

# Performance Agreement 2024–2028 between the HEA and South East Technological University

## Preamble

This Performance Agreement is established between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and South East Technological University (SETU) in accordance with the System Performance Framework 2023–28. The Agreement identifies SETU’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. SETU 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 SETU 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 SETU 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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# Performance Agreement 2024–2028

## Section 1: Context

### Overview of the institution and its context

South East Technological University (SETU) is Ireland’s youngest university, having been formed in May 2022.

SETU is the only university in the South East of Ireland and operates campuses across the region in Carlow, Waterford and Wexford, along with a presence in Kilkenny and Wicklow. SETU is therefore a regional “anchor” institution: it is an important contributor to the development of the regional knowledge economy, a regional employer of significant scale, as well as a regional thought and social and cultural leader. The expectations of the university set out in regional policy documents (such as the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Southern Region*), as well as in overarching national development plans (*Ireland 2040* and associated plans), make it clear that SETU is central to the future prosperity and quality of life of the South East. SETU’s ambitions are directed by these expectations.

To realise regional demands of the university requires that SETU scales up its activities and considerably enhances its performance in research and knowledge transfer in support of innovation in the South East. The university must address the outward migration of talent from the region, expanding its educational offering to ensure a comprehensive portfolio of courses to address the region’s current and future skills needs and knowledge gaps. The university is expected to contribute to addressing the lower-than-average educational attainment of the regional population, ensuring the university is accessible and that programmes are available to a diverse population. The university has been encouraged to take a leadership role in co-ordinating and supporting other regional actors and in driving, in particular, the region’s response to the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, sustainable development and digital transformation. These requirements and expectations inform the university’s strategic plan, *Connecting for Impact: SETU Strategic Plan 2023–2028*, published in May 2023, and, in turn, this Performance Agreement.

#### **Strategic Plan, Vision and Mission**

[Connecting for Impact: SETU Strategic Plan 2023–2028](#) describes the university’s vision and mission.

The university has the following vision:

*South East Technological University will be a leading Technological University with transformative impact on our community, the south east of Ireland and beyond.*

In order to achieve this vision, the university’s strategic plan describes 14 objectives across five domains: Innovation and Research; Learners; Engagement; Staff; and Enablers. Through the university’s executive, a comprehensive and detailed implementation plan has been prepared, resourced, and is currently being executed.

## University Overview

SETU has approximately 17,000 learners and about 1,500 staff. The learner profile of the university is described in Table 1:

Award Type	Description	Full-time enrolment	Part-time enrolment	Total enrolment
0W/0X	FETAC Certificate	0	1,166	1,166
10	Ordinary Degrees	1,769	552	2,321
11	Honours Degrees	8,426	560	8,986
12	Undergraduate Diplomas	0	45	45
14	Undergraduate Occasional	211	36	247
15	Certificates	6	2,122	2,128
16	Higher Certificates	584	475	1,059
23	Postgraduate Certificates	0	214	214
25	Taught Masters	501	489	990
26	Research Masters	248	47	295
27	PhD (Postgraduate)	192	56	248
29	Higher Diplomas	66	326	392
30	Post Graduate Diplomas	22	134	156
<b>Total</b>		<b>12,025</b>	<b>6,222</b>	<b>18,247</b>

Table 1: SETU Enrolment 2023–24 (Source: SRS March 2024)

The staff profile of the university is in Table 2 below:

Type	Number
Academic	835
Management	48
Clerical/Admin.	237
Technical	117
Support staff	62
Student support	20
Researchers	0
Exchequer funded Research staff	81
Other Research and/or Specialist project-based posts funded from non-Exchequer source	143
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,542</b>

Table 2: SETU Staff Profile 2023–24 (Source: ECF return December 2023)

SETU has a demonstrably strong track record in research and as of March 2024 had 248 PhD students. This was the second largest number in the TU sector. The percentage of the overall student population comprising PhD students has been gradually rising over the period 2016–2023 with PhD enrolments increasing by 45% since 2016/17 (source: [Enrolment Trends A, Overall 7 Year Trend, hea.ie](#)). SETU maintains four [Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateways](#). Research expenditure for SETU is c.€23 million per annum, amongst the top performers in the TU sector. The Knowledge Transfer Ireland report for 2022 indicates that SETU had the largest number of collaborative research agreements,

innovation vouchers and consultancy agreements with industry in the sector. SETU accounts for approximately 28% of all collaboration agreements with the sector and over 20% of the overall research expenditure for the sector with the university outperforming the sectoral average in two of the three metrics (source: [Knowledge Transfer Ireland annual report 2022](#)).

The university has a large population of part-time learners and engages with regional industry on skills development reflecting a strong commitment to lifelong learning. The university delivers a large number of Springboard courses amongst other labour-market activation programmes across all campuses. Almost 1 in 4 of SETU's full-time learners is a mature student, the highest percentage in the TU sector (source: [Enrolment Trends A, Enrolment Proportions by Age Group, hea.ie](#)).<sup>1</sup> The university partners with a number of other providers in the delivery of educational programmes with a focus on disadvantaged communities. The university has long-standing partnerships with a range of regional and national organisations, including with the Irish Defence Forces and the Irish Prison Service, involving programme delivery and training. These partnerships have a focus on lifelong learning in the context of supporting upskilling within Ireland's public sector.

SETU has campuses in Carlow, Waterford and Wexford and sustains educational and research activity in all these locations. The university also has a presence in Kilkenny and Wicklow in the form of outreach centres, in the former instance an outreach incubation facility. SETU is also extensively engaged internationally with a range of European partners. The university is part of the CONEXUS European University. SETU supports three centres for overseas delivery, two in China, one in Ghana.

## Approach to the development of the Performance Agreement

SETU's strategic plan, *Connecting for Impact 2023–28*, was approved by the Governing Body in April 2023 and published in May 2023. The approach to developing this Performance Agreement did not seek to duplicate the comprehensive and detailed consultation and development plan for the university's strategy but draws entirely on that strategy and the related Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). No bespoke process was therefore required to develop this Agreement in recognition of the process that led to *Connecting for Impact 2023–28*.

The strategic plan was overseen by a Steering Group that included staff and student representatives and was chaired by the President. The Steering Group created a range of working groups some of whom engaged in detailed consultation with external bodies. Separately, there was a detailed consultation with both internal staff groups and a wide range of external stakeholders, especially other agencies with regional remits, to inform the objectives of the strategy. The Steering Group also engaged in a detailed policy scan and took account of the previous System Performance cycle. The plan was drafted, following inputs from the various working groups, by the Steering Group and approved, in the first instance, by the university Executive and then by the university Governing Body.

These working groups remain the vehicle through which sub-strategies to the Strategic Plan such as the Research Strategy, Teaching and Learning Strategy, and others are developed. The Executive

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<sup>1</sup> Total number of FT enrolments aged 24+ divided by total number of FT enrolments, 2022–23.

Management Team is the vehicle for operationalising and implementing the Plan.

The selection of the performance objectives for this Agreement was entirely informed by the university's strategy; the objectives in this Agreement therefore align with a number of key objectives of SETU's Strategic Plan, as demonstrated in Appendix 1 below.

### **Selecting indicators of success**

As part of the strategic planning process, KPIs were identified for each action and objective in the overall strategic plan. Quantitative measures draw on validated data drawn from university systems, principally the Employment Control Framework (ECF) return, the Student Records System (SRS) return, and Financial Statements. External sources include Scopus for publication data, Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI) reports for knowledge transfer-related data, and HEA-published enrolment statistics for enrolment benchmarking.

The university has created a new unit within the President's Directorate, the Centre for Organisational Research, Data and Analysis (CORDA), with responsibility for co-ordinating, aligning, systematising, cleaning and reporting on unified organisational data. This unit is the key instrument for ensuring the consistency of SETU information gathered from across our campuses. The unit gathers data in support of institutional KPIs and is led by the Vice President for Strategy.

## **Structures in place for evaluation**

This Performance Agreement was approved by the university Governing Body on 18 June 2024. It will be monitored in tandem with the monitoring of the implementation of the university's strategic plan: the implementation plan for the Strategic Plan populates the agenda for the regular meetings of the organisation's Executive Management Team (EMT) who implement and monitor the operations of the Agreement in parallel with the Strategic Plan. The university's Governing Body reviews the implementation of the Strategic Plan thrice yearly (December, March and June) and will review the Performance Agreement according to the same schedule. The Governing Body is presented with three reports in order to assess progress:

- (a) Strategic Plan Implementation Plan, with an assessment of progress against each of the 95 high-level tasks set out in the strategy;
- (b) Strategic Plan KPI Dashboard, with current performance against 44 quantitative KPIs presented for review;
- (c) Strategic Risk Register, which incorporates a risk assessment against each of the objectives of the overall plan, reviewed both by the Audit and Risk Committee and the Governing Body.

The Performance Agreement will be presented as an integral activity to the Strategic Plan and as another means of manifesting SETU's strategic priorities. The university is fully committed to openness and transparency around its performance and will be publishing the outcomes of regular reviews of its strategy, as well as an updated scorecard, on its website.

## Section 2: Performance Objectives

### Performance Objective 1

**To reshape the curriculum to take account of changing patterns of employment and civic and social needs, especially in relation to sustainability and EDI, and to enhance learner support infrastructure and the learning environment.**

**Pillar:** Teaching & Learning

**Transversals:** Student Success; Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Climate & Sustainable Development; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging.

#### Rationale for Performance Objective 1

##### Ambition

SETU aspires to offer an innovative academic portfolio built on high academic standards, good quality research, and strong ties to academic, professional and industrial networks that will be especially impactful on the South East region. The university's goal is to provide a transformative academic, social, and cultural experience for students through a supportive, student-centred learning environment and good quality, digitally informed, empowering teaching. The SETU curriculum is a key mechanism through which the university will advance its plans in relation to education for sustainable development and enabling the green transition. The university aspires to produce graduates who are also strong advocates for equality, diversity and inclusivity.

##### Rationale and Strategic Alignment

This performance objective mirrors a priority objective in SETU's published Strategic Plan. The Objective sees SETU respond to:

- A. The post-COVID-19 pandemic requirement to reflect on and rethink teaching, learning and assessment in higher education;
- B. The legislative requirements directing the activities of the university in relation to curriculum development (with regional stakeholders in particular) and quality assurance;
- C. Ongoing requirements of institutional consolidation;
- D. Regional and national expectations with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and sustainability in the curriculum;
- E. Identified challenges with regard to student retention and progression;
- F. Student demand and need with regard to the learning environment and specifically with regard to living accommodation.

## Curriculum Development

SETU's focus is, in the first instance, on engaging in a high-level recasting of the university's curriculum. The development of the SETU curriculum is a key element in the SETU merger programme; it is SETU's goal to offer an enhanced, unified curriculum that draws on the best practice in teaching and learning, programme design and delivery, and assessment, developed over several decades by the legacy institutions, aligned across all campuses and optimised to address current and future challenges. We prioritise curriculum reform as a most visible and impactful expression, both to external stakeholders and the SETU community, of the unified culture we seek as a new, multi-campus university.

SETU responds to the invitation to “reconsider how we work, learn, teach and assess” in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as suggested in *Next Steps for Teaching and Learning: Moving Forward Together* (p.15). We recognise the changed circumstances in which learning takes place and seek to respond effectively to those changes. This reconsideration of the curriculum takes place against the backdrop of ongoing commitments to quality improvement, including in the curriculum. The period covered by this Performance Agreement will see SETU complete its first CINNTE review, one purpose of which is to encourage “the enhancement of the student learning environment and experience in institutions” ([CINNTE Cyclical Review Handbook for Technological Universities](#), June 2023, p.23). The demonstration of the high quality of the SETU curriculum is vital for the university's ongoing success.

SETU is directed by [European strategy](#) on sustainable development which recognises that education has an important role to play “in promoting better understanding of the aim of sustainable development, fostering a sense of individual and collective responsibility, and thereby encouraging changes in behaviour” and the [National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030](#) which puts emphasis on enabling learning to become agents “for positive change in reorienting societies towards sustainable development” (p.7). A similar approach is advocated with regard to advancing EDI with significant groundwork having already taken place through the [EDIT](#) project which supports the development of a more inclusive curriculum (see Case Studies in Appendix 3). We take account of the requirement in *ESD to 2030* that institutions “further integrate and mainstream ESD/SDGs (themes, principles, approaches) into specialist, non-specialist and interdisciplinary higher education courses and programmes, including flexible and part-time options” (p.8).

## Focus on Student Success

SETU is informed by the need to progress towards a “whole of institution” approach to enabling student success, as recommended in *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Irish Higher Education*. As a guide to its approach, SETU considers its performance in [StudentSurvey.ie](#) (the national student survey) on a number of measures relating to the learning environment, which is mixed, as indicated in Table 3 below.

Indicator	SETU	All Student Survey.ie	Universities	Technological HEIs
Higher-Order Learning	34.6	35.2	36.6	33.2
Reflective and Integrative Learning	30.7	32.3	33.4	30.3
Quantitative Reasoning	21.5	21.3	22.0	20.5
Learning Strategies	31.7	32.2	33.0	30.6
Collaborative Learning	31.8	30.2	30.1	30.3
Student-Faculty Interaction	16.1	14.0	12.7	15.3
Effective Teaching Practices	34.5	33.2	32.7	33.4
Quality of Interactions	41.0	40.6	40.3	40.6
Supportive Environment	28.8	29.3	30.0	28.4
Learning, Creative and Social Skills	33.6	33.3	33.6	32.6

Table 3: SETU performance in 2023 in the ten engagement indicators of StudentSurvey.ie

SETU is currently top-ranked in terms of student-faculty interaction. The university is committed to the empowerment of students as collaborators in the teaching and learning process. SETU supports the idea that student success “can only be facilitated through meaningful partnership and engagement between students and staff and between all levels of the HE sector” (*Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Irish Higher Education*, p.28). With regard to a supportive learning environment, while outperforming the TU sector, SETU currently underperforms the traditional university sector. The university’s performance with regard to student retention and progression is lower than the sectoral average, as is indicated in Table 4.

