



A Structured Roadmap for Organisational Implementation of The HEA Odyssey Programme

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The European Commission recognises the major contribution played by career development conditions to attract and retain the best researchers in Europe however it also notes that *“The imbalances between the number of PhD graduates and the number of tenure track positions in the public science systems are an obstacle for retaining talent. Training and career development of researchers insufficiently focusses on entrepreneurship or opportunities outside academia. The increased dependency on short-lived, project-based, research funding, has also contributed to this”*.¹ The ERA Policy Agenda is committed to attracting the very best researchers and helping them to develop their careers and make their career choices realistically and effectively however *“The skills mismatches constitute a worrying trend for industry and businesses with negative impact on innovation and productivity both in highly innovative industry and services sectors. Incentivising researchers to pursue a career outside academia through enhanced inter-sectoral circulation schemes involving industry can help improve researchers’ employability and boost the permeability of talents across Europe’s economy and society.”*² The Odyssey Programme is an inter-sectoral circulation scheme.

The purpose of this document is to inform universities in Ireland on steps they can take to enable the Implementation of the Odyssey Programme in their University. This implementation framework is vitally important in the context of Ireland’s capability to realise its objectives in relation to the vision of Impact 2030³ *“We will ensure that researchers have the right skills and opportunities so that they can make their maximum contribution, whether that is in academia, industry, the public sector or elsewhere, and realise their own career potential while doing so. Recognising that the vast majority of early-career researchers will not remain in academia long-term, we will seek to improve career pathways, starting with a deeper understanding of the nature of the demand for research talent”*.⁴ The HEA is providing support by funding the Odyssey Programme across all Irish universities through this programme of funding.

This framework is intended to provide clear standards, and to be sufficiently flexible for Irish Universities to adapt The Odyssey Programme to the needs of their student communities. It is hoped that these guidelines will support the implementation of an inter-sectoral circulation scheme within Irish Universities.

¹ [CELEX:52020DC0628:EN:TXT.pdf](#)

² [CELEX:52020DC0628:EN:TXT.pdf](#)

³ [Impact 2030: Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy](#)

⁴ [impact-2030-irelands-research-and-innovation-strategy.pdf](#)

Scope of the Framework

This Implementation Framework sets out guidelines for Professional Staff in Irish Universities to roll out the Odyssey Programme for Researchers and PhD Candidates. Before we begin it is important to describe the Odyssey Programme

The Odyssey Programme

The two-day Odyssey Programme enables penultimate and final year PhD students, PostDocs, and other University Researchers to adapt, integrate, and expand on their existing expertise to prepare for diverse career choices. It enables participants to embrace and explore various avenues and identify career options that excite and challenge them. Odyssey is a catalyst for preparing our most talented people for careers in industry, government, non-profits, entrepreneurship, and beyond. Odyssey enables the participating Universities to embrace, embed, and support innovative and flexible career planning.

By building on their existing skills learned in an academic research environment, the Odyssey Programme enables the participants to understand and articulate how to adapt and apply their skills to non-academic careers. The programme envisages that the participants will become “academia to industry” ambassadors, creating new bidirectional pathways between universities and other high-performing organisations.

The nature of the Odyssey programme is such that it requires the participants to connect with and trust the trainers. Odyssey trainers must be experienced in work practices inside and outside universities, complement each other in knowledge, skills, and expertise. In addition, guest speakers (Odyssey Graduates from STEM, Medicine & Health, Business & Law and Humanities) contribute during the programme to help consolidate learning and enhance the participant experience.

Overview of The Odyssey Programme

Pre-Meeting

Hold a one-to-one pre-meeting with each participant before the Odyssey Programme. These meetings can last one hour. The objective of these meetings is three-fold:

1. An opportunity for the participants to get to know the facilitator and *vice versa* and, most importantly, build trust.
2. Provides the participant with an overview of what to expect from the two days.
3. Enables participants to reflect on the length of their career in academia and their personal career needs and expectations by answering a series of leading questions.

Two Day Agenda

The two-day Odyssey agenda enables participants to shift their thinking about career prospects in a group setting. Then, once that shift has happened, on Day Two, it enables them to move from a shift in thinking to implement a shift in their career trajectories.

Post-Meeting

Hold a one-to-one post-meeting with each participant following the Odyssey Programme. These meetings usually last one hour. Before this meeting, each participant will have provided their resumé/CV in an MS Word document for editing. Work with them to re-craft their resumé into a two-page competency-based non-academic CV. This meeting combines an individual CV clinic plus a final questionnaire. The purpose of the final questionnaire is to ascertain whether the participant has experienced the desired career mind shift that is encouraged in the programme. It also assists the participants in putting the programme lessons into practice.

Learning Outcomes

Odyssey participants are enabled to:

1. Gain a deeper awareness of the variety of exciting and challenging career options outside the academy.
2. Apply the change in perspective learned in this programme to willingly explore and progress to new career prospects.
3. Analyse and appraise the current job market and the many opportunities available to them.
4. Understand and project their skill set to jobs outside of academia.
5. Appreciate the cultural differences and success metrics in organisations beyond academia, thereby enhancing their potential for future leadership and impact in multiple sectors.

Evaluation and follow up

To evaluate the effectiveness of this programme it is important to monitor the progress of the participants over two years to determine their career outcomes. An analysis of the specific characteristics of programme should also be compiled inclusive of detailed feedback from participants (including before and after interviews and questionnaires), leading to a more enhanced programme highlighting areas for improvement and development.

Quote from a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education

“A career-diversity program overseas is worth replicating at American universities.”

