



TUS

**Technological University of the Shannon:
Midlands Midwest**

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**Transitions & Student Success Strategy for the Technological University of
the Shannon: Midlands Midwest**

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The Strategy Rationale

This strategy is presented in order to enhance TUS Transitions and Student Success activities in advance, during, and in the aftermath of the transformation to the new TUS organisational structure. Identified primarily is the need for continuous inclusive processes and constant internal consultation and collaboration. It is acknowledged that many of the measures identified in this plan will not immediately impact on university performance but will provide a platform to enhance the university in the five- to ten-year timeframe.

Though student success is recognised as far more than progression and completion statistics, this plan recognises that attrition is a wicked problem, which is one that cannot be strategically addressed using traditional approaches to problem-solving (Beer and Lawson, 2017). The institutional strategy is, therefore, based on identifying causes of attrition and providing mitigation through a combination of institutional and localised interventions.

This strategy's priority is placed on the continuous gathering and dissemination of key statistical indicators. Such an evidence-based approach is advocated by both the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFTL) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA). Key statistical data will inform an array of internal stakeholders in three broad categories, namely student performance; access; and student recruitment through advanced progression paths.

Underpinning the rationale is the acknowledgement of a required collaborative all staff team-based approach across and between all university functions.

The Strategy Focus

Much of the context of the student success discourse emanates from a publication by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Published in September 2019, *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Higher Education* built upon *The Department of Education and Skills System Performance Framework for the Higher Education System, 2018-2020* which required all higher education institutions to develop a Student Success Strategy that embeds a holistic and whole-of-institution approach.

In order to assist individual HEIs with implementing *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Higher Education*, The NFTL launched a resource entitled *Seven Cs for Embedding Student Success: A Toolkit for Higher Education Institutions* in October 2021. Described in further detail later in this plan, the purpose of the of the toolkit is to support institutions to take whole-of-institution approaches to the continuous improvement of student success.

By implementing the Seven Cs process, TUS will develop a more comprehensive Student Success Strategy over the medium- and long-term with input from multiple stakeholders. It is envisaged that implementation of the 7Cs process will commence once the new TUS structure is embedded.

This proposed strategy mirrors content from *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Higher Education*, which identified Student Success Themes listed below.

Student Success Themes

1. Engagement and Student Partnership.
2. A strategic Approach to student Success–Enabling Policies and Practices.
3. Professional Development and the Centrality of Staff Who Teach.
4. Evidence-based Decision-making.
5. Supporting Transitions and Cultivating Belonging.
6. Assessment and Feedback.

All six pillars will feed into the overall future strategic direction of the university through implementing the seven Cs process. Three of the six themes have been identified to include in this first iteration of the strategy as they relate to the core function of supporting student transitions and success.

1. Evidence-based Decision-making.
2. Supporting Transitions and Cultivating Belonging.
3. A strategic Approach to Student Success–Enabling Policies and Practices.

These three themes will guide the immediate institutional focus in transitions and student success, with the priority of emphasis firmly placed on the Evidence-based decision-making pillar, which will inform areas for interventions and actions within the other pillars.

Defining Student Success

The NFTL wants each HEI to develop a shared understanding of student success. Based on the national understanding, a proposed TUS definition has been prepared for internal consultation:

- Student success optimises the learning and development opportunities for each student attending TUS to recognise and fulfil their potential to contribute to, and flourish in, society.
- To be achieved, TUS promotes a team-based approach to promote a culture that values inclusivity, equity and meaningful engagement between students, staff, their institutions and the wider community.
- TUS- Where no face is out of place.

Within the shared understanding of student success to be agreed, the following pages outline the opening objectives and context for TUS in promoting student success.

Strategy Theme 1: Evidence-based Decision-making

TUS is committed to constantly seeking to offer the best possible learner experience for all the university's students. Evidence extracted from data sources will be crucial to supporting university efforts in student success. Many data sources will provide information in order for the university to make informed decisions.

Quantitative data sources relating to student performance will be extracted from the university's banner system. Building upon the "report manager" platform devised by the MIS unit in TUS Midlands, key performance metrics will be devised, disseminated, and monitored continuously to measure progress. Further quantitative learner analytics will also be identified to enhance the evidence base.

Qualitative data sources from national reports, published peer reviewed research and the Student Survey [formerly known as the Irish Study of Student Engagement (ISSE)] will inform the university decision-making process for student success. Central to the university is the student voice which staff will proactively seek to hear.

