HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Strategy & Performance Dialogue Process 2025–2028

Contents

1. Introduction and process overview

The HEA Act 2022 provides for a system performance framework and associated performance agreements with designated institutions of higher education.[1] The HEA has a mandate to measure and assess the strategic performance of designated institutions of higher education with a view to strengthening the performance of the higher education system and to ensure institutions' accountability.

The System Performance Framework 2023–2028 sets out parameters under which designated institutions of higher education can identify their contribution to national strategy, as appropriate to each institution's mission, scale, location, and strategic plan. The creation of Performance Agreements (PAs) with higher education institutions (HEIs), and the monitoring of same via reporting and dialogue with the HEA, provides robust evidence on institutional and system health and informs the development of national policy.

In 2024, Performance Agreements between the HEA and designated institutions of higher education were established in accordance with the System Performance Framework 2023–2028. Performance Agreements are the mutually agreed basis for reporting on and strategic review of an institution's performance. This review will take the form of an annual Strategy and Performance Dialogue process that consists of three components:

- HEI Impact Assessment Case Study (IACS)
- HEI Self-Evaluation Report (SER)
- HEI–HEA Strategy and Performance Dialogue meeting

The Strategy and Performance Dialogue process for 2025–2028 has been designed following a multi-stage consultation with HEIs and is responsive to learning from previous framework processes. Revisions to the process for 2025–2028 include:

- Fixed reporting schedule and templates to support HEI planning.
- Revised Impact Assessment Case Study process to support enhanced transparency and learning.
- Revised Self-Evaluation Report template to capture HEI evaluation of and strategic reflection on performance.
- Direct engagement with the HEA Executive in Strategy and Performance Dialogue meetings to enable a discussion informed by national strategy and policy.
- Facility to request modifications to Performance Agreements to support responsiveness to changes in institutional strategy and/or national policy.

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[1] 'Designated institutions' refers to designated institutions of higher education as defined in Section 53 (1) of the HEA Act, 2022, with which the HEA shall or may enter into a Performance Agreement, as per Section 36 (1) and (2) of the Act.

1.1 Annual reporting and review schedule

Performance Agreements span the period September 2024 to August 2028 and reporting and review of institutions' performance under the System Performance Framework 2023–2028 will occur in 2025, 2026, 2027, and 2028. An indicative schedule for the annual reporting and review cycle is outlined below.

Strategy and Performance Dialogue	Indicative Timeframe
IACS call for submissions	February
IACS due	March
SER templates issue	April
SER due	September
HEA review of SER	October
Strategic and Performance Dialogue meetings	November–December
Latest month to request PA modifications for current academic year onwards	December
Meeting note shared	January

Table 1: Strategy and Performance Dialogue process annual cycle schedule 2025–2028

2. Impact Assessment Case Study

Annual reporting requirements under the System Performance Framework 2023–2028 include the submission of an Impact Assessment Case Study. Impact Assessment Case Studies (IACS) are linked to a positive funding mechanism that supports and recognises excellent performance within the higher education and research system.

The purpose of IACS is to:

- Demonstrate the impact of the higher education and research system on society, the environment and the economy at the local, national and international level.

- Showcase exemplary HEI initiatives that have contributed to the achievement of national strategy.

- Enhance dissemination of good practice and learning across the system.

- Gather evidence to inform public policymaking and to identify areas for potential further development and investment in the system.

- Inform the allocation of annual performance funding.

IACS will be reviewed by an independent expert evaluation panel according to the process set out in the [Impact Assessment Case Study Information Pack](). An overview of the IACS process is provided below:

- HEIs submit a case study that demonstrates the impact of an exemplary initiative (see Table 1 of the [information pack]()).
- Case studies are reviewed and scored by an independent expert evaluation panel.
- HEIs are notified of process outcomes and provided with feedback.
- Performance Funding allocations are announced and ['Stories of Impact']() are published online.
- HEIs in receipt of Performance Funding submit project plans and budgets for performance funding projects to the HEA for approval.
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks are agreed, and approved projects commence.
- HEIs report to the HEA annually on progress, outcomes, and expenditure for the duration of the projects (up to three years).

3. Self-Evaluation Report

A Self-Evaluation Report (SER) capturing performance in relation to the objectives and targets set out in the institution's Performance Agreement will be due for submission annually (see Table 1). This report will focus on performance in the previous academic year (e.g. the 2025 report will focus on the academic year 2024/25) and will comprise two parts, as set out below:

Part A — Performance Indicators:

- Completion of an indicator table for each Performance Objective. The 'Result' column should be completed by providing the most up-to-date data available. The period to which the data relates can be specified under 'Data source & date.'
- Brief explanatory notes, for example on data source, collection mechanisms, period to which the data relates, or methodology for calculation or verification of metrics, may be included.

