



# N-TUTORR EXTERNAL EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

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## Acknowledgements

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## Background

This report provides a summary of the external evaluation commissioned by the N-TUTORR Programme in June 2024. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the programme's effectiveness in achieving its stated objectives, and to provide outputs *“to help guide the ongoing and future implementations of the programme, and any successor programmes that may be developed in response to future funding opportunities, ensuring the attainment of N-TUTORR's longer term strategic objectives efficiently and sustainably”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N-TUTOR External Evaluation RTF, May 2024

## Executive summary

### Programme Overview

The N-TUTORR programme (National Technological University Transformation for Recovery and Resilience) was an ambitious partnership response from the Technological University (TU) sector to the 2021 Irish Government's National Recovery and Resilience Plan<sup>2</sup> in particular *Priority 3: Social and Economic Recovery and Job Creation*. It provided an unprecedented opportunity for the emerging sector to access significant funding to enable and drive forward sectoral transformation within the context of this wider, national socio-economic plan.

Operating within a challenging timeframe and complex institutional merger landscapes, the development and delivery of the programme brought partner institutions together through an engaged collaborative partnership to enable sector-wide digital transformation of the student learning experience.

The N-TUTORR programme has significantly exceeded its set targets around student and staff engagement in training and learning activities<sup>3</sup>. It created effective programme management processes for the successful delivery of a complex multi-million Euro funded programme. The range and depth of the outputs from the programme clearly demonstrates both the capacity and capability of the partners to work at both sectoral and institutional levels to transform the student learning experience. Deliverables include, but are not limited to, transformed campus facilities, digitally enhanced frameworks for academic integrity, resources to support staff and students engage with generative AI, and new student partnership approaches to curriculum design.

The N-TUTORR programme has laid the foundations for sector-wide transformation, providing a successful blueprint for collaborative, sector-level development and innovation. Its impact extends beyond its immediate outputs. N-TUTORR has enabled a cultural step change in increasing confidence around the distinctive learning opportunities that the Technological University sector provides.

### Key Achievements

- Demonstrated that the sector can successfully manage and deliver large scale transformation programmes.
- Illustrated the sector's agile, innovative and entrepreneurial spirit in responding to funding opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d4939-national-recovery-and-resilience-plan-2021/>

<sup>3</sup> Programme Targets: 9,600 Students of all five technological universities enrolled in a new or reformed curriculum or having benefitted from new or reformed training or learning activities; 4,000 Staff members of all five Technological Universities having participated in upskilling and development activities.

- Exceeded engagement targets of 4,000 staff and 9,600 students engaged in training and learning activities.
- Created a collaborative model for higher education transformation.
- Supported the development of innovative approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment.
- Facilitated cross-institutional knowledge exchange and capacity building.
- Supported institutions to develop an institution-wide shared understanding and culture during complex merger processes.
- Enabled a rapid and informed response to emerging challenges such as student engagement, academic integrity and generative AI.
- Established new collaborative opportunities and professional networks.
- Increased confidence and capabilities at macro, meso and micro levels.

#### *Transformed learning spaces*

- Created a range of technology enhanced learning spaces available to staff and students across the sector.
- Enhanced sector capacity to procure, implement, enhance and embed learning platforms (for example enhancements to VLEs (virtual learning environments), procurement of academic integrity software) in day-to day-use.
- Provided Professional, Managerial and Support Service (PMSS) staff with opportunities to access training to develop skills for working more effectively in contemporary learning environments (for example training offered in Climate Change, EDI, MS packages).

#### *Emerging Programme Level Values and Outcomes*

- Unprecedented levels of inter and intra-institutional trust.
- Students as valued partners in programme development.
- New collaborative approaches of working across professional and academic services.
- Increased institutional and individual capacity to deliver transformative learning experiences.
- A new culture and expectation of professional development among both academic and professional service staff.
- The TU sector emerging as a distinctive aspect of the Irish education system and contributing to national priorities such as Academic Integrity.

The agreed goals of this external evaluation were to understand the process of change at macro (sector), meso (institution) and micro (individual) levels and to make recommendations to secure progress and sustain the impact of the programme.

