

Research Strategy 2026–2028

Applied Research for Practice, Society and University Status

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I. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this Strategy

Triagon places a high value on research, on the integration of research findings into teaching and professional practice, and on the contribution that its research makes to science and society. This Research Strategy sets out how Triagon will develop its research activity over the period 2026 to 2028. It translates the research ambitions of the **Triagon Academy 5-Year Strategy** (December 2024), referred to in this document as the Strategic Plan, into objectives, principles, responsibilities, actions and measurable targets.

The Strategy is intended to guide decisions on research priorities, staff development and the allocation of resources, and to provide staff, doctoral candidates, students, partners and external reviewers with a clear account of what Triagon's research seeks to achieve and how its progress will be measured.

1.2 From the 2023 Research Strategy to 2026–2028

The 2023 Research Strategy established eight guiding criteria that have shaped research at Triagon as a young institution operating in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment: a focus on applied research, a preference for empirical approaches, an international perspective, guided research focus areas, quality orientation, output orientation supported by dedicated research time, active dissemination, and agility in responding to emerging needs.

These criteria remain valid and are retained as the guiding principles of this Strategy (Section III). What has changed is the institutional context. The Strategic Plan commits Triagon to obtaining university status, to attracting international students, to expanding its program portfolio and to achieving excellence in academic research. The present Strategy therefore adds:

- explicit research objectives aligned with each pillar of the Strategic Plan;
- updated research focus areas that reflect the current program portfolio;
- defined governance and responsibilities for research;
- a research integrity, ethics and data framework linked to Triagon's policies;
- an implementation roadmap and key performance indicators taken directly from the Strategic Plan.

1.3 Strategic Context

The Strategic Plan is built on four pillars. Research is the explicit subject of Pillar 4, but it underpins each of the other three:

Strategic Plan pillar	Contribution of research
Pillar 1: Obtaining University Status	A sustained, quality-assured research record, research-active faculty and doctoral provision are central to demonstrating readiness for university status through MFHEA institutional accreditation.
Pillar 2: Attracting International Students	International research visibility and partnerships with universities abroad strengthen Triagon's reputation and support joint supervision, exchange and recruitment.
Pillar 3: Expanding the Program Portfolio	Applied research with industry partners identifies emerging needs, informs the design of new programs and keeps existing curricula current.
Pillar 4: Excellence in Academic Research	Research output, research funding and collaboration with research institutions are the direct targets of this Strategy (Section X).

The Strategy also responds to the statement in Triagon's December 2024 pre-audit overview that applied research and active engagement with industry partners form part of the institution's strategic focus areas, alongside quality improvement, portfolio expansion and internationalization.

1.4 Scope and Status

This Strategy applies to all research carried out under Triagon's name or affiliation, including research by academic staff, doctoral candidates, and bachelor and master students undertaking dissertations or research projects. It is approved by the Senate and is to be read in conjunction with the documents listed in Annex A, in particular the Strategic Plan, the Faculty and Staff Policy (the Staff Policy), the Employee Handbook, the Research Ethics Policy and the Doctoral Regulations. Where this Strategy refers to a provision of another document, that document governs the detail.

II. Research Vision, Mission and Objectives

2.1 Research Vision

Triagon aims to be recognized internationally for applied, empirically rigorous research that addresses real challenges faced by organizations, professionals and communities, and that directly enriches the learning of its students.

2.2 Research Mission

Triagon's research mission follows from its institutional mission of providing accessible, flexible and high-quality education for non-traditional and working students. Triagon conducts research that:

- is grounded in professional practice and relevant to industry and society;
- meets international standards of methodological quality and research integrity;
- involves students and doctoral candidates as active participants in the research process;
- is shared openly with the scientific community, practitioners and the public.

2.3 Strategic Research Objectives

Five research objectives (RO) give effect to the Strategic Plan. Each is linked to one or more pillars and to the actions and indicators in Section X.

Objective	Description	Strategic Plan
RO1 Research output and quality	Increase the volume and quality of peer-reviewed publications by faculty and doctoral candidates.	Pillar 4
RO2 Research capacity for university status	Build a research-active academic community, with dedicated research time, development opportunities and doctoral provision that meet the expectations of institutional accreditation.	Pillar 1
RO3 International research collaboration	Establish research partnerships with universities and research institutions abroad that lead to joint projects, publications and supervision.	Pillars 2 and 4
RO4 Applied research with industry	Develop research with industry partners that informs new and existing programs and supports knowledge transfer.	Pillar 3
RO5 Integrity, impact and funding	Ensure that all research meets the highest standards of integrity and ethics, generates visible impact and is supported by diversified funding.	Pillar 4

III. Guiding Principles

The eight principles of the 2023 Research Strategy are retained and updated as follows. They apply to all research activity at Triagon and inform decisions on research topics, supervision and the allocation of resources.

