

South East Technological University

CINNTE Institutional Self-Evaluation Report

Staff Consultation Draft

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	7
1.1 Overview of this Report	7
1.2 SER Methodology	8
1.2.1 Governance and Management	8
1.2.2 Consultation in the SETU Community	9
1.2.3 SER Approval	9
1.3 Overview of SETU	9
1.4 SETU Strategic Objectives	10
2. Governance and Management of Quality	13
2.1 Overview	13
2.2 The Establishment of a New University	13
2.3 Management and Governance of Quality	15
2.3.1 Governing Body	16
2.3.2 Academic Council	17
2.4 Development and establishment of the new SETU Academic Council	20
2.5 Faculty and School Profile	21
2.6 Risk Management	22
2.7 Quality Ethos, University Strategy and the Quality Framework	23
2.8 The University Regulatory Framework	24
2.8.1 The Regulatory Environment for SETU	24
2.8.2 Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE)	27
2.8.3 Policy development at SETU	28
2.9 Academic Measurement, Reporting and Publication	29
2.9.1 Performance Agreement Between SETU and the HEA	30
2.9.2 Data Usage and the Quality Data Cycle	30
2.9.3 Data Reported to Governing Body and Academic Council	32
2.9.4 Publication of Data and Information	35
2.10 Reflections and directions on the governance and management of quality	36

2.10.1 Reflections	36
2.10.2 Directions.....	37
3. The SETU Student, their Experience and their Voice.....	40
3.1 Overview	40
3.2 The SETU Student: A Profile	40
3.2.1 Student Population.....	41
3.2.2 Socio-Economic Profile	43
3.2.3 International Students.....	45
3.2.4 Mature Students.....	47
3.2.5 Part-Time Students / Life-Long Learners.....	47
3.3 Student Expectations – What SETU does	48
3.3.1 Programme Portfolio	48
3.3.2 Student Charter	50
3.3.3 Access, Transfer and Progression	50
3.4 Student Engagement – What SETU does	54
3.4.1 Student Centrality and the SETU Strategy.....	54
3.4.2 Current student-centred approaches.....	55
3.4.3 Student Supports	56
3.4.4 Engagement Initiatives	56
3.4.5 Disability Support Service	58
3.4.6 Counselling Services	59
3.4.7 Student Non-Progression and Retention	60
3.4.7.1 <i>Student Non-Progression</i>	60
3.4.7.2 <i>Addressing non-progression: retention initiatives in place and planned</i>	62
3.4.8 Physical Supporting Infrastructure	64
3.5 Wider Student Environment – What SETU does	66
3.5.1 Sustainability	66
3.5.2 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.....	67
3.5.3 Careers Development Centre	67

3.5.4 Staff Training and Development.....	68
3.6 The SETU Student Experience – What our students say ...	71
3.6.1 National Student Survey.....	71
3.6.2 Students’ Union	73
3.6.3 Student Data and Voice Capture Mechanisms.....	74
3.6.4 Student Feedback Sessions	74
3.7 Reflections and directions on the governance and management of quality.....	77
3.7.1 Reflections	77
3.7.2 Directions.....	78
4. Our Engagement - Regional and Global.....	80
4.1 Overview	80
4.2 Regional Engagement.....	81
4.2.1 Engagement with Employers and Industry	82
4.2.2 Public Outreach and Community Engagement	86
4.3 Engagement with other Educational Providers	89
4.3.1 Engagement with the Further Education and Training Sector	90
4.3.2 Engagement with Collaborative and Linked Providers	92
4.4 Global Engagement	94
4.4.1 Developing a Strategic Plan for Global Partnership & Internationalisation.....	94
4.4.2 Quality Assuring the International Learner’s Experience.....	96
4.4.3 Global Engagement Data Recording and Reporting.....	98
4.5 Communicating with our Stakeholders – Internal and External	99
4.5.1 Overview of Marketing and Communications activity	99
4.5.2 University External Communications	100
4.5.3 University Internal Communications.....	101
4.5.4 Quality Assurance of our Communications	101
4.6 Reflections and directions for SETU’s Regional & Global Engagement Plans.....	102
4.6.1 Reflections.....	102
4.6.2 Directions	104

5. Research, Innovation and Enterprise.....	108
5.1 Overview	108
5.2 Research and Strategy.....	109
5.3 Governance of Research and QA	112
5.3.1 Research Policy	114
5.3.2 Funding Research and Innovation	116
5.3.3 Graduate Studies	116
5.3.4 Research Ethics, Research Integrity and Research Data	117
5.3.5 QA of Research at Institute- and Centres-level	121
5.4 Research Student Centrality.....	123
5.4.1 EDI in Research Student Recruitment	124
5.4.2 Student Admissions and Integration	124
5.4.3 Clear Pathways	125
5.4.4 Complaints Process and the Student Voice.....	125
5.4.5 Communication and Publicising Research.....	125
5.4.6 Research Student Supports	126
5.5 Curriculum and Research Training and Development	127
5.5.1 Resources.....	128
5.5.2 Research Development Activities.....	128
5.5.3 Research Training and Workshops/Events.....	129
5.6 Reflections and directions on Research, Innovation and Enterprise.....	133
5.6.1 Reflections	133
5.7.2 Directions.....	134
Chapter 6 – Conclusions	136
6.1 Overview	136
6.2 Reflections on the CINNTE process	136
6.3 Resourcing the implementation of recommendations	137
6.3 Recommendations for the University	139
6.5 Next steps for SETU	141

Staff Consultation Draft

1. Introduction

Established in 2022, SETU is a university built upon the legacies of Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow. These institutions, with over 50 years of history, have significantly impacted the social, economic, and cultural fabric of the South East region of Ireland. By merging and forming a new university, under the [Technological Universities Act 2018](#), SETU has reshaped the higher education landscape in the region.

As a multi-campus technological university, SETU offers a comprehensive range of educational opportunities across all levels of the [National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#). Additionally, the University collaborates with international and national partners on various educational and research programmes.

SETU is committed to international engagement, entrepreneurship and regional development. Through its focus on academic excellence, inclusivity and a stimulating learning environment, the University strives to be a cornerstone for sustainable economic, environmental, cultural and social progress in the South East.

Published in 2023, SETU's Strategic Plan ([Connecting for Impact](#)) outlines a vision of inclusive education, innovation and impact. This plan ensures access to diverse learning and research opportunities for students. By fostering a culture of exploration, creativity and high standards, SETU encourages its students, staff, partners and stakeholders to develop their knowledge and values. Ultimately, the University aims to create a supportive and dynamic environment where everyone can learn, grow, and contribute to positive change.

1.1 Overview of this Report

This Self-evaluation Report (SER) is structured into six chapters. The current chapter introduces the University and its strategy, as well as the process adopted in developing this document.

Chapter 2 addresses the management and governance of quality at SETU as we describe the establishment of robust new structures. The chapter further explores the University's Quality Framework and how it is developing, including how the use of quality data is being enhanced. The current policy framework approach is outlined and we explain the staged and managed way in which it is evolving.

Chapter 3 considers the student experience at SETU; we examine how the University seeks to develop this central area through various actions and initiatives. The chapter also considers SETU's student profile, drawing upon the Institutional Profile document, and themes that we are hearing from the student voice and understanding from the data.

In Chapter 4, we explore SETU's external engagement with a variety of key stakeholders and how these engagements are being further developed. As an open, inclusive University, with a strong regional and global mandate, it is important that SETU further progresses its external relationships and builds these.

Chapter 5 demonstrates SETU's strong research culture and ethos. A key area of focus for the University is the growth of its research student numbers and the chapter details the strong foundations that the University is putting in place to support the achievement of this objective, as well as the quality of its research education and outputs.

The document finishes with Chapter 6, where we provide a conclusion to the report. This chapter, in reflecting on the document, summarises a series of recommendations for the University to consider as we move forward.

1.2 SER Methodology

1.2.1 Governance and Management

The University considers institutional review an integral part of its ongoing quality assurance (QA) processes. Given its central role, the Steering Committee chaired by the President is the focal point for all review activity. To ensure University-wide involvement and a holistic overview of relevant activity, the Steering Committee formed seven working groups, with a membership total of almost one hundred people. These working groups were:

1. Quality framework
2. Academic delivery
3. Academic administration and information systems
4. Learner experience
5. Research and innovation
6. Our people
7. Our engagement – regional and international.

Membership and contributions were actively sought from various stakeholders across the University, including:

- Academic Council
- Executive Management Team (EMT)
- Offices of the Registrar
- Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning
- Vice President for Student Experience

- Vice President for Strategy
- Senior Management at VP level
- SETU Students' Union (SETUSU)
- Heads of Function/Heads of Department representatives
- SETU staff members

This broad representation ensured a comprehensive review process that reflected the perspectives of all University stakeholders.

1.2.2 Consultation in the SETU Community

Members of the SETU community were, at various stages of development, invited to contribute to the development of the draft SER document and consulted on the draft document as it evolved. These included the SER Steering Committee and the working group leaders, Governing Body, the Office of the President, the Students' Union, the Office of the Vice President for Corporate Affairs and Finance, the Office of the Vice President for Strategy, the Office of the Vice President for Research, Innovation & Impact, the Academic Council, the Executive Management Team, SETU staff and students.

Some working groups also consulted with students in preparing their reports for the Steering Committee. For example, working group 4 (Learner experience) undertook a series of feedback sessions with students to capture learner voice and experience. While the feedback focussed on learner experience themes, the aim was to incorporate a key theme or themes from a number of working groups as appropriate to help inform and shape recommendations for the review and beyond.

1.2.3 SER Approval

This document has been developed by the SER Team, the Steering Committee and seven working groups. The document was presented to SETU Academic Council on xx for approval and to the SETU Governing Body on xx for final approval.

1.3 Overview of SETU

SETU is the only University in the South East region of Ireland, which has a population of approximately 580,000 people. The University has 18,000 students and over 1,500 staff, spread across campuses in Carlow, Waterford and Wexford, with a presence also in Kilkenny and Wicklow. Educational programmes, full-time and part-time, are delivered by SETU at levels 6 to 10 on the NFQ. Programmes are offered in an array of disciplines and fields including business, computing, education, engineering, health sciences, humanities, and science. In addition to school leavers, SETU offers programmes to lifelong learners using flexible learning modes and delivery methods. The University also engages in linked and

collaborative provision with national and international partners, and is a member of the European University, EU Connexus. SETU's research activity is conducted in collaboration with regional enterprise and involves the delivery of research programmes at master's and doctoral level. SETU has established a research institute, several research centres/groups, and hosts four Enterprise Ireland-funded Technology Gateways.

1.4 SETU Strategic Objectives

SETU's strategic objectives are set out in [Connecting for Impact](#), which is the University's strategic plan for 2023-2028. Twelve objectives are set out across four categories:

Our Innovation & Research

1. Build SETU research capacity and capability in areas of strength and potential.
2. Elevate our research and innovation activity to levels consistent with a top young global university.
3. Enhance our ability to translate our research into meaningful impact for the region and beyond.

Our Learners

1. Expand SETU educational provision to maximise educational opportunities for people in the region through a renewed programme portfolio that aligns to regional skills and educational needs, develops new discipline areas to address regional demand and arrest the outward migration of students from the region, and that enhances access and progression pathways.
2. Recast the SETU curriculum to create a research-informed, internationalised curriculum across all campuses that will take account of changing patterns of employment, the centrality of equality, diversity and inclusion, and the opportunities associated with sustainability, new and developing technology, and civic and social needs.
3. Reorganise and enhance our learner support infrastructure and learning environment, encompassing all aspects of the student experience, to ensure opportunities for active, equitable and inclusive participation of all our learners in all aspects of university life, and position SETU as a leader in how we enable learner success.

Our Engagement

1. Lead and deepen strategic partnerships with government, local authorities, education sector, public sector, enterprise, culture, voluntary and community organisations within the south east to maximise regional cohesion and impact,

enhance capacity to plan for and respond dynamically to current and emerging skills and educational needs of employers, and to enhance regional productivity, growth and sustainability.

2. Partner internationally to extend our reach and maximise our impact, enhance our attractiveness and reputation, and to drive an inclusive, outward-looking region.
3. Ensure sustainable development is embedded in SETU's leadership, governance and operations, and that the SETU community of staff and students are sustainably aware and incorporate sustainable practice into daily university life.

Our Staff

1. Build a unitary university culture that cultivates a strong sense of shared community, acknowledges and values employees, and fosters wellbeing and happiness.
2. Empower and enable our staff to achieve their highest potential in a fulfilling and happy work environment, with clear career progression options for all.
3. Actively mainstream equality, diversity and inclusion across our university, where all participants in university life live the values of equality and inclusion in our interactions, behaviours and operations, and in the way we lead and manage.

Each of these objectives gives rise to a series of actions that are described in the strategic plan, along with how progress is being measured. The strategic plan also sets out the vision, mission and values of SETU.

The strategic plan is referenced extensively in this document as it provides the framework and the momentum for many of the changes and initiatives that are identified in this report. SETU is a young university and, consequently, its structures, policies/procedures, systems, approaches, processes and culture are all in a transitional stage of development. Their evolution will need to take place in a phased and orderly manner to allow stakeholders time and space to process change so that it is embedded effectively and is reflective of our strategy.

The recommendations in the final chapter recognise where further development is needed and provide important impetus for the University to place focus on these areas as well as any other areas identified in the course of the Main Review Visit.

The review process has been of great importance and value to the University and has allowed us to evaluate and reflect on where we are and where we need to go. We look forward to continuing to develop as a new institution as we progress these areas to bring

SETU forward and fulfil our ambitions and objectives as a successful regional and global university.

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2. Governance and Management of Quality

2.1 Overview

SETU recognises the importance of the governance and management of quality. We begin by outlining the key University structures that have been put in place since 2022, following the establishment of SETU, that govern and manage quality. The chapter then addresses the University's quality ethos, how this is reflected in its strategy, and acknowledges the SETU Quality Framework as an important element of delivering on that ethos. The regulatory environment in SETU is discussed, including plans for its further alignment and development in pursuit of SETU strategy. The Quality Framework principles are noted and there are examples (in Appendix 1) of how SETU currently addresses them and how we will continue to address them on the back of further developments. Information is also provided on the University's data usage, reporting and publication and how this is evolving with changing structures.

2.2 The Establishment of a New University

In May 2022, SETU formally came into existence as the legislative and operational activities necessary for its initial formation were completed. The complexity of creating a new university from the merger of two long-established and effective higher education institutions spans governance, managerial, operational and cultural dimensions. This requires an effective change management process to guide the necessary stages to realise the new University vision. SETU is more than the sum of its merging parts, as a new University with strong strategic ambitions and aspirations to lead substantial regional development and HE landscape change. This strategic intent has been given form in the University's first strategic plan.

The University recognises the need for organisational and structural changes to drive our ambition and that this requires a well thought-out and structured pathway. The University also recognises the need for new internal roles and new contract grades to retain and attract appropriate high-quality staff and is in discussions with the Higher Education System in respect of these needs. The initial stages of restructuring have been agreed by the University's Governing Body in October 2023 and several cross-university roles have already been appointed to support the development of the University's activity. The University is moving to a structure as per Figure 2.1, in which the University President will be supported by three high-level executive functions led by Senior Vice Presidents (Academic, Operations and Finance) and by a University Secretary attached to the President's Office. The Senior Vice Presidents will be supported by a functional structure led by Vice Presidents and the

University has commenced re-allocating previous positions to enable this to develop. From January 2024, university-wide responsibility was assigned to five Vice Presidents in Academic Affairs Teaching & Learning; Student Experience; Finance; Global Partnerships; and Governance. The University has also recently completed the recruitment of new senior posts: Vice President People, Culture & EDI; Vice President Research, Innovation & Impact and an Associate Vice President for Sustainability.

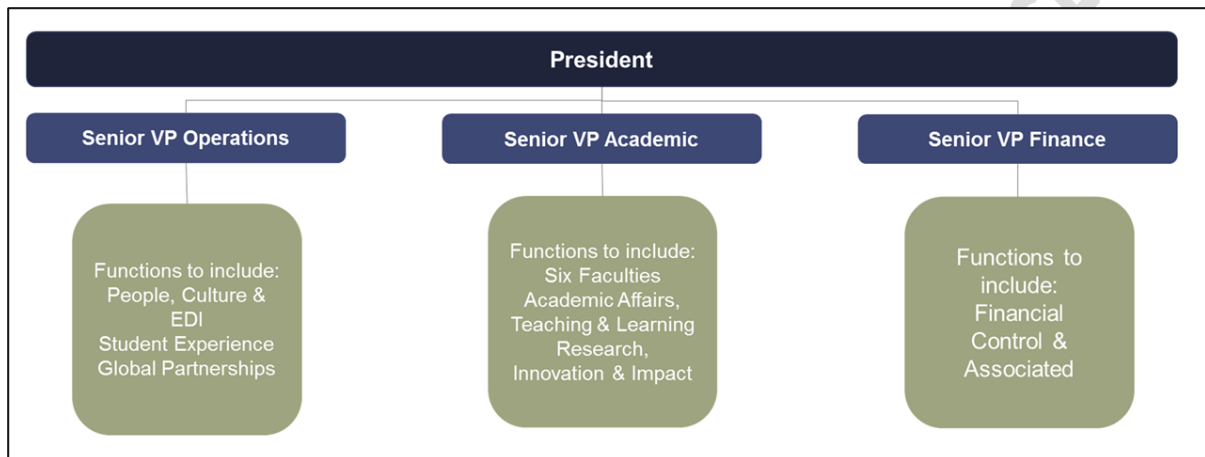


Figure 2.1: New SETU Organisational Structure

To support the change process the University has also invested in project management posts, largely funded by the Technological University Transformation Fund (TUTF) and Technological Sector Advancement Fund (TSAF) allocations, and in the creation of structures and roles to support change, including the Staff Change Network and a Senior Change Management Professional role. A formalised and bespoke change process aimed at creating new functional and academic structures in line with the approved high-level design has commenced and is being actively monitored and supported (see Case Study 2.1).

Case Study 2.1: Change Management



Our University has developed a bespoke Change Management (CM) process and toolkit that helps us adapt and improve. We have used it for different purposes, to support various merging and integrating teams, and for University-wide strategic initiatives that promote continuous improvement and change.

An example of a University-wide initiative is our recent organisational redesign project.

The redesign project is happening in two stages:

Stage 1: Stabilise (What & Why) This stage focuses on achieving clarity and stability in the new organisational structure. We will define the goals and rationale for the redesign, allowing staff to participate and understand the changes. This fosters ownership and helps with implementation.

Stage 2: Optimise (How) Once the structure is clear, this stage focuses on developing specific objectives to improve each Faculty or PMSS (Professional, Management and Support Staff) unit. This aligns with the "how" part of our CM framework and represents ongoing efforts for continuous improvement.

Our goal is to complete Stage 1 (Stabilise) by September 2024, ensuring transparency and clarity on the new structure across all faculties and PMSS units. Then, we will move on to Stage 2 (Optimise).

2.3 Management and Governance of Quality

In accordance with the provisions of the [Technological Universities Act \(2018\)](#) ("the 2018 Act"), SETU's [Governing Body](#) was formed in May 2022 and an [Academic Council](#) was subsequently established. The functions of both of these bodies are set out in the 2018 Act. In addition, the University has established a School/Faculty¹ structure. Academic Council is responsible for the academic governance of SETU and reports, as relevant, to Governing Body, while Schools/Faculties have a reporting line to Academic Council on academic matters; these reporting lines ensure the flow of relevant information and allow governance oversight. The structure is summarised in Figure 2.2 below.

¹ The terms 'School' and 'Faculty' are equivalent to each other and relate to the structures from the antecedent institutions.

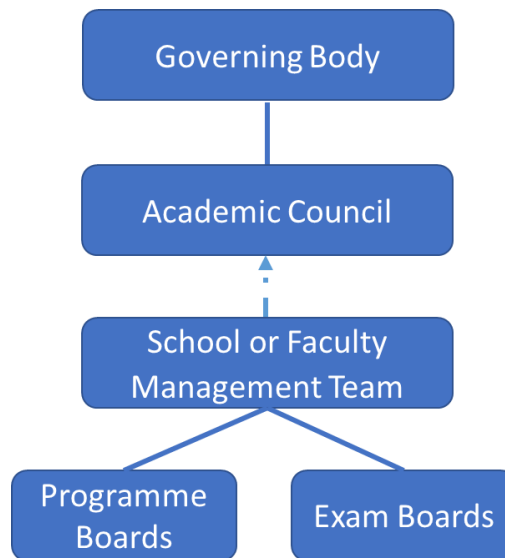


Figure 2.2 – Summary of University Structures for the Management and Governance of Quality

2.3.1 Governing Body

The Governing Body is the statutory body that has overall oversight of the University. There are nineteen members of Governing Body, which includes external members, staff members and three student members. A competency framework for membership is in place to ensure that the required range of expertise is available to support the work of the Governing Body. Details of the current members are available in the Governing Body section of the SETU [website](#). To ensure visibility of Governing Body activities and to promote openness and transparency, the minutes of all Governing Body meetings since SETU’s establishment are published on the SETU website. In addition, the Chairperson of Governing Body and the President organise University-wide webinars both to inform and engage with SETU students and staff on University matters.

The Governing Body has established seven committees/sub-committees to support its work. These are the:

- Audit & Risk Committee
- Commercialisation Committee (a sub-committee of FCIC)
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee
- Finance & Capital Investment Committee (FCIC)
- Joint Quality Committee (a joint committee of Governing Body and Academic Council)
- Nominations Committee
- Policy Committee

Further information about each of the committees is available on the Governing Body section of the [website](#).

In accordance with the [interim Code of Governance](#), an internal review of effectiveness of the Governing Body has taken place in the form of a self-assessment evaluation questionnaire completed by members to generate proposals for improvements. This was considered by Governing Body in [April 2024](#). An external review of effectiveness will be carried out by an independent third party in accordance with the requirements of the Code.

2.3.2 Academic Council

The functions of SETU's Academic Council are set out in s.17 of the 2018 Act, including that 'an academic council shall control the academic affairs of the technological university, including the curriculum of, and instruction and education provided by, the technological university.' In this respect, the Academic Council has academic oversight. Minutes of Academic Council meetings are available on the [SETU website](#). All Academic Council minutes are brought to the next Governing Body meeting for noting and regular reports from Academic Council are presented to Governing Body both on a routine and issues' basis. An innovative design feature of academic governance has been the creation of a joint Governing Body and Academic Council committee on quality (the Joint Quality Committee), which is designed to ensure quality review cycles for both academic and professional areas are engaged in and acted upon throughout SETU.

The first SETU Academic Council was appointed (by Governing Body) in May 2022 as an interim Academic Council. A committee structure based on legacy designs was then established to enable the activities of the University, pending a new Academic Council design.

Following a detailed design process that was externally chaired, a new Academic Council structure was established in March 2024 to meet the aspirations of the new University. The new Academic Council consists of up to 59 members from across the University. Ex-officio members are the President (as chair), four Vice Presidents and all Heads of School/Faculty. The elected members consist of Academic Staff members (elected by School/Faculty and by skill characteristics), two Heads of Department, Professional, Management and Support Staff members, and student members. A majority of the members of Academic Council are academic staff members.

Further information on the development and establishment of the new Academic Council is provided in section 2.4. The following committee structure (Table 2.1) emerged from this new design:

Committee	Terms of Reference (some key items abridged as examples)	Core Responsibility
<p>Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters pertaining to taught programmes and students, including ensuring integrity of teaching, learning and assessment and achievement of appropriate standards, and recommendations to Academic Council on relevant approvals • Oversee development of relevant policies • Relevant data reviews 	<p>All taught programmes (incl. PG) development, approval, quality assurance metrics, the teaching, learning and associated strategies</p>
<p>Research and Research Programmes Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support relevant developments in research and innovation • Matters pertaining to research programmes and students including ensuring the integrity of teaching, learning and assessment and achievement of appropriate standards, as well as recommendations to Academic Council on relevant approvals • Oversee development of relevant policies • Relevant data reviews 	<p>Research activity including the PG research student</p>
<p>Student Experience Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that there are effective policies to support student services • Support student engagement 	<p>The student environment</p>

Committee	Terms of Reference (some key items abridged as examples)	Core Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the support of student health and welfare • Oversee development of relevant policies • Receive and act on relevant reports 	
Joint Quality Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations to Academic Council and Governing Body on relevant policies • Agree and monitor schedule of quality reviews and report on outcomes • Approve and monitor implementation plans • Agree schedule of data for review • Implement policy on academic risk • Prepare Annual Quality Report 	All quality review cycles

Table 2.1 – Academic Council committees

In addition to the above committees, Academic Council establishes working groups to address specific matters or areas of work that are identified as important to the University. These have included the Academic Council Design Working Group, the Academic Delivery Framework Working Group, the First Year Experience/Start Date Working Group and the Gen AI (Generative Artificial Intelligence) Working Group.

The Gen AI Working Group was established to explore the opportunities, ethics, and challenges of using Gen AI in learning, teaching, assessment, research and administration by students, academics, and professional staff at SETU. It will advise and make recommendations to Academic Council and across SETU. To date, the group has developed guidelines documents for staff and students on the use of Gen AI which have been approved by Academic Council. A staff Gen AI Hub and Gen AI area in the student hub have been developed with a wide range of resources and tools to support the University community. Ongoing professional development workshops are also taking place across the University.

As part of the agreed design for the new Academic Council, a review of its operation is to be presented to Governing Body after six months of operation.

2.4 Development and establishment of the new SETU Academic Council

The design adopted for the new Academic Council is based on the recommendations of an externally focused University working group (including two student members and two external members, one of whom chaired the group). Based on a review of academic governance structures at various international universities, the University developed a conceptual framework for Academic Council that focused on the desire to create a university governance model emphasising SETU's strategic orientation. A key design feature is the creation of a category of elected members based on prioritised university areas (see Case Study 2.2).

Case Study 2.2: Design of the new SETU Academic Council

In October 2022, the Governing Body appointed an Academic Council Design Working Group. The overarching purpose of the Design Group was to '*recommend a structure that connects SETU with national and international best thinking in the academic governance space*'. The design that emerged has features that one would associate with traditional governance structures (committees, representation from academic and non-academic areas, student members) which maintain a link to past councils but also has features that are novel, including:

- Ten Academic Staff members have been **elected to Academic Council on the basis of skill characteristics**. These skill characteristics have been identified with reference to SETU's strategic objectives and specific requirements in legislation. The characteristics are: *Research, Innovation and Doctoral Supervision; Educational Enhancement and Curriculum Design; Learner Support and Learner Experience; Collaboration and Sustainability; and Experience and Engagement with Business, Enterprise and the Professions*. This helps to connect Academic Council directly to the University's strategic objectives and to support their delivery.
- A **Joint Quality Committee** has been established, which reports to both Academic Council and Governing Body. This committee is responsible for ensuring the overall quality of the University based upon reviews of information, including aggregated data, and through its interaction with relevant University bodies arising from reviews. The establishment of this committee ensures that a quality focus is central and connected to both Governing Body and Academic Council.
- In the case of three committees, their membership consists of members of Academic Council, co-opted/nominated specialists and **nominees from each School/Faculty**. The inclusion of School/Faculty nominees supports the maintenance of a close connection between Academic Council and the Schools/Faculties and enhances the two-way flow of communication on academic matters, including academic quality.

The University was conscious that developing and embedding a new design would change how Academic Council would look and operate. The Academic Council elections in early 2024 were also the first such set of Council elections in SETU. Consequently, a number of initiatives were conceived to help with this embedding.

Four information sessions (two in-person and two online) were delivered in advance of the deadline for nominations for election. These were an opportunity for staff to find out information about the elections and Academic Council, and to ask any questions. All staff were invited to attend, and presentation slides used at the sessions were shared with all staff.

An induction and training session for members of the new Academic Council was provided in February 2024. Given that a number of the members of Academic Council were first-time members, this was an important session. Members were provided with an opportunity to ask questions. Further training for members of Academic Council and its committees will be delivered in due course as part of capacity building.

2.5 Faculty and School Profile

On establishment, SETU retained the Faculty and School structures that existed in the antecedent institutions. These are as follows:

- Faculty of Business & Humanities
- Faculty of Engineering
- Faculty of Lifelong Learning
- Faculty of Science & Health
- School of Business
- School of Education & Lifelong Learning
- School of Engineering
- School of Health Sciences
- School of Humanities
- School of Science & Computing
- Wexford Campus

Each Faculty/School has its own management structure, with Heads of Department [and, in the case of the Wexford Campus, the Deputy Head of Campus] reporting to the Head of Faculty/School. All Heads of Faculty/School, along with all Vice Presidents, are also members of the University [Executive Management Team](#).

The Governing Body has approved the transition of the University into six integrated faculties:

- Science & Computing
- Engineering
- Business
- Education & Lifelong Learning
- Health Sciences
- Arts & Humanities.

The University wants this transition to deliver real change and to maximise its potential to deliver a strong regional curriculum, research and engagement profile that generates regional impact. This task goes beyond the restructuring of existing, antecedent activity and requires new investment in people as well as new forms of employment contracts and managerial roles to generate this effect. In recognition of this challenge, the University is actively engaged with the State to highlight the need for new structural and governance forms to fully deliver on the new technological university sector's potential.

2.6 Risk Management

The University has invested in the creation of a dedicated structure to support risk management throughout the University with resources located within the Office of the Vice President for Governance. There are a number of components to the University's approach to managing risk. These include:

- Establishing an Audit & Risk Committee as a committee of Governing Body. As part of its risk management remit, the committee is required to review risk processes and registers to ensure that risks are captured, considered, controlled and mitigated as appropriate.
- The University's Risk Management Policy sets out the approach to risk and risk reporting and also includes the University's risk appetite.
- A live University Risk Register is maintained. The Strategic Risk Register is maintained in relation to the risks the University faces in achieving its strategic objectives and all Schools/Faculties and functions maintain local risk registers. All risk registers are regularly updated and reported to management. The University has risk software in place.
- Operating an internal audit function (outsourced), which reports to the Audit & Risk Committee. A risk based internal audit plan is approved by the committee, based

upon which reviews are undertaken and subsequently reported on. Actions arising from reviews are monitored by the committee.

The University is planning to develop an academic risk policy as part of the Joint Quality Committee's work plan, designed to support risk management, the Quality Framework and, more generally, the academic activities of SETU.

2.7 Quality Ethos, University Strategy and the Quality Framework

The University's Quality Ethos draws from the Mission, Vision and Values set in the [Strategic Plan](#) (p.8 and 9). Included in The University's Values are:

- We place students at the centre of what we do;
- We promote excellence;
- We work collaboratively.

A positive and collaborative culture is essential for the University to fulfil its mission. This requires all stakeholders to actively participate in quality assurance and enhancement processes. This collaborative approach fosters good governance, builds public trust and ensures the University remains fit for purpose in a changing environment.

To achieve this positive culture and quality outcomes, SETU has designed a Quality Framework, which was approved by Governing Body in February 2023. This is an overarching framework that encompasses the whole of SETU, covering all University activity across all units, areas and functions. The framework is informed by and draws from the [European Standards and Guidelines \(ESG\) 2015](#) and the [Technological Higher Education Quality Framework](#) (THEQF), as well as the statutory and regulatory environment in which Irish education operates, and has regard to the [QQI Core Statutory QA Guidelines](#) and other relevant topic- and sector-specific QA guidelines.

The Framework document sets out the underpinning quality philosophy of the University, the purpose of the framework, how the University approaches quality assurance and enhancement and twelve principles that guide the development of quality assurance and enhancement activities across the University. In this regard, the Framework is core to quality in SETU and guides developments in governance, regulations, policies and procedures.

In order to demonstrate how SETU is addressing these principles, Appendix 1 sets out each of the principles and maps these to examples of current activities and approaches of the University, relevant regulations and policies (including areas under development) and other means by which SETU is implementing the Quality Framework. This highlights how, within

an evolving policy environment, SETU is addressing quality but is also conscious of the need to further develop and enhance in this space. The development of this appendix has, operationally, been a valuable exercise and is a working document for the University as we continue to develop and implement new approaches.

The Framework is being embedded across all University units and functions, driving continuous improvement efforts. It is also aligned with SETU's Strategic Plan, ensuring a unified approach to achieving quality.

The Quality Framework gives voice to each of the University's values – for example, student centrality links to Quality Framework Principle 3 (Learner-Centred Learning); promoting excellence links to Quality Framework Principle 1 (Policies and Procedures for Quality Assurance) and Principle 5 (Development of Staff); and working collaboratively links to the Quality Framework in its totality.

