

Performance Agreement 2024–2028 between the HEA and University of Limerick



HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Preamble

This Performance Agreement is established between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and University of Limerick (UL) in accordance with the System Performance Framework 2023–2028. The Agreement identifies University of Limerick’s performance objectives and the associated implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting processes.

This Performance Agreement will be used by the HEA to measure and assess the strategic performance of the institution via an annual cycle of reporting against the agreement and strategy and performance dialogue. University of Limerick should notify the HEA in writing of any proposed modifications to the Performance Agreement with a supporting rationale when submitting the annual report. Any agreed amendments to the Performance Agreement will be recorded by the HEA with the supporting rationale. This information may inform future monitoring and review processes and inform HEA reporting at a system level.

The HEA and University of Limerick acknowledge that policy underlying some or all of this Performance Agreement is subject to review from time to time by the HEA or Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The HEA and University of Limerick agree that if changes need to be made to the Performance Agreement because of such a review, the HEA will notify the institution in writing.

This Performance Agreement will be published on the HEA website in line with the HEA mandate to measure and assess institutions’ strategic performance with a view to strengthening the performance of the higher education and research system and of Higher Education Institutions, and to ensure institutions’ accountability. It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that the information presented in the Performance Agreement (including qualitative and quantitative data) is accurate.

The term of this Performance Agreement is from September 2024 to August 2028 unless terminated earlier by agreement.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Context

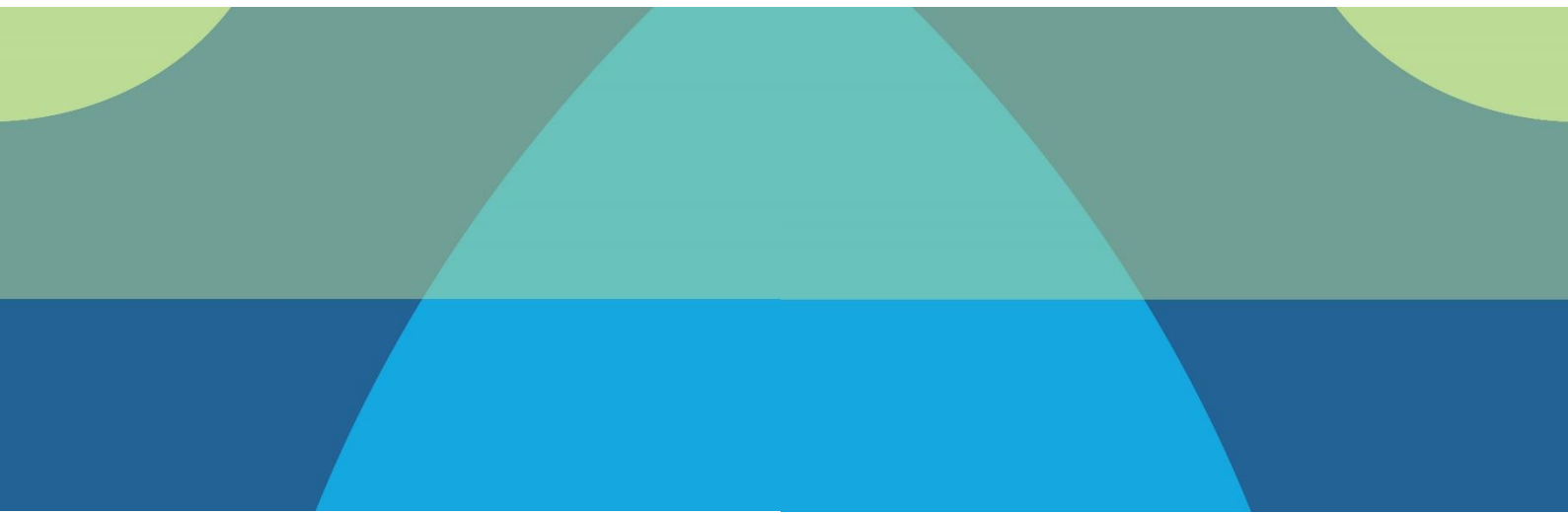
Overview of the institution and its context.....	4
Approach to the development of the Performance Agreement.....	5
Structures in place for evaluation	6

Section 2: Performance Objectives

Performance Objective 1.....	7
Performance Objective 2.....	13
Performance Objective 3.....	21
Performance Objective 4.....	27
Performance Objective 5.....	34

Section 3: Matrix and Signatures

Framework Matrix	40
Signatures	41



Performance Agreement 2024–2028

Section 1: Context

Overview of the institution and its context

University of Limerick (UL) celebrated our 50th anniversary as a HEI in 2022. As a pioneering and dynamic young university, UL has built a reputation for our excellent fundamental and translational research with deep societal impact; co-operative education for all our undergraduate students; innovative programmes of learning that are increasingly co-designed and co-delivered with partners in industry, government, and civil society; and excellent graduate employability. Leveraging our extensive network of partnerships with industry, government, communities, and academic institutions, we are a catalyst for social and economic transformation in Limerick, the Mid-West region, and the country, with international reach.

Having been established in synchronicity with Ireland joining the European Communities, we maintain a strong commitment to Europe, as evident in hosting the largest Erasmus+ programme in the country, and through our partnerships and growing engagement in Horizon Europe. In the academic year 2023/24, the University had 17,972 students enrolled. 4,540 (25%) of these were postgraduate students. 972 of the postgraduate cohort are working toward PhDs. 2,681 (15%) of our students are enrolled on a part-time/remote basis. 2,278 (13%) of our students are enrolled from outside of Ireland.

On 30th September 2024, the University employed 2,042 FTE staff. 1,073 FTE staff (53%) are in Academic roles and 969 (47%) are in Professional, Management or Support roles.

As stated in our current Strategic Plan, *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019–2024*, UL's mission is 'to build on the expertise of our scholars in creating, harnessing and imparting knowledge for the benefit of our students and the enrichment of our community'. Our mission puts the students, and their future impact on society, at the heart of all we do. In shaping the talent pipeline for the Mid-West and for the country, UL focuses on educating the professional leaders, disruptors, and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the [CINNTE Institutional Review report](#) (2020), we instigated a calibration of the Strategic Plan in 2021. While maintaining the five goal areas, priorities have shifted, with the amplification of being a research-led HEI, an emphasis on green internationalisation, a pronounced focus on people, institutional culture and communication, and the embedding of sustainability.

After the calibration of the Strategic Plan, *Wisdom for Action: Research Strategy 2022–2027*; *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022–2027* and the UL Mission-based Sustainability Framework 2030 were finalised. Most recently, *Human Rights, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027* was completed and the new Global Engagement Strategy 2024–2028 is

emerging. These strategies form the basis of this Performance Agreement and will inform the development of the new university strategy.

Approach to the development of the Performance Agreement

The development of the Performance Agreement is founded upon the extensive stakeholder consultations that have underpinned the calibration of *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019–2024*, *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022–2027*, *Wisdom for Action: Research Strategy 2022–2027*, our Athena Swan Action Plan, *Human Rights, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027*, the IT Strategy and the development of the Sustainability Framework. It implements key recommendations made by CINNTE, together with insights from our Quality Review Cycle and the respective Quality Improvement Plans.

Our Sustainability Framework 2030 weaves sustainability into every facet of university operations. In 2022, we mobilised the UL community to make the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) actionable within the context of higher education. Furthermore, we have developed an ambitious Climate Action Roadmap 2030 that responds to sectoral requirements.

Similarly, our commitment to human rights, equality, diversity, and inclusion is central to all areas of institutional performance, as the people of UL — students and staff, and the organisational culture — are central to our endeavours.

This Performance Agreement was developed collaboratively by members of the Executive Committee working with their respective units. The Executive Committee and Governing Authority have noted progress made through this engaged and iterative process. The Performance Agreement was approved by the Executive Committee on 23rd October and the Governing Authority on 29th October 2024.

At the HEA visit to UL in April 2024, it was agreed that the university strategy development timeline be extended to allow the incorporation of recommendations from the Section 64 report and to facilitate adequate consultation with stakeholders. This Performance Agreement is expected to be updated in 2025 to reflect the new university strategy, in line with the HEA process to modify performance agreements. On 27th May 2024, the Governing Authority requested that we explicitly state that the Performance Agreement may be amended, with potentially significant changes proposed, as we develop our new strategic plan.

Structures in place for evaluation

The primary responsibility for the implementation, monitoring, assessment and reporting on the Performance Agreement will rest with the Executive Committee (EC). The Finance, Performance & Strategy Committee will have an oversight role in the process.

