

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Atlantaigh

Atlantic Technological University



EDI Steering Group Annual Report 2024/25

EDI Steering Group Annual Report *December 2025*

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Purpose of this Report

The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Steering Group produces this annual report to provide transparency and accountability in advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion across Atlantic Technological University.

The report outlines progress on key initiatives, identifies challenges, and highlights actions taken during the academic year.

As part of its governance responsibilities, the Steering Group reports to the University Planning Team and shares this report with the Governing Body and all staff.

This ensures that EDI remains a core consideration in planning, policy, and practice throughout the University.

The report also supports continuous improvement and demonstrates compliance with national frameworks, including the HEA Gender Action Plan and Athena Swan Ireland Charter, ensuring that institutional actions align with sector-wide standards and best practice.

This report will be published on the EDI SharePoint, accessible to staff and students, and will also be publicly available on the ATU website.

Structure and Responsibilities of the EDI Steering Group

The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Steering Group provides leadership and accountability for embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion across all aspects of university life.

It oversees the implementation of EDI objectives, supports working groups, and ensures alignment with national frameworks and institutional plans.

The Group reports to the University Planning Team and contributes to good governance through annual reviews and progress reporting.

Membership ranges from 12 to 20 representatives drawn from academic and functional areas, ensuring gender balance and geographic representation.

The Vice President for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Online Development chairs the Group. Members may include staff from faculties, HR, Student Services, and EDI, with the option to invite specialists as needed.

The Steering Group meets at least four times per academic year, with additional meetings convened at the request of the Governing Body or President.

The table presented on the next page shows each member's attendance at the five scheduled meetings of the EDI Steering Group during the 2024/25 academic year.

Ainm	lonadaí	Attendance
Jacqueline McCormack (Chair)	Vice President EDI & Online Development	4/5
AnneMarie McCormack	Representative from Academic Affairs	4/5
Breda McTaggart No longer with ATU	Faculty Head representing Business & Social Sciences Faculty Grouping	2/3
Cait Noone	Faculty Head representing Creative and Cultural Practices Faculty Grouping	3/5
Chris O'Malley	VP representing Research & Engagement VPs	1/5
Des O'Reilly	Head of Dept representing Engineering Faculty Grouping	3/4
Gerald Gavin Medical leave	Representative from Academic Affairs	2/5
Jerry Bird Retired	Faculty Head representing Science Faculty Grouping	1/1
Mary Nestor Extended leave	EDI lead, ATU Galway Mayo	2/5
Rod Toner	Representative from HR	3/5
Debbie Molloy	Representative from Students, T&L	4/5
Rory McMorrow	Representative from Students, T&L	4/5
Sharon McLaughlin	EDI lead, ATU Donegal	5/5
Simon Stephens	Representative from Academic Affairs	4/5
Suresh Pillai	Senior academic from Faculty of Science	2/5
Thomas Smyth	Faculty Head representing Science Faculty Grouping	5/5
Tom Reilly	EDI lead, ATU Sligo	4/5

Progressing ATU's Compliance with the Public Sector Duty

Under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, all public bodies must eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect human rights for staff and service users.

This Duty requires ATU to embed equality and human rights across all functions and integrate these commitments into strategic planning and annual reporting. Implementation must be organisation-wide, led by senior management and supported by staff with relevant expertise.

Section 42(2) obliges public bodies to publish a human rights and equality assessment in their strategic plan, outline policies and actions to address identified issues, and report annually on progress in an accessible format. ATU is not yet meeting these obligations. The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission's monitoring report for 2024 notes that 42% of third-level institutions fully or partially complied with assessment and reporting requirements.

IHREC recommends embedding responsibility for the Duty within existing structures such as senior management teams, planning or risk forums, or committees like the EDI Steering Group. For larger organisations, a dedicated unit is considered beneficial.

ATU is advancing its implementation of Section 42. The ATU Performance Agreement 2024–2028 commits to training the Governing Body, its EDI Subcommittee, UPT, and the EDI Steering Group on their responsibilities under the Duty.

