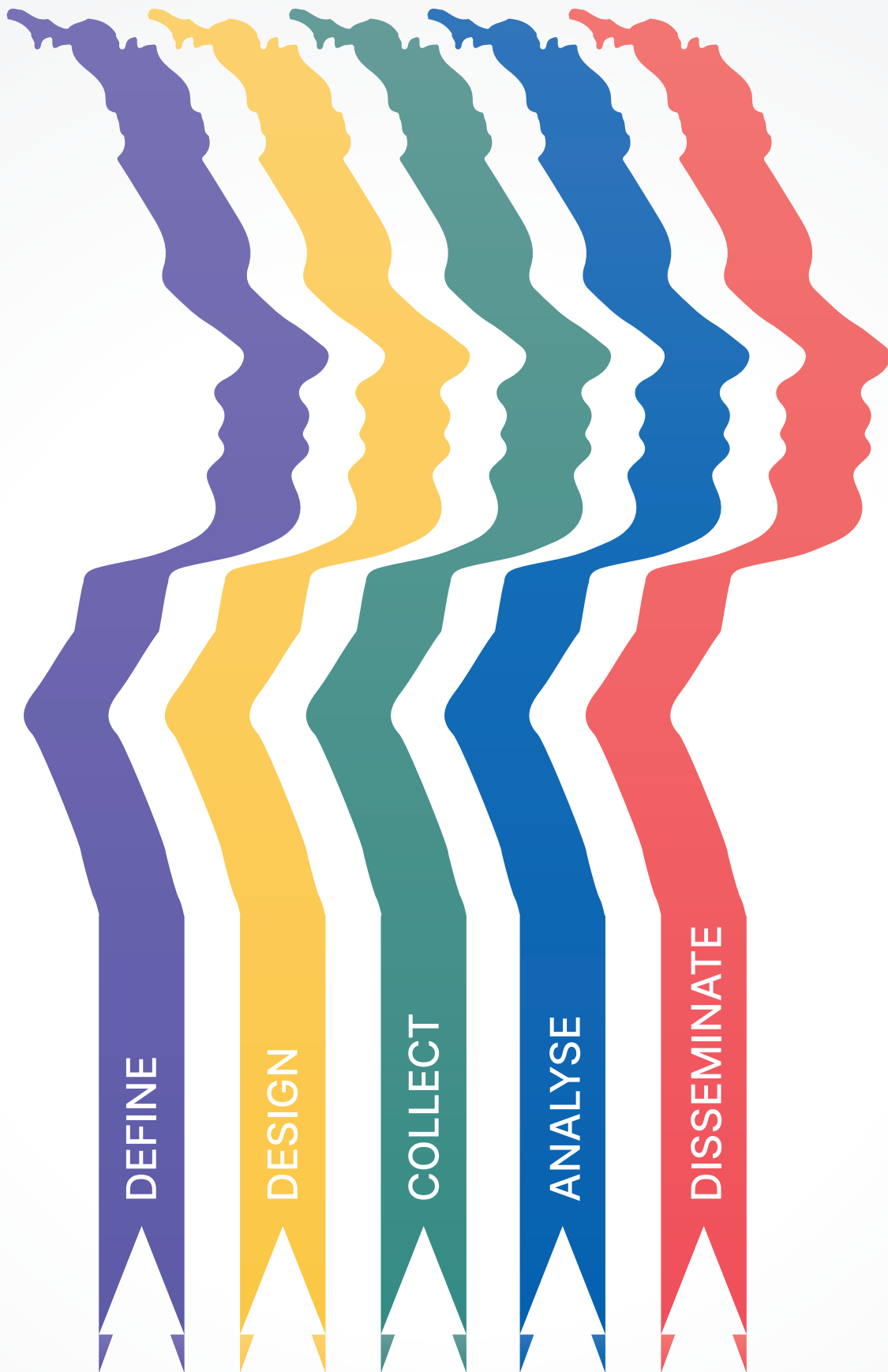


CONNECTING RESEARCH TO IMPACT

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING RESEARCH STRATEGY 2025-2028