Part B — Performance Evaluation and Strategic Reflection:

- Evaluation of the institution's performance in relation to the indicator data provided for each Performance Objective in Part A, including trend analysis, where appropriate.
- Reflection on learnings or insights from the institution's evaluation of performance and information on how that will be used to inform strategy, planning, policy, and/or decision making in the institution.
- Identification of learnings or insights from the institution's evaluation of performance that may contribute to system learning and/or national policy development and implementation.

HEI reporting will adhere to a fixed template over the 4 years (see Appendix 1: Example Self-Evaluation Report Template). Templates will be pre-populated with Performance Agreement data and annual SER data and will issue to HEIs in April. Queries relating to the SER may be sent to systemperformance@hea.ie in advance of the submission deadline.

Word count limits apply to some sections of the SER. These word limits are in place to support efficient and focused reporting and apply to all HEIs. Where an institution's report exceeds the word count

limits, the institution will be asked to revise and resubmit the report. Appendices are not permitted. Further guidance on reporting requirements is embedded within the SER template (see Appendix 1 for an illustrative example of the SER template).

Data submitted by the institution in the SER will be reviewed by the HEA prior to the Strategy and Performance Dialogue meeting. The institution may be contacted with queries arising from the submitted report in advance of the meeting. The SER report will be published (with redactions where necessary) on the HEA website after the conclusion of the annual Strategy and Performance Dialogue process.

4. Strategy and Performance Dialogue meeting

Performance and strategy will be discussed in an annual Strategy and Performance Dialogue meeting. The institution will be represented at this meeting by up to five members of senior leadership, including the head of the institution. Two additional HEI staff with specialist knowledge of performance evaluation or strategic planning processes in the institution may also attend. Relevant members of the HEA's Senior Management Team and System Development and Performance Management unit will attend.

Meeting agendas will be tailored to the institution and informed by the SER, System Performance Dashboard data, and current or emerging national strategy or priorities. It is expected that the discussion will focus on performance in relation to objectives and targets, insights and learning arising from the self-evaluation, and priorities in and adjustments to implementation going forward. The meeting may also address proposed modifications where relevant (see Section 5).

A meeting note will be produced and shared with the institution.

5. Performance Agreement modification process

5.1 Scope of modification process

Modifications to Performance Agreements may be requested where there is a significant change in an institution's strategy or policy. Changes to or developments in national strategy or policy and its implementation may also necessitate modifications. Modifications are expected to apply at Performance Objective or indicator level (e.g. adding, revising, or deleting an indicator). Modification requests related to targets are not within the scope of this process.

Modification requests received before 31 December may apply to the current academic year, meaning the revised Performance Agreement will form the basis for reporting due in the following year. For example, where modifications requested in December 2025 are approved, the revised Performance Agreement will form the basis for reporting in 2026 (i.e. in the SER due in September 2026 on the academic year 2025/26).

Modifications notified to the HEA after 31 December cannot be applied retroactively and will not take effect until the following academic year (e.g. a modification requested in January 2026 will apply from academic year 2026/27 and be reported on in the SER due in September 2027).

5.2 Request for modifications

The institution should notify the HEA in writing of any proposed modifications to the Performance Agreement at the earliest opportunity. Requests for modifications may be submitted at any point in the year and must include a clear and robust supporting rationale.

A modification request should be submitted in writing by the President's Office or equivalent to systemperformance@hea.ie. Where appropriate, the institution will then be asked to submit a revised Performance Agreement for review by the HEA. Once modifications have been agreed, the revised Performance Agreement will be signed by all relevant parties and published on the HEA website.

HEIs will also be required to note in the SER any modifications to the Performance Agreement requested or approved during the reporting period. This information may be discussed in the Strategy and Performance Dialogue meeting. Approved modifications will inform future monitoring and review processes and HEA reporting on the higher education and research system.

6. System Performance Framework and Governance Oversight Framework

The HEA implements the System Performance and Governance Oversight frameworks as parallel, complementary frameworks. As part of the annual Strategy and Performance Dialogue process, steps will be taken to ensure that the institutions have engaged with the required elements of the Governance Oversight Framework. Where there are issues arising, the HEA may deem an institution to be ineligible to receive Performance Funding (see also *Eligibility decision process* in the IACS Information Pack).

7. System Performance

Following the conclusion of the annual Strategy and Performance Dialogue review cycle, the HEA will provide an update on the system's performance and on insights and learnings from the process to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). An interim and final System Performance Report will provide an overview of the Higher Education System, capture progress and outcomes under the 2023–2028 Framework, and identify key challenges and opportunities for the higher education and research system.

Appendix 1. Example Self-Evaluation Report Template

Introduction

This Self-Evaluation Report will form the basis of the HEA's assessment of the strategic performance of the institution with respect to the objectives and targets set in the Performance Agreement established between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and [institution] in accordance with the System Performance Framework 2023–2028.

