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

OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Preamble

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

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

The HEA and University of Galway acknowledge that policy underlying some or all of this Performance Agreement is subject to review from time to time by the HEA or Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The HEA and University of Galway 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.
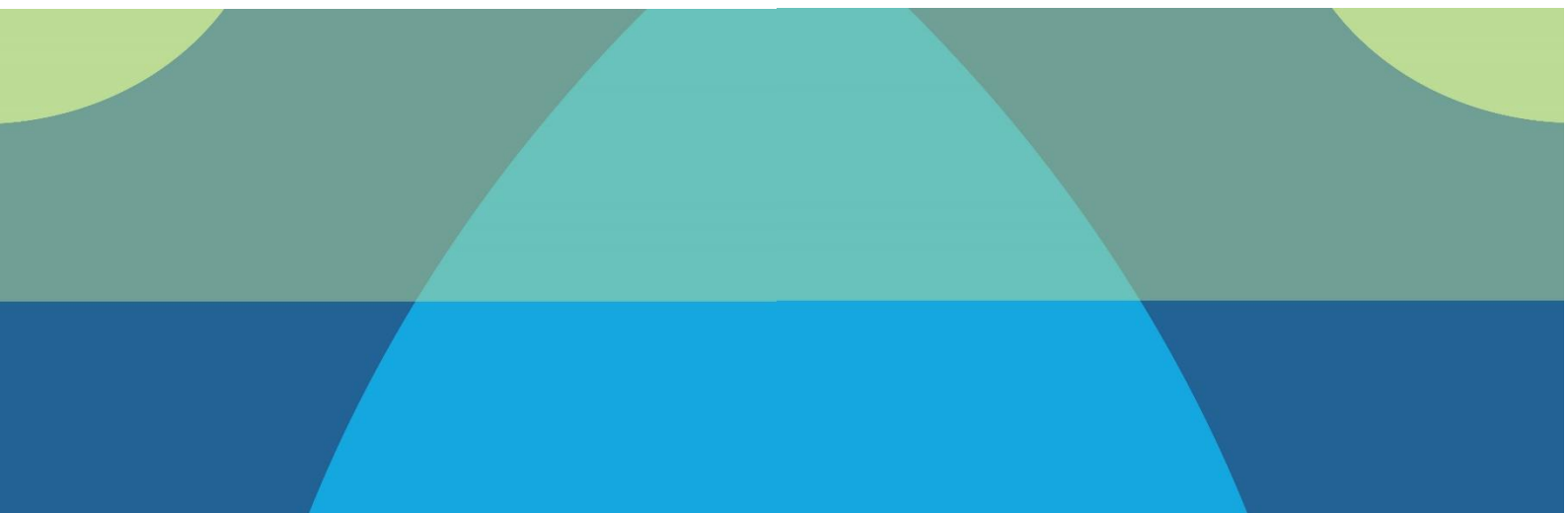
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Performance Agreement 2024–2028

Section 1: Context

Overview of the institution and its context

University of Galway has been inspiring minds since 1845 as a research-led university. Today, our student body numbers almost 20,000 students, who come to Galway from across Ireland and from 122 countries across the world. Our staff numbers approximately 3,000, with one-in-five colleagues coming from overseas.

From our riverside campus in the heart of Galway city, we reach out to the world through our network of research collaborations with over 4,200 institutions in 136 countries, and through our alumni network of over 100,000 graduates globally.

We are proud of the contribution we make towards building Galway's reputation as an internationally recognised centre of excellence for MedTech, data science, culture and creativity, climate and oceans, public policy, and innovation. Since 2020, our research has generated 13 spin-out companies, creating employment and investment in Galway and the surrounding region.

We serve our region with distinction, supported by our satellite campuses in Gaeltacht communities in An Cheathrú Rua, Carna and Gaoth Dobhair, in our Medical Academies in hospitals in Galway, Mayo, Sligo and Donegal, and in our Shannon College facilities in Co. Clare.

Our University's mission is firmly focused on the public good. We are here for our students, our society and our planet. University of Galway is a research-driven university for our time, dedicated to nurturing global citizens and addressing key questions facing the world. Our University is distinctive for our transformative and impactful teaching, research and innovation, our inclusive student experience, the unique bilingualism of our campus, and our passion for culture and creativity. By engaging in our region, nationally and across the world, we deliver sustainable societal change.

The University is in the final year of its current Strategic Plan, *Shared Vision, Shaped by Values, 2020–2025*. The plan is structured around four core values: Respect, Openness, Sustainability and Excellence. A year-long process to develop the next Strategic Plan is currently underway, with the new strategy to be launched, following consultation, in early 2025. As the timelines for the strategic planning process and the Performance Agreement development process are not aligned, it may be necessary to modify some of the indicators established in the Performance Agreement at the end of the first year of reporting, to reflect targets set for the new Strategic Plan.

Profile of the University

Tables 1 and 2, below, show the breakdown of student and staff numbers at University of Galway.

HEA Programme Description	Full-Time	Part-Time	Distance	Grand Total
Undergraduate Honours Degree	12,498	222		12,720
Undergraduate Diploma		607	11	618
Undergraduate Occasional	884	6		890
Certificate		435		435
Professional Training Qualification (Undergraduate)		73		73
Postgraduate Certificate	65	143	1	209
Masters Taught (Postgraduate)	2,323	395	45	2,763
Masters Research (Postgraduate)	48	13		61
PhD (Postgraduate)	1,013	113		1,126
Professional Training Qualification (Postgraduate)		192		192
Higher Diploma	74	43		117
Postgraduate Diploma	156	304		460
Foundation (Undergraduate)	66	31		97
Access (Undergraduate)		8		8
	17,127	**2,585**	**57**	**19,769**

Table 1: Student numbers by cohort for 2023/24 [Source: HEA Return]

Staff Cohort	Headcount
Academic	1,288
Support	1,085
Research	718
Grand Total	3,091

Table 2: Staff numbers by cohort for March 2024 [Source: HEA Return]

Approach to the development of the Performance Agreement

At present, University of Galway is in the final year of its current strategy, *Shared Vision: Shaped by Values, 2020–2025*, and the planning process is underway for the next Strategic Plan. As noted above, the development of this Performance Agreement ran in parallel to a strategic planning process, with the Performance Agreement constituting the first major input to the Strategic Plan. The parallel development of the Performance Agreement and the new Strategic Plan is set out in Figure 1, below.

Additional inputs to the development of both the Performance Agreement and the Strategic Plan include an extensive Reputation Audit by Times Higher Education Consultancy to understand how our University's academic reputation is perceived by its key stakeholders, as well as significant work in determining strategic opportunities and risks. The Reputation Audit includes a benchmarking exercise with six national and international universities of similar size and profile to University of Galway.

Extensive consultation on the Performance Agreement with staff, students and other stakeholders, internal and external, has taken place over the last six months.
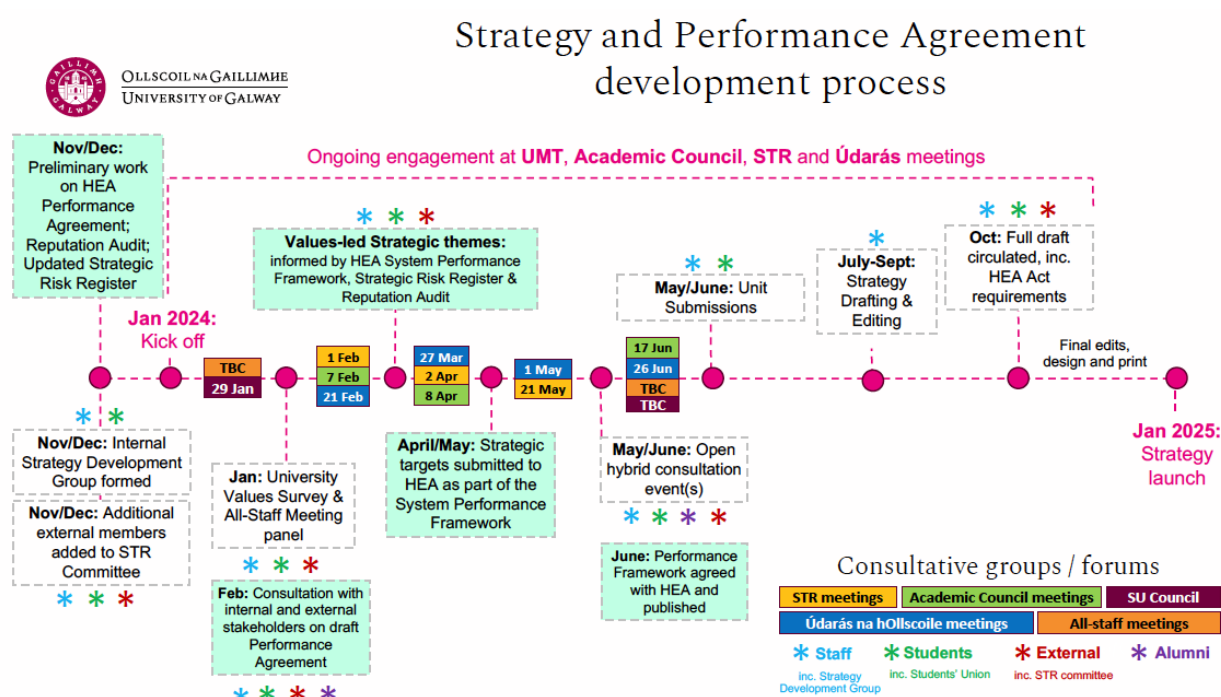
Figure 1: Overview of the Strategy and Performance Agreement development process

Selection of indicators

The selection of indicators of success for performance objectives is linked to the development of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the current and the next Strategic Plan. There is significant overlap between the indicators chosen for the Performance Agreement and those included in the current Strategic Plan, and it is anticipated that many of these indicators will carry through to the next Plan

also. In general, the majority of targets set are based on quantitative data sources and existing data sources are used to measure progress, though in a small number of cases, baselines are to be established and data sources developed over the course of the framework. Data selected is generally benchmarked nationally with other Irish HEIs (such as undergraduate progression rates) or benchmarked internationally (such as results from the European Commission's *Horizon Europe* research funding programme).

Climate, environment and sustainability

Sustainability is one of University of Galway's core values and consideration of climate and environment informs every aspect of our strategic planning, including the development of our response to the System Performance Framework, particularly under the Engagement pillar and also under Teaching & Learning. University of Galway's Sustainability Strategy to 2025 sets out a vision of being a leader in sustainability by embedding sustainability in our culture, operational policies, and governance structures, and by empowering our communities to be champions of sustainability. University of Galway is a signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Accord, has been named an SDG Champion by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, and is currently ranked **34th in the world (and number 1 in Ireland)** for sustainable development by THE Impact Ranking. The University has also received a Gold rating from the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS), and the Green Campus designation from An Taisce.

The University Management Team (UMT) has adopted a Climate Action and Sustainability Policy 'to embed carbon management into all University operations and processes [and] lead the transition to a sustainable future by embedding the Sustainable Development Goals'. Our Community & University Sustainability Partnership (CUSP) steers our sustainability efforts. The CUSP team is a multi-disciplinary team of over 30 students and staff from across the campus and community partners, all working together with the common aim of establishing the University as a leading institutional model for sustainability. The implementation of the Sustainability Strategy is led by the Director of Sustainability and the Sustainability Office (5.5 FTE). Progress on the Sustainability Strategy is reported annually through the governance structures and through many reporting and certification schemes, including the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate, STARS, THE Impact and Green Campus. These mechanisms enable the measurement and mitigation of sustainability risks and the balancing of stakeholder interests.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is a core pillar of University of Galway's planning process and is incorporated into the University's strategy under the Respect value. EDI considerations inform our response to all four pillars of the System Performance Framework but are particularly amplified through our performance objectives and indicators under the Engagement pillar.

Learning from evaluation processes

The learnings from the previous cycles of Strategy and Performance Dialogue have informed the selection of objectives and indicators and the approach to developing this Performance Agreement. For example, one specific learning from the first two cycles is the importance of setting targets over

which the University has direct control, as opposed to targets which have significant external dependencies. In previous cycles, in the area of research outputs, a target was set for Field-Weighted Citation score, which is a very important indicator of quality but one which is not within the direct control of the University, and one which can take a long time to influence. In this cycle, the focus has shifted to quality of research outputs as demonstrated through a higher percentage of publications in top-quality journals, which is a more meaningful and actionable indicator for individual academics.