The remainder of this report focuses on four areas where the potential for continued collaborative development was identified across the evaluation process:

- Capacity and capabilities
- Approaches to metrics, data and evaluation
- Time/timing
- Legacy and sustainability.

Appendix 1 contains a full list of the evaluation outputs and deliverables on which this report is based. This includes a range of stand-alone summary outputs from our stakeholder workshops which should be read in conjunction with this report.

## Common areas for continued development

### Capacity and Capabilities

Across all the stakeholder engagement activities undertaken throughout the external evaluation process, increasing capacity was highlighted at both institutional and TU sector levels. The level of investment and the scale of activity of the programme were seen as producing capacity “*at another scale*” to previous initiatives.

An unrealised early ambition for N-TUTORR was the development of a shared infrastructure for a sector-level CRM system. Given the relatively short time frame of the programme this sector wide vision could not be realised due to variances in systems and system versions across the partner institutions. However, the infrastructure developments that have taken place and are now operational within each partner institution have had positive impacts for institutional process.

The N-TUTORR experience has fostered a new level of expertise and ethos of knowledge exchange around systems/hardware requirements and procurement at both institutional and sectoral levels. As highlighted in our Macro Level Briefing Paper, these have the potential to develop beyond the programme.<sup>4</sup>

The programme has provided a blueprint for the management of a sector-wide programme, with a centrally co-ordinated, appropriately staffed project management office. The governance of the programme with the Steering Board, comprising of all the partner Presidents and chaired by the HEA, was perceived by all stakeholders as having a significant impact on and beyond the programme. It increased trust and collaboration between the HEA and the sector as well as providing timely and effective decision making. This model could potentially be used for future partnership working.

The programme was also seen as a catalyst for institutional capacity building. The programme themes aligned well with existing and emerging sector priorities. Each partner has been able to integrate the work of the programme into their strategic conversations and developments. The programme instigated new collaborative opportunities in each of the partner institutions, for example around CPD opportunities for professional services staff.

Bringing people together under the umbrella of a sector-wide programme was particularly useful during a period of multiple mergers, as a way of bridging potential tensions across merging campuses. N-TUTORR provided how the sector funding can be realised in equitable ways across a partnership of institutions with varying sizes, histories and resources.

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<sup>4</sup> Since the end of the external evaluation project, data has been collected evidencing the impact of the new infrastructure developments funded through N-TUTORR.

Internal programme management and institutional knowledge management capacity were enhanced by programme participation. However, as the programme teams will be dispersed when programme funding ends, there is the risk of losing ready access to significant elements of new knowledge, understanding and capacity.

As highlighted in our interim report, there were challenges recruiting project staff with the skillsets required. Whilst guidance was provided to partners around the make-up of their teams, some skillsets were not recognised early enough in the recruitment cycle. For example, staff with data handling and finance/procurement skills were not always in place, and as a result some institutional leads had to spend time dealing with procurement issues and filling gaps across their teams.

The level of investment did prove challenging for some of the partners as existing procurement, recruitment and payment procedures were initially not flexible or scalable enough to respond to this scale of funding and levels of activity. This did cause delays to staff recruitment and to the payment of student champions.

Similar challenges were faced by the Project Management Office (PMO) hosted by THEA. The level of support needed to co-ordinate a programme at this scale was initially underestimated by partners developing the proposal but was subsequently developed at speed. As the funding for that team comes to an end, there are similar risks to loss of capacity that we have identified in the partner institutions.

The physical and digital infrastructure developments that have been funded through N-TUTORR have enhanced the capacity of each partner to deliver learning and teaching across multiple sites and delivery modes. As highlighted in the evaluation section, the impact of these developments is just starting to be realised. Partners could use the Jisc Digital Maturity Framework<sup>5</sup> as a possible structured approach to benchmarking institutional digital transformation.

Collaborative approaches, frameworks and resources for Academic Integrity have allowed for a step change in capacity and have supported responses to generative AI and student engagement challenges not only across the TU sector, but, increasingly, across the whole Irish HE sector. The partnership with the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) has focussed on this topic and has also proved to be an example of effective wider collaboration.