	SETU	TU Sector	All HEIs
Level 6	29%	25%	25%
Level 7	31%	32%	31%
Level 8	23%	20%	14%
	24%	23%	15%

Table 4: SETU Non-Progression Rates 2021–22 vs Sectoral (Source: [HEA Statistics](#))

In the period of this Performance Agreement, the university will prioritise student belonging and wellbeing, and therefore will put sustained focus on retention and progression.

### The Campus Environment

The university recognises the practical and logistical considerations that go into cultivating a positive learning experience for students, not least those relating to student quality of life. SETU’s Strategic Plan, *Connecting for Impact*, therefore sets out an ambitious capital development programme for the university. With regard to student accommodation, SETU is currently able to satisfy less than 10% of the quantified demand across its campuses, with university-managed accommodation only available in one location (Waterford). Our target is to increase the available beds by 700 to 1,100, matching 23% of demand. This is in the context of projected national increases in enrolment for several more years: [one scenario](#) predicts an 18% increase to 2032.

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

### Curriculum Development

The vehicle through which SETU will engage in deep reflection on its teaching and learning approaches will be through the development of a range of SETU sub-strategies to the core Strategic Plan. These strategies will set out, over the course of the coming years, plans to support curriculum reform and enhance the learning supports available to all students. Responsibility for the development and execution of these sub-strategies has been assigned to relevant Executive officers within the university.

SETU will establish a strategic framework for curriculum development in SETU through the publication of a range of new strategies and the initiation of a number of high impact projects, specifically:

- Teaching, Learning Assessment Strategy (due December 2024)
- Student Success Strategy (due end-summer 2024)
- Career Development Framework project (due May 2025)
- Student belonging and wellbeing project (due May 2025)
- Library Development Strategy (due December 2024)
- Sustainability Strategy (including approach to ESD) (due May 2025)

To support the achievement of indicator 1.1, the university will also commence a graduate attributes project by 2025 that will ensure the curriculum embeds:

- The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The core principles of EDI aligned to university actions plans and strategies.
- Entrepreneurship skills.
- Global perspectives.
- Research skills, problem-solving skills, and transversal skills.
- Digital skills.
- Social and democratic engagement.

For the purposes of this Performance Agreement, and with specific reference to *ESD to 2030*, SETU will measure the extent to which ESD informs and the SDGs feature in the SETU curriculum. The university proposes to measure this both quantitatively and qualitatively. Through programme validation and review processes, the University will advance an ESD approach in the curriculum (indicator 1.1.1), while, through student surveys, the University will measure student awareness of the SDGs (indicator 1.1.2). The university has appointed an Associate Vice President for Sustainability as well as a Vice President for EDI who will guide the development process with regard to the integration of these elements into the curriculum. A qualitative exercise commencing with baseline identification in

2024/25 will be the primary instrument for measuring progress.<sup>2</sup> Our cumulative target is for all of SETU’s programmes to demonstrate some alignment with the SDGs by the conclusion of this Agreement.

Developments in digitally informed educational strategy will be monitored and advanced through SETU’s participation in the [N-TUTORR](#) project. The CINNTE review of SETU (due for Q3 2024) will be an opportunity for the university to have external validation and examination of plans in relation to the curriculum as well as to broad student supports. SETU continues to collaborate with partners on the development of its curriculum, especially with a range of enterprise partners. Outside the enterprise domain, we note examples of external partnership in SETU such as with An Cosán, Family Carers Ireland, the Irish Prison Service and the Defence Forces as indicative of a university that has strong expertise in the co-creation, co-design and collaborative models of delivery. These models will continue to evolve and develop in SETU into the future (see also Performance Objective 5). We direct readers to the Case Studies in Appendix 3 below for examples of some of SETU’s collaborative provision.

### **Student Success**

Monitoring and achieving improvements in the quality of the learning environment and student engagement, as demonstrated in student surveys, and improved student retention and progression rates will involve, *inter alia*:

- extending and developing the range of data available to determine appropriate interventions at discipline, unit, class and individual levels to support progression, including developing data that will help identify at risk students earlier in their studies;
- supporting co-ordinated action across Faculties and central areas;
- developing appropriate “fall-back” pathways where appropriate;
- further developing SETU’s peer support network as well as other learner supports;
- investing in staff training.

The SETU Student Success Strategy will describe a detailed programme of work in this domain.

### **The Campus Environment**

SETU has committed to a range of capital developments over the course of its Strategic Plan. Central amongst these will be expanding the range of university-run student accommodation. This will make

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<sup>2</sup> SETU does not currently have a national, numeric benchmark for ESD in higher education. The benchmark used in Indicator 1.1.1 is therefore policy and framework based, drawing on ESD to 2030, UNESCO ESD for 2030, HEA Performance Frameworks, and STARS. Our understanding is that the development of more formal national benchmarking evidence is part of the wider body of work currently being explored.

As a full curriculum audit is not feasible at this stage (and is planned for the coming years), the baseline has been established using a proxy approach, aligned with AASHE STARS “getting started” guidance and sector practice. On this basis, an estimated 10% baseline is considered conservative and reasonable for early-stage, pre-framework ESD integration.

a marked impact on the region and will contribute to enhancing the attractiveness of the South East to international students and others.<sup>3</sup>

### **Risk**

Key risks associated with elevating institutional performance are captured in the risk registers of the organisation and are monitored through the standard governance processes. SETU has identified a risk that the quality of the university curriculum is not upheld. The quality assurance of the curriculum, however, is strongly supported by robust internal and external processes that will highlight emerging challenges, if any, and support ongoing quality reform as necessary. With regard to capital investment, the university will continue to engage with the relevant State agencies to ensure progress continues to be made towards achieving the university’s capital development plans. The university commits in its strategic plan to engage in a detailed planning exercise to ensure continued alignment between staff and capital resources and student needs, including when it comes to new programmes.

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<sup>3</sup> The cycle of development here prohibits the setting of annual targets. We offer a target for the end of the Agreement only.

## 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
1.1.1	% of programmes with ESD embedded in the curriculum	SETU curriculum	Qualitative	2024/25: 10%	AASHE STARS guidance and sector performance	N/A	10%	25%	100%	100% of programmes
1.1.2	% of students who indicate partial or full awareness of the SDGs	SETU Student Survey	Quantitative	2024/25: 47%	AASHE STARS guidance and sector practice	47%	50%	75%	80%	80% of students
1.2	Proportion of students reporting frequent engagement with academic staff on academic performance <sup>4</sup>	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	18.6%	Average for all HEIs	N/A	18.6%	N/A	TBC	TBC, Above the national average
1.3	Proportion of students reporting agreement that SETU provides effective academic learning supports <sup>5</sup>	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	62.0%	Average for all HEIs	N/A	62.0%	N/A	TBC	TBC, Above the national average

<sup>4</sup> % of students responding *Often/Very often* to Section D, Q1. ‘During the current academic year, how often have you taken opportunities to discuss your academic performance with academic staff?’

<sup>5</sup> % of students responding *Agree/Strongly agree* to Section C, Q2. ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree that your university provides effective academic learning supports (learning centre, computer centre, maths support, writing support)?’

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.4	<b>Progression Rate (%) new entrants</b>	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2020/21: 79%	Attain national average, all HEIs	82%	83%	84%	85%	85% <b>4 p.p. increase on baseline</b>
1.5	<b>Provision of university student accommodation to meet outstanding demand (# beds)</b>	University records	Quantitative	2023: 9.7% of demand (425 beds)	Not available	—	—	—	23% (1,100)	23% of demand <b>13.3 p.p. increase on baseline</b>

## Performance Objective 2

**To elevate research and innovation, in domains aligned to regional priority, to levels consistent with a top young global university, maximising impact on regional enterprise and society.**

**Pillar:** Research & Innovation

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

### Rationale for Performance Objective 2

#### Ambition

SETU aims to drive innovation and deliver transformative impact on the South East region. Building on strong foundations, over the course of this agreement the university will position itself to lead the region as an innovation region, its enhanced research activity having strong and positive social and economic engagement with and impact on business, enterprise and the professions, the community and all stakeholders. SETU's ambitions align not just with regional expectations as articulated in regional development policy but with the functions of the Technological University set out in legislation and are calibrated to the criteria set out in the Technological Universities Act (2018) with regard to research students, staff capacity and overall research profile.

#### Rationale and Strategic Alignment

SETU's ambitions with regard to research and innovation see SETU respond to:

- A. Regional economic policy that sees the future South East as a prominent Irish and European innovation region.
- B. The elevated performance standards of a modern, high-performing university, reflected in the legislative requirements set out in the Technological Universities Act with regard to research activity and graduate student recruitment.

#### Regional Innovation

The *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region* sets out the need to create “enhanced innovation capability in the region through considerably enhanced research and innovation infrastructure in support of the regional strategy to build knowledge-intensive industry and sustainable and high-quality employment” (p.333). The *South East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024* has as a strategic objective, “Building on our existing RD&I capacity to place innovation at the heart of the South-East economy”, with the aim of enhancing “the capacity and capability of our existing research ecosystem while developing new areas of RD&I activity that can assist the region’s continued transformation to a green, digital, and sustainable knowledge-based economy” (p.25). SETU’s selection of this performance objective recognises the core role assigned to SETU regionally when it comes to the creation of an Innovation Region.

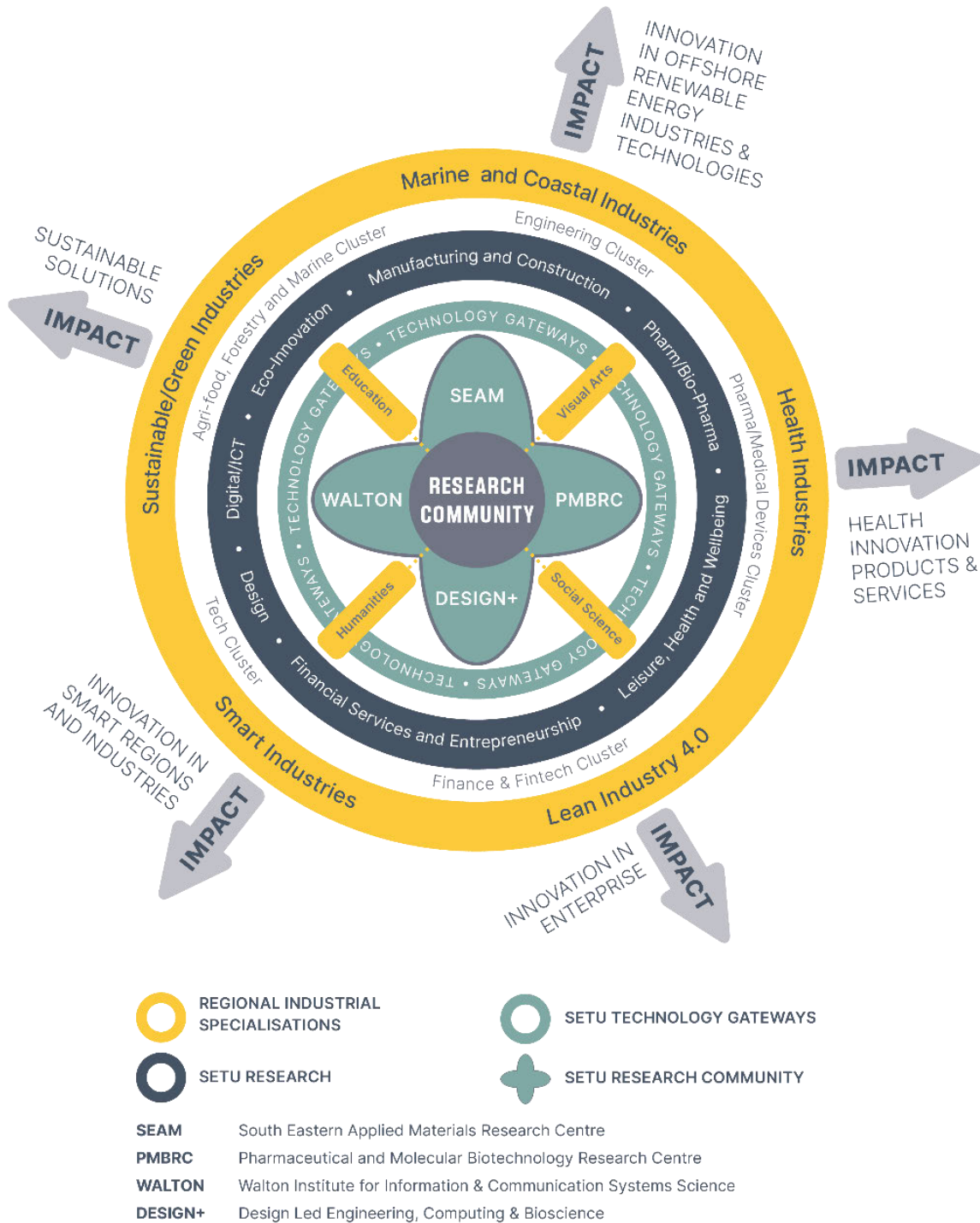


Figure 1: SETU Innovation and Research Ecosystem

The positioning of SETU’s research effort within the regional knowledge and innovation ecosystem is represented in Figure 1. The figure points both to existing areas of activity and future potential. Emerging opportunities in renewable energy, the marine economy, and One Health will be explored with regional partners as relevant over the course of this Performance Agreement, and SETU is poised to play a substantial role in these domains. Declared areas of priority that already attract considerable investment and are targeted for future growth include:

- financial services
- advanced manufacturing
- ICT
- pharmaceuticals
- agriculture
- renewable energy and sustainability more broadly
- one-health
- eco-innovation

These regional imperatives are reflected in SETU’s Strategic Plan and in turn in this Performance Agreement as the priority areas against which we measure impact (see also Performance Objective 5 below.)

