

Performance Agreement 2024– 2028 between the HEA and Atlantic Technological University



Ollscoil
Teicneolaíochta
an Atlantaigh

Atlantic
Technological
University

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Preamble

This Performance Agreement is established between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Atlantic Technological University in accordance with the System Performance Framework 2023–28. The agreement identifies Atlantic Technological University'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. Atlantic Technological University 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 Atlantic Technological University 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 Atlantic Technological University 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.

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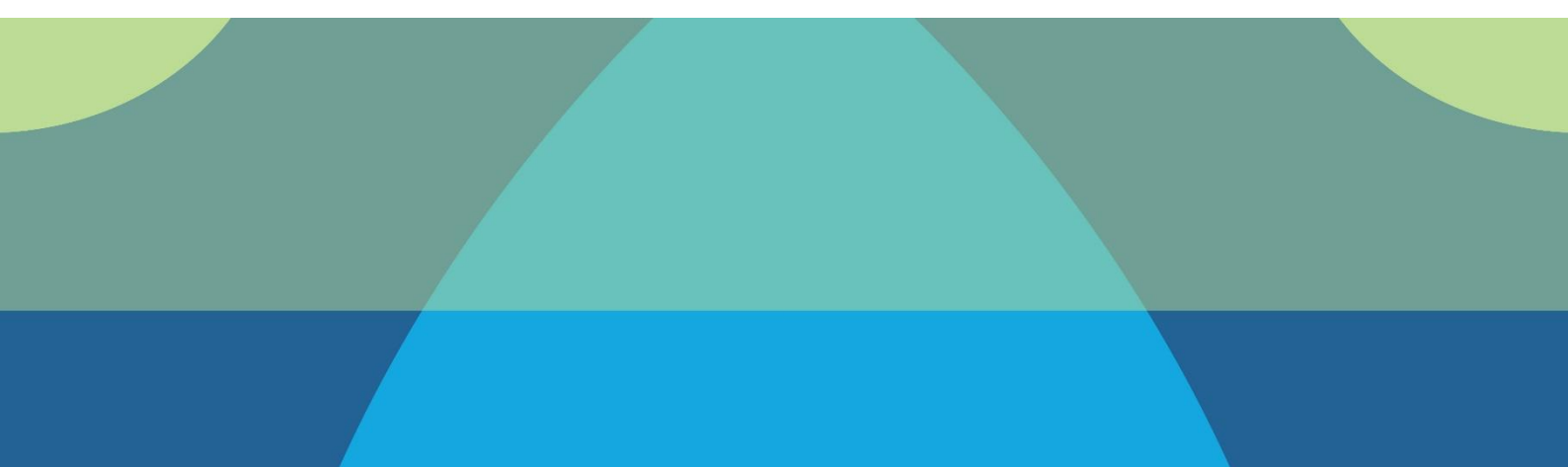
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Performance Agreement 2024–2028

Section 1: Context

Overview of the institution and its context

Atlantic Technological University (ATU) was established in April 2022, following the merger of Galway–Mayo IT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT. In November 2023, St Angela’s College also joined ATU, leading to a university with a combined total of 26,692 students (SRS 2023/24).

	Full-time	Part-time	Remote	Total
Other Enrolments	0	1,504	0	1,504
QQI FET Cert	0	0	0	0
QQI FET Advanced Cert	0	1,504	0	1,504
<i>of which are apprenticeships</i>	0	1,504	0	1,504
Undergraduate	12,972	4,324	4,013	21,309
Foundation/Access	150	32	0	182
Diploma	11	12	45	68
Certificate	0	3,466	2,098	5,564
Higher Certificate	345	50	309	704
Ordinary Degree	2,507	615	726	3,848
Honours Degree	9,959	149	830	10,938
Occasional	0	0	5	5
Professional Training Qualification	0	0	0	0
Postgraduate	937	1,260	1,682	3,879
Postgrad Diploma	40	320	236	596
Postgrad Higher Diploma	31	355	649	1,035
Postgraduate Certificate	7	146	316	469
Masters Taught	508	305	402	1,215
Masters Research	196	85	79	360
Doctorate	155	49	0	204
Occasional	0	0	0	0
Total UG and PG Enrolments	13,909	5,584	5,695	25,188
Total Enrolments	13,909	7,088	5,695	26,692

Figure 1: Student profile by programme type for ATU for academic year 2023/24.

The majority of undergraduate students in 2023/24 were registered on honours degree programmes. Those who were registered in the category “Certificates”, which accounts for over 5,500 registrations,

are either part-time or other (e-learning/remote) learners. The relatively low number of Research Masters and PhD registrations (n=564) is evident from this profile and is addressed in Performance Objective 2.

Tables 1 and 2 show the staff profile of ATU in December 2023. Staff numbers are expressed as Whole-Time Equivalent (WTE).

Core Academic staff by grade:	Whole-Time Equivalent		
	Male	Female	Total
Senior Lecturer 3	11.00	5.20	16.20
Senior Lecturer 2	26.00	18.00	44.00
Senior Lecturer 1	22.00	21.00	43.00
Lecturer 2	2.00	1.00	3.00
Lecturer 1	8.34	64.02	72.36
Lecturer	364.13	363.71	727.84
Assistant Lecturer	172.53	127.67	300.20
Other (by grade)	—	—	—
PTAL	13.54	10.53	24.07
CSM	1.00	—	1.00
Total	620.54	611.13	1,231.66

Table 1: Academic staff profile (Consolidated Employment Control Framework Return, December 2023).

All Staff	WTE	Headcount
Academic	1,231.67	1,406
Technician	187.26	199
Management, Clerical, Admin. and Library Staff	512.94	553
Student Services including Examination Invigilators	68.73	241
General Operatives & Asst, Building Officers	113.63	137
Researchers	1.00	1
Total	2,115.23	2,537

Table 2: Staff profile (Consolidated Employment Control Framework Return, December 2023).



Figure 2: Location of nine ATU campuses, geographically located across the Northern and Western NUTS region.

The University has nine campuses, spread across a large geographical region that largely overlaps with the Northern and Western Region as defined by Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). Our campuses are deeply embedded in the region and the communities where they are located (Figure 2). The Northern and Western Region has distinctive features which set a unique context for ATU as it launches its first Strategic Plan. Firstly, the region is now designated as the only “Transition Region” in the State, meaning the GDP per capita is between 75% and 100% of the EU27 average. In other words, the region has not prospered economically compared to the other regions of Ireland and the EU27 in recent years. In addition, distinctive characteristics of the region include the prevalence of Gaeltacht areas, remote communities (e.g. islands) and the border with Northern Ireland. The contrast of a highly developed medical technology cluster in Galway with the prevalence of

SMEs throughout the region, many of which are linked with more traditional sectors, shows the heterogeneity of the enterprise base of the region. The uniting factor is the Atlantic Ocean, which symbolises both the challenges faced in the region (e.g. impact of climate change) and the opportunities which are emerging and prioritised in the regional enterprise plans (e.g. blue economy). It could be argued that this region has the most diverse profile in the State and that it consistently lags behind other regions, yet has potential not nearly realised to date.

The Northern and Western Regional Assembly has profiled the region and set out three interrelated functional areas which can best develop the region:

1. **Better Places** — policymaking, monitoring/oversight and promoting enhanced co-ordination in our region through the implementation of our Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
2. **Competitiveness** — optimising EU policy and funding instruments for regional/local development priorities
3. **Collaboration** — engaging with innovative research partnerships and regionally based networks to accelerate priorities identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

With specific reference to higher education, the Assembly has also strongly advocated for the need for significant capital investment in third-level infrastructure and support for improving human capital levels in the region, to improve R&D and innovation capabilities. These areas set out a blueprint for ATU as it develops its approach to the region and sets its performance objectives for the next four years.

The report of the TU Research Network (TURN) (2019) sets out a number of key actions which will transform Technological Universities to realise the vision for research, teaching and learning informed by societal challenges, provision across the full range of Levels 6–10 with emphasis on STEM, high-quality research concentrations, universities of scale operating on an international level and enabling a wider spectrum of provision and access through, for example, digital provision, and, finally, operational autonomy and flexibility. Key actions relating to:

- collaborative networks (especially in relation to driving regional investment),
- building research capacity for TUs to function as major engines of innovation, and
- digitalisation for connectedness as well as digital literacy

provide strong signposting for strategic direction and mirror strongly the mandate set out in the Technological Universities Act (2018).

The first ATU Strategic Plan places heavy emphasis on the region and the role of ATU in enhancing the region, expressed through the vision and mission (Figure 3).

The key themes of the plan (Guiding Lights in Figure 3) align broadly with the structure of the System Performance Framework 2023–2028. Three main themes, *Enabling Education*, building *Engaged Research* and creating a *Connected Ecosystem*, are underpinned by the necessity for *Organisation Transformation*, with *Sustainability* to permeate the plan as well as have its own specific section.

Figure 4 shows the main objective headings under each of the Guiding Lights.

In addition to its strong regional remit, ATU, since November 2022, has been a member of a European Universities Alliance ([EU GREEN](#)), with a focus on *Responsible GR*owth, *Inclusive E*ducation and the *EN*vironment, serving the more peripheral regions of Europe. The alliance comprises nine members and is led by the University of Extremadura in Spain.



Figure 3: Vision, mission, values and Guiding Lights (themes) for ATU's first Strategic Plan.

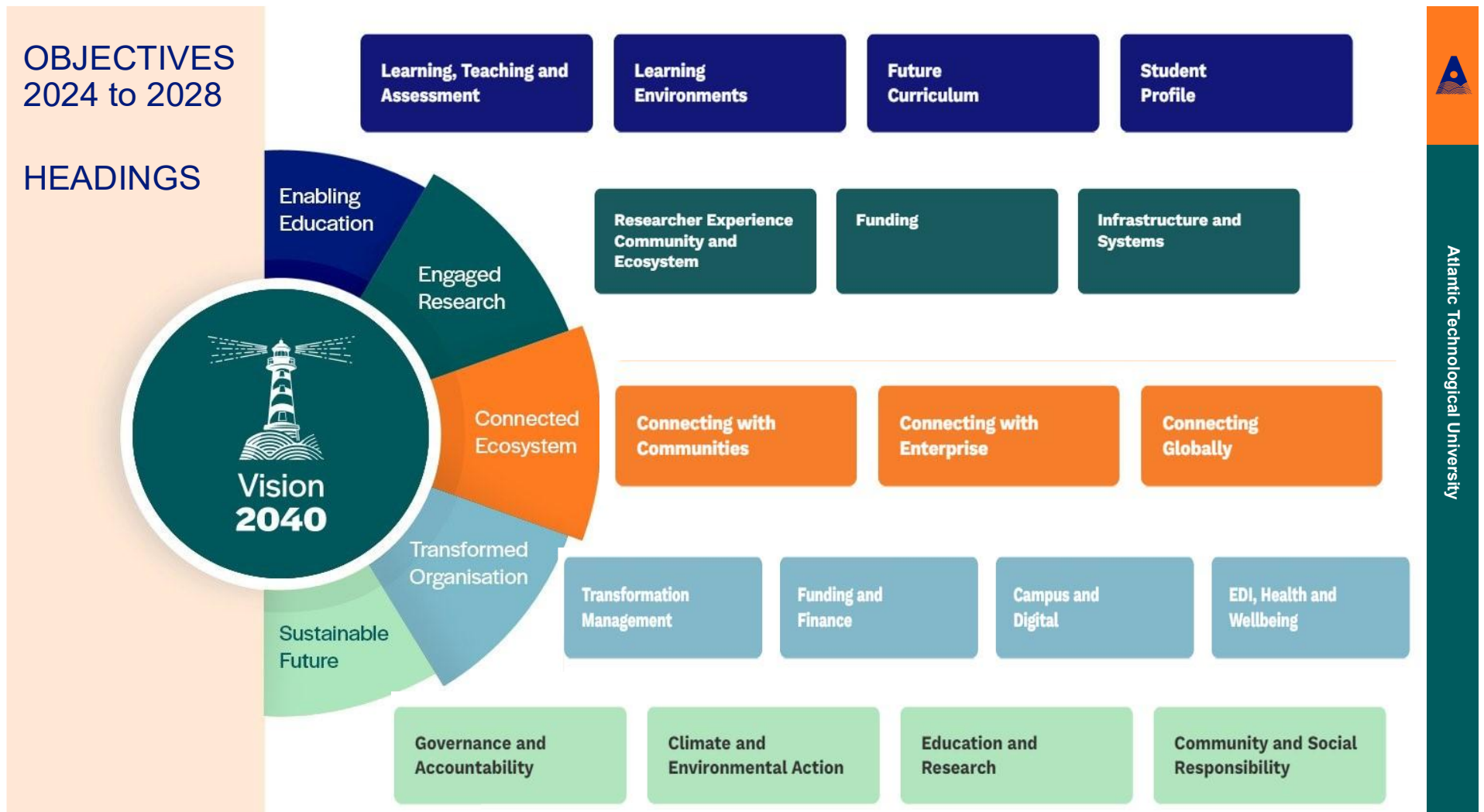


Figure 4: Main headings for strategic objectives across the five Guiding Lights in the ATU Strategic Plan.

