Performance Agreement 2024–2028 between the HEA and Dublin City University

DCU
Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Preamble

This Performance Agreement is established between the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Dublin City University in accordance with the System Performance Framework 2023–28. The agreement identifies Dublin City University's performance objectives and the associated implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting processes.

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

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

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

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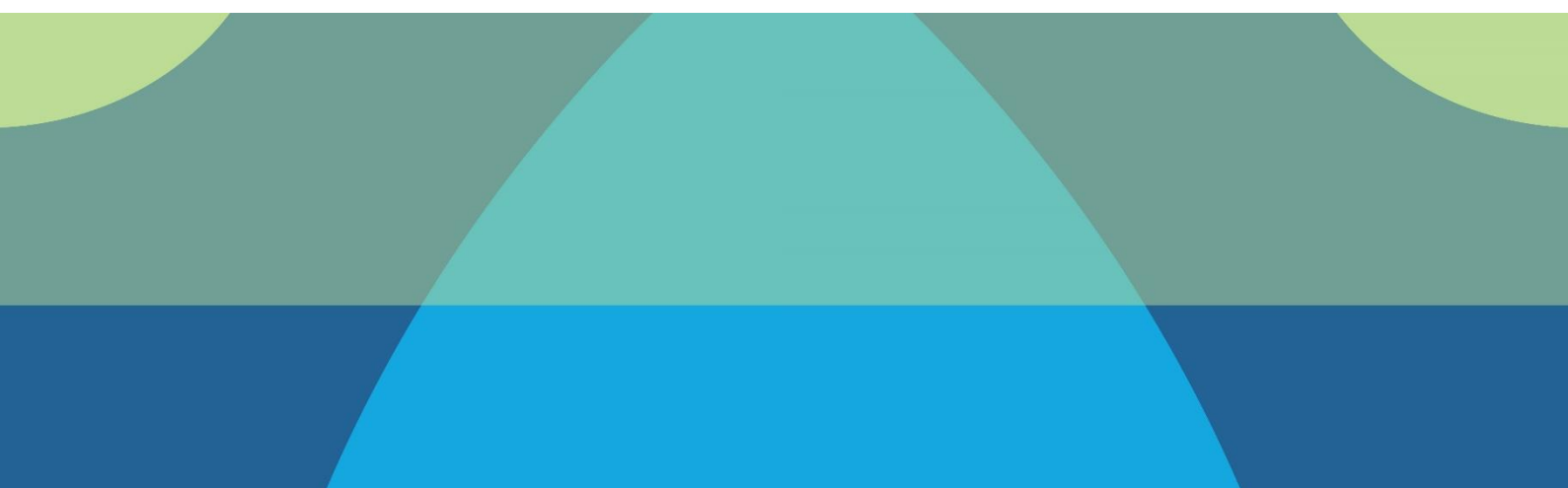
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Performance Agreement 2024–2028

Section 1: Context

Overview of the institution and its context

DCU's mission is 'To transform lives and societies', a mission which was recently renewed in our latest strategic plan, launched on 5 October 2023 (Figure 1). Our strategic plan is entirely digital — the first in Ireland — facilitating interactivity and also affording agility and flexibility. The strategy is underpinned by our guiding principles of 'People', 'Focus' and 'Impact': our 'people-first' philosophy puts our students, staff and stakeholders at the heart of our priorities, while 'Focus' and 'Impact' reflect our intention to prioritise the areas where we can make the greatest impact, maximising scarce resources. Our values have been constant for a number of years, but we added 'Inclusive' to reflect our increasingly diverse community and our very high impact rankings in areas of widening participation.
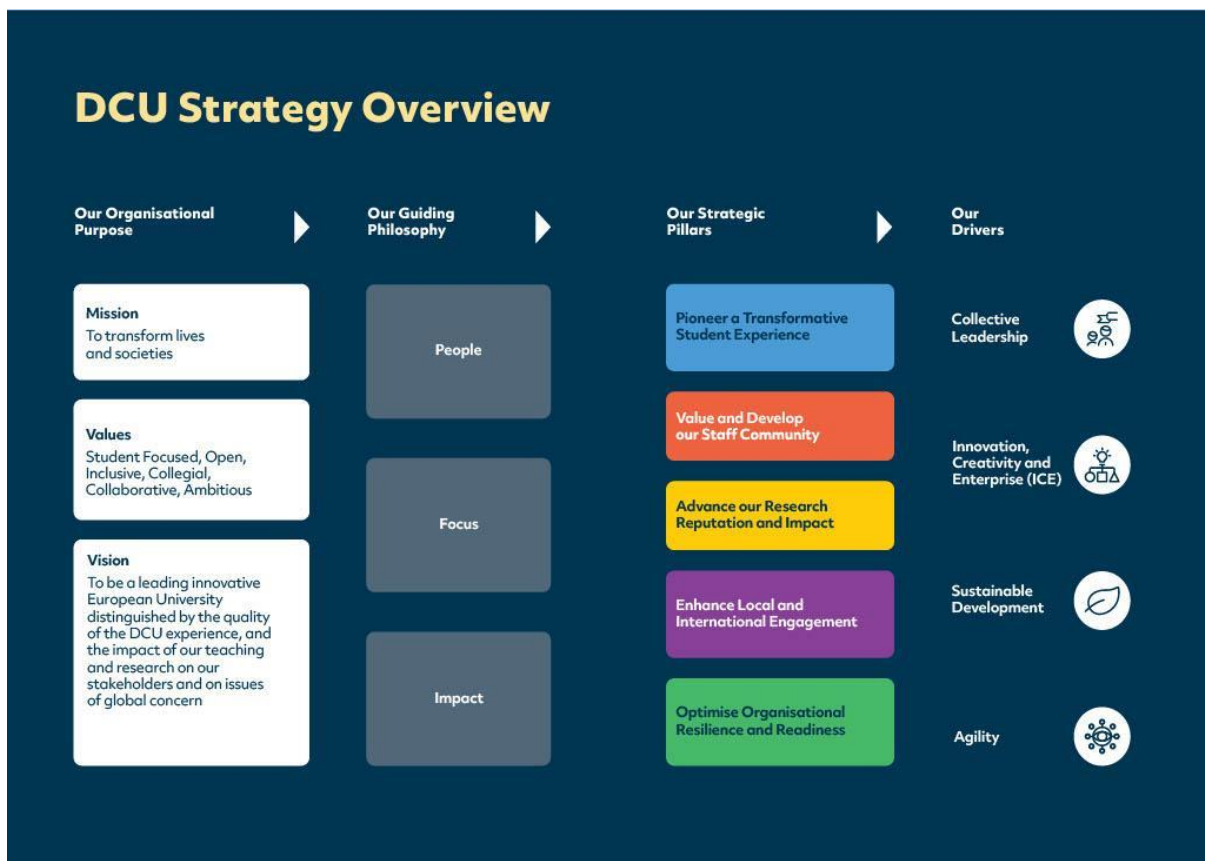

Figure 1: DCU Strategy Overview

Our vision is to be a leading innovative European University, distinguished by the quality of our teaching, our students' experience and our impact on both our stakeholders and issues of global concern. Rapid, unprecedented technological, social and environmental change means that the future is unscripted. Graduates are changing career with ever-greater frequency; employers are increasingly prioritising applicants' skills rather than their qualifications; organisations with no prior footprint in higher education are entering the sector; free, real-time access to information is depreciating the relative value of knowledge, as is its shortening half-life; technological developments provide myriad opportunities to enhance what we do, while also representing numerous challenges. The complexity of the environment we inhabit, the organisational capabilities, readiness and resilience we require, the type of teaching and research we must engage in and the diversity of our stakeholders, require us to navigate this space successfully and these factors have informed our strategy, 'Transformation for an Unscripted Future'.

DCU currently has over 19,000 students (76% undergraduate, 24% postgraduate) and 1,900 staff (50% academic, 50% professional/management/support), with 94% of our staff funded from Core or Exchequer allocations. Our student–staff ratios are a particular challenge, and it is hoped that these will improve in line with the goal of moving closer to the EU average, as stated under Funding the Future.

The European focus of our vision reflects our commitment to, and our standing as, a partner of choice for high-impact European consortia, such as the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU) – www.eciu.eu. Our impact, nationally and globally, is evidenced in the 2023 THE rankings (6th in the world for reduced inequality) and the 2024 QS rankings, where we have risen 35 places to joint 436th overall, joint 137th globally for sustainability, number one in Ireland in a number of areas, as well as ranking strongly across a number of other measures.

