



ATU supports the Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainability Impact Report 2025



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Tionól Réigiúnach an Tuaiscirt & an Iarthair
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HEA

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About the Editors



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Dr Sarah Carroll is the Organisational Impact Research Coordinator at ATU, funded under RISE@ATU. She leads the analysis and reporting on the university's research and innovation strategy in a business partnership between the Presidents' Office and Research, Innovation and Engagement. With a background in data analysis, public engagement in science, and impact evaluation, she is passionate about making complex topics easy to understand and demonstrating how university activities create real-world impact.



Dr James Britton

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Laura Gaughan

Laura Gaughan is the Sustainable Research Compliance Officer at ATU. She leads the Green Labs accreditation program, driving sustainability standards across all research laboratories within the university. Her role also involves ensuring that funding applications meet environmental and sustainability compliance requirements, supporting ATU's commitment to responsible research practices. With expertise in sustainability compliance and research governance, she is dedicated to promoting environmental responsibility into the research culture and fostering innovation that aligns with global sustainability goals.

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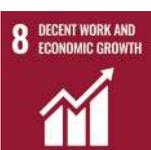
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Introduction

- A message from our President

Atlantic Technological University (ATU) stands at the forefront of a transformative era for higher education, research, and regional development. As a multi-campus university serving the North and West of Ireland, we embrace a unique responsibility: to lead by example in shaping a sustainable future for our communities and beyond. This Sustainability Impact Report reflects that commitment and captures the breadth and depth of our actions to embed sustainability across every facet of university life.

Our Strategic Plan 2024–2028 sets out five Guiding Lights that illuminate our path: Enabling Education, Engaged Research, Connected Ecosystem, Organisational Transformation, and Sustainability for the Future. This report focuses on the fifth light; our pledge to integrate environmental responsibility and social equity into the heart of our mission. It demonstrates how ATU is not only responding to global challenges but actively driving solutions that align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Ireland’s Climate Action Mandate.

From implementing ambitious decarbonisation targets and advancing biodiversity initiatives to fostering inclusive education and empowering communities, our impact is tangible. We have launched pioneering programmes such as the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Academy, introduced innovative research projects tackling climate resilience and water security, and championed grassroots initiatives like the Green Pantry Society and Zero Waste Challenge. These efforts are complemented by both strategic collaborations (locally, nationally, and internationally), and through partnerships such as the EU Green Alliance and PEACEPLUS projects, which amplify our capacity to deliver meaningful change.

Sustainability is not a peripheral goal; it is a defining principle of who we are and what we aspire to be.

Every action outlined in this report reflects our determination to create a university that educates for impact, innovates for resilience, and engages for equity across the West and Northwest region and beyond. Together, we are building a future where knowledge serves not only progress but also the planet and its people.

Dr Orla Flynn
ATU President/Uachtarán



“

As a multi-campus university serving the North and West of Ireland, we embrace a unique responsibility: to lead by example in shaping a sustainable future for our communities and beyond.

”

Our Strategic Plan for 2024-2028

Atlantic Technological University is a catalyst for nurturing positive change across our region. With nine vibrant campuses located across the Northern and Western Region of Ireland, we are uniquely positioned to shape the future of education, research, and enterprise engagement. Our strategic plan is built on five Guiding Lights: Enabling Education, Engaged Research, Connected Ecosystem, Organisational Transformation, and Sustainability for the Future. These lights illuminate our path towards achieving our Vision: becoming an internationally recognised university that enhances the quality of life in our region and creates a sustainable future for all.

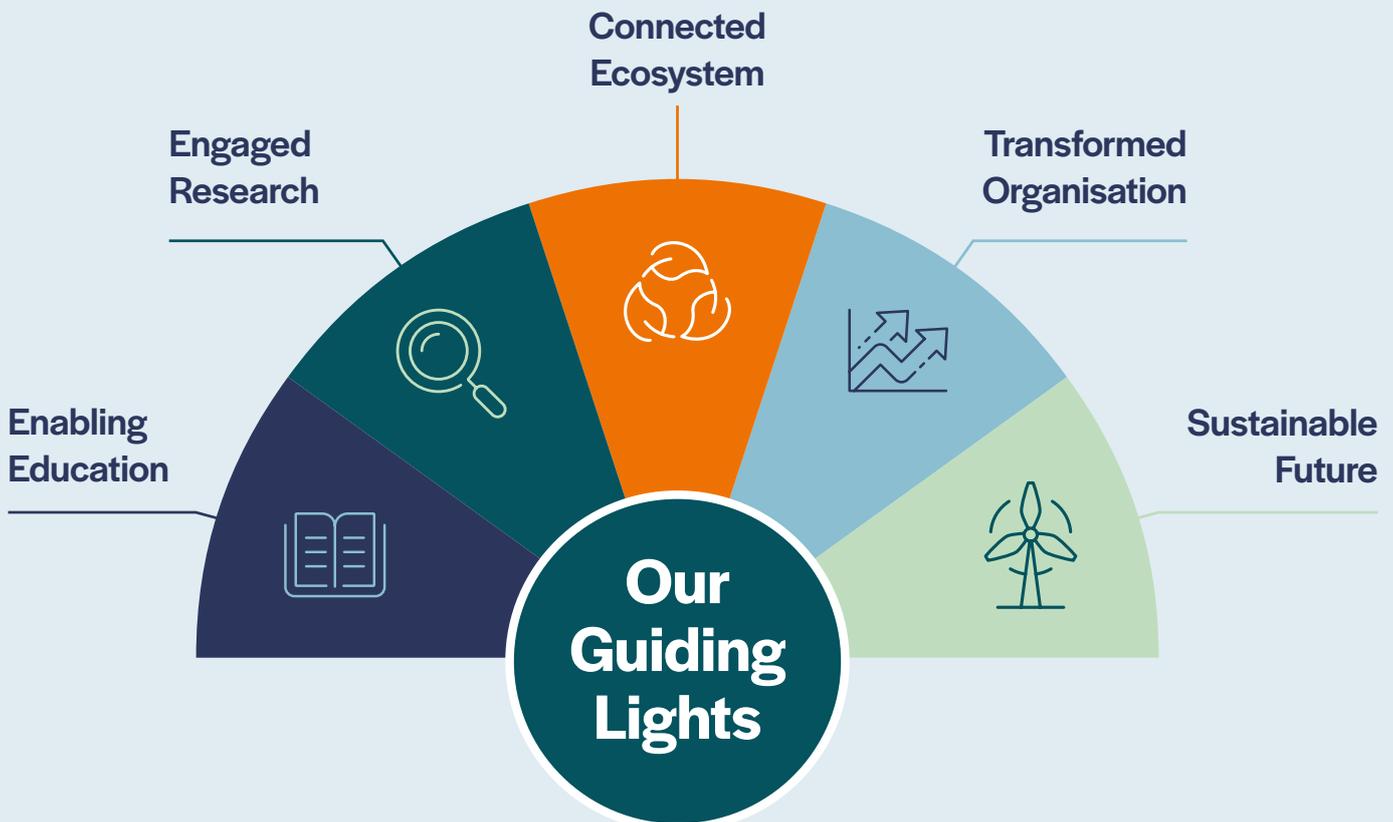
Our Mission, therefore, is to enrich our region by delivering academic and research excellence working collaboratively with regional, national and international partners. We will deliver on our Mission with steadfast commitment to our shared values: Inclusion, Respect, Innovation, Collaboration, Ambition and Trust.

Together, our Vision, Mission, Values, and five Guiding Lights lay the foundation for our strategic journey.

Our fifth Guiding Light, Sustainability for the Future, underscores our responsibility to nurture a sustainable society. We envision a university that not only educates but also leads by example in environmental responsibility and social impact, which is strongly reflected across this report.

Find out more about ATU's 2024-28 strategic plan at:

www.atu.ie/about/governance/strategic-plan



Sustainability Objective Areas



The guiding light ‘Sustainability for the future’ is underpinned by four strategic objective areas for 2024 -2028, across Governance and Accountability, Climate and Environmental Action, Education and Research, and Community and Social Responsibility

Throughout this report, in addition to being profiled against the SDGs, our activities are also categorised as being in alignment with each of these four strategic objective areas:



Governance & Accountability

- Set clear climate action and sustainability targets
- Move beyond compliance to adopt best practice where possible
- Embed sustainability in university policies, strategies and function units
- Ensure sustainability is a key component of decision-making



Climate and Environmental Action

- Implement transformative campus de-carbonisation
- Embed sustainability as a priority guiding principle in the University’s supply chain and procurement policies
- Promote sustainable transport
- Implement biodiversity and habitat protection across all campuses



Education & Research

- Embed climate action, sustainability and the SDGs across the curriculum and research activities
- Promote trans and interdisciplinary collaboration for sustainability, climate action and the SDGs
- Introduce a suite of sustainability-focused programmes
- Conduct impactful sustainability-focused research



Community and Social Responsibility

- Foster engagement of students and staff on sustainability and green campus initiatives
- Develop partnership and outreach activities to enhance sustainability
- Co-create and share learning resources with community and industry partners
- Promote equity and social justice as underpinning principles

Climate Action Roadmap



Ireland's Climate Action Plans 2021 (CAP21) and 2023 (CAP23) and now CAP 24 stipulate that the public sector will lead by example in delivering on Ireland's decarbonisation commitments.

The ATU Climate Action Roadmap demonstrates how the University aims to implement the Climate Action Mandate and meet its 2030 targets and ensuring compliance to the relevant legal obligations as identified in key legislative and policy obligations.



9
campuses



55
buildings/
buildings areas



20
Gwh energy use



156,000m²+
floor area

Our 2030 targets



Reduce GreenHouse
Gas (GHG) emissions
by 51%



Improve energy efficiency
by reducing use by
50% from **2006**
baseline



These goals align with Ireland's national commitments and reflect our determination

to create a resilient, low-carbon future.

Research Publication

Low-income earners feel the brunt of climate change, even in wealthy countries like Ireland and Spain



Article: [Public perceptions of climate risks, vulnerability, and adaptation strategies: Fuzzy cognitive mapping in Irish and Spanish living labs](#)

Authors & Affiliations: A. Tiwari (ATU), L. Campus (Vilanova I la Geltrú, Spain), S.R. Nalakirthi (ATU) & S. Gharbia (ATU)

Background: Europe is heating up fast, but many assume its wealth protects people from climate harm. Little is known about the adaptive capacities of different socio-economic groups: how well different individuals or communities cope with and respond to climate hazards.

What the researchers did: Interviewed over 150 people in Co.Sligo (Ireland) and the Basque Country (Spain), exploring how people perceive risk, their ability to adapt, and the role of local policies. They used a method called fuzzy cognitive mapping to understand how climate hazards like floods, heatwaves, and erosion affect daily life, beliefs, and behaviour.

What they found out: Vulnerable groups, especially women, immigrants, and low-income earners, feel the brunt of climate change. Irish respondents felt more vulnerable to climate hazards, as a great number reported that their day-to-day lives are affected, such as damage to homes, roads and recreational areas.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Vulnerable groups face greater risks and fewer resources to cope, threatening their livelihoods, health, and housing. The study highlights the need for equitable, locally tailored climate strategies.

Campus Initiative

ATU Letterkenny students launch the Green Pantry Society to reduce food waste



The summer of 2025 saw the launch of the **ATU Green Pantry society** in Letterkenny. This innovative student-led initiative aims to reduce food waste from supermarkets by redistributing surplus food among students, whilst fostering sustainability and community spirit.

The Green Pantry Society have partnered up with the **FoodCloud platform** and several local supermarkets in Letterkenny and further afield in Donegal. The pantry collects surplus foods such as items with damaged packaging, end-of-line products and foods nearing their sell-by dates.

In addition, the Green pantry has also joined forces with O'Hehirs canteen to collect Re-Turn bottles and cans at dedicated bins across the Letterkenny campus. The proceeds of the bottles & cans collected will be split equally between the **Donegal Hospice** and to be used to purchase bulk foodstuffs from the FoodCloud platform.

This food is then distributed to ATU students from the An Dánlann student centre, emphasising environmental responsibility and reducing food waste.



Photo Credit: Peter Reynolds



To date, the ATU Green Pantry has **diverted 1,135 kg of foodstuffs from landfill**, preventing an estimated 2,317 kg of CO² emissions - that's the equivalent of 2,702 meals!



Community & Social Responsibility

Reported Impact

Reduced 1,135 of food waste and improved student food access by redistributing surplus supermarket goods through a student-led initiative at ATU Letterkenny.

Research Publication

Using AI models to improve soil nutrition for crops



Article: [A novel application with explainable machine learning \(SHAP and LIME\) to predict soil N, P, and K nutrient content in cabbage cultivation](#)

Authors & Affiliations: . Abekoon (Water Resources Management Laboratory, Sri Lanka), H. Sajindra (Water Resources Management Laboratory, Sri Lanka), N. Rathayake (University of Tokyo), I. U. Ekanayake (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), A. Jayakody (Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology) & U. Rathnayake (ATU)



Background: Cabbage is a nutritionally rich crop widely cultivated for its dietary value and economic importance. Ensuring optimal soil nutrient levels, particularly nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) is essential for maximizing yield and supporting food security. Traditional fertilisation methods often lack precision, leading to inefficiencies and environmental concerns. There is a need for smarter, more sustainable agricultural practices by integrating artificial intelligence (AI) to predict soil nutrient levels based on plant growth characteristics.