South East Technological University

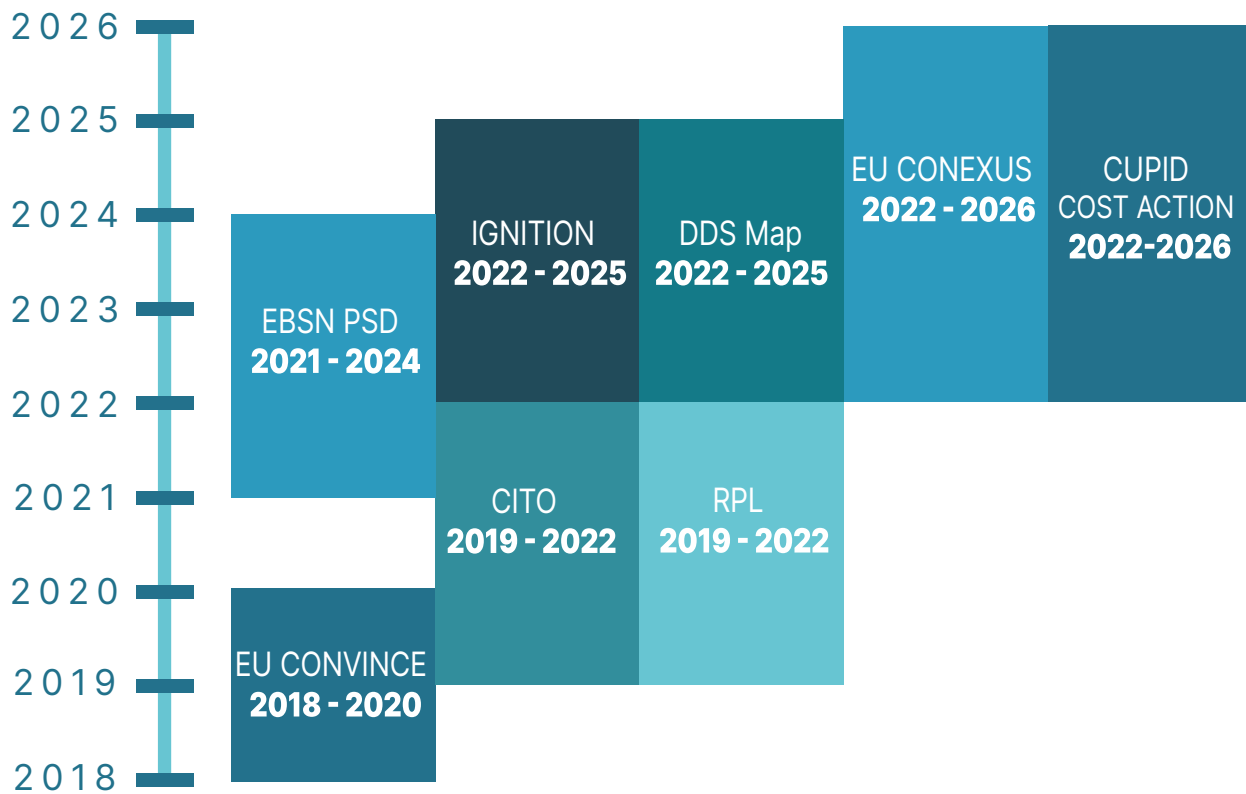


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FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS TIMELINE

Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning, SETU



8 YEARS 8 PROJECTS 34 COUNTRIES 35 PARTNERS €11m FUNDING

In addition to these projects, our faculty actively engages in numerous research initiatives and partnerships that significantly enrich and inform our academic programmes and contribute to our impact in educational practice and policy.



WELCOME



Research has been central to the mission and identity of the Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning since its establishment in 2023 and prior to this in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning since its establishment in 2004. Informed by our origins in adult education, we aim to create a supportive and collaborative environment as we conduct impactful, sustainable research and contribute to education policy and strategic initiatives at regional, national, European and international levels.