The new strategy was developed with a view to reaching our strategic future through a strategic trajectory[1] and is designed with flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness in mind. Given the unprecedented events and continuing global shocks and national challenges we are experiencing, we adopted a high-level, sign-posting and direction-setting approach, rather than fixed, prescriptive actions, to facilitate agility. Our strategic objectives are organised under five strategic pillars that set out our priorities for the next five years (Figure 2), but our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be agreed annually. Using five-year objectives with annual KPIs facilitates the ability to be responsive and dynamic within the context of an overall direction, allowing us to adapt our actions to changing circumstances, changing the trajectory and still achieving our objectives.

A strong alignment framework has been developed to evidence the achievement of our strategic objectives through 15 component strategies/plans from our Faculties and Departments. When developing their component strategies, each area will deliver on the University objectives through approaches informed by relevant quality reviews, accreditation processes and other feedback and advisory sources. Tangible delivery through component strategies is more inclusive and collaborative and, critically, is designed to achieve greater ownership and involvement of every staff member in the institution, thereby embedding strategy on a continual basis.

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[1] Trafford and Boggis (Beyond Default: Setting your organization on a Trajectory to an Improved Future, 2017)

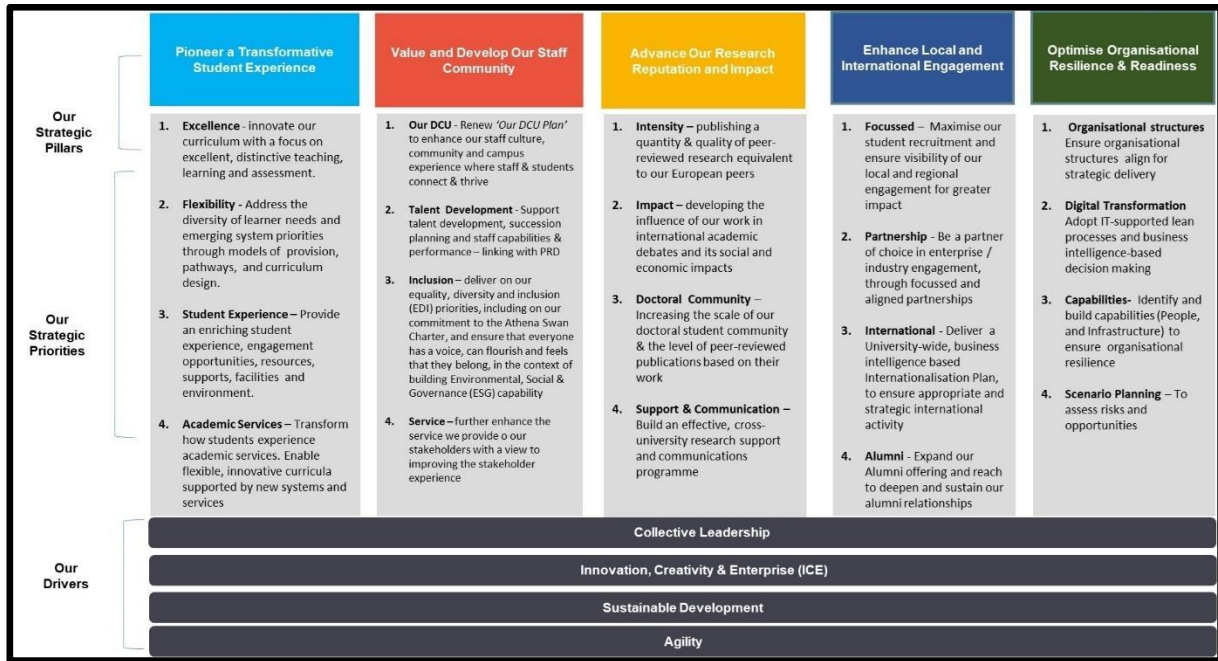*Figure 2: DCU Strategic Objectives*

Approach to the development of the Performance Agreement

The new strategic plan was informed by a Transitional Strategy developed in 2020 and was developed through an iterative, consultative process involving staff, students and wider stakeholder groups, with feedback being incorporated into each revision (Figure 3).
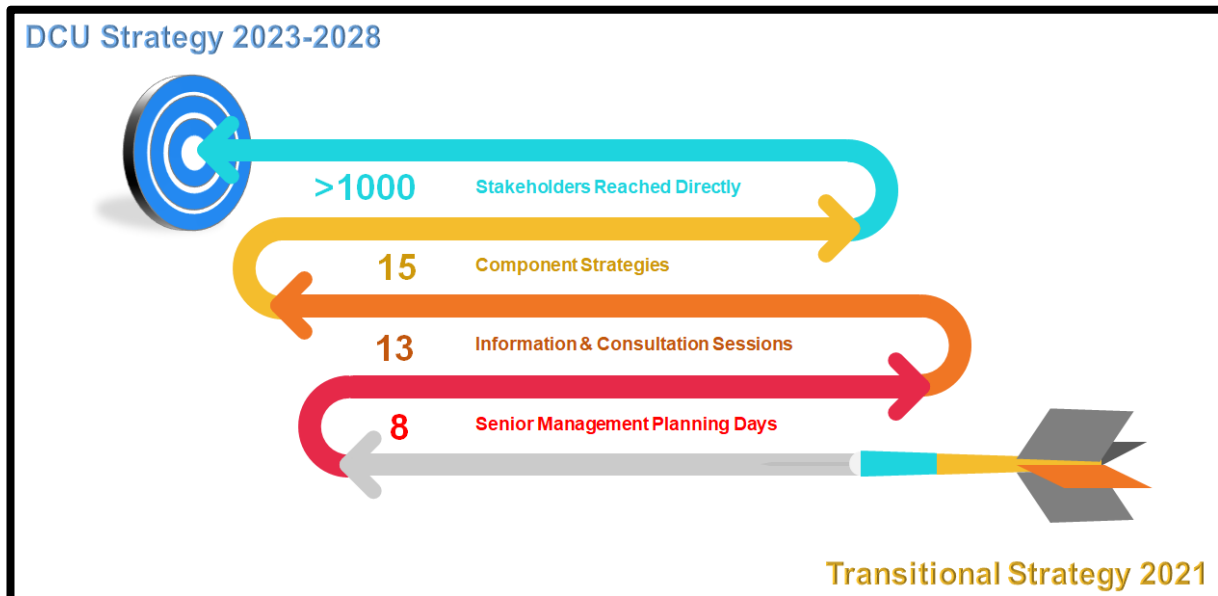

Figure 3: DCU Strategic Consultation Processes

Tight coupling and alignment *between* the strategic pillars, delivered through the Component Strategies and evidenced by the alignment framework, strengthens our ability to achieve efficiency as well as effectiveness. Extensive consultation with staff, students, external Faculty Advisory Boards, industry, local representatives and DCU's Governing Authority informed the development of the strategy, with Governing Authority signing off on the final strategy in 2023.

The objectives included in this Agreement have been selected by the Senior Management Group (SMG), based on our current performance as evidenced from internal sources – Student Information System, Research Information System, as well as the HEA databases, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), Enterprise Ireland (EI) and other relevant national sources.

In selecting the subset of objectives to include in the Performance Agreement, DCU's SMG took account of the following factors:

- In keeping with our guiding principles, areas where we can focus best for maximum impact.

- The challenge that the decision to set KPIs on an annual basis posed to providing annual KPIs in advance for the Performance Agreement. Objectives which had longer-term KPIs, and/or those for which we had more confidence in setting indicators in advance, were prioritised.

- Objectives which deliver sectoral or national policy objectives, as opposed to those more institutionally-focused.

- Considerations specifically referenced in the guidelines for this Agreement — Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Sustainable Development.

Our strategic approach to sustainability takes a holistic Environment, Society, Governance (ESG) approach using a 'Sustainable Development' perspective. In the recent SEAI annual report, DCU ranks highest amongst Irish universities for energy savings. However, our climate focus is on wider net-zero, not just energy, evidenced in our ambitious Climate Action Plan and Climate Action Roadmap, both of which are informed by national targets and set out our mitigation and net-zero goals, as well as the actions we will use to take account of negative impacts. Likewise, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is also explicitly identified in the strategic plan and developed against national targets in the area, including, but not limited to, our continued achievement under the Athena Swan awards process. Contributions to outcomes in both sustainability and EDI are set out under Performance Objective 4.

In developing this Agreement, we drew upon: learnings from the development of our strategy; Review of DCU Futures; industry feedback; SFI and EI; international rankings; and feedback received via the previous Strategy and Performance Dialogue processes, amongst others.

Structures in place for evaluation

DCU has well-developed governance and evaluation mechanisms for the monitoring, reporting and assessment of all activity. For our strategy, a management information system (MIS) dashboard will track and report annually on delivery of each individual KPI. This information in turn will be reported to SMG and GA, having been reviewed and responded to by Faculty and other University committees. The strategy has been designed as a series of annual, rolling strategic indicators underpinned by a feedback loop through the annual MIS dashboard. The 'cascade' approach through component strategies provides a tangible mechanism to ensure operationalisation and delivery of our strategic objectives, facilitating genuine embedding of the University objectives in meaningful ways, right down to individual staff members; our newly revised Performance Review and Development (PRD) process will require each individual's annual goals to be trackable back to the University's strategic objectives.

