory and should continue for some time, capitalising on our investment in new positions (including Chairs).
- / Expectations about research outputs (type, number) are now made clear.
- / Publications by PhD students and submissions of PhD by publication are both increasing across EHS and UL's structures now encourage the latter.
- / New academic staff members are expected to come with a research track record.
- / Tenured track processes are now designed to encourage/reward types and amounts of publications.
- / Research support, training and coaching is available and is tailored to the needs of EHS academic staff members who require this.

Reaching our targets will enable EHS to realise the vision of this strategy document –to develop an international reputation for good quality research and to address key social issues and health and education needs, which are the focus of our work in this Faculty.

**Welcome to the challenge!**





# Appendix 1:

## Research Performance Information 2009 - 2013

EHS has developed well as a Faculty since 2009 and has had notable successes.

- / ISI publications increase from 51 to 163
- / ISI publications per academic increase from 0.40 to 1.25

However, we still need to 'publish or perish' as frequent publication is one of the few methods at our disposal to demonstrate academic talent. It brings attention to our scholars and to our institution, which can facilitate continued funding and an individual's progress through a chosen field.

*It is now important we also focus on the **quality** of publications and citations.*

- / ISI citations (2009-13) = 1,876
- / UL average citations per paper = 4
- / EHS average citations per paper = 1.7

Publications from GEMS researchers had the highest impact, with an average of 4.14 citations per paper, followed by 3.75 for Psychology and 3.71 for PESS.

It is very likely that EHS citations per paper will increase over the next years, due to citations from newer staff / Departments beginning to accrue to UL.

Of note in 2013, **37% of EHS ISI** papers fell into the **lowest impact category**, i.e., were never cited. Shifting this distribution will significantly improve our performance.

Encouragingly, more recent (2014) data show 42% of **EHS publications** are in the **top quartile** so EHS staff members' publications are 'moving in the right direction.'

Few books with prestigious publishers have been published by staff members of EHS.

There were 8 books published between 2009-13, compared to 13 books from S&E and 64 books from AHSS, which may reflect disciplinary differences in publishing. Staff from the Department of Education and Professional Practice (EPS) have been the main contributors to book publishing outputs from EHS.

Health is a fast-moving field with positive developments needing to rapidly impact on practice, so there is a requirement to disseminate study results quickly.

It may therefore be more strategic for EHS staff members working in health to focus on journal and online publications, rather than publishing books, to better keep pace with health developments.



# Appendix 2:

## Implementation Plan

### EHS Research Strategy

**1. Develop a critical mass of people in relation to research priorities,** defined as *sufficient numbers to ensure a 'cluster' (i.e., priority) becomes self-sustaining and creates further growth.* This is further defined by size, inter-relatedness, and level of communication within clusters.

#### 1.1. Priority Champions:

- / Role description of champions developed
- / Appointment of champions
- / Activities of champions reported to research committee
- / Priority activities funded by EHS (ie Distinguished lecture series)
- / Communications within clusters
- / Individual researchers expected to align with a specific cluster
- / Prestigious events with an external and/or international focus

#### 1.2. Recruitment

- / New appointments are linked to priorities
- / Introduction, expectations and priorities made clear and overt

**2. Increase capacity in relation to research priorities,** where capacity is defined as, a *process of individual and institutional development which leads to higher levels of skills and a greater ability to perform useful expertise.*

#### 2.1. New Masters level programmes are aligned with priority areas;

- / Increase post-doctoral and PhD funding applications that are linked to priority areas.

#### 2.2. Funding:

- / Increase numbers and levels of externally funded projects;
- / Use small proposal preparation bursaries in order to encourage quality applications (e.g., seed funding);
- / Provide training and information about external competitive funding;

#### 2.3. Align space and equipment provision / new developments with priorities.

- / Review of space & equipment needs across priorities;
- / Search for synergies in staff members / students use of equipment and space

### 3. Increase our external and international research focus

#### 3.1. Encourage external/national focus for postgraduate to post-doctoral processes

- / Eligibility to apply for fee waivers includes applying to IRC

#### 3.2. Encourage an international - EU and H2020 - focus:

- / Doctoral students encouraged to complete Erasmus+ funded exchange visits (gains credit in EHS sPhD programme)
- / Market our Masters programmes to non-Irish students eligible for Erasmus+ funding
- / Encourage applications for Marie Curie fellowships for EHS students at final stages of PhD
- / Encourage academic staff to mentor people applying for Marie Curie fellowships;
- / Support H2020 co-ordinators and leaders.



# Appendix 2:

## Implementation Plan EHS Research Strategy

*Continued*

### 4. Increase multi-disciplinary working across EHS

4.1. Develop new Masters programmes with a multi-disciplinary focus.

/ Develop an MSc in M- or E-health; an MSc in delivery of distance learning.

4.2. Attract PhD students with a multi-disciplinary focus;

/ Encourage applications for ITNs (PhD, post-doctoral students) with a multi-or cross-disciplinary focus.

4.3. Effective research that makes an impact requires a multi-disciplinary perspective.

/ Researchers will develop long term 'impact plans' for their particular research programme

/ Assess potential for multi-disciplinary working and wide(r) dissemination of results.

4.4. Display and 'celebrate' examples of multi-disciplinary good practice.

/ Hold regular partner / community / academia collaborative events to showcase EHS research and researchers.

### 5. Measure research excellence using standard research metrics and impactful case studies

5.1. Develop incentive system (aka research management system) to encourage excellent research.

5.2 Increase publication rates in high impact ISI journals

/ Increase citation levels, in line with the UL strategic plan for research

5.3. All researchers will complete 'impact' plans as part of the PDRS process

/ Include recognised performance indicators as part of plans.

5.4. Increase levels, types, of grant funding to support high quality research

### 6. Develop a user-centred research environment for EHS.

6.1. Develop online provision including easy, straightforward access to research information for staff, students, of EHS

6.2. Develop EHS-wide examples of policies, procedures and good practice in research support;

/ Liaise with HR to ensure that suitable training is available to interested and able researchers at all levels

6.3. Implement consistent reporting and audit of specific outcomes

/ All EHS research support received (e.g., seed funding; sabbatical and special research leave, etc.) will have governance, such as formal reporting back of outcomes, expenditure, etc.







EHS has been at the forefront of developing structured PhD (sPhD) programmes, led by staff members who are committed to the highest standards of research supervision and enquiry.

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