In line with the HEA's mandate to measure and assess institutions' strategic performance with a view to strengthening the performance of the higher education system and of designated institutions, and to ensure institutions' accountability, this Self-Evaluation Report will be published on the HEA website. The HEA will engage with institutions regarding any required redactions prior to publication.

It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that the information presented in the submitted report (including qualitative and quantitative data) is accurate.

Guidance Note

- All sections of the HEA reporting template should be completed in full.

- The format of the template should not be altered.

- The template has been pre-populated with the agreed Performance Objectives, indicators and targets. Pre-populated elements of the template reflect the Performance Agreement and these entries should not be amended. Queries relating to pre-populated information should be submitted to systemperformance@hea.ie.

- Where word count limits apply, these limits should not be exceeded.

- Appendices are not permitted.

- Reporting should be clear, concise, and evidence based.

- Narrative or bullet point formats may be used, and the use of plain English is encouraged.

- Reporting should be cognisant of the information provided in the System Performance Framework 2023–2028 and System Performance Framework Glossary.

- Where institutional strategies, policies, or other institutional documents are referenced, these should be hyperlinked where possible.

- Data presented in the report should be the most recent data available to the institution (dates should be specified).

- It is the responsibility of higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that the information provided in the report is accurate.

- Redaction may be agreed with the HEA prior to publication, as appropriate.

- The report must be signed by the head of the institution prior to submission.

- The report should be submitted to systemperformance@hea.ie by the stated deadline.

Data Protection

The HEA as data controller will process personal data received via this form in compliance with GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. We will only process the data received via this form for the purposes of reviewing, evaluating, and reporting on the System Performance Framework 2023–2028 and data will be retained in line with our Records Management Policy only as long as is necessary to meet this purpose. For more information, please see the HEA's Data Privacy Notice.

Part A: Performance Indicators

Complete the Performance Objective indicator tables below by entering the most up-to-date indicator data available in the '2024/25 result' column. The timeframe to which the data relates should be added after the data source in the 'Data source and date' column. Pre-populated elements of these tables reflect data in Performance Agreements and these entries should not be amended.

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Performance Objective *n*

[insert 40-word title]

Transversal areas of impact:

No.	Indicator	Data source & date	Data Type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
n.1.											
n.2.											
n.3.											
n.n											

Technical note on indicator data for PO *n*:

Where necessary, a brief explanatory note relating to the data in the table above may be provided here. For example, a note on data source or collection mechanisms, or on methodology for calculation or verification of metrics. Please note that analysis of performance in relation to targets should be reserved for Part B. [200 words approx./ Delete if not required]

Pillar: Research & Innovation

Performance Objective *n*

[insert 40-word title]

Transversal areas of impact:

No.	Indicator	Data source & date	Data Type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25 target	2024/25 result	2025/26 target	2026/27 target	2027/28 target	Cumulative target
n.1.											
n.2.											
n.3.											
n.*n*											

Technical note on indicator data for PO *n*:

Where necessary, a brief explanatory note relating to the data in the table above may be provided here. For example, a note on data source or collection mechanisms, or on methodology for calculation or verification of metrics. Please note that analysis of performance in relation to targets should be reserved for Part B. [200 words approx./ Delete if not required]

Part B: Performance Evaluation and Strategic Reflection

Text should be added to the white boxes in each of the tables below. Word count should be recorded as indicated. Guidance on the information required in each table is provided in the shaded boxes. Pre-populated elements of Part B reflect the Performance Agreement and these entries should not be amended.

Section 1: Context

Provide an update on the context for the implementation of the institution's Performance Agreement in academic year 20[XX]/[XX]. This should include information on the following, as relevant:

- Institutional strategy, including stage of development and/or implementation of the Strategic Plan.

- Changes to the organisation's structure and/or senior leadership.

- Changes to the profile of the institution, i.e. significant changes to the number of staff and/or students or to programme delivery.

- Improvement or development of data collection and evaluation systems and processes, e.g. action taken to address data challenges or gaps, or any new challenges or data gaps that have been identified since the development of the Performance Agreement or submission of the previous SER.

- Any modifications (requested or approved) to the Performance Agreement.

Word limit: 500

[Word count:]

Section 2: Evaluation of Performance

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Performance Objective _n_
[insert 40-word title]
Transversal areas of impact:

Provide an evaluation of the institution's performance in relation to this Performance Objective, with reference to the indicator data provided in Part A. This should include:

- Analysis of the indicator data for this Performance Objective, e.g.:

  o Trend analysis and benchmarking of performance with reference to baselines, benchmarks, and targets. Graphs or charts to illustrate the analysis provided should be labelled and cross-referenced in the commentary.

- Assessment of implementation, e.g.:

  o Effectiveness of the specific actions related to the Performance Objective as demonstrated by the analysis of the indicator data.

  o Internal or external factors that have supported or impeded the achievement of targets.

  o Any additional evidence of performance, e.g. qualitative evidence of outcomes.

