Performance Agreement 2024–2028 between the HEA and Maynooth University

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Preamble

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

Maynooth University (MU) has an established reputation within the national higher education system, leading on undergraduate education reform, widening participation, and the delivery of impactful research through interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches. We have a rich history of learning and scholarship stretching back to the establishment of St Patrick's College in Maynooth in 1795, whilst being an independent university since 1997, through the Universities Act, and as part of the National University of Ireland (NUI) network.

The Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023–2028 was launched in October 2023 and sets out an ambitious and forward-looking programme of development for the future of our University. Our strategy builds on our achievements in equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education and on our commitment to public good as a civic university with significant local, regional, national and international impact.

Our vision is to be a university of excellence, opportunity and impact. We are driven in all of our activities by our core purpose — to imagine and create better futures for all.

Our five-year strategic focus centres on advancing student learning and the development of future-focused skills, excelling in research and creating societal impact, expanding internationalisation, and fostering strong engagement and partnerships. Key enablers that are fundamental to the implementation of our strategy are our commitment to a people-first culture; robust governance, quality, and operational excellence; sustainable infrastructure and financial strength; and foregrounding equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as sustainability, in our approach to all activities and our support to students and staff.

Following the approval of the Strategic Plan, the University developed a suite of rolling three-year implementation plans across all areas of the University strategy, together with appropriate Key Performance Indicators.

Profile of the institution

Maynooth University has experienced rapid growth in student numbers, with a 61% increase over the past decade, from 10,028 students for the academic year 2013/14 to 16,113 students for the academic year 2023/24[1].

As of March 1, 2023, MU's student body consists of 85% undergraduate (13,422 students) and 15% postgraduate (2,379 students, of which 1,788 postgraduate taught and 591 postgraduate research).

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[1] Source MU Institutional data report. Figures are total student headcount.

Student demand for undergraduate programmes continues to be strong, with the University recording a record number of CAO applications (over 18,500) for 2023/24, while registrations of postgraduate research students increased by 30% over the period 2016/17 to 2022/23.

The total staffing at Maynooth University, excluding occasional pay Full Time Equivalents (FTE), amounts to 1,220 FTE. This includes 531 FTE for academic staff, 103 FTE for contract research-only academic staff, and 586 FTE for Administrative, Technical, and Professional (ATP) staff.

Approach to the development of the Performance Agreement

The four performance objectives in the Performance Agreement, under the respective pillars of the System Performance Framework (Teaching & Learning; Research & Innovation; Access & Participation; Engagement), are directly aligned with the key priorities of the MU Strategic Plan.

Due to the timing of our Strategic Plan launch, MU is positioned to identify the performance objectives that are a priority for the University. The MU Strategic Plan was agreed upon following extensive consultations with almost 2,000 staff, students and external contributors, across town hall meetings, workshops and written submissions, and reviewed through an iterative process including the University Executive leaders, the Strategic Plan Steering Group, Academic Council and Governing Authority. The latter three structures included representation from the Maynooth Students' Union.

The University Executive (UE) led the development of this Performance Agreement (PA) through a paper and presentation to all UE members, discussions at UE meetings, and the establishment of a UE subgroup with each member taking the lead for the objective within their respective area of responsibility.

The development of the PA was linked with the development of the University Strategic Plan, which included a stakeholder consultation process. Some of the key external stakeholders consulted included:

- Teaching & Learning (Future Skills) — workshop with local, regional and national business leaders and specific student workshops.

- Research & Innovation (Graduate Research Academy) — town hall meeting with researchers.

- Access & Participation (Enhance research-informed Access practice) — workshop with civil society leaders, workshop with students.

- Engagement (Deepen industry focus) — workshop with local, regional and national business leaders, alumni advisory board and MU foundation.

The approach for selecting indicators of success for performance objectives involved consideration of existing internal quantitative and qualitative data and nationally available data. Ultimately,

consideration for data gathering included: determining existing, robust, benchmarkable data; building institutional capacity to gather the relevant quality data; and identifying new data systems required (e.g. Graduate Register).

The data used includes:

- Teaching & Learning (Future Skills): Internal datasets — Registry, Research Development Office and the Office of the Vice President Students and Learning. External — Studentsurvey.ie, HEA data.

- Research & Innovation (Graduate Research Academy): Internal datasets — Institutional Research Office, Graduate Research Academy and the forthcoming Graduate Register. External — HEA data.

- Access & Participation (Enhance research-informed access practice): Internal datasets — registry and EDI. External — National Access Plan and HEA data.

- Engagement (Deepen industry focus): Internal datasets — Partnership Office mapping data, institutional data. External — HEA data.

Climate, environment and sustainability, in their broadest terms, are considered across the four performance objectives. Our aims in this area include: (i) developing Future Skills of graduates to engage in issues of sustainability and climate change; (ii) enabling multi-disciplinary postgraduate research to respond to complex social issues; (iii) strengthening the social fabric through research-informed access programmes; and (iv) engaging with industry to identify and shape relevant research, including climate research innovations.

MU has proven capabilities in widening access and participation in higher education and this remains a key consideration for the future. Across the four performance objectives, equality, diversity, and inclusion contribute to shaping the actions planned. Firstly, in Teaching and Learning, we will build on our students' existing capacities and personal attributes through a model of strengths-based education that integrates our flexible curriculum and expands placement opportunities. Secondly, improvements for postgraduate research students will broaden opportunities through research-informed actions to foster student success. Thirdly, we will leverage our expertise in access through enhancements of research-informed actions. Finally, industry partnerships will be used to benefit students and research activities.

The VPA/Registrar has been central to the development of the PA and has integrated key lesson learned from the HEA Strategy and Performance Dialogue, QQI Annual Quality Review and CINNTE Institutional review processes. The Vice President for Equality & Diversity has reviewed the PA with respect to Public Sector Duty requirements and an EDI/Athena Swan lens.

Structures in place for evaluation

Implementation, monitoring, assessment and reporting on the Performance Agreement will take place in parallel with the processes to monitor performance in regard to Strategic Plan 2023–2028 implementation.

Responsibility for oversight of the PA will lie with Governing Authority (GA), which will be supported in this oversight by the work of the Finance, Human Resources and Campus Development Committee, and by the Audit and Risk Committee which oversees the strategic risk register.

As a regular item at the University Executive team meetings, ongoing progress will be monitored periodically in line with deliverables.

The University's progress against the PA will be communicated to the University community through the relevant committees of Academic Council, the University Leadership Forum, and an annual President's update to staff. Maynooth Students' Union (MSU) will be updated on progress through participation in University committees and through regular bilateral meetings between the President and MSU President. Progress will be reported annually to the Governing Authority.

Data collection and evaluation processes

MU will use existing data collection and evaluation processes and develop new approaches to utilising relevant data systems and reporting structures. Timelines for evaluation will be established to ensure a comprehensive and timely assessment. Additionally, plans are underway to enhance and develop data collection and evaluation processes throughout the PA's timeframe, addressing any challenges or gaps identified. The Strategic Plan includes a specific focus on data prioritization, integration, reporting, and analysis across various strategic initiatives, such as Operational Excellence, EDI data dashboards, partnerships office, investment in learning analytics, and data-informed talent recruitment and development.