The Governing Authority (GA) will also provide oversight and strategic guidance to the process, with care taken to ensure alignment between the Performance Agreement and the new Strategic Plan.

The UL IT Strategy, *UL Enable (2022–2027)*, sets out our vision to create a world-class digital ecosystem and associated services to support the strategic goals of the University of Limerick. Included in the strategy are plans to facilitate a data-driven environment where data is accessible, measurable, and reliable.

These enhancements will build on work already completed on KPI dashboards in research, finance, human resources, academic registry, and quality assurance. During the term of this Performance Agreement, there will be further development of the business intelligence capability of the University. This will underpin the implementation of an integrated and rolling multi-year planning and budgeting cycle.

The main existing gap in data collection and evaluation is an inability to integrate processes and reports that are based on historic data with future data, where forecasts and plans are set out. During the term of the Performance Agreement, it is intended that this gap will be addressed, thereby enabling strategic planning to be based on past trends that inform future targets, with seamless linkage between the two.

The GA takes the lead on strategic planning and performance, and progress against the performance objectives will be communicated bi-annually to the GA using a data-driven process of evaluation. In line with HEA requirements, an annual structured self-evaluation report will be prepared and submitted to the HEA.

Section 2: Performance Objectives

Performance Objective 1

To deliver an excellent student experience through the provision of flexible programmes that enhance students’ employability.

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Transversals: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Climate & Sustainable Development.

Rationale for Performance Objective 1

UL has grown our student enrolment from 14,475 in 2016/17 to 17,972¹ in 2023/24. Throughout this period, the University has maintained a central focus on the quality of the student academic experience, the transformational impact of our academic programmes and the importance of providing an inclusive and accessible learning and university experience. Key priorities identified under this performance objective (PO) align with the aims of the current strategic plan, *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019–2024*, Goal 1 — Academic Transformation, which include:

- Offering an excellent student experience
- Advancing employability at the core of our curricula
- Providing flexibility for students and facilitating lifelong learning
- Expanding work-integrated learning across postgraduate academic programmes
- Developing innovative learning partnerships with other academic centres and industries
- Being a research-led university anchored in the Mid-West of Ireland with a global reach.

[Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022–2027](#) sets out the plans for how these aims will be operationalised.

Analysis of the feedback gathered as part of the comprehensive consultation process for *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022–2027* provided the evidence base for the selection of the eight indicators for this performance objective.

While exceeding, or being close to the sectoral average, the University’s score on Effective Teaching Practices in Studentsurvey.ie fell during the pandemic to 31.3 (StudentSurvey.ie 2021) from 37.5 in 2016. At 32.5 for 2022 and 2023, this indicator is already showing an improvement. The university

¹ These numbers are a count of all students (full time, part time and remote) excluding single module and ERASMUS inwards.

sectoral average score of 32.7 has been chosen as a comparator benchmark. This indicator (1.1) has been chosen to evaluate the success of ‘Transforming Teaching’ under the University’s Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

The Quality of Interactions indicator in Studentsurvey.ie (1.2) also allows us to measure student engagement with services, for example, to gauge satisfaction with enhanced Academic Registry and Student Affairs online services, as well as face-to-face interactions with all staff. A benchmark of 40.3 has been chosen, as this is the average indicator score for universities in 2023 and is also close to the highest indicator score achieved by UL in 2017 (39.9).

Our first-year progression rate was 88.6% in 2022/23. We aim to restore this to pre-pandemic levels, i.e. over 92% (1.3), through specific targeted interventions and supports, and likewise to increase student engagement beyond the 2021/22 benchmark rate of 90% across the seven traditional universities (source: HEA dashboard). The strategic actions that will support success are detailed below.

With a sustained and pioneering tradition of work-based, integrated learning and teaching at undergraduate level and postgraduate level, UL is a leader in the sector, supporting the future of work and generating new design frameworks and pathways, including the use of micro-credentials, co-located programmes and apprenticeships. The future world of work for our graduates will involve more extensive collaboration with automation and artificial intelligence, ongoing job analysis, advanced training, reskilling, and more fluid working arrangements. This performance objective will support the delivery of our strategy for supporting our students to develop the future graduate capital required to thrive in this shifting context. This strategy is underpinned by a deep institutional commitment to Cooperative Education and career development, as reflected in indicators 1.4 and 1.5, below. The targets for percentage internship/work experience for undergraduate students are 100% for School Placement and 95% for Cooperative Education (indicator 1.4). The target for percentage of postgraduate students with work-integrated learning opportunities is a 40% increase on the UL 2022/23 figure (indicator 1.5). Consistent with our position as a leader in the field, these are high scores when benchmarked against other Irish Universities Association (IUA) institutions, which have an average of 54% of undergraduate students and 36% of postgraduate students who undertake internship/work placements.

We are aiming for a 3% increase to bring the number of flexible, part-time, blended, and distance-learning students at UL to 18% by 2028. This target is benchmarked against an average of 10% for all HEA institutions in 2022/23. UL is proud of our work in advancing lifelong learning, education for sustainable development, and professional growth in a digital age, which is evidenced by a large portfolio of micro-credentials and professional diplomas developed in collaboration with employers as part of the HCI Pillar 3 project, UL@Work. These programmes are delivered fully online to provide accessibility to lifelong learners. We have embedded micro-credentials into these professional diplomas and have launched the Master of Professional Practice programme, providing a curated pathway for work-based learners from micro-credentials to masters. These pathways are supported by our Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies. We also offer a range of professional programmes to An Garda Síochána and a wide range of Springboard+ and Human Capital Initiative (HCI) 1 funded programmes (1.6).

As a research-intensive university, UL is committed to strong growth in our postgraduate student population (1.7). We are aiming for a 4.6% increase, to bring the number of Level 9/10 students, as a percentage of all registrations, to 30% by 2028. This target is benchmarked against 28.6% for all IUA institutions in 2022/23. Three strategic areas of growth are identified. Firstly, growth in the number of traditional, full-time masters programmes designed to enhance the employability of recent graduates; examples include MSc in Business Analytics, Data Science and Machine Learning. Secondly, growth in the number of programmes for work-based/flexible learners, such as PD (Professional Diplomas) in Regulatory Affairs in (Bio) Pharmaceuticals, and PD in Climate Adaption & Sustainability. Thirdly, growth in the number of research/PhD students, driven by increased research funding.

Strategic targets and projects attached to the *Transforming the Curriculum* pillar of the *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022–2027* will support an excellent student experience via our new Integrated Curriculum Development Framework (ICDF), together with integrating the revised Graduate Attributes as part of programme development at UL. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are referred to in the ICDF, where Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) are enabled across the curriculum. For example, learning outcomes which align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be present in the PLOs, as well as opportunities for EDI-related initiatives and social good/justice (1.8). We have set a target for 2030 that 100% of our academic programmes will have been revised in line with the ICDF to embed the Graduate Attributes across the curricula at UL.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 1

Progress on *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022–2027* is reported annually to the Executive Committee, Academic Council & Governing Authority. There is also a Faculty Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee in each faculty whose focus is to implement the strategy at faculty level. These committees report to the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee quarterly, with an annual report to Academic Council.

The University has identified a series of strategic actions that will support the achievement of this performance objective. These include:

- Arts Humanities Social Science (AHSS) Student Retention Strategy (under development)
- Enhanced targeted student support for first-year students on transition to university, right through the first and second semester, including:
 - the First Seven Weeks programme, which supports first-years as they transition to third-level education
 - faculty-based Student Engagement and Support Officers (SESOs)
 - a Student Financial Support Advisor

- dedicated student engagement roles within other professional services, e.g. in UL Global, the Centre for Transformative Learning, the Cooperative Education and Careers Division, the Library and Information Services Division, and the Faculty Support Offices etc.
- Development of the Student Affairs Student Support Centre (opened in autumn 2024)
- Roll-out of universal design for learning (UDL) and inclusive practice initiatives
- Student Personal Advisor Support System (PASS)
- Increased availability of online mental health platforms, e.g. Togetherall, the national out-of-hours peer support initiative, and Niteline
- A new digital Student Case Management System to facilitate a joined-up approach to identifying and supporting students at risk
- A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to support our marketing and student recruitment functions
- Learning Support Centres ([Science Learning Centre](#), [Peer Supported Learning Centre](#), [Maths Learning Centre](#), [ICT Learning Centre](#) and [Regional Writing Centre](#)) provide supplementary support to students through one-to-one, peer and group learning activities.
- Improvements in the Incomplete-grade (I-grade) process
- Presentations to Education and Training Board guidance counsellors on UL supports and student experience
- UL-wide training for staff on identifying and engaging with distressed students.