TUS recognises the potential that data can provide. Evidence arising from detailed analysis allows for gaining new insights and understanding, which is invaluable. The university identifies that responding to the new insights that arise from data is critical. It is how the university acts on the data that achieves meaningful impact for students and their success.

TUS will provide relevant data to the relevant staff members in a timely and effective manner. Projects, actions and interventions identified by evidence will be welcome from the entire TUS community, with projects being approved by the Student Success: Access, Transfer and Progression sub-committee of the University's Academic Council.

Projects, actions and interventions arising from evidence are central to the TUS strategy. Measuring the efficacy of all initiatives in order to quantify success will form part of all projects. The first project identified will aim to increase both participation and success rates in the Autumn repeat examination sitting. The approach to this project will be facilitated through a constructive and collaborative process. It is recognised that several iterations of this project are likely before it becomes fully established across the university.

The university is mindful not to become beholden to algorithms at the expense of human decision making (Fynn, 2016). TUS is a student-centred university. Listening to students is critical to the function, character and community on all the university campuses. The student voice forms soft qualitative data, which will play a considerable role in the university. The student voice, articulated by the student body, will be a primary source of data from which decisions will result.

Communication with and to students will be clear and aligned to the necessity identified in *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Irish Higher Education*:

Informed decision-making is also critical for students, particularly at key transitional points such as module registration or major selection, and also in relation to policy or fees implications of, for example, repeating a year, taking a leave of absence or transferring programmes. Clear, accurate guidelines are essential (p.19).

Gathering of data will be achieved through an array of approaches. Priority will be placed on the gathering and dissemination of student performance data that can be conducted entirely by TUS. Such data sets will include first-year early withdrawal, non-progression and student performance related data. The initial priority will be placed on the statistical measures used by the HEA to measure the university's performance. A full internal and ongoing consultation process with all stakeholders to identify what they consider the most appropriate statistical measures will subsequently be conducted.

It is envisaged that the initial data set will provide academic managers with statistics concerning student participation and success in Autumn repeat exams. A data set is available for dissemination in the Midlands campus, with the data to be subsequently gathered and disseminated to Midwest campus academic managers. An ensuing project will follow, in this academic year, to combine central university initiatives and localised interventions seeking to improve both participation and success levels in the Autumn repeats.

In the longer term, a project will create dashboards for all academic managers to facilitate the access to accurate student performance data in an easily accessible manner. The data will be available constantly to managers to inform decision making and to assist in the identification of localised strategies where appropriate, negating the requirement for disseminating one-off information sets.

Overview of goals associated with evidence-based decision making:

TUS TRANSITIONS & STUDENT SUCCESS THEME 1: Evidence-based Decision Making	
Goals for development & Implementation	
1.	Devolve student related data to academic leaders who can make timely decisions to improve the student experience. TUS will achieve this devolution by developing a student performance data hub for academic leaders to engage with data on programmes under their remit. The goal is for the right people to get the right data at the right time.
2.	Identify trends showing potential areas for improving student success based on student performance data. These areas include early withdrawals, non-progression rates, completion rates, and academic performance.
3.	Initiate projects at university, campus, faculty, departmental levels supporting student success based on data analysis. The university will undertake all such initiatives through a team-based approach with powerful levels of collaboration between the education and student experience function and academic faculties. Idea generation for such initiatives will be encouraged by the broader TUS community.
4.	Conduct reviews that include measuring the impact of internal student success projects and disseminate results within the university.
5.	Maximise the value of qualitative data sources, such as ISSE and institutional surveys. TUS will ensure that academic leaders with decision-making authority have full access to relevant data to inform their decision-making process.
6.	Continuously audit university procedures in order to identify potential barriers to student success. As a learning organisation, TUS will encourage staff to prepare evidence-based business cases that seek to enhance the student experience and reinforce the university's student centricity.
7.	Encourage staff who teach to embrace data use as a means of developing evidence-based teaching design and identifying students that may need additional supports.
8.	Develop institutional data strategies that maximise the value of institutional and learner data as a strategic and learner-centred resource. TUS will utilise international partnerships and networks, including RUN-EU to help deliver this objective.
9.	Embrace soft qualitative data analysis to identify timely institutional intervention supporting student success. TUS staff will proactively listen to the student voice. This student voice goes beyond student representative bodies or academic committees. Recognising the transient nature of the student body and associated changing student-needs, university staff will listen to students in every setting and through all means.
10.	Ensure that current and future students have access to timely, accurate information to enable informed decisions and to establish suitable expectations.
Implementation and development will be through a university-wide team-based approach	

Strategy Theme 2: Supporting Transitions and Cultivating Belonging

TUS is committed to supporting every learner seeking transition to higher education. The university is a close-knit community based on a partnership between Students and Staff. Providing students with a sense of belonging is more than at the core of TUS. It is the value that the university places above all other values. TUS is where “No Face is out of Place”.