Approach to the development of the Performance Agreement

The coincidental timing of the Performance Agreement process and the development of ATU's Strategic Plan is fortunate. Having each develop side by side has ensured a strong strategic focus in ATU's performance objectives. During 2023, the development of the Strategic Plan was a key objective for the University. This Performance Agreement has strong overlap with the plan, and, therefore, the steps and approach to its development (and subsequent reporting) coincide with the Strategic Plan.

The Governing Body has been closely engaged throughout the development process regarding ATU's vision, mission and values and, in February 2024, it approved the high-level Strategic Plan ("[Open Minds, Bright Futures](#)"). Following consultation with and feedback from DFHERIS, a public launch date is awaited pending Ministerial availability. Given the composition of the Governing Body, the importance of ATU to the region has been heavily emphasised and this emphasis extends to many of the indicators under the performance objectives. The Strategic Development Sub-Committee of the Governing Body has reviewed the Strategic Plan, has understood the significance of the link between the Strategic Plan and the Performance Agreement, and has reviewed a draft reporting template comprising Strategic Plan metrics, Performance Agreement metrics and European University Alliance (EU GREEN) metrics. The University Planning Team (UPT) has also been central to the choice of the specific performance objectives and reporting indicators.

There was a comprehensive consultation process in the formation of the Strategic Plan that also referenced the new Performance Agreement. This included a series of meetings with staff and students on all campuses (including St Angela's College before it became part of ATU), as well as consultation with external stakeholders, especially those with a regional remit, such as the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, the Western Development Commission and Údarás na Gaeltachta. In addition, the President established a Strategic Planning Council, representative of all campuses and roles across the University. The Council met once monthly throughout the development process to give feedback and provide input and opinion on different topics related to the plan (e.g. SWOT analysis, sustainability, principles for future structure).

In relation to organisational structures, two further working groups were convened to advise on academic structures (e.g. faculty formation) and Professional, Managerial and Support Staff (PMSS) structures.

The UPT was the key decision-maker in determining the themes and scope of each of the performance objectives. The approach to selecting the performance objectives was to align as closely as possible with the Guiding Lights of the Strategic Plan and with the other multi-year plans aligned with the strategy. In addition, there was a review of further and higher education policy to ensure that ATU was optimising its contribution to national policy, especially given the regional context as set out in the section above. Some targets are implicit in the technological university criteria, and these have been included as they are central to the ongoing development of ATU. Other target areas, such as apprenticeships, have been included because national policy has marked them as priority areas for development, as well as because there is scope for ATU to make a significant regional impact by

increasing provision in these areas.

At the start of the Strategic Planning process, a week-long series of workshops among staff, addressing each of the seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs), set out a number of recommendations which have been absorbed into the Strategic Planning process and the Performance Agreement. Consideration was given to setting a separate performance objective for sustainability, climate and environment, but it was decided to integrate these topics across other performance objectives to show the need to embed sustainability across the University.

As a relatively new university, we are still in a significant phase of policy development across all areas of university activity. Two examples are the development of academic policies and the development of policy in the realm of equality, diversity and inclusivity. This ongoing work shapes the nature of some objectives and their implementation, especially in these early years. ATU will also undergo its CINNTE review in November 2024, and preparation of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Review (ISER) has taken place in tandem with work on the Performance Agreement.

As well as policy development, consolidation is also an important consideration. For example, the three legacy institutes of technology had all achieved Athena Swan Ireland Bronze awards, which have now been replaced with a single ATU Athena Swan legacy award. As consolidation and integration continue, this may change the nature of some of the performance objectives and the way they are measured.

Structures in place for evaluation

The future structures of ATU are still under consideration. Notwithstanding this, the University has interim structures in place, and plans for evaluating the implementation, monitoring, assessment and reporting of the performance objectives. The UPT will remain in situ until a new university senior leadership team is implemented. The Governing Body’s Strategic Development Sub-Committee has a broad remit covering areas of strategic importance and will be a supportive body for evaluation and reporting.

One of the Strategic Plan themes is “Organisational Transformation” and a key objective in that section is transformation management, proposed to be delivered through a new office in ATU. This will involve the utilisation of institutional data and horizon scanning as a basis for strategic decision-making. This office will become a central repository for data, monitoring and reporting, supporting the President, the Executive Team/UPT and, where appropriate, the Governing Body. In essence, it will be the gatekeeper for the Performance Agreement.

Since April 2022, there has been significant progress in unifying systems, but there are still several integration projects which need to be completed to obtain data on a university-wide basis, rather than from legacy systems associated with the four legacy institutions. The recent incorporation of St Angela’s College is a good case in point, where alignment of systems and data is at an earlier stage.

ATU has also established an EU GREEN office; many of the actions relating to the SDGs, as well as

student and staff mobility, will be monitored through this office.

At an earlier stage of the Strategic Planning process, the *System Performance Framework 2023–2028* and Performance Agreement process were presented to the Governing Body, the Strategic Development Sub-Committee of Governing Body, UPT, senior management group, staff unions, partnership group, the Strategic Planning council and an all-staff meeting. It is planned that this level of communication will be continued as the process unfolds in the months and years ahead. In particular, the Governing Body, through the Strategic Development Sub-Committee, will review progress against this Performance Agreement and will have visibility of ongoing reporting on all associated metrics, along with those in the Strategic Plan.

Within ATU, responsibility for the final approval of the Performance Agreement rests with the President and UPT.

Section 2: Performance Objectives

Performance Objective 1

To reduce the overall student non-progression rate across ATU, maintain an above-average student experience through higher quality teaching, increase flexible modes of delivery, and enhance digital and green literacy across all disciplines.

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 1

Non-progression/retention

ATU's inaugural Strategic Plan clearly articulates a commitment to enabling the student body to reach its potential. ATU is aware of the negative impact that the pandemic had on students' capacity to engage with their programmes of study, which led to a significant number withdrawing from the University. This was evidenced by the non-progression rate of 25% recorded by the HEA for the academic year 2021/22. ATU's non-progression rate was similar to SETU (25%) but poorer than MTU (19%) and TUS (21%). Internal analysis revealed that the non-progression rate was higher for students entering with low CAO points (46% for those with points 250-300) and via the DARE route (57%). The University is aware that student retention is multi-factorial. The leading causes of non-progression recorded by the University are personal reasons, wrong course selection and health. A multi-factorial approach to enhancing retention is detailed in the implementation section. The impact of non-progression to the individual student, the University community, the financial stability of the University and the wider community cannot be underestimated, hence why an indicator related to retention has been advanced (indicator 1.1).

Securing robust progression rates for part-time students is challenging. Most part-time students registered with ATU are in employment and studying part time online. Also, in response to students requiring flexibility, students are facilitated to study at a pace suitable to their circumstances. Measuring progression from year to year is therefore less feasible and less suitable for monitoring retention amongst this cohort. A better indicator of success for part-time learners is programme completion.

Teaching practice

ATU's three highest performing indicators in the 2023 Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) were: Quality of Interactions, Effective Teaching Practices and Higher Order Learning. ATU scored 34.1 on the Effective Teaching Practices indicator, which was higher than other technological universities (average: 33.4) and traditional universities (average: 32.7). However, elements of teaching practice

such as Collaborative Learning (27.2) and Quantitative Reasoning (20.8) were two of the University's lowest performing indicators and were lower than the overall averages, which were 30.2 and 21.3 respectively. In addition, as a response to the *Action Plan for Apprenticeship, 2021–2025*, ATU is experiencing significant growth in craft apprentice student numbers and a concomitant growth in lecturing staff in the apprenticeship area. This expansion is very welcome but requires the University to tailor professional development supports for the assistant lecturers employed to teach on apprenticeships. HR evidence indicates that a significant proportion of this cohort of lecturers have minimal teaching experience as their career progression historically focused on developing expertise in their craft skill. This is the rationale for the indicators on teaching practice — one aimed at novice teachers, which targets increasing engagement with the First Steps programme within two years of commencing at ATU (indicator 1.4), and the other aimed at more experienced academics who serve as important role models in the University (indicator 1.3: increasing the complement of staff who have an Advance HE Fellowship award). ATU intends to use the Effective Teaching Practices score or its equivalent when the revised Student Survey is reintroduced (indicator 1.2). The focus on ensuring that all teaching staff are competent in teaching and learning and are provided with opportunities to enhance competency is in alignment with the sentiments expressed in the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (DoE, 2019). The importance of quality teaching and teachers to support engagement and student success is also articulated by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in their publication, *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Higher Education* (2019), which links the indicators on retention and teaching practice. ATU also aims to encourage a number of staff with student support roles to become associate fellows within the lifetime of this plan.

The University has considered the content of the revised student survey in relation to teaching practice and have selected the questions that relate to Assignment, Assessment and Feedback (Section D). These were selected to recognise the value of assignment development, assessment and feedback in the development of the inaugural Learning, Teaching & Assessment strategy, Marks & Standards policy and the Assessment & Feedback policy. The University is also committed to the ALTITUDE charter, and supports staff to consider assignment and assessment type through a Universal Design for Learning lens. Both the University and student body recognise the enabling value of formative and summative feedback. The Teaching & Learning Centre has developed a suite of resources to support the academic community in assignment development, assessment and feedback. Securing baseline data responses to these questions will enable ATU to tailor and/or consolidate continuing professional development (CPD) in this area.

Early analysis from the student survey (2026) suggests that, despite a low response rate of 23%, students need to be assisted in how to deploy learning from all relevant modules to develop their assignments and to glean from academic staff on how they are performing academically. It is noted that 52% of the respondents to the survey were first years and this may have had a bearing on the responses. It is anticipated that as students make progress through their programme, they will become more confident in assignment development and engagement with academic staff. Faculties will be asked to consider the type and timing of feedback, so it benefits students' future performances.

Enhancing digital & SDG capacity

This indicator (indicator 1.5) was selected to support the vision of *Harnessing Digital — the Digital*

Ireland Framework, which is to drive and enable the digital transition across the Irish economy and society. It aligns with one of the focuses of SATLE funding — Digital Transformation in the Tertiary Sector — enabling consolidation and expansion of the digital capacity that is an outcome of the Innovative Opportunities Transforming Education (iNOTE) Project, and which has already been reported upon by the National Forum. The indicator also aligns with the vision of the N-TUTORR Project in relation to digital transformation (see here for more details: [N-TUTORR – Transforming Learning: Home](#)).

The N-TUTORR project, with its focus on Education for Sustainability, the *European Strategy for Universities*, and the *Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development – ESD to 2030* (DoE and DFHERIS 2022) provide the rationale for the selection of this indicator (indicator 1.5), which is focused on ensuring learners acquire knowledge, skills and values as well as the disposition to promote, advance and take action for sustainable development, as required by *ESD to 2030*. This will be actioned through embedding SDGs in future curricula and building capacity among educators' current curricula when revised. Through this indicator, the University will thus serve as an actor for change in green and digital transition. As this is a new initiative, baseline data is not available, but the University will learn from emerging data and benchmark their approach to embedding sustainability in their curricula against UCC and TU Dublin over the lifetime of this agreement.