Resourcing and monitoring of the implementation of PO 1 is linked to the annual budgeting process at UL, with workforce planning aligned to strategic objectives.

Implementation of *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022-2027* is dependent on the level of funding available to academic departments, student services and information technology projects. The level of funding made available to the University under *Funding the Future* is a key dependency in our ability to achieve the goals set out in this PO. Likewise, funding received through the Human Capital Initiative has enabled innovative technical and pedagogical advances and it is anticipated that further funding rounds will contribute toward the achievement of our objectives. Our innovative engagement and collaboration with local and national industry is a critical dependency and there is risk that an economic downturn may affect levels of research, placement opportunities and innovative learning developments.

Governance of all digital projects in the University is managed by the Digital Governance Steering Group, established by the Executive Committee in 2022. UL will apply for alternative external funding sources, as they become available, to support and develop this performance objective.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 1

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.1	Effective Teaching Practices Score	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	2022: 32.5	Match or exceed university sector average (32.7 in 2023), and work towards achieving UL’s previous highest score (37.5, achieved in 2016) by 2028	34.5	35.5	36.5	37.5	37.5
1.2	Quality of Interactions Score	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	2022: 36.3	Work towards exceeding 2022/23 university sector average score (40.3) by 2028	38	39.5	40	40.5	40.5
1.3	Progression rate (%) new entrants	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 88.6%	Work towards restoring pre-pandemic rate (92% in 2019/20) and achieve university sector average by 2028 (90% in 2021/22)	90%	91%	92%	92%	92% 3.4 p.p. increase on baseline
1.4	Proportion (%) of undergraduates who undertook internship or work placement	School Placement Cooperative Education	Quantitative	2023: School Placement (SP): 100% Cooperative Education (CE) 95%	Maintain current rates; exceed university average (54% HEA Class of 2022 survey)	SP: 100% CE: 95%	SP: 100% CE: 95%	SP: 100% CE: 95%	SP: 100% CE: 95%	Maintain baseline

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.5	Proportion (%) of students registered on postgraduate programmes with work-integrated learning embedded in the curriculum	UL Student Records	Quantitative	2022/23: 55%	Continue to exceed the average rate across seven traditional universities (36% HEA Class of 2022 survey) and increase further	65%	75%	85%	95%	40 p.p. increase in students registered on postgraduate programmes with work-integrated learning embedded in the curriculum
1.6	Proportion (%) and number of flexible, part time, blended, distance learners	UL Student Records and HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 15% 2,676 (headcount)	Average rate for all HEIs (10% in 2022/23)	16% 3,000²	17% 3,300	17% 3,450	18% 3,800	3 p.p. increase on baseline
1.7	Proportion (%) and number of students enrolled at Level 9/10	UL Student Records and HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 25.5% 4,483 (headcount)	Average rate for traditional universities (28.6% in 2022/23)	27% 5,050	28% 5,450	29% 5,900	30% 6,300	4.5 p.p. increase on baseline
1.8	Proportion (%) of programmes which embed the revised Graduate Attributes	Academic Programme Review Committee	Quantitative	2022/23: 6.5% (19 programmes)	None available	17%	34%	51%	68%	68% of all programmes revised in line with the ICDF (100% by 2030)

² Number of students will be updated once new strategic plan is in place.

Performance Objective 2

To enhance research performance, support our research community, and translate our research into societal impact through excellent fundamental, translational, and multidisciplinary research that pushes boundaries and addresses global challenges.

Pillar: Research & Innovation

Transversals: Society; Climate & Sustainable Development; Enterprise; International.

Rationale for Performance Objective 2

UL is a research-intensive institution; therefore, this objective is critical to realising our research ambitions and central to our existing and forthcoming organisational strategy. The objective aligns to national strategies, in particular [Impact 2030](#), [Shaping our Future](#), and [Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025](#), and the relevant national policies relating to research. A key driver in UL's research-intensive focus will be to build upon our fundamental research base through strengthening our academic disciplines while enabling multidisciplinary collaboration and partnership.

Our academic community engages in fundamental research that pushes the boundaries of the knowledge base. We have seen new research areas emerge within and across disciplines and make significant contributions for social good, such as psychology, energy, data science and advanced materials. UL research is addressing global challenges including clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, education, and public health. By working together across disciplines, our community is achieving fundamental breakthroughs whilst ensuring research is rapidly translated into economic and social impacts for Ireland and beyond. Our researchers are also impacting EU and national policy in areas including equality, diversity & social inclusion, justice (youth justice and hate crime), education (LGBTQI+ and inclusivity), health (public health, addiction and substance abuse), homelessness, and employment law including workers' rights.

We host externally funded national centres: [EPI*STEM National Centre for STEM Education](#), Dairy Processing Technology Centre (DPTC), [SSPC, Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland Centre for Pharmaceuticals](#), [Lero, Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland Centre for Software](#), Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Technology Centre (PMTC), as well as Centres for Research Training (CRT) in Foundations of Data Science. We also have internal research institutes and centres which are forging their international reputations: Bernal Institute, Health Research Institute, Mathematics Applications Consortium for Science and Industry (MACSI), and the Centre for Social Issues Research, among others. Our plans to grow our research base are ambitious (see targets in indicators 2.5 and 2.6). This planned growth is within the context of the changing landscape for Irish national funding and outlined as a risk in the implementation, monitoring and assessment section below.

UL has an exemplary record in attracting world-leading researchers with success in national and EU programmes, e.g., European Research Council (7 Awardees), Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) (host to several COFUNDS and numerous postdoctoral fellowships), Science Foundation Ireland, Irish

Research Council, Enterprise Ireland, HEA North South Research Funding, Health Research Board (HRB), Enterprise Ireland Disruptive Technology Innovation Fund, among others.

UL has consistently grown our intake of European funding over each Framework programme. Under the Horizon 2020 programme, UL was awarded €34.7 Million, a 70% increase over our funding under FP7. Most notably, Horizon 2020 led to increases in our Excellent Science profile, with the funding of our first ERC advanced grants, as well as diversification of our Industrial Leadership and Societal Challenge profile. We plan to continue to drive growth in this area, building from our success in Horizon 2020, with a view to realising a 50% increase with a cumulative total of €52 million from Horizon Europe (2.6). Our focus is to continue to grow our success in the Excellent Science Pillar and the Global Challenges Pillar, through increasing ERC and MSCA applications and awards and growing the number of Principal Investigators who are successful in coordinating projects in Pillar 2, Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness.

Our early-career researchers are a vibrant, international community and our ambition as a research-intensive university is to grow our population of highly motivated researchers (2.1) while focusing on enhancing the student experience and facilitating greater engagement across the doctoral population (2.4). In 2023, UL established the first Doctoral College in the Republic of Ireland, which is committed to ensuring a quality experience for postgraduate research students (PGRs), advancing doctoral education and ensuring UL PhD students attain additional skills to enhance their careers.

As a research-intensive organisation our strategic focus is on traditional and structured research PhDs. While we recognise the growth of professional doctorates, these are still limited to a small number of programmes and faculties. Our main strategic focus in growing PhDs is being supported by collaborating with national and international partners to secure funding for cohort PhDs through joint and dual PhD awards, Innovate for Ireland, and MSCA COFUND and Doctoral Networks.

In addition to facilitating growing student engagement across disciplines, the Doctoral College is driving improvements to heighten the PGR experience, including:

- Systems deployment reducing administrative burdens by introducing best practice systems to streamline workflows associated with the postgraduate researcher journey.
- Developing a supplemental PGR award to formally recognise research-related and professional development activities undertaken in addition to the research thesis.
- International partnerships to drive collaboration through joint PhD degree arrangements. These allow a PhD candidate to complete a PhD degree at two universities in two different countries via joint supervision within UL and an international partner institution.

A national leader in the research impact agenda, UL's Research Impact programme is in line with international best practice³. Through this programme, we have developed a library of case studies⁴ demonstrating our excellent research and our impact across a range of sectors. We continue to evolve how impact is recognised. Key initiatives include the President's Research Excellence and Impact Awards⁵ recognising outstanding research collaborations, early-career researchers and research outputs⁶. Our research impact programme has been enhanced to include mechanisms to support and enhance the impact journey across all career stages, including case study development, public engagement activities, Research Week, and our awards scheme. We will seek to further examine the breadth of the impact agenda by reviewing our research impact case study library to identify impact across policy, economy, health and culture, among others (2.7). In addition, we welcome the IUA focus on policy impact and facilitation of brokerage activities and will continue to engage fully with these critical opportunities for stakeholder engagement between academia, government and civil society.