3.1 Focus on Applied Research

With non-traditional students from a wide range of industries as its main target group, Triagon focuses on applied research. Foundational and basic research is not a priority across Triagon's programs. This orientation is reflected in teaching, which relies on application-oriented methods such as case studies and on materials drawn from applied research journals.

3.2 Focus on Empirical Research

While non-empirical scientific approaches have their place and merit, Triagon strongly encourages students, and requires doctoral candidates, to address their research questions through empirical approaches. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods designs are equally valid.

3.3 International Perspective

Triagon understands science as a collaborative, international endeavour. It welcomes regional research projects, for example on Maltese public governance, but always with an international perspective in mind: local topics are investigated with internationally recognized methods so that findings can contribute to the international scientific community. This principle directly supports Pillar 2 of the Strategic Plan.

3.4 Open, but Guided

Students remain free to propose their own research topics, for example for master dissertations. At the same time, Triagon defines research focus areas (Section IV) and offers topics within them to students and teaching staff. This allows research to be coordinated and aggregated, for example in multi-study papers, and raises the quality of research output.

3.5 Quality Orientation

The practice-focused background of Triagon's students and of many of its staff guides the choice of research topics, but not the scientific quality expected of methodological and analytical approaches. Triagon targets a solid level of research quality, indicated for example by the standing of the journal, its indexing and the academic eminence of the publication, and strives for high-level publications. For doctoral candidates, publication-quality research is required.

3.6 Output Orientation and Resource Allocation

Each faculty position has at least 40% of its workload dedicated to research and publication. Where teaching responsibilities temporarily require a higher share of staff time, compensatory mechanisms offset this in subsequent terms so that the overall ratio is maintained. Research output that meets Triagon's quality expectations is incentivized and supported, for example through the compensation of publication fees (Section VI).

3.7 Dissemination and Impact

Triagon encourages staff and advanced students to take part in scientific discourse through publications, conference contributions and other formats such as video and poster presentations, short papers and extended abstracts. These formats are also practised in teaching. Beyond academic dissemination, Triagon expects its research to reach practitioners, partner organizations and the wider community (Section IX).

3.8 Agility and Responsiveness

The research strategy and research focus areas are revised as new colleagues join, as new programs are introduced under Pillar 3 of the Strategic Plan, and as new topics emerge from industry. Research objectives are informed by market research and analysis and by consultation with academics, industry experts and other stakeholders, so that Triagon's research remains aligned with the needs and priorities of the communities it serves.

IV. Research Focus Areas

The 2023 Research Strategy identified three focus areas: management intelligence systems with a focus on artificial intelligence and technology acceptance; the European economy and digital communication of sports with a focus on resilience during times of disruption; and applied creativity and innovation. In line with the principle of agility (Section 3.8), these areas have been reviewed against Triagon's current program portfolio and are updated as follows.

4.1 Management Intelligence Systems, Artificial Intelligence and Technology Acceptance

Research on how organizations and individuals adopt and use digital technologies, artificial intelligence and data-driven decision support, including technology acceptance, digital transformation and data platforms. This area continues the principal focus area identified in the 2023 Strategy and the December 2024 pre-audit overview, and is closely linked to doctoral research in the DBA program.

4.2 Sport, Health and Resilience

Research on the sports economy and the digital communication of sport, sport and exercise science, health promotion and prevention, and the resilience of individuals, teams and organizations in times of disruption.

4.3 Applied Creativity, Media and Innovation

Research on creativity and innovation in organizations, creative media, music and the performing arts, including practice-based and artistic research methods.

4.4 Leadership, Organizations and the Future of Work

Research on leadership and strategic management, human resource management, business psychology, project management and the design of work and organizations in the digital era. This area is proposed as a new focus area, reflecting the weight of these subjects in the master and doctoral portfolio.