Flexible modes of delivery

The *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* called for HEIs to be flexible and innovative in the manner they deliver programmes and, in response to this, the legacy institutes of ATU developed programmes utilising online learning with associated infrastructure to support delivery. This proactiveness led to ATU having a leadership position in online and flexible learning delivery, in terms of both student numbers and range of programmes. The Human Capital Initiative Pillar 3 challenged HEIs to be agile, responsive and innovative and, through the [Higher Education 4.0 Project](#), ATU has responded with many innovative practices that meet the needs of employers and employees. These initiatives contribute significantly to sustaining the region from both an economic and social perspective, which in turn helps to address the vision of the *Rural Development Policy 2021–2025* as well as supporting ATU's leadership position in the online and flexible learning space. Flexibility is one of the six student-centred goals of the *National Access Plan* and the flexibility and choice in ATU's online provision are addressed in Indicator 1.6 of this performance objective. ATU wishes to retain its leadership position in online, flexible and professional development nationally, as flexibility in study options is a key priority for present and future learners, supporting access, inclusion, and personal and regional development. ATU is ambitious for growth in this area and intends to continue to lead in terms of the development and implementation of online learning innovations in teaching and assessment. ATU plans to participate in the *Times HE* benchmarking exercise and this will influence the indicator targets over the lifetime of the Performance Agreement (indicator 1.6).

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

The Head of Student Success in ATU has led on the development of a student success strategy and is now working with relevant stakeholders on the formation of an accompanying action plan. The aim

of the strategy is to enhance student engagement/retention and a sense of belonging in the student population. Actions to support student retention include a comprehensive induction programme that traverses semesters, a range of academic supports (maths support, academic writing, skills support) accessible to all students, individualised career guidance to support correct programme choice, and specialised support for neurodiverse students and students with mental health challenges as it is recognised that the latter cohort have poorer progression rates. The Head of Student Success will work with the academic community, Students' Unions and PMSS to ensure that the actions are achieved.

ATU's inaugural Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) strategy and action plan is near completion. The vision of the strategy is the provision of an agile, transformative educational experience that empowers our students to unlock their potential, with all activities, resources and supports that enable our students' education underpinned by the inclusive philosophy of Universal Design (UD) and the principles of sustainability. The strategy will ensure that teaching practice continues to be developed and supported, thereby enabling the achievement of indicators 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4. A continuum of professional development opportunities is available to staff, depending on their teaching acumen. Novice teachers can avail of the University's *First Steps in Teaching and Learning* programme whilst experienced teachers can become Advance HE Fellows. The University's commitment to supporting staff to achieve this fellowship is evidenced by the establishment of a funded support and mentoring scheme called *ATU Engage*. These programmes are in addition to a series of accredited Teaching and Learning postgraduate programmes and CPD opportunities through the Teaching and Learning Centre.

The ATU N-TUTORR Curriculum Framework, which seeks to address education for sustainability by embedding sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the curriculum, will be deployed to achieve indicator 1.5. The N-TUTORR team will provide guidance for programme boards and planning teams and promote sustainability education and education for sustainable development, driven and delivered by utilising the benefits of digitalisation and technology. Staff competence and capacity in the area of sustainability for education and digitalisation will be developed through resources available through the Teaching and Learning Centre and via a series of bespoke N-TUTORR [resources](#). Academic champions funded via N-TUTORR will provide staff with peer support. Through our European Universities alliance (EU GREEN), academic staff will also have access to a range of master classes and bespoke programmes with an SDG focus to further support their capacity to deliver and assess programmes with embedded SDG content.

ATU is working to maintain its leadership position in online and flexible learning despite the changing HEI landscape, which has brought most other HEIs into the flexible/online space. International benchmarking would assist in the further development of this area, especially in the context of the increasing number of pathways and the development of micro-credentials. ATU therefore intends to participate in the Times HE international ranking for online provision. This ranking is currently in the planning phase, and the detail of measures is not yet known. Strategies to support the University in maintaining its current leadership position include the approval of a university Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy, development of a micro-credential strategy, a programme portfolio review, mainstreaming a number of the innovative practices that emanated from Higher Ed 4.0, and enhancing the teaching and learning physical and digital environment.

Systems and policy integration

The completion of systems integration and aligned processes during the lifetime of the Performance Agreement will support the vision of the University LTA strategy and the mainstreaming of outputs of Higher Ed 4.0 and N-TUTORR.

In this Performance Agreement, the integration of selected systems across the University has been identified as having a direct impact on the student experience or on related decision-making.

- **Student Records Management System** to enhance decision-making at university level. ATU is a leader in a pilot that will assist future implementation in other institutions in the sector.
- Unified applications processes and system and **CRM** (customer relationship management) for online, flexible and professional development and international students. Coherent and enhanced reporting, metrics to drive decision-making and evidence to support applicant and learner experience and teaching practices.
- University-wide **module management system** to facilitate programme design across campuses, interdisciplinary programmes, and greater choice for students with access to modules beyond their campus/school.
- Integration of a **virtual learning environment** and associated educational technology is being undertaken to ensure a unified approach, better “look and feel” and improved student online experience.

These projects are all complex in their own right and are taking place in the context and environment of business continuity, ongoing operations and existing systems, which can affect delivery schedules and implementation.

As ATU develops, new teams, reporting lines and responsibilities are being established. The responsibility for Teaching and Learning in the University resides with the VP Students, Teaching & Learning and the VP EDI and Online, Flexible & Professional Development. A virtual Teaching & Learning Centre has been established which works alongside the Online, Flexible and Professional Development unit to ensure academic staff are employing the most current teaching strategies in the manner that suits the diversity of students needs and programme outcomes in the University. Both vice presidents will oversee the fulfilment of this objective over the lifetime of the Performance Agreement.

Quality assurance

Finally, quality assurance, through the completion of the academic policy framework across the University, is a significant undertaking that will provide a consistency of approach for all students, irrespective of discipline or location.

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	Non-progression rate (%) new entrants	ATU reporting unit / HEA SRS	Quantitative	25% (2022/23)	TU average (24%) Selected comparator HEIs (SETU 20%, TUS 19%, MTU 14%)	24% for 2022/23 new entrants	23% for 2023/24 new entrants	22% for 2024/25 new entrants	21% for 2025/26 new entrants	21% 4 p.p. reduction over 4 years
1.2	Percentage (%) of students responding “often” or “very often” to questions in Section D, on Assignment, Assessment & Feedback, in the Student Survey	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	37.3%	Technological Sector Average	N/A	37.3%	N/A¹	50%	Increase % of positive responses by 13 p.p.
1.3	Advance HE Fellowship award attainment as a result of ATU Engage programme	ATU Teaching & Learning Centre	Quantitative	2023: 36 to date	Not available	51	71	96	121	121 Increase of 85 on baseline

¹ The revised taught Student Survey runs biannually and will not run in 2027.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.4	Number of persons who are employed in an academic capacity with minimal teaching experience to have completed First Steps programme within two years of commencing at ATU	ATU Teaching & Learning Centre	Quantitative	N/A Revised programme for 2024/25 (First Steps in T & L)	Not available	25	40	60	80	80 academics will have completed First Steps programme
1.5	Proportion (%) of new programme curricula (Level 8 major awards), identified at programme validation stage, that have embedded SDG content applicable to programme	Quality Office ATU	Quantitative	No baseline data	Not available	20%	40%	60%	80%	80% of Level 8 major awards developed since Sept 2024 will have embedded SDG content
1.6	Number of part-time, flexible, and online enrolments	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2023/24: 12,783 (E-learning: 5,695 PT: 7,088)	Leadership in online and part-time provision in higher education sector in Ireland. Comparators: TU Dublin, MTU and TUS.	13,166	13,561	13,968	14,386	55,081 enrolments over 4 years 3% growth year on year Overall growth of 12.5%

Performance Objective 2

To increase ATU’s impact on the Northern and Western regional ecosystem through increased researcher numbers and projects related to regional innovation.

Pillar: Research & Innovation

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 2

The expansion of research capacity at ATU across the Northern and Western region is pivotal to alignment with national Smart Specialisation Strategy goals and leveraging regional strengths. By enhancing research capabilities, ATU can significantly contribute to regional economic development, innovation, and national policy objectives. This strategic move is supported by several national policy drivers and the unique attributes of the region.

Alignment with national Smart Specialisation strategic goals

The National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022–2027 emphasises the development of key sectors where the country has competitive advantages. These include digital technologies, sustainable energy, advanced manufacturing, and health sciences. By increasing research capacity in these areas, the University can:

1. **Digital Technologies:** Foster advancements in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and big data analytics.
2. **Sustainable Energy:** Drive innovation in renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and green technologies.
3. **Advanced Manufacturing:** Enhance capabilities in robotics, automation, and materials science.
4. **Health Sciences:** Improve healthcare technologies, biomedicine, and public health initiatives.

Regional strengths and opportunities

The Northern and Western region possesses unique attributes that align with national Smart Specialisation strategic goals. These include:

1. **Natural Resources:** Abundant natural resources provide opportunities for research in renewable energy and sustainable practices.

2. **Industrial Base:** A strong industrial base supports advanced manufacturing and technology-driven solutions.
3. **Academic and Research Institutions:** Existing institutions, including ATU, offer a solid foundation for expanding research capabilities.

National policy drivers

1. **National Development Plan 2021–2030 (NDP):** The NDP emphasises regional development, innovation, and the creation of a knowledge-based economy. Increasing research capacity aligns with these objectives by fostering regional innovation ecosystems and creating high-value jobs.
2. **Impact 2030: Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy:** The national strategy places research and innovation (R&I) at the heart of addressing Ireland’s social, economic and environmental challenges, maximising the impact of R&I on national priorities. Expanding research at ATU supports this by generating new knowledge, technologies, and applications.
3. **Climate Action Plan 2024:** Emphasising sustainable practices and renewable energy, the Climate Action Plan drives the need for transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy, which the region is well-positioned to address.
4. **Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework:** The strategy aims to position the country as a global leader in digital innovation, progressing the digital transformation of the Irish economy and society. Enhancing research in digital technologies will help achieve this vision.

Economic and social impact

Increasing research capacity will have a profound impact on the region by:

1. **Boosting Innovation and Competitiveness:** Enhanced research capabilities will drive innovation, leading to new products, services, and business models.
2. **Attracting Investment:** A strong research ecosystem attracts both public and private investment, fostering economic growth.
3. **Creating High-Value Jobs:** Research activities create skilled jobs, retaining talent within the region and reducing ‘brain drain’.
4. **Improving Quality of Life:** Innovations in health sciences and sustainable practices contribute to societal well-being and environmental sustainability.

As outlined in Section 1, ATU has underscored its role in the regional ecosystem in its first Strategic Plan. Innovation has been identified as a key deficit by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and a significant contributor to the status as a “Region in transition”. Disposable income per

head of population l in 2019 was at 87% of the national average ([CIA02 - Estimates of Household Income](#)). There are 43,235 people employed in enterprises in the region that have fewer than 10 employees – this represents 17% of the total employed nationally in small enterprises. ([Our Region's Economy | Regional Development Monitor](#))

As a new technological university, ATU is ambitious for its own development in research and innovation and how this can be carried out within the context of the Northern and Western Region (indicators 2.3 and 2.4. ATU’s mission and Strategic Plan align with the policy framework outlined above, seeking to significantly enhance regional innovation capacity and capability.

As a new technological university, it is no surprise that the broad area of research and innovation is the most challenging for ATU to contend with in achieving its mission to support the region. The summary of some benchmark KPIs in Table 3 reveals a general need to double (at least) the research outputs at ATU, which will require investment in the University’s capacity to meet this challenge. It is noteworthy that the citation impact for ATU compares well with benchmark institutions, confirming the quality of ATU’s research output. Research income per academic is lower than the sector average, and ATU is targeting improvement in this area over the timeframe of this agreement (indicator 2.5).

Indicator	ATU	Sector benchmark
TU Metric — Research Enrolments (2022/23)	4.1% (excludes St Angela’s)	5.7% (all System)
Research Income per academic (FTE) (2019/20)	€13,195	€47,719 (all System)
Horizon Funding (EU Contribution)	€6.1M	€15.6M (TU average)
Share of RFAM² v RGAM³	RGAM approx. 20% RFAM approx. 15%	
Citation Impact (Bibliometrics SciVal)	1.5	SETU — 1.42 UCD — 1.73

Table 3: Summary of some benchmark KPIs setting context for this performance objective (PO2).