2.8 The University Regulatory Framework

2.8.1 The Regulatory Environment for SETU

The University is in a transitional phase, building on the activities and quality environments of the antecedent organisations to enable a single, unified SETU. SETU's regulatory environment is complex and the creation of a single set of operational academic processes is a challenging task requiring both operational and cultural change. We recognise that integration occurs at multiple levels and the task of creating a single, unified University regulatory framework requires a staged approach – commencing with agreed high-level principles and progressing to more detailed operational policies, procedures and processes. These processes of development and implementation must be adequately supported by a change process that both creates and adequately embeds the new University model. The use of state funding through TUTF and TSAF have been useful in this regard and have gone some way to help create central University-wide roles that support executive management structures with University-wide responsibility, and to plan the sequencing of necessary precursors to successful delivery of an integrated regulatory framework.

Recognising these constraints, the University is focused on prioritising academic policy development, that is risk focused and which aims to create the high-level regulatory environment in which all activity has an overarching framework, but which also allows some aspects of academic delivery to vary across programmes. Variation in programme delivery within a University is not uncommon as specific disciplines have unique characteristics. This approach has also enabled an Academic Delivery Framework Working Group (a working group of Academic Council) to take the necessary time to conduct international

comparators of academic delivery with a view to creating an internationally relevant delivery framework for the University (see Case Study 2.3 below).

On establishment, the University adopted the regulations, policies and procedures in situ from the antecedent institutions at that time. While broadly consistent, the various systems, Semesterisation and Modularisation (SAM) and the Academic Delivery Framework (ADF), had some variations and the University was keen that necessary emerging changes to academic delivery would develop in a manner that did not adversely impact any individual student or cohort of students. Examples of differences include matters of timing of credit accumulation or whether external examining activity is at the programme or the module level. Where differences could be isolated to programmes (or programme sets) and fitted within the Quality Framework, these differences were permitted to continue, pending University agreement on a unified academic delivery framework.

This means that, while there may be some slight differences at the more detailed level of policy and procedure, there is consistency across the University in terms of overall regulation. Figure 2.3 shows the hierarchical nature of the regulatory environment, with the Quality Framework driving over-arching regulations which in turn set the principles that must be followed in more detailed regulations and policies:

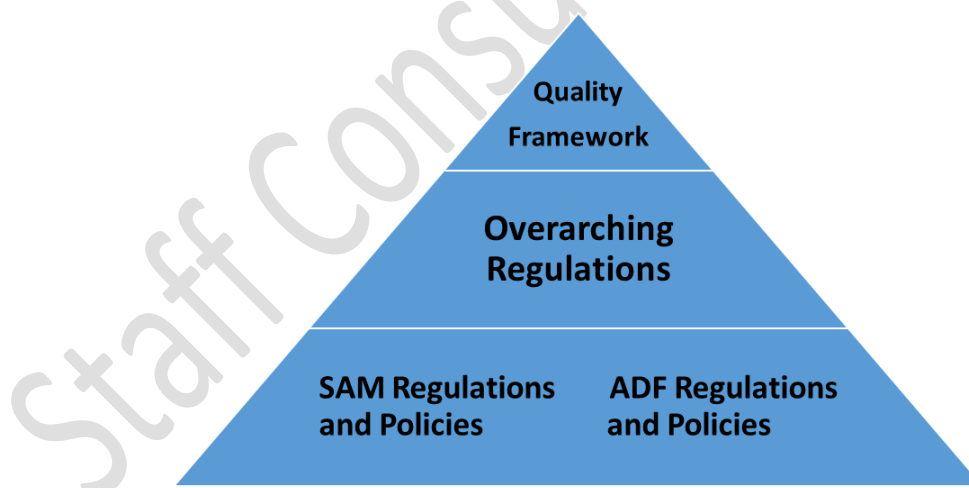


Figure 2.3 - Relationship between Quality Framework, over-arching regulations and framework-specific regulations and policies

Regulations are updated and published annually, at the time of writing the SETU Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes 2023-2024 (approved April 2023) are in force. These regulations set out the University regulations for all taught programmes and for the students of all taught programmes, Similarly, the University has developed a set of Research

Degree Regulations which provide high-level principles for research degrees at SETU (these are further discussed in Chapter 5).

It is worth noting that these regulations, policies and procedures have in part transitioned across to SETU from two long established HEIs. They have been in active and continuous use in the antecedent institutions for many years and indeed have been part of previous institutional reviews (most recently, both Waterford IT and IT Carlow were reviewed as part of the CINTE institutional review cycle in 2020). The University recognises that the creation of a single delivery framework consistently applied across all of SETU is a core requirement for delivering on the strategic goals of the University, and the University has established the necessary infrastructure to deliver on this requirement. The Academic Delivery Framework Working Group (Case Study 2.3) is actively working on the design and the resources and project structure, and recognises that consultation with staff and staff development processes will be needed to implement any recommendation.

Case Study 2.3 - Establishing a new Academic Delivery Framework

In June 2023, the SETU Academic Council approved the establishment of an Academic Delivery Framework Working Group. This group crosses the University and is co-chaired by the VP Academic Affairs, Teaching & Learning and the VP Student Experience. Terms of reference were established for the group, which include:

- Examine ways in which SETU can utilise a modularised and semesterised system to maximise student learning and make recommendations to Academic Council on the best approach to adopt in the University's new Academic Framework.
- Consider how the delivery, support and assessment of student learning can be optimised within a modularised and semesterised system and make recommendations on appropriate structures and approaches to allow Academic Council to achieve this as part of the University's new Academic Framework.

The Working Group has developed a number of discussion papers and have had very valuable engagements with four senior academics who have presented on the approaches in their universities. These universities are located in Australia (Swinburne University of Technology), the US (Georgia Southern University) and continental Europe (Klaipeda University and University of Zadar). Themes explored have included the use of academic success coaches, internal moderation of assessment, approaches to external examining, aligning professional accreditation to quality assurance, approaches to progression, and student effort hours and workload.

The Working Group is currently examining some of the different approaches identified in terms of their suitability for SETU and will report to Academic Council on their recommendations, including their potential implications for overall quality and student experience in the University.

2.8.2 Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE)

Policy and regulation development to govern quality assurance and enhancement are advancing in the University. This section provides an overview of the stage of development of three of the most important policy areas: programme development; SETU's academic regulations; and university reviews.

Programme development

SETU is developing a programme development and approval policy, which will set out the University's approach to validating programmes of education and training from NFQ levels 6-10. The policy will incorporate the validation of collaboratively-developed programmes with external partners, ensuring that all programmes leading to SETU awards are subject to consistent and rigorous quality assurance processes. The policy and associated validation process will be implemented in academic year 2024/2025.

Academic regulations

SETU has developed and implemented academic regulations for the University, which set out the principles that the governance, management and delivery of all taught programmes across the University must adhere to. Matters encompassed within the regulations include requirements for *inter alia* the:

- registration and enrolment of learners;
- the structure of the academic year and academic programmes;
- the delivery of assessment;
- the operation of programme and examination boards; and
- making of awards.

University reviews policy

SETU has developed a policy that sets out the requirements for the conduct of all types of review within the University. The policy is cognisant of national and international practice and developments and will support SETU in complying with its obligations, both statutory and non-statutory as well as an overarching review model that is based on international best practice, including those expectations set out by the [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#). Review types include *inter alia* reviews of education provision, primarily through faculty/departmental/school review; reviews of University services; thematic reviews of specific matters or topics at an institutional level, including matters that emerge as themes across reviews; and limited area reviews. The policy also sets out how the outcomes of reviews will be approved, progressed and monitored by the University.

2.8.3 Policy development at SETU

A listing of the approved SETU academic and student policies/procedures that have formed the focal point of policy development since SETUs establishment is provided below (Table 2.2), along with policies/procedures and related documents that are currently in the approvals process or in consultation with stakeholders. The approach highlights the prioritised areas of development, recognising the time and resource constraints needed to achieve our strategic ambitions:

Policy/Procedure	Status
SETU Quality Framework	Approved by Governing Body (February 2023)
SETU Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes 2023-2024	Approved (April 2023)
Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure	Approved by Governing Body (February 2024)
Student Academic Misconduct Policy and Disciplinary Procedure	Approved by Governing Body (February 2024)
Student Charter	Approved (October 2022)
SETU Honorary Degrees Process	Approved by Governing Body (February 2024)
SETU English Language Requirements	Approved (February 2023)
SETU Generic Award Standards	Approved (May 2022)
Academic Council Procedures Document	Approved by Academic Council (June 2024)
Terms of Reference for Academic Council Committees	Approved by Academic Council (June 2024)
Assessment and Feedback Policy (and associated guidelines)	Approved by Academic Council (June 2024)
Supporting and Determining Student's Fitness to Continue in Study - Policy and Procedure	Approved by Academic Council (May 2024)
SETU Dignity and Respect Policy for Students	To go to Academic Council for approval
SETU Student Complaints Policy	In consultation
Academic Integrity Policy	In consultation
Reasonable Accommodation for Students with Disabilities Policy	In consultation

Policy and Procedure on Assessment Appeals	Presented to Academic Council committee for discussion
SETU Policy on External Examining	Presented to Academic Council committee for discussion
University Reviews Policy	Presented to Academic Council committee for discussion
Policy on the Principles of Academic Delivery	To go to Academic Council committee for discussion

Table 2.2 Academic and student policies/procedures approved or in the approvals/consultation process

Appendix 2 sets out the existing academic and student policies by framework, excluding the approved policies above. Colour coding has been included to indicate the prioritisation of work in aligning these areas around singular SETU policies as we move forward; the development of associated procedures will follow from this. The table provides an overview of current alignment and development plans, including where the area is addressed at a high-level in the over-arching SETU Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes as appropriate.

2.9 Academic Measurement, Reporting and Publication

The measurement, reporting and publication of relevant data is fundamental to good quality assurance. Data are used at all levels of the organisation, from individualised roles to high level strategic decisions. The University's challenge is to ensure the flow of data is appropriate to its decision-making needs and this is all the more challenging within the context of merging and creating a multi-campus environment. The organisational design decisions articulated elsewhere in the document are one conscious manner in which academic data flows can be improved – so too are Academic Council Design elements including the Joint Quality Committee. Improved flows of data to Academic Council (see for example the section on retention; section 3.4.7) and the wider publication of reports and data will support greater cultural engagement with data informed decision making. The Joint Quality Committee has taken responsibility for the quality assurance of data flows and ensuring that the appropriate data gathering, reporting and actioning is incorporated into the University's policy environment.

The University has also established and staffed a new unit, the Centre for Organisational Research, Data & Analysis (CORDA), as part of the President's Office to assist with the collection and analysis of relevant University and sectoral data.

2.9.1 Performance Agreement Between SETU and the HEA

The University is currently finalising its Performance Agreement with the Higher Education Authority (HEA) as part of the HEA's System Performance Framework 2023-2028. The Performance Agreement has been informed by the SETU Strategic Plan and five objectives align with a number of key objectives of the Strategic Plan:

- **Performance Objective 1:** Reshape the SETU curriculum to take account of changing patterns of employment and civic and social needs (especially in relation to sustainability and EDI), and enhance learner support infrastructure and the learning environment to position SETU as a leader in enabling learner success
- **Performance Objective 2:** Elevate SETU research and innovation, in domains aligned to regional priority, to levels consistent with a top young global university, maximising impact on regional enterprise and society.
- **Performance Objective 3:** Expand SETU educational provision to maximise educational opportunities for people in the region through a renewed programme portfolio, aligned with regional skills needs.
- **Performance Objective 4:** Partner internationally to extend our reach and maximise our impact, enhance our attractiveness and reputation, and to drive an inclusive, outward-looking region
- **Performance Objective 5:** Lead and deepen regional strategic partnerships to maximise regional cohesion and impact, enhance capacity to plan for and respond dynamically to current and emerging skills and educational needs of employers, and to enhance regional productivity, growth and sustainability.

Each of the five performance objectives have a number of priorities that have been agreed between SETU and the HEA over a series of submissions and meetings since the System Performance Framework was launched in SETU on 25th September 2023. The recommendations and priorities recorded in this institutional self-evaluation report are subservient to the priorities listed in the Performance Agreement. The final Performance Agreement is expected to be published on the HEA's website in summer 2024².

2.9.2 Data Usage and the Quality Data Cycle

The University's quality data cycle is set out in Figure 2.4 below. This consists of four elements:

- The implementation of the activity (academic or service)
- The gathering of data on the activity
- The evaluation of the data gathered, in identifying what it means
- The review of the data evaluated, in identifying implications for the organisation, and actioning on this basis

² <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/managing-performance/system-performance-framework/>

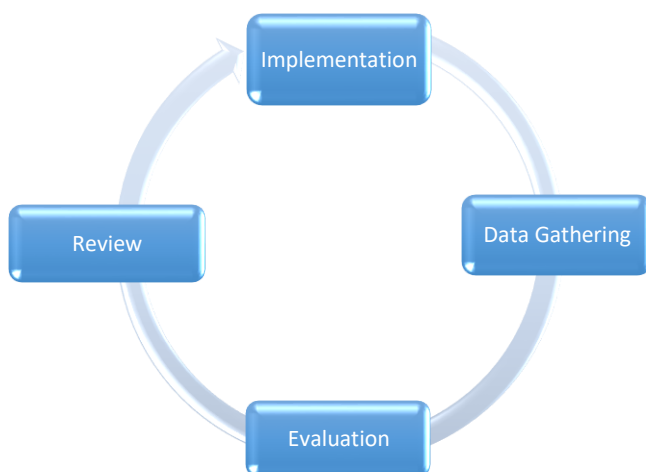


Figure 2.5 The Quality Data Cycle

In the context of this cycle, the following are examples of data usage in the University and how this can support and enhance quality:

1. *Policy reviews* – policies are reviewed and updated in accordance with the [Policy Management Framework](#). It is important that data on reviews are collected to ensure that these are happening as scheduled, so that policies remain contemporary and that any related policies are considered.
2. *Reporting required within policies* – policies can set out a requirement to periodically produce data for University bodies on activities, who are then expected to consider the data and what implications this may have for the University and for the policy itself. For example, the Student Expected Behaviour Policy and Disciplinary Procedure requires that, on at least an annual basis, an anonymised report of the types of complaints raised, investigation roles, the types of adverse findings of misconduct, outcomes arrived at, and sanctions administered is provided to Academic Council, EMT and Governing Body.
3. *Programme, service and thematic reviews* – these reviews address academic and non-academic areas and their activities, as well as key institutional themes identified through scrutiny of data, review outcomes and consideration of developments in the external environment. Programme and service reviews take place in accordance with agreed schedules; thematic reviews are initiated based on proposals by governance units or committees. The unit/area under review engages in a comprehensive self-evaluation and generates a report that is reviewed by a panel of experts. An outcome of reviews is an implementation plan, which is monitored by and reported on to the relevant University body.

4. *Quality data reports to University bodies* – At certain times during the year, quality data is reported to different University bodies. This can represent aggregated sectoral data (such as from the HEA), national survey data (such as StudentSurvey.ie, which is also split by University) or University-specific data (such as enrolment data, and summaries of external examiner and programme board reports).

To demonstrate the breadth of data reported, the next sub-section identifies the types of data that have been reported to Governing Body and Academic Council.

2.9.3 Data Reported to Governing Body and Academic Council

Regular reports from academic and corporate governance perspectives are considered by the Governing Body and the minutes of the Governing Body [are published](#) on the SETU website. The range of activities and reports presented to Governing Body since May 2022 include:

- Research funding, research student enrolment and research impact
- Performance in non-EU student recruitment and Erasmus activity
- Central Applications Office data on admissions
- Admission of students from the region and bordering counties
- SETU enrolment data and national trends
- Undergraduate progression rates

In a similar vein, Academic Council minutes [are published](#) and the range of reports and activities include:

- Summary of Programme Board Reports
- Summary of External Examiner Reports
- CAO performance
- Report on progression rates
- Student enrolment profile
- Deferrals, withdrawals and transfers
- Summary of semester 1 performance
- Module pass rate
- Variations in Honours Bachelor's Degree Classifications.

There is insufficient space in this report to discuss all of the data that are reported to the University and the associated implications. Consequently, the next two sub-sections

examine two key reports to demonstrate how the University is considering the data and acting upon this. The reporting to Academic Council by External Examiners and Programme Boards are important sources of data for the University from both a QA and a QE perspective.

2.9.3.1 External Examiners

The role of the external examiner has been pivotal to the historic quality assurance systems within the University and is a system that is strongly based in the Irish education landscape. It has served as a cornerstone process for external validation of the activities and standards within programme delivery and student attainment. A benefit of the merger is that different approaches to the detailed operation of external examination, for instance the primary focus on modules or programmes, has enabled the University to generate a broader and wider-ranging University-wide discussion on the future direction of travel for external examining and this is being examined within the Academic Delivery Framework Working Group.

The combined analysis of the 2022/23 external examiner reports provides a way-point to future potential directions of travel and a baseline understanding of the quality levels achieved through the University. Data were analysed based on over 300 reports received across all Faculties, Schools and Departments. The data show an overwhelming positive response on University standards and benchmarks standards as similar to (91.2%) or higher than (8.8%), other institutions, with 99.6% of external examiners benchmarking the University as achieving similar or higher standards than the NFQ.

The quality of assessment in terms of enabling learners to demonstrate achievement and in terms of being consistent, appropriate and fair was similarly rated positive by over 97% of all external examiners.

To support the Academic Delivery Framework Working Group, data was also extracted on the nature of the feedback given by external examiners. The purpose of this was to consider the balance of the benchmarking and assurance work completed by external examiners against the more potentially critical nature of feedback that supports quality enhancement and reflection. Over half of all feedback was reviewed as overwhelmingly positive, additionally, over 40% was rated as being very positive and all the balance being positive. This was coupled with a review of the extensiveness and complexity of the feedback. Generally, the feedback and its complexity tended toward simpler and routine matters. This data is useful to the Working Group and the discussions on future directions of quality assurance. It is evident that the external validation of the standards achieved in the University is strong and that the University can be confident in the quality of the University's

graduates. However, future policy development in this area might consider the balance between annual external validation and quality enhancement and development roles of external examining. The Working Group are to that end reviewing international systems of standard validation and the multiple manners in which that can be achieved.

Notwithstanding the positive findings, a number of recommendations are made. These include the need for:

- uniformity of template and process across the University to support comprehensive data collection and analysis;
- training for external examiners on the completion of the external examining form; and
- emphasis to external examiners of the value and necessity of constructive criticism as well as positive feedback to support quality enhancement of the University's education provision.

2.9.3.2 Programme Boards

A recent synthesis of programme board reports considered 81 reports from across the University (academic year 2022/2023)³. Sample themes arising from student input to programme boards include concerns with regard to the assessment workload, schedule and deadlines; the attendance and engagement of their peers in the programme; commentary on the benefits and advantages of both online and face-to-face delivery; and positive feedback on the dedication of lecturers and the value of peer-to-peer support.

The synthesis also notes that, of the 81 reports considered:

- only 22% comment on professional body accreditation;
- 33% do not include student feedback on their experience of the programme;
- 18.5% do not reference external examiner feedback;
- 83.9% do not detail how external examiner feedback has been responded to.

Arising from these findings, the report recommends a number of enhancements to the programme board reporting process, which will support the University to close the quality loop:

³ Note: The total number of programmes leading to major awards considered across all programme board reports was 713; the total number programmes considered overall was 1403.

- Develop a School/Faculty/Department response template to indicate how external examiner recommendations are actioned;
- Link external examiner recommendations and School/Faculty/Department responses to programme board reports;
- Develop a standard programme board report template; and
- Develop a standard, uniform process for the sign-off and approval of programme board reports.

2.9.4 Publication of Data and Information

SETU prioritises open communication, ensuring all stakeholders, from prospective students to alumni and the wider community, have easy access to relevant information. This commitment to transparency empowers informed decision-making. For example, this can mean that:

- Prospective students can easily find details about programmes, opportunities and events of interest to them.
- Current students can easily find relevant information about their programme, learning outcomes, teaching methods, and resources to navigate their academic journey.
- Our graduates can stay connected and celebrate SETU's achievements.
- The University's stakeholders: Partners, funders and collaborators gain insights into SETU's mission, values, and strategic goals, fostering more meaningful engagement.
- The wider public develops a deeper understanding of SETU's societal impact, research activities, and contributions to regional development.
- Through the publication and sharing of relevant quality data, the public have confidence in the University's standards, processes and overall quality ethos.

This open information approach reflects SETU's values of transparency and accountability, building trust and strengthening relationships with all stakeholders. The SETU website has recently been redeveloped and is an important means of sharing data and information with internal and external stakeholders, and with the public generally.

Examples of quality data published by the University on its website include the Annual Quality Report and evaluation reports on validated programmes. With the establishment of CORDA, the University may look to identify other data sources that can be communicated to the public and its stakeholders, and the most effective means of doing this.

2.10 Reflections and directions on the governance and management of quality

2.10.1 Reflections

Chapter 2 has focused on the governance and management of quality in SETU, and addresses the University's establishment, approaches adopted in governance and risk management, its quality and regulatory frameworks, and the usage, reporting and publication of quality data. Reflecting upon the CINNTE review objectives, we believe that chapter 2 (and related Appendices 1 and 2) demonstrates that we are addressing both objective 1 and objective 2. This is summarised in table 2.3 below:

Objective 1: To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of the new technological university through consideration of the procedures set out in the annual quality report submitted by the university.

How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 2

- Fully functioning Governing Body (GB) and Academic Council (AC), with clear reporting lines
- Risk management processes and risk registers
- AC committees scrutinise policies and procedures before recommendation to AC for approval
- New University structures, and executive responsibilities defined
- QA/QE approaches are identified
- New regulations, policies and procedures being developed and implemented, following an extensive approval process
- During transitional period, application of well-established and robust regulations, policies and procedures of antecedent institutions remains in certain areas; comprehensive coverage of areas demonstrated
- A work plan for further alignment, with prioritised areas
- University Quality Framework developed and being implemented
- Joint Quality Committee established, oversees University quality reviews and QA data reviews
- External, experienced persons involved in QA processes (e.g. external examiners; external members of programme validation panels)

- CORDA supports QA data collection, analysis and reporting
- QA data/information reported to/acted upon by University bodies, as demonstrated

Objective 2: To review the enhancement of quality by the technological university through governance, policy and procedures.

How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 2

- Emerging new organisational structures underpinned by change management process
- Strategic Plan sets out wide range of priority objectives for the University and actions stemming from these; implementation of these enhances the University
- New AC design implemented, which incorporates enhanced features
- Cross-University membership of AC and committees, including student members, ensures broad representation in decisions and actions
- Change management process and toolkit developed and in use
- Establishment of Joint Quality Committee as a committee of both GB and AC; centralises a quality focus and enhances data flows and reporting
- New AC committee structure, with terms of reference to ensure clear focus on specific areas
- Ongoing development of singular regulations, policies and procedures
- Policy Management Framework mandates periodic review of policies and procedures
- Development of a new Academic Delivery Framework, which is evidence-informed and draws upon international experiences
- Quality data analysed to generate and support enhancements
- University reviews identify areas for enhancement
- Implementation of a single University website as a means of enhancing internal and external communication, and the sharing of data and analysis of same

Table 2.3 – Addressing CINTE review objectives in chapter 2

2.10.2 Directions

While we demonstrate that we meet the above objectives, we recognise that there is scope to make further impact in governance and management of quality. Recommendations pertaining to such developments are presented below, as well as the challenges that exist for SETU in implementing these.

1. *Phase the development of aligned SETU policies and procedures⁴ in prioritised areas based on Appendix 2, and manage the rollout of these policies and procedures (including communication, training and change management) to all stakeholders.*

An important goal for the University, from a quality perspective, is to have a singular repository of academic policies and procedures. This will ensure an aligned approach across SETU for all staff and students. At present, this is the case for a number of policies (identified in Table 2.2) and we are working towards this on other policies also identified in the table. The presence of a single Quality Framework document and a single set of Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes needs to be leveraged to homogenise all policies and procedures consistently. Appendix 1 identifies where the priorities lie in terms of now seeking alignment at a policy level, with procedural alignment then to follow in a phased manner. A workplan will address communication and training around the new policies and how change will be managed for various stakeholders, most notably staff and students. Challenges here will be resourcing this work and ensuring that staff and student stakeholders are effectively engaged, informed and enabled for change.

2. *Produce the new SETU Academic Delivery Framework and develop a co-ordinated, cross University implementation and engagement plan, to include any revisions required to policies and procedures.*

The work on a new Academic Delivery Framework for SETU has the potential to generate new and novel approaches to teaching, learning and academic delivery based on international practice. When field work and analysis is complete, the working group will report its recommendations to Academic Council. This change process will culminate in a plan addressing how the new Framework will be implemented and how stakeholders will be engaged with on the implications of the new Framework. Changes to how we deliver and design curriculum will have substantial policy and practice impacts and provides both an opportunity to innovate, and also a significant change project with concomitant risks.

3. *Ensure that the Joint Quality Committee and CORDA are provided with the necessary resources to allow them to undertake required work in the areas of data generation, analysis, reporting and review, and to drive evidence-informed enhancement across University activities.*

⁴ Research policies and procedures are addressed in Chapter 5.

The establishment of the Joint Quality Committee is pivotal to both QA and QE in the University. As identified in section 2.9, the committee is responsible for the quality assurance of data flows and ensuring that the appropriate data gathering, reporting and actioning is incorporated into the University's policy environment. CORDA has a vital role here also, in the collection and analysis of relevant data internally and externally. Both require appropriate support from SETU to be able to carry out this important work, with the committee also having a key involvement in the University's quality reviews to be considered as well. Delivering on infrastructure requirements within the fiscal envelop of the university is not without its challenges.

4. *Embed relevant University data and analysis of the data in communications with our internal and external stakeholders.*

Leveraging the new University website, which represents an important source for the publication of information to staff, students, prospective students, and other external parties, will further enhance openness and transparency. To date, the University has not used the website extensively as a means of publishing quality data on its activities and an analysis of such data. With the work of the Joint Quality Committee and CORDA being undertaken, there is an opportunity now for the University to examine what data and analysis would be useful to publish and how to promote its availability to an even wider range of stakeholders, including (but not limited to) through the website. An important challenge here will be the time and work involved, and so this will need to be supported by relevant University teams including marketing and IT.

^[1] Recommendations with regard to research policies and procedures are addressed in chapter 5.

3. The SETU Student, their Experience and their Voice

3.1 Overview

In its Strategic Plan 2023-2028 the University commits to offering a student-centred education that is supported by lifelong learning, access, equality and inclusion, and to the provision of a comprehensive educational offering. In this regard, the University has ambitious but achievable plans to further enhance the SETU student experience under the leadership of the Vice President for Student Experience. SETU is at a juncture where supports and services are delivering a strong and valuable experience to students, but where improvements are in train in a number of identified areas.

This chapter explores the **Student Experience** under three headings:

- **Student expectations (section 3.3)** – what should be expected of SETU by students and prospective students, and how we seek to address these expectations
- **Student engagement (section 3.4)** – how we engage with our students to support them in their University journey and provide a positive experience of their time with SETU
- **Student enhancement (section 3.5)** – how SETU is working to enhance our students, beyond the learning and development they attain from their programme of study, to prepare them to be good global citizens and to support them in their career development

As a new University, SETU offers a holistic student experience, guided by the Strategic Plan objectives. Objectives and actions from the Plan are interwoven in this chapter to highlight how improvements are incorporated within our education delivery and service provision. The student voice, which rounds off this chapter, is an important source for stimulating improvements in what we do.

In advance of exploring the student experience, this chapter begins by setting out a profile of SETU students, which informs the diverse approach taken by the University in designing and delivering its student experience.

3.2 The SETU Student: A Profile

All students are registered on a formal programme of study within a home department. Each programme has a management structure that consists of the lecturing staff and a number of support roles, notably programme leaders and, where the programmes are large, year tutors. These staff and support roles are available to students for academic progress and queries and as a contact point for wider support services through central University

offices. Programmes are grouped into cognate departments with a departmental management structure led by a Head of Department, who is the first formal University management point for students and is core to the effective delivery and management of the department's curriculum. Departments are further aggregated to school/faculty structures under a relevant Head of School/Faculty. This Head of School/Faculty is a member of the senior management team of the University. There is a relevant school/faculty office that provides an administrative point of contact for the student.

In addition, there are administrative support offices in the Offices of the Vice President of Academic Affairs, such as Admissions, Registration or Awards that provide points of contact for students to engage with administrative or general queries concerning their time at the University.

Similarly, there are a myriad set of student focused support services deliver through the Office of the Vice President of Student Experience that incorporate health and welfare, disability and access and the student life activities, such as library, and clubs and societies. International students also have dedicated offices within the offices of the Vice-President for Global Affairs that can support international specific issues and provide a point of contact and reference for learners.

3.2.1 Student Population

In 2022/2023, SETU had 17,938 enrolments with 11,453 students studying over 240 programmes full-time and 6,485 studying over 250 programmes part-time or online (Institutional Profile (IP), Table 3). Student enrolments have fallen just under 7% from 19,278, pre-merger, in the 2020/2021 academic year. Full-time students are almost evenly split between male and female, but over 56% of part-time students are male, which results in slightly more male to female students overall (IP, Table 14).

SETU offers programmes across most disciplines with 22% of enrolments in *Business, Administration and Law*, 20% in *Health and Welfare* and 18% in *Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction* (IP, Table 5). This emphasises the wide-ranging offering of the University, which is consistent with its regional mandate and HE responsibility.

In 2022/2023, the majority of students at SETU were enrolled on undergraduate honours degrees (47%), with higher certificates (13%) and undergraduate ordinary degrees (13%) the next most popular types of award. While this might suggest opportunities to expand numbers at certificate and undergraduate general degree level, the reality is that these are

areas of decline nationally⁵. However, notwithstanding this, programmes leading to these award-types remain an important means of providing as many students as possible with access to third-level education and the scope to progress to higher qualifications in time.

There were 1,097 apprentices (6% of enrolments) enrolled in bricklaying, electrical, electronic security systems, motor, plumbing, electrical instrumentation, carpentry and joinery, and instrumentation apprenticeships (IP, Table 6). While a relatively low percentage of the overall student numbers, the University has identified this as a potential growth area and Action 4.3 of the Strategic Plan highlights the development of an apprenticeship strategy as a means of reinvigorating our apprenticeship offering, increasing apprentice numbers and positioning SETU as a leader in the field.

The University's strength and success as a regional driver is evident from the demographic profile of its learners. Over three-quarters of full-time students in SETU originating from Ireland in 2022/2023 came from the South-East region (Waterford 20%, Wexford 16%, Kilkenny 11% and Carlow 8%) and its neighbouring counties of Kildare (8%), Tipperary (7%) and Laois (6%) (Figure 3.1). This reflects SETU's provision of a vital service to the region, as students recognise the advantages of higher educational opportunities close to home, particularly in light of the cost and lack of availability of student accommodation elsewhere in Ireland.

As can be seen from Figure 3.1, as one looks north and west of the campus locations, the numbers from those counties who are SETU students substantially declines. As SETU develops and introduces newer programmes in areas of high demand and low supply (such as veterinary, pharmacy, optometry and teacher education), this profile may change. However, this is likely to take time, given the lead-in time required for new programmes and the challenges faced in the region itself regarding availability of student accommodation.

⁵ Cf. Walsh, P. (17 November 2023). The NFQ: A Reason to Celebrate: Presentation by Pdraig Walsh, CEO of QQI to NFQ 205h Anniversary Conference. Accessible at: <https://www.qqi.ie/news/the-nfq-a-reason-to-celebrate>.