Section 2: Performance Objectives

Performance Objective 1

To give all our undergraduate students the opportunity to acquire future-focused skills, such as data and digital skills, as well as an opportunity to engage in experiential learning opportunities including real-world learning experiences.

Pillar: Teaching and Learning

Transversals: Student Success; Digital Transformation; Flexibility, Upskilling, and Lifelong Learning.

Rationale for Performance Objective 1

Our graduates enter an employment environment that is demanding and changing. While graduates have engaged in a deep study of specific disciplines, they are expected to integrate into work environments where a range of skills are expected, including specific data and digital skills and the "soft skills" of working collaboratively, and engaging with international colleagues. To respond to this need, we aim to enhance the opportunities for our graduates to develop a range of work and life skills during their undergraduate studies.

This is one of the key aims of our strategic plan, in which we commit to:

- Increasing opportunities to co-design curricula and assessment with students and external partners to ensure that we meet future needs.

- Building on our students' existing capacities and personal attributes through a model of strengths-based education that integrates our flexible curriculum and the development of skills for future life with the education of inquisitive and independent people.

- Investing in the future of our students by integrating 'real-world' and international learning opportunities into their learning experience. All undergraduate students at Maynooth will graduate with digital and data literacy and future-focused capacities that will enable them to navigate fast-evolving societal contexts.

The focus on digital skills is a central part of the national digital strategy, which states that, 'For Ireland to be an international leader in the digital economy, our skills policy must be focused on meeting digital skills needs at all levels. This includes supporting appropriate levels of digital skills for the labour force as a whole,' (*Harnessing Digital — The Digital Ireland Framework*, Dept of the Taoiseach, 2022, p24).

There is clear evidence of the need for these skills:

- The OECD notes that 30% of adults in Ireland have less than basic digital skills, including information and data literacy, and digital content creation (*OECD Skills Strategy Ireland 2023*, p67).

- The shortage of ICT talent is potentially significant for a number of sectors where ICT skills, including data analytics, are needed. (*Ireland's National Skills* Strategy, p25).

Despite the importance of these skills, data from the national student survey (StudentSurvey.ie) suggest that MU students are less likely than those in other Irish universities to report engagement in quantitative reasoning.

Student Survey Engagement indicator scores 2023

Indicator	Mean, MU	Mean, all 7 Universities
QR — Quantitative Reasoning	20.2	22.0

% of students who do the following either often or very often: student survey 2023

Quantitative Reasoning	MU (%)	All 7 Unis (%)
Reached conclusions based on your analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics, etc.)	30.4	**38.0**
Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue (unemployment, climate change, public health, etc.)	27.4	**30.2**
Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information	23.2	**25.3**

Under this performance objective, we will:

1. Provide data analysis skills training to students in subjects across the curriculum, through embedded content and elective courses, and make these courses visible to students.

2. Provide digital skills training to students in subjects across the curriculum, through embedded content and elective courses, and make these courses visible to students.

3. Increase the number of students who engage in authentic work-related and experiential learning across the curriculum, through embedded content and elective courses or through co-curricular opportunities.

Data analysis and digital literacy are already included in some subject curricula. As part of the Performance Objective, MU will commence an initiative to make these skills more widely available across programme offerings and more explicitly emphasised, so that all graduates have the opportunity to acquire these skills and to demonstrate that they have done so.

A number of work-related and experiential learning opportunities are already in place, although some are pilot activities. This performance objective will scale up and mainstream these experiences.

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

Key actions to support the achievement of this performance objective include:

- Establishment of a future-focused skills steering group acting on feedback from employers, graduates and students.

- Development of agreed learning outcomes for digital skills, data skills and work-related skills.

- Support for staff to deliver future-focused skills.

- Identification and labelling accordingly in the Academic Database of existing modules that meet these requirements.

- Encouraging students to plan their learning journey and ensure that they take data and digital modules during their degree.

- Development of resources to support students to understand, talk about and evidence their future-focused skills.

The initial phase of this activity involves careful engagement with employers, graduates, and students to co-create the data, digital learning and work-related learning objectives and develop the detailed design for the initiative. Training in these skills will then be made available to students in four ways:

1. Integrated into their disciplinary studies. In this model, departments will integrate the acquisition of digital, data and work-based learning skills into specific modules within their programme.

2. As an elective module or other learning opportunity taken for credit. Students in most MU programmes are able to take up to 10 credits of elective material in second year, and this is credit-bearing and integrated into their award.

3. As a not-for-credit co-curricular study. To cater for those who are in programmes where flexibility for electives is not available, training in these skills will be made available as a co-curricular course. Students who take the course and reach the required standard will have this recorded on their academic transcript.

4. Through engagement in learning delivered in collaboration with employers, with pathways to externally accredited learning.

We recognise the diverse nature of our student population and through different approaches to skills development we aim to cater for different learning needs and disciplinary requirements.

This new emphasis on digital, data and work-based skills will require engagement across all academic departments, led by the VP for Students and Learning. In some cases, it will involve identifying modules where these skills are already being taught and making these more explicit in the learning outcomes and assessment. In other cases, it will require changes to module content. Staff

development to support this will be provided through the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL).

The focus for delivering authentic work-related and experiential learning will be:

1. Strengthening the accredited placement function to increase the number of students who have the opportunity of doing a work placement as part of their undergraduate studies.

2. Increasing the opportunities for work-related and experiential learning through integration into modules, electives, and increased co- and extra-curricular activities.

Maynooth University offers a wide range of work-related and experiential learning opportunities that will be further developed over the course of this objective. The current opportunities include:

- Short extra-curricular work experiences in research and professional services
- Virtual work-related learning experiences and job simulations
- Mentoring
- Elective module in employability and skill development
- Structured process for recognition of co- and extra-curricular experiences enhancing future-focused skills
- Career insight fairs and sessions.

The External Relations office will engage with employers seeking opportunities for collaborative opportunities suitable for undergraduate students. This sub-component is as yet uncertain, but a valuable additional strand if it is viable.

Risks and challenges

This is an institution-wide curriculum adaptation project and requires a coordinated effort across multiple academic and professional units. Clear leadership and coordination will be crucial.

The key risk with the embedded approach is the capacity of staff to embed these skills in their teaching to the required standard. This risk is mitigated by the planned staff development activities coordinated through the Centre of Teaching and Learning. These will provide academic staff with support to enhance the digital and data content of their teaching. In addition, the project design calls for every student to have the ability to access digital and data modules during their degree. However, as most students take multiple subjects, not all subjects need to embed these skills. Even if a student is taking two subjects and neither has embedded skills, the opportunity to take the skills modules as an elective remains.

There is a risk that students will not take up these opportunities, either because they do not see the relevance, or because they wish to avoid a specific topic (e.g. data). We aim to reduce this risk by providing students with guidance material at the start of their degree, and asking them to map out their skills profile, and plan to enhance their skillset. This message will be reinforced in careers and pre-employment advice.