This plan seeks to complement the role of the university’s access functions with a priority of focus on the supporting and enabling the academic functions seeking to further develop academic pathways for incoming students from current and prospective partners. The plan also recognises the need to provide sufficient supports to ensure that all students entering TUS have the opportunity to succeed.

Strengthening links with other educational providers, including the FET sector, is at the heart of this plan. The rationale comes from many national policies, namely the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*, which commits to expanding progression routes into Higher Education; the *National plan for Equity of Access for Higher Education 2015-2021* which prioritises the building of coherent pathways from further education and the fostering of routes to Higher education and the *SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy 2014 -2019* that identified the need for clearer learning pathways into, within and from Further Education to support progression targets. A set of *Strategic Performance Agreements* between Solas and ETBs plan for more learners to transition from further education and training to higher education.

The immediate focus within TUS will be to develop links with partner providers and form an evidence base of FE students transitioning into TUS. This focus will establish what FE programmes currently have either no identifiable pathway to TUS or have a low proportion of student seeking to progress to the university.

Broadening access to Higher Education has also been prioritised in Ireland. *The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2014-2019* identified and classified underrepresented groups:

- Entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education.
- First time, mature student entrants.
- Students with disabilities.
- Part-time/flexible learners.
- Further education award holders.
- Irish Travellers (Higher Education Authority, 2015, p.34).

More recently, the National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 refined underrepresented groups as students who:

- 1) are socioeconomically disadvantaged;
 - a. from a low-income background or socioeconomically disadvantaged area;
 - b. being a first-time or second-chance mature student;
 - c. having experienced the care system, the criminal justice system or homelessness;
 - d. being a lone or teen parent;
 - e. being a carer;
 - f. being a migrant or refugee or being from an ethnic minority;
 - g. having experienced the international protection process; or
 - h. being a survivor of domestic violence
- 2) are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities.
- 3) have disabilities, including intellectual disabilities.

The National Access Plan is underpinned by four national targets and nine Key Performance Indicators, identified as:

Flexibility within higher education

- 1) Participation by part-time/flexible learners.
- 2) Progression from further education to higher education.

Diversity across programmes and levels

- 3) Postgraduate study among selected priority groups (for example, postgraduate/mature students from disadvantaged areas, Traveller students, students with disabilities).
- 4) Student diversity across selected fields of study (for example, initial teacher education, medicine).

Access and participation for priority groups

- 5) Students with a disability who are supported by the Fund for Students with Disability (FSD).
- 6) Students attending DEIS schools.
- 7) Students who are lone parents.

Student Success and Engagement

- 8) Progression and completion among selected priority groups (for example, students and mature students from disadvantaged areas)

9) Graduate outcomes among selected priority groups (for example, students from disadvantaged areas and those attending DEIS schools)

Broadening participation is reinforced in the *Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020* which seeks to “Significantly improve the equality of opportunity through education and training and recruits a student body that reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland’s population” (Department of Education and Skills, 2018 p.15).

TUS welcomes a diverse student cohort, recognising that many pathways students have undertaken to register at the university. From an academic perspective, the university’s Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy, *Putting Learning First*, includes a full pillar encompassing the pedagogies of care and positive transition.

Augmenting the academic perspective is a full array of activities from University clubs and societies offering a more rounded student experience. Students can avail of an array of supports from within the university seeking to enhance their journey. Building from the work of Vincent Tinto, TUS will enhance the institutional setting to increase student retention (Tinto, 1993a, 1993b, 2006, 2012, 2017). The University’s institutional setting comprises a range of communities. Students who are more prepared to engage meaningfully with the institutional communities and who integrate well are more likely to persist with their studies when faced with setbacks or challenges. Equally, a student who does not integrate meaningfully, with any of the set of communities within an institution, is more likely to reach a decision, to leave their studies, which could be on a voluntary or an involuntary basis.