At an individual level, the range of CPD opportunities for professional and academic staff has been game changing. For PMSS staff, N-TUTORR provided access to training opportunities at an unprecedented scale. Sharing resources at a sectoral level (e.g. the Masterclass series) also provided an easily replicable and sustainable model for ongoing capacity and capability development. Whilst some of these activities e.g. the Masterclasses, were seen as being able to be continued there was a sense of uncertainty around the sustainability of ongoing development opportunities, particularly for PMSS staff.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/framework-for-digital-transformation-in-higher-education>



### *Sector/institutional capabilities*

N-TUTORR was perceived as positive enabler for change and developing capabilities. The programme developed sectoral leadership capacity around the development and implementation of collaborative, large scale transformation programmes as well as increasing the partner institutions' capabilities to successfully engage and meet the delivery targets of such programmes.

### *Individual (staff/student) capabilities*

Staff and students were able to develop a range of capabilities through the activities, resources (e.g. white papers, shared procurement guidelines, the Curriculum and AREA Student Competency Frameworks) and CPD activities. Work-stream 1 case studies demonstrate the continued impact of fellowship partnerships on both staff and students.

The programme's Student Empowerment Co-ordinator role was new to the sector. During the Most Significant Change<sup>6</sup> (MSC) face to face workshops, this role was highlighted as being of particular significance to the successful engagement of students, and in developing the confidence and capabilities of the programme student champions. The loss of these roles with the conclusion of the programme could have an impact on continued student partnership working.

The loss of programme staff from the PMO team and the institutional partners was highlighted as a risk around maintaining some of the project management capacity developed as part of implementation of the programme. Concerns were also raised around access to resources once the programme ended, which is discussed more in the legacy/sustainability section of this report.

### *Recommendations*

- Partners to review and share the digital transformation brought about through the programme using the Jisc Digital Maturity Toolkit. This could help to identify future areas for institutional/sectoral capacity building developments.
- Review project management approaches developed during N-TUTORR to help inform future collaborative projects and provide guidance on scale of appropriate staffing at partner institutions.
- Review and development of Student Empowerment Co-ordinator roles across the sector.
- Continued development of project management capabilities at both institution and sectoral levels.
- Continuation of development of sectoral approaches to CPD for professional services and academic staff, as highlighted in our Sector Level Briefing Paper.
- Continuation of the masterclass series. This could perhaps work equally well as a podcast series.

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<sup>6</sup> The Most Significant Change process is detailed in the original evaluation proposal and interim evaluation report

- Development of a sectoral approach to the continued development of digital capabilities for both students and staff. This could build on existing sectoral experiences such as ATUs DigitalEd.ie project, and the revisiting the National Forum's All Aboard Framework<sup>7</sup> in the context of the current needs of the TU sector.

## Approaches to metrics, data and evaluation

### *Metrics and data*

The programme's reporting structure was defined through the original proposal, with set targets for student and staff engagement in training and learning activities (at least 4,000s staff members and 9,600 students from participating institutions). These targets were met and exceeded before the external evaluation project started.

Engagement data was critical for demonstrating the value of the programme to funders and raising the status and credibility of the programme at the participating institutions. Considering the context of the sector when the programme began, with a number of the partners in the midst of internal merger processes, coupled with a lack of sector experience in collaborative projects of this kind, exceeding the set targets well before the programme end date was a significant achievement.

However, it was recognised that this data on its own does not adequately represent the range of benefits brought about through the work of the programme. As our interim report noted, participation data does not always reflect the value of project activities to participants or the larger impacts that can arise from the cumulative effects of multiple activity streams.

Data collection was also identified as a challenge across all of the partners in the initial stakeholder interviews. A significant amount of time was spent at the start of the programme developing data processing and sharing agreements across the partnership.

### *Recommendations*

- The data sharing/handling processes developed through N-TUTORR should be used as a foundation for future sector-level data sharing.
- Future collaborative projects should discuss and agree data sharing/processing approaches as part of any bid development.
- In future collaborative projects, all partners should have a shared and unambiguous understanding of the resource implications for data collection, and of the reporting requirements of funding agencies.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/project/all-aboard-enabling-empowering-staff-students-to-flourish-in-the-digital-age/>

### *Evaluation Process*

Whilst each of the programme work streams did include some form of evaluation relating its specific outcomes and deliverables, the original project proposal and agreed workplan did not include a wider programme level evaluation framework or theoretical approach to ground the assessment of impact, such as a theory of change model.