The availability of suitable placements is a key challenge and is often the main capacity constraint in placement activities. While we aim to enhance the capacity of our placement function, and to increase engagement with employers, we recognise that the availability of placements is not entirely within our control. To avoid capacity constraints, we have designed this project with alternative work-related experiences, as described above. These will provide opportunities for students for whom a placement is not available, or who do not wish to extend their degree duration to take up a placement. This may be of particular benefit to those students taking two humanities subjects, for whom placement is more difficult.

This project involves significant software modification, first to the academic database, then to the student records system, to enable insertion of additional fields. Ideally, these modifications will lead ultimately to a system that would allow a supplemental skills transcript. We have confidence that the academic database can be modified reasonably quickly. The changes to the student records system will take longer, and until they are in place, detailed analysis of uptake will not be possible.

Once the modifications to the student records system are in place, we will be able to analyse (i) the number of unique students taking skills modules, (ii) the percentage of students who take at least one data module and at least one digital module, (iii) the correlation, if any, between placement and degree outcomes, and (iv) the level of uptake of these skills modules by faculty and programme.

There is also a risk that the digital and data skills will become dated and will be no longer relevant to the labour market. We will address this through regular review of the content and learning outcomes for skills modules, at least every three years.

Monitoring of progress will be done through assessing (i) the number of skills modules on offer and the programmes in which they are offered, (ii) student uptake of these modules, and (iii) relevant scores in student survey results. If the indicators in the student survey are changed, the monitoring framework will be adjusted accordingly. Note that in years when the national student survey is not running, we will have an alternative monitoring mechanism in place, but this may not be at institution-wide scale. Student participation will be disaggregated by discipline to some extent, although this will not be fully possible until the student records system can be modified to capture skill-specific data. The available information will be reported in annual updates.

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	**Proportion (%) of departments with data modules[2]**	Registry-extract from academic database	Quantitative	2023/24: 0% of 30 departments	Not Available	**17% (5)**	**33% (10)**	**67% (20)**	**67% (20)**	**67% (20)**
1.2	**Proportion (%) of departments with digital modules**	Registry-extract from academic database	Quantitative	2023/24: 0% of 30 departments	Not Available	**17% (5)**	**33% (10)**	**67% (20)**	**67% (20)**	**67% (20)**
1.3	**Number of undergraduate student registrations on data modules[3]**	Student registration data	Quantitative	2023/24: 0	Not Available	**250**	**500**	**1,000**	**1,000**	**2,750 students over 4 years**
1.4	**Number of undergraduate student registrations on digital modules**	IRO drawn from student registration data	Quantitative	2023/24: 0	Not Available	**250**	**500**	**1,000**	**1,000**	**2,750 students over 4 years**
1.5	**Undergraduate students taking accredited work placement (excluding education)**	IRO drawn from student registration data	Quantitative	2023/24: 421	Not Available	**500**	**550**	**600**	**650**	**2,300 students over 4 years**

[2] The number of data modules and the number of digital modules will be disaggregated by Faculty and department for monitoring purposes, but we have not set a target value for each discipline.

[3] Note that it is not yet possible to express 1.3 to 1.6 as a % of students, as some students will take more than 1 module. Consequently, the figures may include a student taking more than one data or digital module.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.6	**Number of students taking an authentic work-related learning experience.**	Careers and Employability Service data	Quantitative	2022/23: 1,117	Not available	**1,250**	**1,425**	**1,600**	**1,775**	**6,050 students over 4 years**
1.7	**Quantitative Reasoning Indicator in Student Survey[4]**	Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	2023: 20.2	Mean for all universities (22 in 2022)	**N/a**	**N/a**	**21**	**22**	**22**

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[4] As the Student Survey will not run in 2024 and 2025, and the survey questions and indicators have not yet been finalised, there is a significant uncertainty about the movement of this indicator. Nevertheless, by increasing the data content in our curriculum, we expect to reach the University mean for the quantitative reasoning indicator by the end of the period.

Performance Objective 2

To enhance the experience, inclusiveness, success, and employability of postgraduate research students and the impact of postgraduate research.

Pillar: Research & Innovation

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 2

Postgraduate research (PGR) undertaken by PhD and master's students plays a central role in fostering a thriving research ecosystem. PGR students, particularly those studying at Level 10, drive the expansion of new knowledge, contribute to ground-breaking research, and are pivotal in advancing research developments. Realising the significant current and potential impact of PGR necessitates effective support and resources to benefit students, institutions, and society.

The Maynooth University Strategic Plan for 2023–2028 focusses on creating opportunities and better futures for all, including opening up more opportunities for PGR study and making these available to a diverse student population, whilst emphasising research excellence. To this end, the actions presented below will increase the number and diversity of PGR students at Maynooth University and enhance their support systems, leading to improved graduation rates, research quality, and long-term career success.

Maynooth University's Strategic Plan is also aligned to *Impact 2030*, which is Ireland's comprehensive approach to research and innovation. *Impact 2030* acknowledges the pivotal role of talent in Ireland's national research and innovation performance, and the importance of a consistent experience for PGR students. This initiative commits to raising the number of researchers in the Irish workforce from 9.52 per 1000 in 2015 to 15 per 1000 by 2030. Notably, the *HEA Graduate Outcomes Survey* from 2021 reveals that 85% of Irish PhD graduates continue to work in Ireland, contributing to the country's prosperity.

Our Strategic Plan and Performance Objective align with *Impact 2030*'s goal of increasing the number of researchers in the Irish workforce and ensuring a consistent experience for PGR students. We interpret experiential consistency as providing tailored support and training to cater to the diverse needs of PGR students. Expanding participation in PGR study necessitates an inclusive approach.

PGR education is no longer reserved for the privileged or economically advantaged. All students with the potential to undertake PGR study should have the opportunity to do so and achieve success. Importantly, this opens up research to new and diverse perspectives, unique insights and experiences, enhancing the richness and impact of the research and expanding the talent pool. However, universities must ensure the availability of adequate support and resources to enable a diverse student body to thrive. For example, an Australian study suggests that enhanced funding models are required to support universities with high numbers of disadvantaged students, to ensure their success

(Equity in postgraduate education: Widening participation or widening the gap? Grant-Smith, Irmer and Mayes, 2020). Given Maynooth University's commitment to opportunity and inclusivity, this evidence is highly relevant to supporting these objectives.

Skopek, Triventi, and Blossfeld's 2022 study on European doctorate completion rates demonstrates that student quality, academic environment, and financial conditions significantly affect completion rates and student outcomes (How do institutional factors shape PhD completion rates?). This underscores the importance of resources and support for students and supervisors, coordination of doctoral programme structures, and the development of a supportive research culture within departments.