To deliver this, the EDI team has scheduled familiarisation sessions for these four bodies, concluding in December 2025. The sessions will cover legal requirements, key steps for implementation, opportunities and challenges, and the role of organisational values.

Sessions are facilitated by Niall Crowley, an independent equality and human rights consultant since 2009. Niall's work spans policy advice, organisational development, research, and training at national and European levels. Formerly CEO of the Equality Authority and co-founder of Values Lab, he has pioneered values-led approaches to equality and human rights and supported numerous public sector organisations, including universities and ETBs, in implementing the Duty.

Once the familiarisation sessions conclude, the EDI team will draft a recommendation for the Steering Group outlining next steps for ATU in fulfilling its statutory Public Sector Duty under Section 42 of the 2014 Act. These steps will set out how ATU will assess its functions, identify and address equality and human rights issues relevant to those functions, and report annually on the actions taken and outcomes achieved.

Driving Equality Through the Athena Swan Bronze Award Process

ATU's commitment to gender equality advanced significantly this year with the successful submission of its inaugural Athena Swan Bronze Award application. This achievement reflects extensive collaboration across the university and marks a major milestone in embedding Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion principles into ATU's culture and governance.

The application process was informed by a university-wide Athena Swan Staff Survey, launched across all campuses on 7 October 2024. Staff participation was critical, and the survey achieved a strong response rate of 40%, with 980 colleagues contributing from all campuses and staff groups. The survey was approved by ATU's Ethics Committee to allow future use and publication of the data. This engagement was supported by over 30 Equality Champions, who actively promoted participation on their respective campuses.

Following the survey, focus groups were held to gain deeper insights into emerging issues. Data from both the survey and focus groups was analysed by Ortus Research, and key findings informed targeted recommendations to address structural and cultural barriers to gender equality.

The Self-Assessment Team (SAT), established in December 2023 and chaired by ATU lecturer Mary Loftus supported by EDI gender equality lead Tom Reilly, led this work with six dedicated working groups formed in February 2024. SAT met monthly and engaged widely across the university, presenting emerging themes and proposed actions to the University Planning Team, the EDI Subcommittee of the Governing Body, the EDI Steering Group, HR Managers, all-staff meetings, and online briefings. Staff and management provided constructive input, helping refine the final recommendations.

Further dissemination took place throughout April and May via infographics, EDI communication channels, posters, and campus screens. Once finalised, the application moved through governance structures for submission in June 2025.

The Athena Swan Ireland Charter provides a framework for institutions to advance meaningful, sustainable gender equality through evidence-based approaches, supporting compliance with Irish equality legislation and addressing structural inequalities.

Developing ATU's Gender Action Plan 2026–28

As part of the Athena Swan process, the SAT developed ATU's next Gender Action Plan 2026-28 submitted alongside the Bronze Award application to drive measurable progress in gender equality . This new plan succeeds the current plan, which concludes at the end of this year. 49% of actions in the existing plan are complete, 29% are in progress, and 22% remain unachieved.

The 2026-28 plan incorporates a critical review of outstanding actions, barriers to implementation, and opportunities for renewed prioritisation. It is structured around SMART goals to ensure measurable, meaningful progress in advancing gender equality across all areas of the university. All progress reports, the submitted application, and the new Gender Action Plan will be accessible via the EDI SharePoint and published on the ATU website for public access.

The strong collaboration and support from staff and management were and will continue to be vital in meeting ATU's gender equality commitments and ambitions over the coming years. Sincere thanks are extended to Mary Loftus, Chair of the SAT, and the SAT members, most of whom volunteered their time and expertise in addition to their core responsibilities.

Growing Leadership Capacity Through the Aurora Programme

Aurora is an annual leadership development programme delivered by Advance HE, designed to support academic and professional staff who are not currently part of senior management.

The programme helps participants explore and strengthen leadership capabilities through interactive workshops on identity, influence, power, politics, and adaptive leadership, supplemented by networking opportunities. ATU enhances the programme with mentee training and mentoring relationships with senior staff.

