University of Limerick

HEA An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas The Higher Education Authority

First Seven Weeks (F7W@UL) Programme

Overview of Initiative

The First Seven Weeks (F7W) programme was launched by UL in 2009 as the first of its kind in Ireland. Designed to enhance the first-year undergraduate student experience, it provided structured support for adjustment to university life resulting in increased student retention and progression.

In 2025, a university-wide action-focused working group was established to revise and enhance the programme within the framework of the first-year experience and the UL Student Engagement Forum. The revised and rebranded programme, **F7W@UL**, was informed by a changed higher education landscape after Covid-19. The initiative adopts a holistic approach to student engagement and success by addressing students' social, academic, and practical needs over seven themed weeks.

Key changes include:

1. Expanding our target audience to include all incoming students including 'New @UL' students, those returning from cooperative placement, studying abroad, illness, bereavement, and any other extended period of leave.
2. Highlighting key information, supports, and resources for our commuting students, who face a particular set of challenges.
3. Ensuring our social media communication is clear, correct, concise, and facilitates feedback and the closing of the feedback loop.

Monitoring & Oversight

Monitoring and reporting of operations take place through day-to-day line management structures in the Centre for Transformative Learning, which operates within the Office of the Provost and Deputy President. The programme is also reviewed and monitored through student feedback surveys, social media analytics, and staff input. SWOT analyses are conducted to assess the programme on an ongoing basis with a view to increasing effectiveness each iteration. The findings and recommendations are reported to Associate Vice-President Student Engagement and other stakeholders.

Key Features

- All students
- Student wellbeing, experience, & success focus
- Commuter students
- Transition focus

Aims & Objectives

Aim: To ensure a smooth transition for new entrants into third-level education, in turn leading to improved retention, progression, and student performance.
Objective 1: To enhance student engagement and support, thereby increasing retention.
Objective 2: To improve student retention and progression rates.

Institutional Context

UL Performance Agreement 2024–2028
(Key Performance Indicator 1.3: increase progression rate of new entrants to 92% by 2028)

Data & Evidence of Impact

In 2024, 71% of 3,649 students surveyed responded affirmatively that the F7W programme helped them stay on their course.
Although a direct causal relationship cannot be inferred as progression is multi-factorial, non-progression rates for new entrants in UL have fallen from 11% for the 2021/22 cohort to 8% for the 2023/24 cohort.

Positive student feedback is consistently received on the F7W directional guides and Hub staff. There has been increased footfall at the F7W Hub over time (from 2,157 in 2014/15 to 2,729 in 2024/25) and in 2025/26 a high level of social media engagement. Further impact data is planned to be gathered each year by conducting a F7W Student Survey which includes specific questions relevant to retention and progression.

Additional Information

- First Seven Weeks Programme at UL
- First Seven Weeks Interactive Handbook