4.5 Alignment with the Program Portfolio

The focus areas connect research directly with Triagon's programs, so that dissertation topics, doctoral projects and research-informed teaching reinforce one another:

Focus area	Principal programs (Academic Calendar, Winter Semester 2026–27)
Management Intelligence Systems, AI and Technology Acceptance	DBA; MBA; B.Sc. Business Management; M.Sc. in Project Studies

Focus area	Principal programs (Academic Calendar, Winter Semester 2026–27)
Sport, Health and Resilience	B.Sc. Sports Science; M.Sc. Sports Science (all specializations)
Applied Creativity, Media and Innovation	B.Sc. Creative Media; Bachelor in Music; Bachelor in Performing Arts
Leadership, Organizations and the Future of Work	M.Sc. Leadership and Strategic Management; MBA (HR Management, Business Psychology, Project Management); DBA

Each new program introduced under Pillar 3 of the Strategic Plan will be mapped to an existing focus area or, where appropriate, will lead to a proposal for a new one. Research outside the focus areas remains welcome where it meets the principles in Section III.

V. Research Governance and Responsibilities

5.1 Governance Structure

Research is governed within Triagon's institutional governance framework. Responsibilities for research are allocated as follows:

Body or role	Responsibilities for research
Senate	Approves this Strategy and research regulations; receives the annual research report; oversees academic standards in research.
President	Provides institutional leadership and ensures that resources for research are aligned with the Strategic Plan.
Vice President (Teaching and Research)	Owns and implements this Strategy; approves research under Triagon's name and affiliation; reports annually to the Senate.
Executive Dean	Allocates academic workload, including research time; approves staff development (Staff Policy §13(1)); ensures research informs teaching.
Scientific Advisory Board	Provides external advice on research quality, focus areas and partnerships.
Doctoral Examination Committee	Oversees doctoral research and progression; grants ethics clearance for doctoral projects; organizes the Doctoral Examination Conferences.
Quality Assurance Unit	Collects research data and monitors indicators within the quality management system.
Research focus area leads	Coordinate research, topics and multi-study projects within each focus area (Section 5.3).
Academic staff and supervisors	Conduct, publish and supervise research in line with Section VIII.

5.2 Approval of Research and Institutional Affiliation

All research conducted under Triagon's name requires the approval of the Vice President (Teaching and Research), who also reviews affiliations with external research bodies. Staff must use Triagon as their institutional affiliation in all research outputs produced in the course of their employment and must report publications, conference presentations and funded projects so that they can be recorded (Employee Handbook, Section 6.5).

5.3 Research Focus Area Leads

For each focus area in Section IV, the Vice President (Teaching and Research) will appoint a research-active member of faculty as focus area lead. Leads coordinate research topics offered to students, identify opportunities for multi-study publications and external funding, and contribute to the annual research report.

VI. Research Capacity, Development and Resources

6.1 Research Time

Each faculty position has at least 40% of its workload dedicated to research and publication (Section 3.6). Research objectives are agreed as part of the annual goal-setting and review cycle, which is based on the job profile (Staff Policy §3; Employee Handbook, Section 7.1).

6.2 Recruitment and Academic Careers

Research record and research potential are assessed when recruiting academic staff (Staff Policy §2 to §9). Research achievement is a central criterion for academic promotion under the Academic Promotion Policy and for appointment to full professor under the Professorial Appointment Regulations (Staff Policy §18).

6.3 Research Development

Triagon supports the research development of its staff through the activities set out in the Staff Policy (§10 and §11), including training in research methods, attendance at and presentation at conferences, mentoring and coaching, and support for doctoral qualifications. Staff request development activities through the approval process in Staff Policy §13 and record them in accordance with the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy (Employee Handbook, Sections 7.3 and 7.4). Early-career researchers will be paired with experienced researchers within their focus area.

6.4 Research Funding and Incentives

Triagon will support research through internal and external funding:

- **Internal support:** compensation of publication fees for outputs that meet Triagon's quality expectations; funding for conference participation through the staff development process
- **External funding:** Triagon will seek to increase its research funding by 90% over the period of the Strategic Plan through EU funds, partnerships and sponsorship from industry (Strategic Plan, Pillar 4). Relevant sources include European programs such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, national research funding in Malta, and industry-commissioned research.

6.5 Research Infrastructure

Research is supported by Triagon's digital infrastructure, including the online library and databases, the virtual learning environment and digital collaboration tools. Triagon will develop secure institutional storage for research data and an institutional repository for research outputs (Section 9.4).

VII. Research–Teaching Nexus and Doctoral Research

7.1 Research-Informed Teaching

Research and teaching are mutually reinforcing at Triagon. Faculty draw on their own research and on current applied research in their teaching, use case studies and research articles as core learning materials, and involve students in research-related tasks. Program design and review take account of research findings in the relevant focus area.