As demonstrated by the global pandemic, timely access to high-quality research outputs is critical to enable research partners to address grand challenges. We will continue to champion good research practice and to progress Open Research initiatives; UL is leading a NORF project to develop a National Research Data Management Framework and is an active member of the National Forum for Research Services and Infrastructure. We will continue to progress our open science commitments and track progress regarding Open Access publications across articles and review papers (currently 72%; see Indicator 2.10). An analysis of Open Access publications for 2023 (using Scopus for journal articles and review articles in gold/green) illustrates UL as performing well among Irish HEIs; 3rd place nationally and close to the national average for open access (73%). As an early signatory to CoARA and a member of the Irish national chapter, UL is in the process of preparing our CoARA action plan, which will reflect our ambitions and developments underway in the area.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 2

UL's strategy is overseen by our Executive Committee and actions supporting it are devolved across the organisation as part of the implementation process aligned with our quality improvement action plans. Reporting on progress is undertaken at EC and Governing Authority meetings.

Wisdom for Action: Research Strategy 2022–2027/ Eagna Chun Gnímh, is monitored by the University Research Committee, a sub-committee of EC led by the Vice President for Research. Several key actions within the strategy, together with workforce planning activities, support delivery of strategy.

³ OECD (2017) "Supporting Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Higher Education in Ireland", OECD Skills Studies, Paris: OECD Publishing quoted UL's Research Impact Programme as "an excellent example of emerging good practice which could be mainstreamed across the Irish higher education system and abroad."

⁴ UL case study process is aligned to UK REF and other international best practice and embedded in our quality system.

⁵ [President's Research Excellence and Impact Awards: Outstanding Research Collaboration, Early Career Researcher Starter, Early Career Researcher Consolidator, Research Output Awards](#)

⁶ In 2023, the awards programme was expanded to incorporate Research Output Awards at faculty-level to bring the initiative in line with developments in responsible assessment.

A number of key initiatives currently underway are critical to supporting our ambitions for research. These include:

- An emphasis on strategic recruitment and retention of strong research talent at all academic levels in addition to a review of workforce planning, promotions and recruitment policy, and processes to ensure an integrated approach across all disciplines.
- Continued focus on our EU ambition and dedicated resourcing to support research funding in this area.
- Building new capacity in key areas of emerging strength through an internal call for new internal research centres in cutting-edge areas of research, such as energy, implementation science, ageing, artificial intelligence, and risk, to position groups to bid for larger awards. The success of UL researchers, for example, the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project in the 2022 round of HEA Performance Funding, underpins the establishment of a new internal research centre in implementation science.
- Investing in and streamlining systems to enhance research support processes across post-award, pre-award, compliance, communications, business development, research impact, Open Science, research IT and faculty supports.
- Significant investment in digital transformation projects to support research, with deployment of a new Current Research Information System as part of our IT Strategy, UL Enable Phase 2.
- A plan for additional research space to further support areas of strength in climate/energy and health.
- Devolution of research KPIs across faculties to ensure alignment across academic units with overall UL ambition and to drive ownership of KPIs and implementation within academic units.
- Delivery of the KT Boost programme, supported through a recent EI funding award, to drive innovation and industry collaboration. The appointment of a business engagement manager for UL will support continued industry relationship building to support our research and will align with our success in co-operative education.

Implementation plans for our research strategy have undergone costing exercises to identify resource requirements in terms of staffing and non-pay. A number of initiatives have been funded, in particular our digital transformation activities via UL Enable, our internal research centres call and our research outputs awards. New initiatives are part of UL's integrated planning process, and research requirements are identified in the budgeting cycle.

A revised budget model to support research performance is under investigation to ensure resource follows performance in research.

Progress against this objective will be evaluated using a number of mechanisms including our quarterly KPI reporting to GA, our research performance interactive dashboard available to all staff, Annual Research Performance Report, renewal of HRS4R accreditation, and progress in performance indicator rankings.

The national research funding landscape in Ireland is currently undergoing substantial change and redevelopment. While these changes are welcome, they bring with them a level of uncertainty around the funding instruments available to HEIs. The targets set out below are underpinned by the following assumptions:

- Irish and European R&D funding budgets are not reduced, and institutional funding success rate continues to grow.
- Exchequer funding to support research and scholarship is available at current levels at a minimum.
- Ireland continues to invest in our established SFI research centres which are critical to meeting the challenges of the future. UL has enjoyed excellent success in the SFI Research Centre calls since 2012. The shift in the national SFI centre landscape is ongoing and may present significant challenges to the HEI sector, including UL.
- Ireland supports PhD research by establishing a sustainable funding model. The national PhD funding landscape is very challenging due to a number of factors. The national directive to increase some externally funded PhD Stipends (SFI and IRC funded) has resulted in the University increasing all internally-funded stipends between €15,000 and €22,000 to €22,000 per annum for a maximum of a four-year duration of postgraduate study. All internally-funded stipends less than €15,000 were increased by 47% per annum for a maximum of a four-year duration of postgraduate study. The 47% increase is derived from the increase that PhD students on a stipend of €15,000 would receive if their stipend was increased to €22,000. The increases will come into effect from 1 July 2024, backdated to January 2024. The high national employment rate has a significant impact on the available PhD cohort. UL is seeking to mitigate against these challenges in a number of ways including continuing our track record in COFUND, MSCA Doctoral Networks, and Innovate for Ireland.
- National gold Open Access funding, which is critical to support Ireland's Open Access targets, continues. In particular, funding levels tracking alongside increases in research output. The NORF target of 100% Open Access will require transformation of the academic publishing system.

Learnings, adaptations and improvements garnered through evaluation are incorporated into Quality Improvement Action Planning. In 2023, UL completed our first thematic review of the professional supports for research across the organisation, including research support, HR, finance, and corporate secretary. The external quality review made key recommendations which have been incorporated into the quality improvement action plans (QIAP) for a number of units and are reported on regularly to our EC. In addition, further quality review activity is planned for 2024 in the area of research ethics.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 2

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.1	Number of PGR new entrant enrolments⁷	UL student records and HEA SRS	Quantitative	2023/24: 200 including professional doctorates	Maintain current share of PGR enrolment amongst IUA members (11% in 2023/24)	210 in 2024/25	225 in 2025/26	240 in 2026/27	250 in 2027/28	250
2.2	Number of PGR graduations	UL Student Records	Quantitative	2023: 161 graduates	Not available	170 (2024)	180 (2025)	190 (2026)	195 (2027)	195
2.3	PhD Completion rate (%)	UL Student Records	Quantitative	TBC	Not available	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
2.4	Students' rating of their opportunities to engage with other research students	Research culture in PGR Student survey.ie (biennial survey)	Quantitative	2023: 62.4% agree <i>'Opportunity to discuss my research with other research students'</i>	Exceed national average (62.4% in 2023)	N/a	65% in 2025	N/a	70% in 2027	70% agree 7.6 p.p. increase in 2027 compared to 2023 baseline
2.5	Research income⁸	UL audited accounts	Quantitative	€38.1M (2022/23)	Average for Irish HEIs of similar size (€39.6M in 2021/22)	€40.5M in 2023/24	€43.2M in 2024/25	€45.6M in 2025/26	€48M in 2026/27	Increase in annual income to €50.4M by 2027/28⁹

⁷ Based on the average of the intake over the last three years.

⁸ GAAP adjusted research income from audited accounts reported in academic year.