Through this PO, SETU will contribute to the achievement of [Impact 2030](#)’s goal to elevate Ireland from a strong innovator to an Innovation Leader by 2030 (pp. 25, 61). *Impact 2030* also aims to “position Research and Innovation as critical enablers to support delivery of our climate action targets and address wider environmental and sustainability challenges” (p. 19). SETU will focus on leading research in sustainability and eco-innovation to help position Ireland “at the cutting edge of scientific, technological and social innovation in meeting our climate, energy, and environment targets” (p. 20).

### **Building Capacity and Critical Mass**

SETU’s current research profile is described in Figure 2 below. SETU’s aim is to build critical mass through elevating the performance of existing research centres and groups with a focus on achieving internationally accepted research performance metrics, better to support regional innovation. The targets set out in the [Technological Universities Act 2018](#) with regard to the post-designation performance of the new universities on graduate student enrolment and staff education to PhD level inform SETU’s objectives with regard to enhanced research activity. These targets specify that:

- 7% of the student population at levels 8–10 are research students;
- research is conducted within the university to a “high standard” with “positive social and economic effects on business, enterprise, the professions, the community, local interests and other related stakeholders in the region,” and;
- research and doctoral degree provision is available in 5 fields of education.

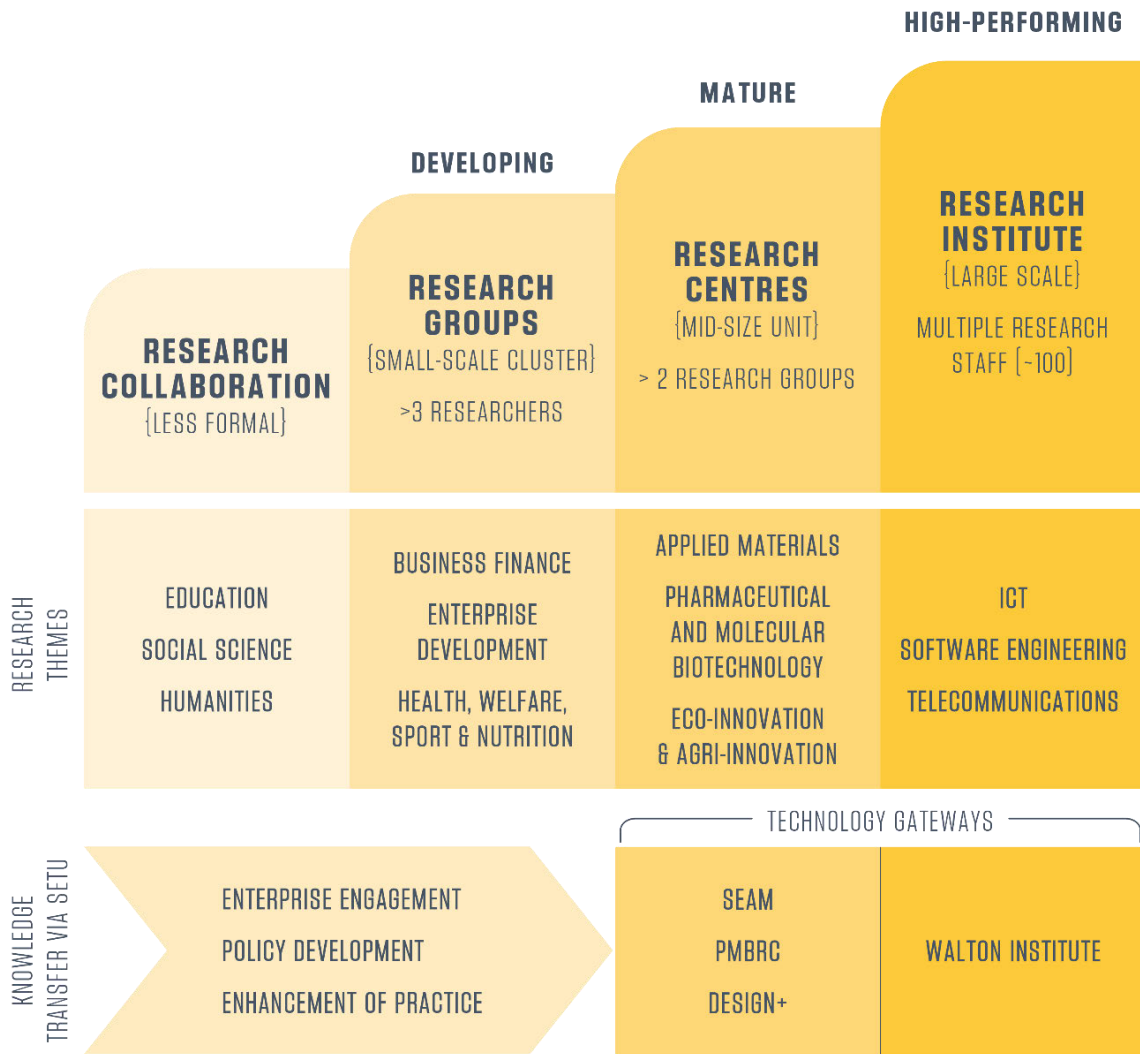


Figure 2: SETU Research Profile

With regard to research student targets, SETU is currently (2022/23) at 5.6% as indicated in the Table 5 below. However, SETU recognises that when PhDs alone are considered, institutional performance aligns more closely with the TU sectoral norm. SETU has 17.1% of the TU sector PhDs (ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>) and 2.14% of national PhDs (ranked 10<sup>th</sup>) (Source: [Data for Download and Visualisations, hea.ie](https://www.heai.ie/data-for-download-and-visualisations)). Over the course of this agreement, the university will target a 40% rise in PhD numbers, aligned with meeting the legislative requirements (indicator 2.1).

	TU sector	Traditional Universities	Others	SETU
Higher Diplomas	1,860	1,120	110	365
Honours Degrees	46,740	98,250	9,945	8,115
PhD	1,315	8,920	285	225
Postgraduate Certificates	1,465	2,780	395	125
Postgraduate Diplomas	1,450	5,075	335	145
Postgraduate Occasional	415	2,530	170	55
Research Masters	1,065	530	40	355
Taught Masters	5,030	22,605	885	975
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>59,340</b>	<b>141,810</b>	<b>12,165</b>	<b>10,360</b>
Total PhDs	1,315	8,290	285	225
Total Research Students	2,380	9,450	325	580
Total L8-10	59,340	141,810	12,165	10,360
<b>% Research of L8-10</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>
<b>% PhDs of L8-10</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>

Table 5: SETU Research Student Enrolment (2022–23) (Source: HEA Statistics)

The following shows university publications for the last three years along with the percentage of those publications in high-impact journals.<sup>6</sup>

Year	Number of publications	Percentage in High Impact Journals
2021	275	63.6%
2022	312	64.7%
2023*	263	62.0%
<b>2021–2023*</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>63.5%</b>

Table 6: SETU Publications 2021–2023 (Source: SciVal)

SETU ranks twelfth amongst Irish universities when it comes to the publication count in the period 2021–23, accounting for 1.3% of the total publication numbers produced (which is 66,168). The TU sector accounts for just over 8% of the total publication count and SETU accounts for approximately 15% of the TU sector total (Source: SciVal). From this base, SETU will build its research base through increasing the volume of research publications to improve the university’s ranking within the TU sector, including elevating the percentage of publications in higher impact journals (indicators 2.6, 2.7).

The university outperforms the sectoral average across two of the three metrics used by Knowledge

<sup>6</sup> Source: SciVal 11 Apr 2024 with Scopus data up to 3 Apr 2024. 2023 is considered an incomplete year until June 2024. High impact journals are journals classified as being in quartile 1 or quartile 2 of any Scopus subject category for the Scimago Journal Rank metric (<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>).

Transfer Ireland in determining innovation performance as indicated in the Table 7 (source: [Knowledge Transfer Ireland annual report 2022](#)). The university outperforms the traditional university sector several times over on collaborations and consultancy agreements.

	Research expenditure (less block grant) in the reference year [2022] (€)	Research expenditure derived from industry (€)	Total collaborations, innovation voucher and consultancy agreements with industry
SETU	22,903,915	936,926 [4%]	238
TU Sectoral Average	15,833,755	997,082 [6.3%]	120
SETU vs Average	+7,070,160	-60,156	+118
TU Sectoral Total	110,836,287	6,979,575	841
SETU % of Total	20.7%	13.4%	28.3%
University Sector Average	69,675,065	4,985,932 [7.1%]	83

Table 7: Sectoral Research and KT Performance in the TU/IoT and University sectors (Source KIT Annual Survey 2022)

SETU’s ranks ninth in Ireland with regard to signed grant agreements under Horizon Europe (€11,311,218) representing 3% of the national total (€372.3m). SETU was by far the highest performing Technological University and accounts for approximately 42% of the TU signed grant agreements under Horizon Europe (the TU total was €26,775,585) (Source: europa.eu portal, 19.02.2024).

On the basis of this data, SETU will build research critical mass and sustain research activity over the period of this agreement through:

- Increasing number of PhD programmes in areas of regional priority (indicator 2.3).
- Growing research expenditure by 20% and enhancing SETU’s research connections to industry by increasing the percentage drawn from industry to the sectoral norm of 6% (indicator 2.4).
- Growing the number of research agreements with industry by approximately 35% and achieving 60 Licences, Options, and Agreements (LOAs) (indicators 2.5, 2.6).
- Increasing by 50% the volume of research grant applications demonstrating increased research activity across the organisation (indicator 2.9).

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

An overarching new research strategy to 2028, to be published in the second half of 2024, will articulate in detail SETU’s research plans. SETU has convened a number of working groups to develop this strategy with the purpose of:

- identifying the strategic priority research themes for SETU with relevance to the regional ecosystem;

- enhancing research culture, including staff development and increasing supervision capacity, and revising workload allocation practices to facilitate engagement in research;
- significantly elevating interactions with the regional enterprise base, including micro-enterprise, in support of innovation and knowledge transfer;
- enhancing research support infrastructure and existing technology transfer structures, including pre- and post-award support, training and skills development.

The research strategy will involve:

- Defining key research areas of focus for SETU including existing strengths (ICT; Pharmaceutical biosciences; advanced manufacturing) and themes where SETU now has scale as a consequence of the merger (Eco-innovation & Sustainability), as well as new strategic opportunities in domains such as One Health;
- Linking of technology gateways into Schools and Faculties to leverage excellent engaged research further;
- Leveraging opportunities for interdisciplinary thinking in recognition of SETU's broad disciplinary base with expertise in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences;
- Scaling up publication count and matrix, industry and research funding applications;
- Developing appropriate graduate studies structures and operations and growing the numbers of level 10 students, both funded and self-funded;
- Enhancing capacity, capability, and impact in innovation and knowledge transfer;
- Developing capacity, capability and impact of research on rural and micro-enterprises;
- Developing staff capacity, including supervision capacity and early career development;
- Enhancing infrastructure and resources in support of research.

The university plans to advance both EDI and sustainability through ensuring that these are considered in the formulation and execution of all research programmes and projects. We will develop our capacity and capability in measuring the contribution of all research projects to the SDGs.

The university identifies in its strategic plan the need to scale up research activity across SETU in areas of identified strength and impact. Key to this will be increasing the number of research students within the organisation, as set out above. This increase will be achieved through:

- Continued promotion of PhD opportunities across the university.
- Continued investment in SETU PhD scholarship schemes from SETU's own resources.
- Promotion and investment in co-fund PhD schemes with industry.

- Engagement with cotutelle PhD models via the European University, EU-CONEXUS, and the recruitment of students via that route.
- The introduction of a new TU-RISE-supported academia-enterprise PhD scholarship scheme, an investment of c.€1.3 million.
- TU-RISE supported investment in support for the development of a professional doctorate in design.

The university continues to invest in graduate studies and in supervisor supports and training, with a view to supporting improved student completions at doctoral level. New graduate studies regulations will describe the governance, management and quality infrastructure to support PhD studies. The university is currently developing capacity to track and report on PhD completion rates and on-time completion rates and anticipates integrating these measures into the Performance Agreement in due course (see indicator 2.2). The variability in the sample size of the student cohort points to potential reliability challenges when it comes to these measures: for 2017/2018, there were 42 new PhD/Research Masters students in SETU while in 2018/2019 there were only 16. The university has set a target of maintaining or improving current completion rates for indicator 2.2 and will also monitor in-time rates internally (notwithstanding the growth in this population).

SETU will continue to direct its research effort largely in domains with the highest impact on regional industry. SETU will prioritise PhD student recruitment in these domains. We recognise the domains prioritised by the region map to ISCED codes 04, 05, 06, and 07. SETU continues to develop its reporting capability and will refine the level of detail with regard to the domains of specialism over the course of the agreement.

SETU builds on a strong track record in research funding and will be ambitious in its aims in this regard across the course of this agreement. SETU aligns with Knowledge Transfer Ireland targets in relation to LAO and Research Agreement ambitions.