The Faculty has developed enduring partnerships with local and national government agencies as well as regional bodies in our areas of expertise that include adult and community education, adult literacy, further education and training, the recognition of prior learning and the continuing professional development (CPD) of educators. These collaborations underpin our promotion of education as a catalyst for social mobility and inclusion.

We have a strong track record of securing competitive research funding from both national and international funding agencies, and we continue to broaden and deepen our international research partnerships. Research-led teaching is integrated into our curricula at undergraduate, postgraduate and professional levels to ensure that our students have access to the state of the art in critical, practical and evidence-based learning.

We are committed to cultivating a vibrant research eco-system and culture through the collaboration of dedicated staff, visiting professors, educational professionals and our dynamic postgraduate community. Our ambition to develop this further is demonstrated by the launch of two new research centres that will advance scholarship in our key priority areas; Innovation in Education and Teacher Education.

This strategy sets out the Faculty's ambitious roadmap for the next three years. It aligns with the mission, values and objectives highlighted in SETU's Connecting Research to Impact 2025-2028 and Connecting for Impact in Lifelong Learning, Strategic Plan 2025-2028. It establishes our pathways for engaged, innovative and inclusive research as we generate new knowledge, develop our partnerships and respond to complex societal challenges.

I would like to acknowledge the role of the Faculty Research Committee and our colleagues from across the Faculty who contributed to this new strategy.

Dr Helen Murphy

Head, Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning



1 INTRODUCTION

The Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning was established in 2023 following the establishment of SETU as a Technological University. Prior to this, the School of Education and Lifelong Learning on the Waterford campus in WIT developed a Research Strategy with priorities including building research capacity, building a research culture, supporting key areas of expertise within the School, attracting external research funding and increasing the number of research students (PhD and Masters by Research). This strategy needed to be reviewed and revisited in light of our new status as a Technological University, the SETU University Strategy Connecting for Impact 2023-2028 and the recently published University-wide research strategy 2024-2028. Given our origins in adult education, valuing the experience and agency of adult learners is a key differentiator and an integral focus of our research. This informs our ambition to create a nurturing and supportive research environment, where students and staff actively engage and collaborate with one another in the development of new knowledge. This new Faculty-wide strategy reflects our shared commitment to advancing knowledge, practice, and innovation in research in education and lifelong learning within a technological university context.

We collaborate with regional, national and international partners on research focusing on adult and further education, adult literacy, the continuing professional

development (CPD) of educators and education as a pathway to economic growth and social inclusion. We have been successful in securing research funding from national and international funding agencies and continue to build and benefit from our relationships with our international research partners. We have created a vibrant research culture and eco-system through the work of our dedicated staff, our visiting professors, our track-record of growth in postgraduate study and our engagement with educational professionals across the spectrum of education. Our ambitions for developing our research capacity and outcomes are congruent with international higher education institutes.

Our commitment to elevating our research capacity and activity is recognised in the two new research centres in the Faculty: the Centre for Educational Innovation and Engagement and the Centre for Research in Teacher Education. The Centre for Educational Innovation and Engagement will be the primary Faculty research centre providing a hub for researcher development, knowledge transfer and stakeholder engagement as we respond to complex societal challenges and advance scholarship in our key priority areas. The Centre for Research in Teacher Education will be hosted and led by FoELL, serving as a university-wide research centre that connects scholarship in teacher education across SETU (see Figure 1).