A further learning relates to the importance of ensuring that ownership for delivery of targets is shared across all units that contribute to the delivery of a target. For example, in setting a target for international student numbers, the first two cycles of self-evaluation have taught us the importance of a coordinated approach to the delivery of this target across all units, with a shared responsibility for delivery.

As outlined above, the Performance Agreement is being developed in parallel with the development of a new Strategic Plan and so has been informed by progress reports and evaluations of performance against the last Strategic Plan. Findings from the QQI Cinnte Review and QQI Annual Quality Reviews, together with results of Athena Swan self-assessment surveys and consultation in the preparation of a Race Equality Action Plan, have all informed the selection of objectives and indicators in the Agreement.

Structures in place for evaluation

The Performance Agreement is managed by the University Management Team and developed on behalf of the UMT by the Secretary for Governance & Academic Affairs, in partnership with all UMT members and with the Director of Strategy Implementation. From UMT, learnings from previous cycles of Strategic Dialogue and evaluation are cascaded across the institution by individual College Deans, Vice Presidents and Heads of Support Service areas, who consult with their units and bring feedback on the suggested indicators and targets back to the Secretary for Governance & Academic Affairs and to UMT.

Governance of the Performance Agreement is provided by Údarás na hOllscoile, University of Galway's Governing Authority, through its Standing, Strategic Planning and Governance Committee. The Committee has engaged with the development of the Performance Agreement throughout the drafting process and, will provide oversight of its implementation throughout the period of the agreement. The final draft of the Performance Agreement was approved by Údarás na hOllscoile on 26th June 2024.

Academic Council, as the governance body for academic matters in the University, also played an important role in reviewing the draft Performance Agreement, providing feedback and ultimately making a recommendation to Údarás na hOllscoile on its adoption.

Consultation with students was led by the Students' Union, with the Students' Union Executive and Student Council playing an important role in gathering student feedback. A consultation session took

place with Student Council in late January, with excellent engagement from students on the performance objectives proposed.

Ongoing monitoring of performance against the Performance Agreement will be undertaken by UMT and overseen by a combination of Academic Council and the Standing, Strategic Planning and Governance Committee, on behalf of Údarás na hOllscoile. Annual self-evaluation reports will be approved by UMT and Údarás na hOllscoile before being submitted to the HEA.

Data collection and evaluation processes

The key data sources and evaluation processes used to measure performance against the indicators set include existing data sources such as:

- Statutory HEA returns (e.g. progression data, attainment data)

- Survey results, including results of the annual Irish Survey of Student Engagement and Athena Swan self-assessment surveys

- Research funding data available through the European Commission

- Research output data available through SciVal

- Innovation and knowledge transfer data available through Knowledge Transfer Ireland

- Data related to sustainability targets, which are monitored using internal data systems and through SEAI monitoring.

In a small number of cases, baseline data is not yet available, and data sources are under development (e.g. baseline to be established for Irish Traveller and care-experienced students).

Additionally, the recent decision to pause the Irish Survey of Student Engagement for a second year presents challenges for establishing indicators under Performance Objective 1 (indicators 1.3 and 1.4). Student engagement is a key priority for University of Galway, so we have decided to leave these indicators in place in anticipation of the return of ISSE in year 2 of the Performance Agreement.

Over the five-year period of the framework, two important developments are anticipated in University of Galway's data collection and evaluation capabilities: the ongoing development of Dante, the University's data warehouse, and the development of a new Student Record System, including new data integration, analysis and reporting tools.

Section 2: Performance Objectives

Performance Objective 1

Enabling Student Success: **To support our students to fully engage with formal and informal learning opportunities, while improving our approaches to teaching and assessment, which will be reflected in improved student progression and student satisfaction with their experience.**

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Transversals: Student Success.

Rationale for Performance Objective 1

Alignment with institutional and national strategy

This performance objective is multi-faceted, addressing a number of dimensions of student success, including retention, progression and aspects of student engagement as measured by student surveys, as proxies for student success. We recognise that student success cannot be measured through engagement, progression and completion rates alone but, post-Covid, these are key areas of priority for our University. Our Student Success Strategy has a more holistic focus and defines student success more broadly, as follows: 'Student success at the University of Galway means empowering all students to explore and achieve their academic, personal, career, and citizenship goals'.

This performance objective also addresses specific aspects of student academic success by setting goals to review and reform approaches to assessment and to develop students' assessment and feedback literacies in the context of academic integrity, technological development, assessment for learning, programme-level outcomes and the development of ethical and professional values.

This performance objective is aligned with the University's Strategy to 2025, *Shared Vision, Shaped by Values*: 'We will support and enhance student transition and progression by developing and implementing a Student Success Strategy, and by investing in new processes and systems, through the Student Digital Pathways programme, that meet student needs and future-proof our university' (AE02 — Flagship Action under value of Excellence).

The objective is also aligned with our (forthcoming) **Student Success Strategy** commitments to enhanced governance and partnership, improved onboarding and transitions support, student health, wellbeing and belonging, scaffolding academic success, future-proofing, and future-readiness. The Strategy will set out a number of actions designed to improve student progression and satisfaction (see below).

Performance Objective 1 is further aligned to our **Academic Strategy 2021–2026**, which includes commitments to curricular renewal and reform, improved teaching and learning spaces (including the development of a new Learning Commons), professional development of teaching staff, and more (see below).

Finally, Performance Objective 1 is aligned to our **Sustainability Strategy 2021–2025**, which includes objectives to develop and implement a Healthy Campus Charter/Framework.

Performance Objective 1 is aligned with the following national strategies and policies:

- National Access Plan 2022–2028

- Higher Education Healthy Campus Charter and Framework

- National Skills Strategy 2025

- National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework

Evidence base for performance objective:

The primary evidence base for student engagement targets is the results of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (indicators 1.3 and 1.4). Given the decision to pause the ISSE Survey for 2024 and 2025, data for these years will be taken from University of Galway's internal Student Voice Survey. There are likely to be some issues of comparability across years and benchmarked national data will not be available while the survey is paused.
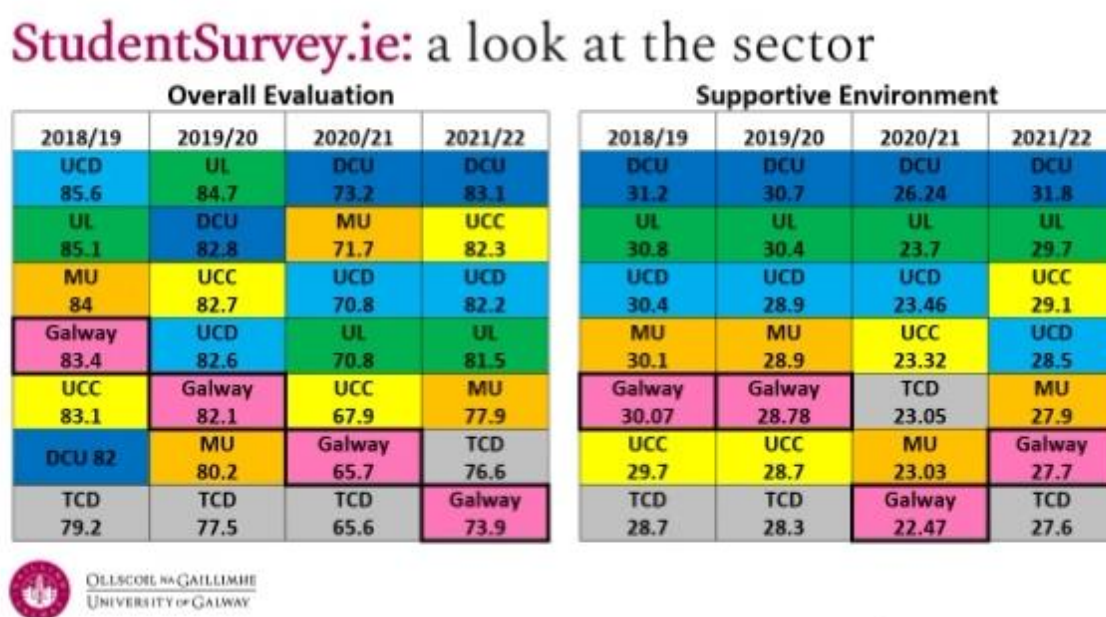
Figure 2: Selected results (Overall Evaluation and Supportive Environment) of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement between 2018/19 and 2021/22, for the traditional universities

The evidence base for progression indicators is the HEA student number returns. From 2016/17 to 2018/19, University of Galway had been making steady progress in reducing our non-progression rates, bringing us into line with the sectoral averages. However, the impact of the Covid-19 public health emergency on student engagement and on student progression was significant, resulting in a reversal of the positive gains made in the earlier years. This area represents a priority area of focus for the University. See Table 3, below, for comparative data.

	Year 1 Non-Progression Rates					
	2016/17	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**	**2021/22**
University of Galway	10.0%	10.1%	8.4%	6.4%	9.0%	11.3%
DCU	8.0%	10.0%	7.0%	5.0%	6.0%	9.0%
Maynooth University	12.0%	13.0%	11.0%	9.0%	12.0%	15.0%
TCD	8.0%	7.0%	7.0%	5.0%	7.0%	9.0%
UCC	6.0%	7.0%	6.0%	5.0%	8.0%	10.0%
UCD	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	6.0%	7.0%	9.0%
UL	10.0%	9.0%	8.0%	5.0%	10.0%	11.0%
Average of 7 Universities	**8.0%**	**9.0%**	**8.0%**	**6.0%**	**8.0%**	**10.0%**
University of Galway New Entrants	3,310	3,320	3,215	3,290	3,395	3,370
University of Galway **Year 2 Non-Progression**		7.1%	7.3%	4.6%	7.0%	7.4%

Table 3: Comparative non-progression rates in the traditional Irish universities [Source: HEA Student Returns]

Level of performance objective:

Performance Objective 1 represents **continuing development in a priority area**. It should be acknowledged that the disruption to the student experience during the Covid-19 emergency has had a very significant impact on progress against the indicators selected, so the targets set here aim to bring the student experience back to pre-Covid performance levels.

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

A broad suite of actions has been identified across institutional strategies to enhance student learning, wellbeing and development experiences, including actions identified through the Student Success Strategy and institutional and College-level plans developed in response to StudentSurvey.ie results.

The Dean of Students and the Deputy President and Registrar are the executive leads at UMT level for actions under Performance Objective 1. Working in partnership with the College Deans and Vice Deans for Teaching and Learning, a new Student Experience Committee and a new Centre for Student Success will implement actions towards the attainment of this objective.

Our **Academic Strategy 2021–2026** contains a suite of actions designed to enhance the student learning experience, including commitments to:

- Expand **peer-assisted learning** opportunities for all students, with a particular focus on first-year undergraduates

- Develop comprehensive, integrated **student learning supports**

- Renew and reform **curricula** to explore and identify opportunities for work-based learning, internationalisation, universal design and inclusivity, flexibility, and graduate attributes and skills

- Review and enhance **assessment practices**, and renew focus on **assessment and feedback literacy**

- Improve the **professional development framework** for staff supporting teaching and learning

- Develop new, and improve existing, **teaching and learning spaces**, including the delivery of a new Learning Commons/Library and digital learning environments and tools

- Enhance opportunities for students to demonstrate their **skills and experience** through curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular achievements and awards

- Embed the **Sustainable Development Goals** in our curricular and co-curricular offerings.

Additional actions designed to enhance student progression and satisfaction are outlined in our (forthcoming) **Student Success Strategy**, which includes commitments to:

- Strengthen **student partnership** (with, but not limited to, the Students' Union) to deliver an improved holistic student experience

- Strengthen **partnership between academic and professional services** to foster student success, including introducing improved processes for responding to indicators of student failure or withdrawal risk

- Review **student-facing policies** to ensure policies are fit for purpose and accessible

- Ensure a **strong start** for all new and returning students through the development of resources and programmes aimed at all new entrants and continuing students

- Build on our Student Journey Map, ensuring that **information and supports are aligned with known transitions** across the student life cycle

- Implement the **Healthy Campus** initiative, incorporating a major student wellbeing and belonging initiative and a programme of community events at our Galway and satellite campuses

- Increase student participation in **extra-curricular activities**, with a focus on boosting the participation of underrepresented groups

- Further embed principles of **universal design and inclusive practice**

- Provide more **non-commercial social spaces and diverse study spaces** for students

- Strengthen processes for gathering, reporting, analysing, and responding to **student feedback**

- Review policy and processes for providing **regular and timely feedback to students**

- Enhance the future-readiness of our students through sharpening our focus on employability, entrepreneurship, and global citizenship, including through the introduction of a University Skills Passport (USP).