Key actions in relation to research in the ATU Strategic Plan are shown in Figure 5 and these are strongly congruent with capacity-building measures in the TU Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise (TU RISE) scheme.

² Total recurrent funding from HEA, including ‘top slices’.

³ Core grant element of recurrent funding.



Figure 5: The research themes in ATU's Strategic Plan, divided into three objective areas.

The TU RISE programme (RISE@ATU) invests European Regional Development Funds to progress Ireland’s *Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation* (S3) in the Northern and Western region. RISE@ATU will advance institutional research and innovation (R&I) capacity while delivering tangible benefits to enterprises, empowering diverse beneficiaries, and ultimately fostering regional prosperity and cohesion.

RISE@ATU sets ambitious objectives to scale and sustain increased R&I capacity for the region, building on the Smart Specialisation framework, *Impact 2030*, and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), through continuous engagement and collaboration with regional enterprise and stakeholders. However, it recognises that ATU is building from a low base in terms of human capital. It also recognises that significant regional disparity exists in the number of doctoral graduates. Dublin-region universities (comprising UCD, TCD, DCU, TU Dublin and MU) were responsible for 59% of all Irish doctoral graduates in 2017, 2018 and 2020. UCC graduated 13%, UL 7%, and University of Galway 15%. Baseline data shows that ATU’s postgraduate research enrolment in 2021/22 represented less than 1% of national PhD enrolment.

In designing this performance objective and the related indicators, the focus was on achieving targets to support regional development by growing researcher numbers in ATU (indicator 2.1). The first manifestation of this will be the establishment of five Postgraduate Research Training Programmes (PRTPs) linked directly with Smart Specialisations and with enterprise.

A significant part of the TU RISE programme will be the recruitment and deployment of postdoctoral researchers during 2025, again linked with regional plans and enterprise (indicator 2.3).

As the number of postgraduate students grows in the years ahead, it is important that the quality of the postgraduate student experience is monitored, maintained and enhanced (indicators 2.2 and 2.6). This has been a traditional strength of the legacy institutions and could be a differentiating factor for postgraduate study at ATU. As part of the institutional review process, a baseline survey has been designed to attain feedback from postgraduates under the headings of quality of supervision, responsibilities and supports, academic processes, research culture, training and development, facilities and infrastructure, and overall experience. The first survey was completed by the end of Quarter 1, 2024 and provides baseline data for the student experience. The survey showed that almost 90% agreed or strongly agreed with affirmative statements concerning supervision, contact with supervisors, and feedback. In general, the academic processes were also favourably rated, with some work to be done with student induction and procedures for final assessment. The area of greatest concern was lack of infrastructure and specialist facilities in ATU and timely access to specialist facilities – ratings were broadly in the range 55% to 75%, depending on the question. Overall, 77% of students rated the experience as good or excellent.

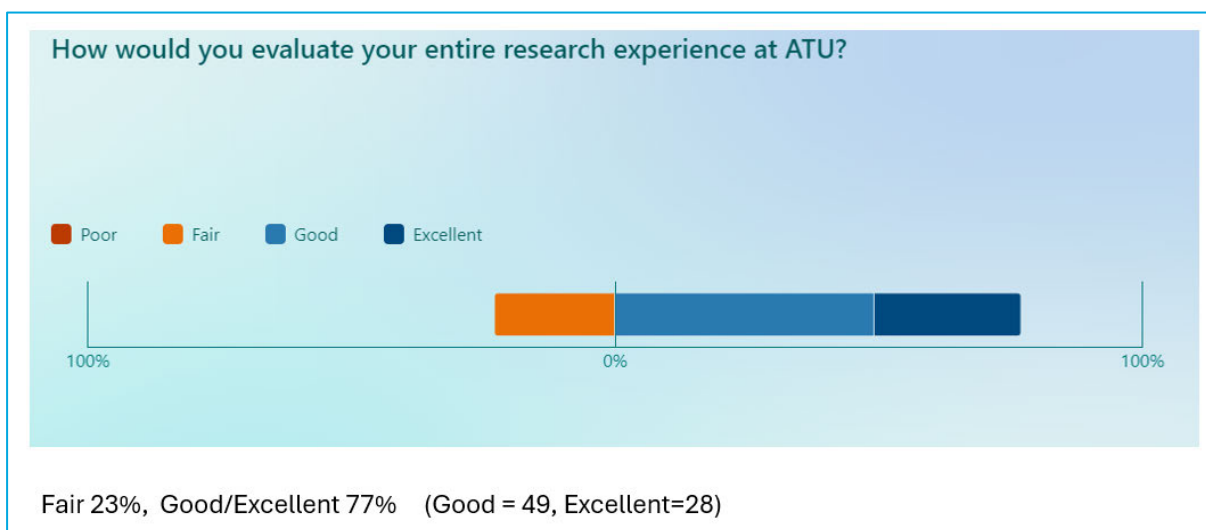


Figure 6: Overall measure of research student experience (internal survey, Q1 2024).

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

It is planned that RISE@ATU will be closely aligned with Performance Objective 2. Therefore, the implementation and monitoring will closely follow the deliverables under the various work packages in that proposal. Table 4 shows the summary of the RISE@ATU work packages, including start and end dates, with the VP Research & Innovation holding overall responsibility in ATU for this strand, mediated through the research directors (x3).

Work Package No.	Work Package Title	Start MM/YY	End MM/YY
WP1	Establishment and development of Research and Innovation office capacity	01/24	12/27
WP2	Establishment and development of Research Advisory and Support Services	05/24	12/27
WP3	Enhancement of research capacity: postdoctoral fellowship programme	06/24	12/27
WP4	Enhancement of research capacity: postgraduate researcher programme	01/24	12/28
WP5	Enhancement of research capacity: design and development of undergraduate & postgraduate modules	06/24	12/26

Table 4: Summary of ATU’s TU RISE work packages as outlined in the application.

In broad terms, the phases of implementation over the lifetime of this Performance Agreement can be characterised as follows:

- 2024/25: Setting the Foundation
- 2025/26: Research Infrastructure and Resources
- 2026/27: Empowering Researchers and Operationalisation
- 2027/28: Expanding, Impact Assessment, and Adaptation

The Research Office will be monitoring and reporting the progress of the work packages.

In relation to student experience, as referenced earlier, the Research and Innovation sub-committee of ATU’s Academic Council has carried out the first postgraduate student survey for the CINNTE institutional review, and it is planned that this will become an annual survey. In addition, a university-wide annual project progress reporting system is in design phase.

This performance objective represents a significant element of ATU’s strategic plan and encapsulates the evolution from institute of technology to technological university in relation to research. Table 5, below, shows some of the risks associated with the various elements of this performance objective.

Risk	Mitigation
1. Funding Shortfalls: Risk of insufficient funding to support the expansion and sustainability of research activities, particularly in securing external grants and matching national benchmarks.	Proactive engagement with funding bodies and potential collaborators, diversifying income streams, and robust grant management.
2. Talent Acquisition: Challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified researchers, postdoctoral researchers, and students, particularly in a region with existing disparities.	Developing attractive recruitment packages, enhancing training and support programmes, and leveraging regional partnerships.
3. Infrastructure Deficiencies: Inadequate research infrastructure, including labs and facilities, that could hinder progress in innovation and student satisfaction.	Prioritising investment in critical infrastructure, phased implementation, and utilizing existing regional resources.
4. Alignment with National Priorities: Risk that research projects may not fully align with national Smart Specialisations or regional strengths, reducing potential impact and funding.	Continuous alignment of research centres and projects with national and regional strategies, and regular reviews of project portfolios.
5. Research Output Quality: Risk that increased quantity in research does not translate into high-impact, high-quality outputs, affecting the University’s reputation and benchmarks.	Implementing rigorous quality control processes, providing training in research methodologies, and fostering collaboration.

Table 5: Risks associated with PO 2

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 postgraduate research enrolments as proportion (%) of total enrolments	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2023/24: 564 (PhD + Research Masters) 3.8%	TU Dublin	590 4.0%	620 4.2%	650 4.4%	700 4.7%	Increase in p.a. enrolments of 136 0.9 p.p. increase on baseline
2.2	PhD completion rate (%)⁴	Student records, HEA statistics	Quantitative	2018/19 cohort (six years up to 2023/24) 50%	TU Dublin 2023/24 86%, MTU not available	N/A	56%	59%	62%	+12% increase from baseline
2.3	Number of postdoctoral fellowships co-invested with Enterprise	TU RISE reporting and SETU TU Industry brochure	Quantitative	2022/23: 0 funded by TU Rise	Targets set in TU Rise work package. Funding 10 postdocs under TU RISE	10	0	0	0	10
2.4	Number of enterprises supported by TU RISE (Indicator Code RC001)	TU RISE reporting	Quantitative	2023/24: 0	Targets set under TU RISE Indicator Code RC001	20	70	70	70	230 over 4 years

⁴ The percentage is calculated based on the number of full-time students who initially register in a given academic year, who are conferred with a PhD by or during the academic year 6 years thereafter (i.e. the PhD is conferred within 6 calendar years from initial registration). This calculation excludes students who initially register on a Masters by Research programme and who do not transfer to a PhD programme. It includes: 1) students who initially register for a Masters by Research Programme but who transfer to a PhD programme, 2) students who withdraw from the PhD programme, 3) students who leave the PhD programme with an exit award, and 4) students who are still registered or, at the time of calculation, have deferred the current year of their programme.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.5	Research Income (€) per Academic Staff (FTE)	ATU; HEA System Performance Dashboard	Quantitative	2019/20: €13,195	Reduce gap to TU average Baseline average for all TUs is €20,043 in 2019/20	€14,000	€15,000	€16,000	€18,000	+€4,805 36% increase on baseline
2.6	Proportion (%) of research students reporting good/excellent student experience	ATU research student survey / National Student PGR Student Survey	Quantitative	2024: 77% Good/ Excellent from internal ATU PGR survey ⁵	Not available	80%	80%	80%	80%	3 p.p. increase on baseline
2.7	Number of start-ups⁶ supported through the four ATU innovation hubs, through facilities and funded programmes	ATU Innovation Hubs	Quantitative	95 in 2023	Numbers of start-ups supported by innovation hubs in other TUs	105 in 2024	110 in 2025	115 in 2026	120 in 2027	120 start-ups in 2027 (increase of 25 on the baseline)

⁵ An internal ATU Postgraduate Research (PGR) student survey was used to provide the baseline data as the national PGR survey was not conducted that year. ATU will use data from the national survey for years in which that survey runs, and will use data from its internal survey for other years. The questions relating to overall student experience are sufficiently similar to allow for consistent tracking of performance against the indicator.

⁶ The reported figure includes innovation centre clients, Student Inc. entrepreneurship participants and New Frontiers participants.

Performance Objective 3

To widen access and participation by increasing the number of access routes and by providing awards addressing the needs of priority groups, national policy and regional agendas in an inclusive learning environment.

Pillar: Access & Participation

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 3

Widening access and participation

According to HEA statistics (2020/21), a significant percentage of the ATU student population is considered to be socioeconomically deprived (19% of new entrants to ATU in 2020/21 were from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, compared to the national average of 11% [source: HEA SPF Dashboard]). Figure 7 shows the 2023/24 student profile. There are increases in recipients of SUSI, Student Assistance Fund and PATH 2 bursaries and in the number of students accessing ATU via the DARE route. Since inception, ATU has been committed to widening access, with ATU reserving places for QQI FET applicants on 95% of full-time programmes. Currently, work is being undertaken to widen access to teacher education programmes in the creative disciplines, in addition to the initiatives ATU St Angela's has put in place for initial teacher education in Home Economics, with the aim of having an agreed FE route for the academic year 2025/26. The University, in its first year, aligned the entry requirements for QQI FET applicants for 90% of programmes across all nine campuses, with further alignment underway. University internal data sources reveal that of the 2023/24 new entrants in possession of a 2023 Leaving Cert, 31% had attended DEIS schools.