1 INTRODUCTION

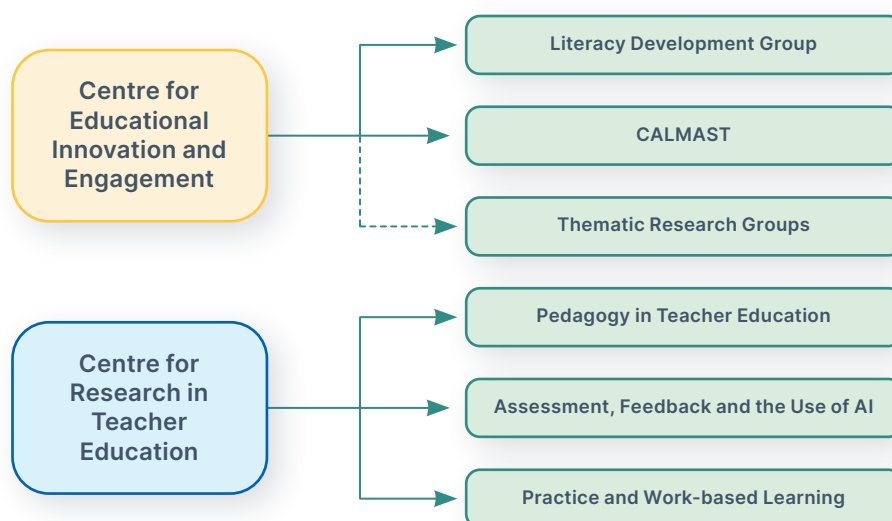


Figure 1: Current position based on new organisational structures for Research Centres across SETU including existing Faculty Research Groups, with the expectation that additional Groups may be formed over time.

We extend our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the development of our Faculty's Research Strategy. This work reflects the collective insights and aspirations of our colleagues and students across the Faculty.

We are especially grateful to members of the Faculty Research Committee and its Faculty Research Strategy Working Group,

whose thoughtful engagement and critical perspectives helped shape the direction and priorities of this strategy.

We also acknowledge the support and guidance of the SETU Research Office, as well as our external partners and collaborators, whose ongoing engagement continues to enrich our research culture and broaden our impact.

PURPOSE

This strategy outlines our vision for research from 2025 to 2028 (inclusive), and our aim to advance our researchers' aspirations, engagement with our partners, and the enhancement of educational discourse, practice and policy at regional, national and international levels. As previously outlined, it builds upon the work of the existing Research Strategy for the School of Education and Lifelong Learning 2022 - 2025 and aligns with to the SETU strategies [*Connecting for Impact 2023 – 2028*](#); [*Connecting Research to Impact 2025*](#)

[*– 2028*](#); and the [*Connecting for Impact in Lifelong Learning Strategic Plan 2025 –2028*](#).

In addition to outlining our vision and mission, this strategy highlights our research profile and identifies areas for further development. The strategy will outline the key indicators to effectively measure our success and impact. A subsequent implementation plan will outline the essential steps needed to reach our goals.

RESEARCH IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

SETU aims to be a pioneering and a leading European Technological University (TU), serving the requirements of the South-East region in parallel with a global perspective. Research plays a pivotal role in SETU as we work towards transforming lives and driving regional growth through excellence in research-informed teaching, collaboration and innovation. Within this vision, the Faculty of Education and Lifelong Learning plays a central role by advancing inclusive, practice-orientated, and socially responsive research that supports ongoing educational and socio-economic transformation across the lifespan. This strategic focus is reflected in the two core areas of the Faculty's work: education and lifelong learning. Each area seeks to uniquely contribute to shaping research that is relevant, impactful, and grounded in the needs of diverse learners, educators, and communities.

The Faculty is responsible for the design and delivery of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for educators and for leading practice-based research in Education, Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning. Current doctoral research topics for students include: adult learners in the co-creation of curriculum design in lifelong learning programmes; integration of asylum seekers and refugees in tertiary education (TE); learners' perspectives of environmental sustainability in TE; research and development learning environment; connected curriculum; digital pedagogy and FET teacher educators; collaborative pathways for social inclusion and sustainable development; and the nature of personal engagement in research work in

Irish TUs. Staff also engage in collaborative interdisciplinary supervision of doctoral research students with other Faculties within the University.