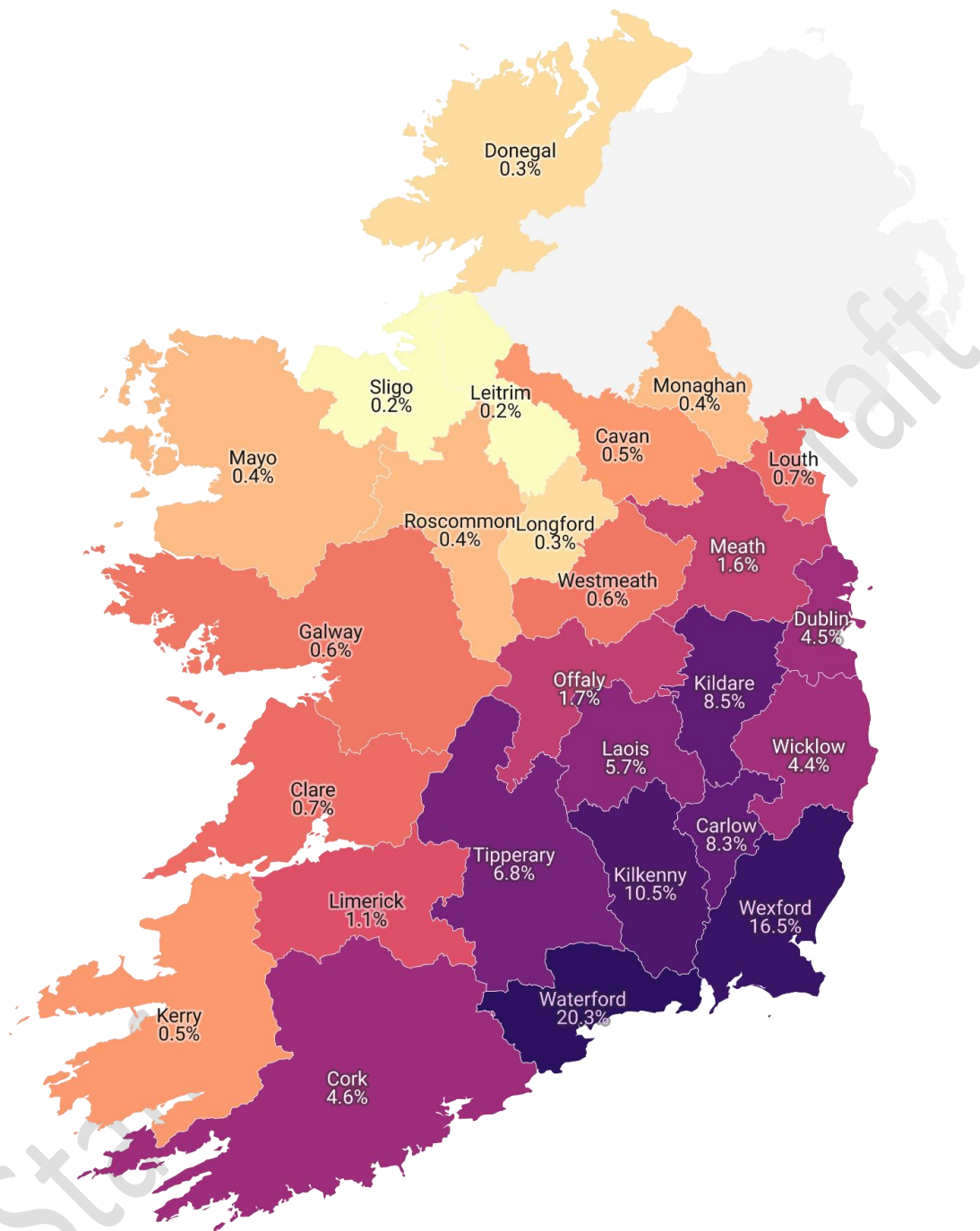


Figure 3.1 County of origins of SETU full-time students 2022/2023 (Source: HEA. Created with Datawrapper)

3.2.2 Socio-Economic Profile

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) uses Deprivation Index Scores (DIS) to assess the socio-economic profiles of higher education students in Ireland. The DIS measures the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data from the 2016 Census. In 2020/2021, of the eighteen higher education institutions that are under the

remit of the HEA, SETU had a very high number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the second lowest mean DIS of -1.4 compared to a national mean of 2.1.⁶

In SETU, of the 2020/2021 cohort of students, 15% were classified as ‘disadvantaged’ (the national average was 10%), and a further 39% were marginally below average (IP, Table 10). Only 8% of SETU students were categorised as ‘affluent’ (the national average was 20%) (Figure 3.2).

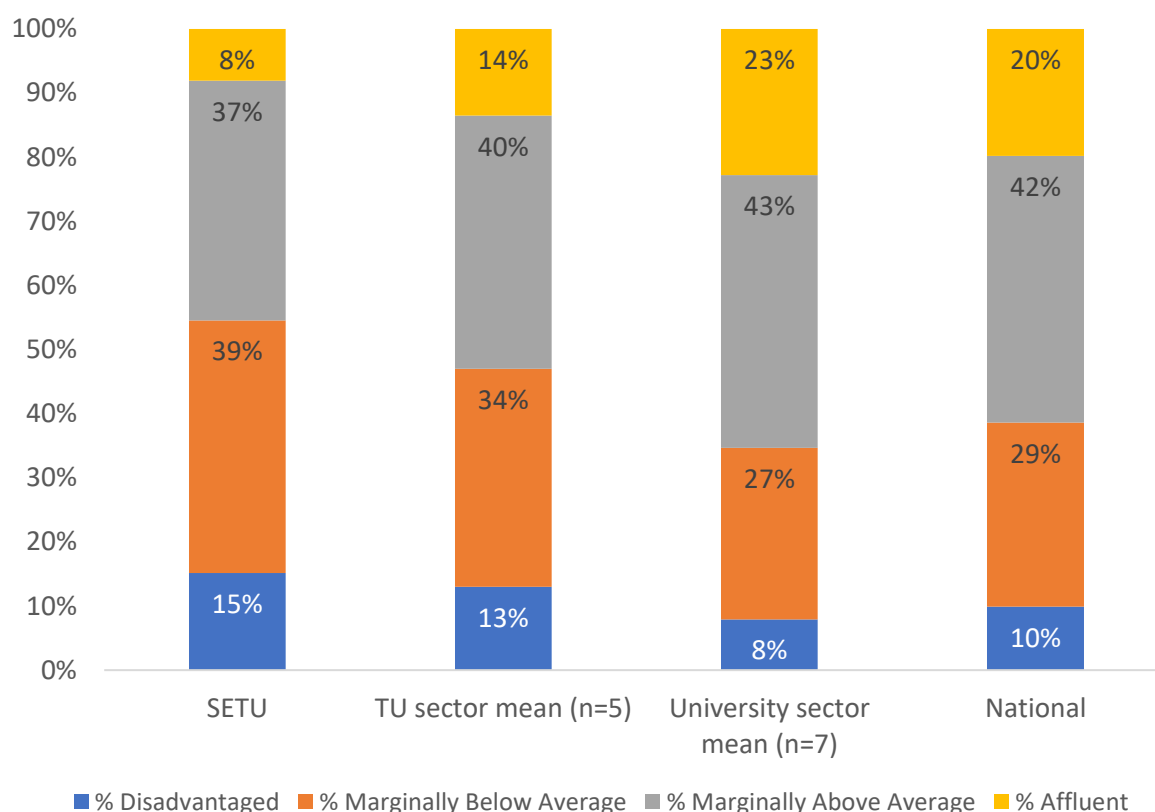


Figure 3.2 Socio-economic profile of the SETU student population in 2020/2021 compared to the technological university, university and national means. (Source: HEA Socio-economic Profiles 2020/21).

For 2022/2023, almost half (48.9%) of full-time undergraduate new entrants to SETU were in receipt of a Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI)⁷ grant and 23% attended a DEIS (Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools)⁸ secondary school prior to entering SETU (IP, Table 11).

⁶ <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/students/widening-participation-for-equity-of-access/dis-2020/3-course-profile-dis-2020/>

⁷ <https://www.susi.ie/about-susi/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/4018ea-deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/>

Collectively, this data highlights that many SETU students face greater socio-economic challenges than students in other institutions. This underlines the open nature of the University but also emphasises the importance of providing a broad range of supports for students and is an area of focus, as later sections of this chapter will illustrate.

3.2.3 International Students

SETU's enrolment of international students grew steadily from 2016/2017 to 2019/2020 when almost 9% of full-time students were domiciled outside of Ireland before studying at SETU (Figure 3.3). The COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions enforced in Ireland and other countries resulted in a decrease in international students, but numbers have recovered in 2022/2023 and are expected to increase in the period to 2028 (and is, indeed, an action [8.1.2] outlined within Strategic Plan 2023-2028). This is important for the University as increasing numbers of international students brings greater diversity within the University community and broadens the perspectives of staff and other students, as well as being an important source of revenue in a tight domestic market.

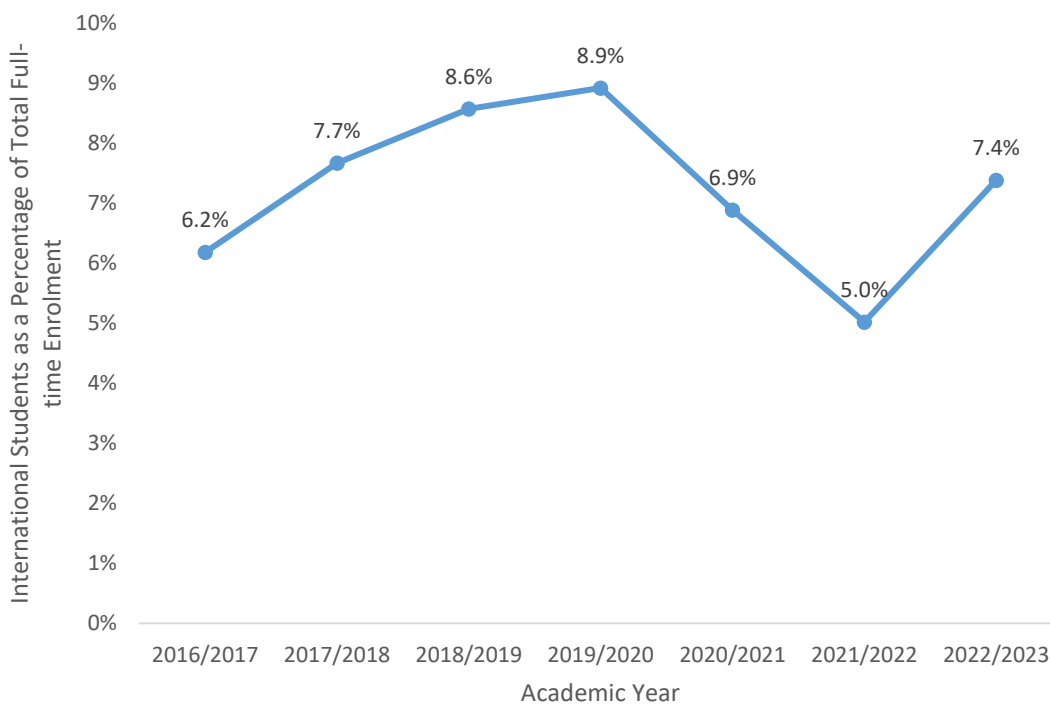


Figure 3.3 International students (i.e. domiciled outside of Ireland prior to studying in SETU) as a percentage of full-time enrolments in SETU from 2016/2017 to 2022/2023 (Source: HEA).

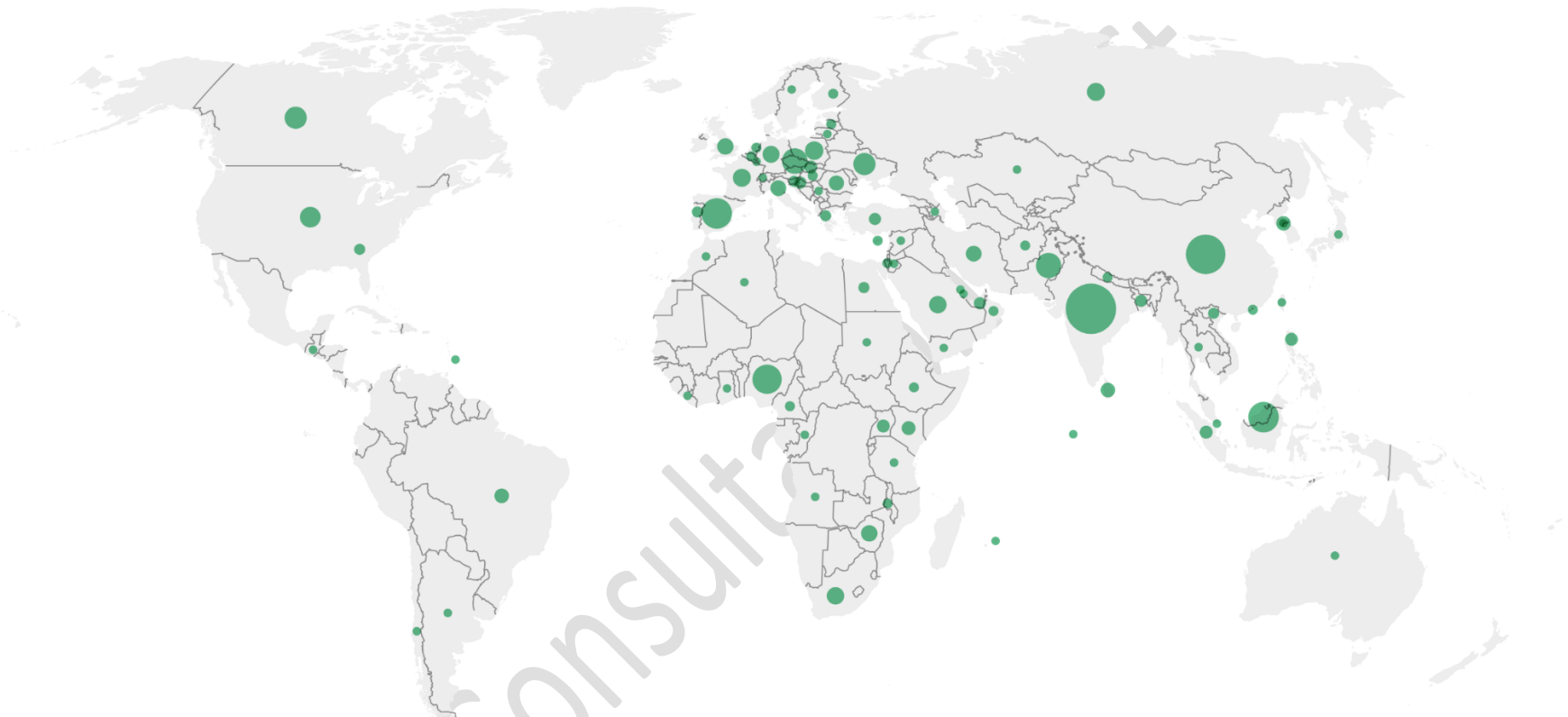


Figure 3.4: Domicile country of origin of SETU full-time students 2022/2023 excluding Irish and Northern Irish students, overseas based students and incoming Erasmus students. (Source: SETU March 2023 SRS. Created with Datawrapper) Note: The larger the bubble the greater the number of students from that country.

The 780 full-time international students recorded in 2022/2023 (IP, Table 17) had been domiciled in 86 different countries on six continents before commencing their studies with SETU (Figure 3.4). Eighteen countries had at least ten students enrolled in the University, with India (161), China (93), Malaysia (51) and Spain (51) providing the highest number of SETU's international students.

In 2022/2023, a further 300 students studied in SETU as part of Erasmus+ and other mobility programmes. SETU promotes outward bound opportunities to our students as important ways of broadening their education and experience. However, this is not an option for all students for a multitude of reasons, and the uptake of outbound activity is lower than ideal. While SETU does not anticipate significant increases or expansion of its Erasmus+ activity, it continues to seek additional ways to support and encourage domestic students to engage in internationalisation. SETU is introducing an 'Internationalisation at Home initiative' as part of the development of a broader international strategy. Further information on this is provided in Chapter 4.

As part of the international agenda, there were 566 SETU students enrolled overseas in 2022/2023, with 269 at SETU-HUAHE (Henan University of Animal Husbandry and Economy, China), 286 at Jilin Normal University (China) and 11 at Accra Business School (Ghana). In 2023/2024, students were enrolled in an additional SETU Joint International College: SETU-NUIST (Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, China). As part of its planned international expansion, the University will continue to examine such opportunities developing from existing experiences and approaches.

3.2.4 Mature Students

In 2022/2023, 8.6% of full-time undergraduate new entrants to SETU were classified as mature learners (over the age of 23) compared to 5.4% nationally (IP, Table 13). For all students (full-time, part-time, undergraduate and postgraduate), based on HEA information, the percentage of mature learners in SETU is 47.2% (nationally 36.6%) with a median age of 25 (nationally 23). The University recognises that mature students are an important cohort who add greatly to and enrich our programmes in terms of their life and work experience, different and diverse perspectives, and their maturity of approach.

3.2.5 Part-Time Students / Life-Long Learners

SETU had the fourth highest number of part-time enrolments nationally in 2022/2023 with 6,485 students (IP, Table 3). The University has had a high proportion of life-long learners for many years with students enrolled on honours degree programmes, master's programmes and minor or special purpose type programmes. SETU delivers programmes with a range of State and other partners, including the Defence Forces, Teagasc, the Irish

Prison Service, An Cosán and the Tivoli Institute, with over 1,900 students enrolled on these programmes in 2022/2023 (IP, Table 7).

The life-long learning rate in Ireland's South East is 12.3%⁹ (quarter 4 2022). Dublin and the West regions had slightly higher participation rates at 14.3% and 13.0% respectively. This would indicate that there is some scope to increase part-time enrolments. A key action (4.4) of SETU's Strategic Plan, is to implement a strategy and a sustainable business model for life-long learning. SETU will also identify opportunities for developing additional routes for flexible and part-time learning and online delivery, with supporting QA, such as new policies on micro-credentials, to maintain public confidence in our graduates.

3.3 Student Expectations – What SETU does ...

3.3.1 Programme Portfolio

As a University, our students and prospective students should expect a quality educational experience and we deliver this through our portfolio of programmes. SETU provides undergraduate, and postgraduate (both taught and research) programmes, offered in full-time, part-time, online and blended learning, and block release modes.

Overall, 151 undergraduate programmes are accessible through the CAO¹⁰ application process, while a further 270 postgraduate courses are accessible through the Processing Applications in the Cloud (PAC)¹¹ service. The University showcases its programmes through a [single webpage](#) on its website, from which users can access information on add-on undergraduate, part-time, and Springboard+ and HCI Pillar 1 programmes, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. This webpage provides programme information, entry requirements, details of further study opportunities and contact details. The University's admissions and related entry policies are set out on the [Policies and Documents webpage](#).

Allied to the website information, the University reaches out to prospective students and promotes its programmes through open days and social and traditional media channels, [secondary school visits](#) and the hosting of on-campus of ['Try' events](#) in different discipline areas. The 'Try' events provide early and timely opportunities to those who are considering third-level studies to gain an insight into different areas and fields, experience a taste of SETU student life and ask questions of staff.

⁹ Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO (ILFS) data in Solas Lifelong learning in Ireland June 2023 report; available at <https://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/df6c2249bf/lifelonglearning-report.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.cao.ie/>

¹¹ <https://v2.pac.ie/>

SETU programmes are well connected to industry, the professions and the region. In designing programmes, the input of industry, professional, community and commercial stakeholders are core elements of programme validation. The University embeds work placement and similar activities as part of its programmes where possible. This is further addressed in Chapter 4. Many of these placements are with employers in the region, creating potential employment opportunities for our students following the completion of their programmes, while positively promoting SETU. In addition, the University strives for the professional accreditation of its programmes where this is possible and reports the professional body recognition as part of the Annual Quality Report.

As part of the transition to a university, SETU recognised that regional expectations are that the programme portfolio might expand into wider professional career areas in support of regional needs. A number of specific areas will be progressed in response. Of particular note is the University's successful submission for the development of pharmacy and veterinary programmes in the recent national call designed to increase graduate capacity nationally. Both of those programmes also link to the strong regional base in the agri-food sector and pharmaceutical industry. Work has commenced on these areas in advance of the finalisation of the funding allocation. In addition, the University has recognised that the region lacks teaching training facilities and the University is well positioned based on its experience in training qualified teachers in further education, to build relevant teacher education capacity to meet national deficits.

SETU collaborates extensively with various external partners to offer programmes. Nationally, partnerships include other educational institutions, Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the Defence Forces, the Irish National Stud, DAA airport group, An Cosán, Gaelic Athletic Association, Irish Prison Service, An Garda Síochána and SOLAS. SETU programmes are also delivered internationally in countries such as China, as noted above. Collaboration with external bodies expands SETU's reach, contributes to Internationalisation at Home, and allows for the development of specialised programmes and developing partnerships with other HEIs, such as through the EU-CONEXUS project. Exploring such partnerships offer valuable opportunities for students and the University, including expanded reach and specialised programmes and is part of the focus of a new strategy on Global Partnership & Internationalisation (see Chapter 4).

The University is commencing an Academic Portfolio Project as part of Action 4.1 in the Strategic Plan. This will be a root-and-branch review of the existing academic portfolio to develop plans to elevate the quality of existing programmes and to realise new opportunities across undergraduate and postgraduate offerings.

3.3.2 Student Charter

The University [Student Charter](#), published in 2023, formally identifies SETU's student commitments. These include commitments to “ensure the student is supported throughout their academic journey through continuous engagement, support from expertly trained teaching and support staff and access to appropriate and suitable facilities” and to “provide an open, outward-looking academic community that is exposed to new thinking and research ideas” (p. 8). The Charter also outlines what is expected of students, and is built upon a series of underpinning values and core beliefs. The Charter was created by a cross-university team of staff and students.

3.3.3 Access, Transfer and Progression

SETU are committed to providing students with opportunities for access, transfer and progression across all levels of the National Framework of Qualifications and these are embedded across our regulations. Progression to next levels of the NFQ are generally recognised across all of our programmes. Our work with further education providers further enhances the recognition of progression from different forms of education and provides opportunities for learners at all levels.

The data on student profile shows the diversity of students within the university and particularly highlight the success of the university in attracting and developing students from disadvantaged socio-economic and demographic groups.

3.3.3.1 Access

The SETU Strategic Plan's ambition is to foster a supportive and inclusive environment for our students and ensure equity of access to educational opportunity. SETU exceeds the national HEI average in all four targets set out in the National Access Plan 2022-2028¹². This demonstrates that SETU is recruiting students from the priority groups of the plan, supporting a diverse student body that is reflective of Ireland's population.

¹² <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b156c-national-access-plan-2022-to-2028/>

HEA System Performance Framework Dashboard (HEA, 2023)		
All New Entrants		
	Average of all HEIs	SETU
3.1 Disadvantaged New Entrants (Academic Year (AY) 2020/2021)	11%	19%
3.2 Disadvantaged Mature New Entrants (AY 2020/2021)	10%	13%
3.3 Students with a Disability (AY 2022/2023)	13%	14.6%
3.4 Traveller Enrolment (AY 2022/2023)	0.1%	0.2
Access Survey Respondents		
	Average of all HEIs	SETU
3.1 Disadvantaged New Entrants (AY 2020/2021)	11%	19%
3.2 Disadvantaged Mature New Entrants (AY 2020/2021)	10%	13%
3.3 Students with a Disability (AY 2022/2023)	19.4%	20.1%
3.4 Traveller Enrolment (AY 2022/2023)	0.2%	0.2%

Table 3.1: SETU metrics for Pillar 3 (Access and Participation) of the HEA's System Performance Framework 2023-28¹³

Given the profile of students discussed earlier, it is critical that our prospective students have clear and engaging processes to enable them to connect with the University and to support them in applying and transition into the programmes of the University. SETU has implemented many initiatives to this end ranging for pre-access (particularly for disadvantaged) to targeted orientation initiatives (Table 3.2).

¹³ <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/institutes-performance/system-performance-framework-dashboard-23-28/>

	Initiative	Description
Pre-Entry	College Awareness Week	Primary/post-primary schools visits, Mature Student information events.
	Leaving Certificate Revision programme	An intensive leaving certificate revision programme is delivered on SETU campus for leaving certificate students in linked and DEIS schools. 256 students from DEIS schools registered for the programme in 2022/2023.
	Workshops on available supports and bursaries	Online and in-person workshops on the various supports and bursaries available to students while on campus. All workshops are held in computer labs to mitigate barriers to computer technology for the completion of SAF forms, 1916 Bursary application forms etc.
	Primary School Campus Taster Days	School students in local and regional DEIS primary schools are invited for a day on campus with activities to engage with a series of activities. They conduct a school project on college life and present this in SETU, as well as meeting students and exploring the facilities available.
	Outreach Access / HEAR / DARE / Reach / 1916 / Disability School Visits	Outreach visits are made to secondary schools in the South East; workshops are held with 5th and 6th year (penultimate and final year) students (in particular in non-DEIS schools).
	QQI-FE Workshops	A pre-entry workshop to support students in the transition to third level education is offered to QQI-FET applicants.
	Sanctuary Scholarship Programme	Places are reserved for CAO applicants who are Asylum Seekers and/or in Direct Provision, with fee waivers plus Financial Scholarship offered to successful applicants.
	Pupils in DEIS secondary schools are invited to 'Try' events	The SETU Access office reserves several places on each event for DEIS pupils and pupils are selected to attend and referred through their school guidance counsellor. In addition, senior pupils from DEIS secondary schools are targeted for SETU visits – information on access routes and targeted academic supports are provided to these 6th-year (final-year) groups.
	School visits	School liaison and marketing visits are conducted with schools in the south east region.
Post-Entry	Specific orientation programmes	Specific Orientation Programmes (including Peer to Peer Support) with information on academic, personal and financial supports for priority groups: HEAR/DARE , Reach , 1916 , CAP , Mature Students, students with disabilities.
	Student information handbook	A student information handbook is produced, which showcases the range of supports available to all students – including academic, financial, mental health, student wellbeing supports, etc.
	Student support services webpage	SETU's website includes a dedicated Student Support information webpage, with contact details provided for all support services.
Other Initiatives	Information sessions with community partners	To explore progression routes for specific cohorts of learners. Partners include organisations representing the further education and training sector, the community and voluntary sector, and the Traveller community.
	Online workshops on available supports	Online workshops for guidance counsellors, students and parents regarding financial and academic supports available for students at SETU.

	Initiative	Description
	Programmes for socioeconomically disadvantaged students	Engagement with programmes such as HEAR, DARE, Reach & CAP, which support learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds by providing them with extra CAO points.
	Improved Student Assistance Fund application process	For current students, a streamlined tailored SAF (Student Assistance Fund) application form to support students from socioeconomic disadvantaged backgrounds was introduced. SAF can also be awarded to part-time learners.
	StudyClix	Universal programme in local secondary DEIS schools in Waterford and Carlow. The pilot programme targets 755 students, with the hope of, ultimately, rolling out the programme to other DEIS schools. This is a collaborative initiative between SETU, the Waterford School Completion Programme and DEIS schools.

Table 3.2: SETU initiatives to engage students including pre-entry and post-entry

The University will further broaden the range of pathways to education through a new Widening Access and Participation Project (Action 4.6 of the Strategic Plan). SETU will build on its current access initiatives including support to members of the Traveller and Roma communities to access educational opportunities.

The University has introduced a new policy for the [recognition of prior learning](#) (RPL) and its implementation will provide lifelong learners with further access and progression points to, and enable greater alignment between workplace learning and higher education.

3.3.3.2 Transfer and Progression

The University uses the National Framework of Qualifications as the core underlying mechanism for recognising and transferring learners between programmes and providers. The University curriculum is built on a foundation of recognising each level in the framework and the progression routes from that level to the next. For instance, it is common that level 8 awards also have embedded within them level 6 and level 7 awards and that the learner can move seamlessly between them. The University also works closely with FET providers to admit students into both first year of programmes and through advanced entry (particularly through programmes such as the tertiary programmes) as well as using Recognition of Prior Learning as an entry process across the University. Annually approximately one-fifth of full-time student intake arises from outside the traditional school leaver.

In addition, to progression from NFQ level to level, SETU have a number of initiatives in place to facilitate opportunities for students who may find themselves on unsuitable programmes including the:

- [CAO 1st Year Transfer scheme](#)
- [Cross-Campus scheme](#)
- [Internal Advanced Entry process.](#)

For September 2023, there were 169 transfer applications evaluated and 69% of these were successful. The success rate of the 33 cross-campus transfer applications was lower (30%) due to lack of availability of places in the student's desired programme or failure to meet the entry requirements for the chosen programme. The primary objective of these transfer schemes is to establish mechanisms to ensure that students have chosen suitable courses, aligning with SETU's "right student, right programme" approach.

3.4 Student Engagement – What SETU does ...

We engage with our students in a variety of ways at different stages along their educational journey. The engagements may differ on a case-by-case basis but, at their core, they put the student at the centre.

3.4.1 Student Centrality and the SETU Strategy

The University's Strategic Objectives 6 and 12 are clear in their ambitions, with Strategic Objective 6 setting out six actions that will facilitate the University to '[r]eorganise and enhance our learner support infrastructure and learning environment, encompassing all aspects of the student experience, to ensure opportunities for the active, equitable and inclusive participation of all our learners in all aspects of university life, and position SETU as a leader in how we enable learner success'. These actions include the development and implementation of a student success strategy, the prioritising of improvements in retention and progression, and a focus on student belonging and wellbeing amongst others.

Strategic Objective 12 focusses on the creation of an inclusive and welcoming campus environment. Three distinct goals are identified to realise this, including a collaborative effort to develop a "Values in Action Framework". This framework, co-created with staff and students across SETU, will serve as a guiding document to foster a strong sense of belonging and inclusion. Secondly, to amplify student voices and perspectives, the "SETU 100" initiative will be established. The SETU 100 will comprise of a diverse range of students, who will act as co-creators, actively shaping SETU policy, curriculum, quality enhancement efforts and research activities. Finally, achieving the designation of "University of Sanctuary" in April 2024 is a notable achievement, further solidifying the University's commitment to providing a safe and welcoming space for all students. In 2024-25 SETU will provide a

number of scholarships to support students drawn from refugee, asylum seeker and other migrant groups.

3.4.2 Current student-centred approaches

SETU adopts a student-centred approach to its teaching and learning strategies, promoting values of equality and inclusion across all its activities and involving the student at every stage from programme design, provision, assessment and evaluation. This student-centred approach is also reflected in SETU's teaching and learning philosophy, which explicitly encourages students to take a more participatory role in the assessment and feedback processes facilitating a culture of meaningful and authentic learning. Aligned with this, a range of active learning and collaborative methodologies are adopted within the University, which reflect national and international developments in pedagogical practices. These methodologies, which include challenge-based learning, team-based learning and experiential learning, all prioritise the needs, experiences, and learning preferences of the individual student, thereby fostering an environment which is conducive to engagement and promotes student success.

In recent years, there has been a significant focus on the incorporation of universal design in education, with the development of an accredited Universal Design for Learning (UDL) continuous professional development programme for staff. The programme, [developed under PATH 4 funding](#), focuses on adopting a whole-system design to support all aspects of the learning environment, including the physical and digital environments as well as the teaching and learning strategies. SETU has also adopted a university-wide approach to embedding Ally¹⁴, an accessibility tool which supports a more inclusive approach to digital content and enhances accessibility. In addition, SETU offers CPD events promoting awareness and showcasing good practice and has drafted a proposal for Teaching Excellence Awards to recognise excellence in teaching practice.

Co-creation also features as a key principle of programme design in SETU with the development of the Programme Development Charter, which highlights the importance of student engagement across all aspects of programme design and delivery. This is supported by student-led assessment design, through activities such as joint rubric design and dialogic feedback processes. SETU aims to continue to operationalise the Charter, so that it becomes an integral part of the programme development process, ensuring that students play a more active role in their learning journey.

¹⁴ <https://ally.ac/>

3.4.3 Student Supports

In putting the student at the centre of all that we do, it is vital that SETU ensures that each student is supported throughout their time with us. SETU recognises that support is not just required for a student's academic journey; it is also needed to facilitate their overall growth as a person. Consequently, the aim of the University's student supports is to empower students to succeed academically, develop personally, and thrive in a diverse and inclusive learning environment.

The academic experience should see the student develop essential academic skills such as critical thinking, academic writing and presentation, working in partnerships and teams, research, time management, and study techniques. Moreover, this should be realised for each student, independent of their background or specific challenges they may face. This approach helps to close achievement gaps and ensure equitable access to academic success. The SETU emphasis on small class sizes, dedicated lecturing staff, support provided by programme leaders and class tutors, and the availability of further supports for students with additional challenges are cornerstones in fostering excellence in our academic delivery.

Beyond academic supports for students, personal development support manifests itself in mental well-being, self-efficacy and self-sufficiency, as well as career readiness. [Support services](#) offer resources to help students manage stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns that can impact their academic performance and curtail their experience of being a student. The services and supports available to SETU students also foster a sense of self-efficacy in students by equipping them with the tools and strategies they need to navigate the challenges of university life. Finally, with regard to personal development, the University offers career counselling, CV workshops, and placement opportunities to help students prepare for their future careers (see section 3.5.3).

Financial wellbeing of students is a complex area and the University's Student Assistance Fund (SAF) funded 1,188 full time students in 2022/2023 to a total value of over €2.1 million. The magnitude of the resources deployed and the volume of applications is a clear sign of the challenging times for higher education students and the vigilance required by the University support services in relation to financial difficulties experienced by students.