In the academic year 2023/24, 2,165 students registered with the Disability service, of which 36.4% were new entrants. The percentage of full-time students registered with a disability is 14.8%. Since becoming ATU, the University has been focused on establishing baseline data as a single entity and integrating systems so that trends will be identifiable, thus enabling accurate reporting on NAP targets.

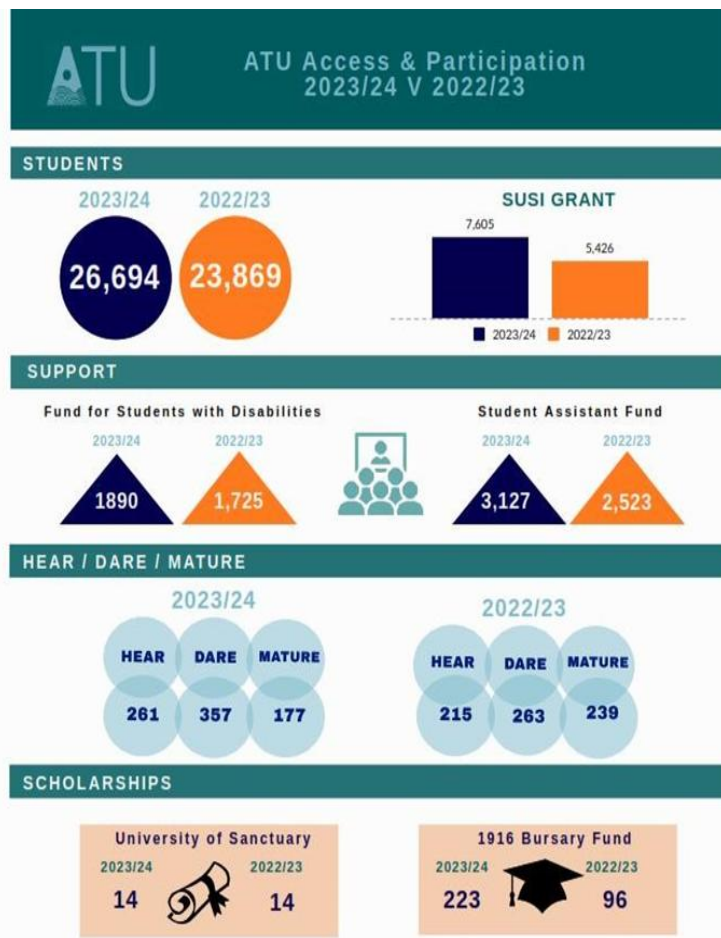


Figure 7: ATU student profile (SRS, March 1st 2024.)

The establishment of ATU in 2022 increased awareness around the availability and accessibility of university education in the region, leading also to an increased awareness amongst the Traveller community of opportunities in ATU. The timeframe also coincided with the provision of HEA PATH 3 and PATH 5 funding aimed at increasing support for the Traveller community in higher education. HEA PATH 3 is a joint collaboration of the West/Northwest Higher Education Cluster (ATU and University of Galway), which saw the funding of one full-time and one part-time Traveller Education Officer for the region. HEA PATH 5 funding provides supports for a number of initiatives, mainly Traveller-led. ATU has focused its efforts on delivering tangible outcomes to commitments under the National Access Plan (2022–2028), contributing to a whole-of-government and a whole-of-education approach. It engages with the Traveller community under three pillars, as follows:

- Other education providers:** ATU is working with other education providers in a variety of ways to increase numbers of students from the Traveller community progressing to higher education. Current data indicates that 31% of Travellers complete the Leaving Certificate (in comparison with 91.4% of the general population). Census 2022 indicates that 4.7% of Travellers completed a third-level education, compared to 47.7% of the general population (*Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, 2024–2030*).

- **Traveller advocacy groups and other stakeholders:** HEA PATH 3 and PATH 5 funding has provided possibilities for collaboration with several community development and advocacy groups, including Donegal Travellers Project, Galway Traveller Movement, Sligo Traveller Support Group (STSG) and other stakeholders, providing a partnership approach to access and widening participation. The Certificate in Community Development is an example of this partnership approach, delivered by ATU in conjunction with the Health Service Executive (HSE), local partnership companies, and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP). Forty-three women successfully completed this programme in June 2024. ATU is not advancing this as a potential indicator at this juncture as the demand for the programme needs to be explored further and the supporting financial infrastructure needs to be in place.
- **Institutional developments:** PATH 3 and PATH 5 funding has enabled an increase in supports for prospective and current students. ATU is actively engaged in increasing awareness of the Traveller community on its campuses across the region, which will support increased Traveller self-identification.

Further information is available at www.atu.ie/traveller-roma.

ATU aims to maintain current Traveller participation levels of 0.2% of new entrants (2022/23). The immediate lack of certainty around the continuation of PATH 3 funding and the plans for PATH 5 funding beyond 2025 — both of which are necessary funding prerequisites to support initiatives to enhance Traveller participation — is an obstacle to advancing a more ambitious target. Discussion on sustainable funding for this area is required, particularly given the prioritisation of the Traveller community under the National Access Plan (2022–2028) and commitments made under the recently published *Traveller and Roma Education Strategy, 2024–2030* and the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2024–2028*.

ATU is committed to meeting its responsibilities under the National Access Plan in relation to widening participation and is active in all five PATH streams. This commitment is clearly articulated and accommodated in the inaugural university Access, Transfer and Progression policy. The indicators selected are in relation to widening access provision (indicators 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5) the creation of a bespoke programme for students with intellectual disabilities (indicator 3.6), creating a conducive learning environment for our neurodiverse students (indicators 3.9 and 3.10) and supporting tertiary education programme expansion (indicator 3.4).

Widening Access programme provision across the western seaboard

Access programmes have been successfully delivered at the University’s Donegal campus for the past two decades. Students in the counties of Sligo/Leitrim/Mayo were served by the University of Galway (UoG) satellite access programme until two years ago when UoG ceased satellite provision in Sligo. ATU aims to address this dearth of provision by expanding its provision to three further sites over the lifetime of the Performance Agreement. The need to address this gap was compounded by a review of the Access programme’s student profile, which revealed that many of the students would be categorised, according to the National Access Plan, as being from one of the recognised priority groups, i.e. socioeconomically deprived (e.g. carers, recipients of the care system, Travellers, asylum

seekers, ex-prisoners, persons who have never accessed higher education before, etc.). The Access programme provides a viable, supportive route to higher education, with over 50% of all Access students progressing to an undergraduate programme. The Access programme will be delivered in ATU Donegal and Sligo in the academic year 2024/25 and extended to ATU Mayo in 2025/26 and ATU Galway in 2026/27 (indicator 3.5).

Delivery of a bespoke programme for students with an intellectual disability

As a response to the National Access Plan and PATH 4, ATU has developed and validated a programme for students with an intellectual disability. This programme is due to commence in the academic year 2024/25 on three campuses. There is currently no HEI on the western seaboard offering a programme for students with an intellectual disability. ATU has a long-standing tradition of supporting opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to actively participate in campus life. The ‘Count Me In’ initiative by Western Care, in partnership with the University at the Mayo campus, allows individuals attending their service to benefit from and engage in college life, sampling lectures, participating in tasters and pre-entry programmes, and pursuing part-time third-level education. Collaboration with organisations such as the Brothers of Charity (via the School for Design & Creative Arts in Galway) highlights the commitment of ATU to inclusive projects. Letterkenny Institute of Technology (now ATU Donegal) played a pivotal role in establishing the Northwest Steering Group for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in 2019, bringing together employers, agencies, schools, and advocacy organisations to develop a third-level programme. St. Angela’s College in Sligo successfully delivered a non-certified two-year programme in Contemporary Living for Adults with an Intellectual Disability from 2011 to 2017. In addition, IT Sligo was instrumental in facilitating the HSE (Health Service Executive) in the delivery of a Level 4/5 QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) Community Link Programme to persons with intellectual disabilities onsite for over a decade, allowing students to attend college alongside friends and family members. ATU’s decision to develop an accredited programme was also influenced by the empirical evidence on the positive outcomes to students and their families from having the opportunity to participate in third-level education (indicator 3.6).

Number of registrants accessing ATU via Tertiary Education programmes

In conjunction with the National Tertiary Office, Donegal ETB, Galway–Roscommon ETB and Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim ETB, ATU has shown its commitment to the concept of widening access and participation through Tertiary Education provision. Three programmes were developed in 2023/24 in the disciplines of Business, Engineering and Science, in addition to nursing provision via this route. Cavan–Monaghan ETB joined the cluster in 2024, and this will be an impetus for further programme development (indicator 3.4).

Craft Apprentices

ATU currently delivers training for five different trades, with plans to expand into seven trades in 2024/25, as per Table 6.

ATU Campus	Apprenticeship	Students per year
Sligo	Electrical	16 students x 12 blocks x 3 terms = 576
	Carpentry and Joinery	16 students x 4 blocks x 3 terms = 192
	Toolmaking	16 students x 3 blocks x 3 terms = 144
Galway	Electrical	16 students x 12 blocks x 3 terms = 576
	Motor Mechanic	16 students x 2 blocks x 3 terms = 96
	Wood Manufacturing and Finishing	8 students x 3 blocks x 3 terms = 72
Letterkenny	Electrical	16 students x 6 blocks x 3 terms = 288
Future plans		
Sligo	Electrical	16 students x 4 blocks x 3 terms = 192
Castlebar	Electrical	16 students x 4 blocks x 3 terms = 192
Killybegs	Electrical	16 students x 6 blocks x 3 terms = 288
Letterkenny	Metal Fabrication	16 students x 2 blocks x 3 terms = 96
	Refrigeration	16 students x 1 blocks x 3 terms = 48

Table 6: Craft apprenticeships at ATU.

Consortium-led Apprenticeships

ATU is currently the Coordinating Provider across five disciplines in consortium-led apprenticeships, with plans to expand across more levels and campuses in 2025/26 as per Table 7.

ATU Campus Delivery	Apprenticeship Programme	Students per year	Qualification Level	Industry Consortium Coordinators
Sligo	Insurance	100	L8	Insurance Institute
Sligo	Manufacturing	16	L6 & L7 (L8 in 2025/26)	IBEC
Sligo	Transport Operations & Commercial Driving	16	L6	FTAI
Sligo	Civil Engineering	96	L6 & L7 (L8 & L9 in 2025/26)	ATU
Galway	Manufacturing (L8 Civil Engineering planned in 2024/25)	67	L6 & L7 (L8 in 2024/25)	IBEC

Table 7: Consortium-led apprenticeships at ATU.

The locations of the ATU campuses ensure that availability of apprenticeship programmes is spread across the region and the recent introduction of the apprenticeship in Wood Manufacturing and Finishing in ATU Connemara is an example of how this can be achieved. There are many stakeholders involved in apprenticeships, which makes future planning more difficult to predict; however, ATU is planning to grow the number of blocks and students in craft apprenticeship programmes over the lifetime of this agreement (indicator 3.3).

Micro-credentials

The expansion of micro-credentials, minor awards, and special purpose awards (SPAs) offers a flexible and accessible way for individuals to acquire specialised knowledge and skills (indicator 3.7). These shorter, focused programmes enable upskilling, reskilling, and lifelong learning, making education more accessible to a broader range of learners. ATU is a leader in remote learning, and this is an ideal mode of delivery for these shorter awards. Until now, ATU has not pursued the marketing of micro-credentials with the same intensity as other HEIs and is providing limited numbers in bespoke areas at present. However, ATU has developed its policy in relation to micro-credentials, which was approved by Academic Council in Q1 2024. For benchmarking purposes, classification of non-major micro-awards in part-time mode to include minor awards, SPAs and other micro-credentials gives a basis for comparison. Using these criteria, ATU led the HEI sector with 5,965 enrolments in 2022/23, out of a total of 32,395 across the system. Though this element of provision is undergoing transformation, ATU intends to retain its leadership position in part-time flexible offerings that are under 60 credits (indicator 3.7).