Additionally, assessment reform and academic integrity will form part of a holistic approach to enhancing student success. Concerns about the integrity of particular types of assessments, arising from both the experiences of emergency remote teaching during the Covid pandemic period and the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), have led University of Galway to take an early leadership position in the area of academic integrity (first institution to employ an Academic Integrity Officer; host of major international conference) and to connect this with the more positive development of more authentic and aligned approaches to assessment of student learning and demonstration of achievement.

University of Galway has established an Academic Integrity Unit within its Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching (CELT), led by the Academic Integrity Officer. Specific actions include the establishment of an Academic Misconduct Register (to not only manage cases, but also provide indications of types and volume of particular infractions) and the development of a comprehensive suite of guidelines (including effective responses to the advent and impact of Generative AI), support materials, and professional development opportunities.

A full review of approaches to assessment across all Colleges, Schools and programmes will also be undertaken by the Teaching & Learning Committee, led by the Deputy President and Registrar, and a strategy for revised approaches to assessment developed. Key supports for this are already being put in place, including a toolkit for such reviews and identification of possible actions. Opportunities exist for rich sectoral-level cooperation through the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) and other networks, including identifying scope for collaborative resource development, sharing experience of systems and technologies, etc.

Challenges and Risks

There are challenges which may impact the successful implementation of some, or all, of the actions listed above, and the achievement of the targets set out below. These challenges include:

- **Resource constraints:** for example, staffing and staff capacity, space and timetabling constraints, and availability of funding.

- **Buy-in / competing priorities**: With so many demands on academic and professional services units, it could be challenging to achieve the level of focus and buy-in required to make meaningful changes to our learning, teaching and assessment environments and to the wider student experience.

- **Culture:** In some cases, a long-term cultural shift will be required to effect change; for example, including students as partners in learning and decision-making, redefining our understanding of full-time study, or moving away from deficient approaches to diversity.

- **Changing student demographics**: Our students are increasingly drawn from traditionally underrepresented groups, and often face barriers to their success.

- **Staff and student turnover**: The success of many of the initiatives listed will depend on effective staff and student leadership, and the stability and continuity of institutional priorities.

- **Systems and processes**: Delays to the development of new systems and processes (for example, timeframes for procurement and systems integration) may stall progress on some of our planned initiatives.

- **Structural barriers:** Securing consistency of practice and integrated planning across a complex and diverse organisation with differing disciplinary contexts will be a challenge.

The risks posed by not mitigating against these challenges include:

- Low or reduced student satisfaction

- Low or reduced student wellbeing and belonging

- Student withdrawal or failure

- Legal action as a result of failure to comply with national or international requirements.

All such potential risks will be identified, with appropriate mitigation measures, in the University's Risk Registers. Benchmarking with appropriate comparator institutions will be undertaken where appropriate in each area of activity.

Performance against indicators — including annual reviews of retention and progression data — will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Student Success Committee and reported to Academic Council.

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	**Progression rate (%) new entrants**	HEA SRS and Non-Progression and Completion Dashboard	Quantitative	2022/23: 88.7% 2,954 students progressed of 3,330	Above average progression of all Irish universities	**89%** **of 3,330 students**	**90%** **of 3,330 students**	**91%** **of 3,330 students**	**92%** **of 3,330 students**	**92%** **3.3 p.p. increase on baseline**
1.2	**Progression rate (%) Year 2 entrants**	Internal monitoring processes	Quantitative	2022/23: 92.6% 2,889 students progressed of 3,120	At national average level of all Irish universities (no national comparator benchmark data available for Year 2 cohort)	**92.8%** **of 3,130 students**	**93%** **of 3,163 students**	**93.5%** **of 3,196 students**	**94%** **of 3,230 students**	**1.4 p.p. increase on baseline**
1.3	**Score in the Supportive Environment index of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement**	Student Voice survey and Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	2023: 29.4	National average of traditional university sector[1] (29.8 in 2023)	**29.7[2]**	**30**	**30.3**	**30.5**	**At the national average of traditional universities for Supportive Environment**

[1] The traditional university sector in this instance includes the following universities: University of Galway, UCD, TCD, UCC, UL, Maynooth University, DCU.

[2] Student satisfaction score in University of Galway's internal Student Voice survey will be used as an interim measure, pending reinstatement of Studentsurvey.ie.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
1.4	**Score in the Effective Teaching Practices index of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement**	Student Voice[3] survey and Student Survey.ie	Quantitative	2023: 32.4	National average of traditional university sector (32.7 in 2023)	**33**[4]	**33.7**	**34.4**	**35**	**At the national average of traditional universities for Effective Teaching Practices**

[3] Please note that the Student Voice survey measures different aspects of the student experience to ISSE and uses a different scoring system. While it will provide an interim measure of student satisfaction, direct year-on-year comparisons with the baseline ISSE scores will not be possible until the ISSE survey is relaunched.

[4] Effective Teaching Practices score (or equivalent) in University of Galway's internal Student Voice survey will be used an interim measure, pending reinstatement of Studentsurvey.ie.

Performance Objective 2

Becoming a Global University: **To become a truly global university with a diverse student population that enriches our teaching and learning environment and enhances the quality, reach and impact of our research.**

Pillar: Teaching & Learning

Transversals: International.

Rationale for Performance Objective 2

This performance objective aligns with our Global Galway Project and with the University's Strategic Plan 2020–2025. The Global Galway Project, which echoes our institutional Strategic Plan and key performance metrics, articulates our ambition to increase our international student population, both through increasing the proportion of international students and through diversifying the regions of the world from which we attract students.

This performance objective is aligned with *Irish Educated, Globally Connected — An International Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016–2020* and with *Global Citizens 2030, Ireland's International Talent and Innovation Strategy*. The latter strategy highlights the importance for Ireland's economy of a global talent pipeline, and the need for multinational, multicultural and diverse workplaces.

Global Citizens 2030 also highlights the strategic importance of the European Universities alliances. University of Galway is a member of the ten-university ENLIGHT alliance, which raises our institutional profile and influence at European and national levels and provides a route for a diversity of educational, research and development opportunities for students and staff.

Evidence base

Academic literature highlights the role of diversity in the higher education student population in engendering intercultural awareness and tolerance[5] and in supporting the civic agendas of universities[6].

Baseline data on full-time international student numbers was taken from 2019 and benchmarked against counterpart universities — indicating a lower proportion of international students than similar Irish universities.

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[5] Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S. & Gurin, G. (2002) Diversity in Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes. Harvard Educational Review 72 (3), 330-367.

[6] Lamie, J. & Gore, T. (2021) The civic agenda and the globalised university: conflicting or compatible? In *The evolution of transnational education: pathways, globalisation and emerging trends*. Edited by C Hill, J Lamie & T Gore. eBook ISBN 9781003225386.

Diversity of the student population was measured as the total number of countries from which students join the university and the numbers joining from each of these countries — indicating a skewed distribution with high numbers from very few (three) overseas countries and then a long tail with very few, often 1 student, from 100+ countries.

Level of performance objective

This objective is a **continuing development of a priority area**. Growth in international student numbers, recruited from a wider range of countries, is a priority to diversify our student population and to reduce risk around sudden drops in international student fee income due to global shifts and crises.

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

University of Galway has made significant investment in international student recruitment in the last three years. This investment is targeted at both growing and diversifying the international student population. Resourcing has been used to invest in greater overseas recruitment representation, expansion of the agent network, more targeted marketing strategies and improved customer relations management.

The executive lead is the Vice President International, who reports on progress to the University Management Team, the International Committee (which reports to Academic Council), and, in the governance structures, to Údarás na hOllscoile, via both the Standing and Strategic Planning Committee (which oversees strategy implementation) and the Finance and Resource Committee.

Targets were compiled through discussions with our four Colleges, overseas representatives and agent networks to determine the level of demand within the University, as well as likely future trends for international recruitment and mobility over the next four years. This information was also reviewed against the University's own capacity to support international students, including in areas such as accommodation and student services.

Challenges and Risks

Internal challenges around the admissions processes for Postgraduate Taught applications and offer-making behaviours are risks to the growth and diversification of international students. External challenges include both the regulatory frameworks for working with overseas service providers and the volatility of global markets and geopolitical relationships.

Actions being taken to mitigate these risks include investment in our admissions software systems and a review of the benefits of a more centralised admissions process with increased monitoring and data reporting functions. Additionally, the development of a recruitment strategy which supports the diversification of the countries from which we recruit international students is planned, to reduce dependency on a small number of key countries.

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 international students (non-EU full-time fee-paying)**[7]	Student registration data	Quantitative	2023/24: 1,789 (10.9%)	No HEI comparison data as this is an internal definition	**2,019 (12.3%)**	**2,092 (12.7%)**	**2,092 (12.7%)**	**2,092 (12.7%)**	**Increase of 303 international students** **1.8 p.p. increase on baseline**
2.2	**Proportion (%) of full-time students from outside of the Island of Ireland (based on domicile)**[8]	Student registration data, HEA SRS	Quantitative	2022/23: 17.6% (2,895)	National average is 17.8% for 2022/23 for 7 traditional universities (Source: HEA SRS data) Target is to exceed national average for traditional universities	**18.5% (3,040)**	**19% (3,122)**	**19.5% (3,205)**	**20% (3,287)**	**2.4 p.p. increase on baseline**

[7] The denominator for this metric is the total full-time student population for the University of Galway; for the per annum targets this denominator has been assumed as static from 2023/24 until 2027/28.

[8] Indicator 2.2 relates to the percentage of outside of the Island of Ireland full-time students (based on domicile) expressed as a percentage of the total student body. The assumption here is that the total student body stays the same as it was in AY 2022/23. The University is currently undertaking a planning exercise in relation to the size and make-up of the student body over the next five years, as part of a strategic planning process, so this assumption may change in response to the outcome of that wider University planning exercise.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
2.3	**Number of countries from which five or more international students register (outside Island of Ireland)**	Student registration data	Quantitative	2023/24: 30 (28% of the 106 countries from which students registered)	No national benchmarking data available	**30 (28% of 107)**	**31 (29% of 108)**	**32 (29% of 109)**	**33 (30% of 110)**	**Increase from 30 to 33 countries**
2.4	**Number of semester/ full-year (FY) outbound student mobilities (undergraduate headcount)**	Outbound mobility captured data	Quantitative	2023/24: 785	No national benchmarking data available	**832**	**882**	**935**	**1,000**	**Increase on baseline of 215 outbound students p.a.**
2.5	**Number of semester/ FY inbound student mobilities (undergraduate headcount)**	Erasmus, international exchange and study abroad (fee-paying) captured data	Quantitative	2023/24: 882	No national benchmarking data available	**935**	**991**	**1,050**	**1,114**	**Increase on baseline of 232 inbound students p.a.**
2.6	**New ENLIGHT Joint Education Initiatives involving University of Galway with at least two ENLIGHT partners**	ENLIGHT partnership data	Quantitative	2023/24: 24	University of Galway and ENLIGHT partner data	**10**	**9**	**11**	**14**	**68 Joint Education Initiatives with ENLIGHT partners (including baseline) over the current funding period 2023–2027**

Performance Objective 3

European Research Excellence: **To produce research that is recognised as being excellent, transformative and relevant to societal and economic needs, and to train the next generation of researchers, with a particular focus on increasing the quality, impact and international reach of our research.**

Pillar: Research & Innovation

Transversals: International; Climate & Sustainable Development; Society; Digital Transformation.

Rationale for Performance Objective 3

Alignment with institutional strategy

Performance Objective 3 is aligned with University of Galway's Strategic Plan, *Shared Vision: Shaped by Values* — in particular, with the 'Excellence' value, which is a core pillar of the strategy. This performance objective is also central to the *University of Galway Research and Innovation Strategy 2021–2026: Purpose. People. Place.* The objective is particularly embedded in the 'People' pillar of this strategy, and in our talent development ambitions.

Impact is the core evaluative criterion for our research performance and has been the inspiration for our success in particular domains. We already have two examples of research traditions in the University that exhibit the characteristics of research engaged in transformation with global impact that leads on to innovation. Firstly, the Galway MedTech cluster is highly impactful. The University's work in this area has been foundational to the cluster in the city and region, and now the ecosystem of FDI companies and local SMEs is becoming crucial to the continuation of our research. The research horizon for work on the technological enhancement of medical care and the integration of technology into wellbeing is vast. This research tradition is well established in the University and innovation in this domain is already profound in terms of business and healthcare.