From the stakeholder interviews, it was clear that the programme offered both a positive potential for transformation – at a time of sector consolidation – and the necessity of responding to rolling crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change, and from student engagement to the challenge of assessing students who have access to generative AI.

As evaluation was not explicitly included within the original workplan, it is understandable that was not consistently developed across all work-streams. Setting up programme teams in each partner institution, developing and meeting the engagement targets for each work-stream were significant undertakings within the programme lifecycle. There were also timing issues around evaluation, particularly for Work-stream 3, where many of the physical campus upgrades have only been available for staff and students relatively late in the programme lifecycle, from the start of the 2024/25 academic year.

In a context of both positive transformational potential and crisis response, the evaluation literature<sup>8</sup> suggests that evaluation should:

- Be agile, particularly in terms of methods.
- Be participatory, accepting that stakeholders and evaluators alike will have ‘skin in the game’.
- Help to construct a meaningful trajectory and associated values, rather than assessing outcomes against a pre-determined course.
- Do justice to the complexity of systems and relations.
- Attend to how agency and capacity for transformation are built at different levels of the system.

Our interim report extracted an implied theory of change approach based on the original project proposal (Figure 1).

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<sup>8</sup> Patton 2023 [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-18268-6\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-18268-6_2)

Patton and Felcis 2023 <https://aea365.org/blog/transformational-eval-week-principles-for-evaluating-transformation-by-michael-quinn-patton-and-veronika-felcis/>

Wise and Arnold 2022 [https://wp.circle.lu.se/upload/CIRCLE/workingpapers/202210\\_wise.pdf](https://wp.circle.lu.se/upload/CIRCLE/workingpapers/202210_wise.pdf)

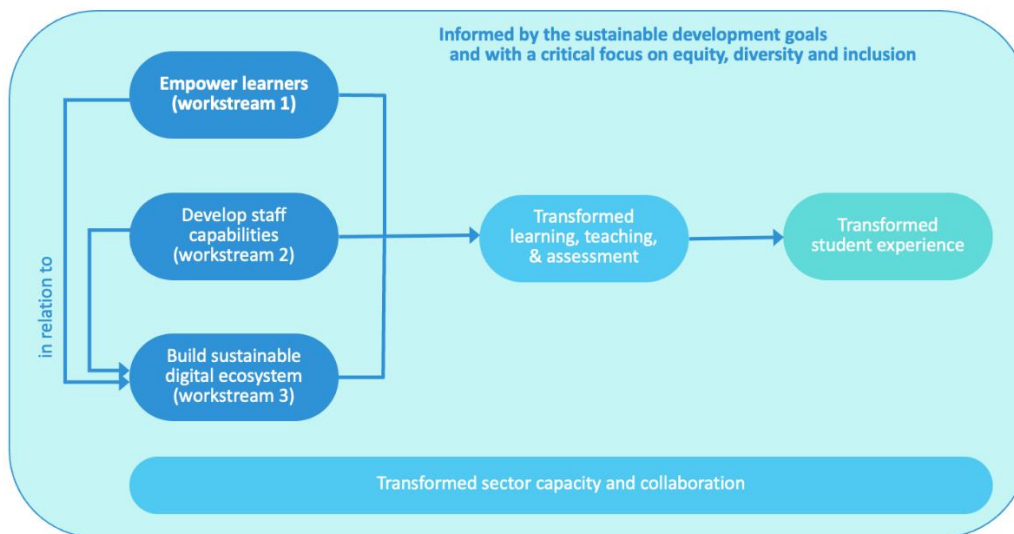


Figure 1: theory of change implied by original programme objectives and work-streams

The community element of the programme was highlighted throughout the evaluation process. This model could also provide a focus for the development of supported communities of practice (see figure 2).

