Technological Universities Association (TUA)

Investing in Ireland's Technological Future

Strengthening Technological Universities as Engines of Regional Growth

Budget 2027 Submission

Introduction

Technological Universities deliver for Ireland across a broad range of important national metrics.

The European Commission's 2026 Country Report is unambiguous: over 80% of Irish businesses report significant skills gaps; domestic R&D investment lags behind that of comparable economies; and regional productivity disparities are widening. Addressing these challenges demands third level institutions that are embedded in every region, aligned with enterprise, and capable of delivering at scale.

That is precisely what Technological Universities (TUs) do.

The TU sector serves student populations that closely reflect Ireland's socio-economic diversity, provide pathways to higher education for learners from all backgrounds, and develop graduates who contribute richly to their local and regional economies. Through strong engagement with industry and research that addresses real-world challenges, TUs play a distinct and vital role **in driving regional development, enhancing national competitiveness, and ensuring that economic opportunity is distributed across the country.**

About TUA

The Technological Universities Association (TUA) is the advocacy and representative body for Ireland's Technological Universities and Institutes of Technology. Formed to give a strong collective voice to the technological university sector in higher education, TUA advocates for the investment and policy conditions that allow TUs **to strengthen regional higher education provision, expand research capacity and deepen engagement with society and enterprise.**

TUA members:

- **ATU:** Atlantic Technological University
- **DkIT:** Dundalk Institute of Technology
- **IADT:** Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
- **MTU:** Munster Technological University
- **SETU:** South East Technological University
- **TU Dublin:** Technological University Dublin
- **TUS:** Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest

The TU sector in numbers[1]

105,000 +

enrolled students across the TU sector

6,090+

Companies served by Technology Gateways between 2013 and 2024[3]

29

Campuses in 18 counties

€46.2m

Horizon Europe funding, 100 projects, 28 co-ordinated by TUs[4]

80%+

Graduate employment rate within 9 months

1,250

PhD students enrolled 2024–2025

€126m

Competitive research income in 2024[2]

940

Average collaborations, innovation voucher and consultancy service agreements with industry annually.[5]

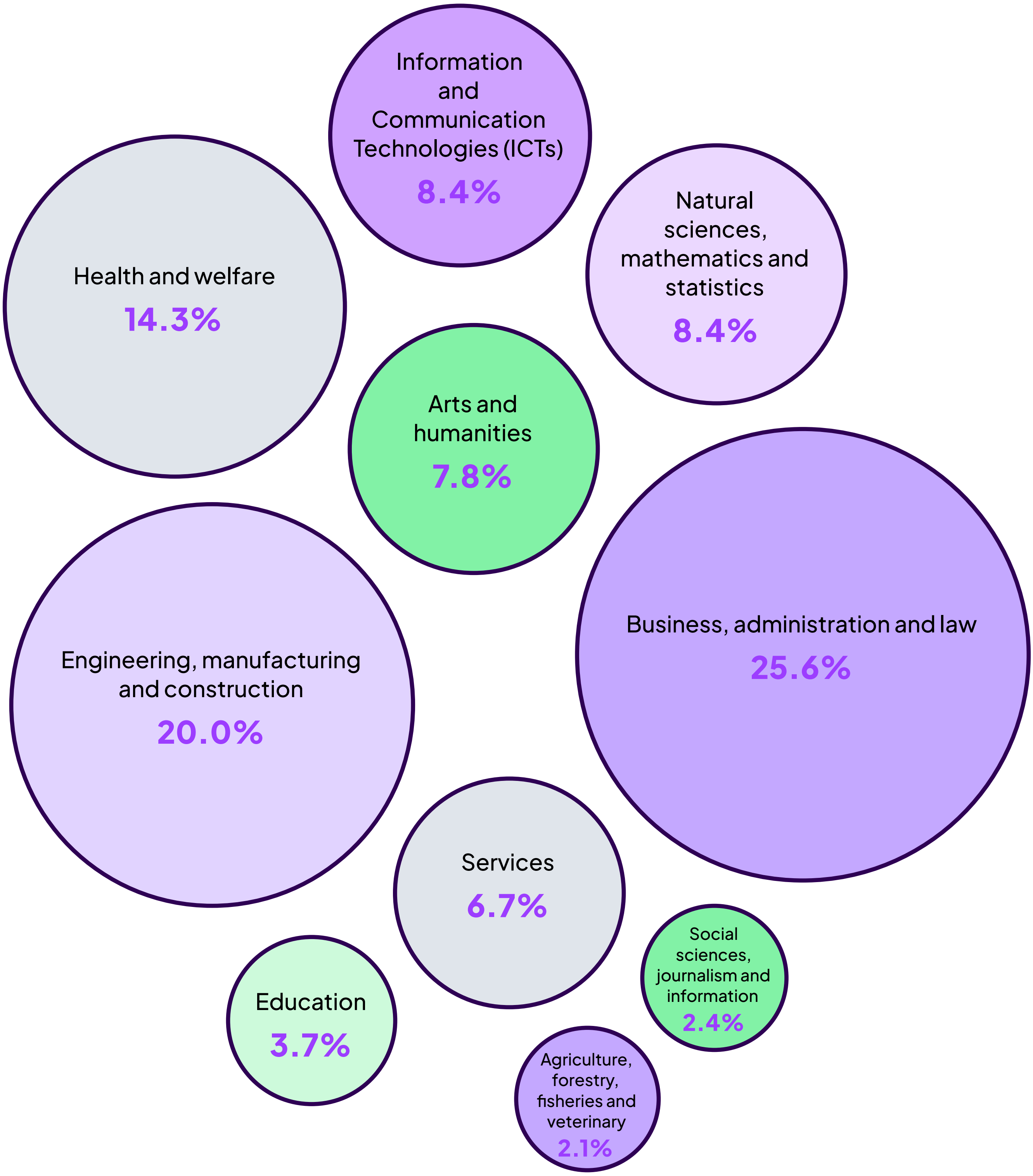
These impact figures reflect institutions that are deeply embedded in regional economies, actively engaged in translational research, and directly aligned with the workforce needs of the enterprise and public services that its supports.