Maynooth University has significantly increased registrations of PGR students (PGR refers to all research students excluding professional doctorates) by 30% between 2016/17 and 2022/23, with a 34% increase in graduations over the same time frame. Of our 520 current research students (excluding professional doctorates), 67% receive funding for their studies (349 students, including 48 in receipt of IRC funding, 149 supported by a supervisor funding agency award, and 152 funded by Maynooth University), of which 44% are funded by MU schemes. Our success rates in the externally funded IRC Government of Ireland scheme have varied between 8% and 25% between 2018 and 2023.

However, external factors such as economic changes, the job market, and housing availability, can impact research students' ability to engage in and sustain PGR study. While these factors are beyond our control, they emphasise the need to support our students in being successful in receiving externally funded PhD scholarships, and to review our internal funding programmes and models of programme delivery. This will ensure that there are opportunities for students to undertake PhDs whilst continuing with work and career (work-based PhDs) and to receive recognition for published work undertaken outside of a PhD registration (PhD by prior publication), and that we provide internal funding models that meet student needs.

In terms of outcomes, the Horizon 2020-funded *DocEnhance* project reveals that over half of doctoral graduates work outside academia, with two-thirds engaging in research as part of their employment (What comes after a PhD?). This statistic emphasises the need to enhance PhD training so that graduates can compete in a non-academic environment, including experiential learning, mobility (both international and sectoral), non-academic collaboration, and career-focused programmes. This training is particularly important for graduates from disadvantaged areas who, on average, earn significantly less following graduation than affluent graduates (HEA, 2021).

An OECD Skills Strategy Ireland report (2023) also speaks to the need for intersectoral mobility for PGR students between academia, industry, public and voluntary sectors. In alignment with this finding, our goal is to develop doctoral programmes integrated with non-academic sectors while maintaining academic excellence.

Our plan, outlined below, is consistent with the evidence that achieving inclusive PGR education requires tailored support with personalised needs analyses, and that the new types of PGR programmes that students undertake should be flexible and supportive and should enhance their opportunities for career success both inside and outside academia. The plan includes cross-sectoral supervision and experience, sectoral and international mobility, and the provision of non-traditional

modes of study. All of this will require supports and training for staff as well as students and careful evaluation of student outcomes and completion rates. It is important to note that 83.5% of MU PGR students rate their research experience as 'good to excellent' which is well above the national average (72.9%), so our goal in this area is to continue to exceed the national average.

This objective represents our ambition to be a leader in the sector in providing personalised, needs-based support and training to our PGR students while recognising the need for their continual development in a changing world.

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

Management and reporting structures for this performance objective include the University Executive, the Academic Council Research Committee, and the Academic Council Graduate Education Committee. A project team will be convened to run this project and report to these committees. The Vice President Research and Innovation (VPRI) is responsible for the overall oversight and management of this performance objective. The VPRI chairs relevant committees, is a member of both the Academic Council and the University Executive, and convenes the project team.

To support the achievement of this performance objective, the University will:

1. Establish a Graduate Research Academy to create an inclusive PGR community in which all students can thrive and appoint a Director of Graduate Research to lead these developments.

2. Develop a new induction programme for PGR students, accompanied by an initial and a continuous personalised needs analysis process to ensure that training meets students' individual needs, irrespective of their background (2.1).

3. Develop collaborative PhD offerings to leverage the strengths of a more unified tertiary system and research and innovation system for the benefit of our students (2.2).

4. Develop and offer innovative, accessible models of doctoral education delivery, including professional doctorates embedded in workplaces and PhD by prior publication, to increase the accessibility and inclusiveness of PGR study (2.3).

5. Review the PGR training curriculum within the structured PhD programme and ensure that this provides excellent research training and career development opportunities with future-focused skills.

6. Provide support and training for supervisors, including mentoring and role modelling, through our newly established distinguished international collaborator scheme.

7. Enable different modes of PhD supervision, including team, international, cross-sectoral and distance co-supervision.

8. Increase the numbers of theses submitted using non-traditional submission models (i.e., by

publication) to increase accessibility.

9. Improve our success rate for national externally funded PhD programmes through reviewing and supporting the application process.

10. Complete a review of our internally funded PhD schemes to ensure that these are conducive to student success.

11. Review graduate research regulations and ensure that they align with the strategic goals of the University.

Resource provision

People: Appoint a Director of the Graduate Research Academy to provide senior academic leadership, and additional professional support staff to support the development of the Academy.

Space, physical and virtual: Provide physical space on campus for the Academy staff and students. Further develop the web presence of the Graduate Academy to ensure accessibility.

Financial requirements: Allocate specific and enhanced funding for PhD students in the MU resource allocation model. Review scholarships and stipends to ensure they meet student needs. Allocate funding for doctoral research events throughout the year.

Mechanisms for progress evaluation

The plan includes milestones, deliverables, and quantitative targets, such as PGR registrations, progressions, and graduations. Regular evaluations will use a traffic light system to identify risks and co-dependencies. Mitigating strategies and controls will be implemented when key risks and challenges are identified.

Opportunities

Partnerships, including with the Technological sector, offer opportunities for each partner to leverage the other's expertise, including work-based learning and strong employer relationships.

International and cross-sectoral co-supervision offers an opportunity for Maynooth University to provide virtual mobility (via supervision) and develop new pathways to impact (via cross-sectoral perspective).

Providing supervisory training and development to our academic staff will improve their confidence, skills and competencies in PGR education and research. This will improve the experience of PGR students and will improve progression and graduation rates.

Challenges

Financial constraints may deter prospective PGR students. A mitigating strategy is to develop work-based professional PhDs, which are designed for people in work.

Disparities between the different funding schemes could produce tension between students and challenges to community cohesion. A mitigating strategy is to work hard to develop a sense of community through events and social opportunities designed to bring students together.

Risks

External dependencies such as cost of living, housing, and inflation can impact student progression and completion rates.

Lessons learned, adaptations, and improvements

Lessons learned, adaptations, and improvements from evaluations will be actioned through the project team and relevant committees. Reports will be published to document progress and recommend good practices.

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 students completing induction programme and personal needs analysis in first year (as % of total intake)**	Graduate Research Academy	Quantitative	2022/23: 0	No comparator data available	**95 (68%)**	**112 (75%)**	**124 (80%)**	**140 (85%)**	**471 students over 4 years** **(85 p.p. increase on baseline of 0)**
2.2	**Number of new collaborative PhD registrations p.a.**	Graduate Register, needs to be created	Quantitative	No Baseline as data not available	No comparator data available	**10**	**5**	**5**	**10**	**30 over 4 years**
2.3	**Number of students registered on 'new' mode L10 programmes (Work-based, professional, prior publication, flexible)**	Graduate register, needs to be created	Quantitative	2022/23: 0	No comparator data available	**0**	**10**	**20**	**30**	**30**
2.4	**Number of postgraduate research (level 10) entrants**	Institutional research office and HEA SRS returns	Quantitative	2022/23: 118 Provisional 2023/24: 122	No comparator data available	**135**	**149**	**155**	**165**	**40% increase on 2022/23 baseline**
2.5	**Number of postgraduate research (level 10) graduations**	Institutional research office	Quantitative	2022/23: 63	No comparator data available	**75**	**80**	**83**	**92**	**46% increase on baseline**