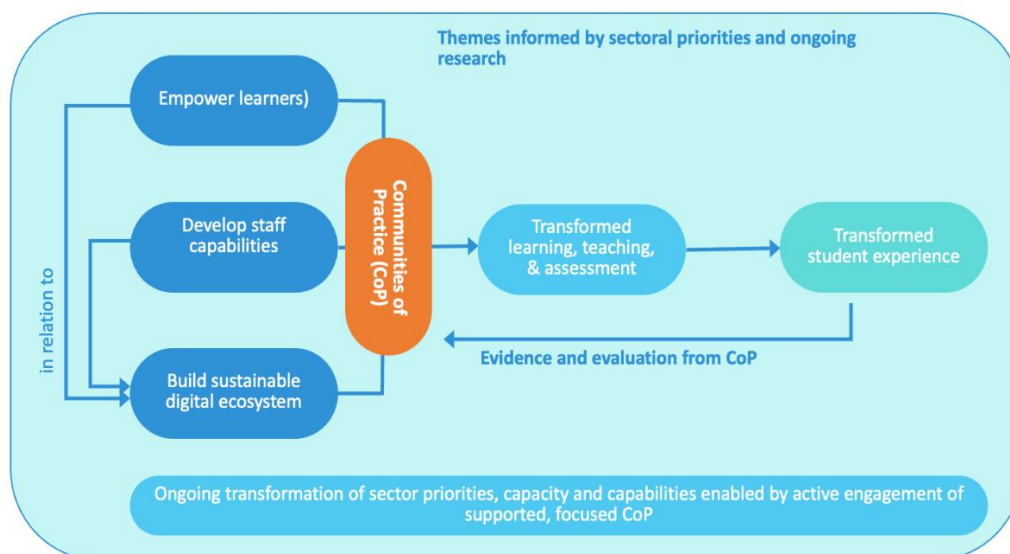


Figure 2: expanded theory of change, allowing for ongoing development of impacts and trajectories through CoPs

Work-stream 1 did explicitly include a research element in relation to the Students as Partners in Innovation and Change Fellowship Programme (SaPICF). Researchers were embedded in the lead partner programme teams. Despite the challenges of gaining ethics approval for research across all partners, they carried out a robust evaluation of the short term impacts of the Fellowship programme, with impact case studies

mapped to the programme themes and the production of a [book](#). Figure 3 illustrates the theory of change that was identified in the course of this research.

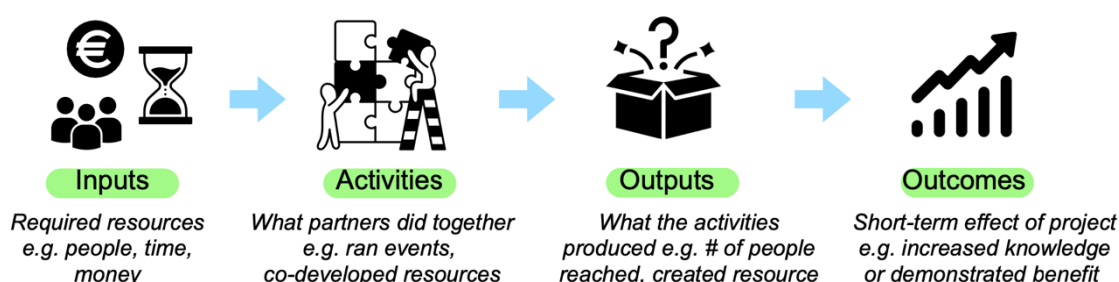


Figure 3: SaPICF theory of change<sup>9</sup>

There is potential to use this model for the evaluation of the outcomes and immediate effects of other project activities, particularly in Work-streams 2 and 3. If capacity could be found, a short survey could be circulated to all the professional staff who participated in training offered through N-TUTORR. This would focus on identifying outcomes for those staff, since data already exists for the other elements of the model. Similarly, for Work-stream 3, Work-package 3.2, the model could be used later in the academic year to identify tangible outcomes from the range of digital infrastructure funded through N-TUTORR. This could focus on the student experience.