What the researchers did: Cultivated cabbage plants in controlled greenhouse environments across Sri Lanka and collected data over an 85-day period.

They measured plant height, leaf count, average leaf area, and soil nutrient levels weekly. Using this dataset, they developed and tested several machine learning models to predict soil N, P, and K content. A user-friendly web application, “SoilNutriPredictor,” was also developed to make these insights accessible to farmers.

What they found out: The AI models developed were highly accurate in predicting soil nutrients. The predictions matched real-world measurements closely, proving the tool works well. It showed that taller plants with more leaves usually meant better soil nutrition, while larger leaf areas and longer growing times sometimes signalled lower nutrient levels.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

This AI tool could help farmers to use fertilizer more efficiently allowing them to grow healthier crops and making food production more sustainable.

Community Engagement



Healthy campus healthy lives: A week of action for World Health Day

Between 7th-11th April, ATU proudly marked World Health Day with a vibrant week of health and wellbeing events across our Letterkenny and Killybegs campuses. This initiative highlights our commitment to the [HEA Healthy Campus Framework](#), which was signed earlier this year.

In collaboration with the EU Green Alliance, the week-long celebration brought together over 500 staff and students in a dynamic programme of 30 activities designed to foster a whole-campus approach to health. Under the themes of healthy environments, healthy eating, sexual health, mental wellbeing, and physical activity, the events showcased the power of collaboration and community.

The week of activities ranged from walk-and-talk sessions and wellness cafés to suicide prevention and self-harm awareness workshops.

Fifty staff and students completing vital training in suicide awareness and understanding self-harm; an important step in building a more supportive and informed campus community.

The initiative was truly cross-sectoral, involving the Students' Union, international student ambassadors, pastoral care, careers services, the Health Centre, sports staff, and lecturers from diverse disciplines. External stakeholders included the Road Safety Authority (RSA), An Garda Síochána, Donegal Local Development Company, Inishowen Local Development Company, Kidney association, Letterkenny Community development project, HSE Addiction services, Connecting for life, Marie Keating Foundation.

[Learn more about the HEA Healthy Campus framework](#)



Photo Credit: Sharon McLaughlin



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

This week of activities for World Health day fostered awareness and action on living health lifestyles to prevent disease and improve quality of life.

Research Publication

Online cultural events can foster emotional connection for those living with Dementia

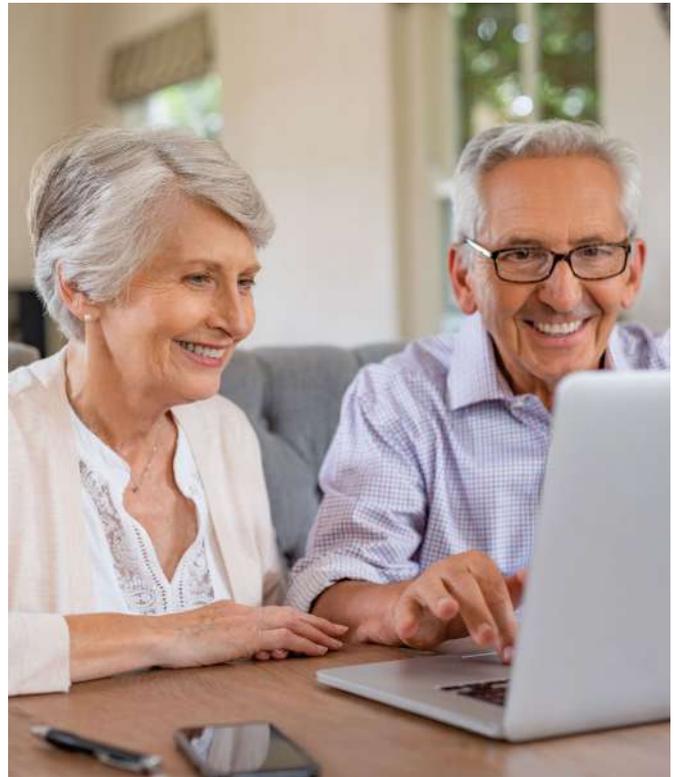


Article: [Unlock and revive: co-producing impactful and accessible online culture and heritage events for people living with dementia](#)

Authors & Affiliations: G. W. Kerr (ATU), H. Stewart (Edinburgh Napier University), S. Smith (Edinburgh Napier University) & J. Ali-Knight (Edinburgh Napier University).

Background: Dementia is one of the most pressing public health challenges of our time, affecting over 60,000 people in Ireland and nearly one million in the UK. As the condition progresses, individuals often face isolation, reduced access to cultural experiences, and a loss of connection with their communities. Recognising the need for inclusive engagement, the researchers set out to explore how online cultural events could support the well-being of people living with dementia and their caregivers.

What the researchers did: The Unlock & Revive project brought together seven cultural and heritage organisations in Edinburgh to deliver 21 online events specifically designed for the dementia community. These sessions included virtual garden workshops, musical performances, storytelling, and art socials. The events were co-produced with people living with dementia, ensuring their voices shaped the design and delivery. Researchers observed sessions, conducted interviews with event organisers, and held focus groups with participants to understand what made these events meaningful and accessible.



What they found out: Online cultural events can foster emotional connection, stimulate memory, and build a sense of community. Participants described the events as “happy,” “enthused,” and “included.” Carers noted improvements in confidence and engagement, and the digital format allowed those in remote areas to participate. A new framework was developed based on six key human experiences: security, belonging, continuity, significance, achievement, and purpose. This offers a practical guide for future event design for those living with dementia.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Demonstrated that inclusive, co-produced cultural programming can significantly enhance the emotional and social well-being of people living with dementia.

Research Publication

Impulsivity partially explains the link between substance use and suicidal behaviour in college students

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



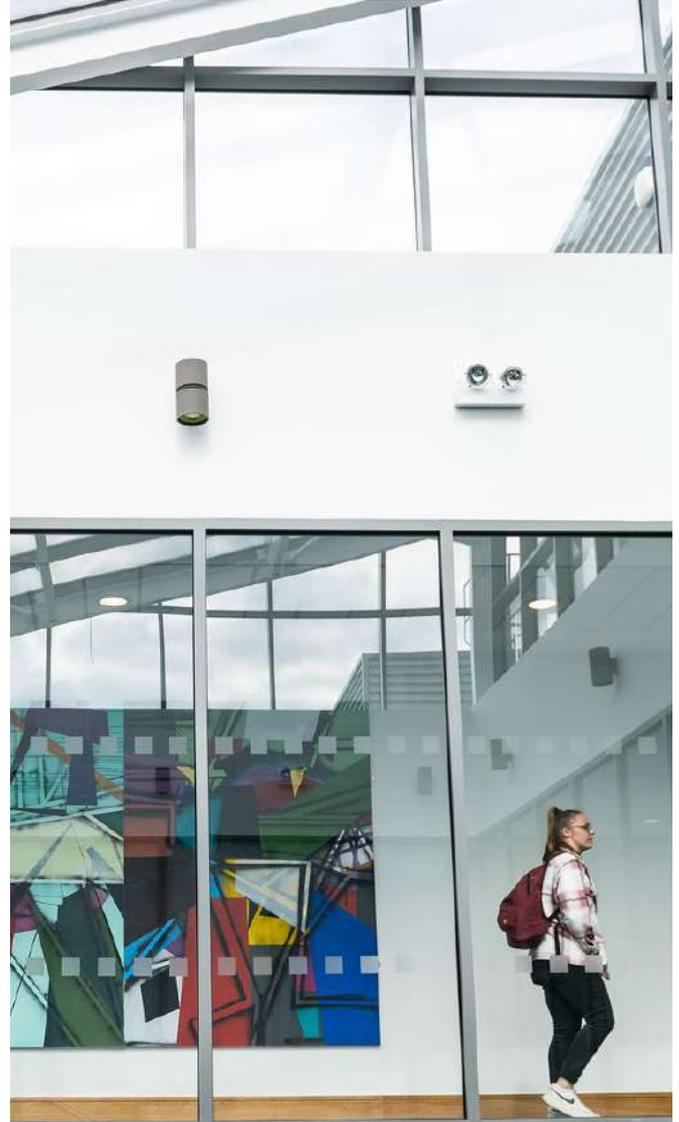
Article: [🔗](#) **The mediating role of impulsivity on suicidal behaviour among higher education students with depression and substance abuse disorders**

Authors & Affiliations: R. McHugh (University of Ulster), M. McLafferty (ATU), N. Brown (ATU), C. Ward (University of Ulster), C.P. Walsh (Linköping University), A. Bjorson (University of Ulster), L. McBride (ATU), J. Brady (Tyrone & Fermanagh Hospital), S. O'Neill (University of Ulster) & E.K. Murray (University of Ulster).

Background: People with alcohol or drug dependence often have higher impulsivity, which has been linked to future alcohol abuse and increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours; especially among those who are also depressed.

What the researchers did: Surveyed 1,829 first-year college students in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to explore how impulsivity influences the connection between depression, substance abuse, and suicidal behaviour.

What they found out: Impulsivity partially explained the link between depression or substance abuse and suicidal thoughts or actions; it was especially associated with suicidal ideation, attempts, and selfharm, but not with planning suicide. Male students and those with more severe depression or substance abuse had higher levels of impulsivity.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Targeting impulsivity in mental health screenings could help identify at-risk students earlier and improve suicide prevention efforts, supporting their health and wellbeing.

Education initiative

AREA Competence Framework: Empowering students for a sustainable future



The AREA framework was a national deliverable under the N-TUTORR Transforming Learning Programme under the Student Empowerment work stream led by Dr Carina Ginty (ATU) and Dr Moira Maguire (DKIT). This student competency framework highlights key digital and sustainability competences which can be embedded into programme modules, transforming awareness into action and guiding students towards lifelong success in an evolving world.

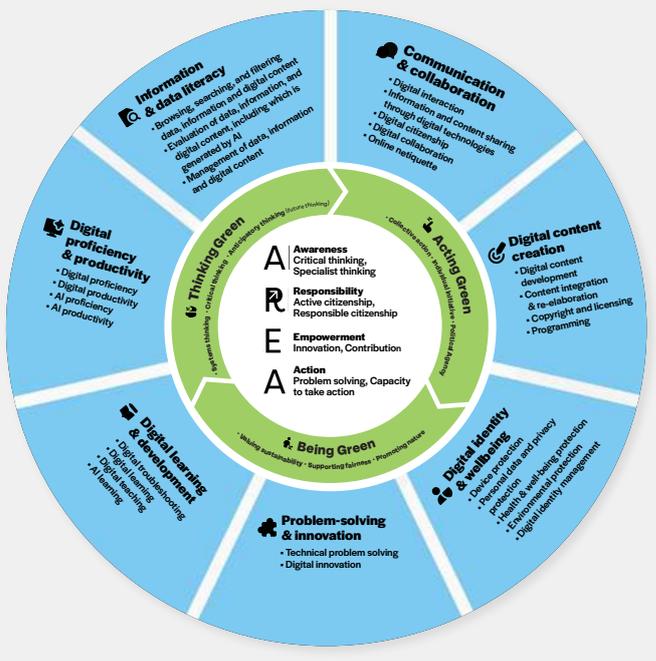
Informed primarily by the UNESCO (2019) framework for Education for Sustainable Development and the GreenComp European Sustainability Competence framework, the green Sustainability component outlines three main competences: Thinking Green, Acting Green and Being Green.

To complement the competency framework, two new AREA Discovery Digital Open Badges were developed by the ATU Teaching and Learning Centre team in collaboration with the ATU Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Academy.

The AREA Discovery online self-assessment tool takes 20 minutes to complete and covers digital skills assessment including Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy and a green competency based assessment tool, that is aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are available to access nationally at <https://MyDigitalBackpack.ie> and locally on ATU's <https://CPDLearnOnline.ie>. It is free to access for all students and staff and a national digital badge is awarded on completion.

The AREA framework **integrates** digital and sustainability **competences** into module learning experiences, **transforming awareness into action** and guiding students toward **lifelong success** in an evolving world.

Digital Competences
Sustainability Competences



The AREA framework was designed in collaboration with the Student Empowerment sector leads, the Student Empowerment research team, the N-TUTORR Student Empowerment Co-ordinators across 5 technological universities and 2 institutes of technology, and the N-TUTORR student and academic champions and academic developers from across the technological university sector.

[Explore AREA](#)



Education & Research

Impact

Embeds digital and sustainability competences into higher education, fostering inclusive, future-focused learning that equips students for lifelong success in a rapidly changing world.

Education initiative

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Academy



The ESD Academy is a collaboration between the ATU Centre for Sustainability and the ATU Teaching and Learning Centre. Launched in March 2025, it demonstrates leadership through a whole-of-university approach to embed sustainability, the SDGs, climate action and justice at the very core of the curriculum in ATU.

The work is framed by the 6Cs:



The ESD Academy responds directly to the National ESD Strategy to 2030 and ATU's sustainability commitments as outlined in ATU Strategic Plan 2024-2028, the Climate Action Roadmap, and HEA Performance Agreement 2024-2028. The Academy offers a range of professional development and training opportunities for ATU staff, students, and our local communities. Find out more at: <https://www.atu.ie/about/teaching-and-learning/education-for-sustainability>.