“Now more than ever, amid budget cuts and academic-job shortages, we need to publicize our best practices and share programs that work. In that spirit, I want to spotlight a career-diversity program for graduate students in Ireland — the Odyssey Program at University College Cork — that deserves a tryout on the American side of the pond.” **Professor Len Casutto**



Step-by Step Guide to Implementing the Odyssey Programme

Step1: Project Setup – Assemble team

The first step involves establishing a strong foundation for the Odyssey Programme. This includes assembling a multidisciplinary group or team with clear roles and responsibilities, such as a project manager, facilitators, and administrative support. Governance structures should be defined to ensure accountability and compliance with your institutional policies. Financial oversight mechanisms must be implemented to manage budgets effectively and maintain transparency. A detailed project charter outlining objectives, scope, and deliverables is an option to choose which would guide all subsequent activities.

Step 2: Stakeholder Engagement – Focus Groups and Institutional Buy-in

Engaging stakeholders early is critical for programme success. This step focuses on conducting focus groups and consultations within your organisation to secure institutional commitment. Communication strategies should be developed to articulate the programme's value proposition, aligning it with institutional goals and national research priorities. Due to the nature of this programme (to encourage participants to pursue roles beyond academia) building strong relationships with academic leaders and professional staff will assist with buy-in and facilitate implementation across the university.

Step 3: Recruitment - Participants

Recruiting participants may be challenging during the first iteration of the programme. Aim to attract a diverse cohort of penultimate and final-year PhD candidates (plus researchers if you wish) from various disciplines. Implement inclusive selection processes to ensure representation across all disciplines. Clear eligibility criteria and transparent communication about programme benefits will encourage participation. This step may also involve coordinating with a variety of university departments to identify suitable candidates and confirm their commitment to the programme schedule.

Step 4: Pre-Programme Activities

Before the main programme, facilitators should conduct individual pre-meetings with participants to build trust and set expectations. These sessions provide an opportunity to explain the programme structure, objectives, and anticipated outcomes. Facilitators should use reflective questions to help participants assess their career aspirations and readiness for change. This personalized attention ensures participants are mentally prepared and motivated to fully engage in the two-day programme. It also builds trust, which is very important in this programme.

Step 5: Deliver 2-Day Odyssey Programme

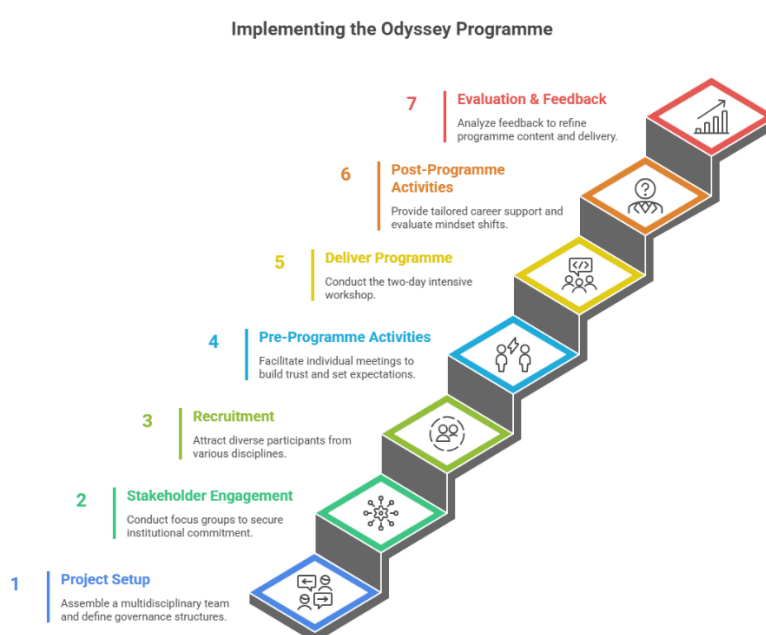
The core of the Odyssey Programme is the two-day intensive workshop designed to shift participants' perspectives on career opportunities beyond academia. Day One focuses on challenging traditional academic career assumptions and broadening horizons through interactive sessions and group activities. Day Two emphasizes practical strategies for implementing career transitions, including action planning and skill mapping. Guest speakers from industry and former participants share real-world insights to inspire and guide attendees.

Step 6: Post-Programme Activities – CV clinics, final questionnaire

Following the workshop, facilitators hold one-to-one post-meetings to consolidate learning and provide tailored career support. A key component is the CV clinic, where participants transform academic CVs into competency-based formats suitable for non-academic roles. Facilitators also administer a final questionnaire to evaluate mindset shifts and capture feedback. These activities ensure participants leave with actionable tools and confidence to pursue diverse career paths.

Step 7: Evaluation, KPI's, Feedback

The final step involves comprehensive evaluation and reporting to measure programme impact and inform future improvements. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as participant satisfaction, career transition rates, and institutional support should be tracked. Feedback from participants and stakeholders can then be analyzed to refine programme content and delivery to suit your university needs.



Odyssey Tool Kit

The Odyssey Toolkit is designed to support implementation. It includes a variety of tools and resources to help facilitate the effective roll-out of the programme in your institution. The toolkit comprises the following components:

- Email Announcing the Programme
- Email to Participants
- Pre-Meeting Questionnaire
- 2 Day Agenda
- Generic CVs
- Final Questionnaire
- All Presentations provided by the coordinator during the programme

All templates and presentations are available upon request to the HEA National Odyssey Programme Coordinator marykate.oregan@ucc.ie .

Mary Kate is also happy to meet and discuss the programme and assist you with any questions you may have.