The strategy development process facilitated the identification of data gaps and built gap-analysis into the process of setting KPIs. In addition, a comprehensive Business Intelligence (BI) Project has commenced which will evaluate our current data repositories, conduct a gap analysis and introduce a comprehensive framework to achieve integration, visibility and coherence across our numerous systems and data sources. New national requirements to track and report on data not previously required and/or where there is no sectoral mechanism to record such data are a significant challenge. For example, there is no obvious mechanism whereby being a member of the Travelling Community is recorded reliably. Likewise, the socio-economic status of mature entrants has never been collected and would be difficult to capture reliably as it is primarily self-identified. DCU would welcome agreement on definitions and mechanisms for reliable collection of data which has not previously been recorded. The very significant costs associated, for example, with our climate targets, which are government mandated, represents an inherent contradiction between funding and requirements which has yet to be resolved. Likewise, changing national targets and priorities make planning a challenge.

Section 2: Performance Objectives

Performance Objective 1

To integrate Transversal skills (TS) in curriculum delivery and University processes for an expanded set of undergraduate Programmes across five Faculties.

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Transversals: Student Success; Enterprise; Society.

Rationale for Performance Objective 1

The initiative to achieve this objective is:

- ***The integration of Transversal skills (TS) in an expanded set of programmes, and evidenced in a new platform.***

In the context of our mission and vision and the factors influencing their development, our Teaching and Learning (T&L) strategy seeks to ensure that students develop both the discipline knowledge and the transversal skills (TS) needed to reframe uncertainty as an opportunity, and to successfully navigate a world defined by rapid change. Increasingly there is a move towards a 'skills first' recruitment model in industry, resulting in a disconnect between industry and HEIs when transcripts do not capture skills acquired. This disconnect is something DCU is aiming to solve. By offering transformative learning journeys, we aim to help our students and graduates to be future-capable, rather than future-proof. This agentic-based objective is a key element of our plans to build on achievements in the HCI3-funded DCU Futures programme and is directly relevant to national and European skills agendas. It also aligns directly with ambitions for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). As such, we intend to prioritise this objective in any opportunity to secure funds following from phase 1 of HCI Pillar 3. The significant impacts of this objective are long term — exceeding the timeframe of this agreement.

DCU Futures has facilitated the laying of foundations for a world-leading approach to TS development and evidencing in higher education, and under this agreement we aim to capitalise on that investment and ensure innovation is fully embedded and scaled. A robust Transversal Skills Competence Framework (TSCF) has been designed by DCU, following extensive engagement with both internal and external discipline expert stakeholders and industry employers. The TSCF addresses 17 transversal skills and focuses on:

- Ways of Thinking: ethical decision-making, creative thinking, critical thinking, futures literacy, sustainability literacy.

- Ways of Working: leadership, communicative competence, teamwork and collaboration, intercultural competence, entrepreneurship.

- Tools for Working: digital literacy, data literacy, project management, multilingualism.

- Tools for Thriving: career visioning, health literacy, personal agility.

Each programme will have a set of priority TS and will assess each of the constituent competences for these TS over the course of the programme. The impact of embedding these within curricula will contribute to impact within several of the transversal areas of the System Performance Framework 2023–28: Climate and Sustainable Development (sustainability literacy, futures literacy especially), Student Success (skills for employment and life), Enterprise (directly addressing employer-expressed priorities), and Society (intercultural competence, creative thinking). It also impacts Digital Transformation, moving us to new digital infrastructure to support a whole new strand of activity in the University. This objective aligns with a range of national and sectoral priorities including: the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DoE, 2019); the DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2012–2023 (DFHERIS, 2021); National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, National Skills Strategy 2025 (DFHERIS, 2021); our participation in the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU) and feedback and review of the DCU Futures programme.

A robust protocol for prioritising and mapping TS within DCU Futures programmes has been established. This allows us to identify to what extent these TS are currently being developed and formally assessed within curricula, and also offers an effective template for scaling TS to additional programmes. Significantly, we have completed the procurement of a SaaS Transversal Skills Platform, Unihub, which will not only enable students to self-report their competence in a given priority TS, but also generate a fully personalised DCU-validated TS profile based upon the formal assessment of students' competence in specific TS within their programme. In 2024/25, this platform will have been integrated with the Virtual Learning Environment and other systems necessary for its operation. It will enable students to collect and showcase evidence of how transversal skills competences were achieved and assessed, allowing them to demonstrate the skills they have developed to potential employers, and the University to evidence contribution to skills via the curriculum. Crucially, integrating the formal assessment of TS within curricula and capturing this in students' personalised profiles provides potential employers with institutional assurance regarding an individual's TS, rather than having to rely exclusively on self-reporting.

The evidence base for the inclusion of this objective is the same as that which informed the original successfully HCI-funded DCU Futures initiative. More recently, the value of TS has been reinforced by international reports, such as the UK Essential Skills Tracker Report (2023), the OECD Skills Strategy Ireland Report (April 2023) and the Final Report of the TRANSVAL-EU Project (2021). Baselines are taken from these systems and monitored and reviewed using institutional reporting tools (such as Power Bi). As this is a novel and transformational initiative, there are no direct benchmarks or comparators as defined in the SPF Glossary. Our holistic approach to TS is informed by the Stanford "Axis Flip" in terms of the fundamental importance attributed to the development of transversal skills and evidence of the acquisition of transversal skills competencies (which they call a skills map). The York Award at the University of York was also a valuable source of information in terms of the evidencing of transversal skills as a key artefact to support graduate employment. It should be noted,

however, that neither approach is directly analogous to that developed in DCU Transversal Skills, in that the DCU approach moves beyond that imagined in both of these initiatives.

Our objectives represent our ambition to be a leader in this area. DCU Futures is our core educational philosophy, and we aim to be the sector leaders in the area of authentically embedded and assessed transversal skills.

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

In Q4 2024, we will admit the first cohort of undergraduate students that will have access to the TS platform over the full course of their programme. Our objective is to systematically integrate TS into their DCU learning experience, and to do so across an expanded set of programmes. We will:

- integrate the new platform, its technical support and publishing of personalised TS statements into normal University processes (digital transformation).

- develop, roll out, reinforce, review and re-iterate a programme of student education relating to the TSCF, how to evidence achievement and engage with employers on a skills profile.

- develop and roll out CPD programmes for academic staff relating to developing, integrating and assessing TS in a disciplinary curriculum context.

- develop a very substantial set of resources centrally which can be used by colleagues within modules or used by students for self-directed learning.

- build on the curriculum maps across the 16 programmes for which they were developed in DCU Futures, identify gaps and, on a rolling basis, design opportunities to develop and assess specific dimensions of competences.

The extent of curricular emphasis on transversal skills and rate of roll-out of provision of evidence to employers of graduate skills attainment will be monitored throughout the timeframe of this agreement.

Leadership in this area is under the VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar and progress will be tracked and reported on through our existing Annual Programmatic Review (APR) and Periodic Programmatic Review (PPR) processes as well as through the DCU Strategy MIS Dashboard. Annual reporting will take place through Faculty T&L Committees, to the University's Education Committee, Academic Council, Senior Management and Governing Authority. The cascade model underpinning the DCU strategy, and the tight coupling of Component Strategies/Plans for delivery of University KPIs, will ensure that the breadth and depth of activity required across all areas of the University, from faculties and schools to departments and units, is operationalised.

Resourcing of this objective is a critical factor in successfully achieving our goals. In a very limited funding context, especially noting our student–staff ratios, it is very difficult to deliver curriculum and system innovation of this type. A continuation of HCI funding is necessary as underfunding represents a significant risk to successfully achieving this objective. Risks related to this performance objective will be actively monitored by the Education Committee of the University and managed via allocation of resources as far as possible. Underfunding will certainly impact the pace and scope of delivery.

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	**Percentage of students from relevant programmes engaging with the platform to evidence TS**	Unihub	Quantitative	0% of relevant students engaging with the platform	N/A - no benchmark available at present	**20%**	**40%**	**60%**	**80%**	**80%**
1.2	**Proportion (%) of relevant[2] students that report valuing transversal skills as part of their education**	Institutional Student Survey on TS	Quantitative and qualitative	Baseline to be established.	N/A - no benchmark available at present	**5%**	**20%**	**35%**	**50%**	**50 %**
1.3	**Proportion (%) of relevant Students who perceive transversal skills as important to their employability**	Institutional Student Survey on TS	Quantitative and qualitative	Baseline to be established.	N/A - no benchmark available at present	**20%**	**40%**	**60%**	**80%**	**80%**
1.4	**Proportion (%) of Employers reporting 'excellent' or 'very good' across a range of transversal skills (on average)**	INTRA Employer survey	Quantitative	Baseline to be established.	N/A - no benchmark available at present	**30%**	**45%**	**60%**	**75%**	**75%**

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[2] Relevant – Students who have undertaken programmes with TS embedded in them

Performance Objective 2

To develop our research and innovation outputs and impacts, to grow our research community for both societal and economic benefit and build the crucial research and innovation bedrock required to realise the ambitions of Impact 2030.