3.4.4 Engagement Initiatives

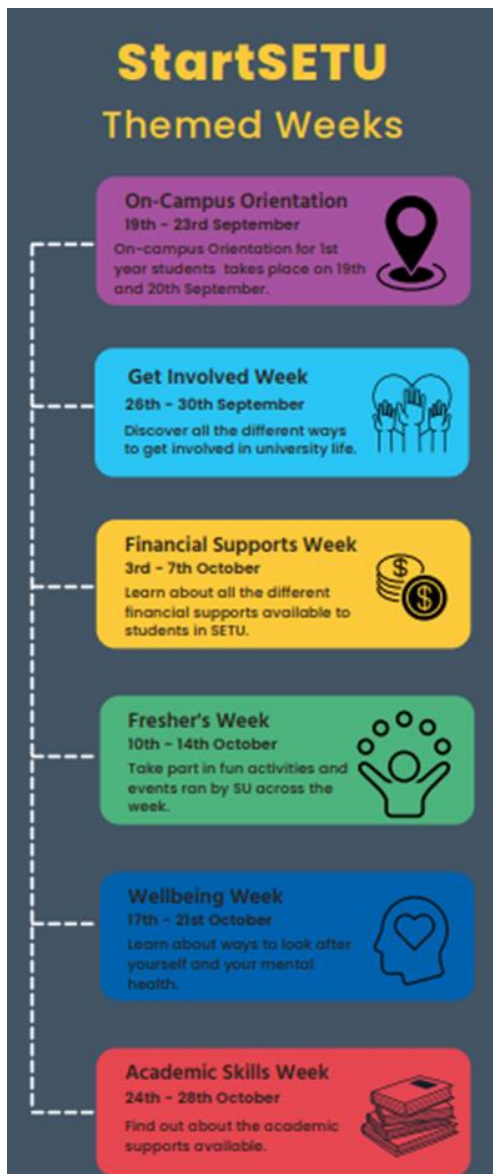
SETU acknowledges that period during which a student is transitioning from school to university is a one during which student interactions with the University community should be empathetic and given particular attention. The complex process of transitioning and integrating can present specific challenges and pressures. Making and maintaining social connections with peers, staff and members of the University community – and the support

provided by each of these cohorts – are key contributors to success. SETU is aware that, during the transitional phase, students need to feel that they belong and to identify with others; evidence shows that this period can be enhanced by providing the opportunity for students to form positive social relationships with other students and staff.

SETU undertakes many initiatives to engage with new students and existing students including:

- Online and on-campus orientation for first-year, apprenticeship, mature, postgraduate and international students
- Student handbook - a one-stop shop for all student support information in SETU
- Themed weeks - This brings together all the student engagement activities in SETU during semester 1 to enhance student engagement and experience (see below)
- [Student Assistance Fund \(SAF\) information workshop](#)
- Student-led communities: [clubs and societies](#), and the SETU peer mentoring programme
- [Students Heard podcast](#) - A podcast for students from the student engagement team to discuss issues and supports that are available. Topics include social anxiety, career development, navigating college assessments, navigating college finances, and volunteering
- [HELP Programme](#) – an online programme designed by SETU students for SETU students to support them to transition to higher education
- Mainstreaming EDI across the University through EDI initiatives such as the University of Sanctuary, disAbility Network and the Rainbow badge.

Orientation



2,462 first year students attended our online orientation sessions in September 2022, which represented 81% of the first years in that year. Over 3,000 students received on-campus orientation in 2022-23. The University produced its first student handbook in 2022-23. 12,500 were printed (a copy for every undergraduate student). The handbook is a one-stop shop for all student support information in SETU.

Themed Weeks

Themed weeks bring together all student engagement activities during semester 1 to enhance engagement and the student experience. Themed Weeks include:

- Finding Your Feet Week
- Fresher's Week
- Get Involved Week
- Financial Support Week
- Academic Skills Week
- Just Ask Week
- Mind yourself and healthy eating week
- Revise and study week.

3.4.5 Disability Support Service

SETU is committed to providing equal opportunities for all students, and that includes ensuring students with disabilities have equitable access to their chosen programme of study. The University encourages students with disabilities to register with their campus Disability Office to receive support services and apply for reasonable accommodations to help succeed in their studies. These accommodations might include assistive technology, learning support, or accommodations for exams. The Disability Office will conduct an individual needs assessment based on supporting documentation. This ensures that we can provide the most tailored support to help students to thrive at SETU. At present, reasonable accommodations are addressed on a campus basis; a Reasonable Accommodation for

Students with Disabilities Policy, which will apply across the University, is currently in the consultation phase.

The numbers of students registered with their campus Disability Office has increased considerably in the last five years, with a 44% increase between 2018/2019 and 2022/2023 (see Figure 3.5). As the graph shows, this has been a steady increase which would suggest a continuing trend that the University needs to plan and make provision for.

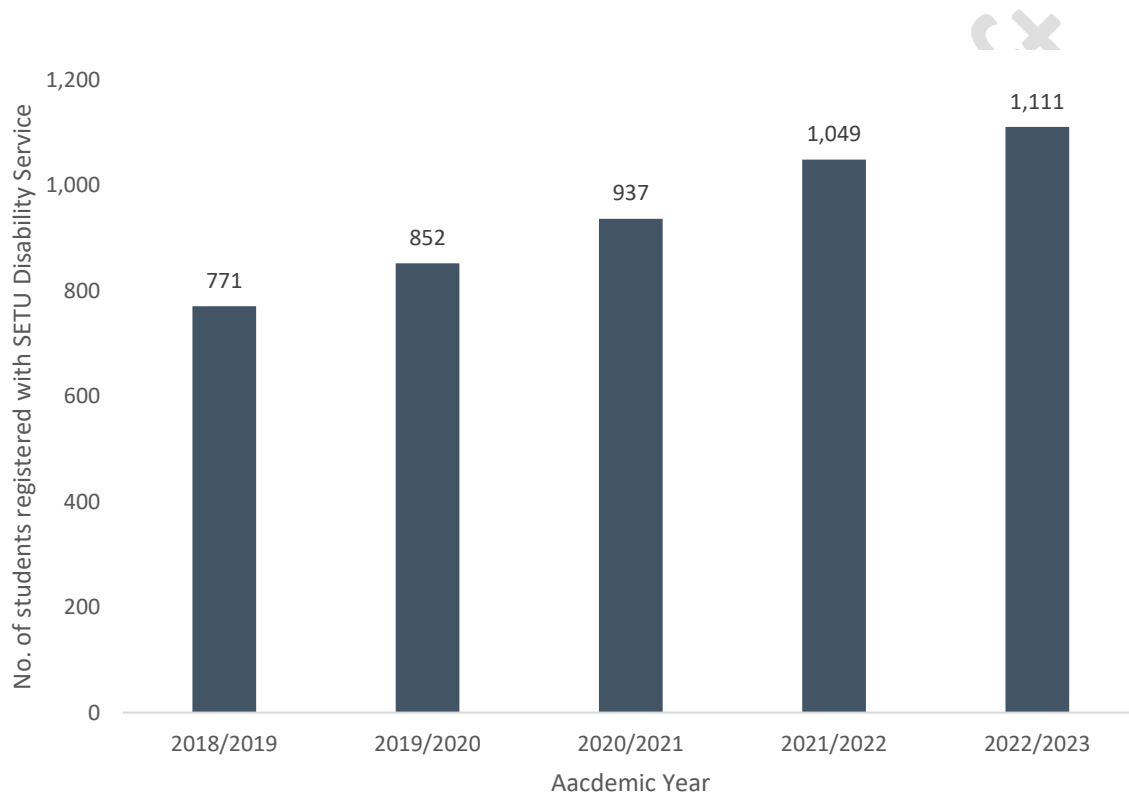


Figure 3.5 Number of students registered with the SETU Disability Office by academic year

3.4.6 Counselling Services

The counselling services provide students with access to professional counsellors who offer support for a wide range of issues, including mental health challenges, academic difficulties, and personal problems. Individual counselling includes scheduled appointments for psychotherapy and same-day urgent assessment appointments, which comprise a risk assessment and clinical interview for students presenting in significant distress or who appear to be at risk of harm. There is a particular challenge in continuing to meet the demand for services and the growth in mental health issues among young people has been the focus of substantial media over the past couple of years. In practical terms, for example one of SETU's campus counselling services, in 2022/2023 had 2,797 scheduled

appointments for psychotherapy, in addition to 120 same-day Urgent Assessment appointments, comprising a risk assessment and clinical interview for students presenting in significant distress or at risk of harm. These interventions combined represent an increase of 106 sessions on the equivalent provision in the 2021/2022 academic year

The Togetherall peer support and mental health platform was launched across the University in October 2022. From its launch to June 30th 2023, 253 students had registered and engaged with Togetherall. Notably, across that time period, the hours of engagement with Togetherall, outside of Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, grew consistently. Provision of group counselling service interventions also increased across the range of psychoeducation and therapeutic group offerings provided annually. These include timetabled mental health awareness/self-support interventions, active consent training, and international student self-care interventions.

3.4.7 Student Non-Progression and Retention

3.4.7.1 Student Non-Progression

The percentage of full-time undergraduate new entrants at SETU that did not progress to second year in a programme in SETU within the following two academic years was 28% for the 2021/2022 cohort (Figure 3.6 and IP, Table 15). The non-progression rate was 13% in the main COVID-19 impacted cohort of 2019/2020 but has increased in line with the national and international post-COVID trend since then (Figure 3.6). Non-progression rates are lower (25%) in level 8 (honours degrees) than level 7 (ordinary degrees) and level 6 (higher certificates) at 36% and 46% respectively (Figure 3.6 and IP, Table 15).

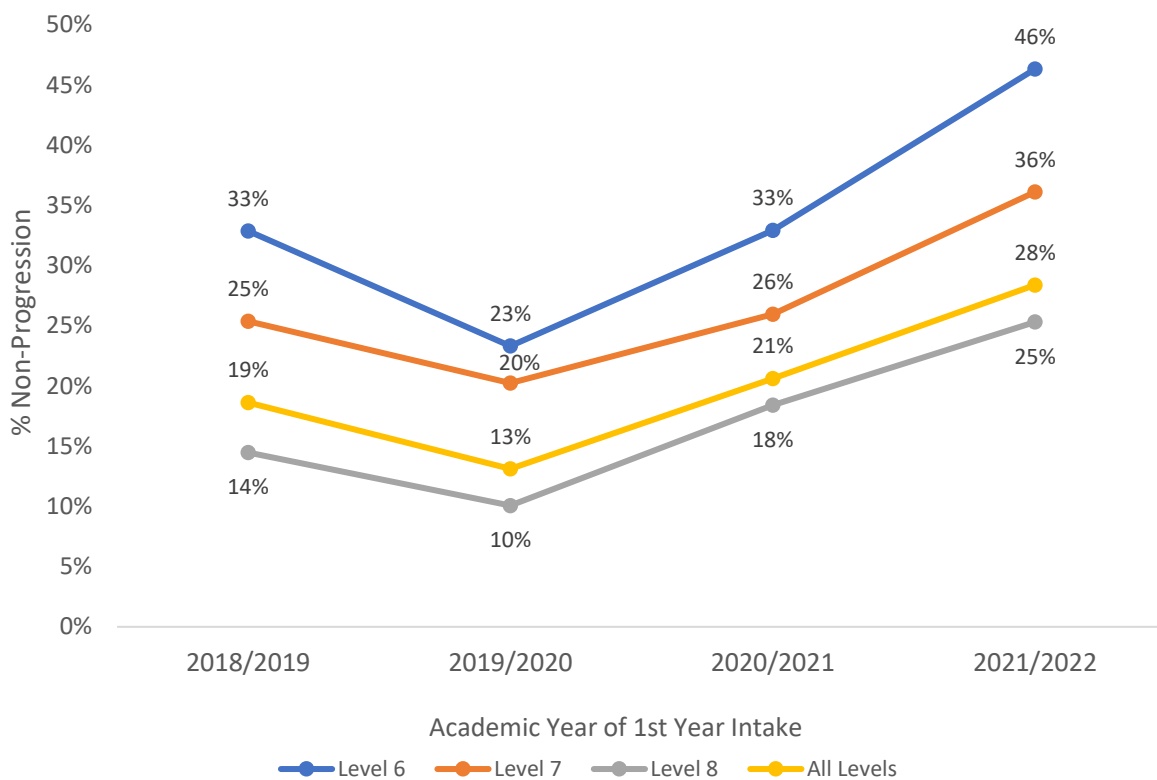


Figure 3.6 Percentage non-progression of full-time undergraduate new entrants at SETU from the intakes of 2018/2019 to 2021/2022

SETU's non-progression rate for first-year honours degree new entrants for 2021/2022 was 23% based on the HEA's methodology (which deems that a student has progressed if they are present in the same institution in the following academic year regardless of programme type, course year or mode of study). This non-progression rate was disappointingly high and was the second highest in the country, with means of the five technological universities, the seven universities and all eighteen HEIs being 20%, 11% and 15% respectively (Figure 3.7).

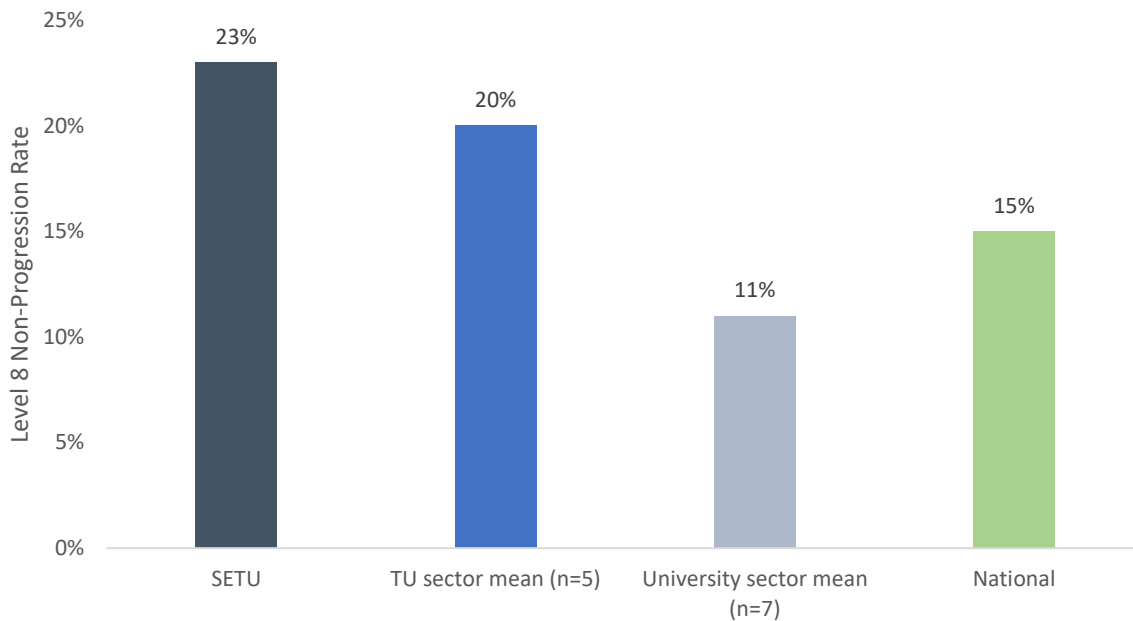


Figure 3.7 Non-progression rates of level 8 (honours degree) full-time new entrant undergraduates in 2021/2022 (Source: HEA¹⁵).

Non-progression rates are relatively low at 19% for *Health and Welfare and Social Sciences, Journalism and Information* programmes while *Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction* programmes have a non-progression rate of 42% (IP, Table 16).

The high rates of non-progression are clearly problematic and do not fit with the SETU ethos, as we pride ourselves on our student centrality and the principle of “right student, right programme”. This has understandably prompted the reporting of data on non-progression to both Governing Body and Academic Council for consideration and the University is seeking to address this through appropriate interventions.

3.4.7.2 Addressing non-progression: retention initiatives in place and planned

SETU recognises that the high level of non-progression amongst our first-year full-time undergraduates is a major concern and that focused and effective initiatives need to be implemented. Action 6.2 of the Strategic Plan acknowledges this issue and states that SETU will “[p]rioritise retention and progression with the goal of exceeding national norms while preserving academic excellence”. By specifying this as a strategic action, the University is making retention an area of focus while recognising that it will take time to fully address.

¹⁵ <https://hea.ie/statistics/data-for-download-and-visualisations/students/progression/non-progression-and-completion-dashboard/>

One of the steps being taken is developing a strategy based on the model of student retention and success developed as part of the What Works? Programme (Figure 3.8).

The existing activities in SETU that contribute to student success – and thus help to improve student retention – are listed in Table 3.3 along with new and revised activities SETU has or is planning to implement in the next academic year.

	Activity
Existing Activities	The provision of academic supports – e.g. by the Academic Writing Centre, Library, Maths Support Centre.
	Financial supports e.g. through the Student Assistance Fund.
	Pastoral supports.
	First-year transfer and deferral, which allows a student to transfer to a different programme or defer their programme until the following academic year.
	StartSETU website and webchat (https://start.setu.ie/).
	HELP Programme - an online university-wide programme designed to support transition and retention (https://www.setu.ie/teaching-learning/higher-education-learning-programme).
	Supports for specific student cohorts – e.g. reasonable accommodations, laptop scheme.
	Extra-curricular activities – e.g. sport, clubs and societies.
New & Revised Activities Planned	Ongoing orientation and themed weeks.
	Peer mentoring - students from 2 nd year and above volunteer as peer mentors to provide support and information about the University to first-year students.
	Student volunteering – volunteering opportunities are open to all registered students and include working with young children, teenagers and adults. Examples of volunteer activities include acting as ‘buddies’ for school pupils visiting SETU campus, providing homework assistance, and supporting SETU outreach and access activity to encourage specific cohorts to consider (returning to) higher education.

Table 3.3: SETU activities to improve student retention and success

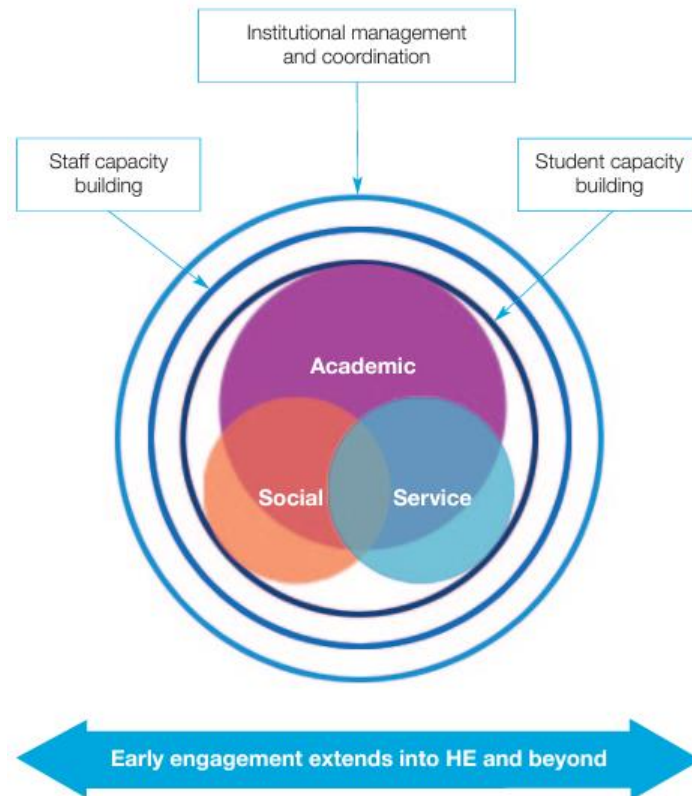


Figure 3.8 What Works? model of student retention and success (from Thomas, 2021)¹⁶

The time lag inherent in calculating non-progression rates is an issue when trying to tackle this problem as the students have already left SETU by the time progression rates are calculated. Improvements in data reporting is crucial to becoming more proactive in identifying and responding to trends in student retention. Further work is required on how to do this effectively.

SETU will also investigate the use of various data analytics to determine if robust, ethical and GDPR compliant methodologies can be developed in order to identify students at risk of dropping out or failing to progress successfully. This would be very advantageous both to the University and students as it presents an opportunity to address retention at an early stage and take prompt interventions where this is deemed appropriate.

3.4.8 Physical Supporting Infrastructure

While SETU is a regional provider and draws mainly from the region, students still seek accommodation on or near our campuses. The cost of accommodation, nationally, is a critical factor in access to higher education and participation both on campus and in terms

¹⁶ Thomas, L. (2012) *Building student engagement and belonging in higher education at a time of change: Final report from the What works? Student retention & success programme*, London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation, available: <https://documents.advance-he.ac.uk/download/file/document/316>.

of the wider social engagement and development. It is costly to develop campus accommodation but it is nonetheless a crucial aspect of infrastructure for a University.

SETU currently provides almost 430 bed spaces across a number of on-campus and close to campus facilities. These facilities provide a comfortable and secure environment for students to focus on their studies and interact with their peers. That said, the University recognises that there is a shortage of student accommodation and has plans to develop more, reaching 1,160 beds by 2028. This will require funding on the back of a viable business plan.

[SETU's library services](#) are of high quality, providing students with the resources and services they need to succeed academically. Students have access to print and electronic books and journals, specialised online databases, quiet study areas, and designated spaces for group project work. The libraries are staffed by knowledgeable professionals who support students find the necessary information and resources. The libraries' electronic resources provide students with access to a wealth of information that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. These resources include online databases, e-books, and journals, all of which can be accessed from anywhere at any time on various devices.

There is currently a total of 164 classrooms within the University. In addition, to these classrooms there are laboratories (225), workshops (23), and multipurpose rooms. The classrooms play a crucial role in students' learning process. They are the primary location within the University where students attend lectures, take exams, and participate in group discussions. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that these classrooms are equipped with the necessary resources and facilities to support effective learning.

Reflecting upon the current facilities, the University has a substantial number of laboratories and workshops, which indicates a strong focus on practical-based learning. These facilities provide students with hands-on experience in their respective fields of study, which is essential for their future careers.

Action 13.1 of the Strategic Plan addresses the University's plans to expand its facilities, recognising this as a key enabler in delivering on the strategic objectives. In this regard, elements of the planned actions (acquisition of the Waterford Crystal site to facilitate the development of the University-Enterprise Quarter, completion of the Corporate Services Building and acquisition of a site in Wexford) have been completed. Further projects include the Engineering, ICT and General Teaching Building and the Advanced Science Building. These measures will allow for vital expansion for SETU across the region and improve the academic environment for staff and students. These plans are not without challenges

particularly the need for substantial funding which is often problematic given the overreliance on the State to finance capital development. This is an area of on-going dialogue between the University and the relevant state bodies. In addition the University must balance the on-going maintenance and enhancements of existing buildings to ensure they are fit for purpose. This is a crucial funding challenge, not just for SETU, but nationally for higher education.

3.5 Wider Student Environment – What SETU does ...

As a new University, we recognise that our responsibility for developing our students does not end in the classroom. We seek ways to enhance and enrich our students for their bright futures and we are taking a number of positive and developmental steps to do this.

3.5.1 Sustainability

Sustainability forms a key part of SETU's Strategic Plan. The strategy outlines a clear commitment in the Mission Statement to “drive sustainable economic, environmental, cultural and social development in the south east of Ireland”. Part of this is educating students on sustainability as well as ensuring that this is an important component of their SETU student experience and preparation for the future. There are four elements to this, which the University will pursue:

1. *Embedding Sustainability in the curriculum:* SETU will continue to integrate principles, values, and practices of sustainability into all aspects of learning and education. Programme and module outcomes and content will be redesigned to explicitly incorporate sustainability as a concept and practice and to embed transformative learning, supporting students to make sustainable changes to their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their beliefs, challenging their assumptions and reimagining new ways of thinking.
2. *Sustainability Competencies:* SETU will focus on developing key competencies in students, such as systems thinking, ethical reasoning, and collaborative skills. Critical thinking about the complex nature of sustainability issues will be further encouraged.
2. *Cultural and Global Perspectives:* SETU will incorporate diverse cultural and global perspectives to help students understand sustainability in different contexts. This will be achieved through study abroad programmes, guest lectures, and partnerships with international universities.

4. *Development of a suite of accredited offerings:* SETU will incorporate a range of short, accredited offerings (e.g. micro credentials) for staff in the area of sustainability.

The University is taking positive steps to bring forward the sustainability agenda, with a key component of this being the recent appointment of an Associate Vice President for Sustainability, which is a new position.

3.5.2 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The University has established a number of 'firsts' in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) arising from a new EDI Office and a Vice President for EDI. It is currently developing an EDI strategy, and has an overarching EDI policy and equality statement in place. SETU has also developed a number of related action plans, including a Gender Equality Action Plan and a Tackling Sexual Violence & Harassment Action Plan. A Race Equality Action Plan is also in development. In 2024, SETU applied for and received University of Sanctuary designation from Universities of Sanctuary Ireland, and also holds an Athena Swan Bronze Legacy Award.

Following on from these actions there have been EDI events, training and networks, including the LGBTQ+ Staff Network, the Disability Network, the Family Carer's Ireland Caring Employer Initiative, and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Through the EDIT (Embedding Equality Diversity & Inclusion in the Curriculum of the new Technological University Sector) project, led nationally by SETU, developments are ongoing to establish a framework and toolkit to embed EDI into the curricula of the TU sector, as well as an *EDI for transformative research* module for postgraduate research students.

A number of challenges and recommendations have been identified in the EDI space for SETU, which include:

- Mainstreaming EDI activity to a greater extent across SETU so that EDI becomes everyone's responsibility, not just the EDI Office/networks, etc.
- Embedding EDI values across the University, so that they guide our actions and behaviours;
- Embedding EDI into the curriculum so that all of our students experience an inclusive, modern curriculum which prepares them for the global workforce.

3.5.3 Careers Development Centre

Through the [Careers Development Centre](#), SETU's career services help students explore career paths and develop the skills they need to be recognised in their chosen fields.

As well as one-to-one careers consultations, the Careers Development Centre offers targeted employability programmes (accredited and non-accredited) on topics such as professional development; building a career; skills and competences for the world of work; development of e-portfolios and CVs; and planning for postgraduate study. There is also an extensive graduate recruitment programme, advertising over 1470 graduate vacancies annually and hosting 5 graduate recruitment fair on campus

The services also offer mock interviews to help students prepare for job interviews. In 2022/2023, on the Waterford campus 3,707 students submitted their CV for review and 3,752 students had in-person sessions with a Careers Advisor. 125 companies signed up for the Feature Friday virtual event, where every Friday companies enter an SETU hosted online forum and offer a Q&A session with students. In the physical world, 113 companies and professional bodies promoted their opportunities on the Waterford campus to our students. SETU also hosted six Employer Careers Fairs on campus and a further two fairs off campus, in that year.

The Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS) represents HE careers and employability professionals from 21 HEIs based on the island of Ireland. Every year AHECS recognises excellence in careers centres' service provision through the AHECS Awards. In the two years since its formation, SETU has won awards for building effective partnerships (2023) and employability (2024). The Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS) represents HE careers and employability professionals from 21 HEIs based on the island of Ireland. Every year AHECS recognises excellence in careers centres' service provision through the AHECS Awards. In the two years since its formation, SETU has won awards for building effective partnerships (2023) and employability (2024).

Finally, the Careers Development Centre is the work package leader for the [EU-CONEXUS Career Network](#), leading activity to develop an employment and internship careers service for the EU-CONEXUS community. This service will provide job-readiness training for students, develop a professional learning community for staff, and create an alumni network across the EU-CONEXUS university alliance.

3.5.4 Staff Training and Development

SETU recognises the importance of staff training and development. By offering staff access to the latest insights and skills, and fostering a culture of continuous learning, the University can benefit from a more motivated community, increased productivity, innovation, and staff retention. The aim is for a more positive and efficient work environment, ultimately leading to improved academic and support services for students. Staff development strengthens the

University not only internally, but also helps create a more attractive environment for potential future students and staff.

The University values staff training and development and this is represented in the Strategic Plan, which states that we should '[e]mpower and enable our staff to achieve their highest potential in a fulfilling and happy work environment, with clear career progression options for all staff' (Objective 11).

Currently, training is primarily managed by Human Resources, with provision from two centres: the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning ([CTEL](#)), and the Teaching and Learning Centre ([TLC](#)), as well as external funding initiatives, such as [SATLE](#). This can present issues with reporting on staff training activities across the organisation. However, Action 11.4 recognises the need for a coherent and unified approach to "[c]reate a unified, centralised Learning & Development unit and focused process for training, ensuring access for all".

The Strategic Plan further lists the following Actions relevant to staff training and development:

- Increase staff training and development expenditure by 30% per annum up to 2028 (expenditure decreased to 1.4% of overall non-pay expenditure for 2022/2023 compared to the baseline of 1.7%)
- Increase the number of staff with PhDs by 30% over the next 5 years (44.0% of full-time academic staff had a PhD in 2023/2024 compared to the baseline of 43.2%)
- Increase enterprise research agreements by 30% (decreased to €1.35 million in 2022/2023 from baseline of €1.6 million).

At present staff development covers a broad range of learning opportunities, such as attending accredited modules or programmes, and many non-accredited opportunities, including workshops, seminars, attendance at conferences and events, engaging in online and blended learning options and idea-sharing. Each year, a CPD week is provided across the University, which has in-person and online sessions across a wide range of topics including generative AI, assistive technologies, research impact, module design, approaches to student engagement and UDL. In total, the CPD week held in February 2024 saw over 40 sessions delivered. The uptake of these sessions was high with over 204 participants signing up for sessions and 147 of those signing up to more than one session. Feedback from participants was very positive with colleagues commenting on the extensive range of areas covered.

A challenge for the University is to create a more uniform and cohesive development landscape. At present, the University recognises the need to offer professional development in a holistic manner, considering the varying training and development needs of different cohorts of staff across the University. This means, for example, continuing to offer opportunities for researchers and academics, and improving the offering for professional, management and administration staff. This will necessitate the development of a Professional Development Framework, which captures the available supports to enable staff to build their capability and support their career progression through relevant and meaningful learning opportunities.

SETU academic staff are supported in their enhancement efforts by CTCL in Waterford and the TLC in Carlow, which were recently brought together under a single executive function. The centres offer a range of formal and informal CPD including:

- Special Purpose modules at level nine on all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment, which form part of a Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning and Master of Education in Teaching and Learning offered by SETU;
- Workshops, seminars, community of practice events and a university-wide book club;
- One-on-one developmental and training sessions for lecturers.

CTCL and TLC efforts to support staff for quality enhancement are complemented by N-TUTORR (National Technological University TransfORMation for Recovery and Resilience national project) and SATLE (the Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education) funded initiatives in the staff capabilities stream including:

- A technology-enhanced learning community of practice;
- N-TUTORR masterclasses;
- Development of a national Academic Integrity programme for staff and students;
- Access to LinkedIn Learning;
- Creation of a support programme for postgraduate researchers – GRAD (Graduate Resource and Development);
- Support for staff members applying for Advance HE fellowships;
- Facilitating [National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education's](#) Digital Badges.

A cross-sectoral staff mentoring programme has been launched, of which SETU is a participant. The programme is open to all members of the staff community (including professional staff) in each of the participating partners and aims to facilitate personal and professional development of staff either as mentors and/or mentees. Further information is available at the following [link](#).

3.6 The SETU Student Experience – What our students say ...

SETU is committed to capturing, listening to, and hearing the student voice in order to enhance the student experience. Closing the feedback loop to provide students with feedback on their suggestions is a clear goal of all higher education institutions and we demonstrate our commitment to this principle by partnering with students in decision-making processes. As previously noted, a key element of this is the participation of students in University governance and programme management bodies, the formalised capturing and reporting of student feedback in annual programme board reports and the vital involvement of students in University working groups when formed. The process of preparing for institutional review has presented a further opportunity to elicit student feedback on particular areas to gain a greater understanding of their experiences and their perspectives on being an SETU student (see section 3.6.4). A key learning from this is that formalising and repeating this exercise could be of great value to the University, particularly now that a methodology for capturing their voice has been established (see section 3.6.4 for further detail).

3.6.1 National Student Survey

SETU students participate in the national survey of student expectation and engagement, StudentSurvey.ie, to provide feedback on their experience in the University. This survey started in 2013 and is designed for first-year, final-year and taught master's students. The survey did not run in 2024 as a review of the survey is currently being conducted. The University works with the Students' Union to promote the survey. The SETU response rate was 23.9% for the 2023, which is the only survey which has been conducted since the University's formation. This response rate is quite good but slightly lower than the 25.7% rate for all HEIs that participate in the survey and the 26.7% for technological higher education institutions.