Significant outputs and outcomes:

- The Increased climate literacy and confidence to act by delivering Carbon Literacy Training to 10 ATU staff, and over 250 students.
- Enhanced practitioner capacity to integrate sustainability into teaching and practice by awarding level 9 Postgraduate Certificate on Education for Sustainability to over 100 persons across ATU, the TU sector and with EU Green Alliance members (since 2019).
- Strengthened national collaboration and shared understanding of ESD through collaboration with DCU, TU Dublin, SETU and UCC, by rolling out a National Open Course on Education for Sustainability. This course has had 3 national rollouts, with over 300 participants to date.
- Improved community engagement and systems thinking through the 'SDGs to 2030' game, delivered via the 'Climate Club' to the One Westport community group, Year 2 engineering apprentices, and students and staff on the EU Green Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) 'Living, Inquiring and Knowing'.
- Increased awareness of global goals by enabling 37 Year 2 apprenticeship students in Civil Engineering to complete an SDG badge as part of their immersive in-person week at ATU Galway.
- Expanded facilitating capacity for climate education by delivering 'Climate Fresk' facilitator training to 10 ATU staff, who have since embedded it across their modules and programmes.

Dr Mark Kelly, Dr Carina Ginty and Dr John Scahill at ESD Academy Launch



Education & Research

Impact

The ESD Academy embeds sustainability and climate literacy across teaching, learning and community engagement which in turn equips educators, students and citizens with the knowledge and skills needed for a more just and sustainable future.

Education initiative

How Teaching and Learning are promoting the SDGs across pedagogy and practice



At ATU we believe that quality education (SDG 4) is the foundation for creating a sustainable future. Education empowers individuals, transforms communities, and drives innovation, thus making it central to achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through a diverse range of initiatives, the Teaching and Learning Centre are embedding sustainability across curricula, fostering critical thinking, and equipping learners with the knowledge and skills to address global challenges. From digital badges and open courses to interactive workshops and postgraduate programmes, these initiatives ensure that sustainability is not just a concept, but a lived experience for students, staff, and the wider community.

Together, we are shaping graduates who are informed, responsible, and ready to lead in a world where sustainability matters.



Certificates and Digital Badges in Sustainability

- Digital Badges for the Sustainable Development Goals ([Link](#))
- Introduction to the SDGs Digital Badge for Students ([Link](#))
- SDGs 101 for Staff ([Link](#))
- 17 SDGs - 17 MOOCs ([Link](#))
- Carbon Literacy Training
- Level 6 Certificate on the SDGs ([Link](#))
- Level 9 Postgraduate Certificate on Education for Sustainability ([Link](#))
- National Open Course on Education for Sustainability ([Link](#))
- National Open Course on Embedding the SDGs across the Curriculum ([Link](#))

Programme Design Frameworks:

- **ATU and EU Green 7 Steps to Programme Design** (with elements focusing on Sustainability)

A range of sustainability and climate focused workshops are detailed on the Education for Sustainability website:

- Climate Fresk
- SDGs to 2030 Game
- Mapping the SDGs to the Curriculum
- Education for Sustainable Futures
- Lego Serious Play for Sustainability
- In the Loop Circular Economy
- Risk and Race Circular Economy
- Design Sprints for Sustainability
- EU Green Competency Framework
- How Bad are Bananas Carbon Footprint
- Eco-Action Games



Education & Research

Impact

These initiatives advance SDG 4 by embedding sustainability into education, ensuring learners gain the knowledge, skills, and values needed to create a more equitable and sustainable future.

Research Project

ATU leads in the first cross-border digital training hub: NW DEPTH



Launched April 2025, the NorthWest Digital Employment Pathways Training Hub (NW DEPTH), seeks to develop a learner-centred Digital Skills framework that encourages individuals to progress along flexible learning pathways allowing them to re-enter or progress in their roles.

Led by Dr Paddy Hannigan (ATU), NW DEPTH will run for four years; the first cohort of learners started in September. It will see an investment of nearly €10 million in digital skills in the Northwest region, including an innovative portfolio of upskilling and reskilling courses in digital and cybersecurity to be delivered to over 2,000 individuals.

The projects focus on digital skills, which are critical to the region's development, reflects a region-centred approach. By tailoring programmes to meet the upskilling and reskilling needs of individuals and enterprises, NW DEPTH demonstrates a commitment to addressing the diverse educational requirements of the Northwest Region, raising awareness of the importance of digital and cybersecurity skills for the region's future.

Additionally, a digital strategy will be developed to complement other major investment plans, such as the Derry and Strabane City Deal, ensuring a vibrant future digital ecosystem of international significance.

NW DEPTH is a PEACEPLUS funded program led by ATU in partnership with Ulster University, Northwest Regional College, and Donegal Education and Training Board via the Northwest Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC).



“

This is the first time that the EU PEACEPLUS has made a substantial allocation to addressing skills on a cross-border basis. Following my recent visit to Northern Ireland, it was clear that the appetite for institutions, North and South, to collaborate is huge. Harnessing the collective expertise and resources in key skills areas including digital is key to positioning people on this island to respond to the demands of reskilling and upskilling.

James Lawless, TD and Minister

”



Education & Research

Projected Impact

NW DEPTH will empower over 2,000 learners in the Northwest region with flexible, learner-centred digital and cybersecurity skills pathways, fostering inclusive, lifelong education and advancing equitable access to quality learning opportunities.

Research Publication

The use of Digital Storytelling in classrooms can increase engagement and improve scientific literacy

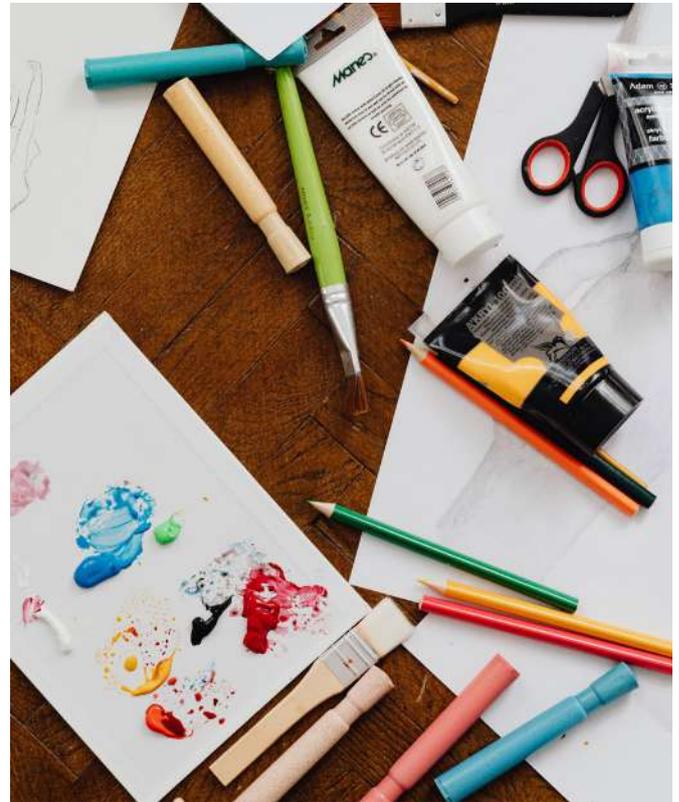


Article: [An evaluation of the art of science project; an intervention to promote digital storytelling in a cross-curricular \(art and science\) and cross sectoral \(primary and postprimary\) environment in Ireland](#)

Authors & Affiliations: A.M. Clarke (ATU), K. Stapleton (Mary Immaculate College) & T. Whitaker (Hibernia College)

Background: Digital storytelling is a pedagogical tool that integrates narration, animation and digital tools to illustrate a story. Previous work has demonstrated that digital storytelling can be used effectively to promote literacy skills across various academic disciplines. This study set out to evaluate the Art of Science project, an initiative designed to employ Digital Storytelling to spark curiosity, foster creativity and strengthen digital and scientific literacy.

What the researchers did: Over three years, Science and Art teachers from five schools (two primary and three post-primary) were trained on how to use digital storytelling to teach scientific concepts. Science class was taught as usual, whereas the students who studied Art in addition to Science carried their learning over to the Art class. Developing personal 2D or 3D art work, students created visuals to accompany the narration of their understanding of science topics. Teachers then assessed these Digital Stories using a rubric agreed on by all the participating science teachers. The project produced over 30 original digital stories teaching science, encouraging collaboration, problem-solving, and ownership of learning. Teachers (n = 8) were interviewed on their experience.



What they found out: Teachers reported a noticeable rise in engagement and confidence among pupils who used art techniques in their science learning, compared to those who did not. Learners explained scientific concepts in their own words, improved oral language skills, and demonstrated creativity. Teachers also observed stronger collaboration, with tech-savvy students supporting peers and even teaching their teachers. Beyond the classroom, the project fostered communities of practice among educators, bridging gaps between art and science and between primary and post-primary sectors.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Promoting inclusive and engaging learning by equipping students with creative, digital, and critical thinking skills that prepare them for lifelong education.

Research Publication

Survey study reports insufficient guidance around physical activity during pregnancy



Article: [🔗 We need more guidance, more encouragement and empowerment for what our bodies are capable of”, pregnant and postpartum women’s knowledge and experiences of receiving physical activity guidance and support on the island of Ireland: an online survey study](#)

Authors & Affiliations: M. Faulkner (ATU), S. Currie (University of Stirling, Scotland), B. Fitzpatrick (Ulster University) & E. Deery (Ulster University)

Background: Staying active during pregnancy is widely recognised as beneficial for both mother and child, improving mental wellbeing, reducing health risks, and supporting recovery after birth. Yet, despite global guidelines recommending regular physical activity during pregnancy, many women in Ireland lack the knowledge and support needed to make informed choices.

What the researchers did: Led a large-scale study to understand women’s experiences of receiving physical activity guidance during maternity care.

Over 430 women who were pregnant or had given birth within the past three years completed an online survey. The study explored their knowledge of physical activity guidelines, the advice they received from healthcare professionals, and their confidence in that guidance.

What they found out: The findings revealed significant gaps. Only 7% of participants could correctly state the recommended guidelines for physical activity during pregnancy and postpartum. Most surveyed (96%) had not heard of any pre-screen tools or questionnaires about physical activity during pregnancy. Just 28% reported receiving any advice from healthcare professionals, and even fewer felt that guidance was timely, clear, or supportive. Many women described inconsistent advice, fear-based messaging, and a lack of resources while 70% said they wanted more support to stay active. The researchers propose five actionable steps and recommendations informed by the study findings, including the provision of clear, specific and accessible evidence-based guidelines regarding physical activity during pregnancy.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Strengthening gender equality by ensuring women have access to clear, evidence-based physical activity guidance that supports autonomy and informed decision-making during and after pregnancy.

Community Engagement

Empowering women to build businesses and shape communities across Ireland’s Gaeltacht communities, the West and North-West



The EMPOWER programme is supporting women to turn ideas into enterprises, and ambition into action. In 2025 alone, 87 women across the Gaeltacht and the West and North-West of Ireland have engaged with EMPOWER’s suite of supports, gaining the confidence, tools, and networks to START, GROW, and ELEVATE their businesses. EMPOWER currently offers two tailored pathways: Cumasú and Elevate.

Launched in 2024 and delivered in collaboration between ATU Innovation Hubs and the Rubicon Centre at Munster Technological University (MTU), EMPOWER Cumasú is designed for women in Gaeltacht regions across Ireland and has already seen 63 participants complete the programmes. The autumn 2025 cohort is now underway with 27 participants, with another intake of 12 participants scheduled for November 2025. Launched in September 2025, with 12 participants, EMPOWER Elevate is a new prestigious 20-month programme which creates a critical ecosystem for established businesswomen in Co. Mayo and Co. Galway. It comprises three semesters with practical milestones, a clear roadmap and tangible outputs. EMPOWER Elevate is led by Susan HayesCulleton and Louise Foody, bringing together the expertise of a seasoned, exportfocused entrepreneur and corporate executive with 20 years of digital transformation and investing experience.

The impact is tangible. New businesses are being launched, existing ones are scaling, and investment is being secured. More than 250 alumni now form a vibrant ecosystem of female entrepreneurs. Participants benefit from expert mentorship, structured business acceleration, and a hybrid delivery model that respects their diverse responsibilities.

Optional Irish language classes and community events, such as the Nollaig na mBán celebration and workshops with alumni, foster connection, culture, and confidence. EMPOWER’s approach proves that even in relatively remote areas, highlevel skills and enterprise can be nurtured, closing geographic inequalities in opportunity, revitalising local economies, retaining talent in the region and inspiring other women to pursue business. The high demand and over-subscription signals strong local talent in the regions, and the programme’s track record in launching new companies, creating employment, helping businesses scale, and securing investment points to real, measurable outcomes rather than mere promise.

EMPOWER Cumasú is funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta & delivered by ATU iHub Mayo & the Rubicon Centre at Munster Technological University (MTU). EMPOWER Elevate is co-funded by Local Enterprise Office Mayo and Local Enterprise Office Galway, and delivered by ATU iHub Mayo.



Photo Credit: Michelle Lee

EMPOWER Elevate: Back row L-R: Judi Roche, Michelle Lee, Mairéad Herlihy, Stephanie Colombani, Lisa Kleiner, Cathy McDonnell, Asumpta Gallagher, Suzanne Carney, Catherine O’Grady Powers, Suzanne Lynch, Jo Anne Butler, Joanna Ciezka, Maria Staunton. Front row L-R: Kate O’Callaghan-Momberg, Imelda Tierney, Kerry Quinlan, Susan Hayes Culleton, Louise Foody, Sandra Ganley, Jev Salmame.