⁹ Assumes national funding for research centres to continue at 2022/23 levels.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.6	Value (€M) of Horizon Europe research funding awards	UL	Quantitative	Total awards from Horizon 2020: €34.7M Horizon Europe Awards in 2022/23: €7.1M	Average total awards from Horizon 2020 for Irish HEIs of similar size: €30.6	€9.8M in 2023/24	€10M in 2024/25	€6M in 2025/26 ¹⁰	€10M in 2026/27	€42.9 total from Horizon Europe to date by 26/27 Overall target for Horizon Europe is €52M (50% increase from Horizon 2020)
2.7	Number of Research impact case studies	UL case study archive	Quantitative	2023/24: 24	None available	4	4	4	4	16 new case studies over 4 years, leading to a total of 40 case studies 67% increase on baseline
2.8	Citation Impact score (Citations per paper over 5-year publication window)	Scopus/ Scival	Quantitative	Jan 2023: 10.0 averaged over 5-years (2019-2023)	National average citation impact for 7 Irish universities over 5 years (11.11 for 2018–2022)	10.3 (2020-2024)	10.7 (2021-2025)	11.1 (2022-2026)	11.5 (2023-2027)	15% increase by 2023-2027 window, measured at Jan 2028
2.9	Number of Licenses, Options & Assignments	KTI Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey	Quantitative	2023: 45 LOAs over 4 years (2020-2023)	National average for no. of LOAs per €10M research spend (3.0 in 2023)	13 (2024)	14 (2025)	15 (2026)	16 (2027)	58 LOAs over 4 years

¹⁰ The reduction in the 2025/26 funding is due to a projected gap in the adoption and launch of the Horizon Europe Pillar 2 2025 work programmes.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.10	Percentage of publications that are Open Access Publications¹¹	UL	Quantitative	2023: 72%	National average (73% in 2023) ¹²	75% (2024)	75% (2025)	75% (2026)	75% (2027)	Above national average 75%¹³ 3 p.p. increase
2.11	Percentage of papers co-authored with international researchers	UL	Quantitative	2023: 61.2%	National average for the 7 universities (63% in 2023)	61.5% (2024)	62% (2025)	62.5% (2026)	63% (2027)	63% 1.7 p.p. increase

¹¹ Journal articles and reviews in green/gold only.

¹² Analysis via Scopus of national average of journal articles and review articles only.

¹³ Target to place above national average is limited by institutional funding and staffing to supplement national open access publishing deals. Ireland is currently 6th in the world for open access, see <https://esac-initiative.org/market-watch/>. UL is placed number 3 nationally, therefore increases in this area are limited based on resourcing available (institutionally and nationally).

Performance Objective 3

To increase enrolment, progression and completion rates for students from under-represented communities and priority target groups identified in the National Access Plan and to create a more inclusive and accessible learning and university experience for all students.

Pillar: Access & Participation

Transversals: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Society; Region; Digital Transformation; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

Rationale for Performance Objective 3

The selection of this Performance Objective represents a focus on continuing development in a strategic priority area for the University, reflecting also strategic priorities and KPIs in UL's current strategic plan, *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024*. Key performance indicators identified under this PO align with the aims in *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* Goal 1 – Transforming Education and Goal 4 – City and Region, which include:

- Prioritising an excellent student experience
- Prioritising community engagement

This PO is also aligned with the following key national strategies and policy objectives:

- *National Access Plan 2022–2028*
- *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024-2030*
- *Progressing a Unified Tertiary System for Learning, Skills and Knowledge: Public Consultation Report* (DFHERIS, 2022)
- *National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework* (HEA, 2020)

UL aspires to put access, equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of both strategy and operations. Access, participation and success of all students, including those from under-represented communities and groups, are driven by long-standing investment in our Access and Widening Participation (AWP) services, as well as more generally by universal student services. The Student Affairs division within UL supports all students across the entire student community and lifecycle, with targeted support for under-represented/minority student groups, individuals and communities through our AWP services and via our partnership with education providers across the city and region, from primary level to further and community education and third level. It is also driven by critical community engagement programmes and initiatives across a range of UL departments, including UL's Access Campus in Roxboro; see [UL Engage Annual Report 2023](#) for more detail.

UL commits to continuing to expand this work under this PO and to aligning with key national strategies such as the National Access Plan 2022–2028 (NAP). UL plans to develop an Access and Widening Participation Strategy which will encompass all stages of the student journey, from pre-entry to transition, student progression, and success, aligned with the objectives of the NAP for 2022 to 2028. It is intended that the strategy will inform the future structure and funding requirements of UL's AWP unit, which will enable and drive the attainment of indicators identified for this PO and will enable us to focus on key target areas for improvement. This strategy will also set a whole-of-university approach to AWP and will facilitate development of data-informed and evidence-based initiatives to support AWP strategy and initiatives, and monitoring.

UL's strength and ambitions to date in supporting students with disability / disabled students reflects our focus on indicators 3.1, 3.2 and 3.8. These targets reflect yearly increases in the number of students with disability registering in higher education in Ireland. Building on our recognised performance in Disability Services and Educational Assistive Technology to foster retention, progression and success for students with different abilities / disabilities, UL aims to increase both the percentage enrolment of students, overall numbers and successful completion.

With regard to indicators 3.3 and 3.4, to date, analysis of UL's quantitative performance indicates that with respect to enrolment of students via access pathways (HEAR, DARE, Mature, QQI) in 2020/21 and 2021/22, UL exceeded or met the average student enrolment across IUA universities for the following categories: students with disability / disabled students coming through the DARE access route, students coming through the HEAR access route, and students from disadvantaged / below average areas. However, enrolment of students via the access pathways has not kept pace with the increase in total UL student enrolment in the past six years, although the University is experiencing similar increases or decreases in enrolment trends for key target groups to those across the sector. Increasing the availability of flexible learning programmes and alternative entry routes to improve access and participation for non-traditional learners, including increasing progression from FE to HE via QQI pathways and development of tertiary programme(s) in partnership with the FET sector, will also support achievement of this KPI.

An analysis of UL's student profile is important to informing this PO and related indicators and targets. Data from Pobal in 2022 reveals that the number of people residing in very or extremely disadvantaged areas has risen to 195,992, up from 143,506 in 2016. Individuals living in these areas are prone to experiencing higher unemployment rates, lower educational attainment, and an increased incidence of lone parenthood. The findings indicate that Limerick is among the areas that are disproportionately more affected by disadvantage. In addition, Deprivation Index Score (DIS) data from the HEA dashboard for 2020/21 shows that 8% of UL students are from a disadvantaged background while 34% are marginally below average. At a combined 42%, this proportion is significant in terms of the overall profile of UL's student population and puts UL at the highest combined figure on these measures amongst the seven IUA member universities. At undergraduate level, these figures rise to 9% and 36% respectively. While not the sole measure of disadvantage with respect to accessing third-level education, this profile is critical for understanding, prioritising and meeting the needs of UL's student population and for continuing to focus our engagement and support efforts on students from geographically disadvantaged areas and relevant minority groups and communities.

One of the priority areas under this PO is to achieve an increase in the enrolment of students who are from the Irish Traveller and Roma communities (Indicator 3.9). It is anticipated that recent recruitment of a Traveller Education Programme Coordinator under the current PATH 3 programme, with plans to ultimately mainstream this role, will support achievement of a target of a 133% increase on the 2022/23 baseline by 2028. This work requires intensive engagement with these communities and requires outreach, transition and bespoke post-entry supports.

Indicators 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 reflect ambitions in the NAP that access to higher education extends beyond entry of students from relevant target groups, to include also successful progression and programme completion. The focus of these indicators is on new entrants only, as this approach maps the NAP and how the HEA measures non-progression. UL has put in place indicators for new entrants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and with disabilities. Data protection has been considered in regard to our access indicators. The annual strategic dialogue meeting between the University and the HEA will provide an opportunity to discuss performance in recruiting and progressing students from all cohorts.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 3

Improving the retention, participation, and completion of students from NAP target groups, as well as all students, will be supported by initiatives which have already been outlined in Performance Objective 1.

Achievement of the indicator targets under this PO will also be enabled by the following wider initiatives outside of the AWP Services:

- Development of an integrated student service delivery model across the Student Affairs division, underpinned by integration of a digital Student Case Management System, to assist with the coordination of timely cross-functional support and to allow early identification of ‘at risk’ students, including those from NAP target groups.
- Development of a Student Support and Engagement Hub in 2024 and proposed development of a Student Health, Wellbeing and Access Hub.
- Maintenance and advancement of UL's University of Sanctuary status and our underlying model, initiatives and practices.
- Development of a fully revised RPL policy + procedure (HCI-funded project) to support access for students from non-traditional backgrounds and facilitate lifelong learning.

Achievement of targets will be supported by development of an overarching institutional governance framework for inclusive practice and accessibility, informed by the Altitude Charter, together with development of a university accessibility policy. UL will also explore ways to resource and mainstream innovative supports to benefit learners from all under-represented target groups and communities under a universal design / inclusive practice approach.

The targets set out are underpinned by the assumption that AWP funding budgets are not reduced and there is continued success in institutional funding applications. The learnings and improvements brought about from this PO will be built into relevant reporting structures, from local level to institutional (Executive Committee, Student Engagement, Access and Equality Committee, Governing Authority etc.).