The survey consists of over 60 questions grouped in to ten high level indicators. In 2023, SETU exceeded the average score of all technological higher education institutions in all ten indicators and performed better than the national average in six indicators especially *Student-Faculty Interaction*, *Collaborative Learning* and *Effective Teaching Practices* (Figure

3.9). Over three-quarters of students (76.6%) rated their entire educational experience at SETU as 'excellent' or 'good', which is on par with the TU sector average (Figure 3.10).

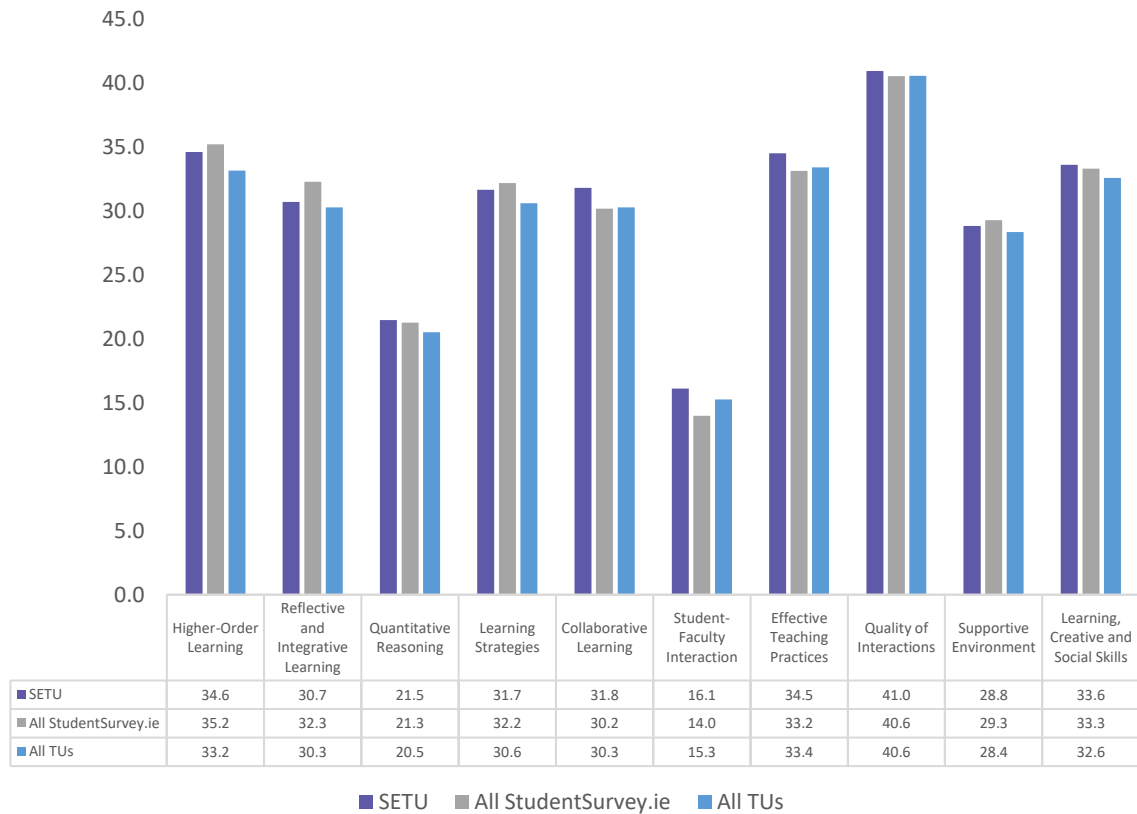


Figure 3.9 SETU performance in the 2023 StudentSurvey.ie based on indicator scores

Evaluation of entire educational experience at SETU?

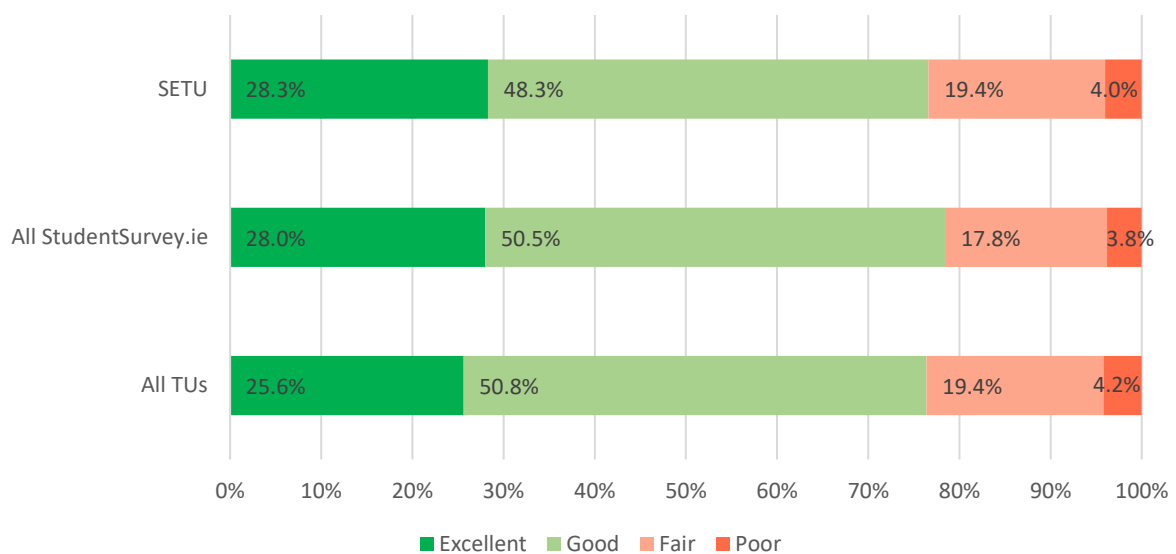


Figure 3.10 Overall student education experience in SETU and nationally from 2023 StudentSurvey.ie

StudentSurvey.ie features, as action 5.6 in the SETU Strategic Plan, to improve student engagement in the national Survey of Student Engagement as part of a comprehensive SETU feedback system for all students that informs the curriculum, programmatic reviews and other developments. This action also requires programme board activities to be informed by the surveys.

The University's iSAID (Interpreting Student and Institutional Data) project created a series of dashboards to make the survey data readily accessible and easily interpreted by a variety of University areas, to inform decision-making, inform staff engagement and CPD needs, and to close the feedback loop for students. The dashboards were presented to Academic Council on 19th September 2023 and launched on 1st March 2024 to all Heads of Departments and Heads of School/Faculty in SETU. A presentation to the Faculty of Business and Humanities followed with several Heads of Departments asking for access to be given to their programme directors.

The iSAID project supports colleagues to reflect upon their teaching, learning and assessment strategies with a view to enhancing the learning environment for our students. The rationale for the iSAID project centred on feedback from staff on the need to display the StudentSurvey.ie findings in a more user-friendly way, thereby ensuring that student feedback could be more easily accessed and acted upon in a timely and effective manner. Overall, the dashboards should ensure that student feedback from StudentSurvey.ie continues to be valued, and that it is acted upon and has an impact upon the University's academic delivery and service provision: this will lead to an enhanced learning environment for all.

3.6.2 Students' Union

SETU Students' Union (SETUSU) is democratically elected by students and represents the student community on University committees and boards, including Governing Body and Academic Council. While autonomous, SETUSU actively works with the University to enhance the student experience and provides information to students through its website, as well as relevant contact details. The University respects the autonomy of SETUSU, recognises the importance of a strong students' union and welcomes the opportunity for ongoing dialogue with the officers afforded by their participation in University committees and boards. For example, the SETSU president and one of the SETSU vice presidents are members of both Governing Body and Academic Council, where they can draw attention to and address student matters directly with the key decision-making bodies.

The Class Representative Council (CRC) are the 'parliament' of the Students' Union and are made up of all elected representative of students' classes and executive officers. There are

three CRCs: Carlow, Waterford and Wexford. The councils meet once a month and adopt policy for the Students' Union, as well as holding the executive officers accountable for the work they do. To maximise their impact and their enjoyment of the class representative experience, all representatives are invited to a dedicated training session at the start of the academic year.

3.6.3 Student Data and Voice Capture Mechanisms

StudentSurvey.ie, the student representative system and programme boards are effective means of capturing the student voice and other student-related information. Throughout the University, there are also other recognised means through which student-related data is acquired, both structured and semi-structured means:

- Banner (the student record system)
- Various Student Services' CRMs e.g. Careers, Counselling, Medical
- Targeted HEA reports e.g. Mental Health SAF (Student Assistance Fund)¹⁷ and FSD (Fund for Students with Disabilities)¹⁸ returns
- Annual reviews e.g. counselling service / careers service
- AHEAD Survey for Students with Disabilities
- Focus groups
- Individual lecturer, programme leader, Heads of Department meetings with students
- Departmental administration offices
- Website 'chat' function for prospective students
- Student Support Services.

3.6.4 Student Feedback Sessions

As part of CINNTE Institutional Review process at SETU, a number of Working Groups were established. As part of the Learner Experience Working Group's input to the Institutional Review, a series of feedback sessions with students to capture the student voice and experience were undertaken in April 2024.

The Student (Pilot) Student Consultation Group comprised 14 first-year students of the BA in Business / BSc in Tourism at SETU Wexford. The primary objective of the group was to gather insights, perspectives, and feedback from specific learners regarding the effectiveness of teaching delivery methods in SETU. The group was diverse with a 50:50

¹⁷ <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/student-assistance-fund/>

¹⁸ <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/fund-for-students-with-disabilities/>

male/female ratio and included two mature students, a European (non-domestic) student and a student disclosed that they were linked in with disability/learning support services. The group was aware of and had experienced a variety of teaching methods – from traditional lecture style to flipped classroom to peer instruction, role-playing and interactive learning. The most commonly experienced (and preferred) method was a traditional lecture followed by a discussion on the lecture. The students welcomed when lecturers shared realistic/practical examples related to the subject content. The least popular teaching methods were those with little discussion or self-directed learning. The overall experience of the student group was very largely positive. The small class sizes, and engagement with the class and the subject matter by the academic staff were very positively remarked upon. In addition, the support staff at the campus were given special, very positive mention on several occasions and are seen by students as critical to their education journey.

In addition to the pilot student consultation group, three student feedback sessions with groups representative of our study body were held on the Waterford, Carlow and Wexford campuses on 16th, 17th and 18th April 2024 respectively. Fifty-two students participated in the sessions and while the numbers were small they were representative of the diverse student body at SETU (Table 3.4).

Cohort	Breakdown of the 52 Participants
Campus	Waterford 14, Carlow 26, Wexford 12
Level	Undergraduate 81%, Postgraduate 19%
Gender	Female 50%, Male 44%, Non-Binary / Prefer not to say 6%
Living Arrangements	Living at home 42%, Renting 44%, Homeowner 10%, Other 4%
Working Part-time	44% with 23% working 11+ hours per week
Travel	Commute 48% (25% commute >50km), Don't Commute 48%, Walk 4%

Table 3.4: Demographics of the 52 participants in the April 2024 student feedback sessions

At each session, facilitators asked a series of questions to stimulate discussion and, from this, a number of themes emerged. These included orientation/transition, peer mentoring, supports and services, academic environment, learning resources, and community and belonging. Students were extremely appreciative of the opportunity to engage in the sessions and were very willing to contribute. Some key points from the sessions and examples of areas for improvement and/or further exploration identified are shown in Table 3.5 along with how SETU aims to progress and address some of the points raised in the feedback sessions.

Key points raised in the feedback sessions	Examples of areas for improvement	Actions planned by SETU to address points raised
In initial days and week/s of the first semester, students really want and value the opportunity to build connections and make friends.	Availability of social spaces.	Continued development of student experience feedback mechanisms and evidence gathering which inform university decision-making.
It is important to students that they receive help to access timetables and find their classrooms. Student felt that, until they settle, it is initially difficult to take in other information.	Continued development and expansion of orientation and student engagement activities.	Continued development and improvement of SETU's student partnership approach.
Across all campuses, the majority of students in attendance felt that support staff and lecturers were very helpful. They mentioned that if they asked for support, it was readily provided.	Range of non-academic activities available outside the classroom, which, it was felt, needs to be expanded/improved.	Continued enhancement of the class representative system.
Students value the role of peers and peer-led activities such as peer mentoring.	Continued development and improvement of Library and IT resources and facilities.	Expansion of SETU volunteering opportunities.
The value and importance placed by students on clubs and societies for building connections was evident.	Review of appropriate student communication mechanisms.	Development of approaches to ensure that the student feedback loop is closed.
	Insufficient availability of parking and student accommodation.	Continued development of student-centred policies and processes.
	Lack of awareness among students of student/EDI policies.	Establishment of SETU 100 (Action 12.5 of the Strategic Plan).

Table 3.5: Key points, areas for improvement and actions planned from the April 2024 student feedback sessions

SETU recognises the importance of gathering and using new data and evidence pertaining to the student experience to inform institutional and local decision-making with the ultimate aim of enhancing the student experience, closing the feedback loop and demonstrating meaningful change as a result.

3.7 Reflections and directions on the governance and management of quality

3.7.1 Reflections

Chapter 3 has focused on the student experience at SETU by describing what students should expect, how the University engages with them and how SETU works to enhance students beyond their programme of study. Reflecting upon the CINNTE review objectives, we believe that chapter 3 demonstrates that we are addressing both objective 2 and objective 3. This is summarised in table 3.3 below:

Objective 2: To review the enhancement of quality by the technological university through governance, policy and procedures.
How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HR, the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning (CTEL) and the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) provide staff training and development to enhance the quality of SETU’s teaching, research, student support, administration and other activities.• N-TUTORR and SATLE funded initiatives including a technology-enhanced learning community of practice; N-TUTORR masterclasses; access to LinkedIn Learning; support for staff members applying for Advance HE fellowships; facilitating the National Forum’s Digital Badges.• It is planned to develop a Professional Development Framework and to create a centralised Learning and Development Unit.
Objective 3: To review the effectiveness and implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression.
How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide students with opportunities for access, transfer and progression across all levels of the NFQ, which are embedded across SETU regulations. Progression to next levels of the NFQ are generally recognised across all of our programmes.• The University works with further education providers such as regional ETBs, which enhances the recognition of progression from different forms of education.• Many initiatives implemented to connect prospective students to the University and to support them in applying and transition into the programmes of the University. These include Primary School Campus Taster Days; Outreach Access/HEAR/DARE/Reach/1916/Disability School Visits; QQI-FE Workshops; pupils in DEIS secondary schools are invited to ‘Try’ events; information sessions with

community partners; and StudyClix - a universal programme in local secondary DEIS schools.

- Building on its current access initiatives including support to members of the Traveller and Roma communities to access educational opportunities.
- Broadening the range of pathways to education through a new Widening Access and Participation Project (Action 4.6 of the Strategic Plan).
- SETU's new RPL policy and its implementation will provide lifelong learners with further access and progression points to higher education.
- Established several initiatives to facilitate opportunities for students including the CAO 1st Year Transfer scheme, Cross-Campus Transfer scheme, and the Internal Advanced Entry process.

Table 3.3 – Addressing CINNTE review objectives in chapter 3

3.7.2 Directions

While we demonstrate that we meet the above objectives, we recognise that – being in transition – there is further impacts that can enhance student experience. These are presented below, as well as the challenges that exist for SETU in implementing these.

1. *Improve the retention and progression of SETU students*

The University recognises that progression rates of SETU students are low in a national context and will prioritise increasing these rates especially in the context of student belonging and wellbeing. Informed by robust data, the University will continue to tailor both its teaching and learning approach and its support infrastructure to enable student belonging and success. There are plans to enhance ongoing orientation and themed weeks, and to further develop the Higher Education Learner Programme (HELP), the peer mentoring programme and increase student volunteering activities.

2. *Strengthen the voice and perspectives of SETU students within the University*

The University will establish the SETU 100" initiative. The SETU 100 will comprise one hundred SETU students that will mirror the diversity of the University's student body. They will act as co-creators, actively shaping SETU policy, curriculum, quality enhancement efforts and research activities. In addition to this key initiative, the University will also deepen student engagement by utilising nationally available instruments (such as StudentSurvey.ie) to ensure that feedback gathered from students informs university activity and close the feedback loop.

3. *Enhance the provision of social spaces and student accommodation across SETU campuses*

Feedback from students has highlighted the need for more informal spaces and social spaces for students across the University's campuses. Capital funding remains a key issue to deliver on the plans to deliver on the capital development plans and requirements over the next five years. This is a key focus of the university management. To retain and grow student numbers the addressing of the shortage of student accommodation, reaching 1,160 beds by 2028 will be important, not only for student access but for student perseverance and health.

4. *Create a centralised Learning and Development Unit for all SETU staff*

The staff development environment is optimised where a scale and clarity of structure enables identifiable and visible single points of contact for individuals. It is important that the good practice, evident throughout the University, is coordinated into a unified, centralised SETU Learning and Development Unit supporting academic staff and professional, managerial and support staff. This enables the development and sharing of practices across the University. The basis of creating this unit will involve the development of a Professional Development Framework, which captures the available supports to enable staff to build their capability and support their career progression through relevant and meaningful learning opportunities.

4. Our Engagement - Regional and Global

4.1 Overview

Through long established engagement with industry, employers, regional education providers and linked and collaborative partners including transnational partners (initiated by SETU's legacy institutions), as well as more recent initiatives such as the EU-CONEXUS European University Alliance, SETU plays a leadership role in ensuring that education and research in the south east is responsive to the needs of the region's learners, employers and industry. Through its international connections, the University links its learners, staff and stakeholders with thought leaders and innovative ideas from elsewhere in the world, and spotlights regional talent and innovation to maximise the south east's global reach.

The key role of SETU's collaboration and partnership with other actors in education, enterprise and research, regionally, nationally and internationally, is underlined by several national and regional policy documents. For example, the Southern Regional Assembly's [*Towards a Learning Region*](#) outlines a framework for the expansion and renewal of learning opportunities and pathways for those living and working in the south east, with coordinated approaches and collaboration a central focus.

The [*National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028*](#), [*Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy*](#) and the [*National Development Plan 2021-2030*](#) note the key part played by technological universities in driving the rebalancing of regional growth and development as well as the role of technological universities as drivers of regional enterprise-academic collaboration and clustering which, in turn, can lead to the internationalisation of regional enterprise.

Furthermore, the [*policy*](#) on progressing a more unified third-level system, launched by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) in 2022, sets out an ambition to develop a more cohesive, joined-up tertiary education system that supports greater fluidity and flexibility of learner pathways. This will see HEIs working collaboratively with Education and Training Boards in their region to inter alia develop and deliver programmes of education and training that culminate in higher education awards.

We endeavour to ensure that engagement with external parties is founded upon clear governance structures in which the roles and responsibilities of SETU and our partners are clearly delineated. Partners are selected based on the outcome of due diligence processes. Memoranda of agreement (MOA) or, where appropriate, memoranda of understanding (MOU), are concluded between the University and our partners and are reviewed and

revised periodically. Further discussion of SETU's quality assurance of collaborative and linked provision is set out under section 4.3.2.2. The governance process for managing all research collaborative, contract and consultancy projects with external partners is outlined in the SETU Research [Procedures Guide](#) and is coordinated through the Office of the Vice President for Research, Innovation & Impact.

In recruiting international learners and staff, SETU attracts talent to the region, which is in turn enriched by the cultural diversity and exchange that the international members of our community bring. Our plans for strengthening existing engagement and developing further relationships and partnerships are anchored in our Strategic Plan, which details SETU's ambitions to lead and deepen strategic partnerships with regional, national, and international partners and – within SETU – to empower and enable our community members to reach their highest potential.

The primary areas of collaboration in which SETU engages and the way we strive to ensure clear, accurate, transparent, and effective communication with external and internal stakeholders are set out and discussed in the sections below. First, we examine regional engagement, acknowledging SETU's clear mandate to have regard to the needs of the region in which our campuses are located.

4.2 Regional Engagement

As detailed in section 4.1, both national and regional policy call on universities to work with each other – as well as with employers and other education, industry, and community partners – to facilitate learning pathways, employment opportunities, regional development and global connections. As the only university in the south east, SETU is a fulcrum of regional engagement, supporting entrepreneurship and enterprise development, as well as established industry.

The University is recognised as central to the continued evolution of its surrounding region by both the [Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region](#) and the [South-East Regional Enterprise Plan](#), as well as the [South East Regional Skills Forum](#). With its regional partners, SETU has a key role to play in ensuring the future prosperity and quality of life of the south east. The University's strategic ambitions are informed and directed by these expectations.

To this end, SETU's Strategic Plan commits to increasing regional productivity, growth and sustainability (Objective 7) and to enhancing knowledge transfer (Objective 3). Regional partnerships also support the elevation of our research performance (Objective 2) – for example through the Regional Research Development and Innovation Integration

Scheme/[TU RISE](#) (Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise) – as well as the reshaping of our curriculum (Objective 5) through the identification of regional skills gaps and industry needs.

4.2.1 Engagement with Employers and Industry

SETU bolsters its educational provision and research, and contributes to regional development, through a comprehensive programme of engagement and collaboration with regional employers and industry partners. This includes consultation to enhance programmes of education as well as research collaborations. Industry and employers are integral parts of SETU's processes for the quality assurance and enhancement of its education provision and to inform the direction and trajectory of our research.

The University's mechanisms for engagement with employers and industry are diverse and, through the Strategic Plan, the University seeks to construct a single, cross-campus engagement function and to develop a comprehensive regional engagement plan (Action 7.1). In this regard, SETU is guided by the statutory function enumerated by the [Technological University Act 2018](#) (section 9) that TUs should foster close and effective relationships with statutory bodies that support regional development in the TU's region, as well as with local authorities, ETBs and organisations that represent social, creative and cultural interests of the region.

The Institutional Profile (Chapter 8) sets out details of how SETU partners with regional industry to support innovation through the provision of consultancy, the conclusion of research agreements, and the development of spin-out companies. The University has three [incubation centres](#) across the Southeast and the University's entrepreneurship programmes (e.g. South East [New Frontiers](#), [StartX](#)) and the incubation centres are underpinned by a strong ethos of partnership with regional development agencies such as [Enterprise Ireland](#), [IDA Ireland](#), local enterprise offices, [South East BIC](#), chambers of commerce, investors and experienced entrepreneurs. In 2022/23, SETU supported more than 50 companies employing in excess of 350 employees through these partnerships.

The University plans to increase its activities in these areas, and, in doing so, enhance its performance in research and knowledge transfer to support innovation and reduce the migration of talent from the region.

Our engagement with industry, employers, and with professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) also, is elaborated upon in further detail below.

4.2.1.1 Engagement with Enterprise, Community & Practice in Programme Development & Delivery

SETU prides itself on supporting our learners to develop into graduates who are equipped with the knowledge, skill and competence necessary for the workplaces of today and of the future. By necessity, this requires close engagement with a breadth of key stakeholders, regionally, nationally, and internationally, to ensure that our programmes are industry- and employer-informed and cognisant of current labour-market skills needs.

Engagement takes a variety of forms:

1. All SETU programme development and approval processes are informed by close consultation with industry: our programme development teams consult with regional employers to explore the need and demand for proposed programmes, adjusting programme learning outcomes and proposed curriculum content to respond to industry/employer feedback.
2. Industry and employer expertise are central to the composition of our programme approval panels. Of 35 programme approval and review processes conducted by SETU during academic year 2022/23, 56 panel members represented industry or third mission¹⁹ (for comparison: there was a total of 63 academic/discipline-specific panel members across the 35 panels).
3. Industry representation is a core part of our external examining system. Of 314 external examiners active across the University, 85 are drawn from industry. They contribute to the University's assessment processes through their consideration of, and provision of feedback on, assessment briefs and examination papers. Following the conclusion of the examination period at the end of each semester, they provide feedback through external examiner forms and examination boards on the quality and appropriateness of assessments (including currency and industry relevance of content) and confirm that assessments are testing the intended learning outcomes.
4. Industry representatives contribute to programme delivery as associate lecturers or as guest lecturers.
5. As set out in more detail below (section 4.2.1.4), work-integrated learning is inextricably interwoven within our programme delivery and supports learners

¹⁹ SETU AQR 2024, pp. 52-53. Accessible at: <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2024-04/south-east-technological-university-aqr-report-2024.pdf>.

to acquire the industry-relevant knowledge and skills and to identify those areas of work that they would like to pursue upon graduation.

6. As set out in more detail below (section 4.3.2 – Linked and Collaborative Provision), SETU develops programmes in partnership with regional and national employers, resulting in bespoke programmes for their employees that culminate in skill and competence development and recognition, as well as qualifications that are recognised within the NFAQ.

4.2.1.2 Engagement with Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

As noted in Chapter 3, a number (over 90) of our programmes are accredited by PSRBs to facilitate their recognition of our graduates, entry on to PSRB registers, and/or advanced entry into relevant professional qualification programmes. Confirmation of the accreditation status of programmes leading to professional qualifications is provided on the SETU website to ensure clear and transparent information for students and prospective students²⁰, who can assure themselves that the programme that they are undertaking is approved by the relevant PSRB. SETU also collaborates with PSRBs to host events that provide information and hands-on experience of the profession in question for prospective students, including secondary school students from the region²¹.

SETU maintains and publishes a register of the PSRBs with which it engages within its Annual Quality Report²², which is submitted to QQI each year and published on both the QQI and the SETU websites.

SETU's endorses the QQI-developed [*Principles for Professional Engagements with Education Providers, including Programme Validation, Professional Accreditation and Approval*](#), which set out the discrete and complementary roles of HEIs, PSRBs, and of QQI as the national quality assurance body for further and higher education and national qualifications authority. The principles call upon all stakeholders to work collaboratively to reduce any unnecessary administrative burden arising from academic and professional accreditation processes. In line with the Principles, SETU's policy on university reviews confirms the University's commitment to working collaboratively with PSRBs with a view to aligning approaches to academic approval and professional accreditation as far as this is feasible,

²⁰ See, for example, the programme information provided for the SETU's LLB Bachelor of Law (Hons) (<https://www.setu.ie/courses/llb-bachelor-of-laws-hons>) and for the BA (Hons) in Accounting (<https://www.setu.ie/courses/ba-hons-in-accounting-cw>).

²¹ See, for example, details of the 'Engineering Your Future' event, hosted by SETU and supported by Engineers Ireland's STEPS programmes, which provided hands-on events for transition year students: <https://www.setu.ie/news/setu-hosts-engineering-your-future-event-2023>.

²² SETU AQR 2024, pp. 29 et. seqq. Available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2024-04/south-east-technological-university-aqr-report-2024.pdf>.

thereby increasing efficiency and supporting learning, exchange and innovation to enhance our processes.

4.2.1.3 Research Partnerships

SETU engages closely with industry through our many research partnerships, which have mutual benefit in ensuring that the activity of regional industry is apprised of innovative developments in the discipline, and in supporting students in developing practical knowledge and skills necessary in the workplace.

The University's connectivity to the regional enterprise base is particularly evident through the considerable level of engagement which SETU's four National Technology Gateway Centres ([SEAM](#), [PMBRC](#), [ICS@Walton](#), [Design+](#)) and its other research centres have with small and medium enterprises (SME) and with large enterprise. For the period May 2022 to August 2023 SETU research centres undertook 238 contracts (contract / collaborative research and innovation vouchers) with industry generating 7% / €2.2m of SETU's research income. Each Gateway is resourced with a full-time manager and business development executives and the governance of each centre comprises an advisory board with representatives from industry, Enterprise Ireland and the Office for the Vice President of Research, Innovation and Impact. Annual performance reviews of the centres are conducted by Enterprise Ireland. Following a competitive evaluation process coupled with strong endorsement from enterprise partners all 4 centres were reapproved for funding in 2023 for a seven-year period.

4.2.1.4 Work-integrated Learning at SETU

Work-integrated learning in SETU is underpinned by SETU's Strategic Plan, in which several strategic objectives reinforce its importance. These include aligning with regional skills (Objective 4); recognising changing patterns of employment (Objective 5); encapsulating all aspects of student learning (Objective 6); and increasing partnerships with enterprise; ensuring cohesion and impact for the learner (Objective 7).

74% of SETU programmes²³ incorporate work placement, which contributes to the development of workplace-ready graduates. Work-integrated learning and practice placement support learners to develop the discipline-specific and soft skills required for the workplace and to determine whether they are suited to those careers associated with their chosen programme of study. SETU's work placement programme is well supported by regional employers, who provide students with supervised and mentored work placements.

²³ Full-time undergraduate general degrees (level 7) and undergraduate honours degrees (level 8) only. For 2023/2024, 99 out of 135 programmes (Full-time UG General Degree and UG Honours Degree that were available to students via the CAO route) had either mandatory or optional work placement.

In turn, employers gain insight to and offer feedback on the skills that students gain on SETU programmes. The KPI for action 5.3.1 of the Strategic Plan aims to have placement on all programmes by 2028.

International opportunities for work placement are also provided to SETU students: For example, students on sports and health science programmes are facilitated to apply for work placement with the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society (PBATS), with whom SETU maintains a related agreement.

Case Study: Undergraduate student placement in the Department of Computing and Mathematics

All undergraduate degree programmes in the Department of Computing and Mathematics (in the School of Science & Computing) offer a semester of Industrial Placement in 3rd year as an option, including BSc. (Hons.) in Computer Science, BSc. (Hons.) in Computer Forensics and Security, and BSc. and BSc. (Hons.) in Software Systems Development.

These placements are sourced nationally, although most of them are in the southeast region, where there is a well-developed and connected tech industry cluster. This tech cluster is supported by SETU through its [Walton Institute](#), and [ArcLabs](#) (an SETU Innovation and Incubation centre).

Pre-placement modules in professional practice are incorporated within each programme to support the quality of the learner experience as they prepare for learning in the workplace. Feedback from students is obtained via their work placement assignments, during site visits, and through meetings with the placement coordinator throughout the semester. Assignments also offer a chance for students to reflect on their experiences, thus strengthening their learning while in the workplace. Feedback from employers is captured in evaluation reports and during site visits.

Employers are welcomed on campus to deliver talks and presentations to specific classes, or larger groups, where they can give students and staff an understanding of their companies. In addition, several events organised by the department allow the strengthening of connections with employers. These events give the department a chance to bring employers and students together in a setting that is not necessarily a presentation or interview. Examples include the Final Year Projects Expo; Computing Careers Fair; Computing Week; Women in Tech.

4.2.2 Public Outreach and Community Engagement

SETU contributes to the education and cohesion of its surrounding communities by leading and – through partnerships with central, regional and local government, as well as with state agencies, enterprise, cultural, voluntary and community organisations – facilitating engagement with discrete cohorts of stakeholders as well as with the general public. Examples include primary and secondary school pupils and their parents, prospective SETU

students, individuals wishing to upskill to support their return to work or to secure promotion opportunities, individuals with specific needs and senior citizens. Engagement includes festivals, events and initiatives to support education and the provision and exchange of information about specific disciplines, and outreach events that bring together members of the community and encourage engagement with each other and with the University. Outreach activities include [‘Try’](#) and progression events for FET (Further Education and Training) students to familiarise them with the University and with specific programmes; [events for senior citizens on the educational offering of the University](#), and collaborative events with PSRBs, such as the [‘Engineering Your Future’](#) event for transition year students, which is held in collaboration with Engineers Ireland.

Case Study: ATTAINS and Brighter Futures

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

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

SETU’s expansion of cross-regional outreach activity often has a particular focus on enhancing public awareness and understanding of science and technology and on leading the creation of multi-sectoral clusters (involving partnerships between local authorities,

industry, and various state agencies) to deliver STEM engagement activities at local level (Action 7.7.1). This aspiration builds on the record of accomplishment of entities such as SETU's [Centre for the Advancement of Learning of Maths, Science and Technology](#) ('CALMAST'). CALMAST has been instrumental in establishing STEM clusters in Wexford, Clonmel, Dungarvan, Waterford and Kilkenny. These draw together local resources: industry, local authority functions including libraries, community groups, schools, etc.

Case Study: CALMAST – STEM Engagement

CALMAST was established at SETU in 2003, building on the work of the South East Schools Science Initiative which began in the 1990s. The centre is part of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning and works closely with the Schools of Science, Engineering and Health Sciences, with cross-disciplinary projects with the other schools at SETU.

Funded by Science Foundation Ireland as the STEM Hub for the Southeast of Ireland, CALMAST is developing clusters of industry, schools and government agencies across the region to deliver STEM locally through symbiotic partnerships. Its guiding principle is 'STEM for all' and the centre is committed to inclusion regardless of gender, socio-economic background, ability or location.

The centre engages over 35,000 participants in the region each year. Maths Week Ireland, founded and coordinated by CALMAST, engages a further 500,000. The Centre adopts a partnership approach working with external groups such as local and national visitor centres, local and other governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations, community groups, library services, institutions and industry to achieve impact, scale and sustainability. It aims to reposition STEM in culture by proposing a wide range of activities that promote inclusion, creativity, critical thinking, self-confidence and awareness of the environment.