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

The EMPOWER programme is advancing women’s economic empowerment by enabling them to lead thriving businesses that revitalise local economies, retain regional talent, and inspire inclusive growth.

Operational Activity

First Athena Swan Bronze award marks key equality milestone for ATU



In a major step forward for gender equality, ATU has been awarded the Athena Swan Bronze Institutional Award, marking a milestone in its commitment to building a more inclusive university culture. This achievement reflects two years of dedicated work by ATU’s Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (SAT), established in September 2023 and coordinated centrally through the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Office.

The SAT was established two years ago to lead the application process. Members undertook this work voluntarily alongside their core roles. The SAT, chaired by Mary Loftus, Lecturer on the Sligo Campus, worked closely with the EDI team, led by Tom Reilly, to carry out an assessment of gender equality across the university and develop a Gender Equality Action Plan to address identified issues, a plan which outlines over 20 targeted actions. These include:

- Establishing a mentoring programme for staff
- Improving gender balance on committees and in leadership
- Supporting career development and research funding
- Ensuring transparency in workload allocation
- Introducing a flexible working policy
- Reaffirming a zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and harassment

Equality Champions across campuses supported the all-staff survey that informed the application. The process involved campus wide consultation, data analysis, and alignment with national recommendations. Contributions from academic and professional staff, students, and senior leadership were central to the initiative.

Securing the Athena Swan Bronze Award is a formal requirement for higher education institutions in Ireland that wish to access certain categories of research funding, particularly from national bodies such as the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Irish Research Council.

Beyond compliance, the award provides an external benchmark of ATU’s progress on gender equality and institutional commitment to structural change. It has fostered a culture of shared responsibility, improved awareness of EDI issues, and laid the groundwork for departmental awards. Feedback from adjudicators highlighted areas for development, guiding future improvements toward a Silver Award.

ATU Gender Equality Action Plan 2025 - 2028



Governance & Accountability

Impact

Driving structural change by embedding inclusive policies that support career progression, leadership equity, and safer, more flexible working environments for all.

ATU Operations

ATU Respect engages over 10,000 staff and students in critical prevention programme



ATU Respect is a key ATU initiative that is preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV) including sexual violence, coercive control, stalking and sexual harassment. Through education, support, and robust policies, we work to prevent and respond to all forms of GBV in our community.

In the academic year 2024/25 ATU Respect facilitated 10,461 participant engagements across 161 training, education and awareness events across all 9 campuses. The prevention programme included the delivery of consent education, training for staff and students on preventing and responding to all forms of gender based violence, and awareness initiatives to create visibility and build an ATU community wide awareness and understanding of the ATU Policy and the nature and prevalence of gender-based violence.

Engagement Metrics

- 6,884 participants reached through awareness-raising and engagement activities.
- 3,788 students and staff participated in training.
- 3,603 students in total received consent education across the academic year.
- 3,997 students attended Introduction to Respect sessions.

- 3,012 first-year students (45%), including Apprentices, received consent education during induction.
- 1,322 students engaged in the Connect and Respect Orientation Week.
- 1,128 participants took part in other 16 Days of Activism campaign activities.
- 591 students completed the newly developed Consent Matters two-hour workshop, focused on communication, boundaries, and respectful relationships.
- 200 participants joined flag-raising events during the 16 Days of Activism campaign.
- 143 students and staff engaged in One Million Stars workshops (see p.49).
- 94 participants attended the Thriving Compassionate Campus Conference (organised in conjunction with Health, Wellbeing and Counselling) to strengthen strategies around compassion and resilience.



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

ATU Respect is fostering a safer and more equitable campus environment by actively preventing and addressing gender-based violence through comprehensive education, awareness, and support initiatives.

Research Project

NANAQUA: Training doctoral researchers in nanotechnology-enabled water treatment



Traditional wastewater treatment systems often fail to effectively remove Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CECs), which include pollutants like pharmaceuticals, endocrine disruptors, and PFAS that threaten freshwater ecosystems and human health.

Funded by Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral Programme, NANAQUA aims to overcome this by integrating nano-functionalized materials into chemical and biological treatment processes, including real-time water quality monitoring. Coordinated by KU Leuven in Belgium, NANAQUA brings together leading universities and companies across Europe, including ATU, University of Santiago de Compostela, University of Salerno, TU Delft, PureBlue Water, NorGenoTech, and University of Glasgow.

Long-term, NANAQUA (<https://nanaqua.eu>) promises cleaner water, healthier ecosystems, and a new generation of experts equipped to tackle global water challenges.



ATU NANAQUA Team: Dr. Kris O'Dowd, Ms. Aiswarya Parak-kat Bhaskaran (Doctoral Candidate) and Prof. Suresh C. Pillai

Significant milestones this year:

16 Doctoral Candidates Selected NANAQUA is the first European doctoral training network dedicated to nanomaterials in water treatment. These researchers work on individual projects that contribute to three main research areas: chemical degradation using nanocatalysts, biological treatment enhanced by nanomaterials, and environmental safety assessment using biosensors and life cycle analysis. Find out about the 16 candidates at <https://nanaqua.eu/#!/filledpositions>

University of Glasgow Hosts First Network-Wide Event (NWE1), June 3-6

This hybrid event marked the very first in-person meeting of the newly recruited doctoral candidates, their supervisors, and associate partner representatives. The agenda included a full Consortium Meeting and a Supervisory Board Meeting, alongside dedicated training sessions for the DCs, designed to equip them with skills that will be essential throughout their projects. Participants also enjoyed a lab tour at the University of Glasgow, gaining first-hand insight into the cutting-edge facilities, and a site visit to SCENE, which provided valuable exposure to applied research and innovation in real-world contexts.

KU Leuven Hosts Second Network-Event (NWE2), Oct 14-17

The event marked an important milestone for the project, combining intensive scientific training, strategic discussions, and hands-on learning experiences in the field of wastewater treatment and environmental analysis.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Improving water purification, monitoring water quality in real time, and reducing pollutants in freshwater ecosystems helps protect public health, preserve biodiversity, and ensure global access to clean and sustainable water.

Research Publication

Low doses of ozone can effectively disinfect urban wastewater for reuse without leaving toxic traces



Article: [Urban wastewater treatment by ozonation: Disinfection by-products and toxicity assessment](#)

Authors & Affiliations: K.J. Castañeda-Retavizca (University of Almeria, Spain), K. O'Dowd (ATU), E. Jambrina-Hernández, (University of Almeria, Spain), S. Nahim-Granados, (University of Almeria, Spain), P. Plaza-Bolaños (University of Almeria, Spain), S. Malato (University of Almeria, Spain), M.I. Polo-López (University of Almeria, Spain), S.C. Pillai (ATU) & L. Oller (University of Almeria, Spain)

Background: The world is running short of clean drinking water. Studies have predicted that 2.7 billion people will face severe water shortages by 2025.

We need alternative water resources - such as treated urban waste water. One method of cleaning urban waste water is ozonation - where water is injected with ozone, a powerful oxidant.

What the researchers did: Tested different amounts of ozone on treated urban wastewater to see how well it inactivated pollutants and harmful bacteria, and whether it created any toxic byproducts in the process.

What they found out: Ozone successfully removed up to 80% of tiny pollutants and killed bacteria like E. coli. The lowest dosage that was tested was the most optimal - it successfully disinfected the water whilst avoiding toxicity related to byproducts.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

This method shows promise for making wastewater cleaner and safer to reuse, helping to increase the number of water resources available, and contributing to address global clean water shortages.

Research Publication

Using Artificial Intelligence can help dairy farmers reduce electricity needs by 13%



Article: [A Deep Reinforcement Learning Approach to Battery Management in Dairy Farming via Proximal Policy Optimization](#)

Authors & Affiliations: N. Ali (University of Galway), R. Shaw (ATU) & Karl Mason (University of Galway)

Background: Dairy farms use up a large amount of electricity - this is likely to increase along with the demand for milk production. Therefore, dairy farms would benefit from enhancing electricity efficiency through the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) controlled renewable energy systems.

What the researchers did: Tested a deep reinforcement learning algorithm (Proximal Policy Optimisation) on real farm data from Finland to find out how well it manages the use of dairy farm batteries and how much electricity is purchased from the grid.

What they found out: The PPO algorithm managed the batteries effectively. It reduced electricity purchased from the grid by 13% compared to no battery, 2.6% compared to rule-based algorithms, and 1.6% compared to traditional Q-learning.



**Education
& Research**

Projected Impact

Harnessing the power of smart algorithms can play a key role in making dairy farming more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly.

ATU Operations

ATU's renewable energy initiatives



As part of action to support national and global climate action plans, ATU has been steadily investing across electrical vehicle charging and renewable energy generation. This has been taking place across several campuses, over the last five years, with plans to continue the rollout to all campuses over the coming two years, over the last five years, with plans to continue the rollout to all campuses over the coming two years.

Electric Vehicle Charging

So far, we have installed over 10 electric vehicle charging points across campuses at Donegal, Galway, Mayo and Sligo.

Renewable Energy Sources

Similarly, ATU has been investing in the deployment of various technologies including biomass plants, heat pumps, and photovoltaic energy generators.

- Donegal has installed 600 kW of Biomass heating boiling capacity, along with >40kW of photovoltaic panels, and ThermalMax tubing.
- Galway has installed approx. 350 kW of low carbon heat pumps, along with photovoltaic generation on the roof of the iHub building
- Sligo has installed over 200 kWp of photovoltaic solar energy generation panels in Ash Lane campus

Shared Electric Mobility Project

In partnership with Trinity College Dublin, ESB and Enterprise Rent-A-Car, ATU will lead a €1.35 million shared electric mobility project. Funding of almost €850,000 has been awarded by the Government of Ireland through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). This project will deliver four shared electric mobility hubs in Dublin, Galway, Sligo and Donegal with each hub providing charging infrastructure, electric cars, ebikes and ecargo bikes for shared use.



169 solar panels, block innovation centre ATU Sligo



Port Road Electric Vehicle Chargers, Letterkenny



Biomass Plant Room, Letterkenny The plant plant comprises 2 No. 300 kW Herz wood chip boilers, a 20,000-litre buffer tank and heat exchanger, feeding into existing LTHW header. Chip storage capacity is up to 20 tonne, which is distributed via an auger system.



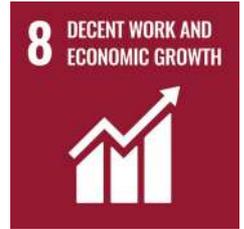
Climate & Environmental Action

Impact

By investing in renewable energy technologies and infrastructure, ATU is driving sustainable energy transition, reducing carbon emissions and promoting cleaner energy use.

Research Project

ECT4SME project aims to drive SME innovation in cross-border collaboration



October 2025 saw the launch of a major PEACEPLUS project spearheaded by Dr. Ciaran O'hAnnrachain, strategic projects manager at the ATU Letterkenny School of Business.

The ETC4SME (Enabling Technology Cluster for Small and Medium Enterprises) project is a €9.45 million PEACEPLUS funded project in which ATU is the lead partner, in collaboration with Queens University Belfast, Ulster University and Catalyst, a science and technology hub in Northern Ireland.

ETC4SME will support SMEs across the PEACEPLUS region (Northern Ireland & the border counties) to implement innovations to address SME product or process improvements. The focus of these improvements will be in areas of Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The project will help SMEs adopt technology-enabled innovations to enhance competitiveness, sustainability & job creation.

PEACEPLUS is a €1.14 billion (2021–2027) cross-border funding initiative managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and supported by the EU, UK, Irish governments, and Northern Ireland Executive. Find out about all the PEACEPLUS projects ATU is involved in on pages 54-55.

“

ETC4SME is a game-changer for SMEs in our region. By combining academic expertise, industry insight, and crossborder collaboration, we're creating a powerful platform for innovation, sustainability, and growth. At the end of this project, it is envisaged that SMEs across the twelve counties will be better placed to operate within a multi-jurisdictional environment, plan for scale up and develop export potential; and to provide a vibrant economic environment that is attractive to inward FDI.

”

Dr Ciarán O'hAnnrachain



Education & Research

Projected Impact

ETC4SME empowers local SMEs to innovate with AI and sustainable practices, driving regional growth and resilience

Research Publication

Third-level tourism degrees have a significant knowledge gap in sustainable literacy



Article: [Curricula, sustainable literacy and decarbonisation: The Net-Zero challenge for tourism educators in Ireland](#)

Authors & Affiliations: A. Conefrey, J. Hanrahan, C. McTiernan, J. Carty, D. Byrne (ATU) & L. Oller (University of Almeria, Spain)



Background: Tourism is a cornerstone of Ireland's economy, generating billions annually and supporting over 200,000 jobs. However, the sector is also a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, with international travel accounting for the majority of its carbon footprint. As global commitments push for a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030 and Net-Zero by 2050, the tourism industry faces a pressing challenge: how to balance economic growth with climate responsibility. This study aimed to evaluate how well Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that deliver modules on tourism incorporate sustainable literacy and climate action into their syllabi.

What the researchers did: Conducted a nationwide audit of tourism curricula across Irish HEIs to assess how well they prepare students for sustainability and decarbonisation challenges. A detailed questionnaire was distributed to education managers in 14 HEIs, achieving a 92% response rate. The survey explored three themes: (1) Alignment of learning outcomes to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (2) Explicit knowledge transfer and development of sustainable literacy, and (3) Further learning needs.