The other arena in which our research is clearly energised and stimulated by our environment, and in which our work, in turn, has played a part in social and political transformation, is the area of human rights. The Irish Centre for Human Rights is globally visible and globally significant. It has played a central role in the revolutionary transformation of Irish civic culture in the past forty years. The new centrality of rights as an optic for citizenship has driven a transformation in Irish identity. The work on rights in the university extends even beyond the Centre and its profound impact. The Field-Weighted Citation Index for work addressing SDG 16: *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*, is 2.49, the highest for any SDG. Our work on rights illuminates the positive relationship between issues articulated in our social and cultural environment and research in the University.

The three indicators below pertaining to European funding and ERC performance (indicators 3.1–3.3) have been carefully selected based on our performance in/experience from the two previous European funding cycles (2007–2013 and 2014–2020), including the Framework Research

Programmes in those periods (FP7 and H2020). The targets are based on learnings from these periods and, more recently, the HEA Performance Funding 2019 'Strategic European Research Awards' initiative.

Alignment with national strategy

This performance objective aligns with Irish commitments to the development of the **European Research Area**. Ireland has committed to the actions for developing the European Research Area as an instrument for deepening and strengthening research culture in the country. Three of those actions are particularly relevant to this performance objective:

- No. 15: Build up research and innovation ecosystems to improve excellence and competitiveness

- No. 16: Improve EU-wide access to excellence

- No. 17: Enhance public research institutions' strategic capacity.

Action 17 is particularly relevant as it sees building strong output assessment as an integral part of scientific management. Considerable evidence correlates strong research ecosystems with networks of international research collaboration, which, in turn, are highly correlated with high-quality outlets for research outputs.

This performance objective also aligns strongly with Objective 2 of the **Impact 2030** vision that embraces research excellence as the basis for national success and is the precondition for success in Pillar One: 'Maximising the impact of research and innovation on the economy, society and the environment'.

Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy identifies talent as the heart of the research and innovation ecosystem. Research talent is recruited to the system in two ways — firstly, through recruitment of principal investigators (PIs). Our capacity to support the ambition of the highest-quality PIs, by capturing the resources necessary for them to pursue their research, determines the reach of our research and innovation. This is a crucial factor across the life cycle of high-performing PIs. The other major recruitment pipeline for research talent is graduate and postdoctoral researchers, usually recruited to the major projects of PIs. This performance objective addresses the national priority to embed 'research and a research-driven culture' and to elevate the talent pool for business, the public service, and civil society.

Excellence in research and development is acknowledged as a precondition for continued success in the **National Development Plan**. This performance objective assesses the foundation for the research, innovation, and development activity of the University. The chosen indicators emerge from engagement with Research and Innovation Frameworks Eight (*Horizon 2020*) and Nine (*Horizon Europe*) and orientate the University toward the emerging Framework Ten. The framework programmes offer the University a context through which we can assess the quality of research and innovation in the highest quality international context. This collective learning is being gathered and systematised through the University's engagement with the CoARA process. Success in the three

pillars of the **European Union Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation** indicates strength in individual research excellence (ERC and MSCA actions), collective research (Pillar II: Global Challenges), and innovation (EIT and EIC). Deepening European engagement is a specific goal of **Impact 2030** Pillar Five, which cites the development of the European Research Area as the context for 'modernising how we define research impact' (p. 9).

This performance objective uses success in European programmes as an index for research performance, as well as a target in its own right. We anticipate revising this indicator as the CoARA process becomes embedded and new indicators for performance become recognised at a European level. The criteria for the performance objective will also evolve as our research becomes more aligned with our European Universities alliance, ENLIGHT. The current funded phase of ENLIGHT (2023–2027) has numerous incentives to promote deepening research collaboration among partners, with a specific focus on building international networks for our early-career researchers.

Evidence base for performance objective

The evidence base for the indicators related to European funding (indicators 3.1–3.3) is our participation and performance in successive European funding cycles (including the Research Framework Programmes — FP7, H2020 and HEU). Additionally, we consider our relative position vis-à-vis comparator research-intensive Irish HEIs. Maintaining and augmenting our performance in European funding performance is a key element of our overall research endeavours. Comparative European funding data are published by the European Commission.

SciVal provides the evidence base for the indicators related to research outputs (indicators 3.4 and 3.5), including comparative data on University of Galway's research outputs — percentage of publications in the top 25% of journals and percentage of papers co-authored internationally. It should be noted that there are limitations in terms of coverage by SciVal of humanities and some social sciences research publication outlets.

Comparative data from the CWTS Leiden Ranking will also be used to establish international benchmarks.

Additionally, the Vice President for Research and Innovation (VPRI) is leading a project with all nineteen Heads of School and their academic colleagues to identify the top-ranked journals and publication outlets (including, for example, publishing houses) in disciplines within each School. This process is expected to address at a local level some of the limitations of SciVal in terms of coverage of humanities and social sciences publications. Working with CoARA national chapter partners, we will seek to ensure a national consistency that captures a range of output types of particular relevance to arts and humanities disciplines — e.g. monographs, practice research, and other forms of non-standard output.

Level of performance objective

This objective represents **continuing development in a priority area** for University of Galway. Performance targets in this area are subject to continual revision and review.

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

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting for Performance Objective 3 are maintained within a layered and iterative process:

- Implementation is a whole-university activity, embedded in the academic schools and monitored by the College Research Committees. Primary responsibility at this level lies with the Heads of School, in consultation with the Vice Deans for Research.

- Ongoing monitoring and co-ordination are conducted by two working groups convened by the Vice President for Research and Innovation. One group comprises the Directors of Research and Innovation and the Director of Research Accounts. The other group comprises the Vice Deans and the Heads of Institute. These teams meet biweekly.

- Iterative systemic assessment, in comparison with benchmark institutions, is conducted on a septennial basis through the Institutional Review of Research Performance. This is led out by the Quality Assurance unit of the Registrar's Office.

- Target assessment and reporting are conducted through the university management system. The University Research Committee meets three times a term, considers all the data and evidence on research performance, and makes recommendations through the VPRI to UMT and Academic Council. This committee is also the consultative body for consideration and recommendation of appropriate research assessment methods.

- Governance of the research performance of the University is overseen by the Standing and Strategic Planning Committee of Údarás na hOllscoile.

Resourcing

The targets set for European research excellence are ambitious. Recognising this, and the step change required, we are taking actions/committing resources, as follows:

- Our Colleges [and Schools], through their respective strategy processes, have taken ownership of these targets and have developed plans to support their staff in achieving them.

- Two of our four Colleges have appointed research support posts that will, working alongside our central research office, specifically target strategic awards (including ERC awards).

- The academic Workload Allocation Model (WAM) seeks to specifically support new academic appointments to establish/continue their research by providing for reduced teaching and contribution load in years 1 and 2 of their employment.

- At a central research support level, with a view to encouraging/supporting our community to coordinate/participate in large-scale multi-partner European awards, we are strengthening our post-award research support structures, including, specifically, expanding our research legal team and undertaking a post-award process improvement project.

Challenges and risks

Achieving our ambitious European targets will be dependent on both internal (e.g. number and quality of proposals; capacity) and external (e.g. budget constraints) factors. Internal risks will be managed by ensuring that the research community is properly supported — including adequate provision of research time, through the Workload Allocation Model.

Risks related to increasing the quality of research outputs are primarily related to the level of engagement with the performance agenda by researchers and academic staff. These risks will be mitigated by taking a bottom-up, consultative approach with Schools to agree target publication outlets.

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	**Cumulative number of ERC awards won over the period 2021–2027**	European Commission	Quantitative	2023: 3 2021–2023: 7 (Galway, with 7 awards, was at 63.6% of its H2020 ERC award outcome by end 2023)	Exceed the national average in % increase of ERC awards from H2020 to HEU for the seven traditional universities (At end of 2023, the seven universities had been awarded 58 ERCs under HEU — 67.4% of the H2020 ERC award outcome)	**10 by end of 2024**	**13 by end of 2025**	**16 by end of 2026**	**18 by end of 2027**	**Cumulative 18 awards by end of 2027**
3.2	**Number of ERC applications over the period 2021–2027**	European Commission	Quantitative	2023: 15 2021–23: 55	Comparative data for Irish HEIs for period 2021–2027 (At end 2023, 446 ERC applications submitted by Irish HEIs — of which 55 from Galway)[9]	**70–75 by end of 2024**	**85–95 by end of 2025**	**100–115 by end of 2026**	**115–135 by end of 2027**	**115–135 by end of 2027**

[9] Figure includes all HEIs. Individual HEI data not published.

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
3.3	**Cumulative amount of funding awarded through EU programmes in 2021–2027 cycle**	European Commission	Quantitative	2021–23: €68.6m cumulative (At mid-2024, the increase in award values for Galway was at 44%)	Exceed the national average in % increase in value of awards from H2020 to HEU for the seven traditional universities[10] (At mid-2024, the average increase in award values for the seven universities was 46.8%)	**€90m by end of 2024**	**€110m by end 2025**	**€130m by end 2026**	**€150m by end 2027**	**€150m by end of the 2021–27 funding cycle**
3.4	**Proportion (%) of publications in the top 25% of journals**	SciVal	Quantitative	2022: 55.4% 2023: 59% Average for the past 5 years: 56.6%.	The average for 2018–2022 for the other six traditional universities was 56.7%	**56.5%**	**59%**	**61%**	**63%**	**63% by 2028** **4 p.p. increase on 2023 baseline**
3.5	**Proportion (%) of papers co-authored internationally (averaged over 5 years)**	Scopus/ SciVal	Quantitative	2022: 65.5% (1,644 papers) 2018–2022 5-year average: 61.3% (6,905 papers)	2018–2022 average for International Collaboration for the other six traditional universities was 58.6%	**61.7%**	**62.1%**	**62.5%**	**63%**	**63% averaged over 5 years** **1.7 p.p. increase on 2018–2022 baseline**

[10] Comparative data is only available for an element of this indicator — i.e. Horizon EU. Other sources of European funding (e.g. ERDF, DG Health/Connect) are an important element of our research activity. Sectoral data from these sources are not available.

Performance Objective 4

Expand Enterprise Research and Innovation Activity for Our Region: **To retain our regional strength in MedTech and to stimulate a pipeline of valuable commercial projects in other fields of research, particularly in emerging opportunity areas such as renewable energy and marine research.**

Pillar: Research & Innovation

Transversals: Enterprise; Region.

Rationale for Performance Objective 4

Alignment with national strategy and policy

This performance objective is aligned with *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy*, which aims to put research and innovation at the heart of addressing Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges, and with the *National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation (2022–2027)*.

We will increase and deepen enterprise research and innovation activity, which will be central to long-term economic and social sustainability at national and regional levels. There are particular infrastructural weaknesses in the NUTS 2 North West region that will be addressed through licensing and spin-outs, industry collaboration and entrepreneur development.

Alignment with institutional strategy

This performance objective aligns with the University's Research and Innovation Strategy (RIS), which aims to make a positive impact on society. A lot of our innovation activity falls into the MedTech domain, as evidenced by the fact that 80% of our spin-outs over the last ten years are in either MedTech or life sciences. The University has committed considerable resources to support MedTech impact:

- The University Foundation is investing €1M to create a new Ian Quinn Centre for MedTech spin-outs on campus (in addition to the existing Life Science Hub for MedTech innovation). The Centre will provide physical space, mentoring and a vibrant ecosystem for our alumni MedTech companies.

- University of Galway's Business Innovation Centre is home to 30–40 companies and includes a Life Science Incubator on the north campus where stem cell spin-out companies are building leading-edge technologies.

- The University has invested €1.7M in the Atlantic Bridge Fund and is currently planning to contribute to a second major dedicated Life Science Fund.

- University of Galway's highly successful BioInnovate programme, based on the renowned Stanford BioDesign programme, continues to grow, with significant investments made to support knowledge transfer activities including entrepreneurial training with Spin Up Science and a dedicated Proof of Concept fund.

We have a significant base in sustainable technology to build upon. The Ryan Institute is a leading research centre at the University of Galway, focusing on sustainable energy, environmental science, and marine research. The University is actively involved in bioeconomy research, which focuses on using renewable biological resources sustainably, with projects such as AgroCycle and Biorefinery Glas as part of the University's efforts to promote sustainable agricultural practices and biorefinery technologies. The Energy Research Centre focuses on renewable energy research, including wind, wave, and solar energy technologies.