- Strategic reflection, e.g.:

  o Any learning from the analysis of the institution's performance.

  o How learning is being applied to maintain and/or enhance implementation and outcomes in future.

  o How learning is being used to inform decision making, strategy development, policy, and/or strategic planning.

  o New or emerging opportunities, challenges, and risks related to the Performance Objective.

  o Priority(s) in relation to this Performance Objective for the year ahead, with reference to any new actions or initiatives to support implementation.

Word limit: 1,000

[Word count:]

Pillar: Research & Innovation

Performance Objective *n*

[insert 40-word title]

Transversal areas of impact:

Provide an evaluation of the institution's performance in relation to this Performance Objective, with reference to the indicator data provided in Part A. This should include:

- Analysis of the indicator data for this Performance Objective, e.g.:

  o Trend analysis and benchmarking of performance with reference to baselines, benchmarks, and targets. Graphs or charts to illustrate the analysis provided should be labelled and cross-referenced in the commentary.

- Assessment of implementation, e.g.:

  o Effectiveness of the specific actions related to the Performance Objective as demonstrated by the analysis of the indicator data.

  o Internal or external factors that have supported or impeded the achievement of targets.

  o Any additional evidence of performance, e.g. qualitative evidence of outcomes.

- Strategic reflection, e.g.:

  o Any learning from the analysis of the institution's performance.

  o How learning is being applied to maintain and/or enhance implementation and outcomes in future.

  o How learning is being used to inform decision making, strategy development, policy, and/or strategic planning.

  o New or emerging opportunities, challenges, and risks related to the Performance Objective.

  o Priority(s) in relation to this Performance Objective for the year ahead, with reference to any new actions or initiatives to support implementation.

Word limit: 1,000

[Word count:]

Pillar: Access & Participation

Performance Objective *n*

[insert 40-word title]

Transversal areas of impact:

Provide an evaluation of the institution's performance in relation to this Performance Objective, with reference to the indicator data provided in Part A. This should include:

- Analysis of the indicator data for this Performance Objective, e.g.:

  o Trend analysis and benchmarking of performance with reference to baselines, benchmarks, and targets. Graphs or charts to illustrate the analysis provided should be labelled and cross-referenced in the commentary.

- Assessment of implementation, e.g.:

  o Effectiveness of the specific actions related to the Performance Objective as demonstrated by the analysis of the indicator data.

  o Internal or external factors that have supported or impeded the achievement of targets.

  o Any additional evidence of performance, e.g. qualitative evidence of outcomes.

- Strategic reflection, e.g.:

  o Any learning from the analysis of the institution's performance.

  o How learning is being applied to maintain and/or enhance implementation and outcomes in future.

  o How learning is being used to inform decision making, strategy development, policy, and/or strategic planning.

  o New or emerging opportunities, challenges, and risks related to the Performance Objective.

  o Priority(s) in relation to this Performance Objective for the year ahead, with reference to any new actions or initiatives to support implementation.

Word limit: 1,000

[Word count:]

Pillar: Engagement

Performance Objective *n*

[insert 40-word title]

Transversal areas of impact:

Provide an evaluation of the institution's performance in relation to this Performance Objective, with reference to the indicator data provided in Part A. This should include:

- Analysis of the indicator data for this Performance Objective, e.g.:

  o Trend analysis and benchmarking of performance with reference to baselines, benchmarks, and targets. Graphs or charts to illustrate the analysis provided should be labelled and cross-referenced in the commentary.

- Assessment of implementation, e.g.:

  o Effectiveness of the specific actions related to the Performance Objective as demonstrated by the analysis of the indicator data.

  o Internal or external factors that have supported or impeded the achievement of targets.

  o Any additional evidence of performance, e.g. qualitative evidence of outcomes.

- Strategic reflection, e.g.:

  o Any learning from the analysis of the institution's performance.

  o How learning is being applied to maintain and/or enhance implementation and outcomes in future.

  o How learning is being used to inform decision making, strategy development, policy, and/or strategic planning.

  o New or emerging opportunities, challenges, and risks related to the Performance Objective.

  o Priority(s) in relation to this Performance Objective for the year ahead, with reference to any new actions or initiatives to support implementation.

Word limit: 1,000

[Word count:]

Section 3: System Learning and Policy Development

Comment on any learning or insights arising from the institution's self-evaluation of performance in relation to the Performance Agreement that may contribute to system learning and/or national policy development and implementation.

Word limit: 300

[Word count:]

Section 4: Signature of the Head of the Institution

The SER should be signed by the Head of the Institution prior to submission.

On behalf of **[institution]**, I declare that the particulars supplied in this report are true and correct.	
Signature:	
Print Name:	
Date:	