Pillar: Research

Transversals: Society; Enterprise; Region.

Rationale for Performance Objective 2

The initiatives to achieve this objective are:

- ***To increase the Intensity of our Research Publications.***

The key social and economic challenges which we face — locally, in Ireland, and globally — require universities to support an intensive and broadly-based research agenda across and between our subject areas, ranging from discovery-based research to social and industrial application. Public universities have a particular role in sustaining a broad research agenda, where the immediate applications may not be readily obvious. Social benefits of research are as significant as commercial, but research and innovation provide an important bedrock of an economy which can provide good employment opportunities and the economic resources for public services. Without an effective and high-quality research base, we have no possibility of meeting the combined challenges of climate change and global inequality, or of building peace, democracy, and sustainable development.

During the term of the Agreement our aim is:

- To increase the number of articles published in Scopus-indexed journals by 30%. (DCU published an average of 1,270 articles p.a. in the three years 2019–21). The target of 1,651 articles p.a. would position DCU in the upper end of our partners in the European University Alliance (the European Consortium for Innovative Universities — ECIU).

- For 75% of all publications to be open access by 2028. Our 2019–21 average open access baseline was 55% of articles. Reaching 75% by 2028 will position us to reach the national OA target of 100% of publicly funded research being open access by 2030.

Our sustainable development objectives are set out in PO4 below. As our SD framework is fully developed and implemented, relevant indicators, including those related to sustainability, will be developed.

- ***To increase our Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student Community.***

Ireland's economy is heavily reliant on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Attracting high-quality FDI in an ever more competitive global economy necessitates a strong focus on talent and on Research and Development (R&D). Ireland is among the worst performers in the OECD group of wealthy countries in the level of public R&D investment, while also having a very low number of PhD students — approximately half of the level (per capita) compared with the UK and USA. R&D and PhD numbers are key indicators of a high innovation context for FDI, and without a significant change in government policy it will not be possible to achieve the Government policy ambition set out in Impact 2030 to position Ireland as a high-value innovator for FDI.

DCU expects to see growth in PGR student numbers across a wide range of disciplines, reflecting demand and widespread skills shortages in the economy, but growth is likely to be focused on DCU's strengths in Life Sciences, AI and Data Analytics, Climate and Environmental Studies, Physical and Materials Sciences and Engineering, Health Sciences, Sensors, Business, Communications and ICT, Computer Science, Education, Languages, Translation and International Relations.

During the term of the Agreement our aim is:

- To increase our PGR student numbers by 35% (from 810 baseline to 1,180). In addition to growing the scale of our PGR student community to reflect levels in high innovation economies, DCU will also enhance our supports to the PGR community, preparing them for a variety of future careers, with a focus on research impact. This will include increased international engagement and mobility (consistent with climate goals), transversal skills, writing for different audiences beyond the academy and public engagement and communications skills.

- ***To expand Commercial and Enterprise Impact.***

As the University of Enterprise, our industry-focused innovation activity and our enterprise and commercial impact are of critical importance, and inclusion of this area under this performance objective is essential to grow our success in this area. DCU performs well compared to our peers across multiple knowledge transfer metrics. In the period between 2020 and 2022, for each €10m in research expenditure, DCU was ranked first amongst HEIs in the number of new spin-outs formed, patents filed, invention disclosures filed, and intellectual property licences agreed. DCU's future targets for knowledge transfer metrics are informed by Enterprise Ireland and Knowledge Transfer Ireland's strategic goals, with a particular emphasis on achieving economic and social impact through the formation of indigenous high-potential spin-out companies that are centred on intellectual property generated through university research activities.

DCU's existing innovation and enterprise (I&E) initiatives are designed and managed by DCU Invent, DCU's independent knowledge transfer and commercialisation arm. Our knowledge transfer activities are funded in part by Enterprise Ireland (EI) with associated funding performance metrics. In addition to the services provided by DCU Invent, DCU Alpha, the University's innovation campus, provides high-quality offices, labs, and co-working spaces. There are ambitious plans to expand the facilities and better integrate DCU Alpha into the wider University. These two areas are pivotal to our ability to realise our goal to increase our high potential spin-outs and deepen our commercial and enterprise impact.

During the term of the Agreement our aim is:

- To increase the number of new spin-outs (by 67% to 5 p.a.);

- To increase the number of active spin-out (ASOs) (by 60% to 13)

- To increase the number of EI Commercialisation Fund awards that provide the necessary funds to prepare research-based innovations for market entry through a university spin-out by 50% from 4 to 6 p.a.).

Notwithstanding the current challenging external environment, DCU is committed to utilising our own capabilities, and seeking additional external resources, to allow us to be positioned as a research-focused university, as measured by the quality and intensity of our research performance and its impacts. We will be deeply embedded in the European research ecosystem, and from that base will engage and impact internationally.

While supporting a wide range of national social and economic objectives, our University strategy has identified Sustainable Development (SD) as a key driver of everything we do, including research. This driver will inform the research areas we choose to prioritise, and it will inform how we design and conduct research right across the University. The relevant impact indicators will be developed and honed as our SD framework (PO4) is agreed and implemented.

The targets we have set are designed to place us clearly in a peer group of research-focused European universities. They are ambitious targets but are achievable as we will keep focused on these priorities and we will act collectively and collegially through our strategy cascade and coupling approach.

Our objectives are informed by national policies such as Impact 2030 — Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy (DFHERIS, 2022); the National Framework for Doctoral Education (HEA and QQI, 2023); the National Framework on the Transition to an Open Research Environment (National Open Research Forum, 2019); the National Action Plan for Open Research 2022–2030 (DFHERIS, 2022); the National IP Protocol 2019 (Knowledge Transfer Ireland, 2019); and the European Research Policy Area Policy Agenda (European Commission, 2021).

With the vision of being a leading innovative European University, distinguished by our impact on society and on issues of global concern, this is the benchmark against which we selected the priorities to include in this agreement. Our strategic intent is informed by analysing our baseline (current) performance and identifying how we can become comparable with research-focused European universities. We looked at a number of areas in a number of universities where comparisons could be made. These included the Irish HE sector, as well as the UK and ECIU partner universities. Growth of 30% in published research, of 50% in postgraduate research numbers, along with improvements in impact, including commercial exploitation of research, will put DCU among the top performing research-focused young universities, relative to our size and available resources.

The evidence base is drawn from SciVal (for publications, citation impact, open access and international co-authoring), data returned to the HEA for PGR numbers, and our internal systems, as

well as national sources and benchmarks such as Enterprise Ireland Commercialisation Fund Awards and SFI grants, amongst other programmes for funding and commercialisation. DCU has recently reviewed and adjusted its internal research assessment processes in recruitment and promotion to reflect our CoARA commitments, including a responsible use of metrics, and will continue to reflect this changing environment. We use a range of quantitative and qualitative metrics to judge our institutional research performance, and in this document have largely chosen quantitative metrics, to allow future assessment. However, in assessment of individual research performance, we never use a purely quantitative approach, and use peer review, expert commentary, and case studies to complement quantitative metrics.

The objectives included represent continuing development in a priority area. It is critical for DCU, as a university, to grow our research and innovation performance and impact, and to contribute to Ireland's reputation and impact in this area.

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

The responsibility for leading and ensuring delivery of DCU's strategic priorities in this area sits with the Vice President for Research (VPR), supported by the Director of DCU Invent. To achieve the high-level objectives, the VPR, in discussion with all relevant University areas, has identified a series of supplementary goals, necessary to maintain quality and to meet commitments such as open access, government priorities and those of key funders. Research intensity and impact will be evidenced through SciVal, Open Access availability, and other relevant international performance measures. We have recently launched a series of case histories of research impact, to communicate and endorse those aspects of social, cultural and economic research impact that do not lend themselves to simple quantitative evaluation (https://www.dcu.ie/research-impact).

Our innovation impact will be evidenced by our performance in the areas of commercial spin-outs, HPSU status, and our achievement of Enterprise Ireland (EI) Commercialisation Funded awards. To achieve these objectives, we will strengthen our engagement with industry to increase industry-funded research expenditure.

Our progress will be tracked and reported on through our Faculty Research committees, Invent Board, the Research Advisory Panel, the University Research Committee, Academic Council, and on up to Senior Management and Governing Authority. Reporting will also be captured through the strategy MIS Dashboard which will be reported annually. The designed-in learning and feedback processes will facilitate ongoing review and adaptation to changing circumstances.