However, we acknowledge two key challenges to producing impact from our relevant research:

- Limited impact and commercial awareness: Certain sections of the University lack awareness of the commercial potential of their research, resulting in lower rates of invention disclosures. This gap hinders the potential for translating research into commercially viable projects. By embedding commercial training and fostering a culture of research innovation across all departments, we can increase invention disclosures and enhance our research's market impact.

- Overreliance on MedTech: While MedTech remains a cornerstone of our innovation output, there is an overreliance on this sector as the primary source of spin-outs. This narrow focus limits the diversity of our commercial ventures and poses a risk to long-term sustainability. To mitigate this, we will actively stimulate and support commercial projects in other promising fields associated with sustainable technology.

To address these challenges and achieve this objective, we will:

- Foster a culture of commercial awareness: We will develop programmes and workshops to educate researchers on the commercial potential of their work and encourage invention disclosures across all disciplines.

- Diversify our spin-out portfolio: We will establish initiatives to support the development of spin-outs in emerging sustainable technology, while maintaining our strength in MedTech.

- Build strategic partnerships: We will collaborate with development agencies and regional stakeholders to support the growth and scaling of businesses translating University research into commercially viable products and services in all focus areas.

- The University is a member of the ENLIGHT alliance, which involves participation in an ENLIGHT Expert Network (EEN) focused on connecting innovation offices and their industry partners for matchmaking events with regional and European impact.

By implementing these strategies, the University will not only retain its leadership in MedTech but also become a leader in fostering innovation across a broader range of research fields, ultimately making a more significant contribution to regional economic development and societal progress.

Level of the performance objective

We will focus on **leadership**, within the University and through engagement with our regional partners, in two main priority areas:

- Priority Area 1: We will accelerate the progression of our MedTech spin-out companies to achieve High Potential Start-Up (HPSU) status by:

    o Creating mentorship programmes linking spin-out founders with experienced entrepreneurs, especially alumni.

    o Offering comprehensive training programmes on entrepreneurship, business planning, market analysis, and regulatory compliance specific to MedTech.

- Priority Area 2: We will develop our regional mandate through development of infrastructure and venture capital supports by:

    o Establishing a specialised hub for MedTech spin-outs.

    o Developing seed funding initiatives to provide initial capital to promising MedTech spin-outs.

    o Hosting networking events, MedTech forums, and innovation showcases.

We will focus on **development** of four main priority areas:

- Priority Area 1: We will accelerate the progression of our sustainable technology research to spin-out company status by:

    o Increasing the number of patents filed relating to sustainable technology research from a 5-year average of 0.4 to 1 per annum.

    o Increasing the number of licences agreed relating to sustainable technology research from a 5-year average of 1 to 2 per annum.

- Priority Area 2: We will increase the volume and value of licences to companies and external stakeholders by:

    o Increasing the number of licences issued to companies for intellectual property (IP) or research findings from a base of 15 to 19 per annum.

- Priority Area 3: We will increase the number of research collaborations with companies and external stakeholders by:

  o Increasing the number of research collaborations established with companies and external stakeholders from a base of 40 to 55 per annum.

- Priority Area 4: We will achieve a measurable increase in the operational quality of innovation operations, particularly in the areas of speed and simplification, by:

  o Improving the time taken from initial engagement to agreement execution across all categories from 10 days (baseline for 2023) to 8 days.

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

Executive responsibility for innovation resides with the Vice President for Research and Innovation, who is a member of the University Management Team; the Innovation Office is managed by a senior Director who reports directly to the Vice President. A senior member of the Innovation team is a member of the College-level Research and Innovation Committees in each of the four Colleges, to ensure a cohesive approach to innovation across the University.

In the governance structures, the Research and Innovation Committee oversees delivery of the Research and Innovation Strategy on behalf of Academic Council. Údarás na hOllscoile, the University's Governing Authority, receives a report from Academic Council on academic matters, including research and innovation, at every meeting. Additionally, the Standing and Strategic Planning Committee of Governing Authority oversees the implementation of University strategies including the Research and Innovation Strategy.

The specific actions we will take to achieve the performance objective include the following:

- Grow Innovation Office activities in key regional priority areas, as identified in the *National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation (2022–2027)* (NSSSI), by recruiting a new case manager responsible for emerging opportunity areas to develop a pipeline of new commercial projects in NSSSI areas e.g. renewable energy, climate change, sustainability, audio-visual/creative etc.

- In collaboration with Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Western Development Commission (WDC), develop a Life Sciences Hub in the region, delivering state-of-the-art lab space and entrepreneurship training.

- Engage with industry through the provision of targeted, themed Academic Industry Meeting days (AIM days, a collaboration with our ENLIGHT partner, Uppsala University) using a well-established and validated framework.

- Increase the pipeline of new invention disclosures by formalising and expanding the current Innovation and Impact training.

- Participate actively in the new National Knowledge Transfer Communities of Practice (COP) and establish a West/Northwest COP with Atlantic Technological University.

Resources associated with Performance Objective 4

With the support of Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI), the Innovation Office has established a specialist Commercialisation Team with expertise in a range of enterprise and impact support capabilities. We have nurtured a committed and ambitious team with significant autonomy to carry out its remit. With growing maturity and capacity, we have achieved greater levels of engagement with the research, industry, business and investment communities. This is evidenced by our annual KTI metrics returns. To meet our objectives, we will enhance the team through:

- Recruitment of a new Spin-out Development Manager with specific responsibility for supporting spin-outs in NSSSI priorities to HPSU (Enterprise Ireland KTI-Funded).

- Recruitment of a new Intellectual Property and Licensing Manager with responsibility for industry outreach and increasing the volume and value of research collaborations and licences (Enterprise Ireland KTI-funded).

- Recruitment of an Enterprise Engagement and Events Manager who will be responsible for industry events, industry engagement, and industry AIM days (University-funded).

Evaluation

The Innovation Office will report on metrics, quarterly, to KTI and the Vice President for Research and Innovation, and provide an annual report to KTI and the University Management Team. Additionally, an annual report will be provided to Údarás na hOllscoile.

Challenges and Risks

A number of key challenges have been identified, including:

- Regional weaknesses in terms of infrastructure (lack of laboratory space and co-location space for early-stage companies) and investment (90% of venture capital (VC) activity is in the Dublin area)

- Insufficient legal capacity, which restricts throughput

- Increasing volume and deal complexity, which increases the time to negotiate and finalise spin-outs

- Lack of business leads for commercial projects

We will manage these challenges by:

- Diversifying funding for KT activities e.g. HEA, KTI, EI, EU.

- Expanding current innovation training activities (Impact Series).

- Developing plans for a Life Science Hub and Ian Quinn Centre, growing relationships and partnering with existing facilities.

- Requesting core HEI budget to retain at-risk roles.

- Growing capacity in the Innovation Office through mechanisms such as KT Boost, and thereby engaging founders and investors early.

- Sharing best practice through the Irish KT Communities of Practice and the ASTP.

- Continuing to work closely with ATU through the West/Northwest KT Community of Practice and other regional bodies e.g. WDC, NWRA.

- Including key KT metrics targets in College strategic plans and ensuring continual engagement with College Research and Innovation Committees.

Incorporating learnings

The Innovation Office will:

- Review internal business processes on an ongoing basis and implement improvements.

- Drive continuous improvement in the quality of service delivered by the Innovation Office.

- Simplify and streamline processes in the Innovation Office.

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 spin-outs established	Enterprise Ireland, KTI Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey	Quantitative	2022: 4 2019–2022: 14 (Average 3.6 per year, circa 1 spin-out per €17.8M)	Exceed national average of 7 peer universities[11] (Average across the Irish universities is 1 spin-out per €20–33M.)[12]	5	5	5	5	20 over 4 years
4.2	Number of collaborative research agreements with industry	Enterprise Ireland, KTI Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey	Quantitative	2022: 40 2019–2022: 185 (Average 48 per year, equating to 1 per €1.5M of research expenditure)	Exceed national average of 7 traditional universities (Across the 7 universities, the average number of Collaborative Research Agreements over the five years to 2023 is 1 per €1.2M)[12]	45	50	50	55	200 over 4 years
4.3	Number of Licences/ Options/ Assignments (LOAs)	Enterprise Ireland, KTI Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey	Quantitative	2022: 15 (Average 15 LOAs per year, with 1 LOA achieved per €5M of research expenditure)	Exceed national average of 7 traditional universities (Average across the 7 universities is 1 LOA per €3.9M)[13]	16	17	18	19	70 over 4 years

[11] The seven peer universities are: University of Galway, UCD, TCD, UCC, DCU, UL, and RCSI.
[12] The range of averages from the five-year period for the individual universities was 1 RA per €0.74M–€1.5M.
[13] The range is 1 LOA per €2.2M to 1 LOA per €5M.

Performance Objective 5

Improving Progression Rates for Under-Represented Students: **To improve progression rates for first-year students at full-time undergraduate level in the following categories: Students with Disabilities (SWD), HEAR and Irish Traveller Students.**

Pillar: Access & Participation

Transversals: Society; Region; Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging.

Rationale for Performance Objective 5

Alignment with institutional and national strategy

Performance Objective 5 is aligned to University of Galway's Strategic Plan, *Shared Vision, Shaped by Values*, which states 'We will proactively remove barriers to equality and diversity in our University, recognising the individuality of our people's journeys'.

It is also aligned to the Student Success Strategy, currently in draft format, scheduled for launch in 2024/25.

This objective is aligned to the following national strategies:

- *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022–28*

- *National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017–2022*

- *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021*

Evidence base

The primary evidence base for this performance objective is derived from the University of Galway's Student Record System. This indicates first-year progression rates for HEAR students of 86.8% and first-year progression rates for SWDs of 86.7%. Comparative data across the HEI sector for these groups is not currently available. However, according to recent HEA data, non-progression rates for HEAR students have doubled from 2018/19 to 2021/22 (8% to 16%). Baseline progression data for Irish Traveller students will be established in year one, as institutional and sectoral progression rates for this cohort are currently unavailable.

The target for improvement in progression rates for SWDs differs from the equivalent target for the general undergraduate student population for a number of reasons:

- There are a number of exogenous factors impacting on student progression for SWDs. For example, the current housing crisis disproportionately impacts under-represented groups, as do cost-of-living increases. Both of these factors are known to disproportionately impact socio-economically disadvantaged students and persons with disabilities.

- As progression rates increase overall, it is likely that those students at the margins in terms of non-progression will be more likely to experience multiple forms of disadvantage and challenges with regard to intersectionality. Therefore, a more modest target has been set here given the multiple layers of challenges that these students will face.

- According to HEA non-progression data, HEAR non-progression rates have doubled from 2018/19 to 2021/22 (8% to 16%).

Accordingly, it makes sense to take a more modest approach to target setting for this indicator.

Note on baseline data and data reporting

Currently, no data exists for first-year progression rates of Irish Traveller students in higher education. The Access Centre at University of Galway will establish a baseline for this group by using institutional data from the following data points:

- the number of students applying for the University of Sanctuary Scholarship

- the number of students being supported by our Traveller Education Officer

- Irish Traveller Students entering through the Access Foundation programme

Level of Performance Objective

Achievement level: **continuing development in a priority area.**

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

The University's Widening Participation (WP) Committee (chaired by the Director of Student Services), a sub-committee of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC), will monitor, assess and oversee the implementation of this performance objective. See below for governance structure:

Figure 3: Governance structures pertaining to equality, diversity and inclusion within the University of Galway

Achieving the performance objective

The Student Success Strategy, which is currently in development, will include strategic actions and initiatives to enable students in target cohorts to succeed — particularly in the area of academic support, and in enhancing a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Progression data from the Microsoft Power BI portal will monitor the progression of these students and inform and support relevant initiatives aligned with the Student Success Strategy.

Using information collected on under-represented students through the Student Digital Pathway (a new student record system for University of Galway which is currently under development), surveys, and data collected from Cara (Artificial Intelligence bot), we will be able to identify previously unidentified 'roadblocks' faced by under-represented students and provide practical support to address these needs.

Building on the successful Cara pilot, we will utilise a 24/7 AI support system that reacts to under-represented student needs, develops student engagement and triggers an escalation process for human intervention.