In 2024/25, 14 participants were supported through ATU's EDI budget at a total cost of €21,055. This included programme fees, mentoring training, and an additional tailored people management session. To date, 109 women from across ATU have completed Aurora, representing approximately 6.66% of ATU's female workforce.

Participation in Aurora is a key action within ATU's Gender Action Plan and supports commitments under the Technological Universities Act (2018), the HEA Performance Agreement, and ATU's Strategic Plan. These commitments include advancing gender equality, implementing the Gender Action Plan, and achieving an Athena Swan Bronze Award.

A competitive Expression of Interest process in September 2024 attracted 28 applications, with places offered to 14 women. Selection was based on responses to four weighted questions assessing motivation, anticipated benefits, departmental impact, and leadership experience.

Participant Feedback:

- All respondents would recommend Aurora to colleagues.
- Most reported full attendance and rated the programme as extremely useful for developing leadership skills and confidence.
- Participants highlighted the value of mentoring and networking and suggested more opportunities for early engagement and in-person interaction.
- Six respondents expressed interest in contributing to an ATU-wide women's network.

Next Steps:

Feedback will inform the 2025/26 programme, including an introductory session, earlier mentoring, and enhanced networking opportunities. Expressions of Interest for the next cohort will open September 2025. An Aurora Alumni page has been launched on ATU's Workvivo platform, and discussions on an ATU-wide women's network will continue.

Increasing Female Participation in STEM Through STEM Passport

On 4 November 2024, ATU hosted its STEM Passport Awards Ceremony at its Sligo campus, celebrating the achievements of over 400 transition year students from Roscommon, Mayo, Galway, Sligo, and Donegal TY who were a awarded a Level 6 NFQ.

The STEM Passport for Inclusion Programme, created by Dr Katriona O'Sullivan of Maynooth University and supported by Science Foundation Ireland, Microsoft, and Optum, aims to address inequalities in access to STEM careers among students from socially disadvantaged communities. The programme combines hands-on experience in programming and technology with mentoring on STEM career pathways.

In Ireland, there are three times as many male graduates as female graduates in Information and Communication Technologies (Higher Education Outcomes Report). ATU is working across its nine campuses to increase female participation in STEM courses and is proud to partner on this initiative.

ATU's STEM Passport programme actively encourages DEIS schools to apply for places for the 2025/26 school years, ensuring that opportunities reach those who stand to benefit most.

Embedding Race & Ethnic Equality, and Antiracism Across ATU

In line with the HEA Race Equality Implementation Plan, ATU has established a university-wide Race Equality Working Group to develop an institutional action plan that embeds antiracism principles across policies, procedures, curriculum, and culture.

Expressions of Interest to join the Working Group opened in May, with priority given to colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds with lived experience, alongside ensuring gender balance, campus representation, and diversity of roles and career stages. Student representation is also included.

The Group held its first in-person meeting on 5 September 2024 at ATU Mayo, facilitated by Dr Lucy Michael, co-author of the HEA Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector, which informed the HEA Antiracism Principles for Higher Education Institutions. At this meeting, the

Group agreed its mission, priority actions, and draft Terms of Reference. It has continued to meet every six weeks over an 18-month period to progress the ATU Race Equality Action Plan, supported by the EDI Office.

The Group commissioned Dr Michael to lead a consultation process involving four focus groups with management, staff, students, and external partners. These discussions identified systemic challenges and opportunities, including underrepresentation of minority groups in leadership roles, inconsistent diversity practices across campuses, and experiences of exclusion on smaller sites. Participants also highlighted the need to integrate diversity into teaching and campus life, address structural barriers, and strengthen policy implementation. Existing initiatives, such as the ATU Access Programme, were recognised as valuable foundations.

Priority actions emerging from the consultation include:

- Developing comprehensive race equality policies with clear accountability structures.
- Increasing recruitment and progression of minority ethnic staff, particularly into leadership roles.
- Embedding global perspectives and diverse voices in the curriculum.
- Expanding culturally relevant extracurricular activities and student supports.
- Standardising race equality practices across all campuses and strengthening community partnerships.