### Recommendations

- Development of a sectoral evaluation framework/metrics, aligned to the System Performance Framework<sup>10</sup>, to evidence transformation at sectoral and/or institutional levels.
- Collaborative projects should have an agreed approach to evaluation developed and agreed to during the proposal development phase.
- Partners should develop a shared theory of change to provide a vocabulary for evaluation and to help produce a trajectory for ongoing sector transformation. In the short term, this should be used further evaluate N-TUTORR activities and outputs.
- Partners should explore opportunities to conduct some collaborative research around the outcomes for elements of Work Streams 2 and 3.
- A sector-wide approach to ethics approval should be adopted and disseminated for research carried out in the context of future collaborative programmes or studies.

<sup>9</sup> Carroll, S., Antropova, O., Ginty, C., & Maguire, M. (2024). Student Empowerment in the Technological Universities and Institutes of Technology in Ireland: A collection of impact case studies from the N-TUTORR students as partners in innovation and change fellowship programme 2022-2024

<sup>10</sup> <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/managing-performance/system-performance-framework/>

## Time/timing

The timing and timescale of the programme was both fortuitous and challenging. The partners were able to respond in an agile manner to funding opportunities from national and European Union economic developments, particularly the [NextGenerationEU](#), and Ireland's [National Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) (NRRP).

Development of the programme proposal within a very limited timeframe showed a high level of leadership and commitment from the outset, creating pressures to collaborate that were responded to positively from this point forward. The timing of the programme aligned with the emergence of the new TU sector, allowing partners to leverage the programme funding to accelerate their own strategic developments whilst simultaneously contributing to the development of sectoral priorities and values. The transformation agenda and the focus of funding (on digitally enhanced learning and teaching) responded to the specific challenges of the post-pandemic landscape. In terms of partner institutional mergers, the programme provided a timely focus on how geographically dispersed campuses could work together in an equitable way.

The programme was an opportunity for the new sector to find its voice and articulate its values, while continuing to demonstrate its diversity. Sector-level events such as the N-TUTORR week and the Showcase events were able to attract attention and recognition nationally, partly thanks to the timeliness of their themes. The Croke Park event in particular was recognised as a critical moment when the whole country took notice of the emerging sector.

At a practical level, however, timing and timescales were often challenging. The funding period did not align with the academic year, which caused some problems with the roll out of events and activities, the recruitment of project staff, the buy-out of academic staff time, and sustained engagement with students. The 31 December end of programme funding brought another set of challenges in getting final orders and invoices processed through partner finance systems in the required timeline.

Project teams often felt they had to be reactive to the reporting and funding deadlines of programme, whilst conforming to internal timelines and calendars. This meant less time for planning and reflecting on the activities that were being organised and the resources that teams were developing. There was a perception that time pressure also meant that connections across work-streams were more limited than connections in work streams, that aligned with the rhythm of activities and outputs.

## Recommendations

- Future collaborative projects should, where possible align with the academic year.
- Sector level guidance/ processes for the recruitment of short term, project funding staff should be developed.
- Sector level hourly rates for students should be agreed.

## Legacy and sustainability

N-TUTORR has undoubtedly had an immediate and significant impact across the TU sector. The successful delivery of the programme targets has fostered a growing sense of confidence across all the partners. The programme has provided a unique platform to develop, share and present the unique ethos and educational approach of the sector. This was exemplified during the final programme showcase event in November 2024. There is a clear desire to build on the momentum of the programme and to sustain its community and collaborative activities.

Commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals was embedded into the original proposal and programme outputs. However, the wider sustainability of the outputs of the programme are more uncertain. The realities of current funding mean that decisions have already been taken that will reduce capacity and continuity across the partner institutions. The chief concern for Presidents at the time of stakeholder interviews was budgetary constraint. Current core funding was perceived as highly challenging. Short-term funding, whilst welcome, is unpredictable and comes with its own challenges such as short timeframes for spending and implementation. There was consensus that only secure, longer-term funding can secure programme outcomes and impact in a sustainable way.