The CALMAST team have won many national and international awards for their work in STEM engagement, including the 2006 EU Descartes Award for Science Communication, the highest EU award in this field. CALMAST received the Education Awards 2021 (Ireland) Best Outreach Award and in 2021, Highly Commended in THE Awards (Times Higher Education), the first Irish organisation to be so honoured.

SETU's community outreach and engagement also involves members of the University's research active community, eliciting their views, listening to their lived experiences and generating knowledge and novel approaches to support the development and growth of community members.

Case Study: Better Together Co-production

Better Together (BT) is a voluntary online peer recovery community organisation offering daily support for those with substance use and/or mental health challenges. BT was formed in March of 2020 as a direct response to the COVID-19 outbreak to provide recovery support including social connection and personal resources to those who needed it. This collaborative research project was established by the Southeast Regional Drug and Alcohol Taskforce

(SERDAFT), Wexford Substance Misuse Team, SETU, Community Based Drugs Initiative (CBDI) and individuals with lived experience. The project provided a chance to engage those with lived experience as active researchers rather than as research subjects. This research was conducted online from ethics to analysis; an opportunity for group members to meet once in person was provided by way of a data analysis workshop.

At the outset of the project, a voluntary research advisory panel was established to carry out this research project which consisted of eight individuals with lived, living, or learned experiences including a member of the Travelling community, one CBDI worker, one SERDATF Development Worker, one HSE (Health Service Executive) Drug Education Officer, one HSE counsellor and one SETU lecturer.

Among the key achievements and findings of the project were:

- Research validated the importance of an online recovery model during and post COVID-19:
 - *'I had nowhere else to turn to. Every door was locked and every phone unanswered. Only Better Together was there for me'* (Participant Quote)
- The research highlighted the lack of social and community connections in national policy documents and in measurement outcomes for recovery which is valued by those with lived experience:
 - *'I experienced stigma when a service felt that we should not meet up socially'* (Participant Quote)
- BT is an innovative service which responds to isolation and disconnection as it removes the requirement for travelling to and from appointments, time off from work and childcare constraints:
 - *'You can get support just by logging onto your phone which doesn't happen with any other service'* (Participant Quote)
- **86.4%** of participants reported a decrease in episodes of relapse or self-harm.
- **80.4%** of participants reported an increased engagement with appointments.
- **77%** of participants reported a readiness for treatment.
- **97%** of participants expressed improved social and emotional capabilities.
- **94%** of participants expressed an improved feeling of connection.

All outreach events are evaluated, and larger festivals are typically evaluated by independent evaluators²⁴. Evaluation includes participation metrics, participant feedback and presenters' and partners' input. This information is primarily used for further improvement of activity and to identify gaps in provision. It is shared with relevant stakeholders and funders.

4.3 Engagement with other Educational Providers

As referenced in chapter 3, SETU engages in extensive collaboration with a variety of external partners to offer programmes. In many cases, this engagement builds on the solid

²⁴ [South East Science Festival 2022 Evaluation Report](#) and [Wexford Science Festival 2022 Evaluation Report](#)

relationships established by SETU's antecedent institutions. It contributes *inter alia* to national policy, including the [National Access Plan 2022-2028](#) and [the national tertiary policy](#); regional priorities, including the Southern Assembly's call for technological universities to contribute to the expansion and renewal of learning opportunities and pathways for those living and working in the Southeast; and the fulfilment of the statutory functions stipulated for all technological universities within the *Technological Universities Act 2018*, including provision for the broad education, intellectual and personal development of students, collaboration with institutions that provide higher education on the provision of programmes, and the stimulation of and contribution to regional development.

Collaboration with other providers of education and training has necessitated the establishment of due diligence and quality assurance infrastructure to support the maintenance and enhancement of shared provision of education, with memoranda of agreement governing the specificities of each relationship and reviews of the relevant relationship and related programmes conducted periodically.

4.3.1 Engagement with the Further Education and Training Sector

The figure of 10% is named by the [National Access Plan 2022-2028](#) as a target for the proportion of HE student intake originating in the Further Education & Training (FET) sector. Since 2005, there have been four National Access Plans, each with a core theme of progression from FET to HE. For technological universities, the [SOLAS FET Strategy](#) reports that transitions from FET account for around one fifth of the annual student intake.

SETU participates in and operates several schemes that support collaboration with FET partners and the progression of FET learners into HE:

- The Higher Education Links Scheme (HELS)²⁵.
- Preferential entry to students who successfully complete a linked FET programme in [partner COB](#) and training.
- Advanced Entry for FET learners who have successfully completed certain level 6 awards into Year 2 of identified programmes.
- Joint tertiary programmes, as articulated in government policy for a unified tertiary system and provided for in the [Higher Education Authority Act 2022](#).

²⁵ This is a progression scheme that links some National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 5 and level 6 major awards to the first year of selected higher education courses in participating HEIs nationally. See <https://qhelp.qqi.ie/learners/higher-education-links-scheme-2017/> and <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/qqi-awards/going-to-higher-education-using-my-qqi-award-learner>.

- [Apprenticeship programmes.](#)

SETU's recognition of the FET sector and its qualifications enable the university to admit substantial numbers of candidates based on their FET background. In 2023 approximately 6% of University students accepted CAO offers, a further 8% accepted a mature student offer and a further 13% through the HEAR/DARE schemes.

4.3.1.1 Joint Tertiary Programmes

Another more recent route is the establishment of [new tertiary programmes](#). These aim to develop additional pathways between the FET and HE sectors through the provision of programmes that are programmes designed and delivered by ETB/HEI partnerships, with learners commencing in an FET setting (managed by the ETB) and progressing into a HEI, culminating in either a level 7 or level 8 award in the NFQ, thus reducing barriers to progression²⁶. The initiative is funded by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and SOLAS, and coordinated at a national level by the [National Tertiary Office](#) (NTO).

A Tertiary Manager has been appointed in SETU and, in 2023, SETU took part in the National Tertiary Office tertiary education pilot, offering two tertiary honours bachelor's degree programmes.

Continued and increased SETU/ETB engagement as part of broader engagement with regional partners (including the Regional Skills Forum, the Southern Regional Assembly, the local authorities, Civic and Community partners) will be central to the development of a South East UNESCO 'Learning Region' (Strategic Plan Action 7.3), which will aim to promote inclusive learning across communities, widen access, enhance lifelong learning opportunities and integrate pathways. In progressing to the ambition of developing the Learning Region, SETU, Waterford Wexford ETB, the Southern Regional Assembly, local government and industry partners were recently successful in the joint bid to enable Waterford to be designated as a UNESCO Learning City in February 2024. The governance structure and detailed programme of work to underpin this designation currently in development.

²⁶ For example, points, transport and accommodation costs, and fees. See Sartori, S & Bloom, D.D. (2023). A community needs analysis with further education students – Thoughts around progression. Maynooth University: Ireland. Available at: <https://collegeconnect.ie/a-community-needs-analysis-with-fet-students/>

4.3.2 Engagement with Collaborative and Linked Providers

SETU understands collaborative provision to encompass the provision of a programme of higher education and training by two or more providers by formal agreement. Collaborative provision may take a number of forms, including collaboration in the programme's development, in its monitoring, in teaching or assessment, or a combination of these.²⁷ Linked provision occurs where a provider that is not a designated awarding body (DAB) enters into arrangements with a DAB and, under this arrangement, satisfies all or part of the prerequisites for an award of the DAB²⁸.

4.3.2.1 SETU's Collaborative and Linked Partnerships

SETU and its antecedent institutions have a strong tradition of collaborative and linked provision with both domestic and international partners. This is, in part, reflected in the University's leadership in lifelong learning nationally and its position as the second-largest provider of lifelong learning programmes nationally. The Institutional Profile describes and quantifies SETU programmes delivered in whole or in part by partner organisations (Chapter 3: Enrolment Profile), listing partners as diverse as the [Defence Forces](#), the [Irish National Stud](#), [Teagasc](#), and [Local Enterprise Offices](#). The University currently engages in the following types of collaborative partnerships:

- Accreditation;
- Articulation;
- Exchange;
- Off-site delivery; and
- Validation.

Procedures for the quality assurance of the University's collaborative and linked provision will be developed as part of the SETU internal quality assurance infrastructure; these procedures will supersede the procedures of the antecedent institutions, which, during this interim period, continue to regulate quality assurance of collaborative and linked provision.

Collaborative and linked provision offer opportunities to learners from a broad swathe of backgrounds to commence, continue or resume their engagement with higher education²⁹

²⁷ Cf. <https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2021-10/policy-for-collaborative-programmes-transnational-programmes-and-joint-awards.pdf>

²⁸ Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended), s. 2 (1).

²⁹ Note that this is reflected in the fact that SETU has the fourth largest number of part-time learners among all Irish universities, with over 9% of all national part-time enrolments; approximately one third of SETU's enrolments are part-time. SETU acknowledges that that part-time learning opportunities are often a more accessible gateway into learning – especially for some particularly disadvantaged communities, including several of those described in the *National Access Plan*.

and to have learning recognised and accredited within the National Framework of Qualifications. They also facilitate employers, community and voluntary and other organisations to leverage the University's rich knowledge and experience in the development and delivery of programmes of education that support the enhancement of skills and competencies among their staff members and/or other stakeholders to align with their organisational needs and/or the needs of the wider region. A list of organisations that constituted the top employers for the SETU class of 2022 is included within the Institutional Profile (see Chapter 6: Graduates), and the impact of two of the University's collaborative arrangements is particularly evident. Within the top three employers in 2022 are the Irish Defence Forces, employing 124 graduates, and the Irish Prison Service, who employ 44. Collaborative provision is also a significant means of addressing and redressing the average/below-average educational attainment performance of the southeast³⁰.

Collaborations with international partners enrich the University's provision by exposing learners, staff, their learning, teaching and research, to external ideas and approaches, and by providing channels through which the University can extend and amplify its influence on the global stage. The continuation of existing relationships and the establishment of new ones aligns with the University's strategic objectives to:

- Expand SETU educational provision to maximise educational opportunities for people in the region (Objective 4).
- Recast the SETU curriculum to create a research-informed, internationalised curriculum (Objective 5).
- Lead and deepen strategic partnerships with government, local authorities, education sector, public sector, enterprise, culture, voluntary and community organisations (Objective 7).
- Partner internationally to extend our reach and maximise our impact (Objective 8).

4.3.2.2 Quality Assurance of our Collaborative and Linked Provision

The University's collaborative and linked provision relationships are subject to quality assurance arrangements in accordance with the relevant regulations, policies and procedures of SETU's antecedent institutions. For each prospective linked or collaborative provision partnership, a thorough due diligence process is conducted, which considers areas such as expectations of equivalence of learner experience between partners; financial risk; maintenance of academic standards; management of quality assurance; and reputational

³⁰ The overall gap in educational attainment for the Southeast is 48%; the State average is 53%. See Central Statistics Office. Educational Thematic Report for 2022. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2022/profileofagesexnationalityandregion/>.

risk. The outcome of the assessment determines the level and likelihood of risk and supports the University in determining whether to move forward with the partnership (including the determination of any conditions that must be met before progressing).

Memoranda of agreement (MoA) set out mutual and shared obligations. The operation of collaborative and linked relationships, including the content and delivery of all programmes that form the basis for these relationships, is reviewed periodically. Such reviews are undertaken by external peer experts, who may issue conditions or recommendations as part of the review outcome. The response of the partner and of the SETU faculty in question are presented to SETU's Academic Council, which monitors the related implementation plan. A register of the University's collaborative and linked providers is submitted to QQI as part of the AQR. This includes details of the relevant memoranda of agreement entered into with the University's partners, including dates of the agreements' commencement and the dates on which the agreements and the relationships are to be reviewed.

4.4 Global Engagement

4.4.1 Developing a Strategic Plan for Global Partnership & Internationalisation

The quality and quantity of actions relating to global partnerships set out by SETU's Strategic Plan, highlight the University's strong commitment to – and ambition in – this space. The strategy sets out a trajectory for the University that will foster a multi-cultural environment by welcoming an increasingly diverse student population and enhance our recruitment and retention of international faculty. We will also build upon international collaborations, including extensive exchange programmes and participation in transnational education initiatives; provide an increasingly wide range of high quality, globally relevant programmes; continue to place a strong emphasis on preparing students for a globalised world; and – in part, through our engagements with global partners – embed sustainability in our operations and activities.

Actions specified in the Plan include:

- Developing an International Strategy that sets out a vision for SETU's global engagement and connectedness and that supports significant growth in international student enrolment as well as the expansion of international strategic partnerships, including at least two strategic international EDI partnerships (Action 8.1; Action 12.3);
- Reviewing the international attractiveness, relevance, accessibility and currency of our portfolio (Action 4.1.4);
- Extending international mobility options, including expanded Erasmus+ activity, across all programmes and to all students, to include the provision of internationalisation at

home opportunities and develop an Internationalisation at Home strategy (Action 5.5);

- Developing a Rankings and Reputation Strategy to position SETU in the top 1200 universities in the world by 2028, and to be known as a quality university for teaching, research and impact in Ireland and Europe amongst international academics and students as indicated in reputational measures (Action 8.2);
- Delivering and build upon SETU commitments to the European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability (EU-CONEXUS) (Action 8.5).

At the time of writing, the University is developing an internationalisation strategy to accompany the strategic plan (*Global Partnerships & Internationalisation 2024-2029*). SETU's global partnership and internationalisation environment, which will provide the framework for this strategy, is set out below. The policy will draw on strands of national policy, including [Global Citizens 2030](#); the Department of Foreign Affairs' [Statement of Strategy 2023-2025](#); [Global Ireland](#) and the forthcoming *International Education Mark* scheme (see section 4.5.2.2 below), as well as European policy, including the European Commission's [European Strategy for Universities](#).

SETU's Strategic Plan (Action 8.1.2) commits to increasing the proportion of full-time, non-EEA international students enrolled on SETU programmes to 8% of the student population by 2028. This will be in part by (as noted above) reviewing the international attractiveness of our portfolio, ensuring its relevance, accessibility and currency to international students – *Global Partnerships & Internationalisation 2024-2029* will build upon and concretise the actions needed to deliver this commitment.

A further key component of the proposed strategic approach requires the University to build upon and develop further strong, sustainable international partnerships that are founded upon clear governance, measurable outcomes and dedicated resources. These strategic collaborations will extend and maximise our global impact, enhance our reputation and contribute to fostering an inclusive, outward-looking international southeast region. SETU is proud of our history of [international collaboration](#), which includes several collaborations with Chinese colleges (NUIST Joint College in Nanjing; HUAHE Joint College in Henan; and a collaboration with Jilin Normal University on the delivery of a three-year degree in visual communications in design). We have also engaged for over a decade with Colleges Ontario to facilitate graduates of two-year programmes in Ontario to secure an SETU honours degree with two further years of study in Ireland. In this respect, we have considerable experience with and knowledge of developing international partnerships which can be leveraged into the development of future relationships.

Among our newer collaborations is [EU-CONEXUS](#), a multi-partner [European University Alliance](#), which sees SETU partner with peer universities in France, Spain, Germany, Romania, Croatia, Greece, Lithuania and Cyprus with the aim of developing a hub of excellence for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability. EU-CONEXUS is a key priority for SETU in expanding our engagement in Europe, which will facilitate the sharing and broadening of our research expertise and student and staff mobility to and from partner universities.

Alongside several programmes leading to minor awards and micro-credentials, as well as PhD opportunities, [one joint master's programme](#) has already been developed as part of the EU-CONEXUS alliance and a second is planned. SETU's leadership role in the alliance is signified by its chairing (by SETU's Vice President for Student Experience) of EU-CONEXUS' [Academic Council](#) and its plans to take on the coordinating institution role for the evaluation of a second joint master's programme under the [European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#).

Also at the European level, [SETU has recently been confirmed as a member](#) of the [European Universities Association](#) and looks forward, through this engagement, to strengthening existing relationships with European partners and to building new relationships and collaborations.

SETU's internationalisation strategy will commit to an Internationalisation at Home (IAH) strategy to bring global perspectives and intercultural experiences directly into the university campus environment. The University recognises that – notwithstanding current promotion of international opportunities through Erasmus+, international exchange and study abroad, as well as plans to expand our Erasmus+ activity, especially engagement by SETU students in the programme – many SETU students will not travel abroad as part of their learning experience. The IAH strategy will inform how we operate and equip our graduates with the skills and attributes they need to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. It will also help to integrate global perspectives, cultural diversity, and international experiences into our educational environment.

4.4.2 Quality Assuring the International Learner's Experience

As identified in Chapter 2, as a new and developing University, legacy regulations, policies and procedures of SETU's antecedent institutions as appropriate remain in operation until SETU regulations, policies and procedures have been created to replace them. As students of SETU, the same educational regulations, policies and procedures apply to international students as to other cohorts.

4.4.2.1 The International Fees, Scholarships, Agent Commission and Admissions Policy

The International Fees, Scholarships, Agent Commission and Admissions Policy is an example of a policy being newly developed that codifies and enhances SETU's international engagement and recruitment practices. It aims to support the University in attracting a diverse pool of talented students, faculty, and researchers from around the world; supporting sustainability and enhanced SETU functions; and boosting SETUs global footprint and reputation. Its implementation will also facilitate SETU's alignment with the criteria set out by the International Education Mark Code of Practice (see further detail in section 4.4.2.2 below).

The policy takes the innovative approach of establishing an SETU Academic Committee for International Academic Scholarships and Awards (ACISA), to ensure comprehensive oversight of, and advise the University on, the development, implementation and ongoing review of its international academic scholarships and awards programmes. This will help to ensure that these are consistent with the overall mission and values of SETU, as well as broader goals and objectives for internationalisation of SETUs communities and regions. It will be accountable to the Academic Council.

4.4.2.2 The International Education Mark

SETU recognises the critical importance of authorisation to use the IEM, which will send a clear message to our international audience and prospective students about the quality of our offering. This is especially relevant considering its strategic objectives (mentioned above) to increase the proportion of non-EEA learners enrolled on its programmes.

It is envisaged that the IEM scheme will be activated later in 2024 and the University has commenced planning for ensuring compliance with the Code of Practice. As part of this activity, SETU is examining and evaluating its engagement with overseas recruitment organisations to. Planning will also encompass consideration of how SETU complies with requirements likely set out in the IEM including the provision of relevant information (including language requirements and supports) and a strong policy environment both within the academic development and international learner support environment.

Measures that SETU have in place to support (prospective) international students that will reinforce work to achieve the IEM include:

1. Provision of a dedicated section on its website ([SETU Global](#)) for prospective international applicants to facilitate informed decisions. Information

provided encompasses available programmes, entry and English language requirements, visas and immigration, fees, and scholarships.

2. Support of successful applicants in their transition to Ireland through pre-arrival events and chats that aim to provide concise and accurate information to help prepare for arrival and alleviate concerns that students may have about moving to Ireland, while also helping to develop early connections and meet fellow students.
3. Facilitation of virtual and campus orientation, and a welcome party, by the University and the Students' Union, respectively.
4. Information and assistance (pre- and post-arrival) from the SETU International Team.
5. Ongoing support and guidance from Programme Leaders and staff across the University.
6. Support from our peer-to-peer student mentors.
7. A relevant and evolving policy environment.

4.4.3 Global Engagement Data Recording and Reporting

The gathering and analysis of data relating to SETU's global engagement is central to evaluating the University's progress, and to identifying areas for enhancement. SETU intends building on its existing robust data recording and reporting systems to support the expansion of international engagement, the recruitment of international students and staff, and the promotion of mobility opportunities for SETU students. Information on international student numbers is set out in section 3.2.3 and section 5 of the Institutional Profile document.

To support existing data recording, reporting and analysis, SETU participated in the [International Student Barometer](#) (ISB) for the first time in April 2024, with the first SETU results, compared to the international average, shown on the graphic here. The ISB is the world’s largest annual student survey, with over four million students participating annually. It allows universities to track and compare the experiences of international students and enables better-informed decision making by universities. Through the ISB, SETU will gather feedback from international students at various points during their academic journey. SETU will use the outcomes of this survey to benchmark itself against peer universities³¹, to assess progress towards achieving its strategic objectives relating to internationalisation, to refine marketing endeavours and enhance recruitment strategies, and to inform the



adjustment of relevant strategic actions where necessary. Data garnered from the ISB will facilitate the development of tailored plans aimed at ensuring a consistent and meaningful growth in international student numbers and enhance SETU’s ability to comprehend and meet the diverse needs and expectations of its international student community.

SETU is currently implementing the [QS Move On](#) software for all University Erasmus+ agreements. QS Move On is designed to streamline and enhance internationalisation efforts in HEIs and represents a major step forward in consolidating the information around Erasmus+ activity.

4.5 Communicating with our Stakeholders – Internal and External

As an open university that is responsive to the demands and needs of our stakeholders and that creates multiple communication and access points both from and to the university is crucial to the achievement of our strategic goals. However, this must be achieved within a strategic structure that provides consistency of information and expectation.

4.5.1 Overview of Marketing and Communications activity

The university has a dedicated marketing and communication structure that supports the university in ensuring consistency of messaging and providing appropriate conduits through which to channel communication.

³¹ Note that, currently, seven of the eight institutions in the Irish Universities Association (IUA) have implemented the ISB and SETU is aware that two other technological universities are also considering doing so.

SETU's Marketing and Communications function is divided into four principal areas:

- Student recruitment and engagement
- Brand, advertising and promotion
- PR and content
- Web and online

Each of these areas has developed its own skills and areas of expertise but, importantly, all work together as one team across the entire University to maximise the effectiveness of campaigns.

Marketing and Communications also links with PR and marketing professionals within Schools/Faculties, departments and units in other parts of the University to ensure connectivity and consistent messaging. Marketing and Communications' key areas of focus are:

1. Building the reputation of and trust in the University through clear and effective external communication
2. Ensuring accessible and transparent communication with all members of our SETU community, students and staff
3. Supporting student recruitment and retention through clear and accurate information and communication

4.5.2 University External Communications

External communications encompass all aspects of marketing – from developing and maintaining the new [SETU website](#) (launched April 2024), which promotes the University as a world-class, connected university, to the more day-to-day needs of recruiting students or staff and ensuring clear and comprehensive communications with external partners.

There are multiple fora that connect the university to external bodies – for example, industry boards, which serve as a specific focal point for bi-directional communication with relevant groups. Further, the University website provides an important means through which we communicate our full portfolio of activities. It is a repository for communicating our legal structures, our policies and procedures, and our open and transparent approach in providing information. SETU operates under the principle that, when providing information about programmes, associated award titles, credits, and such like, on the University website, it is imperative that it be clear and accurate.

Marketing and Communications works closely with SETU's Registry to ensure that only fully approved course information is published on the website. An enterprise-level content

management system (CMS) is used to manage data, with procedures in place to limit access to sensitive areas for other users. For example, only the University website team may publish or edit the 'Courses' section following discussion and agreement with the University Registry team.

Student recruitment constitutes one of the key areas of activity for Marketing and Communications. The university's right programme-right student approach is designed around the concept that students should be provided with the opportunity to make the best possible decision on what programme of study that best fits their competencies and that informed course decisions lead to better individual outcomes for the student. This approach is achieved through a suite of engagement activities that include, on-line programme choice workbooks, clear web-based information, practical 'try events', multiple opportunities to ask question at university and programme level managed through web-based applications as well as the more traditional marketing activities such as open days. Each September, SETU recruits approximately 3,500 undergraduate first-year students.

4.5.3 University Internal Communications

SETU's Strategic Plan commits to maximising internal engagement to build a unitary university culture and community (Objective 10), empowering and enabling staff to achieve their potential (Objective 11) and to embedding and mainstreaming sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across the university (Objectives 9 and 12).

Internal communications can be challenging in a new, multi-campus university, but is essential to share knowledge and information, provide feedback, engage in collaborative discussion and consultations, influence decision-making and support behavioural change to support the development of a unified university culture.

The University further acknowledges that communication of policies, procedures and frameworks of practice is challenging in a newly merged university. Overreliance on methods such as email can result in information overload. For this reason, SETU has developed and approved policies in this area – notably, the [E-Mail Policy](#) and [Right to Disconnect Policy](#). Since its inception, the University has recognised the need for information to be dispersed more widely and has augmented traditional methods of dissemination through the use of webinars, newsletters, change forums and town halls as more direct mechanisms. Indeed, webinars were used as one of the methods of generating feedback on this institutional self-evaluation report prior to its submission.

4.5.4 Quality Assurance of our Communications

SETU uses a variety of tools to assure and enhance the quality of its communications, including:

- [Matomo Analytics](#) is used to assess the performance of the University website and improve the user experience. [HotJar](#) is also used to assess how users move through the website pages. An example of how use of these tools has led to enhancements is provided by the use of HotJar, Marketing and Communications has been able to identify that most website users click on programme leaders within 12 to 16 seconds of opening a programme page. To capitalise on this behaviour, all pages now have at least one programme leader identified, and Marketing and Communications is working to ensure that 100 percent of those have profile pictures.
- Microsoft Dynamics, the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, is used to manage the University's relationship with second-level schools. The team schedules all visits and interactions through the CRM. All feeder school data are recorded annually, and this facilitates a review of schools' prioritisation each year to support better decision-making. Marketing and Communications records numbers of students with whom the University interacts, the target year of entry, etc., which allows better planning for student visits and open days. Marketing and Communications also uses the email facility to personalise and target emails to specific cohorts of stakeholders; the unit maintains one list of all contacts, which the entire team can access.
- As referenced above, a clear process is in place to support the publication of accurate, approved content about programmes of study on the website. This process is well established in some parts of the university and work is ongoing to ensure full and consistent implementation across the entire institution.
- A dedicated policy page for approved policies has been established and is managed in line with governing body approvals to ensure its accuracy and currency.

Communication is a theme that regularly emerges in Academic Council as it considers how best to communicate its work with the University's constituents.

4.6 Reflections and directions for SETU's Regional & Global Engagement Plans

4.6.1 Reflections

Chapter 4 has detailed SETU's approach to engaging with a number of cohorts of stakeholder – from staff and students within the University to a variety of partners across the education system and industry, within Ireland and abroad. The chapter sets out how SETU's current engagement strategies and practices and their planned evolution align with the objectives of the Strategic Plan and how they will be progressed by the actions outlined

therein. As in previous chapters, we have set out below how the activity and plans outlined in this chapter support SETU in meeting the objectives of the CINNTE review process.

Objective 1: To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of the new technological university through consideration of the procedures set out in the annual quality report submitted by the university.

How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 4

- SETU programme development and approval processes are informed by industry consultation.
- Industry representation forms a core part of SETU's cross-university external examiner system.
- Relevant SETU programmes are accredited/approved by the applicable PSRB and a register of PSRB-accredited programmes is maintained and updated periodically by the University within the AQR.
- A register of collaborative/linked providers is maintained and periodically reviewed and updated by SETU. It is submitted to QQI as part of the University's AQR.
- Clear governance and quality management processes and support structures are in place to underpin research partnerships with external stakeholders.
- EU-CONEXUS, the European University Alliance in which SETU is a partner, is founded upon solid QA and governance infrastructure. Programme development will progress through the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.
- The International Fees, Scholarships, Agent Commission and Admissions Policy codifies and enhances SETU's international engagement and recruitment practices and ensures oversight of academic scholarships and award programmes. SETU's activity to meet the requirements of the International Education Mark Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners will also support these areas.
- Data analysis and reporting through the Student Record System HEA Return is used as a benchmark by SETU in calculating its international student population.
- Quality assurance procedures and practices established by SETU's Marketing and Communications function, in collaboration with other functions, such as Registry, support the University in providing comprehensive, accurate and consistent information to stakeholders. This includes quality assurance of website content and the provision of a dedicated policy page for all newly approved university policies.

Objective 2: To review the enhancement of quality by the technological university through governance, policy and procedures.

How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 4

- SETU aims to increase from 74% to 100% the programmes that incorporate work placement to support workplace-ready graduates. This development will be supported by robust work-integrated learning QA procedures.
- A strategic plan for international engagement is being developed, which will *inter alia* enhance the University's approach to partnering with international collaborators and to enhancing the international student's experience of SETU.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SETU’s Internationalisation at Home strategy will ensure that SETU learners who do not venture abroad during their studies will nonetheless be equipped for an increasingly interconnected, globalised world. • SETU’s participation in the International Student Barometer provides SETU with a benchmark for its engagement with and support of international students and will facilitate the identification of areas for enhancement. • Analytical tools employed by SETU’s Marketing and Communications function support the continual enhancement of the SETU website.
<p>Objective 3: To review the effectiveness and implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SETU’s community engagement (including engagement with minority and socio-economically disadvantaged cohorts) supports prospective learners to learn more about the University and to sample its education provision prior to committing to enrolment, which is intended to support both access and retention. • SETU’s collaboration and engagement with ETBs supports learners to progress seamlessly from an FET environment to a HE one – the diversity of routes allows learners to select the pathway most suited to their own individual circumstances and increases the probability that they will progress within and complete their chosen programme. • SETU’s collaborative and linked provision open up educational opportunities (and higher education awards) to cohorts of learner who may not otherwise have had the opportunity to up-/re-skill, or to progress to higher education, supporting progression to and through HE.
<p>Objective 4: Following the introduction of a statutory international education quality assurance scheme, to determine compliance with the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SETU has commenced planning to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice and is considering how the University complies with the requirements of the Code including provision of accurate information to international learners, and fair, transparent and consistent admission policies. • SETU is also considering additional supports for international students in addition to the many supports currently available such as a dedicated section on our website for prospective international applicants; support of successful applicants in their transition to Ireland through pre-arrival events and chats; facilitation of virtual and campus orientation; a welcome party; information and assistance (pre- and post-arrival) from the SETU International Team; ongoing support and guidance from Programme Leaders and staff across the University; support from our peer-to-peer student mentors.

Table 4.1 – Addressing CINNTE review objectives in chapter 4

4.6.2 Directions

As detailed in the section directly above, the University is confident that it meets the CINNTE review objectives for newly established technological universities. However, as acknowledged elsewhere in this report, we recognise that, as a new university in transition,

further formalisation and enhancement is required to support the achievements of our strategic objectives relating to regional and international engagement. Recommendations that will support us in continuing to meet the review objectives as we grow and mature are set out below, as well as the challenges that we may encounter in implementing them.

- 1. Develop a unified, integrated and systematic approach to communication and engagement across the University with external stakeholders. This includes a cross-campus SETU engagement function that will better enable external partners to access the University's expertise and resources.*

SETU is cognisant that a unified, integrated and systematic approach to communication is needed to support the achievement of our strategic priorities, particularly with respect to deepening our strategic partnerships with key regional stakeholders. This is important for any education provider, but particularly for a young university in the midst of a transition period that entails continual developments in structures and processes. This includes the measures outlined above to ensure clear and accurate communication through our website (primarily for external stakeholders) and an accessible online sharing platform (for internal stakeholders). Ultimately, we aim to ensure that our communication with both internal and external stakeholders continues to create an inclusive environment, recognising the diversity of target participants, their needs and their capacity to engage with the relevant message(s) in a meaningful manner.

SETU engages with a wide range of partners and collaborators in the Southeast region. However, we are conscious that much of what we do evolves organically.

The University is cognisant that the diversity of stakeholders with which it engages (reflecting the considerable breadth of its remit) may pose challenges both in terms of resourcing and in meeting our stakeholders' expectations of a new university. Close consultation with our internal community and external partners will be necessary to ensure that the focus of our engagement activities is prioritised and resourced accordingly at faculty and central level.

- 2. Support increased coordination of professional accreditation and academic validation to maximise the benefit of regulatory and quality assurance processes through collaboration with relevant PSRBs, leveraging such activity to support the development of uniform programme approval and review processes across SETU.*

SETU is cognisant of the significant contribution made by PSRBs to the currency and relevance of its programmes through their accreditation processes and aims to strengthen this contribution in future through the more effective leveraging of such processes. It aims to collaborate more closely with PSRBs, sharing learning across processes and working to ensure greater efficiency and the reduction of unnecessary administrative burden across professional regulatory and internal quality assurance processes. SETU has enshrined its

commitment to engaging in closer collaboration with relevant PSRBs within its recently approved University Reviews Policy.