The Faculty is a leader in lifelong learning, working in partnership with industry and the community to drive socio-economic transformation through high quality, innovative, inclusive and flexible learning pathways. Research and scholarship is one of the five strategic objectives of the SETU Connecting for Impact in Lifelong Learning Strategic Plan 2025 -2028 with associated targets to increase research outputs in lifelong learning. These targets have been explicitly aligned with the Faculty research strategy to ensure a coherent and mutually reinforcing approach to advancing research-informed practice and widening access to education across the lifespan.

Engagement with educational stakeholders is a core aspect of the Faculty's work with staff actively contributing to relevant research committees and editorial boards at regional, national and international levels. Over the past several years, the Faculty has played a significant role in a diverse portfolio of European and national funded research projects that span digital innovation, social inclusion, lifelong learning, and professional development of educators. These include ongoing EU-funded collaborations such as the EU-CONEXUS university alliance project, where the Faculty contributes to reimagining higher education and research mobility across European coastal regions, and the DDS-MAP project, which enhances digital skills among healthcare

1 INTRODUCTION



professionals. The Faculty was a partner in the Erasmus+ IGNITION cooperation partnership project, focused on improving digital literacy and inclusion in higher education. Through the PDS4BST project, Faculty led the development of micro-credentials for basic skills educators across Europe. It also led the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Lifelong Learning project, funded under the Higher Education System Innovation and Transformation call administered by the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA). Other notable contributions include the Erasmus+ CITO policy experimentation project, which created tools for assessing adult basic skills, and EU CONVINCENCE, promoting inclusive education and democratic values across diverse learning environments.

Our commitment extends to hosting international Fulbright scholars and visiting professors who contribute to our educational and research initiatives. We actively engage with international research networks (e.g., Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI), European University Continuing Education Network (EUCEN), European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA),

European Education Research Association (EERA), Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) and national organisations e.g., Ireland's National Adult Teaching Organisation (AONTAS), National Adult Literacy Association (NALA), An Cosán, Adult Literacy for Life (ALL), Higher Education Lifelong Learning Ireland Network (HELLIN) that enable us to share knowledge, engage in innovative studies, and encourage innovation in the field of education.

The Faculty is home to the Vicky Phelan Honorary Research Chair in Equality and Access to Education which was launched in March 2022 and aims to extend the values that Vicky stood for with the values of SETU.

Collectively, our doctoral studies, the honorary Vicky Phelan Honorary research chair, our funded projects and partners, events, outputs, and collaborations with international scholars and education stakeholders reflect the Faculty's commitment to inclusive, practice-based, and policy-relevant research that advances socio-economic transformation and educational access across the lifespan.

OUR VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Vision

To be recognised as a leader of research in Ireland and Europe in Adult Education, Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning and to advance equity, innovation and transformation in educational policy and practice for the benefit of learners, educators and the wider society.

Mission

To explore transformative approaches to access, equity, inclusion and diversity in Education through practice-based research in adult education, adult literacy, lifelong learning, innovation in teaching, learning and assessment, and educational leadership across all educational sectors. We contribute to national and international discourse on education in order to impact positively on educational policy and practice.

Values

- **Respect for adult learners and the wealth of experience they bring to research through their professional practice, prior learning, and/or personal experience**
- **A strengths-based approach to Education and practice-based research**
- **Excellent standards of ethics and integrity in research**
- **Collaboration with internal and external partners**
- **Equity, inclusion and diversity**
- **Curiosity, critical thinking and reflective practice.**

Our values align with the National Policy Statement for Research Integrity in Ireland (2024) and the SETU Code of Conduct for Responsible Research Practice (2025).

Our research aims to address contemporary challenges in education for the betterment of learners, educators and the wider society. Working in partnership with

educational stakeholders, we are committed to pursuing and disseminating research that has the potential to transform people's lives for the better. We do this by creating a research culture and ecosystem where our students and staff are empowered to lead/own their research process and to flourish as researchers.