The strategic alignment between the programmes national and international goals (such as the National Forum's [Next Steps for Teaching and Learning](#), the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#), [NextGenerationEU](#)) and institutional strategies has allowed for early embedding of N-TUTORR outputs. Many digital and physical infrastructure developments have been available for students and staff since the start of the current academic year and are now integrated into the student learning experience. Staff development will continue, but not at the levels achieved when N-TUTORR was delivering at full capacity. In general, whilst the work of N-TUTORR has made some significant advances in transforming the student learning experience, there was a palpable sense of institutions being “*at a cliff edge*” in terms of funding and therefore in terms of further progress and long-term sustainability.

Whilst informally the connections between programme staff will undoubtedly continue, if the community built by N-TUTORR is to be sustained, then ongoing activities needs to be initiated, hosted and managed. The National Digital Leaders Network (NDLN) is an example of a network that hopefully will continue beyond the programme but will need some level of support to ensure that it has a clear focus and continues to make an impact on sector developments.

Recommendations for communities of practice have been made in our Macro Level Briefing Paper. We are also aware of several proposals in development that could support continuation of the Students as Partners initiative and the Student Champions.

The N-TUTORR brand now has significant sectoral and national recognition. It is a signifier of collaboration and digital transformation. As noted in our Macro Level Briefing Paper, the programme website will be key to ensuring that the outputs of the



programme are available and accessible from one central point and that the positive identity of N-TUTORR has an afterlife that can continue to generate value for partners.

In terms of building research capacity, programme outputs and outcomes provide rich resources for future research and scholarship. Individual Fellows could be supported to publish their findings and reflect on their experiences, and there is undoubtedly more to learn collectively around the wider N-TUTORR outputs on transforming the student experience. The successful work that the programme has enabled around education for climate change provides a distinct opportunity to research the environmental impacts of digital transformation including, for example, the environmental costs of generative AI. The resources developed to support Academic Integrity offer another area of scholarship that will be of interest beyond the TU sector.

### *Recommendations*

- Agreement on development of a sectoral approach for supporting communities of practice.
- Agreement on the future use of N-TUTORR branding and sustainability of resources, and programme website.
- Support for further research on the transformational impact of N-TUTORR activities/resources.
- Embed insights into policies & practices (national & institutional).



## Recommendations

Full list of recommendations mapped to macro (sector) and meso (institutional) levels.

Macro (Sector)	Meso (Institution)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative projects should have an agreed approach to evaluation developed and agreed to during the proposal development phase.</li> <li>• Development/use of a sectoral evaluation framework/metrics to evidence transformation at sectoral and/or institutional levels; and/or incorporate the <a href="#">HEA System Performance Framework</a>.</li> <li>• Partners should develop a shared theory of change to provide a vocabulary for evaluation and to help produce a trajectory for ongoing sector transformation. In the short term, this should be used further evaluate N-TUTORR activities and outputs.</li> <li>• In future collaborative projects, all partners should have a shared and unambiguous understanding of the resource implications for data collection, and of the reporting requirements of funding agencies.</li> <li>• A sector-wide approach to ethics approval should be adopted and disseminated for research carried out in the context of future collaborative programmes or studies.</li> <li>• Partners should explore opportunities to conduct some collaborative research around the outcomes for elements of Work Streams 2 and 3.</li> <li>• Future collaborative projects should, where possible align with the academic year.</li> <li>• Sector level guidance/ processes for the recruitment of short term, project funding staff should be developed.</li> <li>• Sector level hourly rates for students should be agreed.</li> <li>• Agreement on development of a sectoral approach for supporting communities of practice.</li> <li>• Agreement on the future use of N-TUTORR branding and sustainability of resources, and programme website.</li> <li>• Support for further research on the transformational impact of N-TUTORR activities/resources.</li> <li>• Embed insights into policies &amp; practices (national &amp; institutional).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners should explore opportunities to conduct some collaborative research around the outcomes for elements of Work Streams 2 and 3.</li> <li>• In future collaborative projects, all partners should have a shared and unambiguous understanding of the resource implications for data collection, and of the reporting.</li> <li>• Embed insights into policies &amp; practices (national &amp; institutional).</li> </ul>

## Appendix 1: Summary of Evaluation Approach and Deliverables

In keeping with the collaborative nature of the programme, the external evaluation team worked closely with the N-TUTORR PMO team to develop the goals and activities to ensure a participatory approach and shared understanding of the evaluation process.

