

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

**SUBMISSION TO ISSUES PAPER: CLARE COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN
2022-2028**

This submission by the University of Limerick relates to the upcoming review of the existing County Clare Development Plan and in particular is a response to the 'Issues Paper' booklet published by the Council with respect to this review.

The University understands that submissions at this stage relate solely to over-arching strategic issues with respect to the future development of County Clare within a regional and national planning context.

The University emphasises in this submission the core topics of particular relevance in the on-going development of the University and the consequential role of the University in the economic, social and cultural development of the County and the region.

The University acknowledges the positive focus of Clare Council in the 3 main issues identified are –

1. South Clare Economic Strategic Development Zone

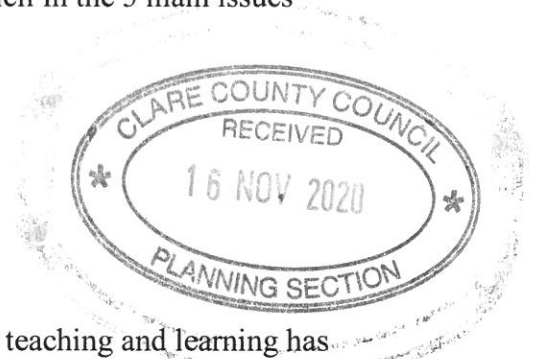
Background

The success of the University as an institution of excellence in teaching and learning has relied from its earliest days on amongst factors, the relationship between the University and the agents of economic, social and cultural development both in the public and private sectors.

The University of Limerick has, uniquely among Higher Education Institutions, focused on partnerships in education which implemented through Coop Education models, see students participate in accredited and assessed work-based learning in business and industry regionally, nationally and internationally.

This model of learning is the successful foundation on which UL is moving now to implement an Academy model for dual education placing enterprise at the fore of design and delivery of programme elements crucial to the siting, prosperity and longevity of industry in Ireland. This model will see Enterprise accommodated on campus and facilitated in its location by the agencies of State including Clare County Council.

The University acknowledges the leadership of the Council's Planning Department in the evolving land use strategies which have led from the initial South Clare Economic Corridor designation of the University's hinterlands in Clare to the current University Zone and forward under this proposed plan to the Strategic Development Zone (Designate). The securing of this designation is a complementary asset in the future development of the Academies model, the future development of the University in County Clare and the future balanced economic, social and cultural development of the region and the country.



Rationale

The University's interest in this proposal is founded on the commitment to continue delivering excellent, relevant education and research at even closer quarter with Enterprise. The academy model where enterprise takes the lead in industry-based provision allowing students the opportunity to graduate with an excellent academic foundation, a mindset for life-long learning and as sought after industry inductees is the cornerstone of this ambition. It is underpinned by translational and applied research initiatives in collaboration with the industry partners.

Academies

Academies will form part of the infrastructure both physical and intellectual, of firms who establish a base on the campus of the University. Elite students will be selected from the first year cohort to be immersed within the Academy throughout their student life at UL. Selection will be by formal assessment of aptitude and predilection. UL will deliver the modules and programmes relevant to the student degree while Enterprise will deliver specialist modules relevant to their industry. Central to the change in the model of engagement, teaching and training staff of Enterprise will be cited as adjunct faculty of the University. All aspects of the Firm's operations will become the on-site experiential learning place for students throughout their four-year undergraduate programme. Talent will be nurtured and will grow with the firm. External placement on international sites of the Academy firm will further broaden the learning experience. Firms will effectively grow their own talent pool of recruits securing the supply of excellent personnel and facilitating future planning and expansion. In tandem, the focus on challenged based learning in the Academy will provide the backbone for a vibrant research and innovation ecosystem.

Each Academy will bear the name of its founding Firm and of the University of Limerick on the site of individual firms, in agreement with the University. The base will be established with the support of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and Enterprise Ireland, acting with the Firm in line with established practice. Academies will be located in the Firm's facilities to a scale negotiated between the firm and UL at start-up.

Degrees awarded to graduating students will be paralleled with sector certification reflecting the graduate mastery in specialist abilities. Furthermore, it is envisaged that the development of European University Networks provided for in the 2017 Gothenburg Declaration will ultimately recognise the University Academy as a model showcasing the declaration at work and granting UL membership to allow cross-border financing from the EU budget and long-term sustainability. The network will also provide for multi-institutional recognition of University of Limerick awards.

It is planned also that multi-national firms establishing Academies with the University of Limerick will be enabled to offer the facilities of the Academy to existing or prospective employees worldwide.