Resourcing the performance objective

The successful implementation of this performance objective will be enhanced with the recruitment in 2024 of a Transitions and Progression Project Officer, through HEA Performance Funding, to lead on the implementation of proactive AI-powered student learning and wellbeing support for these student

cohorts. This is in addition to the Access Centre's Post-entry Support Worker, who works directly with HEAR students at a post-entry level; College Advisors, who work with all under-represented students at post-entry; Disability Advisors working with students with disabilities at post-entry; our Traveller Education Officer, who supports Irish Travellers at post-entry, and the work of our First Year Transitions Officer.

Evaluation

Performance will be evaluated by the University's Widening Participation Committee and at College level. The mechanisms for evaluating progress on this objective are as follows:

- First-year progression data for students with disabilities (SWDs) and HEAR students will be collected through the Student Record System (SRS) and Admissions Office.

- Irish Traveller progression data will be captured manually by the Access Centre until a more formalised, system-based method of data collection is devised.

- Establishing baseline numbers and overall success for this cohort is also a focus of the most recent National Access Plan (2022–2028) for equity of access to higher education.

Challenges and risks

Risks that may impede progress on achieving the objective include:

- Infrastructure: Availability and affordability of student accommodation remains a challenge for many students, with under-represented students more likely to be affected. This risk is being mitigated through investment in purpose-built student accommodation. The University is committed to providing affordable accommodation for students and has reduced rents across many of its residential units over the last three years.

- Mental health issues and long-term effects of the pandemic leading to higher drop-out rates. This risk is being mitigated through the addition of extra mental health and learning supports for students.

- Financial uncertainty caused by a project-based approach to funding of initiatives to support under-represented students, which leads to the challenge of sustainability of projects/ financial instability and difficulty in retaining both staff and students. This risk is being mitigated through allocation of University resources to sustain projects.

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	**Progression rate (%) of new entrants with disabilities (SWDs)**	SRS and admissions office	Quantitative	2022/23: 86.7%	Not available	**87%**	**87.5%**	**88%**	**88.7%**	**2.0 p.p. increase over 4 years**
5.2	**Progression rate (%) of new entrants through HEAR (Higher Education Access Route)**	SRS and admissions office	Quantitative	2022/23: 86.8%	Exceed average, all HEIs	**87%**	**87.5%**	**88%**	**88.8%**	**2.0 p.p. increase over 4 years**
5.3	**Progression rate (%) of new entrants who are Irish Travellers**	Internal data	Quantitative	To be established	Attain University of Galway total undergraduate Year 1 progression rate.[14]	**Baseline established**	**+0.5 p.p**	**+0.5 p.p**	**+0.5 p.p**	**1.5 p.p. increase over 4 years**

[14] Benchmark selected is for comparison purposes only — the numbers of Traveller students admitted nationally each year is small; use of percentage points when dealing with small numbers can be misleading.

Performance Objective 6

Flexible Pathways for Lifelong Learning: **To implement a comprehensive framework of high-quality flexible learning programmes for part-time learners to increase access and participation, expand course offerings, and increase enrolments of flexible learners, while aligning with regional and national workforce development skills requirements and societal needs.**

Pillar: Access & Participation

Transversals: Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning; Enterprise; Region.

Rationale for Performance Objective 6

Alignment with institutional and national strategy

This objective aligns with the University Strategic Plan's values of Openness, Excellence, Sustainability, and Respect. The objective focuses on actively engaging with external stakeholders, identifying training requirements, and providing innovative, flexible solutions to meet skills requirements as a key driver of economic growth both regionally and nationally. It supports the development of new partnerships, new approaches to stakeholder engagement and proactive collaboration, and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Through targeted student engagement, support initiatives, recognition of prior learning, and use of digital learning technologies, learners are enabled to reach their potential, ensuring that lifelong learning is accessible to all.

The **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022–2028** outlines the strategic goal of supporting student-centred flexibility and improving access to higher education for students who are socio-economically disadvantaged in a number of specified groups. These target groups have experienced challenges in terms of rigid programme pathways which provided only full-time progression options on the basis of a four-year degree programme. The expansion of flexible programmes through:

- Part-time degree programmes with exit awards at Certificate (year 1) and Diploma (year 2) creates alternative options for students to engage in a part-time programme in a manner that meets their current needs.

- Use of RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) to enable students to gain credit for prior learning, whether formal or informal, for the purposes of direct/advanced entry/module exemption, provides an accelerated learning pathway for target groups.

- Expansion of micro-credentials acts as a "taster" opportunity for the target groups, who may lack the confidence to embrace a full programme, and provides the additional flexibility to stack micro-credentials over an extended period.

This performance objective aligns with the following indicator in the National Access Plan (2022–2028):

- Key Performance Indicator (1) Part-time/flexible learners

The **OECD Skills Strategy for Ireland** focuses on the significant labour shortages in Ireland that necessitate new upskilling and learning opportunities. The following priority areas are highlighted and call on a response from education providers to meet skills requirements at all levels of the national framework of qualifications (NFQ):

- **Priority 1:** Secure a balance in skills by making education and training provision more responsive to changing skills needs

- **Priority 2:** Foster greater participation in lifelong learning inside and outside the workplace

- **Priority 3:** Better utilise Ireland's research talent and public research and innovation system to drive innovation and promote continuous improvement of leadership and management skills within enterprises

- **Priority 4:** Promote a strategic approach to skills policy, support effective engagement with stakeholders throughout the skills policy cycle and strengthen the collection, exchange and use of skills information.

Ireland's **National Skills Strategy 2025**, '*Ireland's Future*', points to Ireland's recovery from high unemployment rates; however, this recovery has highlighted that technical and enterprise sectors, in particular, have experienced exponential gaps in existing employee skills that need to be improved upon if unemployment levels are to remain consistently low and if companies are to remain competitive. Given the importance of lifelong learning and the need for increased access to skills development, it is clear that the University, as a platform, is central to the solution where said skills are offered in response to the needs of learners, society and the economy.

The recently released **QQI report**, '*From Counting to Cultivating — Successful Participation: A Review of the Landscape of Practice Supporting Access, Transfer and Progression in Irish Education and Training (2023)*', highlights the significant role RPL has in supporting the Access, Transfer and Progression agenda by opening opportunities for learners to develop their education pathway through FE and HE routes. It also highlights the importance of seeking to collect RPL data in a consistent and systematic way.

Evidence base

A review of student enrolment numbers and level of uptake of courses in the special purpose and minor awards category at undergraduate and postgraduate level provided an indication of market demand and trends (reference: HEA Key Facts and Figures comparative data). Flexible learning enrolments at University of Galway as a percentage of the overall student enrolment have averaged between 14.5% and 16.5% over the past three-year period. Within this figure, there has been a notable increase in continuing professional development (CPD) (i.e. short-term course registrations).

This information highlighted:

- A growing demand from industry for upskilling courses that support workforce development. A review of the range of programmes on offer and how they are meeting specific workforce requirements is a continual requirement.

- A reducing number of domestic students opting for postgraduate-level courses, owing to a buoyant employment market. This requires a review of how programmes are offered at postgraduate level.

- An increasing demand for shorter-term courses (i.e. micro-credential-type courses), owing to professional and personal commitments that prevent students from partaking in full awards.

- Undergraduate and postgraduate occasional students have shown an increase in number during 2020–2023, indicating an interest in shorter-term courses nationally. Following a spike in demand in 2020/21, the numbers for postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas are increasing steadily, indicating a demand for more phased awards, while the demand for part-time taught Masters is declining. These figures indicate a market preference among part-time learners for shorter-term awards that may subsequently lead to a major award. This information has informed the indicator and targets for flexible postgraduate enrolments..

- Qualitative feedback received from students at information fairs, one-to-one consultations and general enquiries via email and online marketing forms indicate an interest in upskilling via online and hybrid modes.

Recognition of Prior Learning

University of Galway has a long-established Recognition of Prior Learning policy, which was recently enhanced (June 2023), but it acknowledges that its systems can be improved to capture and record RPL activity so that institutional-level data can be provided. The HCI-funded Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education project, of which University of Galway is a member, is supporting the University to achieve coherency and consistency in practice across its ecosystem and to develop processes to collate RPL data.

University of Galway aims to increase the number of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) applications from learners, who will present prior informal and non-formal learning (Experiential Learning) for entry, advanced entry or module exemption purposes. A specific metric is noted for this area. While Recognition of Prior Certified Learning is well established in University of Galway, Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning needs additional support in terms of building awareness of its availability and guidance/mentoring for learners.

Recognition of Prior Learning can help employers to address upskilling and reskilling challenges, by recognising the skills, knowledge and experience that an employee has learned in the workplace. University of Galway will develop an enterprise partnership to pilot the Recognition of Prior Learning process with a cohort of learners.

Level of performance objective

Due to the cyclical demand for continuing professional development courses and evolving industry needs, this performance objective represents **continuing development in the area**. Course design and development is an ongoing process (i.e. redevelopment required every two years to keep industry pace may necessitate a complete review of programme portfolio); micro-credentials are in their pilot stage at the University as part of a HCI project, and development of systems to support the availability of modules on a single or stackable basis is part of new systems development at the University. The expansion of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is also part of a HCI project. The project aims to develop a system to capture and report on RPL activity data for access, transfer and progression, and to develop industry partnership models to facilitate the accreditation and recognition of work-based and experiential learning — these are in early stages of development.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 6

The oversight of this objective will be provided through a cross-functional team including the following:

- **Centre for Adult Learning and Development** — oversight of industry needs analysis; insights into curriculum development; provision of expertise in online course design and development for professional industry-based learners; promotion of flexible programmes to target audience; provision of student support services for adult learners.

- **College Directors of Strategic Development** — curriculum development and approval in association with relevant academic units and personnel; programme delivery and assessment with academic units.

- **Academic Registry** — management of student applications and enrolment, examination boards and reporting on student numbers, and RPL data and transfer/progression.

The following actions will be implemented to ensure the success of this performance objective:

- **Creation of a multi-disciplinary team** (including senior academic leads, technology staff and professional services staff (previously outlined)) to support the growth of flexible learning programmes at the University and the championing of the necessary infrastructural developments to facilitate flexible programme delivery.

- **Development of partnership models** with enterprise and industry organisations to facilitate the accreditation and recognition of work-based and experiential learning using co-delivery and co-created programmes of study, particularly for in-demand skills areas.

- **Creation of a marketing plan** to promote flexible programmes, targeted outreach, branding, and partnerships with relevant organisations and community stakeholders.

- **Development of a monitoring and evaluation system** that continuously assesses the success and impact of the flexible programmes and focuses on student retention, progression rates and feedback from learners as means of continual process improvement.

- **Targeted professional development of teaching staff** in best-practice teaching pedagogies for online and blended learning (which include the embedding of UDL principles) to ensure that engaging digital content is developed for industry-based learners using cutting-edge creative technologies, to include:

  o Organising capacity-building workshops where teaching staff can learn about various online teaching strategies and tools

  o Developing self-paced online learning modules covering topics such as designing online courses (including Universal Design aspects of learning design) and using the learning management system effectively

  o Sharing case studies and scenarios: developing a community of practice where real-life case studies are presented to show best practice and facilitate discussion and troubleshooting of ideas among academics

  o Organising demonstrations of technologies commonly used in online teaching

  o Inviting guest speakers to share their experience of and insights into online education with teaching staff

  o Running one-to-one hands-on "clinics" to support academic staff at the point when they need it most in course development

  o Participating in the annual ENLIGHT Teaching and Learning Conference to share our best practice and learn from our European partners.

Resourcing the performance objective

This performance objective is expanding on existing programme activity. Academic units already involved in flexible course provision will review how existing programmes are offered based on the current income-resourcing models and assess if additional resources are required. Some economies of scale may be available through related activity. Financing of new programme activity is based on an established budgetary model which factors in new fee income associated with enrolments for the hiring of staff, where required. The micro-credentials and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) projects are currently resourced by HCI Pillar 3, currently funded to March 2025.

Evaluation

To ensure the success of the performance objective, the following measures will be taken:

- A system for regular data collection and reporting on targets will be implemented. Existing systems (Student Records System) and reporting tools available (e.g. Power BI) will be used to facilitate the data collection process.

- Regular meetings with the multi-functional team will be held to review performance, discuss challenges/potential solutions and identify opportunities for collaboration with other University teams (e.g. other industry groups, programme boards etc.).

- Student surveys and focus groups will be used to assess the impact and success of flexible programme provision.