The DCU Research Strategy has been developed in close consultation with each of the Faculties, as well as with DCU Invent and our research centres. This has enabled each area to analyse their current baselines and to identify the performance required to deliver on the overall DCU objectives in ways that are ambitious but achievable in their disciplinary context.

As for all objectives, resourcing of this objective is a critical factor in successfully achieving our goals. The availability of external funding from government and international sources is essential, but we will also strengthen our enterprise and industry partnerships to maximise investment from these sources. To achieve the projected growth in targeted spin-outs, EI Commercialisation Fund awards

from Enterprise Ireland are an essential funding source. DCU Invent works very closely with researchers and Enterprise Ireland to ensure that there is a strong pipeline of high-quality Commercialisation Fund awardees, with a strong commercial lead, that can accommodate the spin-out targets.

This close working model ensures a smooth process and maximises potential for Commercialisation Fund awards. EI is committed to continuing funding Commercialisation Fund awards at least for the duration of KT Boost (2024–2027) and it is expected that beyond 2027 this funding will continue.

In terms of risk management, an increased stipend of €22k (with the possibility to supplement this with a small amount of teaching), will help to increase PhD recruitment. Not every discipline has recruitment challenges, with some areas currently over-subscribed, so balance across disciplines is an important factor for risk management. DCU currently has the most diverse PGR community by type; notably we have the highest percentage of part-time PGR students (see HEA data). We have a strong professional doctorate cohort in non-traditional areas such as Sports Science and Education.

The growth in part-time PGR numbers, including work-based PhDs in STEM disciplines, will be an important feature of future growth and should be recognised to a greater extent in resource allocations by the HEA. As we grow our overall PGR numbers, we expect to maintain our current ratio of part-time to full-time students reflecting our commitment to continuous professional development up to level 10.   To manage risks, we plan to grow our professional doctorate numbers, maintain a healthy part-time PGR profile and increase our capacity in international student recruitment.

Professional Doctorate programmes represent an under-leveraged element of research capacity nationally. DCU will put in place enhanced measures to support this cohort of students, who typically have very significant levels of professional experience, to bring their work to publication. These supports will also strengthen national research capacity, as professional doctorate graduates bring these enhanced skills back to their workplaces. Notwithstanding this, a €25k stipend and more scholarships are key to growth of the full-time cohort in this area. The number of scholarships funded by HEIs from core funding has been reduced in most HEIs to meet the €22k stipend norm set out by the DFHERIS, in the absence of additional funding to meet this cost.

There are no external dependencies associated with the planned expansion of activity and the integration of the DCU Invent and Alpha facilities. However, any future expansion of our Innovation campus would require an external partnership to fund the development phase.

Other factors, such as accommodation (for students and staff) and the cost of living, are very real threats to success. As for the other objectives, the timeframe and advance KPI requirements militate against the internal agility designed in to the DCU Strategy and our adaptability to changing circumstances.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 2

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.1	**Number of articles in Scopus-indexed journals p.a.**	SciVal	Quantitative	Average number of articles in Scopus-indexed journals p.a., in 2019-21 period was 1,270	Comparator EU universities in SciVal	**1,270**	**1,397**	**1,524**	**1,651**	**5,842 total publications over 4 years** **30% increase on baseline**
2.2	**Proportion (%) of publications that are Open Access**	SciVal and Unpaywall	Quantitative	55% of indexed publications (average 2019-21: 699)	Other Irish HEIs	**749** **59%**	**800** **63%**	**851** **67%**	**952** **75%**	**3,352 OA publications over 4 years** **36% increase on baseline**
2.3	**Number of Postgraduate Research (PGR) enrolments**	SIS, HEA SRS	Quantitative	2019/20: 737	Comparator EU universities	**898**	**906**	**1,001**	**1,100**	**1,100**
2.4	**PhD completion rate (%)**	SIS	Quantitative	2023/24: In development (% of doctoral students enrolled that have completed/achieved an award)	None available	**TBC**	**TBC**	**TBC**	**TBC**	**TBC**

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.5	**Number of Spinouts established**	KTI Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey	Quantitative	2023: 2.5 Spin Outs p.a. (3-year average 2020-2023)	Agreed targets with Enterprise Ireland/Knowledge Transfer Ireland under 2024-2027 KT Boost programme	**2 in 2024**	**4 in 2025**	**5 in 2026**	**5 in 2027**	**Increase spin-outs p.a. by 150% on 2024** **3-year average spin-outs p.a. increased to 4.66**
2.6	**Number of Active Spinouts (ASOs)**	KTI Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey	Quantitative	2023: 8	Agreed targets with EI/KTI under 2024-2027 KT Boost programme	**10 in 2024**	**11 in 2025**	**12 in 2026**	**13 in 2027**	**Increase number of ASOs by 63%**
2.7	**Number of Commercialisation Funding (CF) awards to Translate Research into New Ventures**	Enterprise Ireland, KT Boost reporting	Quantitative	2023: 4	Agreed targets with EI/KTI under 2024-2027 KT Boost programme	**4 in 2024**	**4 in 2025**	**5 in 2026**	**6 in 2027**	**Increase the number of EI CF awards by 50% to 6 p.a.**

Performance Objective 3

To address the diversity of learner needs and emerging system priorities through enhanced pathways into HE and targeted supports for non-traditional learners and the wider DCU student cohort.

Pillar: Access & Participation

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 3

The targets and initiatives to support achievement of this objective are:

- ***To grow the percentage of students registered with our Disability Service and receiving the required supports from 6% to 8.5%.***

The National Access Plan (NAP) targets a 29% increase in the percentage of new entrants who have a disability (growing from 12.4% to 16%). These figures include students who may or may not enter via the DARE route, may or may not need additional supports, and some who do not wish to make their disability known.

A 2023 review of DCU's Equity of Access plan indicates that we have increased our disability numbers year-on-year, from 942 in 2020/21 to 1,229 in 2023/24. Currently, 6% of our student body is registered with the Disability Service and receiving active support. It is our experience that all students who register with the Disability Service, but have not come in through the DARE process, avail of the supports available as they register because they need support. Our aim is to bring this number up to 8.5%. This relative increase (42%) exceeds the relative increase targeted in the NAP (29%), although the specific way of measuring participation is not the same.

The reason for the misalignment between our chosen metric and data presented by the HEA is that currently there is a very low response rate by DCU students (28%) to the Equal Access Survey. This distorts the figures published by the HEA for DCU in comparison to other institutions (who average a 74% response rate). It makes sense in that context, and in the context of our ambition that *all* students who need additional support register with our Disability Service, to use the baseline chosen.

As part of this objective, however, we will also address deficiencies in data collection regarding disability status through implementation of our new Student Information System (SIS) and promoting increased participation in the Equal Access Survey to achieve a response rate of 75%. We aim to ensure figures are representative of the actual enrolment of students with a disability in DCU, and comparable to those collected in peer institutions in the sector.

- ***To grow the percentage of students entering eligible programmes from the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, diversify the range of programmes they join and target our support and development offerings to maximise their success.***

We are acknowledged sector leaders in delivering the system priority of providing pathways into HE. Our 'Stronger Connections' initiative, launched in 2021, has already delivered significant increases in the numbers of applications to undergraduate programmes from FET graduates, with a subsequent increase in offers and acceptances in 2022/23 and again in 2023/24. Applications grew from 222 in 2020 to 259 in 2024, with offer acceptances growing from 170 to 252. The approach of simplifying entry requirements and ensuring that all eligible level 8 programmes admit students from the FET sector is proving highly successful.

Our aim is to reach a target of 10% of students across all of our eligible programmes having joined DCU as FET graduates, and to support these students in achieving a high level of success in their programmes, which are offered in each of our five Faculties.

- ***To enhance support for Access students and curate supports for an increased number of PG Access students.***

DCU has the largest and longest established Access programme of the traditional university sector and a very strong reputation for inclusion and ongoing support and development focused on underrepresented students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In building the transition rate to DCU from areas of low Deprivation Index score, we work primarily, and very effectively, through partnerships with schools, generally in our catchment area. The following factors were considered when forming our goals: (i) the HEAR numbers are decreasing (down by 16% in 2023 from 2016); (ii) HEAR is currently under review; and (iii) it is likely that some of our Access cohorts in the regions will focus increasingly on local TUs. In this context, our focus will be to channel resources to strengthen support for our Access students to reach their full potential, e.g. funding to enable Access students to participate in Erasmus programmes or progress to and be supported though postgraduate study.

Success in effectively deploying supports and resources for access students will be evidenced by bringing their rate of timely completion in line with that for all DCU undergraduate students (currently 86.5%), and improved numbers undertaking PG studies and being supported by our Access services.