7.2 Student Research

Bachelor and master students develop research competence through research methods modules and dissertations or final projects. Students are encouraged to choose topics within Triagon's focus areas, and outstanding student research will be developed, with the student's agreement, into conference contributions or joint publications with their supervisors.

7.3 Doctoral Research

Doctoral research is the core of Triagon's research community. It is governed by the Doctoral Regulations and overseen by the Doctoral Examination Office. Supervisors agree a supervision schedule with each candidate, provide timely feedback and report progress to the Doctoral Examination Office (Employee Handbook, Section 6.4). Doctoral candidates are required to adopt empirical approaches and to aim for publication-quality research (Section III).

Two Doctoral Examination Conferences are held each year, in April and October, as the formal venue for viva voce examinations and defence presentations (Academic Calendar, Section 5.6). Triagon will develop these conferences into a visible forum for the dissemination of doctoral research to the wider academic and professional community.

VIII. Research Integrity, Ethics and Data

8.1 Integrity Framework

All research at Triagon must meet the highest standards of integrity. Triagon's framework is based on the principles of reliability, honesty, respect and accountability set out in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, and is given effect through the Code of Ethics and Conduct, the Academic Integrity Policy and the Research Ethics Policy (Staff Policy §17 and §19). Suspected research misconduct is dealt with under these policies.

8.2 Ethics Review and Clearance

Research involving human participants or personal data requires ethics clearance before any data collection begins, in line with the Research Ethics Policy (Employee Handbook, Section 6.5). For doctoral research, clearance is granted by the Doctoral Examination Office. Where research involves external organizations, for example public-sector bodies, researchers must also obtain any approval required by those organizations before collecting data.

8.3 Data Protection and Research Data Management

Personal data collected in research is processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679, the Data Protection Act (Cap. 586 of the Laws of Malta) and Triagon's Data Protection Policy (Staff Policy §21). Research data is stored only in approved institutional systems. Triagon will introduce data management plans for funded and doctoral projects and will follow FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable) wherever data can be shared.

8.4 Artificial Intelligence in Research

Researchers may use approved artificial intelligence tools in line with the Employee Handbook (Section 9.4). Personal data, unpublished research, confidential information and assessment materials must not be entered into tools that have not been approved for that purpose. Researchers remain fully responsible for the accuracy of their work and must disclose the use of such tools in accordance with the policies of the relevant journal or publisher.

8.5 Intellectual Property and Conflicts of Interest

The ownership and exploitation of research outputs are governed by the Intellectual Property Policy (Staff Policy §19(4)). Researchers must declare any personal, financial or professional interest that may conflict with their research, including funding or consultancy relationships, under the Conflict of Interest Policy (Staff Policy §17(2)).

IX. Collaboration, Dissemination and Impact

9.1 International Research Partnerships

In line with the Strategic Plan, Triagon will establish partnerships with at least ten leading research institutions globally by 2028 to foster collaborative projects and joint publications (Pillar 4). Partnerships will be prioritized where they relate to Triagon's focus areas and where they can also support student exchange and the recruitment of international students (Pillar 2). Forms of collaboration include joint research projects and funding bids, co-authored publications, co-supervision and external examination of doctoral candidates, and visiting researcher arrangements.

9.2 Industry and Community Engagement

The Strategic Plan aims to establish partnerships with at least ten leading companies by 2027 to create internship opportunities and co-develop curricula (Pillar 3). Triagon will use these partnerships to identify applied research questions, to host student and doctoral research, and to transfer research findings into practice. Triagon also engages with local communities through knowledge transfer initiatives that promote societal benefit.

9.3 Publication and Dissemination

Triagon encourages publication in peer-reviewed journals indexed in recognized international databases, in line with the principle of quality orientation (Section 3.5). Researchers are encouraged to publish open access or to deposit accepted manuscripts in the institutional repository where publisher policies allow. Conference contributions, practitioner-oriented publications and public engagement activities are recognized as valuable forms of dissemination.

9.4 Research Visibility

Triagon will increase the visibility of its research by maintaining an up-to-date record of research outputs, publishing an annual research report, presenting research profiles of its focus areas on its website, and establishing an institutional repository for research outputs by the end of the 2027–28 academic year.