- Liaison with industry partners through established University industry boards and external organisations (e.g. Regional Skills Forum) will facilitate continual review of regional and national skills needs and areas for revision or further course development.

Challenges and risks

Uptake in course and micro-credential enrolments may be affected by a number of factors:

- **Workplace demands:** Students who are working full time are finding it difficult to meet the demands and time commitment of part-time study. Despite the introduction of flexible modes of delivery (i.e. micro-credentials), workers are under increased pressure in their organisations due to growing workforce demands. Additional student supports are required for this group and will be factored into the programme delivery model.

- **Finance:** Students who are not in receipt of company sponsorship or are enrolled in non-funded courses (excluding Springboard/ICT Skills Conversion courses) are experiencing financial difficulty and are challenged by the increased cost of living. Staged payment models will be in place for learners, and it is expected that the expansion of micro-credentials and stackable accreditation options will encourage uptake in the longer term.

- **Infrastructure:** In order to deliver flexible learning pathways, the University is reliant on the successful completion of a Student Digital Pathways project, a significant capital project to replace its Student Record System. This project is currently behind schedule due to implementation challenges experienced with third-party contractors. Delays to the delivery of this project represent a risk to the University's ability to deliver flexible learning options at scale. The University is currently engaged in a formal mediation process with the third parties, as allowed for in the contract for delivery.

Learnings

There are a number of existing University policies and procedures that will support continuous improvement:

- **Student feedback policy** provides students with the opportunity to propose improvements based on their personal course experience. Feedback reports are reviewed by Programme Academic Directors, the relevant College Office and the Deputy President and Registrar's Office, with appropriate improvements being implemented in subsequent years.

- **External Examiners' reports:** Through the external examination process, academic oversight is ensured on the quality of the course content and assessment process, with recommendations noted through the final programme report and reviewed by the Quality Office.

- **University Curriculum Committee:** With oversight of programme development and quality assurance of awards, this committee will review new course proposals and adjudicate in the context of existing course provision and the University's Academic Plan.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 6

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
6.1	**Proportion (%) of part-time and flexible learners**	Student Record System and HEA student Key Facts and Figures Data report dashboard: Enrolment Trends A	Quantitative	2023/24: 13.3% (2,642)	Maintain and improve performance relative to peer HEIs (Average % of part-time/flexible learners in the 7 traditional universities[15], 15.7% in 2023/24)	**13.6% (2,700)**	**14.1% (2,800)**	**14.6% (2,900)**	**15.1% (3,000)**	**15% average over 4 years** **1.8 p.p. increase on baseline**
6.2	**Total number of industry-focused programmes[16]**	Curriculum Manager University of Galway system	Quantitative	2023/24: 9	No national benchmark available	**10**	**11**	**12**	**12**	**33% increase on baseline**
6.3	**Number of micro-credentials**	Curriculum Manager University of Galway system	Quantitative	2023/24: 40 (available) (Starting from a base of 4 in 2021/22; 19 in 2022/23)	Match or exceed average of all HEIs, as listed on microcreds.ie. (As of July 2024, there are 540 micro-credential listings on microcreds.ie.)	**60**	**70**	**75**	**80**	**80 micro-credentials** **100% increase on baseline**

[15] In this instance, the seven traditional universities refers to: University of Galway, TCD, UCD, UCC, DCU, UL and Maynooth Universities.

[16] Courses which have a specific industry skills need for workforce development (e.g., Automation and Control, MedTech Reg Affairs).

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
6.4	**Proportion (%) of total postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes that are flexible**	Curriculum Manager University of Galway system	Quantitative	2023/24: 27% (48 of 176 programmes[17])	No national benchmark available to compare the proportion of total PGT programmes that are flexible	**29% (52 of 180)**	**30% (56 of 184)**	**32% (60 of 188)**	**33% (62 of 190)**	**6 p.p. increase on baseline**
6.5	**Number of Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning applications per annum**	Student Record System and University of Galway Admissions Data	Quantitative	2023/24: 50 applications	No national RPL comparative data available	**53**	**56**	**59**	**62**	**230 applications over 4 years (24% increase on baseline)**

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[17] Based on the prospectus listing of 176 postgraduate taught programmes (not including multiple iterations [e.g. full time and part time] of the same course), with 48 programmes identified by Programme Directors as offering flexible delivery. Projected growth shows increase of four flexible programmes per year for first three years and two programmes for the final year.

Performance Objective 7

Advancing Equality of Opportunity for All: **To address systemic inequalities and embed an inclusive culture which provides equality of opportunity for all staff and students of all genders and ethnic backgrounds.**

Pillar: Engagement

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

Rationale for Performance Objective 7

Alignment with institutional strategy

The University of Galway EDI Strategy 2020–2025 aims to enable, empower and embed a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the University that benefits the entire University community, and which will enable the University to perform to its full potential.

The EDI Strategy is closely aligned with the University Strategic Plan 2020–2025, which is built on a foundation of core values that define University of Galway's purpose and priorities: respect, openness, sustainability and excellence. The overarching EDI goals in the EDI Strategy directly support the achievement of commitments and flagship actions identified by the University in the Strategic Plan.

Overarching EDI goals:

   i.   The contribution of all members of our University community is recognised and valued.

   ii.   All staff and students are actively supported, according to their needs, to achieve their full potential.

   iii.   University of Galway will drive innovative EDI practices in the higher education sector.

   iv.   We will foster a campus culture which is welcoming, inclusive, safe and free from discrimination.

   v.   We will embed an equality perspective in the day-to-day working across all functions.

Alignment with national strategy

The University of Galway Gender Equality Action Plan (currently in its third iteration) encompasses actions which respond to the recommendations of the HEA National Reviews (2016, 2018, 2022) of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs and actions to address issues and progress gender equality in the self-assessment cycle of the Athena Swan Ireland Charter Framework. The current action plan, GEAP3, is structured in accordance with the thematic areas set out by Horizon Europe, including Measures and Actions against Gender-based Violence and Sexual Harassment. It builds on previous gender equality plans and aims to accelerate progress in achieving gender equality. The next iteration (GEAP4) will be

developed during 2024 in tandem with our self-assessment, ahead of Athena Swan Silver submission in 2025. In accordance with the 2nd HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish HEIs, GEAP4 will continue to implement gender equality initiatives with a sharpened focus on promoting equality for all staff at each stage of the career lifecycle.

The Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment Framework Implementation Plan also responds to the national research on staff and student experiences of sexual violence and harassment in higher education. The plan identifies a number of targeted actions pertaining to education, awareness raising and policy development, with the objective of effecting significant cultural change.

The Race Equality Framework and Action Plan launched in University of Galway on 7th November 2023 is directly informed by the HEA Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector Report 2022, Race Equality Implementation Plan 2022–2024 and Anti-Racism Principles for Irish HEIs. More broadly, it is informed by the UN's call for global action to eliminate racism, A Union of Equality: EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025, Ireland's National Action Plan Against Racism, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, the Higher Education Authority Act 2022 and the Irish Council for International Students 'Speak Out Against Racism' Report.

Evidence base for performance objective

The evidence base for this performance objective is underpinned by the findings from multi-faceted and extensive self-assessment and consultation processes undertaken to inform the Athena Swan Action Plan, the Race Equality Framework and Action Plan, the Universal Design and Accessibility Action Plan and the Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment Implementation Plan. In addition, attaining a silver Institutional Athena Swan award is a strategic objective of the University's Strategic Plan and is a flagship action under **Respectful University of Galway**, which also targets the achievement of an Athena Swan award for all Schools. The HEA-mandated eligibility criteria for Athena Swan success, in terms of Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and Health Research Board (HRB) funding, provide a strategic imperative to apply for a Silver award in 2025.

The indicator pertaining to increasing the representation of ethnic minority staff in the Professional Managerial and Support Services (PMSS) category reflects the acute under-representation of ethnically diverse staff within this cohort. Ethnic minority staff are least represented in the PMSS category due to historical Irish language requirements for all staff up to Grade 3. The planned approach allows for the setting of targets and implementation based on an accurate and established dataset within recruitment campaigns.

Level of the performance objective

This performance objective sets an ambition for University of Galway to **be a leader in the higher education sector** in addressing systemic inequalities and embedding an inclusive culture which provides equality of opportunity for all staff and students.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 7

Progress on implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) and EDI Strategy is reported to the Athena Swan Institutional Steering Committee bi-monthly, to the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Campus Committee (EDICC) quarterly and, in turn, to the EDI HR sub-committee (EDIHRC) of Governing Authority and UMT.

The EDI Annual Report documents the actions and activities undertaken each year to advance the core strategic goals of the EDI Strategy 2020–2025, with specific attention to Gender Equality, Race Equality, Universal Design and Accessibility, and Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response. A core section of the Annual Report will be dedicated to the implementation of KPIs that seek to embed EDI policy in practices at School and Unit level. This will form the basis of the monitoring, assessment and review of effectiveness.

Achievement of the performance objective

Steering committees have been established to provide oversight of and drive implementation of each of the EDI frameworks and action plans (Gender Equality, Race Equality, Universal Design and Accessibility, and Sexual Violence and Harassment Prevention and Response). The composition of the steering committees is designed to support their intersectional nature and address the cumulative impact of inequality.

A mechanism will be developed to embed a culture of engagement and accountability around assessing, reporting, and reviewing the KPIs for embedding EDI policy and practice that are implemented at School and Unit level annually.

Resourcing the performance objective

Dedicated Programme Managers for Gender Equality and Race Equality lead the delivery of the Gender Equality, Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment (ESVH), and Race Equality programmes of work and related action plans. These are resourced on a full-time basis.

Evaluation

The Athena Swan Ireland Charter Framework provides a robust self-assessment and peer evaluation mechanism for external evaluation of progress on advancing gender equality. The Race Equality Action Plan (and other EDI plans i.e. ESVH and Universal Design & Access) have clearly identified responsible leads, measures of success and timelines for evaluating the impact of actions and initiatives internally. Implementation of action plans, including Race Equality and Gender Equality, is reported via relevant University Steering Committees and institutional EDI committees to UMT and Governing Authority, and to the HEA where applicable (ESVH in HEIs Implementation Plan).

Challenges and risks

Sustainable resourcing and recognition of EDI work across all areas of activity continue to be a challenge. In particular, the award criteria for an Institutional Silver award require evidence of 'ensuring active leadership from senior staff, with those in senior roles at the forefront of taking action,

and inspiring and fostering dedication and involvement from staff at all levels; distributing tasks appropriately, formally recognising and rewarding work and ensuring there is not a disproportionate burden on underrepresented groups', in addition to demonstrable progress against our current institutional action plan. There are risks associated with this target as the ongoing cycle of application, implementation and renewal is not sustainable without a capacity-building framework targeting supports and resources to embed Athena Swan. Gender equality is a fundamental value of the European Union R&I agenda and increasingly a core requirement for Horizon funding, as well as being one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

With funding for one year from the University of Galway 2023/24 Strategic Fund, the Office of the Vice President for EDI (OVPEDI) has established a framework to support, recognise, and embed Athena Swan and Gender Equality through application, implementation and renewal cycles with a centralised, streamlined approach linked to strategies at Institutional, School and College level.

The framework provides three key elements:

i. Resourcing of AS work at School and Unit level

ii. Inclusive leadership development and training for managers and senior leadership to embed AS/EDI work into operational plans (planning cycles, KPI setting, performance review)

iii. Targeted supports for staff to mitigate the negative impact of Covid on career trajectories for those with caring responsibilities.

The success of this framework is dependent on future funding beyond 2024/25 to sustain Athena Swan work and achieve this performance objective. The OVPEDI will make applications to the annual University Strategic Fund calls.