2 OUR STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

OUR STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

To become a leader of research in Adult Education, Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning and to advance equity, innovation and transformation in educational policy and practice for the benefit/good of learners, educators and the wider society, we have identified the following strategic research priorities:

1. **Strengthening research, innovation and knowledge transfer.**
2. **People, nurturing a vibrant research culture and a supportive research environment.**

3. **Fostering the development of an ambitious and engaged research community.**

4. **Strengthening engaged, inclusive and impactful research in the region and beyond.**

Our strategic priorities, associated goals, actions and indicators of success, detailed in the remainder of this document, are closely aligned to the SETU Research Strategy [*Connecting Research to Impact 2025 – 2028*](#).



Figure 2: Strategic Research Priorities

2 OUR STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

1

PRIORITY AREA ONE

Strengthening and diversifying research, innovation and knowledge transfer.

We will advance the Faculty's research, innovation, and knowledge transfer capacity in alignment with institutional goals and regional, national, and international priorities.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Scaling up Faculty research and knowledge transfer performance in areas of identified strength and impact by increasing grant capture activity.	Strengthen the Faculty's leadership in impactful, practice-based research with a target of submitting at least three high-quality significant national and/or EU funding applications each year of the strategy. Faculty to elevate performance and develop research and knowledge transfer capacity in domains aligned to regional need (and opportunity), including development of new research centres and research groups. Collaborate with SETU's Research Office to optimise level of research expenditure and funding through strategic grant writing support, and sharing of best practice and high-quality common background material, mentoring of early career researchers by more experienced academics, and pre-submission peer review.	Number and activity of research centres and research groups. Increase in direct research funding and expenditure per annum. Monitoring of grant capture performance metrics, including: • Application activity and success rate. • Direct Research Funding and expenditure. • Collaborative projects and consortia.
Benchmarking Faculty research, innovation and knowledge transfer performance, scale and achievements, and implementation of a structure to develop researchers' knowledge and capability to foster year-on-year growth meeting the set targets.	Identify specific actions to ensure research groups are research-led and multi-campus. Provide leadership, in collaboration with Faculty Management Board, Faculty Research Office, Faculty Research Committee and SETU Research Office, in the development of research by coordinating strategic initiatives, enhancing researcher support, supporting funded research projects, monitoring progress and fostering a dynamic and impactful research culture.	Completed plans and reports, with dedicated operational support structures and resources.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Further developing the Faculty research profile, positioning and connectivity in the region, in Ireland, Europe and internationally.	Leverage EU-CONEXUS network and other relevant national, European and international consortia, partnerships and professional associations (e.g., ESREA, ESAI, EUCEN, SCoTENS) as a potential opportunity for supports and connections with other researchers, in order to broaden SETU's geographic reach, enhance the Faculty's research profile, enable strategic collaboration, and support active engagement in key scholarly and policy networks. Encourage engagement and widespread Faculty adoption of PURE to support research profiles and collaborations. Ensure staff representation on SETU Research Committees, including: SETU Academic Council Research and Research Programmes Committee; SETU Research Ethics Committee; SETU Business, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Programme Board. Ensure Faculty representation on relevant national research committees and organisations (e.g., ALL Strategy Office, AONTAS.)	International research networks profile and geographic reach. Number of active and up-to-date Faculty PURE profiles. Institutional memberships for professional associations and networks (e.g., ESREA, ESAI, EUCEN, SCoTENS). Faculty representation on relevant institutional, regional and national research committees.
Increasing publication performance and diversity.	Embrace open innovation, open science, open research, open data, and OA.	Faculty target: Increase peer reviewed journal publications per annum. • Increase in OA and open research publications. • Number and rating of publications (impact factor, citations, public-private co-publications). Increase in activity of research groups.

2 OUR STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

PRIORITY AREA TWO

Developing people, a vibrant research culture and a supportive research ecosystem.