What they found out: The findings revealed significant shortcomings in tourism education. Half of the programs were not aligned with the UN SDGs, and only 9% included learning outcomes focused on decarbonisation. While most programs acknowledged tourism's impact on carbon emissions, few addressed practical skills such as measuring and monitoring emissions, which are essential for achieving Net-Zero targets. Training on tools like carbon calculators and GIS technology was notably absent, and only 50% of programs offered any instruction on emissions measurement. Educators themselves expressed strong demand for professional development, with 83% seeking additional training on decarbonisation practices. These gaps highlight an urgent need for curriculum reform to embed sustainable literacy and climate action skills, ensuring graduates can drive meaningful change in the tourism sector.

See also: Conefrey et al (2025). Tourism education in Europe and the road to Net-Zero: Are universities doing enough? *Journal of Cleaner Production*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2025.147039>



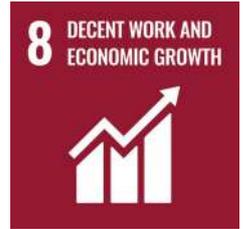
Education & Research

Projected Impact

This study highlights an urgent need for curriculum reform to embed sustainable literacy and climate action skills in Third-level Tourism education, which may improve sustainability efforts in the Tourism sector.

Research Project

SPEAR project positions the Northwest as a hub for innovation in semiconductors and photonics technology



The SPEAR Project (Semiconductor Photonics Education & Research) is a €8.46 million PEACEPLUS initiative led by ATU through the WiSAR Research Centre in partnership with Ulster University, the Tyndall Institute of University College Cork and Seagate Technology. It was launched in September 2025.

Led by Dr Nick Timmons (ATU), SPEAR positions the Northwest as a hub for innovation in semiconductors and photonics technology. This aligns with the EU Chips act and Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3), enhancing crossborder collaboration and embedding advanced technology capacity in the regional economy.

SPEAR consists of three pillars:

- A doctoral college to train the next generation of PhD researchers in semiconductor, A.I and photonics.
- An innovation fund to support research and development in regional SMEs.
- A strategic engagement programme to foster collaboration between industry, academia and policy makers.

SPEAR will be a catalyst for workforce upskilling, sustainable economic growth, enterprise development, and peacebuilding across the border region. The combined expertise of its partners and the investment provided through PEACEPLUS will advance research and innovation and ensure these advances bring tangible benefits to the region's economy and society.

“

SPEAR is far more than an investment in research infrastructure; it is a commitment to regional transformation. By embedding deep technology expertise into the Northwest, SPEAR will support enterprise growth, create high-value jobs, and build resilience in the face of global challenges.

”

Dr Orla Flynn, **ATU President**



Education & Research

Projected Impact

The SPEAR Project is boosting decent work and economic growth in the Northwest by creating high-value jobs, supporting local businesses, and training future tech leaders in cutting-edge semiconductor and photonics technologies.

ATU Operations

Bridging innovation and industry: The role of ATU's Knowledge Transfer Office



The Knowledge Transfer Office (KTO) plays a vital role in fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and the wider community. Acting as a bridge between research and realworld applications, the KTO manages intellectual property, develops strategic partnerships, and promotes the commercialisation of innovative research projects. The KTO ensures that the new knowledge created at ATU delivers tangible economic and societal benefits for the region and Ireland.

The KTO plays a pivotal role in creating and sustaining a connected innovation ecosystem in the region, where research thrives through collaboration and innovation.

In 2025, the KTO achieved several notable successes:

- Supported over 150 industry projects, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- Signed 8 LOAs (Licences, Assignments or Options) with industry partners.
- Hosted technology transfer colleagues from Italy, Portugal and Namibia at ATU.
- Revised the ATU Intellectual Property (IP) policy, which clarifies principles and rules that govern the creation, ownership and commercialisation of IP at ATU.
- Integrated a new IP management software system, streamlining processes and increasing efficiency.
- Became a member of the Association of European Science and Technology Transfer Professionals (ASTP), connecting ATU with a wider network of innovation leaders across Europe.

- Provided intellectual property training to researchers across ATU, empowering them to protect and commercialise their innovations.

ATU researchers, staff, and industry partners are encouraged to get involved with the KTO. Whether you are developing a groundbreaking project, looking for collaboration opportunities, or navigating intellectual property challenges, the KTO is here to support your journey from concept to impact.

The Atlantic Technological University Knowledge Transfer Office is supported under the KT Boost Programme co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-2027



Meet the ATU KTO team: Kieran Ryan, Grace O'Toole, and Helen O'Reilly



Governance & Accountability

Impact

The ATU KTO strengthens regional industry and innovation by enabling collaboration between academia and enterprise, improving intellectual property systems, and supporting the translation of research into real-world solutions that contribute to a resilient and efficient innovation infrastructure.

Case Study

Rockfield Medical: From ATU iHub to global impact



The ATU Innovation Hub centres assist entrepreneurs to develop and bring their business ideas to the marketplace. There are four innovation centres linked to ATU: [iHubs Galway and Mayo](#), [Sligo Innovation Centre](#) and [Donegal CoLab](#).

Founded in 2014 by ATU alumnus and New Frontiers participant Tomas Thompson, **Rockfield Medical** has grown from an ambitious start-up to an internationally recognised medtech company. Specialising in innovative tube feeding solutions, the company has transformed patient care with its ground-breaking mobile feeding system, called Mobility+ which provides a better alternative for the tube feeding community who seek “Nutrition on the Go.”

Throughout its journey, Rockfield Medical has remained deeply connected to ATU, engaging in student projects, internships, innovation vouchers and collaborating with the MET centre on several commercialisation funding projects. Their success story exemplifies the vital role the ATU innovation centres play in nurturing highpotential start-ups, transforming innovative ideas into life-changing medical solutions and enabling Irish start-ups compete on a global stage.



Significant milestones:

- 2015: Secured their first incubation space at the ATU innovation Hub (iHubs)
- 2016: Awarded High Potential Start-Up (HPSU) funding and private investment - enabled them to expand capabilities and refine human-centred design approach
- 2017: Established a dedicated R&D unit at ATU iHubs, collaborating closely with the Enterprise Ireland funded ATU Medical and Engineering Technologies (MET) Centre to develop prototypes and advance product innovation. Recognised as one of Silicon Republic’s “24 Life Science Start-Ups to Watch”
- 2019: Secured €2M Disruptive Technology Innovation Fund (DTIF) grant, supporting advancements in smart enteral feeding solutions
- 2023: Received FDA clearance for its elastomeric enteral feeding pump, marking a significant step towards international commercialisation. Secured Series A funding of €6 million enabling expansion into the US market and completion of clinical studies and market evaluation.
- 2024: Received over-the-counter (OTC) clearance for their Mobility+ enteral feeding system and launched on the US market.
- 2025: Published [robust clinical data](#) demonstrating that Mobility + is a safe and effective alternative to traditional gravity or pump-based enteral feeding systems for adult patients.

Rockfield Team: Rachel Connolly (Clinical Science Liaison) Edel Keaveney (Senior Research Manager), Tomás Thompson (Founder & CEO) & Eoin Gaughran (Electronic Engineer)



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

Through sustained support for high-potential start-ups like Rockfield Medical, ATU Innovation Hubs enrich regional innovation ecosystems, advance medical technology development, and contribute to resilient infrastructure and inclusive industrial growth

Research Publication

Reshaping the future of human-robot teamwork in manufacturing through better sensors



Article: [🔗](#) **A review of external sensors for human detection in a human robot collaborative environment**

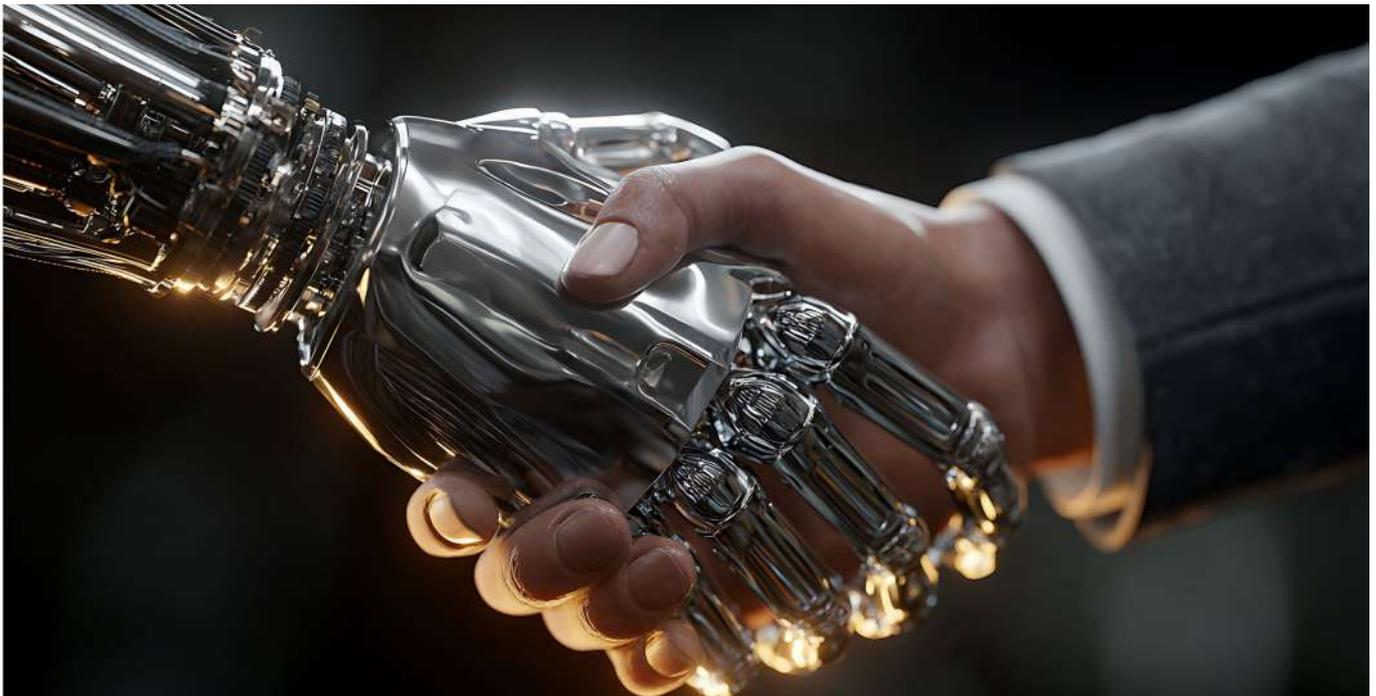
Authors & Affiliations: Z. Saleem (ATU), F. Gustafsson (Linköping University), E. Furey (ATU), M. McAfee (ATU) & S. Huq (York College of Pennsylvania)

Background: In manufacturing, collaborative robots (cobots) are robots that work with humans. For example, they could help a human co-operate carry heavy objects safely, or precisely place objects.

To do this effectively, cobots need to be able to accurately perceive human interaction - which they do through sensors.

What the researchers did: Reviewed different types of sensors and how they're used to help cobots detect nearby humans and objects, focusing especially on real-world (not just simulated) testing environments.

What they found out: They categorised sensor research into three areas (simulated, partly simulated, and real-world) and showed how sensor setups and algorithms help cobots safely and effectively work alongside humans.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

By presenting and discussing different sensors systems, this research may catalyse further work on smart manufacturing and innovation, helping industries become more efficient, modern, and human-centric.

ATU Operations

ATU secures membership of the Age-Friendly University Network



ATU is committed to creating conditions whereby students and staff are treated equitably and inclusively regardless of a number of specific characteristics, including age. The [Age-Friendly University Global Network](#) is an association of higher education institutions committed to promoting positive and healthy aging and enhancing the lives of older members of the global community. It achieves this through innovative educational programmes, research agendas, curriculum development, online education, health and wellness activities, arts and culture programs and civic engagement opportunities.

Reflecting our commitment to ensuring equality and inclusion for all, ATU successfully secured membership of the AFU network on Date.

ATU's inclusion in the Age-Friendly University Global Network marks a significant step in our ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment for learners and staff of all ages. We look forward to advancing the principles of the network and contributing to a global movement that values lifelong learning and active aging.

Network Principles

1. To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the University, including educational and research programs.
2. To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers.
3. To recognise the range of educational needs of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue a Master's or Ph.D. qualifications).
4. To promote intergenerational learning in order to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.
5. To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
6. To ensure that the university's research agenda is informed by the needs of an aging society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
7. To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.
8. To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.
9. To engage actively with the university's own retired community.
10. To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.



Governance & Accountability

Projected Impact

Fosters inclusive lifelong learning opportunities that empower older adults, promote social participation and reduce age-related disparities in access to education, health, and civic engagement.

Research Publication

Three key themes for successful self-advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities



Article: [Fostering self-advocacy development in service-based self-advocacy groups](#)

Authors & Affiliations: J. McCarthy & V. McTaggart (ATU)

Background: People with intellectual disabilities have historically faced significant social exclusion and limited opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Self-advocacy, which is where individuals speak up for themselves and assert their rights, has emerged as a powerful tool to challenge these inequalities.

What the researchers did: Undertook an inclusive qualitative study to understand how organisations can support self-advocacy development through service-based groups. They gathered insights from 14 selfadvocates, 2 managers, 3 group supporters, and 1 advocacy coordinator. Data were collected through focus groups and interviews, using easy-to-read materials to ensure accessibility.

Thematic analysis was applied to identify key themes from participants' experiences.