Learnings and evaluation

Regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting of action plans provide an opportunity to respond to a changing/evolving environment. There is an ongoing cycle of peer-reviewed feedback provided through the Athena Swan evaluation process which is disseminated within the University via the Athena Swan Steering Group and Champions network.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 7

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
7.1	**Proportion (%) of staff experiencing discrimination**	Internal Culture Surveys measured biannually	Quantitative	AS Culture Survey 2023 shows 25% of all respondents experienced discrimination within the University	Not available	**N/A**	**20% reduction on the 2023 baseline figure**	**N/A**	**Further 16% reduction on the 2025 figure**	**Reduce % of respondents reporting that they have experienced discrimination from 25% in 2023 to 16.8% by 2028**
7.2	**Number of new Athena Swan awards achieved**	Athena Swan Ireland	Quantitative and qualitative	Institutional Bronze award 1 School Silver award 11 School Bronze awards AY 2022/23	Irish HE sector 131 award holders in Ireland as of Nov 2023 (119 Bronze; 12 Silver) Source: Athena Swan Ireland	**1 new Bronze School award; 1 new Silver School award (upgrade from bronze)**	**Institutional Silver award; 1 new Silver School award (upgrade from bronze); 3 new Bronze School awards**	**2 new Bronze School awards**	**1 new Silver School award (upgrade from bronze)**	**Institutional Silver award** **4 School Silver awards** **14 School Bronze awards**

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
7.3	**Proportion (%) of Schools with Athena Swan awards**	Athena Swan Ireland	Quantitative	66% Schools hold awards (12 out of 18)	No relevant external benchmark available	**72% (13)**	**89% (16)**	**100% (18)**	**100% (18)**	**100% Schools hold Athena Swan awards** **33 p.p. increase on baseline**
7.4	**Proportion (%) of all administrative and support services staff recruited via external competitions from minority ethnic backgrounds**	Core HR record system and reported to HEA annually	Quantitative	Baseline to be established in 2025	Irish HE sector (HEA Institutional Staff Profiles)	**15%**	**15%**	**15%**	**15%**	**Min. 15% (n=41 approx. based on average of all PMSS posts recruited externally in past 5 years)**

Performance Objective 8

Sustainability at the Core of Our University Experience: **To lead and promote sustainability in all aspects of University learning and research, culture, operations, and governance structures, and to empower our diverse communities of staff, students and partners to co-create tomorrow's sustainable campus and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Pillar: Engagement

Transversals: Climate & Sustainable Development; Institutional Leadership & Culture.

Rationale for Performance Objective 8

Alignment with institutional strategy

At University of Galway, we recognise the pivotal role that our teaching and research activities can play in developing the next generation of students, researchers and innovators for tackling society's evolving sustainable development challenges. While we have made considerable progress over the last few years in embedding sustainability literacy into University practice, we recognise that there is much that needs to be accomplished if we are to live up to the commitments expressed in the University of Galway Strategic Plan, *Shared Vision, Shaped by Values*: 'to be world-renowned for our teaching and research activities that develop our graduates as future sustainability leaders in Ireland and globally'. Over the next five years, we will seek to transform the University's teaching and learning culture so that sustainability becomes a core part of our student learning objectives, and all students, staff and key stakeholders engage with sustainability as a core value of the institution.

We are committed to integrating sustainability into the core fabric of the University's teaching and learning mission at an institutional level:

- Sustainability is one of four pillars in our Strategic Plan, with a Flagship Action to embed sustainability across our learning, research and the student experience.

- A central aim of our Sustainability Strategy is '*to develop the next generation of students, researchers and innovators for tackling society's evolving sustainable development challenges, using our teaching and learning activities*'.

- Our Climate Action and Sustainability Policy formalises our commitment '*to lead the transition to a sustainable future by embedding the SDGs into all our major efforts*'.

- As a signatory to the United Nations SDG Accord, we have committed to '*align all major efforts with the SDG targets and indicators, including through our education, research, leadership, operational and engagement activities*' and to '*share our learning*'.

- As an active member of the UN Academic Impact; Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education; Environmental Association of Universities and Colleges;

and the Global Challenges University Alliance; and as a national SDG Champion, we are committed to embedding sustainability into the learning experiences of our students.

Alignment with national strategy

On a national level, a key objective of the Education for Sustainable Development Implementation Plan 2022–2026 is to '*further embed ESD in curricula and programmes at all levels to ensure learners acquire knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions to promote, advance and take action for sustainable development'.* Performance Objective 8 is well aligned with this goal.

The Government's Climate Action Plan (CAP) commits the public sector to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 51% by 2030 (this forms part of the wider Public Sector Climate Action Mandate). The CAP defines this target as follows: "Emissions reduction targets will be based on an absolute tonnage of GHG emissions. The total tonnage target will be a 51% reduction of direct energy-related emissions (thermal and transport consumption), plus projected supply side reductions in indirect energy-related emissions from electricity." The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) publishes baseline and benchmarking data in the Annual Report on Public Sector Energy Performance. SEAI's 2023 report showed that in 2022, the University had reduced total GHG emissions by 35% on the 2016–2018 average baseline. The University's target for 2030 is a 51% reduction (which would represent 3,407.9 t CO_2). The University will continue to upload energy and GHG emissions data to SEAI's public sector monitoring and reporting system each year.

Evaluating progress

The University of Galway Sustainability Strategy contains 120 objectives and 25 measures of success across seven areas (research and learning, energy and greenhouse gas emissions, nature and ecosystems, built environment, health and wellbeing, governance and leadership, and communications and engagement). The University also participates in sustainability certification/ranking schemes, such as THE Impact and STARS, which require evaluating progress through the submission of a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative information. The following list of measures is a sample of those which will be tracked annually to evaluate progress on this performance objective:

- Number of sustainability programmes and modules offered in each College

- Number of students undertaking sustainability literacy assessment

- Number of academic staff participating in training/workshops relating to embedding ESD in the curriculum

- ESD-related supports/resources/guidance developed for students and staff

- Micro-credentials developed on ESD-related topics

- Number of training courses offered to senior management on ESD/SDGs

- Number of courses offering the Introduction to Sustainability Module

Two indicators were judged to best represent performance: 'Proportion (%) of undergraduate and postgraduate taught (PGT) modules that are sustainability modules' (8.1) and 'Percentage reduction in energy-related greenhouse gas emissions' (8.2). These indicators were selected as they are reliable, quantitative and benchmarkable. Indicator 8.1 measures sustainability at the module level (rather than the programme level) as this can be benchmarked against other HEIs using STARS. Although we are refining our methodology on this measurement (e.g. keyword analysis, standardising definitions, using SDG mapping), our baseline analysis shows that 25% of modules in 2022/23 are 'sustainability modules'. Our target for 2027/28 is 50% of modules, which would exceed the current top two in the world as measured in STARS (UC Irvine 49% and UC Berkeley 47%).

Indicator 8.2 is based on a 51% reduction in energy-related GHG emissions (Scopes 1 & 2) by 2030, compared to a baseline of 2016–2018 average emissions. While the University has made strong progress in this area in recent years, the continued growth of the University, including new buildings, and the energy-intensive nature of research means that this is an ambitious target.

Implementation, monitoring, assessment, and reporting on Performance Objective 8

To deliver on its sustainability commitments, University of Galway has established a cohesive governance structure to guarantee clear and consistent leadership, responsibility, accountability, and oversight of sustainability. The President provides leadership, commitment and support for the University's Climate Action and Sustainability ambitions, and the Deputy President and Registrar is the University Management Team leader with overall responsibility for the University's sustainability function.

Led by the Director of Sustainability, the Sustainability Office enables greater engagement with and awareness of sustainability at all levels of the University. The Sustainability Office leads campus efforts to embed sustainability literacy into all aspects of university learning and research, to implement sustainability throughout campus operations and engagement activities, and to play a central and transformational role in attaining the SDGs by 2030. The Sustainability Office aims to equip, empower and engage the campus community to co-create tomorrow's sustainable campus. The Office ensures milestone targets and accomplishments are shared across the University of Galway community.

Achieving the performance objective

- We will measure and increase the number of programmes delivering sustainability content at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

- We will map and monitor sustainability literacy; we will extend the use of Sulitest as a method to measure and improve sustainability literacy.

- We will compile and encourage implementation of a suite of learning tools and resources to enhance understanding of sustainability and climate change e.g. En-ROADS Climate Solutions Simulator.

- We will work with Colleges, Schools, disciplines and units to identify a network of sustainability curriculum champions who will support academic staff, module owners and programme directors across Schools and Colleges to review learning objectives and integrate sustainability across the educational programmes of the University.

- We will work with students to make university participation more accessible and affordable for them, to ensure that sustainability education and experiences are available at every income level.

- We will embed sustainability across the entire student experience including the student recruitment stage, new student orientation, activities and life on campus (e.g. Students' Union, clubs, societies, outreach).

- We will develop on-campus student sustainability leadership opportunities e.g. institutional awards and student-led demonstrator projects.

- We will work in conjunction with the Community Knowledge Initiative (CKI) to develop and measure co-curricular experiences that achieve sustainability learning objectives and support student organisations, clubs, societies and events focused on sustainability.

- We will incorporate sustainability as part of employee recruitment, staff induction, training and professional development.

- We will offer widely accessible sustainability workshops, awareness days, engagement events, seminars and tours to students, staff and the wider community.

- We will champion inter-, cross- and trans-disciplinary collaboration and engagement as drivers of sustainability teaching and research — for example, by developing our transdisciplinary Introduction to Sustainability Module as a university-wide module available to students across all four Colleges.

- We will adopt a co-creative approach by working with organisations in the wider community that embrace sustainability.

- We will develop targeted relationships with universities in low- and middle-income countries focused on sustainability and create sustainability-related scholarships for students from low- and middle-income countries.

- We will expand innovation and entrepreneurship programmes that enable our faculty, staff and students to sustainably make an impact and promote sustainability within leadership roles.

Resourcing the performance objective

The University has invested significantly in developing a Sustainability Office and appointing a senior Director of Sustainability who, together with other key units across campus, will lead the implementation of the Sustainability Strategy and delivery of Performance Objective 8.

Opportunities, challenges and risks

Sustainability represents an opportunity to transform University learning and research, culture, operations, and governance structures, and to empower its diverse communities of staff, students and partners to co-create tomorrow's sustainable campus and deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. While we have made considerable progress over the last few years in embedding sustainability into University practice, we recognise that there is much that needs to be accomplished if we are to live up to the commitments expressed in the University of Galway Strategic Plan. The University has therefore adopted a Sustainability Strategy and established a Sustainability Office, as described above.

One challenge is the retrofitting of buildings to achieve climate targets and other measures to enable the campus to function as living labs for students and researchers. There is a risk that there will be insufficient political will and resources to make the investment, services and policy changes necessary to support public organisations to reduce their carbon footprints.

Indicators and targets for Performance Objective 8

No.	Indicator	Data source	Data type	Baseline	Benchmark	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Cumulative target
8.1	**Proportion (%) of undergraduate and postgraduate taught (PGT) modules that are sustainability modules**	Akari Curriculum Management System at University of Galway and Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Reporting System (STARS)	Quantitative	2022/23: 25% (398 sustainability modules)	Top two HEIs in the world UC Irvine: 49%, UC Berkeley: 47%	**34%**	**39%**	**44%**	**50%**	**50% taught sustainability modules** **25 p.p. increase**
8.2	**Percentage (%) reduction in energy-related greenhouse gas emissions against a baseline of 2016–2018 average emissions — 11,222.5 t CO_2 (SEAI report)**	SEAI Monitoring & Reporting (M&R) System and SEAI Annual Reports	Quantitative	2022: 7,275.5 t CO_2 emissions Cumulative 35% reduction on 2016-2018 baseline achieved to date	University College Cork (UCC emissions in 2022: 15,388.7 t CO_2 or 23% reduction)	**7,057.2 t CO_2 (3% reduction)**	**6,845.5 t CO_2 (3% reduction)**	**6,640.2 t CO_2 (3% reduction)**	**6,440.9 t CO_2 (3% reduction)**	**Cumulative 51% reduction in energy-related GHG emissions by 2030, relative to 2016–2018 average annual baseline** **11.5% reduction in 2027 relative to 2022 baseline**

Section 3: Matrix and Signatures

Framework Matrix

Transversal areas of impact	Teaching & Learning	Research & Innovation	Access & Participation	Engagement
Pillars				
Flexibility, Upskilling & Lifelong Learning			PO 6	
Climate & Sustainable Development		PO 3		PO 8
Student Success	PO 1			
Enterprise		PO 4	PO 6	
Society		PO 3	PO 5	
Region		PO 4	PO 5, PO 6	
International	PO 2	PO 3		
Digital Transformation		PO 3		
Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging			PO 5	PO 7
Institutional Leadership & Culture				PO7, PO 8
Sectoral & Tertiary Cohesion				

Signatures

On behalf of University of Galway

Professor Peter McHugh
President

Thursday, 9 January 2025

Dr Máire Geoghegan-Quinn
Chair of the Governing Authority

Thursday, 9 January 2025

On behalf of the Higher Education Authority

Dr Alan Wall
Chief Executive Officer

Thursday, 9 January 2025