The HEA Equal Access Survey and dashboard will be used to evaluate progress on this performance objective. As well as this, progress will be evaluated by the linking of the indicators under this PO to existing *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* KPIs, the new UL strategic plan, and the future UL AWP strategy, all of which are reported to and monitored by the Executive Committee and reported to the Academic Council and Governing Authority. Progress will also be evaluated in reports to the HEA.

Progress Reports on *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* KPIs are reported annually to the Executive Committee, University Student Engagement, Access and Equality Committee & Governing Authority. An annual report is made to the HEA on UL progress with respect to National Access Plan objectives.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 3

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.1	Proportion (%) of students registered with the disability service (across all programmes)	UL SRS and HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 5.5%	Work towards exceeding 2021/22 university sector average (2021/22: 6.9%; source: AHEAD) by 2028	6%	6.5%	7%	7.5%	2 p.p. increase on baseline
3.2	Number of students with a disability who are supported by FSD (Fund for Student with Disabilities)	HEA FSD Returns and NAP	Quantitative	2022/23: 972	No HEI comparator available (Total of 14,145 students supported nationally by FSD in 2020/2021)	1,000	1,050	1,100	1,150	1,150 18% increase on baseline
3.3	Proportion (%) of new entrant enrolments of students via access pathways (HEAR, DARE, QQI, MS, Tertiary)	HEA SRS and NAP	Quantitative	2022/23: 17%	Bring UL in line with national average (2022/23 rate for all HEA institutions is 19.5%)	17.5%	18%	19%	20%	3 p.p. increase on baseline
3.4	Proportion (%) of new entrants from DEIS schools	HEA SRS and NAP	Quantitative	2023/24: 9.0%	Bring UL in line with national average (12% in 2020/21)	9.5%	10.0%	10.5%	11.5%	2.5 p.p. increase

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.5	Non-progression rate (%) for new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas	HEA SRS and Non-Progression and Completion Dashboard	Quantitative	2020/21: 11%	Achieve a rate below the average across all HEIs (11% in 2020/21)	10.5%	10%	9.5%	9%	2 p.p. decrease on baseline
3.6	Non-progression rate (%) for new entrants with disabilities	Equal Access Survey	Quantitative	2021/22: 11%	Achieve a rate below the average, all HEIs, by 2028 (13.5% in 2021/22)	10.5%	10%	9.5%	9%	2 p.p. decrease on baseline
3.7	Completion rate (%) students from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas	HEA SRS and Non-Progression and Completion Dashboard	Quantitative	2018/19: 73%	Exceed the average rate across all HEIs by 2028 (70% in 2018/19)	74%	75%	76%	77%	4 p.p. increase on baseline
3.8	Completion rate (%) for students with disabilities	Equal Access Survey	Quantitative	2018/19: 73%	Align UL with the average rate across all HEIs by 2028 (76% in 2018/19)	74%	75%	76%	77%	4 p.p. increase on baseline
3.9	Number of students enrolled who are Irish Traveller and Roma across all programmes¹⁴	AWP Student records	Quantitative	2022/23: ■	None available (33 Traveller students in HE in Ireland 2020/2021)	+2	+2	+2	+2	+8 on baseline 133% increase on baseline

¹⁴ The level of disaggregation of data disseminated publicly is subject to data protection considerations. Data disaggregated to a level which may allow individuals to be identified (even indirectly) is not disseminated publicly.

Performance Objective 4

To catalyse regional regeneration by engaging with industry, community groups, and other academic institutions and providers, to create a diverse and resilient talent pipeline and continue to develop innovative learning partnerships.

Pillar: Engagement

Transversals: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Student Success; Enterprise; Region; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

Rationale for Performance Objective 4

The success of the University of Limerick is intrinsically linked with the success of Limerick and the Mid-West Region. Close partnerships with regional industry over the past 50 years have enhanced student employability, contributed to the development of research excellence and the growth of UL's international reputation and increased postgraduate student numbers. Much of the work associated with this performance objective aligns with *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* [Goal 4 – City and Region](#), [which aims to:](#)

- Support regional economic growth by engaging with regional industry, development agencies and networks (e.g. Explore Engineering, Digital Mid-West, Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce) to provide a sustainable pipeline of talent.
- Inform and influence regional and national discussions through contributions to the National Development Plan 2021–2030, Project Ireland 2040 and the Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan.
- Foster collaboration with industry in developing a dual education and research model.
- Further enhance community engagement and access programmes.
- Strengthen the civil and civic mission of the University by continuing to support local communities through initiatives by students and staff and through community engaged learning volunteering and research initiatives.
- Strengthen community links through community, cultural and sports engagements in the region.

This performance objective is aligned with the following national strategies and policy objectives:

- *Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply 2023* (SOLAS)
- *National Skills Strategy 2025* (DFHERIS, 2021)

- *Skills for International Financial Services* (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2024)
- *Skills for Biopharma* (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2024)
- *AI Skills: A Preliminary Assessment of the Skills Needed for the Deployment, Management and Regulation of Artificial Intelligence* (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2022)
- *Design Skills Implementation Group: Year in Review 2021-2022* (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2022)
- *Skills for Zero Carbon* (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2021)
- *OECD Skills Strategy Ireland: Assessment and Recommendations* (OECD Skills Studies, 2023)
- *Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021 – 2025* (DFHERIS, 2021)
- *Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024* (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2024)
- *National Volunteering Strategy 2021-2025* (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2020)

This performance objective addresses the National Skills Strategy 2025 and Action Plan for Education and Technology Skills 2022, by increasing upskilling offerings in areas of identified skills need through flexible learning pathways and enhanced access for all learners. Performance indicators deliver in line with the Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan (demonstrating innovation in education delivery models), Global Ireland 2025 (demonstrating access and appeal for international students), Future Jobs Ireland (demonstrating collaboration with enterprise) and Enterprise Ireland’s Action Plan for Women in Business (designing programmes appealing to women). UL's HCI projects demonstrate alignment with HCI and key system objectives including:

- HCIO1: Increased provision in areas of identified skills need for enterprise.
- HCIO2: Futureproof graduates with industry-relevant skills for emerging technologies.
- HCIO3: Ensure that there is a greater focus across the whole spectrum of higher education course provision on promoting and embedding transversal skills.
- HCIO4: Incentivise continued reform and innovation in higher education provision, building on best practice available nationally and internationally.

The evidence base that informed the selection of this performance objective is UL’s strength and success in being a leader in the sector in relation to upskilling, lifelong learning and contributing to regional growth. We have a record of accomplishment in securing HCI funding (€20M+ under Pillar 3). UL’s institutional HCI project, UL@Work, has delivered 20+ programmes in emerging technical, digital and transversal skills, in partnership with enterprise. We have also established a Transferable Skills Unit. We will continue to develop our portfolio of programmes for lifelong learners including micro-

credentials, Springboard (in growing numbers), and other professional development programmes in line with agreed KPIs. UL has received funding for fee subsidies for more than 100 micro-credentials as part of the HCI Pillar 3 Micro-credential Learner Fee Subsidy 2024. UL's effort in supporting regional skills development has contributed to continued drops in unemployment rates in Limerick (2011: 20.7% to 2022: 8.6%) and surrounding counties, Clare (2011: 18.8% to 2022: 8.1%) and Tipperary (2011: 19.9% to 2022: 7.7%). However, Limerick continues to be home to some of the worst unemployment blackspots in the country, so our efforts in this area must continue to support growth and high-quality employment in the Mid-West region.

Targets for this objective have been informed by analysis of baseline and benchmarking data, as set out below.