The Working Group has draft targeted actions and proposed mechanisms for university-wide feedback to ensure the plan reflects lived experiences and priorities. It will also advise on monitoring frameworks, including KPIs and data collection, to track implementation and impact. The draft plan has been circulated to university committees in Q4 2025 with a view to finalisation and launch in Q1 2026.

To support engagement, the Working Group launched the **#CountMeIn** campaign across all campuses. This initiative, delivered in partnership with Students' Unions and Libraries, aims to foster a shared sense of responsibility and solidarity in advancing race equality within ATU and its wider communities.

Preventing & Responding to Gender-Based Violence

ATU is committed to fostering a safe and respectful environment for all. The RESPECT team's bespoke training programme, Compassionate Prevention Response (CPR) for Gender-Based Violence, has been delivered to staff and student groups both in person and online, reaching 174 participants. To enhance this training, scripts have been developed for explainer videos featuring student actors, scheduled for production in April. Additional videos, including 'Know the Law' with Caroline Counihan BL, have also been recorded.

Consent education remains a priority. Between October 2024 and April 2025, 591 students completed the Consent Matters sessions, and over 2,400 students have participated in Active Consent workshops during the 2024/25 academic year (excluding apprentices who will complete training later in the academic year).

Policy development has progressed significantly. The Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence Policy was approved by the Governing Body in December 2024. Trade unions have been consulted on the procedures for reporting and investigating allegations against staff, while procedures for student cases have been presented to the University Planning Team. Approval and implementation of these procedures, alongside the training of Gender-Based Violence Support Officers, remain key priorities.

ATU marked the 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence (25 November to the 10 December) with a series of impactful events. Activities included raising the orange flag for Orange the World Day, illuminating campuses, and displaying awareness banners to signal ATU's zero-tolerance stance. Over 1,400 people engaged in seminars, panel discussions, and awareness stands across campuses. Local services including Gardaí, Rape Crisis Centres, Domestic Violence Services, and the Soroptimists joined ATU staff and students in solidarity. Highlights included an exhibition by Donegal Rape Crisis Centre showcasing art created through therapeutic engagement.

In January 2025, ATU hosted the 'Thriving' Conference in partnership with Health and Wellbeing, bringing together over 80 participants and international experts to explore compassionate leadership, trauma-informed practices, and inclusive campus approaches. This event underscored the positive impact of compassion-driven strategies on creating a safer, more supportive environment for all.

Promoting Age-Inclusive Practice as an Age-Friendly University

At the start of 2025 ATU achieved a significant milestone in its commitment to equity and inclusion by joining the Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network, a growing international community dedicated to promoting positive and active aging through teaching, research, engagement, and inclusive practice. This designation reflects ATU's broader efforts to create an age-inclusive environment for learners and staff across all campuses.

The application process was led by Kate Brown, Lecturer in Intergenerational Learning at ATU Sligo, with support from the EDI team and endorsement from the EDI Steering Group. Contributions from staff, students, external partners, and ATU retirees informed the submission, highlighting how existing academic, research, and community engagement activities align with the Ten Principles of an Age-Friendly University. The proposal received final approval from the University Planning Team.

To celebrate this achievement, the AFU Working Group hosted a World Café event during the Age-Friendly Festival on the Sligo campus in April 2024. Organised by Margaret McLoone and her students, the event brought together older adults from the community to share experiences and perspectives on lifelong learning, offering valuable insights into how ATU can continue to foster a welcoming and accessible environment for learners of all ages.

Participation in the AFU Global Network positions ATU within a global movement that recognises the vital role of higher education in shaping an age-inclusive world. This commitment builds on ATU's strong foundation of intergenerational initiatives, including the Creative Generations Festival, supported by the EDI Activity Support Fund. In recognition of

this work, ATU was shortlisted for the National Age Friendly Recognition and Achievement Awards 2024 in the Active and Healthy Ageing category.

As a member of the AFU Global Network, ATU will continue to champion intergenerational learning and promote the contributions of older adults in academic and civic life, ensuring that age inclusivity remains central to its Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy.