SETU envisages that this recommendation will support it in implementing the University Reviews Policy: we will aim to leverage our collaboration with PSRBs on the enhancement of quality assurance processes to implement consistent programme approval and review processes across the University. However, SETU also acknowledges the breadth of PSRB-type engaged in the regulation of our programmes. This will mean that it will not be possible to develop a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to meeting the recommendation. We are cognisant that it will be necessary to engage in intensive consultation with the relevant PSRBs and with colleagues at the coalface of the relevant accreditation process to identify the best 'fit' for the programme(s)/process(es) in question. At the early stages of any collaboration, review and – as appropriate – revision of approach will also be necessary.

3. *Strategically Review all partners involved in collaborative and linked provision for lifelong learning programmes to inform the development and implementation of a strategy for lifelong learning that aligns with the regional skills needs of the South East as well as national demand.*

SETU acknowledges that its portfolio of collaborative and linked partners has evolved over time and is cognisant that each collaboration – and the portfolio in its entirety – must continue to align with and scale to the University's strategic objectives and trajectory.

SETU intends conducting a review of all partners involved in linked provision for lifelong learning programmes (including modes of delivery) with the aim of informing the development and implementation of a strategy for lifelong learning (Action 4.4.3). The review will also support the identification of priority areas for programme development. SETU intends leveraging the review and strategy development processes to reimagine its collaborative and linked provision model, identifying key areas of excellence for collaborative and linked provision, and aligning provision with regional and national skills needs.

As is the case for all other areas of the University's activity, legacy approaches to linked and collaborative provision and their quality assurance will also need to be aligned with each other under SETU policy. Reviews of collaborative and linked provision relationships and programmes are incorporated within the newly established SETU University Reviews Policy and will be conducted in accordance with this policy.

4. *Deliver on SETU's international strategy, which will support the expansion of our international student community and the enhancement of their experience, the strengthening of existing and development of additional sustainable international*

partnerships, and the increased engagement of domestic learners in international exchange programmes.

The extensive work being undertaken by the Internationalisation working group will form the basis for an implementation plan that will enable the achievement of SETU's international ambitions. The plan will need to be resourced and managed as a major change initiative given the breadth and depth of change that is expected and necessary to generate our expected international profile'.

Staff Consultation Draft

5. Research, Innovation and Enterprise

5.1 Overview

The University's research is guided by a strong policy and governance framework, to deliver excellent outcomes, while ensuring transparency and ethical conduct. SETU has recently published its annual research report with metrics and case studies³². A new research strategy, titled SETU Research, Innovation and Impact Strategic Plan, is currently in development and will be delivered in the 4th quarter of 2024. This will support SETU's research framework, through articulation of clear priorities, key areas for growth, fostering staff development, collaboration and innovation. The University recognises the importance of a uniform high-quality research student experience across SETU to nurture exploration and enquiry, whilst simultaneously achieving growth in research student numbers and enhancing research supervision capacity. To underpin these ambitions, SETU places an emphasis on strong research data management, the highest ethical standards, along with a strong support culture and high-quality training and development for all stakeholders. Research in the University encompasses basic and applied research, innovation and entrepreneurship, and graduate studies, and is led by two offices – the Office for Research, Innovation and Impact and the Office of Graduate Studies under the Vice President for Research and Innovation.

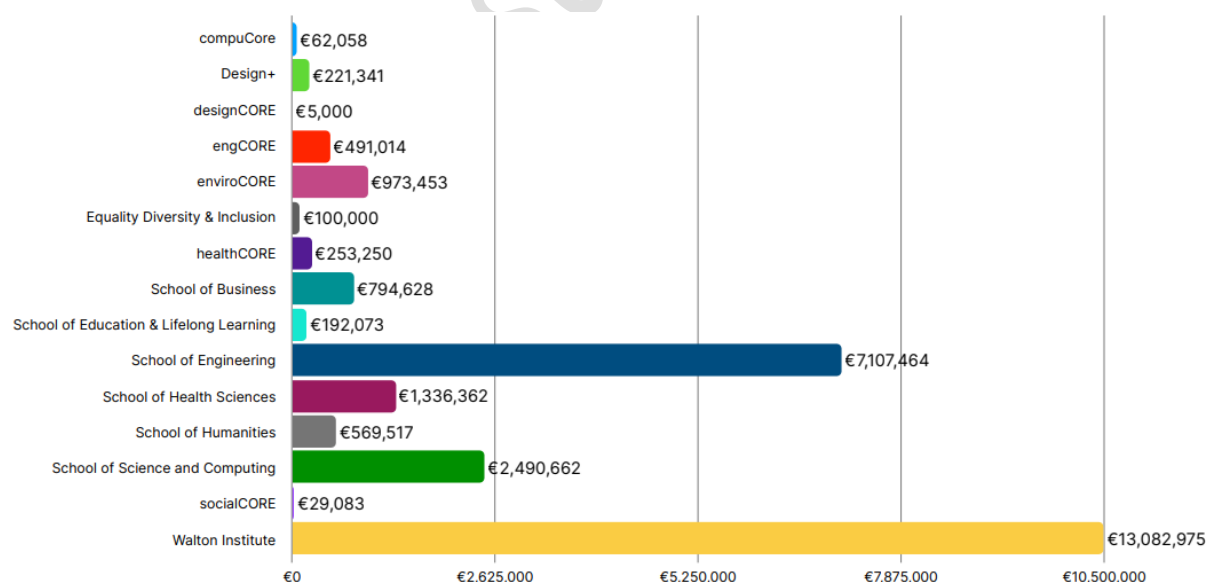


Figure 5.1 Research funding awarded by division 01 May 2022 - 31 August 2023

Generating research funding is fundamental to the University's ambitions and to attracting appropriate peer recognition nationally and internationally. Financially, SETU ranks among

³² <https://www.setu.ie/research-innovation/researcher-support/researcher-facts-figures>

the top performers in the TU sector. During the period 01 May 2022 - 31 August 2023, SETU's total research awards won was €31.85M (excluding capital expenditure). This figure is presented by research division in Figure 5.1.

As of March 2024, the has the second largest PhD student population within the Technological University sector, with a total of 248 students. This number reflects a significant upward trend, with PhD enrolments having grown by 45% since 2016-17 according to data from the HEA statistics bank. Further solidifying its research commitment, SETU maintains four well-established Enterprise Ireland Technology Gateways, fostering connections between academia and industry. Additionally, the Knowledge Transfer Ireland report³³ for 2022 highlights SETU's leadership in collaborative research, with the university securing the highest number of collaborative research agreements, innovation vouchers, and consultancy agreements with industry partners. SETU accounts for approximately 28% of all collaboration agreements with the sector and over 20% of the overall research expenditure for the sector with the university outperforming the sectoral average in two of the three metrics.

In preparing for the SER, an engagement process was undertaken with current postgraduate students to elicit their feedback. The engagement was in the form of a focus group involving 29 students. The feedback generated from the focus group was then analysed and key findings have been interwoven throughout this Chapter.

5.2 Research and Strategy

The strategic framework for the operation of Research and Innovation is set out in the University's Strategic Plan, with a clear emphasis on growth combined with excellence. Five key objectives for developing and scaling up the University's research have been identified by SETU:

1. Increase the number of research funding applications, successful awards and research outputs;
2. Support academics to develop strong areas of critical mass into new flagship Research Institute(s);
3. Support researchers to elevate the performance of existing research groups to focussed research centres in areas of regional need and potential opportunity;

³³ <https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/Reports-Publications/Annual-Knowledge-Transfer-Survey-2022.pdf>

4. Support researchers to deepen and enhance research performance via collaboration;
5. Enhance support for research training and mentoring schemes.

The new Research Strategy (expected to be published in Q4 2024) addresses SETU's future research priorities and how to maximise success. The strategy will focus on seven core areas:

1. Research structures (Research Centres and Institutes) and priority thematic areas;
2. Research performance: scaling up research outputs and successful research funding applications;
3. Graduate studies: Graduate School and growing the numbers of level 10 students;
4. Innovation and knowledge transfer;
5. Rural and micro-enterprises engagement, and research impact;
6. Research Culture, including staff development and supervision capacity;
7. Infrastructure and resources.

The University aims to increase the number of doctoral students to 400, almost doubling the current figures, based on the long-term target for Technological Universities to have approximately 7% of all student registrations being at doctoral level, as outlined in the Technological Universities Act, 2018. This target is ambitious and will require significant additional resources to support the growth in doctoral students, whilst maintaining quality of research and student experience. Continued investment in research and student facilities and attracting and retaining research-active faculty members will be essential, underpinned by the continued fostering of strategic partnerships with academic and enterprise partners. A key enabler is the enhancement of the research environment through developing a new model for workload allocation that takes full account of research activity; introducing a research sabbatical scheme; having the capability to recruit at full professor grade. The TU RISE funding has enabled the recent introduction of a small number of research sabbaticals but the lack of the full professor grade within TUs is, as yet, unresolved but is an active discussion point between TU leadership and Government.

SETU's current research and future strategy aligns closely with its regional development priorities. Key focus areas, as identified in regional policy in the previous Chapter and illustrated in Figure 5.1 include:

- ICT
- Agriculture
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Pharmaceuticals
- Financial Services

The broad disciplinary mix of SETU offers opportunity for interdisciplinary research, as well as a diversity of impactful outputs including new knowledge, policy development, creative endeavours, new products or innovative processes. Anticipated regional development opportunities over the next few years include the offshore wind energy sector, and associated areas, to which SETU is well positioned to take a leadership role.

Staff Consultation Draft

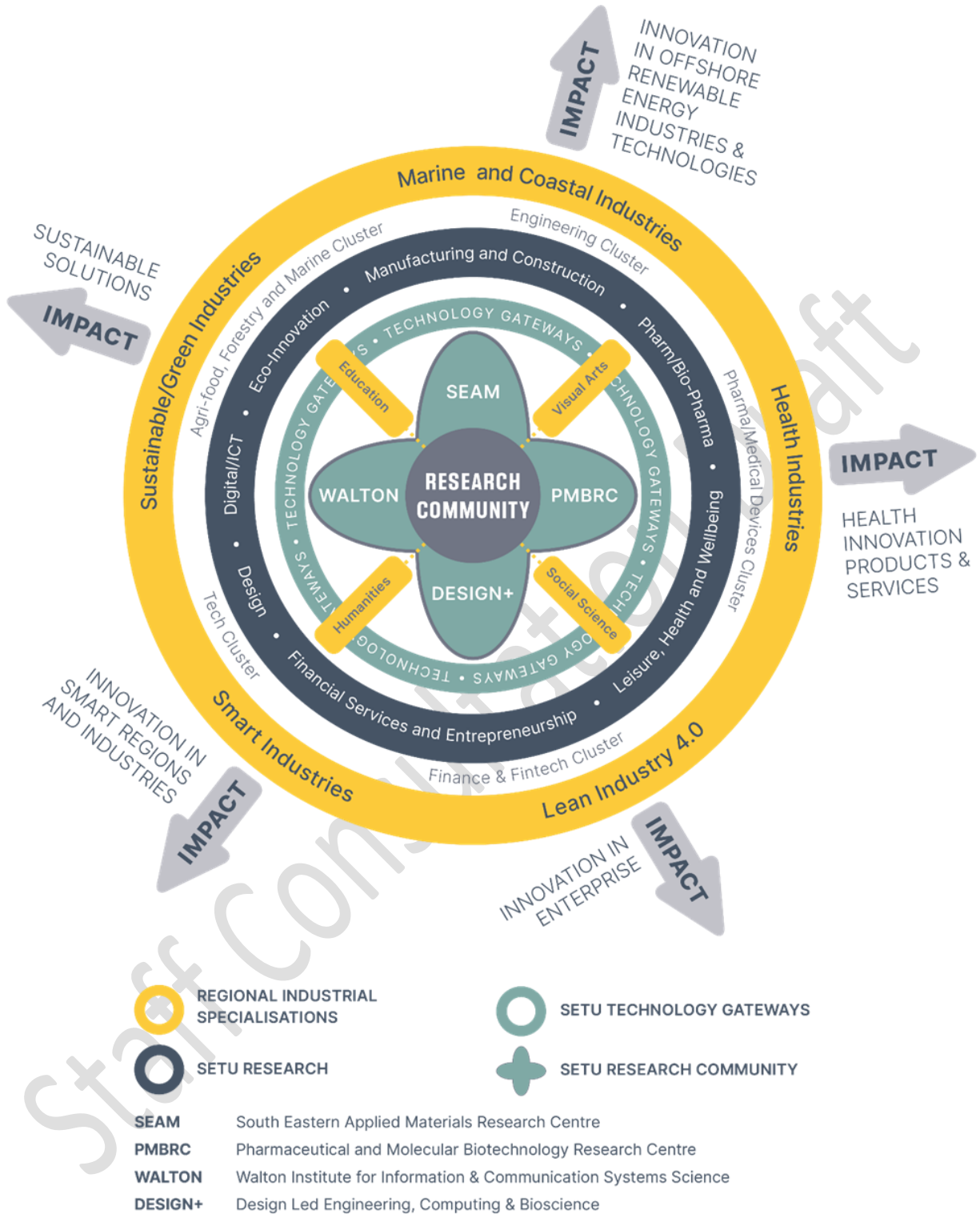


Figure 5.2 SETU’s research aligned with Regional Development Priorities

5.3 Governance of Research and QA

To achieve SETU’s research goals at appropriate standards requires a strong quality ethos. The University’s research policy and governance has had ongoing development since May

2022 to optimise a cohesive, ambitious framework with transparency. The research governance structure includes the Research and Research Programmes Committee (R&RP) of Academic Council and a Postgraduate Studies Committee, supported by the Research Programme Boards and Research Examination Boards. The R&RP committee reviews all research-related policies, following appropriate consultation and makes recommendations to Academic Council. The Research Programme Boards will also act in a strategic manner to develop doctoral education in SETU, including the development of supervisor capacity, policies, and learner engagement and supports.

For research degrees, the academic governance oversight is completed by Research Programme Boards (RPBs), which report to the R&RP committee (Figure 5.1). The Graduate Studies Office is charged with ensuring the quality of the operational aspects of these programmes, which are academically led through School/Faculty structures.

The University, following an external expert consultation process, developed a research governance infrastructure, and has progressed well-defined and regularly reviewed policies and procedures. The University fosters a dynamic research environment through continuously evolving policies and procedures (as outlined later in Table 5.1). These policies will ensure research is integrated with teaching and learning, actively seek stakeholder feedback, prioritize a healthy balance between teaching and research, promote research-informed teaching methods, and measure the impact of research activities. Additionally, the University facilitates diverse research endeavours and supports early-career researchers through its postgraduate programs.

SETU's research student oversight is structured with two key committee formats of Research Programme Boards and Research Examination Boards (Figure 5.3).

Research Programme Boards (RPBs) are School/Faculty-level committees which guide overall research strategy, oversee research student numbers, and report on postgraduate activity to the Academic Council. Initially, there are two RPBs, with plans to expand to one per School/Faculty. They provide long-term oversight of research student progression and quality, including PhD confirmations. Additionally, RPBs develop strategies for doctoral education, including supervisor training and student support.

Research Examination Boards (REBs) are local-level committees (Departmental / School / Faculty) which manage the day-to-day student experience. REBs approve individual student progress, module results, and theses, with final ratification from the Academic Council. They involve internal and external examiners, similar to taught programs. Ongoing quality assurance involves student self-evaluations reviewed by REB members, who then

recommend on student progression. Applications for admission, thesis submission, and examination all go through REBs before reaching the Academic Council for final approval.

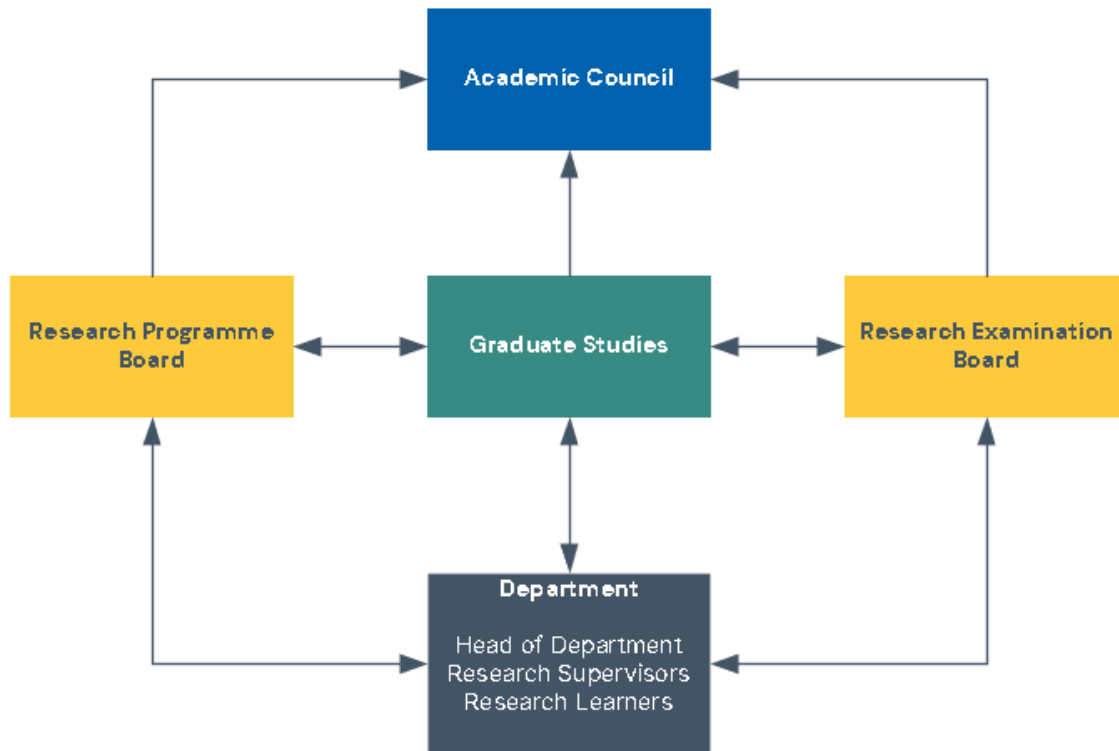


Figure 5.3 SETU quality assurance structures for the operation of research degrees.

5.3.1 Research Policy

Since the establishment of the University, all research regulations, policies, and procedure documents, as relevant, go through a rigorous approval process and adhere to the SETU [Policy Management Framework](#). This entails consultation with stakeholders, and review and debate by the relevant University bodies. Table 5.1 presents the research regulations, policies, frameworks, guidance and code of practice documents created since University inception. Further policies, procedures and similar documents will be developed by the University on a phased and staged basis.

SETU Document Name	Document Type	Status (Committee)
SETU Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference	Governance	30 th November 2022 (EMT)
SETU Research Ethics Committee Operations and Application Guidance Documentation	Supporting/guidance	30 th November 2022
Definition & Organisation of Research units at SETU	Framework	In Development
Application procedure for establishment of research unit	Procedural	In Development
Intellectual Property	Policy	12 th September 2023 (Governing Body)
Consultancy	Policy	Pending Approval
Conflict of Interest	Policy	16 th January 2024 (Governing Body)
SETU Graduate Studies Regulations and Code of Practice	Governance	Pending Approval
Open Research Policy	Policy	Pending Approval
Emeritus Policy	Policy	27 th February 2024
Authorship	Policy	Pending Approval (Governing Body)
Overheads	Framework	Drafted; With Finance Department for consultation
Export Control	Policy	In Draft
Code of Conduct for the Responsible Practice of Research	Policy	In consultation

Table 5.1 Research and Innovation regulations, policies and other relevant documents

5.3.2 Funding Research and Innovation

The University Research Strategy will include its ambitions for Research and Innovation and for Graduate Studies. The strategy encompasses appropriate support and resourcing of SETU Research, which will include the following key features:

- Many of the core funding sources for our centres, Institute and Technology Gateways have been confirmed for the next 5-7 years, which gives the University a very good research foundation and makes research funding targets in the University's Strategic Plan more achievable. National funding for Technology Transfer has also been confirmed.
- The University has been allocated €13.6 million for the [TU RISE](#) project to increase its research capacity, funding, outputs and central research support and compliance functions over the next four years, as well as to increase training offerings relevant to the green and digital transitions. The project will be closely monitored to ensure progress and compliance with relevant institutional and funding body regulations.
- Investment from the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) has included updating University equipment, running Start-up Accelerator programmes, resourcing research leads in schools/faculties, and to support researchers into research through the University's award-winning Research Connexions programme (see also section 5.5.1 below). Pathway 11 in the Connexions programme (Advanced Research Training Fund) supports the development of research-active staff through the provision of dedicated funding for advanced research training. This funding has supported highly skilled researchers, assisted in the development of research capacity, increased research quality, increased the number of higher quality research papers and increased the level of funding by ensuring high quality applications.

5.3.3 Graduate Studies

The Graduate Studies strategy development has the following key features:

- Academic Council approved the integrated graduate studies regulations in May 2024
- The University's Strategic Plan advanced the graduate school structure
- Academic Council, through an external review, deemed all of the University's academic units to be suitable for holding a register of students by research, with cooperation across units recommended

- Quality assurance and compliance for the learners’ lifecycle will be the responsibility of the Office of Graduate Studies
- To support the growth in doctoral numbers, SETU instituted a scheme of 30 PhD scholarships per year in 2022. In the 2022-23 academic year, the increase in research postgraduate student numbers continued, with a total of 329 (see Figure 5.2)

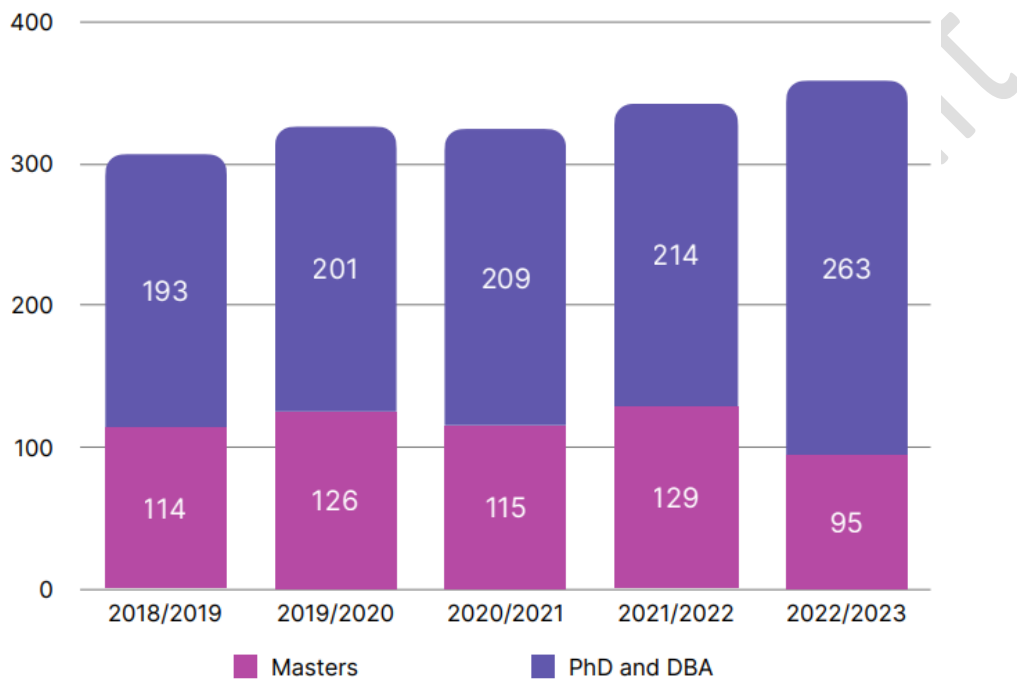


Figure 5.2 Five-year trend for Masters and Doctoral Students

The growth of research presents a number of challenges, such as supervision capacity, financing, uniformity of experience, learner supports, as well as supports for supervisors. Some steps have been taken already and some are in train and this will be elaborated in later sections of this chapter. A key goal is to guarantee the same student lifecycle quality assurance across all campuses. For example, in 2023 the University moved all legacy students to the same scholarship stipend as the rates had varied across campuses.

5.3.4 Research Ethics, Research Integrity and Research Data

Good ethical governance and review of research is a core value and priority at SETU. It is the responsibility of the Research Ethics Committee to scrutinise all research, which involves humans and animals, to ensure it is compliant with statutory requirements. In addition, it must be ensured that research is conducted to the highest ethical principles that emphasise the rights and welfare of subjects (both people and animals), treating all with dignity and

ensuring that those who participate in research, whether subjects, researchers, other stakeholders and/or SETU are not put at risk.

The SETU [Research Ethics Committee](#) (REC) is composed of at least 15 members, that provide experience in or possess an understanding of at least one of the following areas related to research: statistics; law; and ethics. Membership also reflects the current SETU research portfolio and the statutory or regulatory environment/framework in which research is conducted. At least one permanent member of the REC is external to the University and further external members are co-opted to the committee where their expertise is required. A permanent external member provides the REC with the opportunity to consider and accommodate the views of those embedded in the region, but external to the immediate SETU community.

In addition to the University REC, each School/Faculty also has its own local REC with suitably experienced and knowledgeable members. These committees have delegated authority from the University REC to make decisions at a local level on applications which are considered of lower risk (but which can be progressed to the University REC subsequently). This allows for more efficient decision making where risks are low, thus not delaying the progress of projects, while also not over-burdening the University REC.

On an annual basis the REC provides two reports to the President, comprising of the following:

- An audit of ethical decisions made at the level of School/Faculty and report the results to the President, local research ethics committee chairs, and the REC members.
- A separate annual report on the activity of the committee including, but not limited to, the number of applications received, overview of all outcomes, training activities undertaken, proposed changes with regard to members or the Terms of Reference.

Research integrity encompasses responsible conduct of research, research data management and management of research misconduct. SETU is committed to ensuring the highest levels of integrity in all aspects of research practice. The [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), which we endorse, specifies four basic principles of good research practice to be observed by all researchers and research organisations, which can be framed as *reliability, honesty, respect* and *accountability*. SETU strives to ensure that those engaged with research across the University, including all researchers, students, technical, administrative and research support staff and our collaborative partners conduct research according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional obligations and standards.

SETU is a member of a national consortium providing online access to an eight-module [research integrity training course](#). Each module is independent and certified by the training provider, Epigeum.

The Research Integrity Officer is nominated by the University to receive and process all allegations of research misconduct, overseen by the President and Head of Research.

Research ethics and data management are informed by national and international policy, standards, and legislation. Research ethics policy is informed by (inter alia):

- [EU clinical trials directive](#) (2014/536/EU)
- [EU directive on the use of animals for research and teaching](#) (2010/63/EU)
- [EU Ethics for Researchers](#) (ISBN 978-92-79-28854-8)
- [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) (ISBN 978-3-9823562-3-5)

Similarly, policy and standards for data management follow:

- [EU GDPR](#) (2016/679/EU)
- [Data Protection Act](#) (S.I. no 7/ 2018)
- EU policies on open access and open science (e.g. [FAIR](#)).

Good data management and sharing are essential components of an ethical research culture. Where appropriate, the University follows the standards and guidance on research ethics offered by appropriate external regulators such as the [National Office for Research Ethics](#) (human medicine) and the [Health Products Regulatory Authority](#) (animal research).

The University is also an active member of the [National Research Integrity Forum](#) and participates in its Community of Practice which aims to promote best practice and standards across the Irish HEI system in the broad area of research culture.

Integration of policy and practice in the areas of research ethics and data management across the University is informed and guided by national policy and legislation and this is reflected in University policy documents which are publicly available online, specifically:

- [Research Ethics Committee Operation and Guidance](#)
- [Data Governance Policy](#)
- [Data Protection Policy](#)
- [Data Retention Policy](#).

Since establishment, SETU has been active in foregrounding and developing these areas. A key step has been the integration of legacy RECs into a new University REC, and the recruitment and the appointment of dedicated staff resource in the areas of research ethics, research integrity and research data management. The University will also continue to work on the integration of legacy policy documents relating to research ethics to a University wide policy document that reflects the diversity of research activity. The University continues to work toward the implementation of various national policies including the [IUA/ THEA policy statement on Research Integrity in Ireland](#).

Research involving animal or human test subjects are required to apply to the REC and obtain approval from same and any state level research ethics body (e.g., HPRA) prior to the commencement of their research. Those involved in research must also complete research integrity training and any relevant training pertinent to their area prior to commencing research.

The approach to research integrity at SETU is both top down (Academic Council, RPBs, University- and School/Faculty-level research ethics committees) and bottom up (specific training for postgraduates, PG representation on programme boards, and via individual student supervision meetings).

For the 2022/2023 academic year, a total of 579³⁴ postgraduate students were registered at SETU, of which 223 were Level 10. There were 116 research ethics applications made to the University committee, with a further 490 applications to School/Faculty level research ethics committees. All new and existing research students are either completing or have completed their research integrity training as per SETU's policy. In addition, several research funding organisations require research integrity training as part of the terms and conditions of funding award, as such several research active staff at SETU will have completed this training and undergo regular CPD in this area.

Data protection is a complex and important area, requiring, for example, proficiency in national and European data protection laws and practices. SETU has appointed a Data Compliance Officer and a Research Integrity and Compliance officer, who will start in September 2024, to promote a data protection culture and ensure compliance in research ethics and data management.

Recognising the complex and sometimes fluid nature of this area, the University has planned some developments relating to research ethics and data, including further integration of the research and innovation activities. At the time of writing, a common

³⁴ postgraduate student figure here includes taught postgraduates

approach to research data management ([PURE](#)) is being rolled out across SETU (see section 5.5.3 for more detail on PURE). This data management system will be operational across the University by December 2024.

Work is also ongoing in relation to the integration of legacy institutional repositories, which will ensure open access of all University-generated research outputs. Current iterations of the repositories allow for beta versions of publications to be held in an online catalogue. However, where possible, researchers are encouraged to publish with open access journals and the University has made funding available to facilitate this. A Data Steward and Digital Innovation officer will assume function in June 2024 to ensure SETU researchers are trained to comply with FAIR principles, follow optimal data management procedures, etc.

The following groups have been identified as key stakeholders in ensuring that data and ethics procedures are adhered to at SETU:

- Research staff- across all grades from admin + technical support to principal investigators
- Postgraduate students
- Research Integrity and Compliance Officer
- Research Support Unit
- Research Ethics Committee members.

In addition, several external stakeholders that engage in research at SETU either through government funding programmes, such as Enterprise Ireland's Innovation Partnership Programmes, or through facilitating postgraduate research (e.g. Teagasc) have been identified. Such organisations will be bound to SETU research and ethics policies as well as their own governance on same.

5.3.5 QA of Research at Institute- and Centres-level

The research infrastructure at SETU is structured into three distinct entities: Institutes, which represent the largest research units within SETU; Centres, serving as intermediate-sized research units; and Groups, representing smaller-scale research units. Information on the existing Research Institute, Research Centres and Research Groups is available at the following [link](#).

All of these research bodies are required to report on an annual basis to the Office for Research, Innovation and Impact, which itself reports on activity to Governing Body and

Academic Council. In addition, all SETU research bodies are subject to periodic review as part of the new University reviews policy in development.

Two case studies (5.1 and 5.2) are presented here to demonstrate quality assurance approaches and activities at the University's only current Research Institute and one of its Research Centres. This helps to show how external validation of the work of these bodies is conducted, emphasising the important role that funding agencies play here and the need to continually meet their expectations and standards.

Case Study 5.1 - Quality Assurance at Research Institute Level: [Walton Institute](#)

Basic Research: [SFI Research Centres](#) undergo a Centre-wide review every 2 years. This in-person meeting lasts ~1.5 days and each Working Group Chair presents an overview of the status of their research to a table of scientific experts, impact experts and members of SFI ([Science Foundation Ireland](#)) which is open to Q&A. Annual reports must also be submitted and each member of the Centre is required to keep their SESAME³⁵ profile up to date. Research excellence, publications, presentations, funding, number of PhDs, and education and public engagement (EPE), are all reviewed with a range of associated metrics. Continuation of the Centre is based on satisfactory outcome of review meetings and annual reports.

Applied Research: European projects generally have 2 – 3 review periods (depending on duration of the project). These reviews are carried out by the project officer and three subject matter experts. There is a technical and a financial part to the periodic report and both provide the status of the project in terms of objectives, deliverables, milestones, risks, budget and resources, ensuring alignment with the Grant Agreement. Only after successful completion of a review period will the next stage of finances be awarded for the project to continue. EU projects are auditable for 7 years post project closure.

Commercial Research: [ICS Technology Gateway](#) is the main vehicle for Walton Institute's industrial engagement. ICS Technology Gateway leverages substantial research and development expertise of Walton Institute, and its themes are fully aligned with relevant government policy including [Impact 2030 – Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy](#). Each research division within Walton Institute provides R&D resources to the gateway and has an associated set of metrics (number of closed projects, follow-on projects etc...) depending on the funding (innovation vouchers, innovation partnerships, contract R&D / consulting). The

³⁵ SFI's grants and awards management system (<https://www.sfi.ie/funding/award-management-system/>).

delivery manager oversees the project management process in Walton Institute and ensures high quality for each project.