Capacity building activity will in part be supported by TU-RISE, specifically:

- Three research (SLT1) senior lecturers who will focus on supporting and co-ordinating research activity across three thematic areas (engineering and technology; health and well-being; and eco-innovation), an investment of c.€1.2million;
- The creation of an academia-enterprise sabbatical scheme from January 2025 that will support 18 one-year research sabbaticals with demonstrable outputs;
- 10 additional academia-enterprise post-doctoral positions, representing an investment of c.€1.3m;
- A development programme for a regional enterprise competencies needs analysis for future research and forecasting and the rollout of a Regional Economic and Innovation Roadmap & Assessment Framework to regional industry stakeholders.

TU legislation speaks of research of “high standard” and SETU is committed to continuing to improve

the quality of its research outputs as well as the volume through increasing the percentage of publications in high impact journals. SETU is a signatory of the [San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment](#) (DORA) and is committed to ensuring we align our assessment of research outputs with the DORA principles. To this end, all types of research output are recognised and SETU is committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal impact factors. For the recording of research activities and outputs SETU has implemented a well-established Current Research Information System (CRIS) called Pure, currently being rolled out across all SETU campuses. Over the course of this Agreement, as the full implementation of Pure takes places, SETU expects to refine further its research publication metrics and targets based on a more comprehensive capturing and analysis of the full range of SETU research outputs and geographic connectivity than is currently possible using SciVal.

To increase the volume of grant applications and achieve of the funding targets noted above, SETU will target at least 3 strategic grant applications, with faculty and enterprise partners, submitted to Horizon Europe and National funding bodies per annum. An enabler of success will be additional investment in training and development, grant writing, and digital support systems. Through TU RISE, the following suite of training programmes directed both at SETU researchers and PhD students is planned:

- Training programmes in contemporary Grant Writing Training to SETU researchers (also available to regional industry) to be given 4–5 times per year
- Training in grant management (post-award, including budget management)
- Research, policy and impact case study training
- Data management plan generation training
- Open research training
- Equality, diversity and inclusion for transformative research training
- Increased entrepreneurial skills
- Increased European policy skills (including Do no significant harm)
- Optimal academic writing skills
- Enterprise engagement and readiness training
- Intellectual property training for optimal industry collaboration

This training will be coupled with additional investment in central supports for targeting national and EU funding programmes and post award administration.

### **Risk**

Key risks associated with elevating institutional research performance are captured in the risk registers of the organisation and are monitored through the standard governance processes.

A key risk identified by the university is that, in addition to the allocation of funding through TU RISE or similar schemes, the achievement of SETU's ambitions with regard to research are contingent on a

number of actions outside the university over which SETU has little control. Specifically, the creation of full professor roles is critical to the construction of attractive research career paths in SETU and across the sector. The ability of the university to offer competitive, attractive remuneration outside these roles is extremely limited. The university will continue to pursue through national forums and other means the creation of a professor grade within the TU sector as a mitigating action. While the university will move towards implementing a revised workload allocation model to support research, the creation of new academic staff contracts at national level that mainstream research activity is a prerequisite for significant progress towards research targets.

Furthermore, deep consultation regarding the future research strategy will mitigate the risks associated with developing a culture of research within the organisation that scales up activity from the legacy institutions.

Projections with regard to enterprise support through SETU innovation centres are contingent on continued funding from Enterprise Ireland and other sources to support Enterprise Development and the continued RFAM allocation at least to current levels. SETU will need to scale back activity and targets should these funding sources not materialise.

## 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	<b>PhD Enrolment as % of overall enrolment Levels 8-10</b>	SRS	Quantitative	2023/24: 2.41% (250/10,365)	TU Act requirements  Sectoral average (2.36%)	<b>2.35%</b> <b>(260)</b>	<b>2.5%</b> <b>(280)</b>	<b>2.6%</b> <b>(290)</b>	<b>2.75%</b> <b>(320)</b>	<b>2.75%</b> <b>(320/11,950)</b> <b>40% increase</b>
2.2	<b>PhD Completion rate (%)<sup>7</sup></b>	SETU records	Quantitative	2023: 61.5%	Not available	n/a	>60%	>60%	>60%	>60%
2.3	<b>Percentage of PhD projects directly linked to regional priorities<sup>8</sup></b>	SETU records	Quantitative	2022/23: ~50%	None available	~50%	~52%	~55%	~60%	~60% of PhD projects demonstrably related to regional priorities  10 p.p. increase
2.4	<b>Research expenditure per annum and % of which is supported by industry</b>	University financial records	Quantitative	5-year average 2018–2022: €23m p.a.  4% from industry (€940,000 p.a.)	Maintain or improve national ranking (TBC)  Sectoral % funding from industry (6%)	<b>€24.1m in 2024</b> <b>4.5%</b>	<b>€25.5m in 2025</b> <b>5%</b>	<b>€26.6m in 2026</b> <b>5.5%</b>	<b>€27.5m in 2027</b> <b>6.3%</b>	<b>€27.5m p.a.</b> <b>20% increase</b> <b>6.3% from industry</b> <b>(€1.7m p.a.)</b>

<sup>7</sup> The methodology applied was to take the incoming PhD cohort in a given year (e.g. 2017-18 for the baseline) and examining how many of that cohort had graduated with PhDs within six years (accounting for both PT and FT cohorts).

<sup>8</sup> Regional priorities are defined as those identified in Figure 1.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.5	<b>Number of research agreements with industry per annum</b>	KTI annual reports and university records	Quantitative	2023: 109	Targets set by Knowledge Transfer Ireland	<b>120 in 2024</b>	<b>120 in 2025</b>	<b>140 in 2026</b>	<b>150 in 2027</b>	<b>530 cumulative</b> <b>38% increase in 2027 relative to 2023 baseline</b>
2.6	<b>Number of Licenses, Options and Agreements</b>	KTI annual reports and university records	Quantitative	2023: 3	Targets set by Knowledge Transfer Ireland	<b>12 in 2024</b>	<b>14 in 2025</b>	<b>16 in 2026</b>	<b>18 in 2027</b>	<b>60 cumulative</b> <b>600% increase on baseline by in 2027</b>
2.7	<b>Number of Publications per annum</b>	Scopus	Quantitative	5-year average 2019–2023: 263	TU sectoral average 2019–2023: 322 <sup>9</sup>	<b>305 in 2024</b>	<b>320 in 2025</b>	<b>330 in 2026</b>	<b>330 in 2027</b>	<b>325 p.a. (5-year average 2023–2027)</b> <b>30% increase on 2018–2022</b>
2.8	<b>Percentage (%) of Publications per annum in High Impact Journals<sup>10</sup></b>	Scopus	Quantitative	5-year average 2019–2023: 61% (160)	TU sector average 2019–2023: 62% (995/1613)	<b>63% 192 in 2024</b>	<b>65% 208 in 2025</b>	<b>68% 224 in 2026</b>	<b>70% 231 in 2027</b>	<b>70% of publications in high impact journals</b> <b>9 p.p. increase relative to 2019–2023 average</b>

<sup>9</sup> Average number of papers (1613) divided by number of TUs (5)

<sup>10</sup> High impact defined as publications featuring in journals ranked as Quartile 1 and 2 by Scimago Journal Rank

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.9	<b>Number research grant applications</b>	University records	Quantitative	2022/23: 265 <sup>11</sup>	Not available	<b>285</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>1,335 over 4 years</b>  <b>50% increase in 27/28 relative to baseline</b>

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<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this exercise, we exclude consultancy and innovation vouchers from these figures.

## Performance Objective 3

**To expand educational provision to maximise educational opportunities for people in the region, especially for under-represented groups, through a renewed programme portfolio, aligned with regional needs.**

**Pillar:** Access & Participation

**Transversals:** Flexibility, Upskilling, & Lifelong Learning; Region; Society; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging.

### Rationale for Performance Objective 3

#### Ambition

SETU’s ambition to have transformative impact on the South East region is in part founded on a belief in education as a force for individual and social change, and therefore on a commitment to making education available and accessible. The further development of the region requires especially that SETU, the only university in the South East, enhances and expands educational opportunities for people in the region and especially, given the regional profile with regard to educational disadvantage and attainment, for priority groups in national policy. The development of the region requires that SETU functions as an accessible, comprehensive university that can retain regional talent and attract talent and investment into the region as well as acting as a “lighthouse” for sustainability and for equality, diversity and inclusion in the region and beyond.

#### Rationale and Strategic Alignment

The *National Access Plan* recognises that the “technological universities across the country will [...] improve access to higher education and act as an anchor for regional and national innovation and growth” (p.33). Building on the strong traditions of its legacy institutions, SETU embraces this regional anchor role, enhancing educational provision in the South East, creating new educational opportunities and universal access to higher education in the region. Consistent with EU and national policy, the regional authorities seek to encourage life-long and life-wide learning and the broadening of participation in education at all levels. The *National Skills Strategy 2025* points to a number of initiatives that support disadvantaged and under-represented groups, jobseekers, older workers, and economically inactive populations, with an emphasis on educational opportunity. All of these initiatives focus on delivering, not only the profile of skilled labour to the region’s economy, but increasing life quality for the wider population and elevating regional educational attainment levels, and are reflected in SETU’s strategic objectives.

#### Addressing Regional Imbalances

SETU focusses in its strategy on expanding its programme portfolio to include a number of discipline areas not currently available to students in the South East. In this way, the university will assist with

retaining those students and talent in the region as well as making these disciplines accessible to groups, such as those under-represented in higher education, across the region. The areas of immediate priority are in Pharmacy, Veterinary Medicine, and Teacher Training and the university plans to commence enrolment on these new programmes over the course of its plan and of this Performance Agreement.

The university focusses on reversing the outward migration of students from the region and targeting an increase in the overall percentage of regional students who attend the university (indicator 3.1). The outward migration of talent from the South East is a clear and significant challenge to the region achieving the population growth targets described in the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy of the Southern Region (RSES)* and in the related policy for rural development, *Our Rural Future*. Current outward migration is evident in the higher education enrolment patterns set out in Table 8. This table shows that, compared to other regions, the South East suffers a very considerable “brain drain” with the majority of students from the region enrolling in institutions outside the South East.

	Total Enrolment from the Region	Enrolled at HEIs Within the Region	Enrolled at HEIs Outside the Region	% Within	% Outside
<b>South East (CW, KK, W, WX)</b>	<b>15,285</b>	<b>5,440 (SETU)</b>	<b>9,845</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>64%</b>
Mid West (CE, L)	12,695	8,600 (UL, TUS, MIC)	4,095	68%	32%
South West (C, KY)	25,810	18,955 (MTU, UCC)	6,855	73%	27%

Table 8: Regional Enrolment, 2022–23 Full-Time only (Source: HEA Statistics)

Retaining higher education students and, subsequently, graduates within the region is a high priority for agencies responsible for regional development.

### Access and Participation

Increasing the participation rate of Lifelong Learning in the South East is a key target for SETU during the period of this plan. SETU is a leader in the provision of lifelong learning programmes nationally; the university is the second largest provider of part-time education in Ireland and plans to retain that position through the life of this agreement. The university since 2016/17 has recruited between 10.4% and 13.7% of the national part-time enrolment (Source: HEA Statistics). The current participation rate in lifelong learning nationally is 12% (SOLAS, 2021) and EU targets for member states are set at 60% by 2030 (EC, ET2020).

With regard to the region, SETU notes that the Central Statistics Office [Educational Thematic Report for 2022](#) indicates an average or below average performance for the South East when it comes to educational attainment (Table 9) and consequently participation:

Highest level of education attained	NFQ Level	South-East	State
Higher Certificate or equivalent	6	2%	2%

Ordinary Degree or equivalent	7	12%	12%
Honours bachelor degree or equivalent	8	22%	23%
Postgraduate qualification	9&10	12%	16%

Table 9: Highest Level of Educational Attainment Achieved by Persons aged 25–54 by NUTS3 Region, Q2 2022 (Source: CSO)

Addressing the overall gap in educational attainment within the region (48%) when compared with the State average (53%) is a challenge for the South East region and making available the opportunities and pathways to and through higher education is an important part of addressing this challenge. The strong innovation focus of economic development policy within the region suggests in particular a need to address the clear educational attainment shortfall within the region at higher bachelors and postgraduate levels. Through sustaining a significant lifelong learning portfolio, SETU seeks to retain the current percentage of lifelong learners as a percentage of the overall university population (indicators 3.2, 3.3). SETU recognises and plans for the challenges associated with supporting increased access and participation to the university's programmes.

The university's strategy with regard to lifelong learning will not only seek to meet regional skills needs but to strengthen the impact of the university on the target groups described in the *National Access Plan* (NAP). SETU recognises that part-time learning opportunities often offer a more accessible gateway into learning. We note that this is especially the case for some particularly disadvantaged communities and will therefore track the percentage of our lifelong learning population that come from some of the NAP target groups. SETU notes the lower levels of participation by disadvantaged groups in a number of professions as acknowledged in the NAP: the average rate indicated is 10.8% with lower rates for the new professional disciplines which SETU seeks to offer over the course of this Agreement. These include Post-Primary Initial Teacher Education at 8.3%, Pharmacy at 9.5% and Veterinary Medicine at 9.1% (Source: NAP Table A13, pp.104-5). The provision of such programmes within the South East for the first time will have a knock-on effect on the accessibility of these professions.