All the university’s policies and procedures will underpin student success, successful transition, and always cultivate a sense of belonging. TUS is committed to continuously opening new pathways from both existing and new partners. These partnerships conducted through collaboration will maximise the level of preparedness for all inbound students, from every pathway.

Overview of goals associated with supporting transitions and cultivating belonging:

TUS TRANSITIONS & STUDENT SUCCESS THEME 2: Supporting Transitions and Cultivating Belonging	
Goals for development & Implementation	
1.	<p>Collaborate with the All Island Research Observatory (AIRO) to determine the composition of the student body and identify where there is potential to increase access and participation within the university's catchment area.</p> <p>A priority will be to identify students from underrepresented groups in order to monitor and support their progress at the university.</p>
2.	<p>Develop an early warning mechanism for identifying first-year students struggling to make the adjustment to university and subsequently devise interventions to reduce the likelihood of early withdrawal or non-progression.</p> <p>This process involves incorporating early assessments within all first-year curricula. Any student underperforming will be identified by the lecturer and followed by an intervention with the student.</p>
3.	<p>The university will build upon the excellent relationships formed with partner providers from whom students enrol in advanced entry. Priority of focus will seek to ease student transitions, especially for non-traditional student cohorts.</p>
4.	<p>Develop supports, services and events, specifically targeted to help students to adjust to the demands of higher education.</p>
5.	<p>Encourage university academic leaders to place an emphasis on developing the optimal first-year experience. Such encouragement includes the timely provision of data, incentives to improve retention performance and a series of information workshops.</p>
6.	<p>Ensure TUS develops curriculum to instil confidence, esteem and a sense of belonging to transitioning students. Programme structure and delivery besides co-and extra curricula activities will prepare students for future employment, active citizenship with a strong orientation towards lifelong learning.</p>
7.	<p>Embed a university-wide team-based approach with particular emphasis on a strong collaborative interface between academic and professional support staff.</p>
8.	<p>Identify opportunities to support transitions through the first-year curriculum. Early curriculum to focus on maximising engagement and reflecting student's programme expectation.</p>
9.	<p>Continually review all TUS activities to ensure an optimum process of instilling a sense of belonging in the student body exists. TUS will ensure institutional approaches to student transition are informed and complement current national policy, frameworks and guidelines besides institutional data.</p>
10.	<p>TUS is a student-centred university committed to peer-led transitions. Students will be selected to lead peer mentoring and advisory interventions. Potential incoming students will have the opportunity to engage with existing students in advance of their course entry. Once enrolled, peer-mentoring through the university's PASS system will offer support to individuals on their student journey.</p>
Implementation and development will be through a university-wide team-based approach	

Strategy Student Success Theme 3: A Strategic Approach to Student Success–Enabling Policies and Practices

TUS is a learning entity. As the university grows, so too will its institutional knowledge. Policies and processes will be constantly reviewed and updated. University policies will adapt to national policies, published research and by capturing best practice in TUS.

According to the report entitled *Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Irish Higher Education*:

Embracing student success and a positive experience necessitates a commitment on the part of the institution and its constituent schools and units to review their policies and practices, identify and address incompatibilities and misalignments, and prioritise a seamless, coherent student experience (p.14).

The university will engage collaboratively with key stakeholders. A strategic partnership between academics and support staff lies at the centre of this strategy. Each faculty will develop an individual student success approach to reflect its disciplinary needs. A variety of functional areas will support every faculty in this undertaking. Ensuring a harmonisation in approaches to ensure every student has a similar and optimal experience on all the university's campuses is a priority.

Understanding and Enabling Student Success in Irish Higher Education cites research to underpin this point.

According to Felten et al., 'Thriving institutions transform silos into systems by supporting cross-unit coordination and by paying more attention to the student experience than to how the organizational chart divides up the campus' (p. 172).

Over the lifetime of this strategy, an extensive consultation will continue to take place between support staff and the faculties to optimise institutional endeavours supporting the students' journey.

TUS will prioritise the collaboration, collegiality, harmonisation and integration of all staff, professional, technical, administrative, support and academic. The student will be placed at the centre of all the university's activities with a team-based approach built upon the whole-of-institution approach (Kift, 2015) of student success.