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.6	**Postgraduate Research Completion rate (%), within 1 year of scheduled time**	Graduate Research Academy	Quantitative	2022/23: 48%	No comparator data available	**55%**	**60%**	**65%**	**70%**	**22 p.p. increase on baseline**
2.7	**Proportion (%) of academic staff participating in supervision development training and supports**	Graduate Research Academy	Quantitative	No baseline as data not available	n/a	**50%**	**55%**	**60%**	**65%**	**65%**
2.8	**Response in PGR student survey to the item:** **How would you evaluate your entire research experience at this institution? (Good to excellent)**	Student survey.ie (PGR)	Quantitative	2023: 83.5% (good to excellent)	National average good to excellent all PGR (72.9% in 2023)	**84%**	**84.5%**	**85%**	**86%**	**2.5 p.p. increase on baseline, continue to exceed national average.**

Performance Objective 3

To build on our reputation for authentic, strengths-based education, supporting all students, regardless of background, through improved student success data analytics and research-informed practice, and thereby enabling access to and success in higher education for diverse groups of students.

Pillar: Access & Participation

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 3

MU has a proven track record of attracting and retaining students from diverse backgrounds. In 2023–24, 26% of the full-time undergraduate MU new entrant cohort came via HEAR, DARE, Mature or QQI entry routes. However, a percentage of students do not succeed in higher education. Student retention and success is a multifaceted issue driven by various factors. Improved student success analytics to better inform policy, practice and decision-making are central to realising MU's goal of supporting the success of all students, regardless of background.

The National Access Plan (NAP) 2022–2028 seeks to target and support students who are socio-economically disadvantaged; students with disabilities; students from the Irish Traveller community; mature students from disadvantaged areas; students from the Roma community; students who have experience of the care system, homelessness, and the criminal justice system; students who are survivors of domestic violence; and students who are carers. 'Second-chance' mature students, as well as migrants and refugees, are also named for the first time in the Plan.

MU is committed to attracting and retaining these students. Indicators have been selected to identify specific targets in response to the NAP, the data shared on the HEA System Performance Dashboard, and Maynooth University's Strategic Plan 2023–2028 in which EDI is listed as one of five key enablers. Baseline and benchmark figures provided are based on the most recently available figures for a single year.

The key indicators that have been prioritised are 3.1-3.5 (new entrants from 5 priority groups), 3.6 (non-progression by students from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas), 3.7 (completion by students from disadvantaged areas) and 3.8 (student experience of supportive environment).

In relation to new entrants, baseline for new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas as a percentage of all MU entrants is 12%, for mature students from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas is 8%, for students who have a disability is 10.9%, and Irish Traveller students is 0.0% and students transitioning from FET is 4.9%. We have benchmarked our targets against the all-HEIs targets, seeking to achieve or improve on the national average.

The baseline relating to the student experience of a supportive environment at Maynooth is 51.5%. The benchmark figure for student experience of supportive environment comes from the StudentSurvey.ie trends over time nationally to 2021 under each of 3 selected questions relating to supportive environment.

Maintaining current levels of new entrants will be challenging in the context of the current employment environment, cost-of-living challenges, and new opportunities offered by the Further Education and Training sector and by Technological Universities. These challenges are particularly impacting targets for HEAR students and mature students, where national trends are showing a decline. Therefore, maintaining current levels for some target groups represents an ambitious target.

The increasing complexity of student needs presents challenges to student retention. The impact of these challenges is observed in national trends, with non-progression rates higher for students from disadvantaged areas and mature students on Level 8 courses (HEA, 2024). These challenges impact system outcomes. MU is seeking to address this issue by better understanding the factors influencing non-progression at MU and addressing the issues as part of a strategic approach to improving retention rates.

This objective seeks to bring together available data and new research insights to maximise our understanding of student retention and success. The aim is to (i) extend our **data analysis and mapping capability** to improve our evidence base for institutional and national policies; (ii) inform and refine the programmes and supports for all students through a **Practice Partner approach** with departments; (iii) be able to identify specific groups of students with complex needs for **specific support interventions**; and (iv) **advance knowledge, innovation and practice** in inclusion, diversity, equality and access, using data and evidence to promote equality outcomes in education, employment, research and wider engagement in higher education.

This objective aligns with MU's vision to be a university of 'Excellence, Opportunity, and Impact' and our purpose 'to imagine and create better futures for all'. Our *MU Strategic Plan 2023–2028* identifies specific actions relating to access and participation, with the most relevant to this objective being:

- MU is committed to building 'on our students' existing capacities and personal attributes through a model of strengths-based education that integrates our flexible curriculum and the development of skills for future life' (p15).

- 'We will expand and embed flexible and experiential curriculum options within our programme portfolio to meet students' evolving needs, the needs of the workforce and to enable access to education for more diverse groups of students' (p15).

- We will develop a data-informed approach with an 'investment in learning analytics to support students' learning strategies, to guide students on their personalised and collective educational journeys and to inform teaching' (p16).

- 'We will consider the principles of Universal Design for Learning to support inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment' (p16).

- We will develop 'a culture in which consideration of EDI is embedded across all University activities' including a 'Practice Partner Model approach' to working with academic departments 'to provide tailored supports and opportunities for students with complex needs' (p28, p29).

Recognising our existing research, expertise, and good practice in widening participation in higher education, we will establish a **Centre for Inclusive Higher Education** (p28, p29). The Centre will facilitate peer support and peer learning among institutions, to lead research-informed practice and to support the institutional implementation of national policy on widening participation and EDI (i.e. putting national policy into practice through knowledge sharing, communities of practice, dissemination of institutional learning, etc). Bringing together expertise from across the University and nationally, the Centre will advance knowledge, innovation and practice in inclusion, diversity, equality and access and use evidence and data to promote equality outcomes in education, employment, research and wider engagement in higher education. This objective will help to deliver on national strategies as follows:

- The *National Access Plan (NAP) 2022–2028* identifies five student-centred goals of inclusivity, flexibility, clarity, coherence, and sustainability, all underpinned by an evidence-driven approach. MU's objective aligns with the NAP, emphasising rigorous evaluation and data-driven policy interventions, and will help to reduce and address the difficulties and complexities of gathering data on the priority groups, as identified in the NAP.

- The *NFETL Student Success Guiding Framework* underscores the critical importance of data in supporting evidence-based decision-making, which is fundamental for student success. The *National Skills Strategy* calls for enhanced focus on the quality of education at all levels, and a specific focus on inclusion to support education and training.

This objective also supports the vision of a more unified tertiary system which can meet the different needs of all learners and grow equality, diversity and inclusion across the system.

The Performance Objective is positioned to also support other national strategies, including the *Road Map for Social Inclusion*, the *National Disability Inclusion Strategy*, the *Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030*, and the *Migrant Integration Strategy*.

Evidence base

The strategic prioritisation of this performance objective comes from analysis of baseline and benchmark data on target student groups, and progression and completion data. This data provides a picture of the University's strengths as well as areas that require improvement.