National Deprivation Index Scores (DIS) for HEIs show that SETU ranks second nationally for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (15%), significantly higher than the national average (10%), and second nationally for average DIS (-1.4), significantly lower than the sectoral average (0.2) and the national average across all HEIs (2.1) (source: [Deprivation Index Scores by HEI, HEA 2020](#)) With regard to students with disabilities, SETU has a larger population than the overall average for the higher education sector but a lower number than the average for the five Technological Universities, as evident in Table 10.

Indicator	SETU	All HEIs	Universities	TU sector
Students with a disability (Equal Access Survey)	20.1%	19.4%	16.0%	22.2%

Table 10: Students with a Disability (EAS)

Tracking SETU's numbers over recent years shows a trailing off in 2022/23 (20.1%, 1.1% lower than the

sectoral average), compared to 21.7% in 2021/22 (the same as the TU average) and 23.3% in 2020/21 (1.5% higher than the sectoral average) (Source: HEA System Performance dashboard). SETU notes some limitations to the Equal Access Survey (EAS) as a source; for the purposes of this agreement, we use the Fund for Students with a Disability (FSD) return as the primary data source which aligns with KPI 5 in the NAP.

Consistent with national targets, and in the context of an anticipated growth in overall student population, the university plans to maintain its percentage of students with a disability at 8% which will lead to a net increase in students in this population. The university will also target increased participation from members of the Traveller community, aiming to exceed the sectoral average and contribute pro-rata more to the achievement of the national target of 150 by 2028 (indicators 3.4; 3.5). We acknowledge the priority accorded to Roma students also in national planning and as appropriate national benchmarks emerge SETU commits to revisiting this indicator to ensure it also captures students from this group.

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

SETU's plans with regard to this performance objective involve:

A. Expanding the range of educational offerings and pathways into the university:

- To contribute to inward migration to the region and the retention of population within the region;
- To facilitate increased educational access and employment opportunity.

B. Renewing its programme portfolio to take account of regional needs by:

- Expanding into new discipline areas;
- Modifying and enhancing its approach to lifelong learning.

SETU already offers a broad range of programmes across all main disciplines and at all higher education levels on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) but will broaden educational opportunities over the lifetime of this agreement. Applications in response to national calls in relation to Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine have been responded to and university resources made available to commence work on these programmes. Over time, through these means, SETU aspires to address regional outward migration and to align with other regions where universities typically attract over 60% of regional college-going learners (HEA Statistics).

The publication of a range of SETU sub-strategies will give greater detail on implementation and more granular information on specific tasks linked to realising SETU's plans. The first of these sub-strategies is a Lifelong Learning Strategy and Plan (due summer 2024) that will support a consolidation of the university's role as a provider of life-long learning opportunities.

Key inputs into the Lifelong Learning Strategy include:

- a comprehensive skills assessment of the needs of the region;
- a review of the lifelong learning programme portfolio including modes of delivery;
- the introduction of a suite of micro-credentials designed to upskill in specific fields and also to provide access points into higher education not previously available to lifelong learners, and;
- a review of all partners involved in linked provision for Lifelong Learning programmes and aim to consolidate regional and national partners within our Lifelong Learning (LLL) strategy to align provision with regional and national skills needs, underpinned with formal agreements with key partners that include performance metrics concerning learner enrolment, quality enhancement and metrics associated with progression and completion rates.

There are some limitations to the proposed measurement methodology, and it is anticipated that SETU will further refine this measure over the course of the Agreement.

Connected to this, the university will broaden the range of pathways to education and will initiate a widening access and participation strategy during the life of this Performance Agreement. The university will build on the success of initiatives such as its partnership with An Cosán, Tiglin, Family Carers Ireland and the ATTAINS and other PATH-supported projects. The university will especially target increased participation from students with disabilities and from members of the Traveller and Roma communities. This will be achieved through a specific focus on:

- Pathways for students with disabilities
- Pathways for students from a Traveller or Roma background

SETU also aims to build on our current progress to support members of the Traveller community to access educational opportunities; PATH funding has enabled SETU to establish stronger community links with local schools, community organisations and area partners, ensuring that the Traveller voice is heard, informing practice and implementation of Traveller projects by SETU, in turn promoting access to higher education. SETU's approach is framed within its declaration in its strategic plan of a desire to provide an inclusive environment for staff and students. Further information on SETU's engagement with Traveller and Roma communities is set out in the case studies provided in Appendix 3 below.

## **Risk**

Key risks associated with elevating institutional performance in relation to this performance objective are captured in the risk registers of the organisation and are monitored through the standard governance processes. Among the key risks, is the risk that student enrolment targets are not achieved. Mitigations involve the ongoing review and development of the university programme portfolio, the development of a range of sub-strategies and associated plans associated with specific

student cohorts (apprentices; international students; lifelong learners; research students), and a focus on student retention and progression (see Performance Objective 1). Moreover, the university will develop a comprehensive marketing programme in support of enrolment that it will continue to review as the university’s strategic plan is implemented. There are risks also in relation to the short-term nature of PATH funding. Developing access pathways requires deep engagement with communities over a protracted period and continuity of staffing is essential to build trust and ensure consistency over time. In the case of PATH, expertise built up within a small group of specialist staff needs to be retained over a multi-year period for programmes to be successful, and the targets set out in this agreement presume some level of continuity in staffing and funding. SETU as part of its strategic plan will seek new income streams over the coming years, some of which could be potentially directed towards these initiatives as mitigation.

## 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	<b>Proportion (%) of overall HE enrolment from SE attending SETU</b>	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 35.6% of HE-going FT students from SE (CW, KK, WD, WX) enrol at SETU	HEI enrolment profile in select regions (ranging from 68% to 73% in 2022/23)	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>37.5%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>39% of HE-going FT students from SE (CW, KK, WD, WX) enrol at SETU</b> <b>3.4 p.p. increase</b>
3.2	<b>Proportion of part-time enrolments as % total enrolments (WTE)</b>	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2023/24: 16.4%	Maintain sectoral ranking (2nd)	<b>16.5%</b> <b>(n=TBC)</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>17%</b> <b>(n=TBC)</b> <b>0.6 p.p. increase</b>
3.3	<b>Proportion (%) of part-time enrolment from NAP target groups</b>	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2023/24: 12% (~600)	Match or exceed TU sector average	<b>12%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b> <b>(~850)</b> <b>3 p.p. increase</b>
3.4	<b>Number of full-time students with disabilities as a % of total FT enrolment<sup>12</sup></b>	SETU FSD Return	Quantitative	2021/22: 8% (925)	Sustain at 1% or more above national average, 7% <sup>13</sup>	<b>8%</b> <b>(945)</b>	<b>8%</b> <b>(965)</b>	<b>8%</b> <b>(990)</b>	<b>8%</b> <b>(1,015)</b>	<b>Maintain baseline of 8%</b> <b>3,915 students over 4 years</b>

<sup>12</sup> For the purposes of this measure, we use the FSD as the data source.

<sup>13</sup> National % Enrolments with a Disability as % of All Enrolment, FSD: 17,526/256,785=7%.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.5	<b>Number of new entrants from the Traveller community<sup>14</sup></b>	Equal Access Survey	Quantitative	2022/23: █	NAP targets	<b>Maintain baseline</b>	<b>+1</b>	<b>+1</b>	<b>+3</b>	<b>+ 5</b>

<sup>14</sup> 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](#).

## Performance Objective 4

**To partner internationally to extend our reach and maximise our impact, enhance our attractiveness and reputation, and to drive an inclusive, outward-looking region.**

**Pillar:** Engagement

**Transversals:** International; Region.

### Rationale for Performance Objective 4

#### Ambition

Consistent with this vision to be a leading global technological university with transformative impact on the South East region, SETU seeks to enrich its educational programmes and research activities through internationalisation, creating opportunities for students and staff, and regional stakeholders, to connect with, collaborate with, and learn from international partners. The university aims to create and sustain meaningful and strategic European and global partnerships that drive regional attractiveness to talent and investment as well as enhance the organisation. The university's attractiveness to global learners and staff will be an asset to the continuing development of a multicultural region that offers an outstanding quality of life and an economic future to all.

The university will achieve these goals through involvement in high-quality international teaching, research and professional networks in areas of high strategic importance to the university and the region, and through enabling inward and outward international mobility for staff and students. Building on the extensive network of international partnerships already in place, and the long tradition of international student recruitment and international faculty and student mobility, SETU aims to enhance the international positioning of the university to achieve both institutional and regional goals.

The emphasis is on developing a comprehensive university-wide approach to internationalisation beyond mobility and cognisant of future trends in the post-pandemic era, and the value and contribution of internationally connected education and research to the needs of the region.

#### Rationale and Strategic Alignment

SETU priorities with regard to internationalisation will be set and driven in the first instance by the development of a comprehensive International Strategy for the university (due by summer 2024), in turn calibrated to the strategic priorities set out in *Global Citizens 2030*.

The SETU strategy recognises SETU's aspirations to be a global technological university. This will require:

- A. Enhancing the diversity of the international student population;

- B. The recruitment and retention of international faculty;
- C. Further enhancement of international collaborative initiatives;
- D. Extensive exchange programmes;
- E. Participation in transnational education initiatives;
- F. Fostering a multi-cultural environment;
- G. Providing a wide range of high quality globally relevant programmes;
- H. A strong emphasis on preparing students for a globalised world.

The Strategy will especially chart a path towards a step change in recruitment and international positioning, in the university’s partnerships, and in its approach to internationalisation at home. While touching on most of these areas, this Performance Agreement focusses on A, C, D, E and F above.

### Recruitment and International Positioning

SETU’s legacy institutions have been engaged internationally both in education and research over many decades. SETU’s enrolment of international students has comprised between 5% and 7% of its total enrolment since 2016/17 or between 6% and 9% of its full-time enrolment for the same period, disregarding 2020/2021 (the year most impacted by COVID-19). SETU’s full-time enrolment profile is given in Table 11:

	Academic Year						
<b>Domicile Group</b>	<b>2016/2017</b>	<b>2017/2018</b>	<b>2018/2019</b>	<b>2019/2020</b>	<b>2020/2021</b>	<b>2021/2022</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>
<i>Ireland</i>	9940	10165	10125	10610	11090	10785	9785
<i>Northern Ireland</i>	5	10	10	10	5	5	5
<i>Great Britain</i>	60	60	60	45	45	20	10
<i>(Other) EU</i>	115	150	185	170	180	75	170
<i>Non-EU</i>	475	635	705	825	595	475	600
<i>Unknown</i>	5	0	0	0	0	0?	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>10605</b>	<b>11025</b>	<b>11090</b>	<b>11665</b>	<b>11915</b>	<b>11360</b>	<b>10570</b>
<b>% NonEU of Total Full-time Enrolment</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>
<b>% International of Total FT Enrolment</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>

Table 11: SETU Enrolment by Domicile Group (Source: HEA Statistics)

SETU’s performance broadly tracks the performance of other TUs though it is noteworthy that there was a higher downturn in SETU coincident with COVID-19, and a slower recovery, than across the

sector and across all HEIs. In 2022/23, enrolment figures showed a broad re-convergence of the percentage of full-time non-EU students enrolled at SETU to the TU norm (see Figure 3 below).

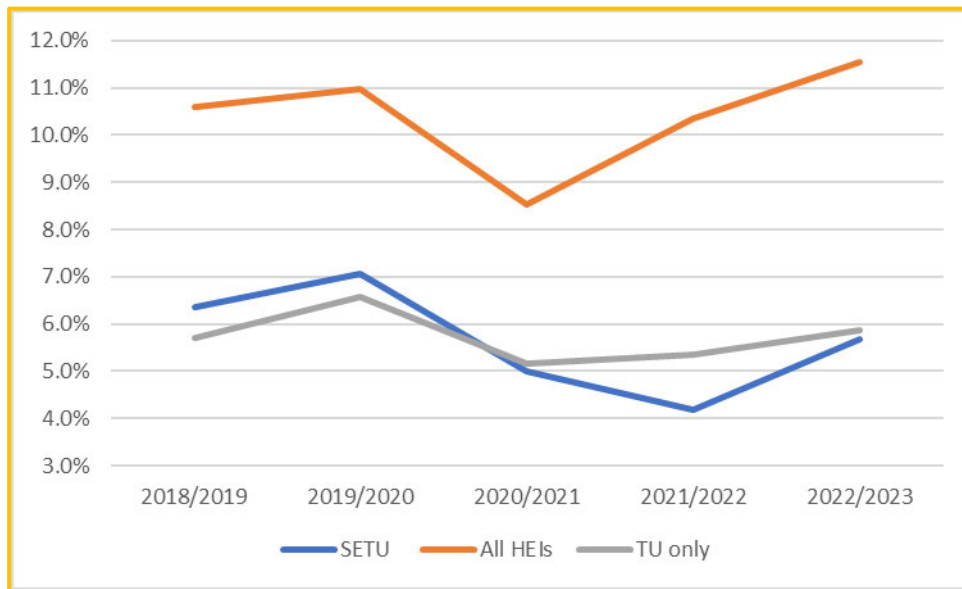


Figure 3: % FT Non-EU out of overall FT Enrolment, SETU vs TU sector vs All HEIs (Source: HEA Statistics)

SETU currently ranks ninth of 12 Irish HEIs for non-EU enrolment and continues to lag behind the traditional universities on this measure. During the timeframe of this agreement, SETU plans for a significant increase in non-EU enrolment targeting improvement to exceed the TU sector norm for non-EU enrolments (6%) to 8% by 2028 (indicator 4.1). This target is consistent with national targets outlined in *Global Citizens 2030* and has been informed by the regional emphasis on promoting the region as “a high quality of life destination on the global stage” (*RSES*) and establishing a “Learning Region” that will be attractive to talent from outside the South East (*Towards a Learning Region*).