- ***To improve student well-being and success.***

DCU has always been known for our excellent student support and development provision, exemplified during the pandemic and a significant factor in being named the [University of the Year](#) in 2021. Given our increasingly diverse student body, our high impact rankings in [reducing inequality](#) (6th globally and number 1 in Ireland), being the first designated autism-friendly university in the world and the first University of Sanctuary in Ireland, and the increased focus on mental health and wellbeing, we continually strive to expand and tailor our suite of supports. Our supports have won numerous international awards, with our Careers Service winning the [global student satisfaction award](#) recently and our Access to the Workplace winning the Times Higher Education [Widening Participation and Outreach Award](#) 2022.

That notwithstanding, given the huge challenges facing students, particularly in relation to well-being, we proactively sought to identify how we might better support students. Our DCU Care & Connect initiative, which was officially launched in September 2023, incorporates the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework, Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions, Responding to Excessive Alcohol Consumption in Third-Level Institutions (REACT), the Framework for the Response to the Use of Illicit Substances in Higher Education, the Healthy Campus Framework and the JED Framework. The comprehensive Action Plan which has been developed will ensure that we work consistently towards the standards set within the national frameworks and develop a campus culture that is safe, respectful and diverse.

Our aim is to ensure that all DCU students have the opportunity to thrive and succeed, with supports targeted to their particular needs.

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

A number of initiatives are central to implementation. For example, the effectiveness of data collection on the disability status of our students will be achieved as part of our adoption of a new registration process on a completely new system, supported by campaigns to promote and grow engagement with the Equal Access Survey and to encourage students to avail of services. Transfer rates from FET to DCU will be increased through both targeted partnerships with specific FET colleges, and broader actions such as the provision of information at offer stage.

To protect retention and enhance supports and opportunities for Access students, we will review current provision and student need through an access student survey, develop a revised programme and re-evaluate financial investment priorities in line with student feedback and new emphasis. We will progress our support and well-being provision through the Care and Connect framework and our Healthy Campus initiative.

This will include a Race Equality Action Plan being developed, a Drugs Policy being published, the roll-out of a student survey delivering improved statistics on mental health and wellbeing and the feeling of belonging of students from minority groups, and a Health Literacy programme being introduced. Furthermore, Focus Groups will be carried out on an annual basis to monitor the EDI environment amongst students.

Progress across all dimensions of this Objective will be tracked and reported on through our Disability Steering Group, the 'Stronger Connections with Further Education Steering Committee', Care and Connect Steering Committee, Admissions Working Group, Faculty Management Committees, Education Committee, Academic Council, Senior Management and Governing Authority. All strategic KPIs are captured and reported by the DCU Strategy MIS Dashboard and will be reported annually.

As the priorities included in this agreement are drawn from DCU's strategic priorities, resourcing will be a combination of internal strategic funding (subject to the overall constraints of the annual budget allocation process), leveraging any future targeted funding calls from government or European bodies, and philanthropic sources. Adequacy and certainty of resourcing are critical factors in successfully achieving our goals. In a very limited funding context, especially noting student–staff ratios, low or uncertain resourcing represents a significant risk to our success.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 3

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.1	**Proportion (%) of students registered with our Disability Service**	Disability Service; Equal Access Survey reported on HEA System Performance Dashboard	Quantitative	2022/23: 1,100 students registered with disability service 6%	Proportion of students with a disability enrolled across all HEIs (6.2% in 2020/21)	**1,235** **6.5%**	**1,330** **7%**	**1,425** **7.5%**	**1,615** **8.5%**	**1,615** **2.5 p.p. increase on baseline**
3.2	**Proportion (%) of eligible programmes achieving target intake from FET**	SIS; Admissions data	Quantitative	2022/23: 53% of eligible programmes > 5% FET intake 6.4% intake from FET across eligible programmes	None available	**70% of eligible programmes > 5% FET intake**	**95 % of eligible programmes > 5% FET intake**	**70% of eligible programmes > 7.5 % FET intake**	**70% of eligible programmes > 7.5 % FET intake**	**10% intake from FET across eligible programmes**
3.3	**Completion rate (%) for Access students**	SIS; HEA SRS and Non-Progression and Completion Dashboard; Access Service data	Quantitative	2022/23: 82.8%	Average, all HEIs (83% in 2023/24)	**83%**	**84%**	**85%**	**86.5%**	**Increase 4-year undergraduate completion rate for Access students by 3.7 p.p.**

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.4	**Number of postgraduate students registered with Access Service**	Access Service data	Quantitative	2022/2023: 56	None available	**58**	**60**	**63**	**65**	**65** **16% increase on baseline**
3.5	**Proportion (%) of students indicating Strong Sense of Belonging (SSB) in Student Wellbeing survey**	SS&D Student Survey	Quantitative & Qualitative	2021/22: 55.5%	None available	**N/a**	**N/a**	**N/a**	**75%**	**19 p.p. increase in reported sense of belonging**
3.6	**Proportion (%) of students indicating awareness of emotional and mental health supports (AS) in Student Wellbeing survey**	SS&D Student Survey	Quantitative & Qualitative	2021/22: 62.7%	None available	**N/a**	**N/a**	**N/a**	**75%**	**Awareness of emotional and mental health supports increased by 12 p.p.**
3.7	**Proportion (%) of students indicating experience of discriminatory & hostile behaviour (DHB) in Student Wellbeing survey**	SS&D Student Survey	Quantitative & Qualitative	2021/22: 11.62%.	None available	**N/a**	**N/a**	**N/a**	**5%**	**Proportion of students experiencing discriminatory & hostile behaviour reduced by 6.5 p.p.**

Performance Objective 4

To design a Sustainable Development Framework to ensure organisational sustainability across all University areas and activities, bringing cohesion to all compliance requirements, in an inclusive and diverse environment.

Pillar: Engagement

Transversals: Climate & Sustainable Development; Society; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging; Institutional Leadership & Culture.

Rationale for Performance Objective 4

The initiatives to achieve this objective are:

- ***The design and implementation of a comprehensive Sustainable Development Framework.***

The importance of Sustainable Development, nationally and internationally, and our reputation and achievements in this area prompted the inclusion of relevant activities under this agreement. Our progress to date is impressive — 6th in the world for Reduced Inequality and 8th for Gender Equality (UN SDGs) in 2023, both up from 2022 (8th and 20th respectively), and the world's first designated Autism-Friendly University and the first University of Asylum. In 2022, our gender pay gap was reported at 10.45% (overall), 9.51% when adjusted for salaried staff, below the national average of 11.3%. Our new strategic plan recognises the need to continue to build on this progress by ensuring that all members of the DCU community flourish in an environment that values and respects the richness of human diversity. We have committed to designing a Sustainable Development Framework within which to cohesively address our further progress in this area.

One of the major challenges associated with Sustainable Development (SD) is that there is no universally agreed definition, and it is often used to mean only climate sustainability. If there were no climate crisis, organisations would still need to be sustainable. A more general conception is that organisations must remain financially viable whilst operating in a non-destructive, long-term value-creating manner[3]. Sustainable Development is one of the four drivers of the DCU Strategy, and we are approaching it in the wider conception of ESG, with building SD & ESG capability across the University prioritised. EDI is critical to any organisation's sustainability and our EDI initiatives are also incorporated into this framework, within the context of an overarching SD Framework. In keeping with our Guiding Principles of 'Focus' and 'Impact', we recognise that no one organisation of our size and scale can address all 17 UN SDGs with any meaningful impact. We have therefore identified six SDGs

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[3] Adapted from Barker and Mayer (2017)

on which we will focus for the near future (Figure 4).

Our approach was informed by the Finnish Higher Education sectoral model for sustainability and responsibility, which incorporates the relevant activities in teaching and learning, research, external engagement and internal operations under a cohesive, holistic framework. As sustainable practices permeate all areas of our operations, making activity visible will provide opportunities to identify efficiencies, avoid duplication, especially in reporting and data collection, and to avoid contradictory decisions (e.g., increase international student numbers and decrease carbon travel emissions). The very significant and growing reporting burden, both nationally and internationally — from carbon reporting to the SEAI, financial reporting at national and EU levels, extensive reporting required for the Time Higher Education UN SDG Impact Rankings, amongst many others — requires us to be as efficient as possible in our tracking, recording and reporting approaches.