Our analysis of the baseline and benchmark data at MU has identified that MU has the highest percentage in the traditional universities of new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. This is an area of strength for the University and maintaining a rate of 12% to 2028 in light of the overall student population increasing at MU represents an overall increase in numbers of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas. Nationally, increasing the number of mature new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas is challenging. While the national average for

this cohort is 10%, we aim to maintain a rate of 8% across the lifetime of this Agreement. This represents an increase in actual mature student numbers. The participation of new entrants with disabilities at MU is an area of strength and increasing the percentage of new entrants annually is an ambitious but achievable target.

The participation of Irish Travellers at MU is an area of strength. Among the graduates in 2024 were the first male Traveller PhD graduate, and 5 Travellers who received degrees in Community and Youth Work through an initiative by the Eastern Regional Traveller Health Unit, Pavee Point, and the Health Service Executive in collaboration with the Maynooth Access Programme and the MU Department of Applied Social Studies. We are seeking to maximise completion of the Equal Access Survey as the numbers of Travellers self-reporting currently is an underrepresentation, as well as to enhance policy developments in this area to achieve the targets. It is likely that numbers reported are underrepresented. We are seeking to maximise completion of the Equal Access Survey as well as to enhance policy developments in this area to achieve the targets. MU exceeds the national average in relation to new entrants from further education and we see this as an area of growth and that the targets identified, while ambitious, are achievable.

Overall, in relation to non-progression and completion rates, MU sees the potential to improve rates across all target groups, which will be supported by increased investment in data analysis, the development of a student 'One-Stop Shop', and the appointment of the Vice President for Students & Learning.

This objective is a 'continuing development in a priority area'. However, the establishment of a *Centre for Inclusive Higher Education* represents an ambition to leverage our existing research, expertise, and good practice in widening participation in higher education and be a leader for research-informed practice in the sector, system and internationally.

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

Responsibility for this objective sits with the University Executive (UE), in particular the Vice President for Equality and Diversity (VPED), the Registrar, and the Vice President for Students and Learning (VPSL). A project team will be convened with representatives from their offices. Additional staff for the Institutional Research and Data Insights Office (IRDI) will be recruited to meet the increasing demands for data and structures will be reorganised to support departments in a practice partner model. A physical and digital 'One-Stop Shop' will be established for students, to provide a comprehensive range of high-quality, technology-enabled, proactive supports to help them reach their full academic, professional and personal potential.

The VPED is tasked with the management of this performance objective. The VPED chairs relevant committees, is a member of both the Academic Council and UE and convenes the project team to deliver on the strategic actions. The Centre for Inclusive Higher Education will report to the VPED and liaise across the University with relevant units, including the Research & Development Office and academic departments, on research-informed practice, as well as with national and international stakeholders.

Strategic actions

- o Establish a Data Advisory Group to review existing data, identify gaps, and propose strategies for improvement.

- o Analyse available data on student progression and success, and prepare a report showing trends over time, by discipline and student characteristics.

- o Embed the Practice Partner Model approach of using data analytics to assist departments in supporting students' personalised and collective learning strategies, inform teaching, and provide tailored support for students with complex needs.

- o Complete analysis of the curriculum and supports in the disciplines with the highest non-progression rate and identify follow-up actions with relevant departments.

- o Enhance the "reach-out" mechanism to engage and re-engage students who appear to be at risk.

- o Establish a physical and virtual 'One-Stop Shop' for students to provide a comprehensive range of high-quality, technology-enabled, proactive supports that will help them reach their full academic, professional, and personal potential.

- o Establish a Centre for Inclusive Higher Education to facilitate peer support and peer learning among institutions, to lead research-informed practice and to support the institutional implementation of national policy on widening participation and EDI.

Opportunities

- o **Effective student success data analytics** will enable more targeted student supports.

- o **Increase Pathways to the Professions** through partnership with Further Education & Training (FET) to further diversify initial teacher education (successful MU PATH 1-funded *Turn to Teaching* project), and nursing (new MU School of Health and Medicine).

- o **Establish Ireland as a leader in access and widening participation** with the establishment of the Centre for Inclusive Higher Education, which will leverage our existing research, expertise and good practice.

Challenges

Comprehensive data gathering, analysis, and reporting at the level required to monitor the individual NAP target groups and provide insight into trends requires dedicated resources and effective systems. We have in place an EDI Data Analyst in this regard and are in the process of identifying updates to our systems to ensure the most effective and efficient data gathering across the University.

External dependencies such as cost of living, housing, and inflation can impact student progression and completion rates. We can mitigate these challenges through our Student Budgeting Advisors, who help students identify additional financial supports, including our Emergency Student Support Fund.

Students experience intersectional disadvantage that can be complex and multi-faceted, which isn't well understood. MU has appointed a Professor of Intersectional Humanities and intersectionality will be a lens through which tailored student success strategies will be developed.

Risks

There is a risk of not being able to keep pace with the increasingly complex needs of incoming students and the increasing resource provision needed to address this. This will be mitigated by robust data analysis of need annually and advice from a widening participation advisory group on an integrated strategic response across the University.

Mechanisms for progress evaluation

The plan includes milestones, deliverables, and quantitative targets, such as enrolment, progression, completion, and student satisfaction. Qualitative data from student and staff surveys will be supplemented by feedback from MAP (Maynooth University Access Programme) Student Ambassadors, Student Advisors, and Academic Advisors on the effectiveness of the actions. Regular evaluations will use a traffic light system to identify risks and co-dependencies. Mitigating strategies and controls will be implemented where key risks and challenges are identified.

Lessons learned, adaptations and improvements

Lesson learned, adaptations and improvements from evaluation of the objective will be actioned through a culture of continuous improvement in the institution, with clear lines of reporting and responsibility at UE for delivery of the Strategic Plan and strategic actions. Strategic Plan progress is monitored by Governing Authority and reported at Academic Council, as appropriate. Reports will document progress and recommend good practice.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 3

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.1	**Proportion (%) of new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas**	MU SRS, HEA SRS and System Performance (SP) Dashboard[5]	Quantitative	2020/21: 12%	Match or exceed average, all HEIs (11% in 2020/21)	**12% (441/ 3,676)**	**12% (452/ 3,766)**	**12% (464/ 3,866)**	**12% (476/ 3,966)**	**Maintain baseline of 12%**
3.2	**Proportion (%) of mature new entrants from disadvantaged areas as a % of all disadvantaged new entrants**	MU SRS, HEA SRS and SP Dashboard	Quantitative	2020/21: 8%	Maintain % relative to average, all HEIs (10% in 2020/21)	**8%**	**8%**	**8%**	8%	**Maintain baseline of 8%**
3.3	**Proportion (%) of new entrants with a disability**	Equal Access Survey (EAS) reported on HEA SP Dashboard	Quantitative	2022/23: 10.9% (384/ 3,533)	Progress towards average, all HEIs (13.9% in 2022/ 23). NAP target by 2028 is 16%	**11% (404/ 3,676)**	11.5% (433/ 3,766)	**12% (464/ 3,866)**	**12.5% (496/ 3,966)**	**1.6 p.p. increase on baseline**
3.4	**Number of Irish Traveller new entrants[6]**	EAS reported on HEA SP Dashboard	Quantitative	2022/23: ▮	Average, all HEIs (0.1% in 2022/ 23). NAP target by 2028 is 0.32%	**+4**	**Maintain increase**	**+1**	**Maintain increase**	**+5**

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[5] For 3.1 and 3.2, reporting is dependent on accessing HEA Deprivation Data.