What they found out: Identified three themes that are important for successful self-advocacy: (1) "A Space and Place" - access to a physical space, having a voice and place to use it, and a shared understanding of what is self-advocacy; (2) "Meaningful inclusion" - organisations and society should facilitate genuine participation, and consult self-advocates on decisions; and (3) "Learning to Lead Opportunities" - both selfadvocates learning from peers, and supporting groups (such as management and advocacy coordinators) receiving more opportunities to learn and provide self-advocates with leadership opportunities. In addition, whilst self-advocates reported benefits such as increased confidence, a sense of belonging and empowerment, challenges persist. Balancing independence with necessary support remains difficult, and organisational culture must shift from a "doing for" approach to one that empowers individuals to act for themselves.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

These findings provide guidance to organisations on critical factors which can foster successful self-advocacy for people with disabilities, thereby strengthening social inclusion and facilitating empowerment and meaningful change.

Community Engagement

ATU secures membership of the Age-Friendly University Network



34 students from ATU and other Irish Universities took part in the Irish leg of the Invent for the Planet (IFTP) competition in February, hosted in ATU Galway. IFTP is an international competition that challenges students to brainstorm and prototype solutions to societal and environmental issues over a 48-hour period. IFTP 2025 was hosted across 36 universities, with approximately 1,500 students participating worldwide from 22 countries.

The winning team from the Irish heat – Team IRIS (Innovation Recycling Infrastructure Solutions) were selected as one of the six teams that progressed to the international final in Texas A&M University in April where they competed for the title of Global Champion.

Team IRIS consisted of Joyce Mathew (ATU Galway), Christopher D'Mello (DkIT), Gabriela Rodrigues (University of Galway), Camillo Murgia (ATU Galway) and Harish Sampathkumar (ATU Donegal). Together they developed an innovative solution addressing two major global challenges - plastic waste and sustainable construction. Their project focused on creating eco-friendly bricks made from recycled plastic and other sustainable materials. This solution not only reduces plastic pollution but also provides a cost-effective, durable, and sustainable alternative to traditional building materials.

IFTP Ireland is led by Dr Jack Saad, Fulbright Scholar, Texas A&M (PhD Robotics, Genova University, Italy) who lectures in industrial and mechanical engineering in ATU Galway.

Dr Saad has been co-managing and co-ordinating the annual event now in its 4 year together with coorganiser and mentors from local industry Damien Toner, Aquatech Business Manager at Bord Iascaigh Mhara – Ireland's Seafood Development Agency; Frank Kane, Senior Scientist, Marine Institute; Derek Thornton Mechanical Lecturer, ATU; Dr Carine Gachon, Transcend project manager at ATU. The local competition is sponsored by Thermo King, EU Green, Marine Institute and Ireland's Seafood Development Agency and the ATU Entrepreneurial Office.



L to R: Back row, Joyce Mathew, ATU Galway, Christopher D'mello, DIT, Gabriela Rodrigues, University of Galway, Camillo Murgia, ATU Galway, Harish Sampathkumar, ATU Donegal. **Front row,** Dipshikha Das, ATU Galway, Kajal Bhapkar, ATU Donegal.



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

Students are empowered to co-create tangible solutions to global sustainability challenges, such as reducing plastic waste through innovative, eco-friendly construction materials that promote circular economy and responsible production practices.

ATU Operations

ATU carries out bike survey of campus facilities to enhance sustainable transport options



As part of our commitment to creating a greener, more accessible university, a bike survey of campus facilities was carried out by our Building and Estates team. This contributes to our action of ‘Promoting Active Travel with progress to Smarter Travel Mark’ detailed in our Climate Action Roadmap.

The survey aimed to identify the availability of:

- Bike parking spaces
- E-bike charging points
- Showers and lockers for cyclists
- Bike repair and support facilities

ATU has over 400 bike parking spaces across our campuses in Donegal, Galway, Sligo and Mayo, with many locations offering covered shelters and CCTV for added security. Galway City’s Dublin Road campus includes fob-access bike storage. Mayo Campus complements its bike facilities with repair workshops and a drying room for cycling gear, while Connemara boasts an eco-friendly living roof bike shelter built by ATU staff. A major €1.35 million shared electric mobility project, funded by SEAI, will soon deliver hubs in Galway, Sligo, Donegal, and Dublin. These hubs will provide electric cars, e-bikes, and e-cargo bikes for shared use, reinforcing ATU’s leadership in sustainable mobility.

Supporting infrastructure e.g. showers, lockers and drying rooms is available on most campuses, ensuring cycling is a practical choice for daily commutes. Initiatives like Lime shared electric bikes in Castlebar further enhance accessibility. The survey provides evidence of positive progress across the university, whilst also identifies areas in need of improvement, such as noting that there was limited E-bike charging outside of the Galway campus, and the lower level of bicycle repair stations.

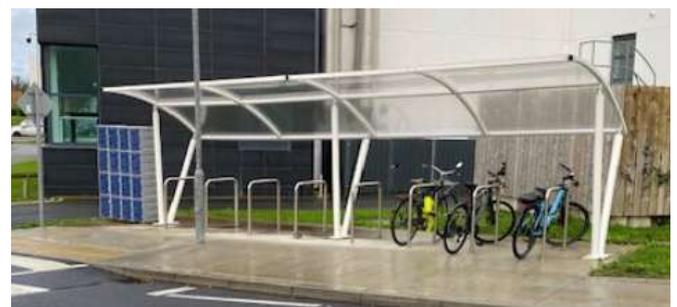
These findings will inform ATU’s next phase of improvements, ensuring future investments deliver even more inclusive and sustainable transport solutions.



Newly completed bike ‘Transportation hub’, Galway Wellpark campus



Bike Shed, Connemara campus



Bike Racks, Sligo campus



Climate & Environmental Action

Impact

By identifying both strengths and limitations in cycling and e-mobility infrastructure, this survey provides a clear roadmap for ATU to enhance sustainable transport and create safer, more inclusive campus communities

Research Publication

WiSAR use 5G technology to make new compact antennae that help cars talk to each other

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



Article: [Compact 5 G mmWave vivaldi antenna for vehicular communication](#)

Authors & Affiliations: S. Saleh, T. Saeidi, N. Timmons (ATU), A.A. Althuwayb, (Jouf University, KSA), & F. Razzaz (Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, KSA)

Background: New wireless communication technologies, especially 5G and millimeter-wave (mmWave) antennas, are being used to make vehicles smarter and safer.

Vehicular communication includes vehicle to vehicle, vehicle to infrastructure (e.g. traffic lights), vehicle to pedestrian, and vehicle to network.

What the researchers did: Designed a new 5G mmWave Vivaldi Tapered Slot Antenna and tested its effectiveness for vehicular communication.

What they found out: The new antenna is simple and compact, yet demonstrates excellent performance. It is also able to radiate in multiple directions which helps to facilitate communication with other vehicles, pedestrians, roadside units and pedestrians.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Improved vehicular communication plays a key role in alleviating traffic congestion on roads which can contribute towards reducing fuel emissions. Real-time data from cars can also inform data-driven urban planning.

Research Publication

Using timber in construction could reduce carbon emissions - but practice & policy reform needed



Article: [A review of best international life cycle assessment \(LCA\) practices in wood construction: Challenges for Ireland](#)

Authors & Affiliations: S. Ge (University of Galway), C. O’Ceallaigh (ATU), & P. J. McGetrick (University of Galway)

Background: To meet Ireland’s 2050 climate targets, the Irish construction industry needs to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon emissions. In the face of an ever-increasing demand for new housing, timber offers a sustainable alternative to traditional construction materials as it emits less carbon and can reduce the overall emissions associated with construction.

What the researchers did: Reviewed relevant literature, policies and documents to identify gaps and challenges in Irish Life Cycle Assessment practices for wood construction, with a particular focus on specific challenges for Ireland.



What they found out: Widespread adoption of timber is hindered by outdated practices, missing policy support, and significant data and methodological gaps in life cycle assessment (LCA) for the Irish context.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Addressing the gaps in data, regulation, and incentives around timber construction and LCA can enable a major reduction in carbon emissions, helping Ireland meet its 2050 climate goals.

ATU Operations

Green Labs initiative drives systemic change in sustainable laboratory practices across ATU



ATU Green Labs was launched in 2020 at the Galway City Campus within the School of Science & Computing. It began as a grassroots initiative led by a dedicated group of academics and technical staff, united by a shared commitment to advancing environmentally responsible practices in science education.

In 2022, ATU became the first higher education institution in Ireland to receive My Green Lab certification for a suite of undergraduate teaching laboratories. This globally recognised certification is the gold standard for sustainable lab practices and reflects our leadership in lab sustainability.

Our primary mission is to embed a culture of sustainability across scientific teaching and research at ATU. We aim to reduce environmental impact and promote resource efficiency, aligning with Ireland's national climate action goals. A key part of our work also involves educating lab users and building a strong, collaborative community both within ATU and beyond.

In 2025, we hosted three engagement events that brought together lab users from across ATU campuses and the wider scientific community. Our flagship event, held in ATU Sligo and supported by the EU GREEN Alliance, featured expert speakers including Jack O'Grady (My Green Lab), Evelyn O'Toole (CLS), and Jeanne Copeland (Greenville Procurement). Dr Maria Dermiki (ATU Sligo), Brendan Alexander (ATU Letterkenny) and Dr Una McCarthy (ATU Sligo) documented their successes and challenges in implementing sustainable practices in their own labs and David Burke, an ATU Sligo Alumnus, described his experience of the My Green lab Certification process as a student and applying this knowledge in industry.



Attendees took part in interactive workshops, collaborating with peers to improve sustainability in lab practicals. Each participant received tailored resources to help implement simple, effective changes in their own labs—empowering them to lead the transition toward greener science.

In 2025, ATU Green Labs hosted three impactful events: An in-person workshop (33 attendees supported by EU GREEN brought together technical and academic staff from Sligo, Letterkenny, and Galway >> increasing knowledge of sustainable lab practices and fostering cross-campus collaboration.

A public webinar (46 attendees), now annual, featured speakers from the University of Groningen, IBTS, and ATU >> enhancing understanding of SDGs and offering CPD opportunities.

A chemistry-focused workshop engaged 10 programme board members >> resulting in revised lab manuals to reduce waste and introduce greener solvents, and the launch of a Sustainability and Safety quiz for all students.



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

ATU Green Labs drives systemic change in laboratory sustainability, reducing emissions and resource use while cultivating a culture of climate responsibility across education, research, and industry.

Community Engagement

Fostering fashion with a conscience with zero waste challenge events



In a world where fast fashion dominates wardrobes and landfills alike, ATU is weaving a different story; one of sustainability, community, and conscious consumption.

To mark International Zero Waste Day, ATU joined its EU Green partners in a bold celebration themed “Towards Zero Waste in Fashion & Textiles”. The goal? To create a whole-campus approach to reducing textile waste, while empowering individuals to rethink their fashion habits.

The initiative was guided by four key objectives:

- Raise Awareness
- Promote Sustainable Habits,
- Empower Action
- Foster Environmental Responsibility.

Across Letterkenny, Galway, and Sligo campuses, two key events were carried out: a Clothes Swap and Interview Wardrobe.

Clothes Swap

Led by ATU’s Pastoral Care Team, the Clothes Swap invited staff and students to donate preloved clothing in exchange for vouchers; 10 items donated meant 10 vouchers to “shop” the swap. A pop-up shop buzzed with activity as participants browsed racks of stylish, secondhand finds, all available for voucher exchange or at reduced prices.

The response was overwhelming: approximately 800 staff and students took part, turning the event into a celebration of circular fashion. Items that weren’t claimed found a meaningful second life through donation to the Simon Community, supporting people experiencing homelessness.



ATU Pastoral Team/EU Green Credit: Sharon Ferguson

Interview Wardrobe

Meanwhile, the ATU Careers Team launched the Interview Wardrobe, a thoughtful initiative to ensure every student has access to professional attire for job interviews. Staff generously donated workwear, and over 200 students across ATU benefited.

With over 50 staff contributing to the Interview Wardrobe and hundreds engaging in the Clothes Swap, ATU’s Zero Waste Challenge wasn’t just an event; it was a movement. A movement that stitched together sustainability, solidarity, and style, raising awareness amongst staff and students in understanding their own purchasing habits, and associated global impact.



Education & Research

Impact

This multi-campus initiative encouraged over 1,000 staff and students to adopt circular fashion practices, reduce textile waste, and make more conscious clothing choices.

Research Publication

New method to monitor drought may help decision-makers plan ahead for water shortages



Article: [🔗 Integrated multi-index drought monitoring and projection under climate change](#)

Authors & Affiliations: S. Moradian (University of Galway), S. Gharbia (ATU), A. AghaKouchak (University of California), A.T. Haghghi (University of Galway) & A.I. Olbert (University of Galway)

Background: Drought is a complex natural disaster with significant negative impacts. Long-term drought projections, catalysed by climate change, indicate that drought conditions will continue to intensify over the coming years.

It is important to better understand how droughts work to help mitigate these challenges.

What the researchers did: Used a comprehensive approach that considers numerous variables such as soil moisture, precipitation, run-off, relative humidity and water demands to monitor and project droughts under climate change.

What they found out: Droughts are more complex than they seem. For example in Dublin, although the weather may seem wetter overall until 2050, the city could still face serious water shortages due to drops in river flow and growing demand.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Giving a clearer picture of future drought risks could help decision-makers plan ahead to protect water supplies and adapt to climate change.