X. Implementation, Monitoring and Review

10.1 Implementation Roadmap

Implementation follows the four phases of the Strategic Plan's implementation timeline:

Phase	Research actions	Link to Strategic Plan deliverables
Phase 1: Planning 2026–27	Approve this Strategy; establish baseline data for all indicators; appoint focus area leads; align dissertation and doctoral topics with focus areas; introduce research reporting through the Quality Assurance Unit.	Accreditation roadmap; partnership proposals
Phase 2: Development 2027–28	Launch mentoring for early-career researchers; introduce data management plans; prepare first external funding applications; sign initial research partnership agreements; establish the institutional repository.	New faculty hires; revised curriculum
Phase 3: Expansion 2028	Scale up multi-study and joint publications; increase funding applications; extend collaborations with industry and research institutions; use research evidence in preparation for university status.	Research funding proposals; partnership agreements
Phase 4: Review and Sustain 2029	Evaluate achievement of all indicators; review focus areas; prepare the next Research Strategy.	Evaluation report; strategic adjustments; university status application

10.2 Key Performance Indicators

Progress is measured against the following indicators. Targets marked with the Strategic Plan are taken directly from it; baselines will be confirmed in Phase 1.

Indicator	Target	Source
Peer-reviewed publications by faculty	100% increase; 200 published papers by 2028	Strategic Plan, Pillar 4 (RO1)
Research funding from grants, partnerships and sponsorship	50% increase over five years	Strategic Plan, Pillar 4 (RO5)
Partnerships with research institutions abroad	At least 10 by 2028	Strategic Plan, Pillar 4 (RO3)

Indicator	Target	Source
Research-related industry partnerships	Contribution to at least 10 company partnerships by 2027	Strategic Plan, Pillar 3 (RO4)
Faculty workload dedicated to research	At least 40% for each faculty position	Research Strategy 2023 (RO2)
Doctoral degrees completed	30	This Strategy (RO2)
Conference contributions by staff and doctoral candidates	50	This Strategy (RO1)
Research involving human participants with prior ethics clearance	100%	Research Ethics Policy (RO5)
Research focus areas with an appointed lead	All focus areas by end of Phase 1	This Strategy (RO2)

10.3 Monitoring and Reporting

The Quality Assurance Officer with the assistance of the Internal Quality Assurance Board collects data on the indicators each year as part of Triagon's quality management system. The Vice President (Teaching and Research) presents an annual research report to the Senate, normally at its October meeting, covering progress against the indicators, research outputs, funding, partnerships and integrity matters. Progress is also considered at the institutional Strategy Retreats held in April and October (Academic Calendar, Section 5.8) and informs Triagon's reporting to the MFHEA, including the self-assessment for institutional accreditation.

10.4 Review of this Strategy

This Strategy will be reviewed in full in 2029, in step with Phase 4 of the Strategic Plan, and earlier if the Strategic Plan is revised, if Triagon obtains university status, or if significant changes occur in its program portfolio or research environment. The research focus areas may be updated at any time with the approval of the Senate, in line with the principle of agility (Section 3.8).

Annex A: Related Documents and Policies

This Strategy is to be read in conjunction with the following documents:

Document	Relevance to this Strategy
Triagon Academy 5-Year Strategy (December 2024)	Strategic pillars, research targets and implementation phases on which this Strategy is based
Research Strategy (2023)	Guiding principles and focus areas retained and updated in this Strategy
Faculty and Staff Policy	Recruitment (§2 to §9), staff development (§10 to §15), related policies (§16 to §22), compliance and confidentiality (§23 to §25)
Employee Handbook	Research and research ethics (6.5), doctoral supervision (6.4), performance and CPD (Section VII), use of AI tools (9.4)
Academic Calendar, Winter Semester 2026–27	Program portfolio, Doctoral Examination Conferences, Senate meetings and Strategy Retreats
Research Ethics Policy	Ethics review and clearance of research involving human participants or personal data
Doctoral Regulations	Doctoral admission, supervision, progression and examination
Code of Ethics and Conduct; Academic Integrity Policy	Standards of integrity and procedures for suspected misconduct
Intellectual Property Policy; Conflict of Interest Policy	Ownership of research outputs and declaration of interests
Data Protection Policy	Processing of personal data in research
Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy; Academic Promotion Policy; Professorial Appointment Regulations	Research development, recognition and academic career progression
European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA)	External framework for research integrity
General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679; Data Protection Act (Cap. 586)	Legal framework for personal data in research
MFHEA Quality Assurance Framework and Accreditation Manual; Further and Higher Education Act (Cap. 607) and subsidiary legislation	External quality assurance and the requirements for institutional accreditation and university status