Between 80% and 86% of graduates from TUs are in employment nine months after graduation.

This is a measure of applied, employment-ready education.

1 Key Facts & Figures | Statistics | Higher Education Authority
2 Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey 2024
3 Between 2013 and 2024 the Technology Gateway Programme has delivered more than €79million of research via 8,935 projects for more than 6,090 companies. Source: Enterprise Ireland
4 Horizon Dashboard: Funding and Tenders Portal
5 Total collaborations, innovation voucher and consultancy service agreements with industry reported in Annual Knowledge Transfer Survey, averaged over 5 years 2020–2024

Figure 1: Fields of study for 2024 graduates in TUA members



Summary of Budget 2027 Recommendations

Priority 1

Invest in Core Funding: The Foundation of Higher Education advancement

1. Restore existing commitments under Funding the Future to close the growing funding gap
2. Address the critical structural issues with nationally agreed pay awards
3. Enable success for students from all socio-economic backgrounds and all ability levels

Priority 2

Enhance Ireland's Research and Innovation Capacity

1. Increase the Research and Innovation allocation to the TU sector to €50m per annum

Priority 3

Deliver the strategic enablers for TUs

1. Advance Professorial Appointments and associated Academic Contracts
2. Recognise the massive impact of increasing non-pay costs
3. Invest in critical campus digital infrastructure
4. Strengthen Ireland's leadership in the European Universities initiative
5. Maintain vitally important momentum in providing Student Accommodation
6. Enable the TU sector to benefit from a borrowing framework capacity
7. Safeguard international collaborations and student pipeline with international student visa scheme

Priority 4

Unlock the National Training Fund to enable TUs to address key national priorities

1. Helping TUs to further support infrastructure Delivery and Construction
2. Keep Ireland near the forefront of Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence
3. Support Ireland in achieving its climate action goals
4. Support scaling of Indigenous Enterprise
5. Play a critical role in Healthcare Workforce Planning

Priority 1

1

Invest in Core Funding: The Foundation of Higher Education advancement

1. Restore existing commitments under Funding the Future to close the growing funding gap
2. Address the critical structural issues with nationally agreed pay awards
3. Enable success for students from all socio-economic backgrounds and all ability levels

Priority 1

1. Restore existing commitments under Funding the Future to close the growing funding gap

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Restore *Funding the Future* momentum with an initial €50 million investment in higher education in 2027.

Commit to fully closing the agreed annual funding gap of €307 million by 2030 through sustained annual investment, including addressing the remaining funding shortfall of €133.5 million over the next multi-annual period.

The 2022 *Funding the Future* review identified a €307 million **per annum** shortfall in core higher education funding, highlighting it as a key constraint on the sector's capacity to meet growing demand and deliver the education, skills, and research outcomes required by Ireland. While approximately half of the identified funding shortfall has been addressed over the past four years, it is a matter of concern that Budget 2026 contained no provision for *Funding the Future* commitment.

Continued growth in student enrolments is placing increasing pressure on the TU sector in particular. For example, this demand is reflected in a 9% increase in CAO first-preference choices for the TU sector in 2026 compared to 2025. This increase is in addition to the overall projected increase in total HE student population into the 2030s which requires a multi-annual budgetary response. Budget 2027 must restore momentum towards the full implementation of an appropriate higher education funding framework by providing sustained investment that enables TUs to expand capacity, maintain quality, **and equip students with the skills required by a rapidly evolving workforce.**

2. Address the critical structural issues with nationally agreed pay awards

Budget 2027 recommendations:

Provide for supplementary funding of €51.5 million in 2026.

Embed the full cost of nationally agreed pay awards in the 2027 core allocation, ending the need for supplementary budget cycles.