Community Engagement

Students and staff plant 250 Native trees



On the edge of Connemara National Park, a five-acre woodland is quietly transforming into a vibrant hub of biodiversity and learning. First planted in 2013 as part of the Green Campus Programme, this native woodland now boasts more than 6,000 trees, including alder, birch, oak, holly, and Scot’s pine. While the journey has not been without challenges, salt-laden winds and browsing deer claimed some early saplings, the resilience of common alder has created a natural shelter belt, enabling other species to thrive.

This year’s annual Tree Week planting brought together students, staff, and local community members under the banner of the Power to Change project. Supported by the Community Climate Action Programme, the initiative strives to reconnect people with nature and foster inclusive climate conversations.

On March 19 2025, ATU students and staff worked together to plant 250 certified native trees in the woodland, diversifying its species mix with birch, sessile oak, rowan, crab apple, and wild cherry. Bird boxes crafted from Irish-grown timber and habitats for invertebrates were also installed, enriching the site’s ecological value.

The woodland is not just a green space; it is a living classroom. A biodiversity survey led by ATU’s Dr. Dolores Byrne has provided a baseline inventory and a roadmap for future action, highlighting the woodland’s role in carbon sequestration, water regulation, and soil health.

These efforts align with ATU’s new strategic plan, under the guiding light ‘Sustainability for the Future’, which places sustainability at its core, ensuring that education for sustainable development is embedded across campuses and communities.

Every tree planted is a step toward restoring Ireland’s native forest cover, which is among the lowest in Europe. For ATU students, this is hands-on learning with real-world impact: understanding ecosystems, valuing Irish-grown timber, and contributing to climate resilience.



Students at ATU Connemara working together to plant native trees

Watch this video about the Community Native Woodland Tree Planting Day! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoW83pyLmps&feature=youtu.be>



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

The tree-planting initiative fosters sustainable cities and communities by enhancing local biodiversity, creating a shared learning space, and strengthening connections between students, staff, and the wider community.

Research Publication

Over 120 microscopic species identified on marine plastics



Article: [🔗](#) **The platisphere: a comprehensive description of geographic and temporal community patterns across the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean**

Authors & Affiliations: A.L. Larceda (Sorbonne University, France) & J. Frias (ATU)

Background: Roughly 8-12 million metric tons of plastic enter the oceans every year. Not only is this physical debris a threat to our environment, but it also hosts microbial hitchhikers – known as platisphere.

What the researchers did: Submerged 3 different plastics (fossil-fuel based LDPE, recycled PP-PC and bio-based PLA) for one year across sites in the Atlantic Ocean (Ireland, Spain and Brazil) and in the Mediterranean Sea (France and Italy). They then used DNA sequencing and Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) to identify the range of microorganisms present in the samples.

What they found out: They identified and described over 120 types of life forms, including fungi, algae and bacteria. Different locations had different microbial communities due to differences in temperature, and levels of salt and chlorophyll. This is the most extensive dataset on the marine platisphere to date.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Understanding what species live in these plastics is important because plastic is lightweight and can travel great distances, potentially bringing nonnative species across the ocean.

Community Engagement



Waves of Change art exhibition ‘Ripples’ promotes ocean literacy in the local community

Waves of Change is a research project that explores Ocean literacy through stakeholder engagement while promoting sustainable development and circular economy values based on the ocean literacy principles.

Inspired by their exciting portfolio of works, six artists (Aisling Roche, JD Whitman, Enda Burke, Kat Austen, Amy Kramer and Róisín Clothier) were invited to attend a month-long immersive residency in the Watershed Studios in Galway. During this period, they explored the Ocean literacy principles through:

- A master class series on the ocean
- An overnight research training cruise onboard the R/V Tom Crean in Galway Bay
- An education tour of the Galway Atlantaquaria, in Salthill

During this residency, the artists collected audiovisual materials to get an appreciation of how scientists collect various samples while at sea and see firsthand the often unseen diversity of life within the oceans.

To showcase their work, in collaboration with the Galway Atlantaquaria, an innovative art exhibition exploring ocean literacy was organised by ATU scientists to inspire the local community.

Through discussion and brainstorming events, the artists and scientists worked together to cocreate a

body of work to promote ocean literacy through the Arts. The Artworks presented included a wide range of media such as ceramics, sculpture, audiovisual poetry performance, illustration, interactive microplastics lab and photography, showcasing the delicate and intricate relationship between human activities and the Ocean. The Ocean themes showcased were ocean acidification, climate change, plastic pollution, and biodiversity. This exhibition highlighted how effective the arts are in communicating science and engaging communities.

“

Having the opportunity to work closely with artists is a grateful experience, as their vision of the world and the Ocean is very different than the vision of an analytic scientific mind. I believe that this exhibition is trying to achieve, for lack of better words, the famous quote of the Japanese writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa: ‘Individually, we are a drop. Together, we are an Ocean’.

”

Dr João Frias, **ATU researcher**



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

This exhibition promoted ocean literacy through combining art and science to inspire public awareness across marine themes, such as biodiversity and climate change, to create dialogue on the protection of marine ecosystems and the long-term health and resilience of the ocean.

Research Publication

New technique developed to identify sperm whales using ariel photographs



Article: [🔗 Aerial Photo-Identification of Sperm Whales \(*Physeter macrocephalus*\)](#)

Authors & Affiliations: S. A. O'Callaghan (ATU), F.A. Abbar (Wageningen University), H. Costa (Nord University), R. Prieto (University of the Azores), M. Gammell (ATU) & J. O'Brien (ATU)

Background: Photo-identification has long been a cornerstone of whale conservation, helping researchers monitor individual animals and understand their movements, health, and social structures. Traditionally, this method relied on boat-based photography of tail flukes and dorsal fins. However, these techniques have limitations, particularly for younger whales that rarely show their flukes.

What the researchers did: Between 2017 and 2024, they used drones to capture high-resolution aerial photographs and videos of sperm whales in both high-latitude foraging grounds and lower-latitude nursery areas.

Operating drones from boats, they recorded images of whales from directly above, allowing for the documentation of physical features across the entire dorsal surface. These included scars, indentations, skin blotches, parasites, and fluke shapes. The team catalogued 336 individual whales and assessed the consistency of markings over time to determine the viability of aerial photo-identification for long-term monitoring.

What they found out: Aerial imagery proved highly effective in identifying sperm whales, including calves and juveniles that are typically harder to track using traditional methods. Permanent features such as white marks, scars, and fluke shapes were especially useful for re-identification across multiple years. Temporary features like skin lesions and whale lice were helpful for short-term tracking. The study also showed that drones could capture fluke details even when whales did not fully raise their tails, and that whales showed minimal disturbance when drones were operated at respectful distances.



Education & Research

Potential Impact

This work enhances marine conservation by expanding species monitoring across life stages and regions, reducing disturbance, and promoting ethical, technology-driven research that informs policy and protects ocean biodiversity.

Research Publication

Want to hear a Corncrake call? Go out on a moonlight 2am stroll



Article: [Passive acoustic monitoring of an elusive rail, the corncrake \(*Crex crex*\): Calling patterns, detectability and monitoring recommendations](#)

Authors & Affiliations: A. Parisi (ATU), M. Greaney (ATU), J. Carey (NPWS), J. Moran (ATU) & J. O'Brien (ATU)

Background: The corncrake is a rare, ground-nesting bird that is endangered in Ireland. Corncrakes are particularly secretive, making them difficult to track, which hampers the design of effective conservation strategies.

What the researchers did: Used novel recording technologies (Passive Acoustic Monitoring) to monitor male corncrake calls and studied how factors like time, weather, and moonlight affected their calling and chances of being heard.

What they found out: Corncrakes call most between 1–2am in May and June, especially on cool, calm, clear nights with bright moonlight. Wind and cloud cover reduce how likely it is to hear them.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Better understanding when and how to detect corncrakes helps conservationists plan smarter surveys—protecting this endangered bird while saving time and resources.

Research Publication

Researchers uncover Ireland's lost wildcats



Article: [Earliest directly dated wildcat \(*Felis silvestris*\) from Ireland](#)

Authors & Affiliations: M. Dowd (ATU), M. De Martino (University of Rome Tor Vergata), M. McCarthy (Rostellan, Cork) & C. Ottoni Martino (University of Rome Tor Vergata)

Background: Deep within Glencurran Cave in County Clare, a team of archaeologists led by Dr. Marion Dowd uncovered a remarkable clue to Ireland's ancient biodiversity. Among thousands of animal bones, a cluster of feline remains hinted at a story that had long eluded science: the presence of the European wildcat on the island. For decades, researchers debated whether wildcats ever roamed Ireland's forests, but evidence was inconclusive. This discovery offered a rare opportunity to answer that question and shed light on the island's ecological past.

What the researchers did: Between 2004 and 2009, excavations at Glencurran Cave revealed over 35,000 bones spanning multiple eras. Among these were 39 bones from a single adult cat, found deep in the cave's dark zone. To confirm their identity, researchers combined two techniques: radiocarbon dating and ancient DNA analysis.

A canine tooth was dated to around 3645–3510 BC, placing the animal firmly in the Middle Neolithic period. Genetic sequencing, carried out in collaboration with European research centres, confirmed the specimen as a male European wildcat (*Felis silvestris*), with no evidence of hybridisation with domestic cats.

What they found out: This finding provides the earliest direct evidence of wildcats in Ireland, proving they were part of the island's natural heritage over 5,500 years ago. The genetic profile links the Glencurran wildcat to ancient populations in Italy and Spain, suggesting a shared lineage across western Europe. It also highlights the fragility of species survival. Wildcats, once widespread, are now extinct in Ireland, largely due to habitat loss and human pressures. The discovery underscores the importance of conserving remaining wild habitats and species, reminding us that biodiversity can vanish silently without careful stewardship. By piecing together this ancient puzzle, researchers have illuminated a chapter of Ireland's ecological history that speaks powerfully to today's conservation challenges.

This work was published in the [Journal of Irish Archaeology](#) (2025) and also formed part of a major international study published in [Science](#) (Nov 2025).



European Wildcat (*Felis silvestris*).

Credit: Luc Viatour, via Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY 3.0



39 bones belonging to adult male wildcat.

Credit: Ken Williams



Dr Marion Dowd at Glencurran Cave, Co. Clare.

Credit: Crossing the Line Films



Education & Research

Projected Impact

This work highlights that biodiversity can vanish silently without careful stewardship, reminding us of the importance of conserving remaining wild habitats and species.

ATU Operations

ATU launches first veterinary school in the North-West and West of Ireland



In October, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science James Lawless TD in collaboration with Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine, Martin Heydon TD formally approved the capital programme supporting the Veterinary Places Activation Programme (VPAP) initiative that will establish two new veterinary schools at South East Technological University (SETU) and Atlantic Technological University (ATU).

This marks a significant step forward in expanding Ireland’s veterinary education footprint and addressing the national need for skilled veterinary professionals.

Minister James Lawless said: “This approval marks a pivotal moment in our commitment to expanding veterinary education in Ireland. With two new schools to be established at SETU and ATU, we will create 80 additional student places annually from 2026, opening up exciting new opportunities for students across the country to pursue careers in veterinary medicine.”



At full roll-out, the new veterinary schools will deliver an additional 80 veterinary graduates per year, directly supporting the agri-food sector and public health systems. Both institutions are committed to welcoming their first intake of 40 students in September 2026. Future plans include the development of a clinical teaching hospital in Letterkenny, which aims to open for students to complete their final year rotations by 2029.

“

I welcome the Minister’s announcement approving the capital programme for the new veterinary facilities at ATU. This is an important step forward for our university and for the West and Northwest, expanding opportunities for students to study veterinary medicine closer to home. The investment will allow ATU to build the facilities and expertise required to deliver high-quality veterinary education and research, while also supporting Ireland’s agrifood sector and wider society. We look forward to progressing the design and planning stage and to welcoming our first students in 2026.

”

Dr Orla Flynn, **ATU President**



Education & Research

Projected Impact

Expanding veterinary education through new schools at ATU and SETU will strengthen Ireland’s capacity to protect animal health and support sustainable agriculture. This will also enhance rural resilience, safeguard biodiversity, and promote responsible land stewardship.

Community Engagement

Staff and students weave 100s of stars together against domestic violence



One in three Irish women, and one in seven Irish men will experience abuse from an intimate partner in their lifetime. These stark statistics underscore the urgent need for awareness and action, which is why initiatives that foster community resilience and solidarity are so vital. ATU is proud to be part of the Irish One Million Stars Initiative, a global community arts project that promotes hope, courage, and solidarity in the face of domestic violence and coercive control.

Amber’s One Million Stars Ireland project is part of the international One Billion Stars initiative, originally founded in Australia in 2012. This initiative invites individuals and communities across Ireland to weave eight-pointed stars as symbols of light, resilience, and unity. These stars are then gathered into public art installations that advocate for a safer and more compassionate society.

Throughout March and April, 143 ATU students and staff participated in two hands-on star weaving workshops, one in Letterkenny and one in Sligo. Collectively, they co-created hundreds of stars for the initiative. The workshops are designed to foster creativity, connection, and reflection on the role individuals and institutions can play in promoting positive change.

The LOVE installation was prominently featured on the Letterkenny campus from March 12th until April 4th, before it was moved on to the the Public Services Centre building of Donegal County Council and An Gránán Theatre. This project also marked a really special collaborative piece with Donegal County Council and Donegal Volunteer Centre.

The ATU Respect team intend to coordinate another series of star weaving workshops in the Spring.