[6] The level of disaggregation of data disseminated publicly is subject to data protection considerations. Data disaggregated to a level which may allow individuals to be identified (even indirectly) is not disseminated publicly. See the HEA Statistics: Privacy, Data Protection and Disclosure Control.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.5	**Proportion (%) new entrants from FET**	MU SRS and HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 4.9% (173/ 3,533)	Exceed average, all HEIs (4.5% in 2022/23)	**5% (184/ 3,676)**	**6% (226/ 3,766)**	**6.5% (251/ 3,866)**	**7% (278/ 3,966)**	**2.1 p.p. increase on baseline**
3.6	**Non-progression rate (%) new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas**	MU SRS HEA SRS[7]	Quantitative	2020/21: 15%	Exceed average, all HEIs SED NP (23% in 2021/22)[8] Maintain MU NP average (15% in 2021/22)	**15%**	**15%**	**14.5%**	**14%**	**1 p.p. decrease on baseline**
3.7	**Completion rate (%) new entrants from socioeconomically disadvantaged areas**	HEA SRS and System Performance Dashboard, and MU SRS[9]	Quantitative	2018/19: 64%	Not available	**67%**	**70%**	**72%**	**74%**	**10 p.p. increase on baseline**
3. 8	**Proportion (%) of students reporting supportive environments**	Student Survey.ie[10]	Quantitative	2022: 51.5%[11]	46.3%[12]	**52.5%**	**53.5%**	**54.5%**	**55.5%**	**4 p.p. increase on baseline**

[7] For 3.6, this is dependent on accessing HEA Deprivation Data.

[8] From HEA: An Analysis of Non-Progression Rates in Irish Higher Education Institutions: Key Tables February 2024 *Non-Progression-Rates-2016-17-to-2021-22-Key-Tables-1*

[9] For 3.7, reporting is dependent on accessing HEA Deprivation Data.

[10] Baseline and benchmark data is currently not available specifically for Access cohorts in the national Student Survey. We would welcome the ability to analyse student survey data by target group. We note the student survey is in a second fallow year for 2024/2025. MU will seek to track the percentage of students from target groups reporting supportive environments. Targets are marked using the 2022 baseline. If the new Student Survey includes data on Access cohorts, targets can be developed and modified.

[11] MU result in Irish Student Engagement Survey relating to supportive environments (average and "quite a bit" and "very much" across 3 categories: (1) providing support to help students academically (57.2%); (2) providing support for overall wellbeing (50.4%); and (3) being involved socially (46.8%)

[12] The benchmark figure comes from the StudentSurvey.ie trends over time nationally to 2021 under each of the 3 selected questions relating to supportive environment.

Performance Objective 4

To increase and deepen our engagement with enterprise partners to enable our strategic ambitions, support national policy objectives and enhance our societal impact.

Pillar: Engagement

Transversals: Climate & Sustainable Development; Student Success; Enterprise; Society; Region; Digital Transformation.

Rationale for Performance Objective 4

Maynooth University has a strong reputation for its authentic engagement with communities, civil society organisations, policymakers and, to a lesser but still significant extent, industry. Until recently, however, the University's tracking of engagement activities has been limited to specific initiatives. To build on this, our new *Strategic Plan 2023–28* identifies engagement as one of four pillars, committing to a comprehensive, institution-wide strategy to track, evaluate and leverage our engagement activity: "We will grow and leverage mutually beneficial partnerships in order to support our strategic objectives." The University "will take a number of steps to enhance its ability to engage … with government, enterprise and industry, community, sports and cultural organisations, alumni and the broader public, in order to build mutually beneficial relationships and amplify our joint positive impact on society."

Specifically, the plan requires partnership with industry and other stakeholders to deliver its strategy in areas including: providing students with "real-world" experiences and skills, growth in research student numbers, a new School of Health and Medicine and other demand-led programmes, research beacons in areas such as Data and Digital Transformation and Climate and Sustainability, and increased philanthropic activity. Industry partners also are key to the successful transition of our students into employment.

In identifying engagement as a pillar of our strategy, we also aligned our plans with national policy objectives and international trends. The list of relevant national polices is extensive. In the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science *State of Strategy 2021–2023*, industry engagement features heavily in the areas of talent and skills, "Connected Research System Support," "Regional Clusters," and "expertise on National Priorities including Climate Action."

Similar references to university–industry partnership are included in *Ireland's National Skills Strategy*, *Funding the Future: Investing in knowledge and skills: Ireland's competitive advantage*, and *Impact 2030* (e.g. Pillar 3.2 "Increase the breadth and depth of enterprise collaboration with the public research system" and 4.1 Talent/Students).

Ireland's *Climate Action Plan 2023* refers to the value of HEIs to Ireland's climate research and innovation ecosystem, for business and across society.

MU's focus on tracking and measuring industry engagement is well-aligned to international trends. A report of the [Oxford University-UIDP 2019 Summit](#) on University-Industry Collaboration highlights the "changing landscape for university–industry partnering," stating, "The relationship between government, universities, and industry has never received such urgent attention." This attention is partly driven by the rapid technological change facing universities and companies and the need for new models to fuel innovation. The report cites, "the growing fusion of technologies across sectors, increasingly being powered by the convergence and integration of … (STEM) and the social sciences, arts and humanities" and "the rise of big data, artificial intelligence and machine learning…creating large opportunities for innovation."

The report highlights key trends in how universities and industry are partnering, from developing local innovation ecosystems to new types of more effective consortia. It cites the integration of social sciences and humanities into university–industry partnerships and describes trends toward longer term, strategic partnerships.

Underlying Maynooth University's strategic emphasis on engagement is a recognition that we lack high-quality data on both the quantity and quality of our existing external stakeholder relationships. As such, the new strategy will establish a Partnership Office to serve as a "Front Door" to the University, enabling a two-way pipeline of engagement between MU and its external partners. The Office also will "coordinate and track the University's engagement activity to measure our progress and assemble data that advances our reputation for positive societal impact, communicated through a Maynooth University Impact Report."

We will collect and track several quantitative and qualitative metrics as a part of our strategy implementation. These include a variety of types of engagement with industry and enterprise, local and regional community partners, civic society organisations/NGOs, policymakers, alumni and donors.