- In 2022/2023, UL delivered the highest baseline number (768) of micro-credentials through the national HCI MicroCreds project, which is a collaboration with seven IUA universities, as evidenced on microcreds.ie. We aim to increase our enrolments by 632 to 1,400 by 2028. UL has the largest offering of skills-focused micro-credentials of Irish IUA university partners, and we aim for continued engagement in Springboard, the HCI IUA-led MicroCreds project, and other initiatives aimed at developing the employability skills of students from the live register (4.1 & 4.2). The national data on Springboard and HCI enrolments, and the System Performance Dashboard are useful sources of benchmark and baseline data. HEA Springboard criteria place a cap on the number of courses each HEI can submit for funding, which is a limiting factor.
- Continued growth in flexible and professional programmes co-developed with industry partners and supported by UL@Work is intended to build on UL's strong reputation in this area, i.e., ISE programme, UL@Work and Apprenticeships (4.3). UL aims to increase Apprenticeship enrolments from a baseline of 199 in 2022/23 to 280 in 2028, supporting the Government target to reach 10,000 registrations each year by 2025 (Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021–2025).
- In the 2022 Graduate Outcomes Survey, 96% of UL graduates were either employed or engaged in further studies. The comparative percentage for the IUA sector was 95%. Based on current engagement with the labour market, UL has decided to set a target of 96% (4.4). This may prove to be a challenge should economic conditions deteriorate over the duration of the Performance Agreement. UL will strive to reach or exceed this target by maintaining high levels of undergraduate work placements through the co-op programme (1.4) and the increased integration of work-based learning into postgraduate programmes (1.5).
- *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* and Pillar 3 of *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2022–2027* signal the importance of student volunteering and the intention to grow this area. In 2023, UL took on the operation of the www.Studentvolunteer.ie project from the IUA leading to development of sustainable StudentVolunteer.ie governance and infrastructure nationally by 2026 (4.5). UL's target reflects an ambition to grow student volunteering activities and engagement with our communities. Continuing to recognise students through our President's Volunteer Awards (PVA) is a tangible demonstration of UL's

commitment in this area. Only two Irish universities offer awards for student volunteering activities via a similar process and UL has benchmarked against University of Galway’s ALIVE programme as the current leader in this activity.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 4

Enablers to achieve the targets set out for this objective include: RPL — to have a fully revised RPL policy and procedure (HCI-funded project) to support access for students from non-traditional backgrounds and facilitate lifelong learning; membership of the Mid-West Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committee; close collaboration with the Mid-West Regional Skills manager to identify and address skills gaps in the region; engagement with publications from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs; and membership of the Shannon Estuary Task Force.

UL’s regional and national enterprise engagement and our contribution to our regional and national stakeholders are delivered in a multitude of ways including:

- Research-led industry collaboration including UL SFI and EI Research Centres, i.e., Lero, SSPC, DPTC, PMTC and platforms such as the Explore Engineering Group
- Close collaboration with regional employers and employer networks such as Explore Engineering, Digital Mid-West, Regional Skills Forum, Skillnet, and Chambers to identify existing skills gaps and future skills needed to sustain regional economic growth
- MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with LCETB (Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board) 2023
- Outreach via the [UL AccessCampus](#)
- UL participation on local, national and international governance structures including regional working groups and boards
- Our work with arts and cultural organisations
- Our City Campus, the vision for which is that, in partnership with Limerick City and County Council, the existing building and site will be transformed to a world-class standard. We see it as an important hub for engaged research and knowledge exchange, as well as a centre for creative making and performance, with a sizeable number of our students based at this facility in the heart of our city.

Performance on *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* KPIs is reported annually to the Executive Committee and Governing Authority. Progress Reports on the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy are reported annually to the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, Executive Committee, Academic Council & Governing Authority. Progress on development and mainstreaming of StudentVolunteer.ie is reported to the national StudentVolunteer.ie group. Strategic actions to support the achievement of this objective will be operationalised by Faculty

Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committees, Research Committee and the Digital Governance Steering Group. Performance of state-supported initiatives and projects, such as UL@Work, CyberSkills, RPL, ReedI, Springboard, micro-credentials, and Apprenticeships, is managed through the funding bodies. The learnings and improvements will be built into relevant reporting structures – from local to institutional, e.g. Executive Committee, Governing Authority etc.

The targets set for this performance objective are underpinned by the assumption that budgets are not reduced and continued institutional funding applications are successful. It is anticipated that a new funding call based on the National Training Fund will issue soon.

The City Centre project cannot proceed to the extent envisaged without substantial state and /or partnership funding and without the collaboration and support of Limerick City and County Council.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 4

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
4.1	Number of Springboard enrolments	UL Student Records HEA System Performance Dashboard	Quantitative	2022/23: 298	Maintain current share of SB enrolments in IUA institutions (13% of 2,124 in 2022/23)	300	360¹⁵	360	360	Increase of 62 121% increase on baseline¹⁶
4.2	Number of Microcredential enrolments	UL Student Records and micro-creds.ie MicroCred portal	Quantitative	2022/23: 768	Continue to provide largest number of micro-credential places nationally	1,000	1,200	1,400	1,400	Increase of 632 enrolments on baseline
4.3	Number of Apprenticeship enrolments	UL Student Records	Quantitative	2022/23: 199	Not available	220	240	260	280	Increase of c.80 enrolments p.a. 40% increase on baseline
4.4	Proportion (%) of L8	HEA Graduate	Quantitative	Class of 2022:	Remain	96%	96%	96%	96%	Maintain

¹⁵ Assumption: National Springboard funding to continue at 2022/23 levels

¹⁶ Note: Student capacity is limited by SB criteria on max no. of progs per HEI (max. 30 progs.)

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
	graduates in employment or further study nine months after completion	Outcomes Survey		96% including postgraduate studies (81% pure employment)	slightly above IUA institutional average (95%, Class of 2022)					baseline graduate employment rate of 96%
4.5	Number of President’s Volunteer Awards	Student Affairs	Quantitative	2022/23: 530	Match or exceed University of Galway (600 ALIVE Awards, in 2022/23)	580	610	640	680	Increase of 150 on 2023 baseline

Performance Objective 5

To foster staff engagement through a culture of openness, transparency, personal responsibility, respect, trust, collegiality, and ambition.

Pillar: Engagement

Transversals: Institutional Leadership & Culture; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging.

Rationale for Performance Objective 5

The University of Limerick has the opportunity build a strong, positive culture of engagement. Recent survey data suggests that UL staff are passionate about the University and wish to deliver on the core missions of the University with creativity and ambition; however, as set out below, there are opportunities to improve culture in relation to leadership, workplace relations and trust. The Mazars Review of culture within the University is complete and agreed, and the William Maher Review of protected disclosures and how they are managed within the University is being completed. Recommendations from these reviews will be incorporated by reference into this performance objective.

While the definitions and solutions to employee engagement are multi-faceted, the benefits of engagement for staff and organisations are well documented (e.g., [The Chartered Institute of People Development \(CIPD\) 2023](#)). The 2009 [MacLeod and Clarke Review](#) summarised four key ‘enablers’ of employee engagement as listed below, which align to the transversals of leadership, culture and EDI:

- Leadership that gives a ‘strong strategic narrative about the organisation’.
- Line managers who motivate, empower and support their employees.
- Employee voice throughout the organisation, to involve employees in decision making.
- Organisational integrity, i.e. professed values are reflected in the actual organisational culture; what we say is what we do.

For the University of Limerick, employee engagement indicators will have impact in the following transversal areas: Institutional Leadership & Culture, and Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging. This work aligns with the following institutional strategy documents:

- *Human Resources Strategy*
- *Human Rights, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027*
- *Wisdom for Action: Research Strategy 2022–2027*
- *Action for Wisdom: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to 2022–2027*
- *Talent Development Strategy*

The development of this performance objective is informed by existing action plans, including the Strategic Governance Committee Action Plan, Silver Athena Swan Award Action Plan to 2026, Athena Swan EDI Staff Culture (AS/EDI) surveys, *UL@50: Strategic Plan 2019-2024* consultations, Unite the Union survey findings, and other organisational consultations and surveys.

This focus on culture is consistent with national and international strategies and plans including the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, EU focus on research culture (e.g., [Science Europe](#), [European Research Area Policy Agenda](#)), the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) and the [IUA Strategic Plan \(2022–2025\)](#). At UL, these national ambitions must translate to a culture that demonstrably fosters staff engagement.

Internal communications need to be strengthened and improved. As a large, complex organisation, it is important that the flow of information is efficient and effective. The [CINNTE Institutional Review Report](#) (2020) recommended that special efforts be undertaken as soon as possible to improve communication where needed, and that the lines of transparent and timely internal communication be strengthened. Positive efforts have been made to deliver on this including town hall meetings, open-door meetings, UL Connect, etc., but every opportunity needs to be taken to further build on this. It was also recommended that the University put in place a regular staff survey.

The Athena Swan/EDI (AS/EDI) Culture Survey 2022, together with later surveys and evidence (including the Unite 2024 Survey), point to the need to address Dignity and Respect (D&R). Feedback from Dignity and Respect training is very positive with consistently high satisfaction ratings (4.29 over last two years), but this training is not mandatory. The requirement for mandatory training has been outlined by the Strategic Governance Committee and is due to be proposed to the Executive Committee in line with the pending review of the Dignity and Respect policy. This is subject to Governing Authority approval. While mandatory Dignity and Respect training is not a general feature in the Irish HEI sector, the responsibilities of HEIs as employers is the same as in any other organisation. While there is a need to be realistic that completion will never be 100%, it is important that systems and processes are put in place to get as close as is reasonably possible to full staff engagement with D&R training across the University. Along with a full communications campaign, a process and system for mandatory training will be introduced with KPI data on D&R training completion (Indicator 5.1). Also, while most respondents (60%: 59%F/63%M) indicated knowing how to report bullying or harassment, 25% of respondents to the Athena Swan/EDI Culture Survey 2022 stated that they did not know how to report bullying and/or harassment. This data forms the baseline for Indicator 5.2. Indicator 5.3 extends the performance measurement beyond training completion to a key outcome of that training. These indicators draw on existing data within the University, focusing on increased awareness and impact.