The Funding the Future framework did not address the structural funding issues associated with public sector pay awards. While institutions are required to absorb the costs of nationally agreed pay increases, the corresponding funding requirement is not fully addressed through core grant allocations. This has resulted in a second funding gap emerging since 2022, which amounts to €51.5 million in the 2026 funding allocation. Supplementary estimates to bridge the shortfall have been required in 2024 and 2025 and will be required again this year.

The size of this shortfall, €51.5m, has been acknowledged by the HEA and a commitment to address this was included in the 2026 Grant Allocation letter. It is essential that funding is provided to meet nationally agreed pay awards in full. This will help minimise industrial relations risks, ensure parity with the wider public sector, and enable higher education institutions to plan and manage their resources sustainably.

A sustainable funding model requires that pay-related costs are funded on a permanent and predictable basis, providing higher education institutions with the certainty needed to plan and deliver for growing student and workforce demand.

3. Enable success for students from all socio-economic backgrounds and all ability levels

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Amend the per-student funding formula to incorporate a student-need weighting that reflects the additional institutional supports required to optimise **access, participation and success for priority learner groups**.

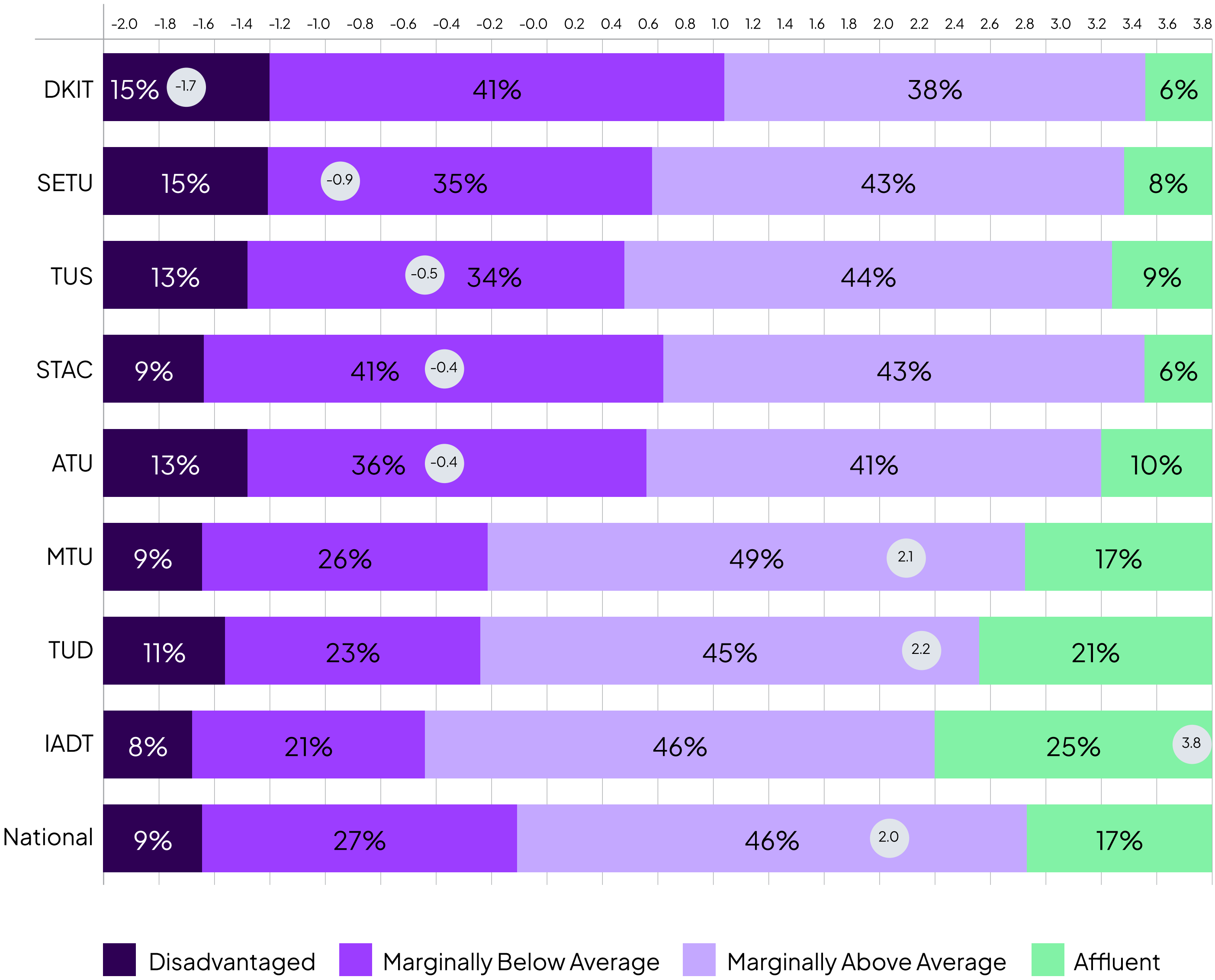
The National Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education[6] recognises that achieving equitable outcomes requires, not only widened access, but also the supports necessary for students to participate fully and succeed in higher education. TUA member institutions play a particularly important access role, enrolling **a higher proportion of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds** than the higher education sector as a whole.