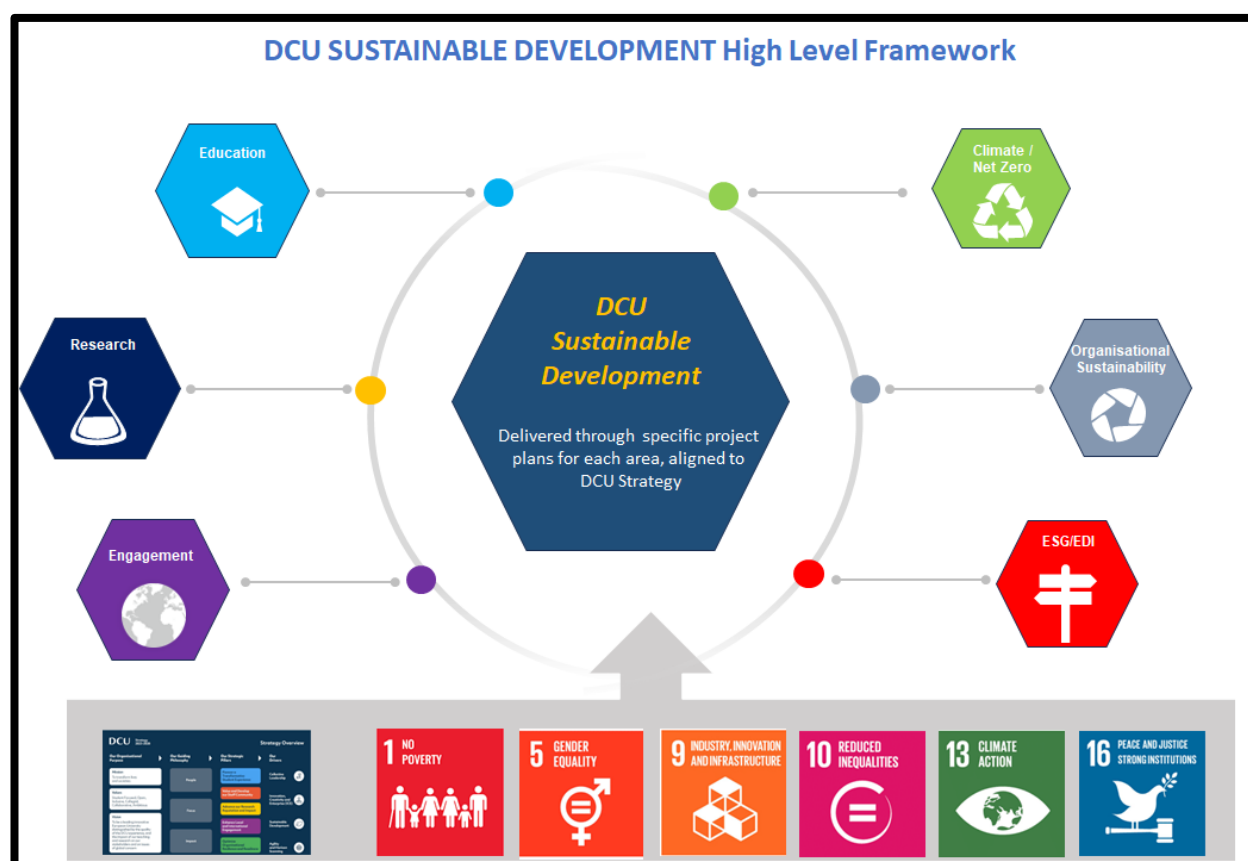A draft of our overarching Sustainable Development Framework is depicted in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: DCU Draft Sustainable Development Framework

- ***Climate action and focus on achieving Net Zero.***

The criticality of sustainability in terms of climate and carbon imperatives, as well as assuring financial and organisational sustainability, and our requirements to meet government targets in these areas, is well established. DCU's Climate Action Plan is underpinned by our Climate Action Roadmap and our performance is closely monitored and published annually. Our climate focus is on wider net-zero achievement, as energy only accounts for 20% of our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

- ***The creation of an Inclusive Staff Environment.***

In PO3, we set out our objectives to ensure student inclusivity. In order to provide our students with a transformative student experience and enable them to transform lives and societies, we must promote a positive staff experience, in a community based on the principles of respect, inclusivity and mutual support. This community recognises and rewards the contributions of every employee and provides an opportunity for everyone to achieve their full potential and effectively contribute to the University's success.

As an inclusive University, we take our responsibilities in the area of EDI seriously and see them as a core element of assuring our organisational sustainability. All training courses have pre- and post-course surveys. Impact of training is significant; for example, our Anti-Racism training showed shifts from 11% to 70% in improved understanding, with 97% stating that they would apply what they learned to their work. Similar statistics apply for all of our EDI training. With such a high impact, it is imperative that we maximise attendance at such training. In the absence of national targets, we have set an ambitious goal of a total of 85% of all staff to have attended EDI training by 2028, with all new staff each year having attended EDI training.

As well as individual training across a range of EDI areas, we have made significant progress in Athena Swan attainment, but we recognise that we have much more to do and we have set ourselves ambitious targets in this regard.

Our EDI objectives under the term of this agreement are:

- To increase overall attendance at ESG/EDI training to 85% of all staff (counted individually)

- To maintain the current level of reported increased understanding of EDI issues amongst staff who have attended EDI training.

- To have Athena Swan Bronze attainment by all (24) academic schools.

Inclusion of these priorities in this agreement is important as they contribute to the achievement of sectoral, regional and government policy and targets in the relevant areas, including the priorities in policies such as Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015); National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022–2024 (DECC, 2022); Climate Action Plan 2023 (DECC, 2023), Second HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEA, 2022); Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector Implementation Plan 2022–2024 (HEA, 2022); Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2019); amongst others.

Overall, this objective represents continued development in a priority area as we work to improve our already strong performance across areas of national and global, as well as organisational, importance.

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

The activity under this objective will be led by our Director of HR, our Deputy President, our Chief Operating Officer and our Director of Finance. Internal monitoring and reporting will be incorporated under the DCU strategy delivery process, as well as through external reporting requirements (e.g. under Athena Swan). Internal structures, such as the University Inclusivity Committee, the Athena Swan Team, the Equality Steering Group and the Sustainable Development Steering Group, will be responsible for overseeing the relevant activity in each area and reporting to the relevant Faculty and University committees, and up through to Senior Management, and Governing Authority.

Over the period of this agreement, we will:
- Align all DCU Strategic Activity to SD achievement
- Provide training to achieve ESG capability
- Review and revise our organisation structure to ensure it is fit for purpose for organisational sustainability.

Alongside our no- and low-cost conservation projects and our *unplugged* and *reduce your use* campaigns, we have a suite of conservation, renewable power and renewable heat projects which will be implemented throughout the period 2024–2030 (see Climate Action Plan, p. 20–22). Our climate action plan lays out our objectives and actions to achieve the National Climate targets by 2030, and our carbon reduction targets are included in this agreement. Over the period of this agreement, we will achieve savings of 1,950,000 kg CO_2e through conservation, renewable power and renewable heat projects.

Achievement of these objectives will be through tight coupling with component strategies as well as transversal delivery between strategic pillars. This tight coupling of all SD activity under one framework makes for a more coherent and integrated approach and also makes the best use of scarce resources.

When the objectives are delivering on mandated targets, they will be subject to the relevant external processes, such as government/agency reporting, audit and evaluation, in addition to our internal evaluation mechanisms — our MIS Dashboard, internal annual reports and progress meetings. As set out under the other objectives, scenario planning is a priority under the DCU strategy, and this creates and facilitates a culture of continuous readiness to engage with opportunities and challenges.

Our risks arise primarily due to scarcity of resources, economic and social complexity and changing national priorities. Net-zero initiatives require investment and the spiralling cost of utilities, amongst other things, has made our tight resource framework even tighter. We have consistently demonstrated our ability to respond and adapt, notably during the Covid pandemic, however persistent and cumulative challenges, without the requisite resourcing model, affect even normal operation and, in particular, constrain our strategic ambitions.

As presented earlier, learning is designed into the DCU strategy — the KPIs for each year will be informed by the performance against the previous years', enabling continuous adaptation and the flexibility to adapt our actions to meet our strategic objectives, rather than changing the objectives themselves.

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	**Emissions savings from Energy Savings Projects in kilograms of CO$_2$e**	DCU Climate Action Roadmap Annual Reports; SEAI Monitoring & Reporting (M&R) System	Quantitative	2018: 12,000,000 (kg CO$_2$e)	Climate Action Plan 2023 targets (DECC, 2023)	**500,000 (kg CO$_2$e)**	**350,000 (kg CO$_2$e)**	**550,000 (kg CO$_2$e)**	**550,000 (kg CO$_2$e)**	**1,950,000 (kg CO$_2$e)**
4.2	**Proportion (%) of staff who attend EDI Training**	Core HR	Quantitative	2023: 851 48%	None available	**162 10%**	**162 10%**	**160 9%**	**160 9%**	**1,500 85%**
4.3	**Proportion (%) of staff who report an increased understanding of EDI issues having attended training**	Post training survey	Quantitative	2023: 70%	None available	**70%**	**70%**	**70%**	**70%**	**70%**
4.4	**Proportion (%) of Schools with Athena Swan Bronze Awards**	Core HR; Athena Swan Ireland	Quantitative	2023: 6 25%	Athena Swan Charter	**11 45%**	**16 67%**	**21 87.5%**	**24 100%**	**24 100%**

Performance Objective 5

To strengthen the focus and impact of our local, national, and international partnerships through coherence, data analytics and business intelligence, for the benefit of the University and our community, industry, societal and economic stakeholders.