Springboard and Human Capital Initiative (HCI)

ATU has been an active participant in Springboard and HCI since its inception in 2011, as illustrated on the HEA System Performance Dashboard. As part of its strategic focus on employability and skills development, ATU will continue to make submissions under these and future labour market activation measures, with a plan to grow the number of Springboard/HCI enrolments over the next four years (indicator 3.8). ATU works closely with industry partners and Regional Skills Fora Managers to ensure all submissions meet skills shortages and industry needs. This is reflected in the large number of applications received and the implementation of waiting lists for these programmes.

Since 2011, ATU has achieved the results in Table 8:

Period	Total Applications	Conversion from Applicant to Learner i.e. Enrolled	Successfully Completed Studies
2011–2023 (incl.)	34,148	13,141	63%
2024	3,691		

Table 8: Springboard applications and completions

In conclusion, the expansion and strengthening of pathways to ATU, with a focus on apprenticeships, flexible awards, and Tertiary Education links, serves to broaden access and enhance the region's education landscape. By embracing these initiatives, we can empower individuals of all backgrounds and circumstances to pursue their educational aspirations, contribute to the workforce, and nurture prosperity in the region.

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

This performance objective has a number of subsets, all linked by enhanced access and participation.

In relation to implementation, Table 9 summarises the key points — responsibility for oversight of this performance objective, along with associated risks, lies with the VP Academic Affairs & Registrar (VPAAR).

Objective Area	Actions and Resources	Risks	Mitigating Actions
Socioeconomic Profile	Continuing access programmes (e.g. HEAR) Maintaining regional provision	Cost of Living	Develop deeper partnerships with supporting organisations such as Local Area Employment Services / Intreo.
Apprenticeships	Funding programme agreed Development of facilities, equipment	Lack of funding Failure to fill new programmes / campuses	Collaboration across ATU to ensure a coherent, coordinated approach to our offerings.
Micro-credentials	Academic council — policy approval Development of offerings by academic units Marketing	Crowded and competitive marketplace	Ongoing review of offerings; deepen relationships with industry partners and representative bodies (IBEC) and Skillnets.
Springboard/HCI	Continuing participation and delivery of programmes	Funding applications are unsuccessful Programmes don't fill	Ensure offerings are embedded in major awards available to other cohorts; review offerings.
FE/HE Pathways	New funded post	Mapping exercise does not deliver viable or attractive pathways	Deepen relationship with FET providers at a discipline level.

Table 9: Summary of objective areas under Performance Objective 3

ATU has been a strong participant in the Springboard and HCI programmes and has benefitted significantly from funding associated with these programmes. ATU has shown high levels of flexibility and adaptability in responding to national calls, and will continue to do so, especially in areas identified under the Strategic Plan. There is an obvious risk to ATU if these programmes no longer run, or if ATU is unsuccessful in attaining funding, especially in relation to popular Springboard programmes and sustaining highly innovative projects under the HCI. This risk is somewhat mitigated by ATU's track record in attracting part-time/online learners outside of these programmes, especially in relation to people in the workplace.

Actions to support widening participation indicators

As the selection of indicators shows, ATU is committed to widening access and participation but is equally conscious of the need to provide a learning environment to support students of diverse needs and backgrounds. Academic staff will continue to be supported in embedding the principles of Universal Design and Learning (UDL) in their teaching, learning and assessment by Teaching and Learning staff and supported to obtain the digital badge in teaching and learning. N-TUTORR will provide complementary support via a series of masterclasses and by funding a number of UDL champions to provide direct support to staff in the teaching environment. PMSS will also be supported to obtain the digital badge *UD: Beyond the Classroom* so their interactions and practices can operate through a UD lens. Building on our commitment to UDL, ATU is working towards being a signatory of the Altitude Charter, which addresses UD under four key pillars:

- Learning, Teaching & Assessment
- Supports, Services & Social Engagement
- the Physical Environment
- the Digital Environment.

A university-wide steering group led by the VP Students, Teaching & Learning will oversee this ambition. The accessibility audit completed in 2023/24 will provide baseline data to help prioritise actions and timelines. In addition, in recognition of our increasingly neurodiverse student population (of the 1,890 students registered with the disability service in 2023/24, 16% had a mental health disorder, 15% ADHD and 12% Autism), ATU will expand the number of campuses which are designated as autism friendly by *AsIAm*. In November 2022, the Sligo campus of ATU became the first campus of the Technological sector to achieve designation as autism friendly. ATU aims to have its Donegal campuses receive designation in Q4 2025, and all campuses of ATU to be designated as autism friendly by 2028, where feasible. Please note that some campuses will not have the ASD student population to meet the criteria for designation (e.g. currently, ATU St Angela's; ATU Connemara) and the focus there will be on adherence to *AsIAm* principles. A data analyst has been appointed (funded by TSAF) to work with the University reporting office to develop processes to capture the required KPIs as per the National Access Plan.

In relation to apprenticeships, ATU has taken the approach of planning for the incremental introduction of new degree-level apprenticeships over the next four years, as well as supporting capacity-building in established craft apprenticeships. Specifically, in relation to craft apprenticeships, ATU plans to increase the total number of blocks by increasing capacity on existing offerings (e.g. Electrical) as well as introducing Metal Fabrication and Refrigeration & Air Conditioning. Importantly, in terms of regional provision, two additional campuses (Mayo Campus and Donegal, Killybegs Campus) will offer craft apprenticeships for the first time.

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 new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas	HEA SRS and System Performance Dashboard	Quantitative	2020/2021: 14% (ATU) ⁷	Continue to exceed system average (11% in 2020/21)	17%	17%	17%	17%	Maintain current socioeconomic profile
3.2	Number and proportion (%) of new entrants who are Irish Travellers⁸	Equal Access Survey reported on HEA System Performance Dashboard	Quantitative	2022/23: 0.2%	Exceed system average (36 in 2022/23, 0.1%)	Maintain baseline (0.2%)	+1 (0.2%)	maintain increase (0.2%)	+1 (0.2%)	+2 Maintain current proportion (0.2%)
3.3	Number of Craft Apprenticeship blocks and enrolments (headcount)	ATU Academic Units and Apprenticeship progress report 2023 and 2024	Quantitative	2023/24: 126 blocks 1,656 students	Total national craft apprenticeship population 27,470 (end 2023) targeted to grow by 11% in 2024	177 blocks 2,472 students	177 blocks 2,472 students	177 blocks 2,472 students	177 blocks 2,472 students	204 additional blocks delivered for 3,264 additional students over 4 years

⁷ This baseline figure does not include St Angelas students who joined ATU after the baseline period.

⁸ 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'. See the HEA Statistics: [Privacy, Data Protection and Disclosure Control](#).

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.4	Number of students accessing ATU via Tertiary Education programmes	ATU	Quantitative	N/A (new initiative)	Not available	75	90	105	115	385 students accessing ATU via this route over 4 years
3.5	Number of students registered on Access Programmes	ATU Academic Units supported by Student services	Quantitative	2023/24: 182	Access Programme in University of Galway (42 students registered in 2022/2023)	200	215	230	250	Increase of 68 on baseline Access programme delivered on 3 campuses thereby providing regional accessibility
3.6	Number of registered students on bespoke programme for students with an intellectual disability (ID)	ATU Academic Units supported by Student services ; HEA PATH 4 Phase 2 Systematic Review and Synthesis of evidence 2025	Quantitative	Not applicable as new programme	TCD programme (since 2006 average annual intake is 10 p.a.)	21	No new intake	15 students	No new intake	36 students registered over 4 years
3.7	Number of students undertaking ATU micro-awards	HEA SRS returns student profile 2024/25; HEA 'Our Data – Students'	Quantitative	2022/23: 5,965	Maintain leading share (System total: 32,395 in 2022/23). Comparators: SETU, MTU	6,000	6,100	6,200	6,300	Increase of 335 on baseline

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.8	Number of Springboard/HCI enrolments	HEA SRS; Springboard	Quantitative	2021/22: 1,653	Maintain share of places for all participating HEIs (8,335 in 2021/22)	1,700	1,720	1,740	1,760	107 increase in annual enrolments over baseline
3.9	Number of academic staff who have gained an understanding of UDL through formal accreditation (digital badges/ PG Cert/ Masters in UDL) or through informal routes such as workshops, conferences, peer UDL support group etc.	SRS for accredited programmes; T&L Office annual statistics	Quantitative	2023/24: 233	Not available.	330	420	510	600	600 staff with understanding of UDL through formal or informal processes
3.10	ATU campuses with AsIAm designation as autism friendly or adherence to AsIAm principles.	ATU disability service	Quantitative	One campus – Sligo	DCU and NCI only other accredited HEIs	N/A	Donegal Letter-kenny campus AsIAm accredited campus	N/A	Galway & Mayo campuses⁹	Four campuses accredited and/or adhering to AsIAm principles.

⁹ AsIAm accredited campuses, if there are sufficient students with ASD to meet criteria for designation. Otherwise, in tandem with ATU St Angela’s, adherence to ASD principles.

Performance Objective 4

To enhance regional economic sustainability by creating a robust ecosystem that is highly engaged regionally, nationally and internationally, driving cross-border and international student enrolment, and enhancing connectivity between the region and organisations across Europe.

Pillar: Engagement

Transversals: Enterprise; Region; International; Climate and Sustainable Development.

Rationale for Performance Objective 4

Engagement can take many forms, and in shaping this performance objective, three areas have been selected which have the common aim of enriching the region and nurturing prosperity for its citizens. Some other aspects of engagement with enterprise in the region are considered under Performance Objective 2.

North–South

The genesis of current policy for North–South cooperation lies in the Good Friday Agreement (1998), which identified education as one area to promote peace and mutual understanding. More recently, the Northern Ireland Protocol (2019) addressed issues relating to the border arising from Brexit, including cooperation in higher education and research, and the *New Decade, New Approach* agreement (2020) confirmed the importance of co-operation in higher education. The Framework for Cooperation on Higher Education Between Ireland and Northern Ireland (2015) was established to enhance collaborative efforts in higher education across the border, placing special emphasis on promoting collaboration, enhancing student mobility, facilitating research partnerships and improving quality and efficiency. Examples include joint degree programmes, research consortia and student exchange.

PEACEPLUS is a cross-border European Union funding programme designed to promote peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. It has a budget of approximately €1 billion and recognises that higher education has a specific role to play in collaborative research and innovation, education and training (including vocational training and skills development), community engagement and social inclusion, support for SMEs and economic development, and environmental sustainability.

The HEA dashboard provides a geographical breakdown of the origin of registered students in HEIs and, usefully, Northern Ireland is categorised as one of the domicile groups. At national level, 1,660 students (980 full-time) were registered in HEIs in the Republic of Ireland in the academic year 2022/23. Of these, ATU had 365 registered students from Northern Ireland (22% of the national total), of which 95 (10% of the national full-time total) were studying in full-time mode. From a geographical

viewpoint, Dundalk IT is an interesting benchmark as it registered 230 students, of which 195 were studying in full-time mode.

Online provision from ATU (85 students) is a significant contributor to Northern Ireland registrations, which is not surprising given ATU's position and offerings in the marketplace and existing North–South collaboration. Given the policy context and the emerging funding programmes for North–South collaboration outlined above, there is an opportunity for ATU to attract more students from Northern Ireland to study at ATU campuses, especially in full-time mode. ATU is targeting an additional 130 registrations from students normally domiciled in Northern Ireland during the timeframe of this Performance Agreement (indicator 4.1).

Sustainability in peripheral regions – EU GREEN

The European Universities initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2019 as a flagship initiative of the European strategy for universities, with the ambition of unlocking transformative collaboration and mobility between European HEIs. The initiative is now an integral part of the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme and is a key element of the push towards establishing a European Education Area by 2025.

Twelve Irish higher education institutions are working in partnership with 97 other European universities as members of European University Alliances (EUAs). In addition, each alliance has associated partners ranging from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), enterprises, municipalities, agencies, associations, local and regional authorities and networks. Irish higher education institutions are involved in more EUAs than any other EU country and are delivering specifically to the Irish international strategy, as stated in Global Citizens 2030, of 'enhancing Ireland's capacity to be trusted influencers and leaders of future developments'.