### Strategic Partnerships

The university has a large network of international partners, as set out below.

- 200+ bilateral agreements across the European Union in 2022/23, and over 120 agreements across, Asia, Europe, Oceania, Africa, and the Northern and Southern Americas
- Full membership of the EU-CONEXUS European University alliance
- Two SETU Joint International Colleges/Institutes
  - SETU-HUAHE (Henan University of Animal Husbandry and Economy, China)
  - SETU-NUIST (Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, China)
- Offshore delivery with JLNU (Jilin Normal University, China) and ACCRA Business School, Ghana
- R&I partnerships across 26 H2020 Projects (2017–2022) involving 548 universities/organisations/companies

- 930 co-authored research publications (2017–2022) involving 943 world-wide organisations with the top five countries being UK, US, France, Italy and China

With regard to offshore delivery, SETU plans over the course of this agreement for a very significant growth in transnational enrolments; we target increasing the enrolment on transnational programmes to over 2,000 students by 2028, in line with existing inter-institutional trans-national agreements. The agreements on our transnational education (TNE) initiatives have all been designed to ensure full cost recovery to SETU. These TNE initiatives are also recruitment channels with the expectation of transfers to SETU.

In the context of planning to define SETU as a “global” university, we support the ongoing renewal of the culture of the organisation to reflect global perspectives and cultivate diversity. Most SETU major awards support international study options abroad for students and the university sustains a wide range of exchange agreements. SETU wishes over the course of this agreement to move towards more balanced mobility whereby we reach a 35:65 ratio of outgoing to incoming students on international mobility experiences (indicator 4.3). This is consistent with the renewed focus on outward mobility in *Global Citizens 2030*.

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

The publication of the SETU Internationalisation Strategy will give greater detail on implementation and more granular information on specific tasks linked to realising SETU’s plans. Responsibility for the development and execution of that strategy lies with the Vice President for Global Partnerships.

This performance objective will be supported through the optimisation of existing resources from the legacy institutions as well as the recruitment of a Global Business Development Manager and the development of a new website and brand presence (SETU Global). In addition, immediate actions have been identified in support of developing student pipelines:

- Streamlining admissions processes with the planned implementation of CRM Recruit, a pivotal development for the organisation, with the consequent efficiencies improving response rate and application turn-around time, critical in the competitive market of international education;
- Informed by robust data and analysis, resourcing priority and secondary markets, with the former receiving priority treatment in terms of market visits and agent supports, and the latter being approaching primarily through digital means;
- Incentivising faculty engagement in international education to generate new programme developments through a proposed financial disbursement model.

The university aims to cultivate strong, generative and sustainable strategic international partnerships, underpinned by clear governance, metrics and resources, that extend SETU’s reach, maximises its impact, enhances its global activities and reputation, and drives the creation of an

inclusive outward looking international region on the global stage. The university will review all existing international partnerships in the context of its International Strategy and nominate and resource those identified as strategic partners.

Furthermore, SETU will prioritise its involvement with the EU-CONEXUS European University initiative. The long-term goals of the [European Universities programme](#) involve improving the “international competitiveness of higher education institutions in Europe” and “promoting European values and identity” through the construction of deep, long-term, sustainable alliances between HEIs across the Union. The aspiration is to move beyond the minds of mobility programmes that have been the basis of European higher education collaboration to deeper forms of working together.

The activities taking place within EU-CONEXUS will contribute to realising many of the Objectives set out in this Performance Agreement and in the SETU Strategic Plan. The EU-CONEXUS workplan will involve delivery specifically on:

- Short study and educational offerings at Bachelor, Master and PhD levels, including a joint Masters programme and 16 micro-credential programmes all led by SETU, with SETU working closely with partners on models for PhD delivery that will contribute to adding to SETU’s PhD cohort.
- Supports for academic and professional, managerial and support staff, including project management supports led by SETU.
- Strengthened research infrastructure and support, including the development of a number of joint research institutes across the consortium, with consequent impact on SETU’s research metrics (see Performance Objective 2 above).
- Inter-campus activities, including student and staff mobility, activities in relation to careers supports and the development of a careers network (led by SETU), cultural and other events.
- Support for cross-alliance technology transfer activity and stakeholder engagement.

SETU has created an EU-CONEXUS office to co-ordinate participation in the activities of the alliance across all faculties and professional, managerial and support units. EU-CONEXUS is funded by ERASMUS+ under the European University Initiative to feed into long term European Union’s political objectives for higher education (Nov 2022–Oct 2026). SETU has also received funding from the HEA European Universities Initiative Capacity Building funding to support its participation in EU-CONEXUS (2023/2024). More detail on EU-CONEXUS is provided in a case study in Appendix 3.

The university plans to develop an Internationalisation at Home Strategy in parallel with the overall International Strategy. This strategy – which will be integrated, valued, visible, and engaged and will be completed by December 2024 – will represent a paradigm shift in the way the university thinks about and practices internationalisation and the global, sustainable perspectives the university tries to cultivate in students.

### **Risk**

Key risks associated with elevating institutional performance are captured in the risk registers of the organisation and are monitored through the standard governance processes. There is a risk that the university's plans with regard to internationalisation are adversely impacted by global geo-political events. The development of crisis management protocols will mitigate immediate operational issues that might emerge. The International Strategy will be informed by Irish foreign policy and will deploy robust governance around international partnerships that will be tested for their sustainability.

## 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	<b>Proportion of non-EU full-time enrolment as % of total FT enrolment</b>	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 5.7% (600)	Exceed TU sector profile: 6% in 2022/23 (4,145/67,530)  Towards average profile, all HEIs: 11.5% in 2022/23 (22,960/198,970)	<b>6.4%</b> <b>(715)</b>	<b>7%</b> <b>(800)</b>	<b>7.5%</b> <b>(880)</b>	<b>8%</b> <b>(980)</b>	<b>8%</b> <b>2.3 p.p. increase</b> <b>3,375 non-EU FT enrolments over 4 years</b>
4.2	<b>Number of trans-national enrolments</b>	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 566	Realise growth targets set out in existing transnational agreements	<b>1,600</b>	<b>1,900</b>	<b>1,950</b>	<b>2,030</b>	<b>7,480 transnational enrolments over 4 years</b>
4.3	<b>Ratio of outward-bound to incoming students under Erasmus (physical and virtual)</b>	HEA SRS/IO Records	Quantitative	2022/23: 22:78 (88 out, 307 in)	Towards balanced mobility	<b>25:75</b>	<b>30:70</b>	<b>32:68</b>	<b>35:65</b>	<b>35:65</b>

## Performance Objective 5

**To lead and deepen regional strategic partnerships, maximising regional cohesion and impact, and enhance the university’s capacity to plan for and respond dynamically to current and emerging skills and educational needs of employers.**

**Pillar:** Engagement

**Transversals:** Region; Enterprise; Society; Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion.

### Rationale for Performance Objective 5

#### Ambition

SETU aims to act as a regional anchor institution and regional key change agent, embedding itself in regional discourse and networks across enterprise, social, cultural, and business sectors. SETU will identify regional skills needs, address gaps in current skills provision (including with partners) and anticipate and plan for future skills requirements. SETU aspires to be a hub supporting regional actors and coordinating regional efforts. SETU is informed by the desire to make the South East a Learning Region and is focussed in this context on enhancing the knowledge-based economy, regional place-making, and citizen empowerment through education, thereby driving productivity, growth, and sustainability.

#### Rationale and Strategic Alignment

This performance objective mirrors a priority objective in SETU’s published Strategic Plan. The Objective sees SETU respond to:

- A. The strong regional leadership mandate set out for SETU in legislation;
- B. Regional and national expectations with regard to the development of the regional labour force;
- C. Regional and national expectations with regard to entrepreneurship and the innovation ecosystem supporting the regional knowledge-economy.

#### Regional Leadership

SETU is guided by legislation which insists that TUs, “having particular regard to the needs of the region” in which the campuses of SETU are located:

- Be active participants in regional coalitions;
- Contribute to addressing particular regional skills and educational needs with particular reference to the development of the regional labour force;

- Engage in research and innovation activity that will be impactful on the region.

The [TURN report](#) further highlights the role that each TU plays as “an anchor institution in the development and the national and international advancement of its region” (p.8). As such, SETU is critical to the delivery of the objectives of the *National Development Plan*, to the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy* for the Southern Region, and to the *Regional Enterprise Plan for the South East*. SETU has an important role in developing regional intelligence, identifying and describing regional challenges, and mobilising the resources of the university and the wider region to address those challenges.

The centrality of the region to SETU as an organisation necessitates that the university includes a region-focussed performance objective and range of indicators to tracking performance in this agreement. While SETU is deeply embedded in a wide range of regional forums, the period of this agreement will see the university position itself more strongly in regional thought leadership through its Grand Challenges activities amongst others.

### **Regional Skills Needs and Supporting Regional Enterprise**

The [National Skills Strategy 2025](#) puts emphasis on education providers offering “skills development opportunities” with the goal of supporting “an increase in the supply of skills to the labour market” (p.11). At regional level, both the *RSES* and the regional *Enterprise Plan*, as well as the work of the [South East Regional Skills Forum](#), reiterate that SETU is a central pillar in addressing regional skills needs, along with partners in the regional ETBs and across the broad range of education providers.

SETU commissioned a report (to be published summer 2024) to describe and quantify significant skills gaps in the region, as a guideline to future action by the university. The report was commissioned in the absence of comprehensive, cross-sectoral and detailed data and also was informed by:

- the dynamic change in economy and society meaning SETU needs progressively to study the university-level lifelong learning needs of the region;
- regional stakeholder requirements that SETU provides leadership in establishing the economic and societal training and education needs of the region.

The initial findings suggest:

- Prominent gaps in engineering, including manufacturing, green economy, construction, and related professional services, with employers seeking graduates and industry professionals for upskilling in automation, quality control, digitisation, and other modern technologies.
- Gaps in areas relating to the renewable energy sector, including offshore wind energy, particularly in high-voltage electrical and engineering areas.
- Gaps in carbon accounting and ICT, cyber-security, artificial intelligence (AI) and technical sales.

The report also indicated a demand for stackable micro-credentials to enhance existing skills across

all sectors. This report, coupled with the work of the Regional Skills Forum (on which SETU is represented), will guide SETU’s future action in support of regional skills.

In order to support regional skills development and deepen impact in the South East, SETU will enhance the work readiness of students by the incorporation of Work Placement in 85% of university programmes consistent with TU legislative requirements (indicator 5.1). The university also plans to increase the number of apprentice students enrolled and continues to participate in national discussions about the ongoing expansion of craft apprenticeship, with a view to supporting regional growth and generating educational pathways in defined areas. SETU aims to grow its overall apprentice population to 1,500 by the end of this Agreement, rising from 6% to 8% of total student enrolment (SRS), as a contribution to achieving national apprenticeship growth targets (indicator 5.2).

The relationship SETU has with partner ETBs is also an important and strategic partnership for regional development. SETU has been proactive in advancing national tertiary system priorities and is an active participant in the pilot Tertiary Programme initiative. SETU is performing well in this domain. Currently, there are 34 tertiary programmes available nationally accepting student applications for 2024/25, and SETU offers 8 of these programmes. This activity builds on long-standing pathway arrangements with a range of regional FE providers. Over the course of this Agreement, we plan to expand our Tertiary Programmes with Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in the context of the Learning Region and in line with legislative requirements to partner closely with regional ETBs (indicator 5.3).

### **Entrepreneurship and Innovation**

The *Regional Enterprise Plan for the South East* sets out a plan for “encouraging entrepreneurship and enhancing the region’s start up ecosystem” in which SETU is prominent. SETU partners in this with regional development agencies and national agencies such as IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland.

SETU is recognised as a central component in this ecosystem especially through its two innovation centres, the [ArcLabs](#) Research and Innovation Centre (Waterford) and Enterprise and Research Incubation Campus [[ERIC](#)] (Carlow) which facilitate business incubation, the delivery of the New Frontiers entrepreneurship programme, and access to the wider university including the university’s research community. SETU’s HCI-funded GrowthHub project supports student entrepreneurship through the delivery of ideation workshops, hackathons, entrepreneurship bootcamps, design sprints, student accelerator programmes and mentoring. Regional development policy necessitates an increase in activity across all these elements of SETU’s contribution to regional entrepreneurship and that over the period of this agreement increases in participation in New Frontiers Phase 2, in support for Spin-Outs, and in the number of employees in companies supported by the innovation centres, which we plan to grow by 20%, is anticipated (indicators 5.4, 5.5, 5.6). SETU’s support for student entrepreneurship through its GrowthHub initiative (funded by HCI to 2025) will also expand, with a target of 400 students engaged per annum by 2028 (indicator 5.7).

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

### Regional Leadership

The publication of the SETU Regional Engagement Plan will give greater detail on implementation and more granular information on specific tasks linked to realising SETU's ambitions. Responsibility for the development and execution of that strategy lies with the Vice President for External Affairs.

SETU plans the creation of a single, cross-campus external engagement function that will co-ordinate university engagement with enterprise and other regional stakeholders. In the period of this Agreement, SETU will partner in region-wide initiatives with central, regional and local government, various State and semi-State agencies, enterprise, cultural, voluntary and community organisations, to ensure consistency in approach to regional challenges and in support of maximising impact. Separate but related processes by which progress towards key regional development goals are monitored and supported, including those processes under the remit of the Regional Assembly and local authorities, are noted. SETU continues to be an active participant in these processes (such as the LECs for the various local authorities, as well as local authority Climate Action Plans) and will benefit from the evaluations that take place as part of those processes.