Pillar: Engagement

Transversals: Enterprise; Society; Region; International; Institutional Leadership & Culture.

Rationale for Performance Objective 5

The rationale and evidence base for the prioritisation of initiatives to achieve this objective are as follows:

- ***Development of an Engagement Database to facilitate business-intelligence driven partnerships for sustainability and future growth.***

As Ireland's University of Enterprise, our industry partnerships are extensive and mutually beneficial. Our enterprise engagement is essential for graduate employment, INTRA placement and research and development investment and collaboration, as well as the expertise it brings through industry advisory boards, Governing Authority membership and alumni engagement, to mention just a few. Our industry partners assist us in our EDI objectives — for example, the unique and internationally award-winning STint and Access to the Workplace initiatives.

In addition to enterprise, DCU enjoys partnerships with community, educational and regional bodies, North–South partnerships, and European and international alliances. Our updated vision under 'Transformation for an Unscripted Future' emphasises our ambitions in the European space, in particular building on our long-standing and successful membership of the European Consortium of Innovative Universities (ECIU).

Our engagement occurs at multiple touchpoints across the University, and, over time, it has become difficult to have full visibility of all of these in order to ensure we can optimise all partnerships at university level. To advance this area, a key strategic objective under the new strategy is to leverage our engagements by developing an engagement database, where all engagement, with all associated activities, objectives and personnel, is recorded, providing a 'single source of truth' at university level. With a database in place, we can then apply business intelligence and data analytics approaches to inform future partnerships as well as to leverage existing ones.

Our aim is to develop a best-in-class database to facilitate business-intelligence driven partnerships for sustainability and future growth (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Draft Representation of DCU Engagement Database

- ***Strengthening of our Community and Regional Engagement.***

Our persistent mission 'To transform lives and societies' reflects our position in, and of, the community and our social and community engagement is well established. Our focus under the new strategy is to evaluate and revise for impact: current 'DCU in the Community' initiatives and community-based learning activities; engaged Research supports; and current staff and student volunteering activities, while also reviewing and consolidating our local and regional engagement activities. We will further strengthen and advance our partnerships with local authorities, such as Dublin City and Fingal, as well as developing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to advance partnerships under the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and the Dublin–Belfast Economic Corridor.

DCU's engagement with Public Participation Network (PPN) member organisations has grown since the beginning of the initiative in 2022. Initially, DCU worked with Dublin City Council and their linked PPN, building on a positive working history. That PPN now has 162 member organisations, the largest PPN in Ireland. We will expand our engagement to work with all of the Dublin region-based PPNs. This will in turn allow us to engage with a very large number of local community-based organisations of all kinds. DCU's aim is to act as a positive educational support in offering capacity-building and civic support to the community. Currently, only one other Irish HEI works with PPNs, so benchmarks are difficult to establish.

Student volunteering is an impactful form of community engagement and DCU is recognised as one of the national leaders in this area and one of the first to begin to collate meaningful data. Consistent data on volunteering is difficult to ascertain — StudentVolunteering.ie indicates that approximately 20,000 students (7.7%) are engaged in volunteering across Irish HE, while the Irish survey of student engagement indicates that 45% of students are engaged in volunteering. Individual HEIs include different activities as volunteering so it is difficult to identify a sectoral benchmark against which to target our activity.

For the period of this agreement our focus is on:

- 4 additional PPN partnerships with local councils.

- Doubling the number of students involved in volunteering.

● ***Growth in International Engagement through business-intelligence informed decision making.***

International engagement is multi-faceted, and we are currently developing a new, comprehensive Internationalisation Plan, which will encompass all aspects of international engagement across all areas of the university, including:

- Educational collaboration – European University (e.g. ECIU)

- International research collaboration (ECIU, ASU)

- International HE Alliances (Essex, ASU, Rutgers, ECIU)

- Inward and outward student and staff mobility

- International student recruitment

- International alumni engagement

The specific targets and outcomes associated with this plan will be informed by the business intelligence generated from the Engagement Database when it is operational. In the interim period, our focus will be primarily on non-EU fee status student recruitment, for which we have well-defined targets. For the period of this agreement our focus is on:

- Growing the number of non-EU students across the University.

In 22/23, 13.7% of Irish HE enrolments were non-EU fee-paying students (HEA, 2024), the latest numbers available. Non-EU fee-paying students represented 4.6% of all DCU enrolments. Over the period of the Agreement, we aim to bring non-EU students up to 7% of DCU enrolments (based on the 2023/2024 number).

● ***Holistic approach to Engagement and Sustainable Development.***

Our ESG approach to sustainable development, set out under PO4, requires us to take a whole-of-value-chain approach, examining how our partnerships and engagements can add to, or militate against, our sustainability into the future. In the area of climate, we know that most organisations' emissions are actually generated downstream — something which makes, for example, green procurement of high importance. DCU welcomes the recent publication of the Green Public Procurement Strategy and Action Plan (2024–2027), against which we can now set targets.

The employability of our students, industry input to our education portfolio (as is exemplified by DCU Futures), collaborations for increased student opportunity across Access, INTRA, STint, amongst others, as well as research collaborations, all impact our overall organisational sustainability.

Therefore, the Engagement Database and associated business intelligence are intrinsically linked to our SD efforts.

Inclusion of these priorities in this agreement is important as they contribute to the achievement of sectoral, regional and government policy and targets in the relevant areas, including the priorities in policies such as the National Skills Strategy (DFHERIS, 2021); The regional skills strategies, for example, The Fingal Skills Strategy (2021); the upcoming DFHERIS International Strategy, *Global 2030;* Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015); amongst others.

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

During the term of this agreement, we will:

- Create an initial enterprise engagement database

- Incrementally add in more partners

- Build Business Intelligence (BI) dashboards to report on and inform current and potential partnerships in a cohesive and synergistic cross-University manner.

The activity under this objective will be led by the Deputy President and the Executive Director of Engagement. Internal monitoring and reporting will be incorporated under the DCU strategy delivery process. The engagement database and associated business intelligence dashboards will be developed through a process of piloting and further refinement, each iteration building on the learning derived from the previous one. For example:

- Focus on enterprise engagement with incremental addition of different partners (employment, placement, education, research, community, etc.)

- Meta Classification of engagement types and touch-points of engagement

- Development of 5 BI Dashboards

- Pilot BI Dashboards

- Review and Refinement

When the objectives are delivering on mandated targets, they will be subject to the relevant external processes, such as government/agency reporting, audit and evaluation, in addition to our internal evaluation mechanisms — our MIS Dashboard, internal annual reports and progress meetings. As set out under the other objectives, scenario planning is a priority under the DCU strategy, and this creates and facilitates a culture of continuous readiness to engage with opportunities and challenges. Our risks arise primarily due to scarcity of resources, economic and social complexity and changing national priorities. The chosen approach to development of the Engagement Database provides a designed-in mechanism for risk management, as the development process facilitates ongoing learning and refinement, with each stage being informed by the last and informing the next.

In relation to international students, delays in processing visas are a significant external risk and an increase in the Stay Back visas for both undergraduate and postgraduates would be a welcome benefit in attracting more international students.

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	Number of individual engagement activities undertaken and recorded	Engagement Database	Quantitative	2023/24: 0 entries in Database	None available (Novel initiative)	3,000	1,000	1,500	500	6,000
5.2	Number of new Public Participation Network Partnerships with local councils	Internal records	Quantitative	2023/24: 1	None available	1	1	1	1	4
5.3	Proportion of undergraduate students engaged in volunteering	Internal records	Quantitative	2023/24: 200 1.3%	No per HEI benchmark available	250 1.4%	300 1.7%	350 2%	400 2.2%	1,300 students over 4 years 0.9 p.p. increase on baseline
5.4	Number of non-EU enrolments as a proportion (%) of total enrolments	Student Information System; HEA SRS	Quantitative	2023/24: 905 4.6%	Irish HE Sector (11.1% in 2022/23)	1,102 5.6%	1,122 5.7%	1,241 6.3%	1,377 7%	4,842 over 4 years 2.4 p.p. increase on baseline

Section 3: Matrix and Signatures

Framework Matrix

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

Signatures

On behalf of Dublin City University

Professor Dáire Keogh
President

Tuesday, 8 October 2024

Ms Brid Horan
Chair of the Governing Authority

Tuesday, 8 October 2024

On behalf of the Higher Education Authority

Dr Alan Wall
Chief Executive Officer

Tuesday, 8 October 2024

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
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