The agreed **goals** of the external evaluation were to:

- Understand the process of change at macro, meso and micro levels
- Act as a critical friend to the internal evaluation and monitoring processes
- Synthesise and learn from existing and emerging evaluation data
- Make recommendations to secure progress and sustain impact (WP4.1) of the programme

The agreed **activities** of the external evaluation were to:

- Understand the background, context and goals of the programme through project documentation
- Review and quality assure the evaluation evidence and processes developed by the programme and its partners
- Interview stakeholders from across the programme and its work-streams
- Run four ‘Most Significant Change’ workshops and critical reflections with stakeholder groups (more detail below)
- Identify key themes, lessons and change stories emerging from those processes (synthesis)
- Make recommendations for future sector-level collaborative developments.

## Stakeholder Engagement

### Phase 1 interviews

A total of 19 interviews with 22 programme stakeholders<sup>11</sup> were conducted. Each interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours. A synthesis of the interviews mapped to a set of six common emerging themes was provided in the interim report in September 2024.

Following the phase 1 interviews and interim report, a second phase of interviews with the 7 Presidents of the partner institutions was undertaken during October 2024. This led to the development of a Macro Level Recommendations Briefing Paper presented to the Presidents Group in November 2024.

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<sup>11</sup> **PMO:** 5 members

**THEA:** 2 members

**Institutional Partners:** Institutional Leads (N=7), Stream Leads (N=4), Researchers (N=2)

**HEA:** 2 members

### *Most Significant Change Workshops*

The Most Significant Change methodology (MSC), is a participatory, dialogic, qualitative method that evolved in development education settings. It involves the collection and selection of significant change stories from stakeholders at different levels of working across a programme. Participants are given a short brief to help them to surface their own most significant change moments, describe the landscapes of change from their perspective, identify helper characters, ‘challenge’ scenarios, and other features of their change journey, and draw lessons for sustained change in the future. Their stories are collected and passed across a programme structure for groups of stakeholders to discuss, to assess for significance, and to consider what they reveal about the wider changes (in this case the six N-TUTORR core themes). In this method there is still a rigorous focus on evidence, but the evidence is considered from different perspectives and is presented in the service of rich and meaningful accounts of change.

3 face to face workshops (1 per workstream) were held in October 2024. These workshops were designed to allow project teams from each of the partner institutions an opportunity to:

- reflect and share the impact that the overall programme has had:
  - on them as individuals
  - on students/colleagues
  - across their institutions
  - across the TU sector
  - in relation to N-TUTORR’s core themes and transforming the student experience
- develop a series of meaningful ‘significant change stories’ about critical incidents and change processes
- provide a space to share, discuss and reflect on the stories

A structured story writing process was developed to support participants during the workshops. This included a range of bespoke materials such as narrative prompts cards and individual storyboards for participants to complete. Participants could take a metaphorical or literal approach to their change stories.

On completion of the individual stories, each participant shared a synopsis of their story with the group. This was followed by group discussion work focusing on what the stories revealed about each of the work-streams, and a plenary discussion. 57 staff and students attended the workshops. Participants were given the option to share their story boards with the evaluators. 52 story boards were collected for analysis. The outputs for each workshop are provided in the workshop findings deliverables.

## External Evaluation Project Deliverables

- Interim report (including synthesis of phase 1 stakeholder interviews)
- Additional interviews with Presidents of each partner institution and Interview synthesis
- Macro Level Recommendations Briefing Paper (for Presidents)
- MSC workshops (1 x online, 3 x face to face)
  - Summary workshop findings providing:
    - a set of key insights around the development, implementation and future of the programme
    - insights into a set of common specific issues and other lessons learned
    - the perceived main impacts from each of the 3 main work-streams at individual, institution and sector level
    - the perceived obstacles, enablers, values and lessons learned across each work-stream
    - a set of powerful metaphors/allegories around the transformational journey of the programme from the perspective of staff involved in / impacted by the programme
    - a set of work-stream/partner project team values
    - a values matrix
- A set of programme level values that complement the programme themes
- Final Report with recommendations on common areas identified through the evaluation process.