An important SETU initiative with regard to the university's engagement with and leadership of the region is the South East Grand Challenges programme. We will convene interdisciplinary student teams to tackle aspects of identified regional challenges and aim to convene at least one team per year to have at least 5 active teams by the conclusion of this agreement. The means by which the efficacy of these teams is demonstrated—and therefore the development of an appropriate output-based performance indicator to track this activity—will form part of the work of the establishment of the initiative and will be developed in the first year of this agreement.

### Regional Skills and Labour Force Development

SETU will continue to work with regional partners in support of regional priority sectors in skills development including in support of regional green and digital development. Important industry sectors to the region include financial services, advanced manufacturing, ICT, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture and emerging areas linked to renewable energy and health (see also Performance Objective 2 above).

Within certain parameters, the majority of SETU's full-time programmes will be required to provide work placement or equivalent opportunities as a demonstration of an engagement curriculum. The university will monitor the number of programmes that include these opportunities across the course of this Agreement with a target of 85% of full-time major awards by 2028.

Regional skills base will be further enhanced through targeted increases in enrolment in Craft Apprenticeship programmes and Springboard enrolments will be tracked to further understand our response to regional enterprise. While we anticipate Springboard numbers rising over the course of the Agreement targets have not been set.

Expansion of our Tertiary Programmes will be supported in part through the National Tertiary Office

funded tertiary manager post. This post and some administrative supports are funded until 2026 and this objective assumes some continuation of these resources beyond 2026. Further information on SETU’s Tertiary System activity can be found in the Case Study in Appendix 3.<sup>15</sup>

SETU recognises the need to supplement programme-level data with data on student enrolment from FE to HE. Significant challenges with data exist that militate against gathering this data at a granular level, but SETU has initiated plans with ETB partners to resolve those challenges and develop appropriate mechanisms to gather and report comprehensively on progression. We anticipate delivering this project and being able to report findings on student throughput within the first 18 months of this Agreement.

### **Regional Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

SETU currently has multiple enterprise incubation facilities and over the course of the SETU strategic plan will move to create a unified innovation and enterprise offering to create seamless regional access in support of enterprise, especially start-ups and SMEs. The centres to date have been enablers of regional innovation activity and facilitators and promoters of entrepreneurship as well as of the commercialisation of research. In due course, the University-Enterprise Quarter will represent a significant intervention also into this ecosystem.

The development plan for regional enterprise also indicates the need for continued support for regional entrepreneurship and for the ongoing development of the regional ecosystem that supports entrepreneurs and new start-up and growing businesses. SETU has a critical role to play in developing the entrepreneur pipeline, including through student entrepreneurship cultivation, in supporting new start-ups, and in providing ongoing support for growing businesses regionally through its innovation and incubation activities. The New Frontiers programmes, delivered across the Carlow and Waterford campuses, together support 100 new enterprises annually which has significant outcomes for the region in terms of new company creation and increased employment opportunities. In 2024, SETU will introduce the startX pre-accelerator programme. SETU will deliver four pre-accelerator programmes annually, funded by RFAM, aligned to the specialisations of SETU’s Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateways, leveraging the expertise of Design +, ICS Technology Gateway, Pharmaceutical and Molecular Biotechnology Research Centre (PMBRC) and South Eastern Applied Materials (SEAM). This will result in at least 32 new companies supported each year, 160 by the end of 2028. Across the three innovation centres in Carlow, Kilkenny and Waterford, approximately 50 companies hold offices and provide employment to 350 people in the region (October 2023). We anticipate the numbers of jobs supported by companies in our spaces to increase by 20% to 420 by the end of 2028, as companies maximise the space they hold with flexible working arrangements for their staff. Student entrepreneurship will be supported through the continued expansion of activities associated with GrowthHub, presuming a continuation of funding.

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<sup>15</sup> The National Tertiary Office has yet to establish national targets for tertiary programmes. The NTO advises (June 2024) that “*The NTO is still working on a proof-of-concept approach until 2026. We (NTO) have established governance groups including the Partners Group. The work of this group will include making recommendations regarding targets for the ‘mainstreaming’ process and beyond.*”

**Risk**

Key risks associated with elevating institutional performance are captured in the risk registers of the organisation and are monitored through the standard governance processes.

SETU has recognised that while many people across the university are engaged externally, there is a need for a more co-ordinated approach. There is a risk that a less co-ordinated approach will be less effective and that, indeed, there may be a duplication of effort as external partnerships overlap or are part of the work of many people. Establishing a single office, with appropriate instruments such as a CRM, will mitigate this risk.

## 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	<b>Proportion (%) of students undertaking work placement on FT degree programmes, Levels 7-8</b>	SETU curriculum	Quantitative	2022/23: 76%	Not available	<b>78%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>85%</b> <b>9 p.p. increase</b>
5.2	<b>Apprentice enrolment as proportion (%) of total enrolment</b>	HEA SRS & funding allocation	Quantitative	2022/23: 6.25% (1,111)	National targets, Action Plan for Apprenticeship (Not available)	<b>6.6%</b> <b>(1,200)</b>	<b>7%</b> <b>(1,300)</b>	<b>7.5%</b> <b>(1,400)</b>	<b>8%</b> <b>(1,500)</b>	<b>8%</b> <b>1.75 p.p. increase</b> <b>5400 apprentice enrolments across four years</b> <b>35% increase on baseline in 27/28</b>
5.3	<b>Number of First Year Tertiary Programmes</b>	HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022: 2	Not available	<b>8</b> <b>(6 new)</b>	<b>13</b> <b>(5 new)</b>	<b>15</b> <b>(2 new)</b>	<b>17</b> <b>(2 new)</b>	<b>17 first-year tertiary programmes</b> <b>(850% of baseline)</b>

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
5.4	<b>Number of participants in New Frontiers Phase 2<sup>16</sup></b>	Tech Transfer Office records	Quantitative	18 p.a. (2023/24)	KTI targets	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>72 participants in NF Phase 2</b>
5.5	<b>New Registered Spin Out Companies [and those achieving HPSU status]</b>	Tech Transfer Office records	Quantitative	2023: 0  7 existing spin-outs, though none was added in 2023.	EI targets	<b>1 [0] in 2024</b>	<b>2 [1] in 2025</b>	<b>2 [1] in 2026</b>	<b>2 [1] In 2027</b>	<b>7 new spin-outs over 4 years</b>  <b>100% increase</b>  <b>[3 spin-outs achieving HPSU status]</b>
5.6	<b>Number of employees in companies supported by SETU innovation centres</b>	Incubation centre records	Quantitative	2023: 350	Not available	<b>350</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>420 employees (+20%)</b>
5.7	<b>No. of students participating in entrepreneurship events in GrowthHub<sup>17</sup></b>	GrowthHub Reports	Quantitative	48 students have engaged with GrowthHub (2022/2023)	SE Enterprise Plan	<b>125 in 2023/24</b>	<b>175 in 2024/25</b>	<b>300** in 2025/26</b>	<b>400** in 2026/27</b>	<b>400 students p.a.**</b>

<sup>16</sup> Targets for New Frontiers assume a continuation of funding beyond the current cycle, due to conclude in 2026.

<sup>17</sup> Targets for GrowthHub student engagement presume a continuation in some form of GrowthHub beyond the current funding period which concludes in 2025.

## Section 3: Matrix and Signatures

### Framework Matrix

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

## 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](mailto:systemperformance@hea.ie).

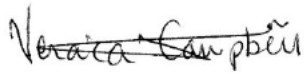
**Table 1: Indicators modified following the 2025 Strategy and Performance Dialogue process**

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
<b>1.1</b>	<b>% of programmes with SDGs embedded in the curriculum</b>	SETU curriculum/graduate survey	Quantitative	2024/25: Not yet available; TBC	National and European education for sustainable development policy	—	50%	75%	100%	100% of programmes

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.2	<b>Quality of student-faculty interaction</b>	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	2023: 16.1	Average for all HEIs (14.0 in 2023)	—	>16.1	>16.1	>16.1	>16.1
1.3	<b>Supportive learning environment</b>	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	2023: 28.8	Traditional university score of 30.0	—	29.0	29.5	30.0	30.0  1.2 increase on baseline score

## Signatures

### On behalf of South East Technological University



**Professor Veronica Campbell**  
**President**

Thursday, 17 April 2026



**Professor Patrick Prendergast**  
**Chairperson of the Governing Body**

Thursday, 17 April 2026

### On behalf of the Higher Education Authority



**Dr Alan Wall**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Thursday, 17 April 2026

## Appendix 1: Performance Objectives and the SETU Strategic Plan

The selection of the performance objectives for this agreement was entirely informed by the university's strategy; the objectives in this agreement therefore align with a number of key objectives of SETU's Strategic Plan. The alignment is represented in the table below:

PERFORMANCE AGREEMENT	SETU STRATEGIC PLAN
<p><b>PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE 1:</b></p> <p><b>To reshape the curriculum to take account of changing patterns of employment and civic and social needs especially in relation to sustainability and EDI, and to enhance learner support infrastructure and the learning environment.</b></p>	<p><b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:</b></p> <p>Recast the SETU curriculum to create a research-informed, internationalised curriculum across all campuses that will take account of changing patterns of employment, the centrality of equality, diversity and inclusion, and the opportunities associated with sustainability, new and developing technology, and civic and social needs.</p> <p><b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:</b></p> <p>Reorganise and enhance our learner support infrastructure and learning environment, encompassing all aspects of the student experience, to ensure opportunities for active, equitable and inclusive participation of all our learners in all aspects of university life, and position SETU as a leader in how we enable learner success.</p>
<p><b>PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE 2:</b></p> <p><b>To elevate research and innovation, in domains aligned to regional priority, to levels consistent with a top young global university, maximising impact on regional enterprise and society.</b></p>	<p><b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:</b></p> <p>Elevate our research and innovation activity to levels consistent with a top young global university.</p>
<p><b>PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE 3:</b></p> <p><b>To expand educational provision to</b></p>	<p><b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:</b></p> <p>Expand SETU educational provision to</p>

PERFORMANCE AGREEMENT	SETU STRATEGIC PLAN
<p><b>maximise educational opportunities for people in the region, especially for under-represented groups, through a renewed programme portfolio, aligned with regional needs.</b></p>	<p>maximise educational opportunities for people in the region through a renewed programme portfolio that aligns to regional skills and educational needs, develops new discipline areas to address regional demand and arrest the outward migration of students from the region, and that enhances access and progression pathways.</p>
<p><b>PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE 4:</b></p> <p><b>To partner internationally to extend our reach and maximise our impact, enhance our attractiveness and reputation, and to drive an inclusive, outward-looking region.</b></p>	<p><b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 8:</b></p> <p>Partner internationally to extend our reach and maximise our impact, enhance our attractiveness and reputation, and to drive an inclusive, outward-looking region.</p>
<p><b>PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE 5:</b></p> <p><b>To lead and deepen regional strategic partnerships, maximising regional cohesion and impact, and enhance the university’s capacity to plan for and respond dynamically to current and emerging skills and educational needs of employers.</b></p>	<p><b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 7:</b></p> <p>Lead and deepen strategic partnerships with government, local authorities, education sector, public sector, enterprise, culture, voluntary and community organisations within the south east to maximise regional cohesion and impact, enhance capacity to plan for and respond dynamically to current and emerging skills and educational needs of employers, and to enhance regional productivity, growth and sustainability.</p>

*Figure 4: Alignment of Performance Objectives with SETU Strategic Plan Objectives*

Note that not all the strategic objectives set out in the SETU strategic plan are encompassed by the performance agreement objectives.

## Appendix 2: Actions Checklist

PO	Action	Indicator
1	<p>Establish a strategic framework for curriculum development in SETU through the publication of a range of new strategies and the initiation of a number of high impact projects, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching, learning assessment strategy (due December 2024);</li> <li>• Student Success Strategy (due end-summer 2024);</li> <li>• Career Development Framework project (due May 2025);</li> <li>• Student belonging and wellbeing project (due May 2025);</li> <li>• Library Development Strategy (due December 2024)</li> </ul>	Publication of strategies
1	Develop and operationalise a plan to embed a defined set of graduate attributes in all programmes	1.1
1	Improve the quality of the learning environment and student engagement as demonstrated in student surveys	1.2, 1.3
1	Facilitate greater student success as evident in improved student retention and progression rates	1.4
1	Address demand for student accommodation with significant investment in university-owned PBSA	1.5
	Develop a detailed plan for the advancement of SETU research and innovation through the creation of a new SETU Research and Innovation Strategy to 2028	Strategy published
2	Increase research critical mass in the university in the first instance through increasing the number of PhD students at the university, targeting a 40% rise in PhD numbers across the course of this agreement, aligned with meeting legislative requirements	2.1
2	Increase the impact of SETU research through ensuring an increasing number of PhD programmes are in areas of regional priority	2.2

2	Build research critical mass and sustain research activity through increasing research expenditure by 20% and enhance SETU’s research connections to industry by increasing the percentage drawn from industry to the sectoral norm of 6%,	2.3
2	Increase SETU research impact on the region through increasing the number of research agreements with industry by approximately 35% and achieving 60 LOAs over the period of the Agreement	2.4, 2.5
2	Build the institutional research base through increasing the volume of research publications to improve SETU’s ranking within the TU sector, including elevating the percentage of publications in higher impact journals	2.6, 2.7
2	Expand the institutional research base and the sustainability of SETU research by significantly increasing the volume of research grant applications, targeting an increase of 50% over the period as a demonstration of increased research activity across the organisation	2.8
3	Expand the SETU programme offering with a view to increasing the percentage of South East college-going students studying in the region, moving towards the profile of other regions	3.1
3	Facilitate increased participation in the region through sustaining a significant lifelong learning portfolio, retaining the current percentage of lifelong learners as a percentage of the overall university population	Strategy published; 3.2, 3.3
3	Consistent with the National Access Plan, increase pathways into education at SETU further adding to the diversity of the university community, with a specific focus on pathways for students from particular target groups	3.4, 3.5
4	Develop an internationalisation strategy that sets out a vision for SETU’s global engagement and connectedness.	Strategy published
4	Further diversify the student population through an increase in non-EU enrolment, with plans to exceed the sectoral norm by 2028.	4.1
4	Develop a prioritisation process and resource model to support further development and expansion of SETU’s international strategic partnerships.	Strategy published