The Academies will embrace further training and CPD of employees of their firm including formal education within the University towards PhD, Masters and Higher Diplomas and Degrees or towards continued professional accreditation delivered through innovative flexible and cumulative approaches, online or hybrid delivery.

The University will recognise prior learning and prior experience in awarding credits towards participation in such programmes.

In line with other projects of international scale the site will be commercially developed by a lead commercial partner who will, working with the State development agencies, undertake the development of the whole site as a single entity assuming risk and taking profit. Ownership will ultimately pass to the industry occupiers with the physical facilities of the academies provided within the firm's asset. State investment will be confined to the provision of infrastructure.

Enterprise

The development of these Academies will require that the University of Limerick expanded campus becomes a prime pitch to attract Enterprise. In partnership, Industry and University of Limerick have identified a model within which the population of students, industry employees and faculty will establish a place of Town and Gown where Enterprise and University will ultimately form seamlessly into Europe's Newest University Town. It will be a hub of Enterprise supporting Education, Life-long Learning and Innovation: from programme design, research development, knowledge exchange and technology transfer including piloting, prototyping and production.

University of Limerick is already in active conversation with State Agencies and Enterprise on this project.

Generated employment is projected at 3,500 jobs in the first ten years of development.

Designation

University of Limerick considers that the designation of the South Clare Economic Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) to support the development of these academies is a matter of national and regional significance. This zone will be a major economic driver for development within County Clare under the new Development Plan, one of the national '*key enablers*'.

University of Limerick wishes to acknowledge the support of the elected members of the Council in unanimous progression of this project in an adopted motion of the Council on April 9th 2018.

In particular, the University highlights the commitment of the Council's representatives on the Southern Region Assembly both current and of the first Board in securing the status of the project as a "*National Enabler*" and the citation of the project in the Strategy as a '*potential project of scale from a European perspective*'.

The University notes that the Issues Paper recognises the SDZ as *'a significant future economic driver'* within County Clare and that it is intended by the Council to include the SDZ in the County Development Plan.

The University strongly supports this strategic initiative and its inclusion in the Plan. It is considered that this zone will be one of the primary economic growth points in County Clare during the lifetime of the new plan.

The University of Limerick is particularly concerned to ensure that uses matrixed for the Strategic Development Zone Designate in the plan will enable the coherent development of industry-led academies elaborating on the Uses cited in the 2017 – 2023 County Development Plan. As noted by the council in its promotion of the SDZ, the project has the *'... potential to create a world class learning, research, living and working hub in a sustainable 'Town and Gown' environment'*

2. Core Strategy

It is noted that the Core Strategy seeks to identify and reserve land in appropriate locations to meet housing/populations demands and to aid in the definition of a settlement hierarchy.

In general the Core Strategy allocation has followed historic trends in settlement hierarchy terms, allocating population increases based on past performance, position in the settlement hierarchy and existing service provision capacity.

University of Limerick wishes to draw the Council's attention to an aspect of the Core Strategy that needs attention having particular regard to the designation of the University's hinterland as mentioned at 1 above.

The SDZ economic vision anticipates that 3,500 jobs can be created within the short term replicating the employment numbers on the current National Technological Park. This employment will generate additional population in the area, living primarily within the site and otherwise in surrounding settlements in County Clare and in Limerick.

To date, the population allocated to the DED occupied by the University (Ardnacrusha) has been under-represented partly because students who generally live on campus are not represented on census counts due to the standardisation of place and time counting as to place of residence on a particular Sunday night. Other factors of designation of the campus population over a broad electoral area serve to exacerbate this effect.

The existing 'settlement' at University of Limerick has, therefore, not been adequately recognised in the Core Strategy and core strategy projections are themselves deficient in the context of future University development and the development of the SDZ.

Going forward, the SDZ will require an additional population allocation commensurate with the employment being created and the new proposed land use.

3. Limerick Northern Distributor Road

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) (section 4) states that the *'fast track delivery of the Limerick Northern Distributor Road (LNDR) is a strategic investment priority for the MASP'*

The issues paper acknowledges that this link road will *'create a critical strategic direct road link between Shannon International airport and the University of Limerick-Clare campus, making it a highly desirable location for foreign inward investment'*

University of Limerick considers that the early full provision of the LNDR is vital to the realisation of the full economic impact of the SDZ and other developments within the present designated University Zone.

University of Limerick supports the RSES in this regard and considers that the early provision of this route should be given priority status in any new County Development Plan.

The Plan should also state that the route including the University Link needs to be provided as one unit and not in phases.

The LNDR is the key to the SDZ becoming a significant economic driver of the economy and linking up with Shannon International Airport with a synergy that will be impactful at regional level.