Students with disabilities are another target group for the National Access Plan. 23.9% of students in the TU sector report a disability compared to 20.9% in higher education nationally.[7]. Supporting these students requires dedicated institutional resources to provide targeted academic, financial, wellbeing and accessibility supports.

6 https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/national-access-plan-2022-2028/

7 Student Disability Data (EAS Disability 2023) | Statistics | Higher Education Authority

Figure 2: Deprivation Index Scores by TU sector institution



The impact of this investment:

A student-need weighting would align funding more closely with policy objectives under the National Access Plan, providing greater certainty and predictability for institutional planning while enabling TUs to **sustain and enhance supports for underrepresented learners.**

Priority 2

2

Enhance Ireland's Research and Innovation Capacity

Increase the Research and Innovation allocation to the TU sector to €50m per annum.

Priority 2

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Increase the Research and Innovation allocation to the TU sector to €50m per annum.

Technological Universities are building a knowledge creation and innovation ecosystem in Ireland's regions - **and it is working**. Competitive research income has grown 50% since 2020. Full-time PhD enrolments have increased 69% since 2018/19. Ireland's TUs secured €46.2m in Horizon Europe funding across 100 projects, 28 of them co-ordinated by TUs.

We're currently on a cliff edge.

The TU RISE[8] programme, an €86m investment in research and innovation capacity across TUs, DkIT and IADT over four years, ends in 2027. It was a foundational investment that enabled TUs to build research and innovation infrastructure, attract skilled staff and establish enterprise partnerships at a critical moment in the sector's development. **Its impact has been substantial and measurable**.

If TU RISE is not transitioned into core funding before the end date, the sector will have spent four years building capacity only to dismantle it precisely at the moment the European Commission is calling for Ireland to **increase its domestic R&D intensity and bridge the gap between academic research and commercial application.**

The effects of this Core Funding Gap are immense.

A research and innovation allocation was introduced for the TU sector in 2019 at €5m per annum, rising to €10m in 2022. It has not increased since. Core R&I funding allows institutions to make multi-annual commitments, to hire researchers on contracts of substance, to invest in infrastructure with confidence, and to build research cultures that attract postgraduate students and enterprise partners.

Scaling the research and innovation allocation to €50 million per annum will sustain the research infrastructure built since 2019 and **provide the foundation for the next phase of TU research development.**

8 TU RISE Call Process | Policy | Higher Education Authority

The impact of this investment:

The impact of increased core research and innovation funding extends well beyond institutional research capacity. It will strengthen the research support functions needed to secure significantly greater levels of national and international competitive funding, including Horizon Europe and Research Ireland's INSPIRE Programme. By investing in the creation of sustainable research environments, partnership building, and developing research talent Technological Universities will be better positioned to develop high-quality collaborative proposals, engage with enterprise and societal partners, and translate research excellence into competitive funding success. This investment will enable the TU sector to build on its growing ambition and capability while maximising the return on public investment in research and innovation.

It would also **strengthen Ireland's European University Alliances**, in which TUA members are strongly represented, and which are evolving from educational partnerships into integrated, long-term research and innovation engines. With sustained national co-funding, these alliances offer a mechanism to deepen collaboration in R&I, position Irish TUs strongly for the 10th Framework Programme, and bring SME partners into European research consortia that they could not access independently.

Priority 3

3

Deliver the strategic enablers for TUs

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1. Advance Professorial Appointments and associated Academic Contracts
2. Recognise the massive impact of increasing non-pay costs
3. Invest in critical campus digital infrastructure
4. Strengthen Ireland's leadership in the European Universities initiative
5. Maintain vitally important momentum in providing Student Accommodation
6. Enable the TU sector to benefit from a borrowing framework capacity
7. Safeguard international collaborations and student pipeline with international student visa scheme

Priority 3

1. Advance Professorial Appointments and associated Academic Contracts

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Commit to expanding Professorial appointments beyond the initial 50, providing TUs with the flexibility to appoint Professors through a combination of core funding, research income and other revenue streams in line with institutional strategic need.

Initiate the modernisation of TU academic contracts as a priority strand of the forthcoming public sector pay agreement Reform Programme for Higher Education, with a defined completion timeline, and prioritising the introduction of associate professor grades.

The landmark decision to introduce Professorial grades in the Technological University sector marked a significant milestone in the maturation of TUs as universities. The appointment of fifty Professors across the five Technological Universities during 2026 and 2027 represents an important first step. However, to fully realise their mission, TUs must have the flexibility to appoint Professors in line with their strategic priorities and evolving needs, supported through **a mix of core funding, competitive research funding, industry partnerships and other income streams**.