In relation to values and expectations, the 2022 AS/EDI Culture survey indicated that 23.9% of staff disagreed with the following statement: “My department or unit promotes clear values and expectations about how people should behave towards each other.” Improving communication of values and expectations about how people behave towards one another is set out under Indicator 5.4. Related to this, the Strategic Governance Committee recommended a charter for UL. The Charter encodes within it a set of values which everyone subscribes to, and which reflect the institutional character that successive administrations will be duty-bound to preserve.

As the first recipient of a Silver Institution Athena Swan award in 2023, UL is recognised as a national leader in striving to achieve gender equality and has a number of action plans and initiatives in place to make progress in this regard (i.e. Athena Swan Action Plan (2022–2026); Race Equality Action Plan (2023–2026); *Human Rights, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027*; Gender Action Plan (2024–2027); Consent Framework Action Plan (2020–2024). However, as clearly set out in our Athena Swan 2022 Silver application, there are areas of concern in relation to culture, communication and trust with only 51% of overall respondents trusting UL to ‘some degree’ to treat them fairly and only 68% of female respondents agreeing that UL Leaders ‘demonstrate visible commitment to diversity’.

The response rate of our research community to the AS/EDI 2022 Culture Survey was disappointing, attracting only a 34% response rate. As our researcher community has a large international base we are concerned with the lack of engagement from this category of staff and while the responses received were positive (e.g. ‘53% of female researchers were in agreement that the ethos of UL is one that supports equality of opportunity for all gender’) the actual number of respondents to this question cannot be taken as a true reflection. To address the lack of engagement of researchers with the survey and to ensure that we are capturing the ‘lived experience’, particularly of our international staff, a large proportion of whom identify as coming from an ethnic minority group, we propose introducing a ‘Reverse/Relational Mentoring Programme’.

By 2029, we aim to be the first institution within the Irish HE sector to have achieved a Gold Institution Athena Swan award, together with several Silver Faculty and Department awards as well as four Professional Directorate awards (5.4). Indicator 5.5 is part of this work and reflects the drive for equality at senior academic levels, with the percentage of female full professorships expected to increase over time. As Queen’s University Belfast is one of only two Gold institution Athena Swan holders, we will benchmark our plan with Queen’s. As the first institution to have implemented a values-based *Human Rights, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2023–2027*, the ultimate goal of the institution is to become an egalitarian university by 2030, delivering on the following SDGs: SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities and SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Achievement of this performance objective will rely heavily on evidence-based action plans. Our ambition is to become a university that models a strong, positive university culture of engagement. We know that there are many great examples of culture across UL, and we want to further develop those. We also know that there are areas that we can further strengthen and in which we can become a leader in the sector, including EDI and talent development.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 5

Given the nature of cultural transformation, the execution of this performance objective must strike the right balance between operational oversight to ensure progress and monitoring, and a devolved and participatory approach to identifying and implementing actions. Leadership for this area rests with the Governing Authority, Executive Committee, Management Council and HREDI Steering Committee.

- The mechanisms and support structures to bring about this institutional transformation will be Executive-led.
- An external company will be engaged to run the Institution Culture Survey.
- A Culture & Engagement working group will be established to ensure progress against agreed actions.
- The Institution Culture Survey will provide the basis for strong organisational action plans. These action plans will take baseline data available from previous surveys and use repeat measures to monitor progress, particularly measures of dignity and respect, trust, and communication of values and expected behaviours.
- The HR Director will report on progress against agreed actions through the Executive Committee, at agreed intervals.
- The Governing Authority will be regularly updated on progress and have oversight of cultural transformation programmes.

Successful cultural transformation needs a whole-of-organisation approach and the commitment of adequate financial resources to its implementation. Devolved groups will be involved in identifying and implementing specific actions to improve engagement and culture.

Ensuring explicit focus on engagement and culture is important for the success of this performance objective. Previous surveys and findings, as outlined in the table below, help to frame relevant indicators in this area. Future surveys will build on this data to provide an evidence-based picture of trends over time. This performance objective will allow for learnings and improvements to be shared across the institution, building on many good practices that already exist and some that will remain.

The recommendations from the Mazars Review of culture will inform the basis for a detailed work programme, which will be updated to reflect findings from future surveys. The successful implementation of this work programme is dependent on the continuing commitment of leadership, management, staff and unions. The availability of funding to adequately resource the work programme is a risk, as is the challenge of embedding a culture of engagement. Making culture and engagement a performance objective will ensure its prominence in planning and budgeting and help to mitigate these risks. Risk management will form an integral part of the action plan arising from the Mazars review.

The implementation of this objective will be evaluated through annual reports to the HREDI Steering Committee, EC & GA. Implementation of the strategy will be included and tracked in the risk register.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 5

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
5.1	Percentage of staff that have received Dignity and Respect training	Core HR	Qualitative	Mandatory D&R training not currently in place.	Not available	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%
5.2	Percentage of staff who indicate they know how to report on bullying/harassment	Staff Survey	Quantitative	2022: 75%	Not available	N/A	80%	N/A	90%	15 p.p. increase on baseline
5.3	Percentage of respondents who agreed that “My department or unit promotes clear values and expectations about how people should behave towards each other.”	AS/EDI Survey	Quantitative	2022: 76.1%	Not available	N/A	81%	N/A	86%	c. 10 p.p. increase on baseline

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
5.4	Number of Academic Units with Athena Swan Ireland awards¹⁷	Athena Swan published awards	Quantitative	2023/24: 1 Institution Silver (IS) 0 Gold school/faculty (GSF) 2 Department Silver (DS) 1 Faculty Silver (FS) 12 Department Bronze (DB) 1 Faculty Bronze (FB) 0 Professional Directorate Bronze (PDB)	Advance HE published list of awards	1 IS 3 DS 2 FS 11 DB 1 FB	1 IS 4 DS 2 FS 10 DB 1 FB	1 IS renewal 5 DS 3 FS 10 DB 2 PDB	1 IS renewal 1 GSF 6 DS 3 FS 10 DB 4 PDB	1 Silver renewal institution Award by 2027 1 Gold school/faculty Award by 2027/28 6 Silver Department Awards 3 Faculty Silver Awards 10 Department Bronze Awards 4 Professional Directorate Bronze Awards
5.5	Percentage of Full Professorships held by women	HEA Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Sex and Gender	Quantitative	2023: 32% of Full Professor-ships held by women	30.8% across university sector 2022 (HEA Statistics)	35%	38%	40%	40%	8 p.p. increase on baseline

¹⁷ There are 28 academic departments. Practice has been to apply by department for Bronze. For Silver, applications will be made at faculty level.

Section 3: Matrix and Signatures

Framework Matrix

		Pillars			
		Teaching & Learning	Research & Innovation	Access & Participation	Engagement
Transversal areas of impact	Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning	PO 1		PO 3	PO 4
	Climate & Sustainable Development	PO 1	PO 2		
	Student Success	PO 1		PO 3	PO 4
	Enterprise		PO 2		PO 4
	Society		PO 2	PO 3	
	Region			PO 3	PO 4
	International		PO 2		
	Digital Transformation			PO 3	
	Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging			PO 3	PO 5
	Institutional Leadership & Culture				PO 5
	Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion			PO 3	PO 4

Signatures

On behalf of University of Limerick



Professor Shane Kilcommins
President

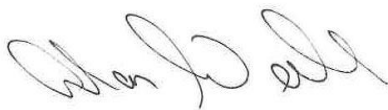
Wednesday, 20 November 2024



Professor Brigid Laffan
Chair of the Governing Authority

Wednesday, 20 November 2024

On behalf of the Higher Education Authority



Dr Alan Wall
Chief Executive Officer

Wednesday, 20 November 2024



Higher Education Authority

3 Shelbourne Buildings, Crampton Avenue
Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, D04 C2Y6

Contact

Phone: +353 1 2317100

Lo-Call Number: 1890 200 637

Email: info@hea.ie / systemperformance@hea.ie