ATU is a member of a transnational alliance of nine European universities (EU GREEN) which are peripheral regionally anchored, while globally oriented, and strategically aligned for engagement with all of the European regions. One of EU GREEN's aims is to "train citizens and deliver research and innovation that contribute to the development of our local and/or regional ecosystems, thus providing answers to pressing challenges for society at large". To do this, a broad educational area is being created where sustainability, in its widest sense, is a transversal element. ATU has identified EU GREEN as an important vehicle to enhance the global view of its students and staff, as well as building engagement networks (which is the work package ATU is leading, and which aligns with a key theme in the Strategic Plan). Importantly, the exchange of best practice should have beneficial outcomes for ATU's region. Mobility is a key factor in achieving this and ATU will facilitate both incoming and outgoing real and virtual mobilities of staff and students across our eight European Universities Alliance partners.

Targets for mobilities have been set out in the EU GREEN programme of work, and ATU's role in and commitment to achieving these has been translated to indicator 4.3 in this Performance Agreement, which sets out that the number of student and staff mobilities to EU GREEN partners will grow from a baseline of 45 (2023) to 310 over four years. EU GREEN is currently in its second year and the processes and definitions for engagement are nearing completion. The final refined definition of a mobility has yet to be agreed so, for the baseline, we have used the term mobility to represent a visit from the ATU

community to an EU GREEN partner university. An engagement hub will be formed by the end of 2024 which will drive and capture mobilities with alliance partners (staff and students) and associated organisations across society and economy in these regions (indicator 4.4).

International

Global Citizens 2030: Ireland's International Talent and Innovation Strategy, launched in January 2024, aims to position Ireland as a premier destination for international talent and innovation by attracting top global students, researchers, and professionals through targeted recruitment, scholarships, and streamlined visa processes. The strategy emphasises enhancing the quality and international reputation of Irish education and research, fostering a robust innovation ecosystem, and building strategic alliances with leading global institutions. It promotes global citizenship education and aligns initiatives with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, while also expanding digital and blended learning opportunities. Comprehensive support services for international students and researchers, along with clear career pathways, are key components, ensuring their successful integration and contribution to Ireland's academic and research landscape. The strategy also focuses on building resilience and adaptability in the education and research sectors to navigate future global challenges. In relation to international students, the strategy aims to increase enrolment numbers and diversity, enhance support services, ensure quality education, promote employability, improve retention rates, and elevate global recognition for international students in Ireland.

In 2022/23, ATU registered 1,105 non-EU students (of which 525 were full-time), representing 4% of the national total of 25,245. Interestingly, when part-time/remote classifications are excluded, ATU's share of the national profile falls to approximately 2.2%. While other aspects of internationalisation are an integral part of university plans (e.g. EU GREEN), there will be a focus on increasing international student numbers through all modes of delivery on our campuses during this Performance Agreement (indicator 4.2). International alliances, opening up possibilities for exchange schemes and joint programmes, should embellish more traditional methods of international student recruitment, while more flexible delivery methods could diminish geographical barriers to international delivery of programmes.

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

The categories chosen under this objective are diverse, with different reporting mechanisms and implementation plans.

North–South

Through its new Strategic Plan, ATU will extend the leadership role it plays in cross-border engagement, to be recognised as the partner university of choice for all bodies interested in advancing the aims of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection, and mutual understanding. The legacy ATU institutes have long-established links with the key stakeholders across both jurisdictions and ATU's footprint encompasses most of the border region. An initial focus will be

on commitments made via Ireland 2040, the *New Decade, New Approach* agreement, and the objectives of the Shared Island initiative.

In January 2024, ATU signed a memorandum of understanding with Ulster University to advance education and research including the exchange of faculty members and technical staff, joint academic programmes, student initiatives, cultural exchanges, and research and consultancy collaborations.

ATU will also build on the work of the North West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC), which was established in 2018. NWTEC is the result of many years of successful collaborative working amongst four education sector providers — ATU, Ulster University (UU), North West Regional College (NWRC) and Donegal Education and Training Board (DETB) — with the aim of improving access to higher and further education and training to students living and studying in the North West City Region. Funding from TUTF and TSAF has been committed to this work. The North West City Region growth agenda has been firmly established through the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP) and associated structures. NWSGP has been co-designed and agreed by local and central government in both jurisdictions as the vehicle for co-ordinating and influencing all aspects of future growth of the North West City Region and is the mechanism endorsed by the North–South Ministerial Council for senior central government officials to engage with the North West City Region on collaborative approaches to growth.

The establishment of the North–South Engagement Centre represents a strong strategic statement by ATU to focus on cross-border opportunities, such as student pathways (for all ATU campuses), enterprise engagement projects with partners such as Intertrade Ireland, the feasibility of a doctoral college, and initiatives to address skills shortages in border areas.

With the appointment of a Schools Engagement Officer (NI Market), ATU’s Market Engagement function is applying rigorous KPIs to this role, measured on student application numbers and student conversions. It is planned that this will result in additional registrations, which is the basis of indicator 4.1 below.

EU GREEN

EU GREEN is contributing to the objectives of the European Universities initiative in the following ways.

- Sustainability Focus:
 - Green Technologies and Practices: Prioritising education and research in green technologies, renewable energy, and sustainable practices, directly contributing to the European Green Deal objectives.
 - Environmental Stewardship: Instilling values of environmental stewardship and sustainability in students, preparing them to be future leaders in these fields.
- Broad Network of Institutions:
 - Diverse Membership: Including a diverse range of universities from different countries, each bringing unique strengths and perspectives to the consortium.

- Resource Sharing: Sharing resources, expertise, and infrastructure among member institutions to enhance overall capacity and capabilities.
- Community Engagement and Impact:
 - Local and Regional Impact: Engaging with local communities and industries to implement sustainable solutions and drive regional development.
 - Global Challenges: Addressing global challenges through a local lens, making a tangible impact on communities and regions across Europe.
- Leveraging EU Funding and Support:
 - EU Programmes: Actively participating in EU-funded programmes, like Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, to support its initiatives and projects.
 - Sustainable Funding: Ensuring sustainable funding and support for long-term collaboration and impact.

EU GREEN is being managed in ATU by the ATU EU GREEN office, including an academic lead and a project manager, funded by the EU GREEN project and supported by the HEA. The implementation and monitoring of the project, including risk management, is carried out within ATU by this office, feeding into an EU GREEN Lead office at University of Extremadura, Spain. The governance structure for the alliance includes a senate, rectors' forum and joint research committee, in which ATU are fully represented. In addition, executive meetings are held fortnightly and attended by the ATU leads. ATU has identified non-engagement of its community as the major risk for the project. To address this, a range of communication tools, workshops and events have been developed and engagement has been increasing steadily. For example, ATU was one of the top two highest represented universities in gaining research seed funding from EU GREEN in Year 1.

International

ATU Global is a newly established brand, integrating international office activities across ATU, especially in the realm of international recruitment and building alliances. Implementation of activities to support the attainment of indicator 4.2 (increasing the number of non-EU students) will occur through this group in collaboration with the faculties, especially where specialist programmes are being targeted at the international market. International recruitment is an important element of the strategic plan and, as such, will be monitored by the UPT at executive level, with oversight from the Governing Body sub-committee for Strategic Development. The achievement of this objective remains dependent on the availability of student accommodation and also on the swift processing of visas by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

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 student enrolments from Northern Ireland	VPAAR, HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 365	Maintain largest share of national total (22% of 1,660 in 2022/23) with reference to nearest comparator, DkIT (14% (230) in 2022/23)	375	385	425	495	130 additional registrations from students normally domiciled in Northern Ireland
4.2	Number of non-EU students (FT)	ATU Global, HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 1,105 in ATU (525 full-time)	Grow non-EU students in ATU to reach a similar level of achievement as TUS. TUS: 820 total (780 full-time) in 2022/23	1,210 (605)	1,300 (650)	1,360 (675)	1,450 (700)	31% increase on baseline over 4 years (33% increase on full-time baseline)
4.3	Number of ATU student and staff mobilities to EU GREEN Partners	ATU EU GREEN Project Office	Quantitative	2023: 45 (43 staff and 2 students)	Targets set out in EU GREEN consortium	70	80	80	80	310 mobilities over 4 years
4.4	Number of national and international organisations accessed by ATU as part of EU GREEN	ATU EU GREEN Project Office	Quantitative Qualitative — (case study based)	Zero — not yet formally commenced	Targets set out in EU GREEN consortium	40	50	60	60	60 organisations engaged through EU GREEN by 2028

Performance Objective 5

To promote equality in all aspects of the University’s activities and to create an environment and culture where all students, staff and others are mutually treated with dignity and respect.

Pillar: Engagement

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 5

Atlantic Technological University is committed to being a diverse, equal and inclusive university and we are making progress on embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across all our activities. Closely aligned with the ATU Strategic Plan and our institutional values, our ambition is that all at ATU can work and learn in an environment which is defined by dignity and respect, where diversity is celebrated, and where everyone is treated fairly, regardless of gender, age, race, disability, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, civil status, family status, membership of the Traveller community or socioeconomic status.

The activities related to this performance objective are closely aligned to the national priorities of gender equality, race equality and prevention of gender-based violence, as outlined in the [HEA Gender Equality Report](#) (November 2022), the [HEA Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutes](#) and the [HEA Race Equality Implementation Plan 2022–2024](#) and the [HEA Ending Sexual Violence Implementation Plan 2022–2024](#).

At ATU, we want to develop and implement initiatives, policies and procedures that support and embed equality, diversity and inclusion across the university. Promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion is the responsibility of all members of the ATU community, and we all contribute to creating a safe and welcoming environment where everyone can bring their full identity to their work and study.

Indicators for measuring progress under this performance objective have been informed by our work on:

- Amalgamation of the three legacy gender equality action plans to form an ATU plan and achievement of the Athena Swan Bronze “legacy” award, with work underway for Bronze award application in April 2025 (indicator 5.1).
- Amalgamation of the three legacy Consent Framework (Preventing and Responding to Sexual Misconduct and Harassment) action plans to form an ATU action plan, which is being implemented.
- Development of a comprehensive suite of training programmes related to a range of EDI-related topics (indicators 5.3, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7).

- Establishment of an ATU LBGT+ & Allies Staff Network (AURA).
- Adoption of the Anti-Racism Principles for Irish Higher Education Institutions and the establishment of an ATU Race Equality Network.
- Approval of EDI policy and Gender Identity & Expression policies, following extensive consultation.
- Interim approval of three legacy Dignity at Work policies by the ATU Governing Body, with an ATU Dignity at Work policy and procedure drafted and currently out for consultation with union partners.
- Completion of a Universal Design and Accessibility (UDA) audit and draft action plan prepared.
- Partnership in the STEM Passport project to encourage girls from underrepresented groups in our region to consider courses and careers in science.
- Ongoing development of a series of events and guest speakers to promote inclusion, including a programme of events to mark: International Women's Day, International Men's Day, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Irish Traveller Ethnicity Day, Intersex Awareness Day, etc.
- Curation of an equality, diversity, and inclusion booklist, available to borrow across ATU, plus library exhibitions for LGBT awareness month and Black History month.

The University reports annually on gender pay gap, gender profile of staff, and sexual violence and harassment. Very recently, we completed the first HEA EDI annual report, which necessitated a comprehensive review of EDI-related data and activities across ATU. In addition, we recently undertook an ADI (Access, Diversity, and Inclusion) review as part of Work Package 7 of EU GREEN. This afforded us the opportunity to identify some gaps in our available data and will enable us to make comparisons with EU GREEN partners and learn from good practice elsewhere in the consortium, as well as to share our own practices. Preparation for the Athena Swan application in April 2025 is providing ATU with a chance to undertake a staff survey, to rigorously analyse our EDI-related data, and to review our Gender Equality Action Plan (indicator 5.1).

Over the timeframe of this Performance Agreement, we will assess our progress on the Performance Agreement through:

- Attainment of ATU's first institutional Athena Swan Bronze award (indicator 5.1)
- Achievement of two Faculty-level Athena Swan Bronze awards (indicator 5.1)¹⁰
- Achievement of gender balance across 100% of decision-making committees in the University (indicator 5.2)

¹⁰ In line with advice from Advance HE to commence Faculty-level applications when our new Faculty structure is in place, the timeframe for achieving this target may need to be altered during the lifetime of this Performance Agreement.