Strengthening Inclusive Leadership Capability Across the University

ATU is a partner in a HEA-funded initiative to design and deliver an Inclusive Leadership Programme for the technological university sector, in collaboration with TUS, MTU, TU Dublin, SETU, IADT, and DkIT. The programme addresses a gap in leadership development opportunities within the sector and is delivered through an inclusive framework, open to managers of all genders—unlike the Aurora Programme, which is women-only.

The Level 9 minor award programme was piloted in 2024/25 across six dates between October and April. ATU participated with six managers, selected following an open call for expressions of interest. Feedback from the pilot was highly positive, and the programme will continue in 2025/26 with refinements based on participant evaluations.

ATU has committed to funding five participants for the next cycle, in line with partner institutions. While the projected cost is €1,500 per participant, a successful application to the HEA EDI Enhancement Fund has reduced costs for all participating universities.

Programme details and the call for expressions of interest opened in June, with applications closing on 1 September 2025.

Mainstreaming EDI Principles Through the Activity Support Fund

Following the success of last year's pilot, the EDI Activity Support Fund was reopened for the 2024/25 academic year. The fund aims to mainstream EDI principles across the university by providing financial support for innovative projects that would not otherwise be realised without funding. For 2024/25, priority themes included:

Collaboration & Inclusion – Projects promoting cross-campus collaboration and an inclusive, welcoming culture.

Awareness of the Public Sector Duty – Initiatives embedding PSD principles into ATU's operations to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and protect human rights. Intersectional Approaches to Gender Equality – Projects exploring how multiple identities intersect with gender in ATU from staff or student perspectives.

The fund was open to staff and students, with awards ranging from €500 to €3,000 per project. Collaborative and university-wide initiatives were encouraged.

As expected, the call was highly competitive, attracting 30 applications from across the university community. Funding was awarded to 11 projects for delivery during the academic year. Supported projects included:

- EU Green Annual Sports Event
- Poetic Justice Poetry Competition
- Creative Generations Festival
- ATU Equality Workshop Series
- Adventure for All Workshops
- Shared Spaces: Art, Dialogue, and Social Inclusion at ATU
- Period Promise Initiative
- Traveller Tinsmiths: Master Artisans James Collins and Tom McDonnell Demonstration
- Disability Awareness Training
- Common Ground Series of Podcasts
- Interactive Art Installation and Dialogue Workshops

The Tinsmith project did not proceed due to the ill-health of one of the artisans, and two of the projects (4, 10) have not yet been delivered.

Projects span a wide range of activities, including guest lectures, awareness campaigns, training, creative arts, and community engagement, reflecting ATU's commitment to advancing equality across all protected grounds and addressing socio-economic disadvantage.

ATU's Applications to the HEA EDI Enhancement Fund

The Higher Education Authority's (HEA) EDI Enhancement Fund supports initiatives that advance equality, diversity, and inclusion across Irish higher education. The fund prioritises projects in areas such as gender equality, race and ethnicity, and the prevention of sexual violence and harassment, and encourages collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to drive systemic change.

As part of the 2025 funding round, ATU partnered in four national projects:

1. Race Equality and Anti-Racism

This project aims to embed race equality and anti-racism principles across Irish higher education by training students and staff as changemakers, fostering inclusive cultures, and building institutional capacity aligned with the HEA Race Equality Implementation Plan and sector-wide commitments.

2. GAELIC Mentors (Gender Accessible & Equitable Learning in Introductory Chemistry) Led by UCD in partnership with ATU, TCD, and Stanford University, this project adapts Stanford Chemistry's STEMentor peer mentoring programme for first-year chemistry courses at UCD, ATU, and TCD. It seeks to enhance gender equity for women and non-binary students, addressing performance and retention barriers and advancing the HEA's gender equality priority. This application was successful.

3. Lead Inc – Strategic Inclusive Leadership

This cross-sectoral initiative focuses on developing and embedding inclusive leadership capacity within the technological university sector. It equips senior and aspiring leaders with the skills, knowledge, and peer supports needed to drive systemic cultural change aligned with key policy objectives, including the Second National Review of Gender Equality, the HEA Race Equality Implementation Plan, and the Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment Framework. This application was successful.