“
The One Million Stars project is a powerful demonstration of what equity, diversity, and inclusion mean in action. At ATU, we are committed to creating a culture where everyone feels safe and respected, and this initiative brings that commitment to life. Each woven star represents connection and care, especially for those who have been silenced or marginalised by domestic violence and injustice. By coming together to engage in this creative collective action, we’re showing that EDI is not just a policy—it’s something we actively build, live, and stand for.
 ”

Dr Sharon McLaughlin, **ATU EDI Manager, Donegal**



Students and staff working together to weave the stars



The LOVE installation on Letterkenny campus

Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

This initiative strengthens community resilience and promotes a culture of safety, compassion, and collective responsibility in addressing domestic violence and coercive control.

Research Publication

Identifying what drives employee motivation, opportunity and ability in workplace improvement processes



Article: [🔗 The role of employees in continuous improvement: a study on employee participation](#)

Authors & Affiliations: Y. Yang (Newcastle University), B. Yang (University of Sussex), G. Onofrei (ATU), H. Nguyen (RMIT International University) & E. Hlaciuc (Stefan cel Mare University)

Background: Encouraging employees to get involved and propose ideas and solutions to current challenges is a critical component of improving workplace processes (called Continuous Improvement or CI). Yet, many managers still struggle with how to motivate staff to actively participate.

What the researchers did: Studied four business units in a German manufacturing company, each at different stages of CI, and used a model called MOA (Motivation-Opportunity-Ability) to understand what influences employee participation.

What they found out: Discovered new factors that explain how motivation, opportunity and ability are influenced. Examples include Awareness of benefits (Motivation) and cultivating an Error-free culture (Opportunity). This provides valuable guidance on how to structure training and development to effectively foster employee engagement.



Education & Research

Projected Impact

By helping workplaces become more participatory, inclusive, and responsive, the study supports fair and transparent decision-making, which are key principles of strong, just institutions.

ATU Operations

EU Green Alliance mobilises universities across Europe for sustainability action



The  **EU Green Alliance** is a transformative partnership of nine European universities: University of Gävle (Sweden), Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences (Poland), Università di Parma (Italy), Université d'Angers (France), Universidade de Évora (Portugal), Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg (Germany) Atlantic Technological University (ATU) (Ireland), Universitatea din Oradea (Romania), and Universidad de Extremadura (Spain).

The Alliance works together with students and staff to embed sustainability into every aspect of higher education. EU Green addresses global challenges through local, regional and European actions, aligning deeply with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

EU Green Work Packages

At the heart of the Alliance are nine strategic work packages, each driving a distinct but interconnected dimension of sustainability:

- **WP1: Innovative Management and Coordination:** Ensure effective governance, quality assurance, and strategic alignment across all partner institutions.
- **WP2: Educational Model Centered on Sustainability and the SDGs:** Develop joint degree programmes and embeds sustainability into curricula and graduate attributes.
- **WP3: Structuring Research-Based Learning Through Excellence Clusters:** Provide a coordinated and interdisciplinary European framework for sustainability related research and innovation by consolidating its activities around six Joint Research Clusters of Excellence, each designed to promote cross-sectoral collaboration and address global sustainability challenges through a European perspective.
- **WP4: Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Sustainability:** Support sustainable start-ups, spin-outs, and industry partnerships that translate research into real-world solutions.
- **WP5: Engagement for Sustainable Societies and Economies (Led by ATU):** Develop an EU Green Engagement hub, and co-design sustainability solutions.
- **WP6: Fostering Mobility and International Collaboration:** Coordinate student and staff exchanges, blended intensive programmes, and cross-cultural learning experiences.
- **WP7: Access, Diversity and Inclusion** – Promote equitable participation and inclusive practices across all Alliance activities.
- **WP8: Sustainability and Healthy Campus:** Advance green campus initiatives, wellbeing programmes, living labs and climate action.
- **WP9: Communication, Dissemination and Impact:** Ensure visibility, stakeholder engagement, and long-term impact of the Alliance's work.



Find out more about several ATU EU Green Alliance initiatives in this report: Healthy Campus Week (p.51), Lab Sustainability workshop (p.39), Fighting fast fashion (p.40), Lecture on environmental leadership (p.52)



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

The EU Green Alliance strengthens SDG 17 by creating transnational frameworks for collaboration, enabling universities like ATU to co-deliver education, research, and engagement initiatives that advance sustainability through shared governance, funding, and innovation.

Guest Lecture

Inspiring guest lecture on Environmental Leadership and Sustainability



ATU welcomed Mr. Gerard O’Leary, former Deputy Director & General of Communications & Corporate Services at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and an ATU Sligo graduate, for a thought-provoking **guest lecture** on environmental governance and sustainability.

The guest lecture was held on April 10, at the AbbVie Auditorium at ATU Sligo Campus, and was hosted in collaboration with the **EU Green Alliance**. Attendees could join in-person, or online.

Mr. O’Leary shared insights from his professional journey, offering students and staff a unique perspective on the evolution of environmental protection in Ireland and globally. His reflections on key environmental trends, policy developments, and the growing importance of sustainability in public discourse sparked meaningful dialogue across disciplines. The session highlighted the vital role of institutions, innovation, and individual responsibility in shaping a more sustainable future.

Attendees gained valuable understanding of current environmental challenges and policy responses, while exploring the intersection of communication, corporate services, and public perception in driving environmental change.

This event also strengthened ATU’s connection with its alumni network, showcasing successful career pathways and inspiring the next generation of environmental leaders. By facilitating direct engagement between students and a senior EPA official, the lecture fostered career awareness, networking opportunities, and collaboration between academia and the public sector.

The event’s potential outcomes extends beyond the session itself, by potentially inspiring future environmental leaders, encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration, and reinforcing ATU’s commitment to sustainability and civic engagement. As part of the EU Green Alliance, the lecture showcase the university’s role in driving informed action and sustainable development.



Education & Research

Impact

This guest lecture fostered cross-sector collaboration between academia, public institutions and alumni networks to advance shared goals in sustainability and environmental governance.

Research Projects



Research Showcase series connects ATU researchers across campuses and disciplines to tackle big issues

A key focus of SDG 17 is to encourage inclusive collaboration to mobilise knowledge, expertise and technology. In line with this, 2025 saw the launch of the ATU Research Showcase Series. Funded by RISE@ATU, the ATU Research Showcase brings together researchers across the nine ATU campuses to highlight how ATU is tackling cross-cutting societal issues.

Each Showcase aligns with national or international public awareness initiatives to enhance the visibility of ATUs research by bringing together twelve researchers working within a given theme, such as Innovation or Health-Tech. The Research Coordinator team (Dr. James Britton, Dr. Shane Conway, Dr. Alan Naughton and Dr. Alan Hernon) aim to use the ATU Research Showcase to strengthen ATU's profile in strategically important areas, build stronger links across our campuses, and inspire future collaborations.

The first Showcase coincided with the Irish Bioeconomy Networks Bioeconomy week and profiled academics working in areas ranging from valorising waste into new value chains to reimagining farming systems and advancing solutions in marine, energy, engineering, food systems and nanotechnology.

The second edition focused on researchers shaping the future of Healthcare with Technology, coinciding with Science Week Ireland. Profiling researchers optimising biopharmaceutical production, developing artificial intelligence platforms for novel diagnostics, advanced manufacturing of medical devices and digital therapeutics that enhance wellbeing among vulnerable populations.

Meet ATU's Health-Tech Leaders
Shaping the Future of Healthcare Through Technology and Research at ATU

Researchers featured: Dr Marion McAfee, Dr Michael McCann, Dr Anushree Dwivedi, Dr Jamie Roche, Dr Saritha Unnikrishnan, Dr Richéal Burns, Dr Lisa Ryan, Faizan Munawar, Dr Aoife Hill, Dr Kenneth Monaghan, Dr Karla Muñoz Esquivel, Dr Konrad Mulrennan.

Logos: Toighde Éireann Research Ireland, Ollscoil Technolaíochta an Aitearraigh Atlantic Technological University, SCIENCE WEEK #scienceweek 9-16 November 2025.

As the technological university for the west and north-west, ATU grounds its innovation focus in regional and national priorities. Through alignment with Ireland's National Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for Innovation 2022–2027, the ATU Research Showcase is highlighting our contributions to sectoral strengths in Agri-Food & Agri-Tech, Engineering, Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences & Medical Technology, Marine technology, Renewable Energy and Sustainability. Reinforcing the role of ATU as a key innovation partner in the region.

All editions of the ATU Research Showcase .can be found on the Zenodo repository by visiting <https://zenodo.org/communities/aturesearchshowcaseseries>



Community & Social Responsibility

Impact

The ATU Research Showcase Series fosters cross-campus collaboration and strategic partnerships, aligning regional innovation with national and global priorities to advance shared solutions for sustainable Community & Social development

Research Projects

ATU awarded over €26m across 14 crossborder PEACEPLUS projects



Being the only University in the Northwest of Ireland, ATU has a special relationship with our counterparts in Northern Ireland. With much of our community crossing the border daily it is of vital importance that ATU works with our partners to achieve lasting peace and prosperity. The PEACEPLUS cross-border funding program, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUBP) is a major funding source allowing research and educational activities to prosper through collaboration of Universities, Public bodies, society and industry on both sides of the border.

In 2025, ATU has seen unprecedented success with PEACEPLUS, partnering in 14 successful projects funded to a total of almost €130 million, with over €26 million going to ATU alone. ATU is the lead partner on three projects: SPEAR, ETC4SME and NW DEPTH, detailed on pages p29, p27 and p17 in this report.

Here, we briefly list the 11 other PEACEPLUS projects that ATU will collaborate on to improve many aspects of life for residents of the Northwest.

NWCAM2 (Northwest Centre for Advanced Manufacturing) will support SMEs to develop environmentally sustainable manufacturing processes and products enabling them to innovate, reduce emissions and compete on a global scale. *Project Lead: Catalyst. Partners: ATU, University of Ulster, NorthWest Regional College and others.*

ONEHEALTH is a cross-border life and health sciences partnership that will use artificial intelligence to tackle health and agrifood challenges. *Project Lead: Catalyst. Partners: ATU, Queen’s University Belfast (QUB), Health Innovation Research Alliance Northern Ireland (HIRANI), Tyndall National Institute Cork and the University of Galway.*

PRISM (Powering Research & Innovation for Sustainable Manufacturing) will focus on concrete production and sustainable manufacturing processes, hydrogen and rotational storage, and food innovation and manufacturing. *Project Lead: Southwest College. Partners: ATU, NWRC & other.*

E-DATA (Enterprise Digitalisation and Transformation Alliance) will support digital transformation for SMEs in Northern Ireland and border counties of Ireland. Offering digital diagnostics, mentoring, and tools to enable digital growth. *Project Lead: Ulster University. Partners: ATU.*

IMPROVE (Innovation in person-centred Medication Prescribing and Review for Optimal Value and Efficacy) will implement care pathways to optimise the prescribing of medications, improve community accessibility needs and reduce the burden on primary care. *Project Lead: Ulster University. Partners: ATU and others.*

PEACETIME (Development of a specialist obesity management service for adults with type 2 diabetes in primary care and the community in the Northwest) will see the development of a specialist obesity management service for adults with Type 2 diabetes in primary care and the community in the Northwest. *Project Lead: Ulster University. Partners: ATU and others.*

GrASP (Green Accelerator Skills Programme) will create two Green Skills Academies which will promote green apprenticeships and develop and deliver a residential carbon literacy programme. *Project Lead: South West College. Partners: ATU, Donegal Education Training Board, North Western Regional Committee.*



Education & Research

Potential Impact

Through strategic cross-border partnerships and €130 million in PEACEPLUS-funded projects, ATU is driving collaborative research and innovation that fosters peace, prosperity, and sustainable development across the Northwest of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

PeatPlus+ will primarily focus on peatland restoration in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. It aims to reduce emissions from degraded peatlands and enhance their carbon capture capacity post-restoration. It also focuses on biodiversity improvement, on the protection of historic features on or below the peat, and aims to positively contribute to flood alleviation, improved water quality, and reduce wildfire risks. *Project Lead: Ulster Wildlife. Partner: ATU.*

FLOW (For the Love of Our Waters) will address the declining water quality in target catchment areas attributable to agricultural pressures and wastewater discharge. It will result in a solution designed to engage communities and make an active contribution to improved water quality in four cross-border water catchments: Lough Melvin, Upper and Lower Lough MacNeane, Cladagh River and the Kilroosky Lake Cluster. The project will also result in the installation of an innovative pilot wastewater treatment facility in Rossinver, County Leitrim. *Project Lead: Irish Central Border Area Network. Partners: ATU and others.*

STRIDE (Smart Rural Innovation Driven Empowerment) will be led by SWC in partnership with ATU, UU & other partners. This project seeks to deliver and implement one jointly developed solution in supporting rural communities to use ICT. *Project Lead: South West College. Partners: ATU, Ulster University and others.*

HF-TIC (Health Frontiers – Technology Innovation Centre) will establish a world-class health focused consortium focusing on next generation medical device technologies, new digital and AI technologies to support health clinic systems, and digital transformation in healthcare practice and culture. *Project Lead: Ulster University. Partners: ATU and others.*



We hope you enjoyed exploring this 2025 collection.

If you are a staff or student member at ATU and would like your Sustainable Development Goal activity to be featured in the 2026 report, please submit via this MS forms: <https://forms.office.com/e/1z1ziLbUgU>.
A member of the editorial team will contact you in due course.



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An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
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