University of Limerick

HEA | An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas The Higher Education Authority

Student Engagement and Support Officers (SESO)

Overview of Initiative

In 2021, a one-year SATLE-funded pilot initiative created four Student Engagement and Support Officer roles, aligned with each of the four faculties in UL. The initiative was a collaboration between the First Year Support Coordinator and faculty Assistant Deans for Academic Affairs, supported by the Student Engagement and Success Unit (Student Affairs, Library, and Centre for Transformative Learning).

The initiative aimed to contribute to improving non-progression rates of first-year undergraduate students by providing an identifiable "first port of call" for students within their faculties to assist them in resolving any academic or personal issue they experience. It also sought to expand supports for student transition and engagement and to cultivate belonging beyond first year undergraduate students, as well as to enhance engagement and partnership between academic departments and student support services.

At the end of the pilot year, analysis of the impact of these roles on supporting students' engagement, on proactive identification of students at risk of non-progression, and on developing stronger cohesion between student supports and faculties resulted in the roles being made permanent in 2022.

Monitoring & Oversight

As this is a mainstreamed service, monitoring and reporting of operations takes place through day-to-day line management structures. The Student Engagement and Support Officers report directly to the Student Support and Development Manager, who in turn reports to the Director, Student Affairs.

Annual reports are presented and discussed with the relevant faculty to share information on their specific experiences and to identify programmes and/or cohorts of students that require more targeted support.

Key Features

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

Aims & Objectives

Aim: The aim of the Student Engagement and Support Officers is to provide full-time undergraduate students with an identifiable "first port of call" within their faculty to assist them in resolving any academic or personal issue they experience to support timely progression through their studies.

Objective 1: To proactively identify and support students at risk of not realising their full academic potential, in collaboration with faculty and support staff.

Objective 2: To advise and support students so that they feel empowered to make appropriate choices concerning their engagement and progression in higher education.

Institutional Context

Key Performance Indicator 1.3 in the UL–HEA Performance Agreement of >92% progression for new entrants by 2028

Data & Evidence of Impact

Year-on-year increase in individual students engaging with the service. 1,813 engaged in 2024/25, representing a 23% increase from a baseline of 1,472 in 2021/22.

While sole or direct cause and effect cannot be inferred, as retention is a multi-factorial issue, non-progression rates for new entrants in UL have fallen from 11% for the 2021/22 cohort to 8% for the 2023/24 cohort.

Additional Information

- Student Engagement and Support Officers | University of Limerick
- Podcasts | University of Limerick
- Be MindfUL | University of Limerick
- Coffee and Chats: Wellbeing Cafe | University of Limerick