4	Support transnational education partnerships in areas of strategic importance consistent with national policy	4.2
4	Prioritise activity within the EU-CONEXUS alliance	Delivery of SETU commitments to EU-CONEXUS
4	Publish an Internationalisation at Home Strategy and Plan	Plan published
4	Continue to support student mobility with the target of more balanced ratio of outward to incoming students under the Erasmus programme	4.3
5	Develop and publish an SETU Regional Engagement Plan that will deepen key strategic regional relationships across education and research, providing for sustainable and mutually beneficial collaborations for students, partners and the region	Plan published
5	Establish the South East Grand Challenges programme and convene interdisciplinary teams towards the development of responses to these challenges in collaboration with external partners.	Teams established and active
5	Deepen regional impact as well as the work readiness of students by the incorporation of Work Placement in 85% of university programmes	5.1
5	Enhance the regional skills base through targeted increases in enrolment in Craft Apprentice programmes	5.2
5	Expand and deepen partnership with the ETBs in the context of the Learning Region, as demonstrated through an expansion of our Tertiary Programmes with ETB partners.	5.3
5	Enhance regional entrepreneurial activity by way of continued support for the New Frontiers programme and spin-outs from New Frontiers, and by supporting an increase in the number of employees in companies located in SETU's incubation space	5.4, 5.5, 5.6
5	Support student entrepreneurship through expansion of activities associated with Growth Hub	5.7

## Appendix 3: SETU Case Studies

SETU offers the following case studies in support of the objectives set out above.

**Performance Objective 1: To reshape the curriculum to take account of changing patterns of employment and civic and social needs, especially in relation to sustainability and EDI, and to enhance learner support infrastructure and the learning environment.**

### ***Case Study: WorkAbility Programme***

SETU has developed a pilot WorkAbility Programme for students on the Autism spectrum to support them in preparing for work placement and graduate roles. This programme facilitates students, who were experiencing barriers, in securing work placement and increasing their employability skills through engaging with the programme.

Specialisterne Ireland is a specialist consultancy for neurodivergent people (autistic people, those on the autism spectrum, with ADHD, dyspraxia/DCD, dyslexia and similar neurodiversities) by supporting them into employment. A formal diagnosis to access their services is not needed. If you identify as neurodivergent (autistic, ADHD, dyspraxic or dyslexic) or face similar challenges, then Specialisterne will support you in your efforts to access employment.

Specialisterne Ireland’s Interview Skills Program will assist students with the interview process and build confidence when they are applying for potential work placement or graduate interviews.

The Careers Service will continue to work in collaboration with the Disability and Access Offices, Faculty staff and Placement managers and in partnership with Specialisterne to further develop these practices and embed this service in SETU. This programme will be expanded across multiple campuses in the life of this Performance Agreement and SETU plans further collaborations with Specialisterne Ireland. This programme is an example of SETU’s commitment to equality and inclusion through supporting its diverse student population.

### **Case Study: EDIT**

SETU is currently leading the sectoral EDIT Project — Embedding EDI into the Curriculum of the Technological Sector. This project is funded by the HEA under the Gender Equality Enhancement Fund. The project was developed by partners across the TU sector including SETU, ATU, TUS, MTU and aims to embed an overarching awareness, understanding and implementation of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in the curriculum of TUs, in order to address challenges that hinder the successful achievement of equality. The EDIT Project was developed in recognition that the reconfiguration of the Irish HE system provides a unique opportunity to embed the principles of gender equality into the academic strategies, policies, procedures, and curricula of the Technological University (TU) sector. The partners have worked with Advance HE to produce a Charter of Principles (launched end May 2024) for adoption by HEIs to help embed EDI into the curricula of the sector, and have developed a comprehensive toolkit for staff in the sector to provide guidance and support. Training for staff across the sector has commenced. The EDIT principles have been adopted by N-TUTORR and will also form part of its curriculum framework.

**Performance Objective 2: To elevate research and innovation, in domains aligned to regional priority, to levels consistent with a top young global university, maximising impact on regional enterprise and society.**

**Case Study: PMBRC**

The Pharmaceutical and Molecular Biotechnology Research Centre (PMBRC) is a leading research centre in pharmaceutical, chemical and biological sciences in Ireland. An Enterprise Ireland-funded Technology Gateway, the PMBRC supports the R&D activities of a wide range of industries in the pharma, med tech, engineering and agri-food sectors and an innovative research programme spanning drug delivery, molecular biology, solid state pharmaceutical science, analytical science, biosensor development and biomedical science. The PMBRC was named Pharma Research Centre of the Year at the 2020 Pharma Industry Awards, having won the Research and Development Achievement awards in 2019, 2017 and 2021.

The profile of PMBRC is as follows:

- 900 m<sup>2</sup> Research Labs
- 28 Postgrad students
- 12 staff
- Publications: 8–14 p.a.
- PhD Graduates: 3–6 p.a Over 50 projects with industry partners > €1,500 p.a.
- Industry cash > €200k p.a.
- Projects with > 7 Enterprise Ireland client companies p.a.
- Researchers from ~ 17 countries
- Partners with companies and universities across the North America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Recent projects include:

- ORBITAL-ITN, focused on innovative technologies for back-of-the-eye diseases (H2020 funded);
- OCUHEALTH, developing ocular drug delivery tech for dry eye disease (EI Commercialisation Fund);
- STREAM, creating real-time aquatic sensors for environmental monitoring (Ireland-Wales Programme funding);
- SSPC, addressing pharmaceutical challenge (SFI funded); and
- Various PhD projects covering drug delivery, organic synthesis, green chemistry, printed medicines, biomedical science, gene therapy, molecular biology, sensor development, and materials science, funded by IRC, industry, SFI, and Horizon 2020.

The period covered by this PA will see the continued development of the PMBRC with increased PhD student numbers, funding application and successes, and publications targeted.

**Performance Objective 3: To expand educational provision to maximise educational opportunities for people in the region, especially for under-represented groups, through a renewed programme portfolio, aligned with regional needs.**

#### **Case Study: SETU and RPL**

Deriving from the successes of its legacy institutes, SETU has played a long and successful role in the use of Recognition of Prior Learning.

Evidenced best in its involvement in key enterprise initiatives, SETU has enabled thousands of learners to access, gain advance entry and exemptions across its portfolio of programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. A key example of this is the use of recognition of prior learning in major public and private organisations such as the Irish Defence Forces and VHI. Building from its success with these enterprise cohorts, the use of RPL to support individual learners also continues to grow.

SETU has played a key role in the National RPL in Higher Education Project. Its management and staff have served on its steering and coordination groups since its inception. This project is a collaborative initiative working to embed and expand RPL across 14 partner higher education institutions. The project is funded by the Human Capital Initiative Pillar 3 (Innovation and Agility) and co-sponsored by the Technological Higher Education Association and the Irish Universities Association with SETU acting as administrative lead.

In and through this network, SETU has led out on policy and guideline definition and in supporting the developing systematic approaches to the recording of RPL on student records. SETU has also led on the integration of FE and HE through RPL in particular through its leading role in the RPL Practitioner Network and as part of its work in the tertiary domain.

#### **Case Study: ATTAINS and Brighter Futures**

Funding secured by SETU under PATH enabled the development of the ATTAINS (Assistive Technology Training Assisting INdependent Success) programme and the Brighter Futures programmes.

ATTAINS introduces post-primary students from under-represented groups to Assistive Technology (AT) techniques to support independent learning and is designed for students with specific learning disabilities. Training is also extended to teachers, staff and parents. Since 2020, a total of 142 participants from across 16 organisations have attended AT CPD training sessions. In addition, in 2023, 31 students (and staff members) from three schools in Waterford were trained in the use of exam pens. Feedback from school partners emphasizes the programme's positive impact on students' confidence and individualized learning experiences. In the period of this Performance Agreement, SETU will expand this programme to a wider catchment area, initially with a target of benefiting over 450 students in the near future.

Brighter Futures fosters a welcoming environment for Traveller children in schools, encouraging their engagement and continuity in education. Supported initially through Dormant Accounts

Funding (now PATH 5), it encompassed various strategies, including weekly workshops with Traveller students where issues such as sense of belonging in school, difficulties with schoolwork, pride in community, reading, and Traveller role models are discussed in a relaxed child appropriate way; Traveller awareness training with teachers and facilitators; design and delivery of a Traveller culture and history module to students and information to support teachers in line with upcoming new national policy guidelines; information and supports for parents and children on progression routes (including CAO, Financial, Academic, Disability supports). SETU is committed to expanding and sustaining the Brighter Futures Programme given its role in enhancing Traveller participation in education, facilitating progression to further and higher education and employment, and fostering connections among stakeholders.

### **Case Study: SETU and An Cosán Addressing Educational Disadvantage**

SETU works with its partner An Cosán to combat disadvantage by delivering holistic, supportive and engaging educational programmes to advance access to higher education for individuals otherwise marginalised from higher education. An Cosán, a partner since 2008, is a pioneering community education organization. A current collaborative project between An Cosán and SETU involves a range of deliverables including

- provision of higher education programmes tailored to the needs and interests of community participants, to include major award and minor award programmes;
- research involving both community practitioners and learners (participatory action research;) and
- the completion of an academic study conducted via a PhD programme that will explore how Higher Education and Community Education providers can address educational disadvantage and extend the reach of higher education into difficult to reach cohorts in the community, this extending access to a broader population.

The programme and research activities involved in this three-year plan that will be enacted during the period of this Performance Agreement will include a dissemination plan designed to inform, build awareness and provide an evidence base for these type of partnerships that can be used by other stakeholders including national policy makers.

**Performance Objective 4: To partner internationally to extend our reach and maximise our impact, enhance our attractiveness and reputation, and to drive an inclusive, outward-looking region**

**Case Study: EU-CONEXUS European University**

SETU is part of the EU-CONEXUS European University, a fully-fledged transnational higher education and research alliance of nine universities from across Europe that aims to address global and local challenges by tackling coastal environmental, economic, and societal needs related to Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability. SETU is part of the alliance with La Rochelle University (FR), Catholic University of Valencia (ES), Klaipeda University (LT), Technical University of Civil Engineering (RO), Agricultural University of Athens (GR), University of Zadar (HR), University of Rostock (DE), and Fredrick University (CY).

The term “Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability” effectively relates to any specialism or discipline that can contribute to the improvement of the standard of living of the inhabitants of our coasts. The alliance priorities four thematic areas: Coastal Engineering, Environmental Science and Biodiversity, Life Sciences and Biotechnology, and Social, Cultural and Human Sciences.

EU-CONEXUS offers joint education, training, study programmes, performs research and develops links with socio-economic actors for supporting innovation. Within the ethos of “more mobility for more Europe”, EU-CONEXUS aims to significantly increase mobility (staff and students) between partner universities. Planned activities include common micro-credentials, a joint PhD School, a Masters in Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability, and initiatives for student, research, and innovation engagement. The EU-CONEXUS alliance universities also maximise their strong relationship to deliver other activities that support the European University initiative, largely through EU funding calls, on themes such as student engagement, joint Masters in Biotechnology, Research for Society.

**Performance Objective 5: To lead and deepen regional strategic partnerships, maximising regional cohesion and impact, and enhance the university’s capacity to plan for and respond dynamically to current and emerging skills and educational needs of employers.**

### **Case Study: Tertiary Degrees at SETU**

SETU aims to encourage the participation and success of students from sections of society under-represented in higher education and partners with FE to offer degree programmes at a local level. The programmes aim to widen access to higher education by addressing many of the barriers associated with HE participation, including CAO points, fees, transport, accommodation, negative preconceptions about university, all of which have been shown to be barriers to progression. Learners benefit by taking the first year of their programme in their local FET centre, where they can build capacity and confidence, which evidence would indicate will help with progression and retention rates. For SETU, this speaks to our values and commitment to championing diversity and to providing greater access to, and easing the transition to, HE, and is in line with our Strategic Plan with regard to arresting the outward migration of students from the region. SETU plans over the course of this Agreement to extending the programme to other ETBs in the South East.

The initial programme offerings under the Tertiary Education System for 2023 are with Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB); these are the Bachelor of Business (Hons) and the Bachelor of Science in Software Development (Hons). Learners complete the first two years of their degree in Portlaoise Institute, before transferring to SETU’s Carlow campus for Years 3 & 4. 29 students began in these programmes in September 2023, 14 on Business and 15 on Software Development. There are four Education and Training Boards in the South East region, currently interested in running tertiary programmes with SETU for 2024.

In addition to the two 2023 existing programmes in Business and Software Development, the following programmes are being explored for 2024 provision:

- BSc. Biosciences & Biopharmaceutical – Abbeyleix FET to SETU Carlow
- B.Bus. In Hospitality and Tourism – Carlow Institute to SETU Waterford
- BSc. IT Management – Ormonde College Kilkenny to SETU Carlow

Other programmes are at discussion stage, but if running, are more likely to be from 2025.



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