4. The Irish Higher Education Action and Response Toolkit for Stalking Project
To develop a national toolkit that guides Higher Education Institutions on how they can identify, prevent, and respond to stalking for all members of a HEI community.

All four proposals reflect ATU's ongoing commitment to embedding EDI principles across the institution and contributing to national sectoral progress.

Strengthening Inclusion Through EDI Networks and Activities

Over the past six months, ATU's EDI team, in collaboration with university partners, has delivered a wide range of initiatives aligned with international observances and cultural events. These activities aim to challenge discrimination, celebrate diversity, and foster belonging across ATU's campuses.

ATU's LGBTQIA+ Staff and Allies Network continues to meet monthly, providing a supportive space for colleagues and actively contributing to campus life. The network champions inclusion by hosting Space Cafés, organising stalls at ATU events, and supporting annual initiatives such as National Coming Out Day, LGBT+ History Month, and Pride. It also works closely with Student Societies to strengthen engagement and visibility. The Race Equality Network met on five occasions during 2024/25, offering an inclusive and open forum where the diversity of insight and lived experience among members informs and shapes ATU's ongoing commitment to race equality.

This programme forms part of ATU's strategic commitment to inclusive leadership development, ensuring that managers across the TU sector have access to high-quality, gender-inclusive opportunities to build leadership capability.

Black History Month's (Oct) international theme for Black History Month was Reclaiming Narratives. Highlights included:

Dr Ebun Joseph, Ireland's Special Rapporteur on Racial Equality & Racism, delivered an online keynote to a full audience at ATU Letterkenny, joined by Balume Amstrong Dube (Donegal Intercultural Platform) and ATU student Immanuel Chirwa. The discussion explored reclaiming narratives through media, literature, and the arts. A recording is available to all staff and students.

Nasya Mcjyn Igelige, a final-year law student, presented a poetry showcase at the Students' Union, followed by traditional African food and music hosted by the Afro-Caribbean Society.

ATU St Angela's hosted a conversation with Baisat Alawiye, founder of Minority Teachers Ireland and Maynooth SU VP for Welfare and Equality.

Libraries across all campuses featured book displays by Black and authors, supported by EDI promotional materials.

Students researched and celebrated Black and Brown academics in their disciplines.

EDI partnered with Galway Mayo Students' Union to launch a **refurbished Union Square** at the Galway Dublin Road campus as a culturally inclusive and accessible space. The design was co-created through consultations supported by an N-TUTORR fellowship, with additional funding from N-TUTORR, Students' Union, and Buildings & Estates. The launch featured music, dance, and food prepared by students.

On **International Men's Day** (Nov) a flagship event at Galway Dublin Road campus promoted wellbeing and connection among male students and was supported by local community partners.

During **LGBTQ+ History Month** (Feb) activities included library displays, an online reading and Q&A with Dr Páraic Kerrigan, drop-in desks across campuses, and workshops on allyship and inclusive language. A practical resource on LGBTQ+ terminology was circulated.

On **Traveller Ethnicity Day** (March) ATU campus libraries stocked Unsettled by Dr Rosaleen McDonagh, accompanied by bookmarks featuring a quote and photo from ATU postgraduate Leonie McDonagh and a QR code linking to ATU's Traveller and Roma Access to Education resources.

On **International Women's Day** (March) ATU's Period Promise initiative was launched, providing free sustainable period products across all nine campuses, alongside the studentled #NailTheStigma campaign.

ATU hosted an online discussion with Anastasia Crickley, former Chair of the UN CERD Committee, and ATU lecturer David Friel on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (April)

ATU Donegal Letterkenny campus hosted the **One Million Stars Project** (April) collaborative art installation promoting hope and solidarity against domestic violence, with star-weaving workshops across campuses.

On **International Roma Day** (April) ATU Library added The Roads of the Roma, an anthology celebrating Roma voices.

ATU's EDI team uses multiple channels to engage staff and students, including LinkedIn, Instagram, Workvivo, SharePoint, and a monthly all-staff and student update. There is an extensive range of human rights and equality resources on the EDI SharePoint available to staff and to students via the Student Hub.