The introduction of Professorial grades highlights the need to progress the broader recommendations of the 2022 OECD Review of Academic Grades in the Technological University Sector.

2. Recognise the massive impact of increasing non-pay costs

Budget 2027 recommendations:

Provide a recurrent grant uplift in 2027 that reflects actual inflationary cost increases in energy, facilities management, and construction, based on verified sector-wide cost data submitted to the HEA.

Technological Universities are experiencing the same inflationary and cost pressures affecting the wider economy. Budget 2027 must recognise these unavoidable cost increases and provide a corresponding uplift in recurrent grant funding.

Failure to do so will **erode institutional capacity and reduce the resources available for teaching, research, student supports and strategic development.**

3. Invest in critical campus digital infrastructure

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Establish a successor digital infrastructure programme providing multi-annual capital for integrated TU digital systems, student record systems consolidation, and equitable student access to AI tools with an allocation of €150m over a five-year period.

A number of sector-specific funding initiatives have been implemented to address the evolving needs of the emerging TU sector. Notably, the NRRP funded N-TUTORR[9] programme explicitly addressed both the sector's regional remit(s) and the TURN report[10] key recommendation to enable "*investment in integrated multi-campus digital infrastructure to provide regional cohesion and to facilitate new modes of learning and the prioritisation of capital investment in TUs.*" The ambitious N-TUTORR programme of defined investment over a two-year period demonstrated the sector's capacity to mobilise in an agile, flexible, and collaborative manner. **The programme's agreed targets were exceeded.**

Further major investment is required to fully achieve integration across multi-campus institutions. For the TU sector, **transfer of craft apprenticeships** and associated sharing of data across multiple FET and HE providers exemplify further **increasing demand and higher expectations** of underpinning data systems. Planned development of the HEA Student Record System 2.0 will also present additional demands and developmental challenges for institutional student data systems.

Technological development, including artificial intelligence, continues to present opportunities and challenges to all education providers. Appropriate, and equitable, access for students to artificial intelligence tools with similar capabilities requires continued investment to address digital inequality. Higher education institutions also need to continually invest in cyber security-related measures, as these threats continue to expand.

9 National Technological University TransfOrmation for Recovery and Resilience (N-TUTORR) project | Policy | Higher Education Authority and www.transforminglearning.ie

10 TU Research Network (TURN) | Higher Education Authority

4. Strengthen Ireland's leadership in the European Universities initiative

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Invest €500,000 per Technological University to strengthen Ireland's leadership role in the European Universities mission.

The European Universities Initiative (EUI) underpins networks of universities in Europe which aim to boost the excellence dimension of higher education, research and innovation, while promoting geographic balance, European values including gender equality, inclusiveness, and equity. Six TUA member institutions participate in EUI Alliances.

One of the key challenges of the Alliance programme to date has been that of funding, as a result of both the programmatic approach by the European Commission through Erasmus+ (and all the limitations imposed by that), and also by the ad hoc nature of Irish support provided by DFHERIS.

The establishment of a dedicated multi-annual fund to support Irish TU partners in the Alliances is urgently needed. Such funding will enable Irish universities to underpin the viability of their respective Alliances and to ensure that the benefits are maximised.

In the last year, the financial environment for EUI Alliances has become more precarious. Growing pressures on the EU budget and competing spending priorities risk constraining future investment in higher education collaboration at a time when the EUI programme is beginning to demonstrate its full potential.

5. Maintain vitally important momentum in providing Student Accommodation

The TUA has welcomed the publication of the National Student Accommodation Strategy 2026 -2035. The first phase will advance proposals in Dublin, Cork and Galway, with Waterford, Limerick and Athlone following in the subsequent phase, and Tralee, Carlow, Sligo and Letterkenny thereafter.

We would like to see momentum being maintained across all phases, particularly where there are projects at an advanced stage of preparation.

6. Enable the TU sector to benefit from a borrowing framework capacity

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Expedite the implementation of the TU borrowing framework for student accommodation and establish a pathway to broader borrowing powers for strategic infrastructure investment.

For the first time, the Student Accommodation Strategy provides a pathway for Technological Universities to access a borrowing framework for the TU Sector. The commitment by the key Government departments and agencies to develop an appropriate borrowing framework represents a significant and welcome policy shift. Enabling TUs to enter nomination agreements, even on a limited basis initially, will provide an important proof of concept and **help unlock additional accommodation capacity for students**.

It is essential that the Government moves quickly to implement these arrangements and ensures that the necessary financial mechanisms, controls and safeguards are put in place without delay. However, this should be viewed as the beginning rather than the end of the process.

7. Safeguard international collaborations and student pipeline

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Maintain streamlined migration and visa pathways for international students and academics through a coordinated cross-government approach that supports Ireland's higher education, skills and innovation objectives.

International learners and academics play a critical enabling role in delivering these statutory functions. Their presence strengthens international academic collaboration, supports globally relevant research and innovation, enriches the learning environment, and reinforces the global connectivity required of a Technological University.