We will cultivate a vibrant, inclusive, and supportive research culture across the Faculty, with a focus on collaboration, capacity-building, and responsible research practices.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Demonstrating efforts to enhance and realise a positive stimulating and supportive research culture and environment, underpinned by collaboration and career development, with strong engagement and connection with learners, cross campus staff, industry and sectors, employers, communities, and other agents in society. Demonstrating collaboration in all research and knowledge transfer activities with partnership and networking with European and international entities.	Provide seed funding for at least six initiatives over the strategy aimed at enhancing the research culture and encourage collaboration within the Faculty (e.g., seminar series, symposia) and with other SETU Faculties (e.g., joint doctoral events; doctoral supervision mentorship programme; academic writing programme). Continue to facilitate a community of practice of researchers through the Education Research and Doctoral Seminar Series. Provide accessible, well-equipped and flexible working and seminar spaces that support individual and collaborative scholarship. Cultivate a culture of research leadership by encouraging staff to apply for institutional, regional, national, and international research roles including chairs of research committees, conferences and editorial boards to enhance individual career development and raise the Faculty's research profile. Champion and adopt DORA-aligned research assessment practices by fostering a culture that values diverse research outputs, encourages responsible metrics use, and supports equitable recognition of academic contributions, research awards, achievements highlighting individual and collective success to inspire engagement, enhance visibility, and build Faculty pride.	SETU target: Increase in staff training and development expenditure by 30% per annum. • Monitor of training, and other activity engagement by staff (including publications, conference attendance, sabbaticals etc). • Number of staff seminars, associated attendance and evaluations. • Number of staff engaged with doctoral supervision mentorship programme. • Number of staff engaged with academic writing programme. • Number of staff nominated for research awards. • Number of staff on institutional and national research committees and editorial boards.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Further developing the research capacity of our researchers for enhanced research outputs in key areas including doctoral supervision and academic publications in alignment with the strategic priorities of the SETU Research strategy	Support Faculty engagement in broad range of SETU research training (including in research integrity, research ethics, engaged research, translational impact, knowledge transfer, equality, diversity and inclusion principles etc) and mentoring (grants, supervision, early career researcher network) schemes. Design and implement a bespoke Joint Humanities and Education doctoral supervision mentorship programme to support early career supervisors, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and ensure high-quality supervision practices across the Faculty. Design and implement a bespoke Joint Humanities and Education writing for publication mentorship programme and foster interdisciplinary collaboration and ensure high-quality research outputs across the Faculty. Support Faculty engagement in SETU supports for staff to support research and knowledge transfer (buyout of time, strategic grant writing support, VP Research, Innovation and Impact Strategic Fund, TU-RISE sabbaticals, OA publication and conference support, co-fund, etc.).	Number of staff engaged in training and mentorship programmes.

2 OUR STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

PRIORITY AREA THREE

Fostering the development of an ambitious and engaged research community.

We will strengthen the Faculty's research community, with a particular emphasis on expanding doctoral education, fostering international collaboration, and enhancing research infrastructure.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Growing the postgraduate research community at the Faculty, particularly doctoral cohorts.	Launch the EdD in AY 2026/27 to address the practice-based research and leadership development needs of educational professionals, with the successful recruitment of an initial cohort as a foundation for long-term programme growth. Support research active staff to apply for national and European funding specific to doctoral studies (e.g. Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions), to build in Doctorates into grant applications where eligible (e.g. Horizon Research and Innovation Actions) and to leverage annual SETU doctoral scholarship calls and partnerships with national stakeholders to secure sustainable funding pathways for individual doctoral research, supporting the development of a vibrant and diverse community of emerging scholars.	Launch of EdD and recruitment of cohort of students. Number of applications for Doctoral scholarships. Monitoring of: • Number of externally funded Doctoral Students (Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland, Europe, industry sectors). • % of Doctoral projects directly linked to regional priorities.
Embedding of opportunities for international academic/research experiences for students and staff to develop global citizenship and highlight SETU as a destination of choice for international staff/students.	Broaden the scope of the engagement with international scholars to strengthen strategic research areas such as Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning, support expertise in supervisory teams and compliment inter-disciplinary supervisory teams; and further extend the Faculty's international research networks matrix. Encourage cross campus supervisory teams, and with one early career researcher as member where appropriate. Transnational supervisory teams will be encouraged, in order to build SETU collaborations geographically and expose our students and supervisors to critical technical expertise.	Number of visiting international scholars. Number of transnational supervisory teams. Cross campus supervision with early career staff representation in place.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Providing infrastructure and resources to support growth in the research community.	Advance equitable access to high-quality research resources by collaborating with Faculty and the SETU Library to identify evolving research resource needs and expand access to key education and interdisciplinary databases, online journals, and open educational resources (OER). Provide funding for staff to publish in at least two open access journals per year of the strategy.	Increase in access to high-quality research resources. Increase in Faculty publications (with Faculty members as lead author/s) in open access journals.
Working towards normalising doctoral-level qualifications (or the pursuit of same) as the minimum requirement for all academic roles, and plan work force development with this Doctorates target in mind.	Supporting staff access to doctorates and professional doctorate study.	Increase the number of staff qualified to doctorate level to 80%. Monitoring of: • Number of academic staff with doctorates.



