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### Abstract

This paper is the second in a pair of papers presenting data release 1 (DR1) of the Herschel Astrophysical Terahertz Large Area Survey (H-ATLAS), the largest single open-time key project carried out with the Herschel Space Observatory. The H-ATLAS is a wide-area imaging survey carried out in five photometric bands at 100, 160, 250, 350 and 500  $\mu\text{m}$  covering a total area of 600  $\text{deg}^2$ . In this paper, we describe the identification of optical counterparts to submillimetre sources in DR1, comprising an area of 161  $\text{deg}^2$  over three equatorial fields of roughly  $12 \times 4.5$   $\text{deg}$  centred at  $9^{\text{h}}$ ,  $12^{\text{h}}$  and  $14^{\text{h}}$ , respectively. Of all the H-ATLAS fields, the equatorial regions benefit from the greatest overlap with current multi-wavelength surveys spanning ultraviolet (UV) to mid-infrared regimes, as well as extensive spectroscopic coverage. We use a likelihood ratio technique to identify Sloan Digital Sky Survey counterparts at  $r < 22.4$  for 250- $\mu\text{m}$ -selected sources detected at  $\geq 4\sigma$  ( $\approx 28$  mJy). We find 'reliable' counterparts (reliability  $R \geq 0.8$ ) for 44 835 sources (39 per cent), with an estimated completeness of 73.0 per cent and contamination rate of 4.7 per cent. Using redshifts and multi-wavelength photometry from GAMA and other public catalogues, we show that H-ATLAS-selected galaxies at  $z < 0.5$  span a wide range of optical colours, total infrared (IR) luminosities and IR/UV ratios, with no strong disposition towards mid-IR-classified active galactic nuclei in comparison with optical selection. The data described herein, together with all maps and catalogues described in the companion paper, are available from the H-ATLAS website at [www.h-atlas.org](#).

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