It is essential that pathways for international learners and academics remain accessible and efficient. To achieve this, there must be a coordinated approach across higher education institutions, the Departments of Foreign Affairs, Justice, and Further and Higher Education as well as agencies such as QQI and Enterprise Ireland. Ireland's migration policy should continue to support the attraction and retention of international talent, ensuring that our **higher education system, workforce and economy can continue to benefit from their contribution.**

Priority 4

4

Unlock the National Training Fund to enable TUs address key national priorities

1. Helping TUs to further support infrastructure Delivery and Construction
2. Keep Ireland near the forefront of Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence
3. Support Ireland in achieving its climate action goals
4. Support scaling of Indigenous Enterprise
5. Play a critical role in Healthcare Workforce Planning

Priority 4

The European Commission's 2026 Country Report for Ireland provides an authoritative assessment of the structural challenges that will shape Ireland's economic policy over the coming decade. More than 80% of Irish businesses report significant skills shortages that are undermining productivity and competitiveness; public investment in research and development remains below that of comparable economies; and regional disparities in innovation and economic activity persist.

Technological Universities are uniquely positioned to respond.

Through their strong regional presence, close engagement with enterprise, and focus on applied research and workforce development, TUs play a critical role in strengthening Ireland's talent pipeline, innovation capacity and regional economies.

The National Training Fund (NTF) is the most appropriate mechanism through which this investment should be channelled. With a surplus of approximately €2 billion and a statutory mandate to support training, upskilling and reskilling, the NTF is specifically designed to address the skills shortages that now represent **one of the most significant constraints on Ireland's future growth and competitiveness**.

Given the critical role of skills in delivering national priorities, including housing and infrastructure, healthcare workforce expansion, digital transformation, AI readiness, climate action and indigenous enterprise growth, a portion of the NTF surplus should be deployed through a ring-fenced, time-limited and outcomes-driven investment programme.

1. Helping TUs to further support infrastructure delivery and construction

Budget 2027 Recommendation:

Establish a dedicated Construction Skills and Capacity Programme, via the National Training Fund, providing workshop, laboratory and simulation infrastructure to expand apprenticeship and construction training intake.

Formally integrate TU construction and built environment programme planning and expertise into the national housing and infrastructure delivery framework, with multi-annual place funding aligned to housing output targets.

Housing and infrastructure delivery is Ireland's most acute domestic policy challenge.

Meeting housing demand will require coordinated investment across the full construction talent pipeline, encompassing trade apprenticeships, professional disciplines, and a **new generation of digitally enabled and sustainability-focused construction roles that have emerged in recent years.**

Technological Universities are the primary construction workforce development partner in Ireland:

- **The TU sector delivers most of the craft apprenticeship nationally**, including electrical, plumbing, carpentry, bricklaying, and a growing range of modern trades
- In the context of a projected shortfall[11] of more than 2200 surveyors over the next four years, 29 of the 33 SCSI-listed programmes are delivered by TUs; the MSc Advanced Quantity Surveyor Apprenticeship launches in September 2026.
- TUs have active research programmes in Modern Methods of Construction, offsite manufacturing, Building Information Modelling, and sustainable building technologies
- **TUA members are key providers of retrofit-related upskilling:** energy assessment, heat pump installation, and building energy rating.

2. Keep Ireland near the forefront of Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence

Budget 2027 Recommendation:

Establish a National Digital and AI Skills Fund, via the NTF, expanding practitioner-level programme capacity, upgrading laboratory infrastructure, and funding regional SME digital engagement and cybersecurity clinic programmes.

The convergence of artificial intelligence, automation, and advanced digital technologies is reshaping the global economy at a pace and scale unprecedented in modern history. Evidence from the ESRI[12], OECD[13], and IMF[14] consistently shows that approximately 40% of Irish jobs, approximately 900,000 to 1 million roles, are exposed to significant transformation from AI-driven change over the coming decade. This represents not only disruption, but also a major opportunity, provided the necessary skills and workforce capacity are in place.

Ireland's National Digital Strategy and AI Strategy both recognise the central importance of skills development in enabling a digital society. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) Skills Insights Note 2026[15] further highlights that, over the medium to long term, **labour supply constraints and digital capability gaps will become one of the defining constraints on economic growth.**

11 Employment Outlook For The Surveying Profession 2026–2029 – Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland

12 https://www.esri.ie/publications/artificial-intelligence-and-income-inequality-in-ireland

13 https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/11/job-creation-and-local-economic-development-2024-country-notes_65d489c5/ireland_fcfbfed2/4b65ba5a-en.pdf

14 https://www.imf.org/en/news/articles/2026/05/25/mcs052526-ireland-staff-concluding-statement-2026-article-iv-mission

15 https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/skills-needs-for-ireland-in-the-long-term.pdf

Ireland is facing a critical shortage of practitioner-level digital talent, including cybersecurity analysts, cloud engineers, data specialists, software developers, and AI deployment professionals, particularly in the SME and public service organisations that account for the majority of employment. Technological Universities are the primary national avenue for developing this workforce.