TUS will support all students informed by an array of national reports including but not limited to:

- National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030,
- National Access Plan 2022 to 2028,
- Supporting a better transition from the second level to higher education,

- Transition from Further Education and Training to Higher Education,
- Entry to Higher Education in Ireland in the 21st century,
- Higher Education Systems Performance Framework 2018-2020.
- The Internationalisation of Irish Higher Education.

Overview of goals associated with A Strategic Approach to Student Success–Enabling Policies and Practices:

**TUS TRANSITIONS & STUDENT SUCCESS THEME 3:
A Strategic Approach to Student Success—Enabling Policies and Practices**

Goals for development & Implementation

1.	<p>The university will implement the <i>7Cs for embedding Student Success: A toolkit for Higher Education Institutions</i>. An element of that process will be to adopt the shared understanding of student success as defined by the NFTL and embed it in the university.</p> <p>The NFTL prescribed a process for embedding student success sustainably within every institution. Entitled “the 7Cs”, the NFTL described them:</p> <p>Commit</p> <p>The institution commits to the student success process by appointing an Institutional Student Success Lead and identifying Student Success Partners across all institutional functional areas.</p> <p>Collaborate</p> <p>A whole-of-institution steering group, which includes students, is set up and facilitated by the Institutional Student Success Lead. This group works collaboratively to consider the National Understanding of Student Success and Embedding Student Success: A Guiding Framework and to create a clear vision of student success from an institutional perspective.</p> <p>Community</p> <p>Facilitated by the Institutional Student Success Partners, the entire institutional community contributes to the ‘taking stock’ process, identifying the ways they are supporting student success and the areas that need to be enhanced.</p> <p>Consensus</p> <p>The results of the ‘taking stock’ process are synthesised for each functional area, compiled and are considered by the whole-of-institution steering group. Guided by the statements for each enabler, the group comes to a consensus and prioritises high level enhancement targets. An implementation plan for achieving these targets for student success over an identified enhancement period is developed.</p> <p>Communicate</p> <p>The steering group communicates the implementation plan, which is enabling, clear, and well-resourced, to all staff, students, and other stakeholders.</p> <p>Connect</p> <p>The Student Success Partners within each functional area, in collaboration with their staff and students, connect how the institutional priorities and implementation plan can be interpreted locally and identify local enhancement targets and actions.</p> <p>Continuing</p> <p>Progress against the Student Success implementation plan is constantly reviewed both within each functional area and by the whole-of-institution steering group, so the continual enhancement of student success is ongoing and based on feedback and data gathered.</p>
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	Implementing the 7Cs is a university-wide activity overseen by a steering group.
2.	A university-wide student success calendar operationalising various initiatives will be published annually to complement and support the annual academic calendar. Activities included will be supports offered by the education and student experience function, besides indicative timelines for faculty activities.
3.	Review institutional policies and procedures to ensure they are aligned, enabling, and student-centred. Review institutional supports and services to ensure they are adequately resourced, fit-for-purpose and well-communicated to all students, especially at key times.
4.	Support faculty to develop and implement best student success and engagement strategies. Creating a positive culture enabling learning is at the centre of TUS. An array of classroom participation strategies enhanced by technological innovation will enable the learner to engage positively with their programme.
5.	Identify, through student partnership, opportunities for addressing logistic and infrastructural obstacles to student success. These logistical and infrastructural include but are not confined to areas such as parking, accessibility of public transport, timetabling and student accommodation.
6.	Every university function will be afforded the opportunity to create an advisory group to assist with identifying strategic priorities and implementation strategies. Such advisory groups will be deployed at the discretion of function managers. Composition of advisory groups will vary but encouragement is given to including personnel from international partner networks such as RUN-EU.
7.	TUS will develop a university-wide procedure to support students undertaking examinations in the Autumn sitting. This procedure will issue following extensive consultation with faculties, support staff and student representatives. The procedure will remain under continuous review over this plan's duration.
8.	Develop university wide communities of practice (COPs) to offer internal peer support and develop synergies between the different campuses. These COPs will inform practice improvement. COPs be encouraged to embrace the diversity of the university's student cohort. Additionally, TUS staff will take part and lead in international networks, including RUN-EU.
9.	Foster a culture of identifying and disseminating examples of best practice in student success within the institution.
10.	Encourage institutional leaders at every level to show an authentic and public commitment to student success. Create a collegiate culture of respectful challenge amongst university staff that seeks to determine the extent of student-centricity on all programmes and in all university functions.
Implementation and development will be through a university-wide team-based approach	

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