- Inclusion of race equality training in induction for all new staff and PhD students (indicator 5.3)
- Increasing the uptake of race equality training for managers, as well as for the wider staff community (indicator 5.3)
- Improving completion of equality monitoring data for existing staff across all the equality grounds (indicator 5.4)
- Increasing uptake of training on preventing and responding to gender-based violence among managers and wider staff (indicator 5.6)
- Roll-out of consent training for first-year students (indicator 5.5).

It is anticipated that an indicator measuring staff perceptions of attitudes towards dignity and respect in the University will be added after the completion of the Athena Swan staff survey in 2025.

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

In relation to EDI, the structures in place in the University include the Governing Body EDI sub-committee and a small EDI team reporting to the VP EDI and Online, Flexible & Professional Development. This team is driving the plans and university-wide teams in EDI-related activities, where needed. The following university-wide groups have been approved by UPT and the Governing Body (on the recommendation of the EDI sub-committee) and are at various stages of the development and implementation of EDI-related policy and action plans:

- EDI Steering Group (comprised of managers from all the Faculties and Functions across ATU)
- ATU Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team
- Working Group for Preventing & Responding to Sexual Violence and Harassment
- Race Equality Working Group (established in response to the HEA Race Equality Report and Implementation Plan 2022–2024)

The University has articulated its ambition to be a signatory of the National Charter for Universal Design in Tertiary Education and is establishing a steering group to ensure this ambition is achieved.

Mid academic year 2024/25, a campaign will be undertaken to encourage staff to provide data to support equality monitoring on equality grounds other than gender. This campaign will be undertaken to coincide with the integration of the legacy CORE (People XD) HR systems into one ATU system. Equality monitoring data allows us to monitor the diversity of our staff and helps us to plan diversity and inclusion initiatives. Monitoring is fundamental to the effective implementation of our EDI Policy. Involvement in the EU GREEN consortium has necessitated gathering additional comparative data from EU GREEN partners, particularly related to underrepresented groups, and has highlighted some

gaps in our available data, including student data relating to ethnic origin, disability, socioeconomic status and dependants. From engagement in the EU GREEN Access, Diversity and Inclusion work package, we will continue to learn from good practice elsewhere in the consortium and to provide opportunities for some of our students from underrepresented groups to expand their networks and have intercultural experiences, as well as sharing our own practices.

To support the implementation of the recently approved EDI policy and Gender Identity & Expression policy, we will be rolling out a programme of training and awareness-raising sessions, including training with Heads of Department on the corresponding Gender Identity and Expression Procedures for staff and students. Following the completion of consultation, it is hoped that the ATU Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure will be approved by the end of 2024. Training sessions will then be arranged for managers across ATU, and online information sessions will be arranged for staff.

We intend to hold a minimum of eight events throughout the academic year to promote awareness and understanding of race equality, intersectionality, ethnicity, racism, anti-racism, and equality and human rights in ATU. We will continue to work to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of the University's students and staff in line with the Human Rights and Equality Public Sector Duty. We will arrange training for the Governing Body, EDI sub-committee of the Governing Body, UPT and the EDI Steering Group on their responsibilities in delivery of the Duty throughout all levels of the University. We will ensure that the Duty is coordinated and embedded across planning and will report on developments and achievements arising from implementation of the Duty in a manner that is accessible to the public.

ATU is working towards an institutional Athena Swan Bronze award submission in April 2025. To this end, the Self-Assessment Team (SAT) has been meeting and developing a staff survey, which will be administered to all staff in early academic year 2024/25. HR data will be analysed alongside the survey results and the review of the legacy amalgamated gender action plan. Focus groups will take place late in 2024 and a revised ATU Gender Action Plan will be compiled, with completion of the application early in 2025. It is hoped that the actions in this plan will also support addressing issues related to the gender pay gap. A risk to this process is ensuring that we have the relevant HR data available when the Core (People XD) HR systems are merged. At present, the advice from Advance HE is that we do not commence on the process of Faculty/Departmental applications until the integration of our new Faculties. As soon as the new Faculty structures are in place, work will commence on Faculty/Departmental applications. ATU intends to continue to facilitate a cohort of women in participating in the Aurora leadership development programme, although we are also considering other inclusive leadership development programmes. In addition, following an audit in Q2 2024, a commitment was made by UPT and Governing Body to work proactively to address gender imbalance in decision-making committees and sub-committees as the terms of reference and membership of these committees are reviewed over the coming years. We will also be mindful of having a gender balance across the chairs of these committees.

The Race Equality Working Group has only been formed recently. In the first year (2024/25), the work of the group will be to assess the position of ATU vis-à-vis race equality and then develop an Action Plan for consultation and approval — training will be part of the plan, hence the subsequent targets.

In the meantime, introductory race equality training will be in place for PhD students and for new staff from semester 1 of academic year 2024/25, as part of induction.

We will continue to support the growth and sustainability of the ATU LGBTQI+ Staff and Allies Network (AURA) by raising awareness of issues faced by this community and by implementing the ATU Gender Identity & Expression policy, commencing in 2024/25, including training for staff and students. We will continue to celebrate the LGBTQI+ community within ATU, supporting Pride, LGBT+ History month and National Coming Out Day. We will continue to raise awareness of issues faced by members of the Traveller and Roma Community and will support services in Faculties and Student Support to increase access and participation for these communities.

Early in the academic year 2024/25, we are planning to approve a new ATU policy on Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence and to consult on the associated processes for reporting and investigation with a view to implementing them early in 2025. We will continue providing consent training for students at induction and, as soon as the procedure is approved, we will begin to roll out training for Heads of Department and, as appropriate, for all staff and students. We will continue to promote the Speak Out tool and monitor its data to inform our actions.

We will begin work on applying for Age Friendly University status. This will entail forming a working group that will complete the application process, aiming to submit early in 2025. This is likely to inform some other EDI- and access-related activities.

Linked to Performance Objective 3, ATU will continue to work in the area of UDA to ensure that services, information, buildings, teaching and learning, and the visitor experience are accessible and inclusive for all. This will involve establishing a working group for the attainment of the Altitude Charter early in 2024/25 and developing and implementing an action plan to be rolled out across the subsequent years. This work will take into account the findings and recommendations of the UDA audit.

We will continue to ensure regular bespoke training to support the EDI aspects of the ATU Strategic Plan, the ATU values, and the performance objective, e.g. Unconscious Bias, Race Equality, Gender Identity & Expression and Intercultural training. In addition, under the N-TUTORR project, a Sustainable Higher Education Futures Curriculum Framework, based around the UN SDGs, has been adopted. Embedded in this framework is the EDIT Charter, which is a series of EDI-related principles which are being integrated into the curriculum. Training on the Curriculum Framework and the EDIT principles has commenced and will continue to be rolled out for all colleagues involved in development of new modules and courses and preparing for programmatic review.

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	Achievement of Athena Swan awards¹¹	ATU EDI office	Qualitative and quantitative	2022: Legacy Bronze Athena Swan award	Not available	N/A	Athena Swan Bronze institutional award achieved	School - level Athena Swan award or equivalent achieved	Second School-level Athena Swan award or equivalent achieved	ATU institutional Athena Swan Bronze award achieved, and 2 Faculty-level awards achieved
5.2	Proportion (%) of decision-making committees within the University that are gender balanced	ATU EDI office	Quantitative	2024: 42% of decision-making committees within the University are gender balanced	Not Available	60%	70%	80% (and gender balance in the Chairs of the committees and sub-committees of Governing Body, Senior Leadership Team and Academic Council)	100%	Gender balance across 100% of decision-making committees of the University

¹¹ Advance HE have advised us not to commence on a Faculty-level Athena Swan application until our new Faculty structure is in place, which might affect the timeline of the Faculty-level applications.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
5.3	Proportion (%) of staff and managers who have undertaken race equality (RE) training	ATU EDI office	Quantitative	2023/24: 25% of managers have completed RE training; <5% of staff have completed RE training	Mandatory RE training for all members of recruitment panels (HEA, 2022, 5) Mandatory Antiracism training for all staff (HEA, 2022, 5) Sectoral average: Maintain	Maintain baseline	10% of staff having undertaken race equality training 50% of managers in ATU having undertaken race equality training	20% of staff 70% of managers	30% of staff 80% of managers	30% of staff having undertaken race equality training, including 80% of managers
5.4	Capture rate of equality monitoring data for ATU staff	HR and EDI	Quantitative	2023/24: Equality data for 23% of ATU staff	Not Available	50%	65%	80%	90%	Equality monitoring data for 90% of ATU staff
5.5	Proportion (%) of first-year students and new entrant apprenticeship students undertaking training in consent	SVHPRM ¹² plus Student Support, EDI	Quantitative	2023/24: 25%	Match the Technological Sector average	40%	50%	60%	70%	70% of first-year students undertaking training in consent

¹² Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response Manager

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
5.6	Proportion (%) of staff trained in the Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence policy and procedure	SVHPRM, EDI and HR* * Note HR data is based on December cut-off from the previous year	Quantitative	2023/24: 0% as this is new training	Match the Technological Sector average	40% of managers trained	70% of Heads of Dept and line managers trained and 30% of all staff undertaking basic training by end of 2025	80% of Heads of Dept and line managers trained; 40% of all staff undertaking training by the end of 2026	50% of all staff undertaking basic training by the end of 2027	50% of staff trained including 80% of managers/ Department Heads
5.7	Proportion (%) of staff trained and/or briefed in the Dignity at Work policy and procedures	SVHPRM, EDI and HR	Quantitative	2023/24: 0% as this new training	Match the Technological Sector average ¹³	60% of managers trained	90% of managers trained and 30% of all staff briefed	50% of all staff briefed	60% of all staff briefed	60% of staff, including 90% of managers, with some level of training

¹³ There is a forthcoming 2023/24 sectoral synthesis report on the implementation of the National Framework for Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment that may help to inform benchmark data for future years of this Performance Agreement

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	
	Climate & Sustainable Development	PO 1	PO 2		PO 4
	Student Success	PO 1		PO 3	
	Enterprise		PO 2	PO 3	
	Society		PO 2	PO 3	
	Region		PO 2	PO 3	PO 4
	International				PO 4
	Digital Transformation	PO 1			
	Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging				PO 5
	Institutional Leadership & Culture				PO 5
	Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion			PO 3	

Modification log

Tables below present indicators agreed in 2024 that have since been revised, replaced or removed via the Performance Agreement modification process.

Provision is made for modifications to Performance Agreements in the Strategy and Performance Dialogue Process 2025-2028. 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 may only apply at Performance Objective or indicator level (e.g. adding, revising, or removing an indicator). Modification requests related to targets are not within the scope of this process.

Modification of a Performance Agreement is agreed as part of Strategy and Performance Dialogue for the year indicated. Targets set for years prior to modification continue to apply; where subsequent annual or cumulative targets no longer apply, they are shown in grey text below. Where indicators below have been revised or replaced, the revised or replacement indicator or indicators will have the same or related numbering. Relevant corresponding changes to the narrative are not recorded here, but earlier versions of the Performance Agreement are available on request from systemperformance@hea.ie.

Table 1: Indicators modified following the 2025 Strategy and Performance Dialogue process

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.2	Effective Teaching Practices score	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	34.1 (2023)	Remain above national mean for good teaching. ISSE 2023 Averages: TUs: 33.4 Traditional universities: 32.7	N/A	TBC	TBC	TBC	ATU will remain above national mean for good teaching.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
5.5	Proportion (%) of first-year students undertaking training in consent	SVHPRM ¹⁴ plus Student Support, EDI	Quantitative	2023/24: 25%	Match the Technological Sector average	40%	50%	60%	70%	70% of first-year students undertaking training in consent

¹⁴ Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response Manager

Signatures

On behalf of Atlantic Technological University



Dr Orla Flynn
President

Wednesday, 15 April 2026



Maura McNally
Chair of the Governing Body

Wednesday, 15 April 2026

On behalf of the Higher Education Authority



Dr Alan Wall
Chief Executive Officer

Wednesday, 15 April 2026



Higher Education Authority

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