Case Study 5.2 Quality Assurance at Research Unit Level: Pharmaceutical and Molecular Biotechnology Research Centre ([PMBRC](#))

Basic Research: The majority of basic research in PMBRC is carried out at postgraduate level and, as such, is governed by the University regulations and associated documents. Research supervisors meet their students on a regular basis (usually fortnightly) to offer guidance and to monitor progress. The progress of each postgraduate student is reported annually to the Research Programme Board of the relevant academic department and corrective actions taken if necessary. Funding agencies (e.g. [Irish Research Council](#), SFI Research Centres, [Horizon Europe](#) etc.) may request separate annual reports or periodic reviews from the students and supervisors. In addition, SFI funded investigators in SFI Research Centres report their performance in terms of publications, intellectual property, funding, research team composition, EPE and other KPIs on the SFI SESAME portal. They also take part in the SFI centre review which takes place every two years.

Applied and Industry Research: Industry research projects are managed by the [PMBRC Technology Gateway](#) team within the PMBRC Research Centre. For short term, contract research projects, the work is carried out and peer reviewed within the research centre prior to reporting to the industry partner. Longer term projects or those co-funded by [Enterprise Ireland](#) (such as Innovation Partnerships) often involve project reviews and reports throughout the project. Some PhD projects are co-funded by industry partners who often nominate a member of staff to the supervisory team.

Commercialisation Research: Where research outputs from our basic or applied research programmes show commercial potential, the primary investigator may seek to secure further funding to bring this innovation to the market. The [Enterprise Ireland Commercialisation Fund](#) typically requires a commercial feasibility assessment prior to a making a full application to the fund, which is then reviewed by a panel of external evaluators. Once granted, the release of funds is subject to periodic stage gate reviews to ensure the commercial and technical milestones are being reached.

5.4 Research Student Centrality

The University is committed to fostering an excellent learning environment for research students. This means providing clear pathways from the outset for each stage of the

research journey, including fair and transparent admissions, to ensure a clear and competitive path for talented individuals from all backgrounds. SETU wishes to recruit a diverse and talented research student body that reflects a firm commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

Throughout the research experience, students will benefit from well-defined pathways, guiding them from initial research questions to successful completion and beyond. To ensure a safe and supportive environment and that the research student voices are heard, student representation on University bodies is encouraged and a robust grievance process will be established, so that research students may raise concerns and have their voices heard. The Governing Body encourages the inclusion of a postgraduate student within the nominees of the Students Union.

Public confidence in our research is of great importance, and the University recognises the importance of publicly communicating the strategies for research and innovation, including the doctoral programme expansion. This commitment to transparency extends to [celebrating the achievements of the University's research and innovation](#), highlighting the exceptional work of [doctoral students](#) and alumni.

Ultimately, the goal is to cultivate [a thriving and supportive culture](#) for postgraduate student research. By developing clear pathways, diverse recruitment, a robust grievance process, and transparent information, the University aims to empower researchers to excel in their endeavours and to further enhance the University's research reputation.

5.4.1 EDI in Research Student Recruitment

EDI principles are central to the University's standardised selection process, ensuring transparency and a level playing field for all applicants. Interview panels include diverse members, to help reflect the diversity in society in our academic community. The University offers interview training for all staff and interview committees are gender balanced. By actively including diverse candidates and fostering inclusive interview practices, the University aims to attract and retain exceptional researchers from all backgrounds. This targeted approach will ensure our research student body not only grows in size but also flourishes in its diversity of thought and perspective. Additionally, [postgraduate positions are advertised nationally and internationally](#), with online interviews via platforms like Zoom or Teams, facilitating participation from a wider talent pool regardless of location.

5.4.2 Student Admissions and Integration

The University is developing a clear and transparent admissions process for research students. In response to requests, where students identified the need to have comprehensive support from the outset, the University will offer sustained induction

programmes for new students, and investigate the rollout of a mentorship programme to integrate new students into the SETU community. This can build upon the learning and experience already developed in SETU from [the existing peer mentoring initiative for undergraduate students](#). The University will also explore the research students' request for cross-campus events to create a community early in their postgraduate life cycle.

5.4.3 Clear Pathways

Clear pathways are required through each stage of the research student's programme. New regulations and associated procedures are currently being developed for implementation across SETU. When implemented, the GSO will offer training for supervisors, staff, and the post graduate community. It is important to also ensure that the academic and pastoral needs of students are met during their postgraduate journey, with many of these being addressed by [Student Support Services](#) and by [Study Supports](#).

5.4.4 Complaints Process and the Student Voice

The University recognises the merits of developing a comprehensive student voice infrastructure that is responsive to student complaints and overall suggestions. This helps to identify weakness in our systems and approaches and ensures that addressing these is done in a collaborative manner. We will offer a research student grievance process along with appropriate representation in decision-making fora and suitable analysis and action following opinion canvassed in the Studentsurvey.ie postgraduate survey, to ensure that students have an appropriate and fair means of offering feedback and raising concerns within SETU. SETU has developed several fora for the student voice dedicated to the postgraduate student community. Additionally, the student voice has been integrated into plans for the new Research Programme Boards. At the students' behest, access to feedback and complaints processes will be more clearly communicated, starting at the postgraduate's induction process.

5.4.5 Communication and Publicising Research

Students have identified a number of areas for improvement around communications relating to them and research publication, both by and for them. In terms of communications, research students acknowledged that there has been a lot of communication regarding the strategic goals concerning research as well as the goal of expanding PhD numbers in the next five years. Related to this, they suggest the University should continue to retain public confidence, by communicating openly and transparently about the University's plans for research and innovation, including doctoral expansion. In terms of their own research, they would like to showcase SETU's Research and Innovation achievements, including by doctoral students and alumni.

Regarding research publication, there are a number of resources available for research students with regards to both dissemination of research and Research and Innovation. The University has expanded access to research databases that are available to research students, but students felt that there should be better communication of availability of such resources. Research students also felt that the recently approved SETU authorship policy would be welcome and they acknowledged that the Technology Transfer Office has expanded its outreach to research students.

Research students recognise the importance of increasing postgraduate numbers, but do not want there to be a risk to standards, for example through poor retention numbers. Related to this point they feel there should be more consistency across the University in encouraging and facilitating timely completion of research programmes or in advertising the terms and conditions around research travel funding.

Finally, where research student numbers are increasing, the students would like to see more doctoral apprenticeship programmes and improved access to teaching hours.

5.4.6 Research Student Supports

Growing the postgraduate student numbers in a sustainable manner requires a firm commitment to student supports. SETU strives to offer a supportive culture for research students to thrive in and produce the highest standards of research. This ranges from the quality of postgraduate research space, including social space, to meeting rooms and providing the resources needed to conduct research. The University realises that growing research numbers and maintaining standards are goals that may conflict with each other and is developing systems of support for students and supervisory staff. Moreover, the funding systems in Ireland can vary considerably over time and by fund, leading to disparities in income for research students, depending on when or by which fund they are resourced. While it is difficult to directly address funding disparities, it is important to recognise their existence and, as much as possible, to maintain other aspects of the research environment to a high standard. The preparation and ongoing support of research supervisors is fundamental to maintaining this high standard.

Case Study 5.3 Graduate Resource and Development

SETU is committed to supporting digital transformation and in so doing to harness digital technologies to create a more effective, inclusive, and innovative learning environment for all students, undergraduates and postgraduates. One particular postgraduate student support is a digital infrastructure to support inclusive and equitable access to a quality learning environment. SATLE funding has been allocated to design, develop and deliver an

online, self-directed programme called GRAD (Graduate Resource and Development) specifically for postgraduate students. The programme will include valuable insights into academic, practical, and personal and professional skill development at postgraduate level to support research students. GRAD will serve as a wraparound online support, with developmental input from students and staff from across the University. This programme is the first of its kind in Ireland to focus directly on enhancing the experience of postgraduate students within an Irish context and any outputs will be available under a Creative Commons licence.

WE WOULD LIKE TO INVITE YOU TO CONTRIBUTE TO

the GRAD Programme

What is GRAD?

Full Title: Graduate Resource and Development Programme

Project Type: National Forum (SATLE Funded) Project

Aim: To design and deliver an online, self-directed support for postgraduate students. This will complement existing supports and provide a unified, wraparound support.

Target Group: All research-led postgraduate students in SETU.

Get Involved:

Please find further information about ways to get involved below:

STEERING GROUP:

We have formed a Steering Group with representation from across functional areas in SETU. The group meets for one hour once a month. For full information on this and how to get involved, please contact us.

CONTENT CONTRIBUTORS:

The Programme will cover 4 pillars: **Academic Selves; Navigating the System; Personal Development; and The Postgraduate Community.**

We are seeking contributors across the university who may be able to provide, source or help us to create content in these areas.



To give you a sense of the format that GRAD may take, please check out HELP (Higher Education Learner Programme), which was developed and launched this year by the Teaching and Learning Centre.

www.setu.ie/helpishere

Figure 5.2 – The GRAD Programme

5.5 Curriculum and Research Training and Development

The research community in SETU is broad and incorporates, for example, postgraduate supervisors, researchers, research technicians, research administration, technology transfer staff, technology gateway staff and research management. The focus of this section is on the resources available, and the development and training opportunities offered to enhance and support this community. The methodology included a review of mechanisms and projects and a series of focus groups with new staff members, experienced researchers and professional support staff to gather feedback on what works and make recommendations for improvement.

5.5.1 Resources

Researchers are a fundamental resource for research and innovation and for society at large. It is highly important that they are equipped with the transferrable skills necessary for effective and successful careers in all relevant sectors of the society, including academia, industry, the public administration and the non-profit sector.

[ResearchComp](#) is the European Competence Framework for Researchers and is a tool to assess and develop researchers' transferable skills and foster career development. Developed by the European Commission in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, delivering on the new [European Research Area](#) and the [European Skills Agenda](#), and contributing to the [European Year of Skills](#). ResearchComp is the first competence framework aligned with the European Skills, Competences, and Occupations classification (ESCO), as it has been developed on the basis of the taxonomy of transversal skills for researchers that was included in the 2022 version of the classification. As an example, the TU RISE postdoctoral call training offerings are aligned to this framework.

The [Researcher Career Development and Employment Framework](#) is an initiative of the Irish Universities Association to develop a coherent national policy on structured career development and progression for researchers. The Framework recognises Post-Doctoral Researcher roles (PD1 & PD2) as Professional training roles, which are transitional in nature as it is recognised that nationally and internationally most HEI researchers will ultimately continue their careers outside the HEI. The Framework's purpose therefore is to prepare researchers for a variety of careers in the public and private sector in research/ non-research roles. SETU is guided by aspects of the framework and is committed to working with relevant stakeholders to underpin career development and progression for our valued researchers.

5.5.2 Research Development Activities

The following is a selection of initiatives and programmes available in SETU for the development of researchers.

[ODYSSEY Research Mentoring Initiative](#): This initiative has been guiding researchers with their own career development, developing competencies and problem-solving skills whilst providing a more neutral support space outside of traditional managerial/supervisory relationships. The ODYSSEY also actively builds a sense of community amongst Mentors and Mentees within wider ODYSSEY networks.

[Aurora](#): In support of the University's Athena SWAN agenda and ongoing commitment to promoting and valuing leadership development and career progression for women across

the University, the EDI Unit funded a number of places on the 2022/23 Aurora Programme, including a Postdoctoral Researcher and a member of PMSS staff supporting research.

Women In Research Network (Wirn): The WIRn inaugural “Visioning Workshop” took place in November 2022, bringing together women in research from across the University. The WIRN aims to appeal to researchers of all levels, and to raise the profile and visibility of female and female identifying researchers at SETU. The workshop explored the accomplishments, challenges, quality of work experiences, insights and recommendations to build a more equitable and inclusive research community for women in research across SETU. Keynote speakers shared triumphs and adversity, and profound reflections of their personal experiences as women navigating their research and wider careers.

Building Research Leaders: This course explored the skills, knowledge and attributes that tend to be associated with research leaders, including interpersonal skills, leadership skills, thinking strategically, self-management and the ability to promote oneself. It is designed to help emerging research leaders to develop these skills through: looking back; looking at the here and now; looking forward; being strategic; ensuring publication productivity; managing competing demands; making research a priority; avoiding becoming overwhelmed-saying no; maintaining a balance between teaching, research and life and self-promotion.

Research Connexions: This research funding initiative provides SETU staff with the opportunity to apply for University funding to enhance their research activity, underpinned by the HEA under the Systems Performance Programme. It comprises of thirteen funding pathways designed to enable and support specific research activity across each of the academic Schools/Faculties within SETU. Research Connexions 2024 saw a total of 118 successful staff members (out of 203 applications) awarded funding. Overall, the funding awarded came to just under €350,000.

5.5.3 Research Training and Workshops/Events

SETU’s Strategic Plan makes a commitment to put our people at the centre of everything we do. Over the next five years and beyond, under Strategic Objective 11 we have committed to “Empower and enable our staff to achieve their highest potential in a fulfilling and happy work environment, with clear career progression options for all”. We will “demonstrate clear career paths for our staff, recognising staff contributions and will act according to our commitments when it comes to equality, diversity, inclusivity and belonging”.

Objective 1 - Build SETU research capacity and capability in areas of strength and potential. Describing and supporting a research career structure with a particular focus on post-

doctoral transition a renewed focus on attracting, developing, engaging and retaining talent across the University.

Action 11.7 - Support career development for all staff, including creating attractive career options for researchers, continuing to implement the Human Resource Strategy for Researchers (HR4SR), and ensuring progression and advancement routes for all PMSS staff.

These actions support the ambition of SETU to significantly increase its PhD offering and number of postgraduate students, hence relying on a training and supported research community to do so. As the research units align in SETU under the guidance of the VP for Research and Innovation, the provision of training, programmes and development of the research community needs to align with the above objectives.

The following is a selection of training, workshops and related initiatives provided to support researchers and staff in SETU. Events (which can be in person or online) are well promoted via email and the [SETU website](#), and can also offer opportunities to provide feedback from participants, to optimise the benefit:

- **Creating The 7 Secrets Of A Highly Successful Research Student (For Supervisors):** This training provides practical strategies to deal with common problems such as: supervisor/student relations; dealing with writer's block; attitude in relation to the PhD; getting a student to seek help when they are stuck; the student who never has enough time; treating the PhD like a job; keeping on going when the going gets tough and planning the viva.
- **Planning Your Research Career:** This workshop gives researchers the thinking time and tools to put together a realistic, achievable plan for their research career over the next 3-5 years, working backwards to where researchers were currently at in their career, helping them to set goals for shorter-term achievements.
- **Supervisor Workshop series:** This workshop series is open to all research supervisors, both experienced and aspiring. It is designed to further support supervisors in developing the next generation of researchers. Topics include Good Practice in Recruiting Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs); Setting Expectations & Boundaries with new PGRs; Supporting PGR Wellbeing; and A Supervisor's role in Research Integrity.
- **[Human Resources Strategy for Researchers](#) (HRS4R) Awareness and Engagement:** HRS4R is the tool for the implementation of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. A key research objective has been to raise awareness of HRS4R amongst our research community.

We introduced the Coming Together series, with the intention of creating a cohesive research community across SETU. We have worked on building relationships based on mutual trust, committing to keeping researchers informed and engaged in every step of HRS4R. Researchers from across SETU regularly participate in cultural, artistic, sporting and social events. This has taken place via several routes, including face to face consultations, online information sessions, research cafes, HRS4R roadshows and within SETU e-newsletters.

- External Activity: Enhancing Strategic Partnerships: In May 2024, SETU hosted the “All-Island Research Culture Conference” in collaboration with UCD, QUB, MTU, TUS and UCC. The conference theme was [Advancing Research Culture Conversations in Ireland](#). Sessions addressed Research Assessment, Engaged Research, and Equality Diversity and Inclusion.
- SETU continues to forge international alliances with relevant and mutually beneficial expertise in the whole area of research careers, to improve our own provision and the profile of SETU internationally. This type of exchange helps us to achieve our HRS4R vision of being a more outward-facing community whilst developing new collaborations, benefiting from different perspectives and staying connected to a diverse range of communities across Europe.
- Gender Equality: SETU have partnered with Maynooth University and five other national HEI’s in a funded research project entitled “Promote: Developing, Promoting and Implementing a Career Progression Training Platform & Network for Early Career Female Researchers-Academics (ECFRAs) across Irish HEIs”, under the HEA’s Gender Equality Enhancement Fund 2023.
- Horizon Europe WIDERIA Access European Excellence Initiative: SETU are a partner in the Horizon Europe WIDERIA Access European Excellence “EU-CONEXUS ENABLES” project “Promoting excellence through innovative eco-systems”. SETU are leading on the Research Careers Work package.

Feedback from focus groups have indicated the high-quality calibre of the training, experts and delivery models and find the advertisement via email suitable.

A suite of additional training spanning grant management, communication, engaged research and impact, data management and entrepreneurship will be offered as part of the TU RISE project. Post-event surveys will be utilised to garner feedback, thereby enhancing future training offerings.

In terms of Quality Assurance of staff development in research and innovation, relevant data on training and development programmes offered can be accessed via the Research Support Unit and Technology Transfer Offices. The programmes are managed, advertised and delivered via these offices but there are multiple offerings that can cause confusion and possibly duplication. The following is an overview of some of the systems that can be used to collate staff training data so a profile for SETU can be developed:

- CORE: SETU has a Staff Learning & Development policy and a CORE system that allows staff to upload and update their training profile for record retention. This is run by Human Resources and can be viewed as a repository. Some of the training provided in SETU comes with a certificate of completion of digital badge that can be added as a record.
- PURE: Pure is a Current Research Information System (CRIS) that brings research information from all university data sources onto a single, intelligent and secure platform. Its fully interconnected data model empowers us to gain a comprehensive overview of all our research activities and to showcase the impact of the University's research achievements. A CRIS makes publications, expertise, research projects, and achievements highly visible and discoverable through a research portal which is on the SETU website. It can deliver substantial benefits in efficiency and it facilitates the implementation of open science. Our PURE portal is a gateway to finding our researchers, our research units, and their various research outputs, impacts and projects. PURE gives researchers and research postgraduate students a public profile where they can showcase their expertise. PURE is also being developed from a technical perspective to become the sole data source for research funding and expenditure reporting.
- HRS4R: The University adopted a fully inclusive approach to both the governance and implementation of HRS4R through a revitalised structure. This structure ensures representation across the entire SETU research communities and emphasises the University's clear commitment to its obligations as a signatory to the Charter and Code. The implementation of HRS4R will be achieved via our HRS4R Operational Group through an ongoing operational planning process, our specific action plan and a programme of institutional initiatives. Progress will be overseen by the HRS4R Monitor Working Group with regular updates reported to SETU's Executive Management team.

5.6 Reflections and directions on Research, Innovation and Enterprise

5.6.1 Reflections

Chapter 5 focused on the University’s research supported by a quality framework that emphasises transparency, ethics, and excellent outcomes. A clear research strategy with defined priorities guides this framework, fostering collaboration, innovation, and staff development. To ensure a uniformly strong research student experience and nurture future exploration, the University is committed to excellent research data management, the highest ethical standards, a supportive culture, and high-quality training for all stakeholders. This comprehensive approach encompasses research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and graduate studies, all led by the dedicated Office for Research, Innovation and Impact. Reflecting upon the CINTE review objectives, this chapter demonstrates that we are addressing both objective 1 and objective 2. This is summarised in Table 5.2:

Objective 1: To review the effectiveness and implementation of the QA procedures of the new technological university through consideration of the procedures set out in the annual quality report submitted by the university.
<p>How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a quality framework for postgraduate research • An AC committee dedicated to research, innovation and enterprise to develop policies, procedures and oversee research programmes • New University Research Programme Boards to inform quality development at Faculty/School level • Research Examination Boards established to monitor progress and to confirm individual research programmes • CORDA supports QA data collection, analysis and reporting • QA data/information reported to/acted upon by University bodies, as demonstrated
Objective 2: To review the enhancement of quality by the technological university through governance, policy and procedures.
<p>How SETU is addressing this in Chapter 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Plan sets out the legislated targets for research postgraduate growth, with associated University actions stemming from these • New AC Research committee has been introduced, which incorporates enhanced role and responsibilities and with terms of reference to ensure clear focus • Putting all university-level QA for research degree into graduate studies and putting a framework in place for faculty-level quality assurance of research degree

through research programme boards. It is acknowledged that this QA function at faculty-level will take some time to emerge (with the development of new structures) but that a strong QA function at a department level already exists in this regard

Table 5.2 – Addressing CINNTE review objectives in chapter 5

5.7.2 Directions

The University is committed to meeting the highest quality standards in Research, Innovation & Impact and graduate studies. There has already been demonstrable progress on the objectives outlined in the previous section. However, recognising our transitional stage, we acknowledge the need for further development in quality governance and management. This section details recommendations for improvement, along with the potential challenges we anticipate in implementing them.

1. Increase the number of research funding applications, successful awards and research outputs

It is very important for the university to simultaneously grow in this manner but to also maintain strong credibility. Therefore, this recommendation must be a phased growth where Quality Improvement is at the heart of the planned increase. Current contracts, with high teaching workload, represent a clear impediment to achieving this. TU RISE offerings and staff (e.g. Strategic grant writer) will contribute towards increased numbers of grant applications. TU RISE Postdoctoral fellows will be expected to submit no less than two competitive grant applications over the course of the fellowship. Research office staff will develop further training offerings, encourage re-submissions informed by evaluator feedback, etc.

2. Support academics to build critical mass and foster collaboration

Research growth requires not alone growth in numbers and research capacity, but also an informed coalescing of existing research units with their own pedigree and research momentum. The process of formation should be clearly identified, with an obvious hierarchy for individual research units. There is an onus on the University to create the optimal environment for the research community to interact across campuses and across disciplines to further develop existing and new research activity.

3. Enhance support for research training and mentoring schemes.

An important goal for the University, from a research quality perspective is to develop core research competencies (e.g. grant writing, supervision etc) and mentoring capacity in a uniformly supportive manner. The University is exploring several means to achieve this, for example through the dedicated training mentioned earlier in the chapter, encouraging supervisory teams and through promoting multi-disciplinary research.

4. *Developing the 'graduate school' model in graduate studies*

The University has decided to model its graduate school to support its research themes and support all types of research learners. Whilst the QA framework is in place and some other services are integrated (for example, a research student conference fund), rolling out additional services to learners will progress over the next number of years.

Staff Consultation Draft

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

6.1 Overview

In this final chapter, on the back of what has been a comprehensive, collaborative and consultative self-evaluation process, we present a series of recommendations. The recommendations are articulated in more detail in the individual chapters (2 to 5) and what is presented here is a summary of these. In tabular format, we link these recommendations to the CINNTE review objectives and we briefly identify how we can leverage resources and/or supports to help with implementing the recommendations. In the limited resource environment that pervades higher education generally, assessing the realism of our plans is highly dependent on having a sufficient resource environment.

With this in mind, we briefly review in this chapter three sources which the University will draw upon in implementing any recommendations. These are the Technological Sector Advancement Fund (TSAF), TU Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise (TU RISE) and National Technological University Transformation for Recovery and Resilience (NTUTORR). The University has plans in place under each of these three funding schemes and it will be imperative to utilise these plans and the resources included to drive changes and actions as SETU continues what is a transitional process. In addition, the University's change management process (case study 2.1) is an important support for the implementation of recommendations.

In advance of this, the next section of the chapter provides some reflections on the CINNTE process and some learnings by the University arising from its experiences of the process. These are recorded here not only for the benefit of the University, the review panel and institutional memory, but also because they may be of value to other universities in the future who are going through a similar process.

6.2 Reflections on the CINNTE process

While the self-evaluation process can be challenging at times – given the volume of work, meetings, and documentation involved – the overall experience has been very positive for the University and its members. Starting this exercise less than two years into the University's existence can appear very early, but it presents a real opportunity to bring colleagues together for a unifying institutional project. Given our multi-campus nature, it requires whole-University projects to cross over campuses, disciplines, areas and levels to really get people to work collectively and to share openly. With more than 100 people involved across different working groups and committees, this happened consistently and in a sustainable way. Enduring connections have now been made between colleagues who would not have worked together before and perspectives, experience and learning has been shared. This is a sustainable benefit for SETU.

The process has furthermore put quality and quality enhancement, in all respects, to the fore for the University community. It is timely to do this, early in our existence, as it forces us to examine our approaches (whether existing or developing) to quality and to consider their effectiveness and/or their need for change. It shows how a quality perspective must be

a core focus for everyone and is vital to achieve, at all levels. The self-critical nature of the process means that we have to be realistic about where we are and what we have achieved, but also what we have yet to achieve and how we will do this. By documenting this, we have a basis to plan for improvements and change in a transparent and inclusive way.

We have learned greatly from the process, across the different working groups, and we have developed documents and approaches that can be of benefit in the future. For example, while Appendix 2 provides useful information at a point in time, it also provides a means and a template to examine further quality initiatives or changes and their consequences for the Quality Framework. In chapter 3, the engagements with students to capture their voice used a replicable methodology that can be further developed and scaled to gain more insights. Across the report, we have developed case studies which – on their own – are very informative and rich pieces that provide snapshots of initiatives, practices and approaches being adopted. The process has encouraged us to commit these to paper and share them with the community, which is a very effective means of communicating what may not otherwise be known generally or widely disseminated. These should act as encouragement for colleagues to develop ideas that they may have by seeing the success of others, while other higher education institutions may gain valuable learning for their own organisations as well.

Interspersed throughout the report is the University's strategic plan. This is to be expected, as the strategic plan is a key roadmap for our development over the coming years and sets down objectives and actions which will impact on quality, the student experience and the University overall. It is important that the plan is referenced and used here, regularly, as it highlights its centrality and importance to developments, but also the awareness of those involved in the production of the report of what the strategy is and what it means. In this respect, the SER gives a living, breathing nature to the strategic plan. Further, its integration with a self-evaluation report just over a year after its launch strongly attests to its relevance and value as a means for us to improve and grow as a University.

6.3 Resourcing the implementation of recommendations

As identified in the overview of this chapter, the University has access to resources from a number of important funds. These have been secured on the back of detailed applications that the University has submitted, which are assisting with its transition, advancement and development in key areas. High-level information on each of these funds and how they are being used by SETU is provided below. Of course, a key problem with the current project funding model is the need to create a sustainable and on-going resources base that is fit for the delivering beyond the term of the project funding. Project funding by its nature creates dependencies beyond the remit of the project.

NTUTORR

The N-TUTORR (the National Technological University TransfOrmation for Recovery and Resilience) is a two-year national collaborative programme of capacity-building activity across six core themes. It has been allocated €40million overall, of which €5.1million flows directly to SETU. Funding for N-TUTORR is provided by the European Union and NextGeneration EU's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), which aims to help

repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the pandemic and prepare for a greener, digital and more resilient post-Covid Europe. The funding's core themes support strategic advancement and quality improvement:

- Digital transformation
- Universal design for learning (UDL)
- Education for sustainability (ESD)
- Academic integrity
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- Employability

The programme has seven partners (the five Technological Universities and the two remaining Institutes of Technology) working collaboratively to develop and deliver the N-TUTORR programme and its objectives. Collaboration and cooperation are central to the project and its support of a more cohesive technological higher education sector; however, a core tenet of N-TUTORR is that, while each partner is moving in the same direction to achieve the objectives, activity and progress does not necessarily have to be in lockstep. Each partner has the autonomy to determine how best to progress work locally.

TU-Rise

Through the Technological University Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise Scheme (TU RISE) SETU has secured €13.6 million in research funding available over a four-year (2024-2028) period.

The funding was established with two key outcomes:

- Establishment and/or development of central research functions in institutions to support research capacity building and further engagement with regions.
- Enhancement of institutional research capacity through increasing researcher human capital in research areas that have potential to facilitate stronger engagement with regional enterprises aligned to Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy and the Regional Enterprise Plans.

The funding available through TU RISE will have a significant impact on research at SETU. This funding will see the significant strengthening through facilitating elevated research and innovation performance in areas of key economic importance for the region, as identified in the regional enterprise plan.

TUTF

Technological University Transformation Fund (TUTF) funding of €16.15 million was provided to assist and support the development and progression of the University. This has been critical to the establishment of SETU, our successful designation as a technological university and our early development. The project has seen the building of capacity to manage the new organisation, a high level of cross-campus engagement across key areas, and the development and implementation of robust plans, structures, processes and governance. Demonstrable progress has been made with important merger and integration milestones achieved in academic and student support, corporate, research and innovation, change and transition, identity and branding, and engagement. The TUTF project is due to be completed in August 2024.

TSAF

The Technological Sector Advancement Fund (TSAF) is a €9.5 million fund awarded to SETU. The SETU TSAF project plan (which commenced in January 2024) will support the strategic transformation of the University targeting capacity building, central to SETU delivering on its mission and strategic plan. This includes enhanced decision-making structures and approaches, completing multiple campus systems integration, alignment of the SETU academic programme portfolio across six new faculties, placing sustainability at the centre of all decision making and activities, systematising external engagement and strengthening capacity in international education. A design-thinking approach will be taken to this transformational change programme with new structures, processes and fora created for enhanced engagement across the University.

6.3 Recommendations for the University

The summary recommendations presented in this chapter are as set out in each of chapters 2 to 5. The recommendations are presented as succinct statements in table 6.1 below, as the detail underpinning them is addressed in the individual chapters themselves. Each recommendation is mapped to the CINNTE review objective that it is addressing and means of helping to resource and/or support its implementation.

Recommendation	CINNTE review objective	Funding source to resource and/or support implementation
Phase the development of aligned SETU policies and procedures in prioritised areas based on Appendix 2, and manage the rollout of these policies and procedures (including communication, training and change management) to all stakeholders. <i>(Chapter 2)</i>	1, 2	TSAF, Change management process, N-TUTOR

Produce the new SETU Academic Delivery Framework and develop a co-ordinated, cross University implementation and engagement plan, to include any revisions required to policies and procedures. <i>(Chapter 2)</i>	1, 2	TSAF, Change management process, N-TUTOR
Ensure that the Joint Quality Committee and CORDA are provided with the necessary resources to allow them to undertake required work in the areas of data generation, analysis, reporting and review, and to drive evidence-informed enhancement across University activities. <i>(Chapter 2)</i>	1, 2	TSAF, Change management process, Core
Embed relevant University data and analysis of the data in communications with our internal and external stakeholders. <i>(Chapter 2)</i>	1, 2	N-TUTORR, Core
Improve the retention and progression of SETU students <i>(Chapter 3)</i>	3	N-TUTORR, Core
Strengthen the voice and perspectives of SETU students within the University <i>(Chapter 3)</i>	1	N-TUTORR, Core
Enhance the provision of social spaces and student accommodation across SETU campuses <i>(Chapter 3)</i>		HEA capital funding calls
Create a centralised Learning and Development Unit for all SETU staff <i>(Chapter 3)</i>	1	N-TUTORR
Develop a unified, integrated and systematic approach to communication as well as a single SETU engagement function to co-ordinate all interaction with external regional partners across the University. <i>(Chapter 4)</i>	1, 2	TSAF, TU-RISE, Change management, Strategic Plan, Core
Support increased coordination of professional accreditation and academic validation to maximise the benefit of regulatory and quality assurance processes through collaboration with relevant PSRBs, leveraging such activity to support the development of uniform programme approval and review processes across SETU. <i>(Chapter 4)</i>	1, 2	TSAF, N-TUTORR
Review all partners involved in collaborative and linked provision for SETU's lifelong learning programmes to inform the development and implementation of a strategy for lifelong learning that aligns with the regional skills needs of the South East as well as national demand. <i>(Chapter 4)</i>	1, 2, 3	Core, TSAF

<p>Finalise and implement SETU’s international strategy, which will support the expansion of our international student community and the enhancement of their experience, the strengthening of existing and development of additional sustainable international partnerships, and the increased engagement of domestic learners in international exchange programmes. <i>(Chapter 4)</i></p>	<p>1, 2</p>	<p>Core, TSAF</p>
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6.5 Next steps for SETU

The CINTE Review process has been one of learning and development for SETU, at an important time of transition for the University. We have learned more about who we are, our trajectory, what we are doing well and where we need to improve. In addition, we have developed a greater understanding of where we can further develop to fulfil our strategic, quality and student ambitions. Arising from the process, we have articulated a series of recommendations for the University. We look forward to, firstly, engaging with the review panel on these recommendations and our overall self-evaluation, and we will learn more and develop further from this phase of the review as we continue our journey of transition and growth.