TUs also play a central role in flexible upskilling for the existing workforce. Through part-time, online, and apprenticeship pathways, they enable workers across all regions to acquire advanced digital competencies without exiting employment, a critical requirement for SMEs and public sector organisations undergoing rapid digital transformation.

3. Support Ireland in achieving its climate action goals

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Formally integrate TUs into national climate workforce planning frameworks, ensuring that skills pipeline projections underpinning the Climate Action Plan are reflected in TU funded place allocations.

Ireland is not on track to meet its 2030 climate targets across greenhouse gas reduction, renewable deployment, retrofitting, sustainable transport, or circular economy transition. Each of these gaps has a workforce and research dimension. TUs are huge drivers of meeting Ireland's climate targets:

- **Workforce for the green transition:** TUs train engineers, technicians, and environmental specialists who design, build, and maintain renewable energy infrastructure, water systems, transport networks, and sustainable buildings. Planning authority technical capacity, grid engineering, and offshore wind expertise are all areas where TU graduates work.
- **Applied research in climate technologies:** TU research centres and Technology Gateways are active in energy systems, sustainable agriculture, climate-resilient infrastructure, and circular economy.
- **Curriculum integration:** the N-TUTORR programme embedded Education for Sustainability as one of six overarching themes across all TU institutions, creating graduates with sustainability literacy integrated into their disciplinary learning.
- **Campus as a living laboratory:** TU campuses across 18 counties can serve as regional exemplars of climate innovation such as heat pumps and solar energy, with learning impact extending into local communities and enterprise partners.

4. Support scaling of Indigenous Enterprise

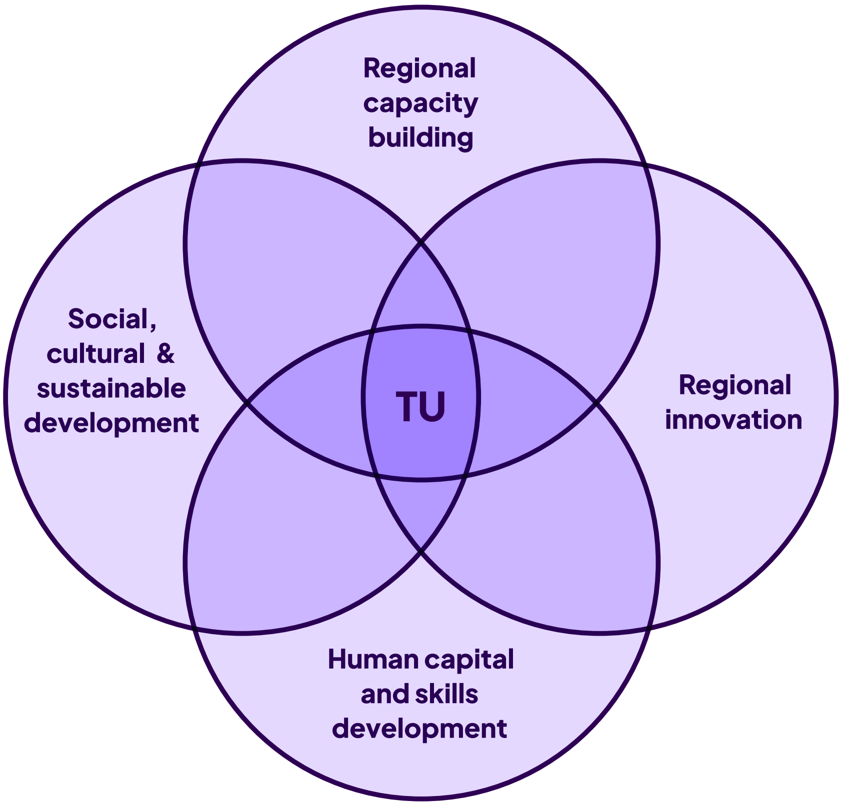
Budget 2027 recommendation:

Establish a TU-SME Innovation Scaling Fund to provide matched funding for collaborative R&D and innovation projects between Technological Universities and high-potential indigenous firms.

The EU 2026 Country Report[16] identifies Ireland's over-dependence on a small number of foreign multinationals as **the defining structural economic vulnerability**. Irish SMEs lag EU peers in productivity, R&D investment, and international engagement. The Country Report is explicit: addressing this requires "bridging the gap between academic research and commercial application" and "ensuring a steady flow of talent and research infrastructure".

TUs are the primary institutions through which this gap is bridged in the regions. Technology Gateways provide the direct collaborative R&D considered most effective for SMEs. TU graduate pipelines put applied, technical talent into regional SMEs. TU incubators support indigenous start-ups. TU campuses co-locate multinationals and domestic firms, creating the knowledge spillovers and supply chain linkages.