However, this strategy is very much in its infancy and much of the University's engagement data is not currently centrally collated. Thus, we have selected a range of performance indicators that speak to the impact of our engagements and for which we have baseline data at this point in the process. Achievement of the Performance Objective will be measured quantitatively and qualitatively by the following indicators:

1. Number of enterprise placement partners

2. Number of research and consultancy projects funded/co-funded by enterprise partners

3. Amount of research income from industry partners

4. Number of enterprise co-funded PhDs

5. Number of participants in MU Alumni-Student Mentoring Programme

6. Number of Impact Case Studies

The University's engagement mapping exercise is now underway, and in our annual reports to the HEA, we anticipate providing a much richer, more detailed picture of both the breadth and depth of our engagement activities.

MU's decision to focus on this work will allow us to solidify and leverage our strengths as an engaged, civic university and become an exemplar model for meaningful engagement.

Our commitment to scaling up the MU Alumni-Student Mentoring Programme is based on the success of the initiative to date and our strategic plans to strengthen student engagement and employability, while tapping the enthusiasm of our graduates to stay engaged with the University. The programme pairs MU alumni volunteers working in various professions with current MU students. Through a series of online meetings throughout the year, alumni mentors provide career-focused support, inspiration and guidance to mentees to prepare them to achieve their career goals post-graduation. The programme also aims to support the networking propensity of Maynooth University students from underrepresented groups, with 30% places prioritized for students from underrepresented cohorts. To meet the 98% target increase in student mentees over the next four years, we will expand eligibility to first year students as a tool to enhance student engagement. We also will streamline the mentor matching process, improve mentor diversity, and effectively manage mentor relationships to ensure the programme's success and growth. The target is also based on an exceptionally strong response rate from alumni interested in participating in the programme.

It is worth noting that across the Irish higher education sector and beyond, there is no agreement on how best to measure effective engagement. Engagement is inherently broad and difficult to measure. This is illustrated across the literature and in a survey of Irish higher education documents, such as the litany of potential metrics included in the Campus Engage *Measuring Higher Education Civic and Community Engagement – A Support Framework*, and the OECD 2017 report, *Enhancing Higher Education System Performance: Report on Benchmarking Higher Education System Performance: Conceptual Framework and Data*, which states:

"*244. Collecting data on engagement across the span of performance will be challenging due to its heterogeneous character and …. has been less studied than education and research. As a result, much of the focus of engagement in higher education has been on the processes (or activities) rather than inputs, outputs and outcomes.*"

The report also states that benchmarking higher education performance "*may prove difficult initially…. However, identification of the areas where data is limited or missing is an important part of the benchmarking higher education system performance process.*"

The new MU strategy begins to assess impact and outputs as well as activities. Our ambition is to use data to both assess our level of engagement with industry and leverage it to progress our institutional strategy, including areas aligned with national priorities and global challenges. We feel engagement comes naturally to us as an institution, and with appropriate focus and resources we can excel as a national leader in this area.

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

The Vice-President External Affairs will oversee the management, collection and reporting of performance objective data. Once established, the new Partnership Office will perform these functions centrally. Industry engagement is a cross-university function, with key spokes across the departments and with the Partnership Office designed as the connecting hub. An advisory group will be established to oversee and support the progress of this performance objective.

In 2024/25, the Partnership Office will create a tiered framework for evaluating our partnerships, based on their level of involvement with the University. Therefore, we will be measuring additional metrics to track the quality of the partnerships. The goal will be to move partnerships along a spectrum of engagement.

Key milestones include:

- completion of an initial 12-month engagement mapping exercise (an appointed *Senior Project Manager – Engagement and Partnerships* began in November)

- launch of the Partnership Office (including a "digital front door" website that signposts examples and contact points)

- publication of a Maynooth University Impact Report

- creation of an Engagement Data Dashboard

These milestones will be supported by a staffed Partnership Office, an integrated client relationship management tool, an in-house data dashboard harnessing the strengths of MU's All-Ireland Research Observatory, staff awards recognising engagement, and other plans in development. The University also has approved the appointment of a Director of Strategic Partnerships and Engagement.

Evaluating progress and incorporating lessons learned

To evaluate performance of the objective over the lifetime of the framework, we will review targets annually and adjust accordingly, ensuring key internal partners are aware of targets and have opportunities to collectively workshop barriers and request supports, with mid-year check-ins. Surveys with external partners and internal colleagues, mid-way through the framework, will inform our progress.

Opportunities, challenges, and risks

The collation of data can provide significant opportunities. With better knowledge of existing enterprise partners and the nature of those partnerships, including potential overlap across the institution, we can deepen existing engagements and forge new connections. Secondly, a structured, resourced approach to industry engagement will create a central knowledge point for staff seeking industry partners.

Challenges include embedding a data capture system and building trust. These issues will be addressed through staff involvement in the initial mapping exercise, and then demonstrating the value of the office and celebrating successful industry-MU partnerships via communications, case studies, impact reports and awards.

External risks include any seismic changes to external research funding schemes or incentives for partnership, a shift in focus, or excess time spent on potential external compliance/reporting metrics that do not align with University strategy.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 4

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
4.1	**Number of enterprise placement partners**[13]	Careers & Employability Service and other units (partially centralised)	Quantitative	2023/24: 211	Not available	**221**	**232**	**255**	**280**	**280 unique partners** **33% increase on baseline**
4.2	**Number of research and consultancy projects funded/co-funded by enterprise partners**[14]	Research Development Office / pilot Engagement Dashboard	Quantitative	2022/23: 116	Not available	**122**	**133**	**140**	**147**	**542 projects over 4 years** **27% increase on baseline**
4.3	**Amount (€M) of research income from industry partners**	Research Development Office	Quantitative	2021/22: €1.8M	Not available	**€2.4M**	**€2.7M**	**€3.0M**	**€3.5M**	**€11.6M over 4 years**
4.4	**Number of enterprise co-funded PhDs**	Research Development Office	Quantitative	2022/23: 6	Not available	**8**	**10**	**15**	**20**	**53 over 4 years**

[13] This number refers to partners in industry/social enterprise/NGO etc. but does not include all placements, such as teaching placements in schools. It also refers to individual partners, noting that one partner could host multiple students.

[14] This includes projects funded or co-funded by enterprise, which includes industry (MNC, SMEs), civic and civil society partners, local and national government departments and agencies (excluding funding agencies and the European Commission), and NGOs. It also includes research consultancy to enterprise.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
4.5	**Number of participants in MU Alumni-Student Mentoring Programme**	Development & Alumni Relations Office / Careers & Employability Service	Quantitative	2022/23: 41 2023/24: 53	Not available	**63**	**75**	**89**	**105**	**332 over 4 years** **98% increase on baseline**
4.6	**Number of Impact Case Studies**	MU	Qualitative	0	Not available	**3**	**6**	**9**	**12**	**30 over 4 years**

Section 3: Matrix and Signatures

Framework Matrix

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

Signatures

On behalf of Maynooth University

Professor Eeva Leinonen
President
Tuesday, 3 December 2024

Dr Mary Canning
Chair of the Governing Authority
Tuesday, 3 December 2024

On behalf of the Higher Education Authority

Dr Alan Wall
Chief Executive Officer
Tuesday, 3 December 2024