2 OUR STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

4

PRIORITY AREA FOUR

Strengthening engaged, inclusive and impactful research in the region and beyond.

We will advance inclusive, community-engaged, and impact-driven research with a focus on addressing societal challenges, fostering ethical practice, and contributing to regional and global sustainable development.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Protecting, promoting and developing the research and innovation ecosystem at our Faculty in terms of people, culture, environment and the contribution of research toward the public good by responding to local, national and global challenges, whether these be social, political, cultural, technological or environmental.	Encourage dissemination of impact of Faculty practice-based research and community-societal engagement and impact case studies.	Faculty contribution to impact and community-societal engagement reports and impact case studies disseminated to SETU community and beyond.
Widely communicating the value and impact of trans and multi-disciplinary engaged research and knowledge transfer activity within SETU, to our stakeholders and to the wider society.	Recruit the second Vicky Phelan Honorary Research Chair in Equality and Access to Education to advance research, foster strategic partnerships, and shape policy and practice in gender equity in Education.	Vicky Phelan Honorary Research Chair in Equality and Access to Education recruited.
	Support strategic events to widely communicate Faculty research activity and strengths including bi-annual Pracademics in Education Postgraduate Research Symposium, and the bi-annual Literacy Development Centre Research Symposium.	Mapping of projects to the SDGs and monitoring the % of projects tackling SDG.
	Provide leadership in the integration of Challenge-Based Learning approaches in practice-based research and postgraduate programmes.	• Number of undergraduate and postgraduate projects with SDG alignment.
	Implement a targeted dissemination strategy leveraging social media, and digital platforms, and encouraging up-to-date researcher profiles (e.g., PURE), open access and repositories to showcase Faculty research activity, projects and outputs and engage diverse audiences.	• Number of SDG addressed overall by research activity.

Strategic Goal	Action	Success measured by:
Ensuring our researchers understand and utilise best practice in relation to engaged research, translational impact, research community and co-production of research with industry and with our communities (including hard to reach groups).	Further align the Faculty Research Ethics Committee to the University's processes and procedures and the SETU Code of Conduct for Responsible Research Practice (2025). Further develop specialist expertise in ethical issues for practice-based research involving marginalised and disadvantaged groups, including collaborative participatory methodologies to increase participant involvement in the design and creation of our research ethics processes. Support researchers to critically engage with the opportunities and challenges of Generative AI in practice-based research by encouraging engagement with targeted training, fostering ethical awareness, and encouraging sustainable practice and innovation in research design, data generation, and dissemination. Encourage staff engagement with SETU designed SDG-based research impact toolkit for staff, postgraduate students and researchers.	Numbers of research active staff trained in Epigeum research integrity and ethics, research impact, community and societal engagement.



FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions about the FOELL Education Research Strategy, contact us at: pgace.wd@setu.ie





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