Figure 3: Higher education in a national and regional context[17]



16 https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-surveillance-eu-member-states/country-pages-including-country-reports/country-report-ireland_en

17 hea_forward-look_forum_26.11.14_discussion_paper_1.pdf

5. Play a critical role in Healthcare Workforce Planning

Budget 2027 recommendation:

Establish a multi-annual capital programme for healthcare simulation and clinical skills infrastructure on TU campuses, funded via the National Training Fund.

Expand healthcare programme places across TU campuses in line with HSE workforce planning projections.

Ireland's healthcare system faces mounting and compounding structural pressure. The Sláintecare reform programme's defining ambition to enhance community and primary care is dependent on the availability of skilled health professionals, trained and working at regional level.

TU graduates account for 75% of all social work and counselling graduates nationally, 63% of all childcare and youth services graduates and 41% of all medical diagnostic and treatment technology graduates. Recent developments, including the introduction of pharmacy programmes in ATU (Sept 2025) and SETU (Sept 2026) demonstrate the sector's capacity to respond rapidly to identified workforce gaps.

TUA members are ready to expand healthcare provision immediately. The constraint is infrastructure, not ambition: simulation suites and clinical skills laboratories are at capacity on multiple campuses, limiting intake even where employer demand and qualified applicants exist.

Conclusion

The conditions that generated exceptional headline growth in Ireland are changing. The structural vulnerabilities masked by multinational concentration, including lagging domestic SME sector, widening regional disparities, critical skills gaps, and under-resourced public infrastructure, are now **the defining challenges for the decade ahead.**

Technological Universities are **integral** to the response to these challenges. TUs train the workers required to address the housing crisis. They produce the digital practitioners the SME skills gap demands. They deliver the applied research that enables indigenous companies to innovate and scale. They support the success of students who would not otherwise access higher education at all.

Budget 2027 is an opportunity to match the ambition of the Programme for Government with the investment that this ambition requires. TUA's asks are targeted, evidence-based, and directly aligned with the Government's own stated priorities. The sector has already demonstrated that it can absorb investment and deliver outcomes: the N-TUTORR programme, TU RISE, the Technology Gateway expansion, and the growth in competitive research income all demonstrate this. What is needed now is a funding model that is sustained, structural, and commensurate with the scale of the national role TUs are being asked to play.

TUA stands ready to work with Government and the state agencies to ensure that that every euro of Budget 2027 investment in the TU sector delivers maximum impact for students, enterprises, regions, and the country.

Appendix 1: Delivering Impact – Summary of TU RISE Initiatives

Rural Innovation Hubs: SETU used funds to open four regional hubs (in Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford, and Wexford) to provide entrepreneurs and SMEs with direct access to university researchers and enterprise supports.

Enterprise-Embedded Researchers: SETU awarded PhD scholarships and Postdoctoral fellowships that require candidates to spend 12 months physically embedded in a partner enterprise to address real-world industry challenges. RISE@ATU has placed 60 PhD students in enterprise-linked research projects aligned with regional priorities. Ten postdoctoral researchers lead collaborative initiatives with industry, helping to address real-world challenges and accelerate innovation.

Industry-Focused Postgraduate Opportunities: Over 150 PhD scholarships were offered at TUs and DkIT to expand, train and develop TU R&I human capital to ensure delivery of impactful R&I outcomes in line with regional needs. IADT's targeted "Elevate" programme offers fully funded Masters by Research scholarships focused on Screen, Design, and Policy to boost Ireland's creative sectors.

Industry-Academia and targeted Research Projects: TU Dublin established the ARISE programme, connecting university researchers with businesses to develop new products and processes that give companies a competitive edge.

CREATE-DkIT addresses real-world challenges faced by enterprises in Connected Health and Wellbeing, Climate and Natural Resources through enterprise-focused Postgraduate Scholarships, Postdoctoral Fellowships and Research Fellows.

TUS RISE supports the development of innovative, high-value products and services, aligned with regional specialisms, strengths and expertise in Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering; Biopharma, Life Sciences and Food; ICT and Creative Industries, and Sustainable Development.

Education & Upskilling: CREATE-DkIT advances synergies between DkIT's R&I agenda, regional needs and the teaching at academic schools by creating enterprise-centric research training opportunities, including industry-focused structured PhD pathways and Summer Undergraduate Research Projects.

MTU's Research to Impact provides a pipeline of R&I-skilled graduates and staff who, through their engagement with regional enterprise and community stakeholders, can stimulate more industry-led sustainable R&I outcomes across the key industry sectors and entirety of the southern region.

Enhanced Industry and Enterprise Engagement: TUS RISE supports for enterprise and entrepreneurship is provided through initiatives such as TUS Works (entrepreneurship pre-accelerator programme for researchers in TUS), industrial immersion and mentorship programmes, industrial workplace exchanges, expert-in-residence programme.

RISE@ATU is designed to deliver tangible benefits for over 230 enterprises, including training, placements, mentoring, and co-created research helping businesses innovate, grow, and connect with ATU's research expertise.

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