

**An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
Higher Education Authority**

**A Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher
Education**

Invitation to Tender

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Tender Documentation

The purpose of this document is to assist interested parties in preparing tenders to develop a Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education.

1.2 Awarding Authority

The awarding authority is the Higher Education Authority.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Higher Education Authority

As the statutory development body for higher education and research, the Higher Education Authority advises the Minister for Education and Skills on policy. The HEA is leading a programme of major strategic reform of Irish higher education and research. The objective is to ensure that the sector is well placed to contribute, to the greatest extent possible, to Irish social and economic development.

2.2 The National Access Office

The role of the National Access Office is to facilitate educational access and opportunity for groups who are under-represented in higher education. The overall goal of access policy in higher education is that the student population in our higher educational institutes will reflect the diversity of Ireland's population.

The National Access Office has the following principal functions:

- Develop and implement a National Access Plan to achieve equity of access to higher education
- Monitor and report on progress in implementing the plan and achieving set targets and outcomes
- Provide advice on national policy to the Department of Education and Skills
- Promote the rationale for access to higher education

2.3 Background to this Request for Tender

The *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019* ('National Access Plan') was published in December 2015. Its publication followed a wide ranging consultative process involving students, higher education institutions, the second level sector, the further education sector, the community and voluntary sector and a range of other stakeholders. The overall vision informing the goals, objectives and actions of the Plan is to ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

The National Access Plan contains a number of targets to increase participation by specific categories of students. Target groups include entrants from under-represented socio-economic groups and communities; entrants with disabilities; mature entrants and members of the Irish Traveller community and students entering on the basis of a further education award.

One of the key objectives of the National Access Plan is, building on the previous work by the HEA in this area, to continue to develop access data collection and analysis so as to deepen our knowledge on target groups and underpin policy making and the development of supports for students. The National Access Plan sets out very specific actions in relation to data:

- To develop an overall data plan for equity of access
- To review current and new data to see how this may be developed to identify geographic areas with high levels of disadvantage and to analyse rates of participation in higher education from those areas
- To develop mechanisms to track progression, retention rates and the student experience of under-represented target groups, including students being supported by the SAF and the FSD.
- To review progression to employment and postgraduate studies by students from target access groups
- To monitor the participation and outcomes for entrants from DEIS schools
- To consult with students and prospective students to inform the implementation and development of access policy.
- To share knowledge and disseminate information on effective initiatives relating to access.
- To review the qualitative indicators of progress on access already in place in HEIs, and to advise the HEA on developing a framework to support good practice.

Currently, equity of access data is collected from a variety of sources, specifically, the HEA Student Record System (SRS) and Equal Access Survey (EAS), Department of Education and Skills (DES) databases, the Central Applications Office (CAO), Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), the HEAR / DARE Schemes operated via the IUA. Other areas of the public sector are working with a number of

different indicators of disadvantage such as the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. Using these data sources, work has commenced on progressing data collection and analysis that addresses the commitments of the National Access Plan. However, a Data Plan for Equity of Access is required that will address the overarching policy question of identifying the best data indicators that will support implementation of the National Access Plan 2015 – 2019 and that will also advise on how data sources can be developed and shared in order to measure these indicators and meet the requirements of the National Access Plan.

Central to the data plan will be recommendations on the data indicators required to understand the socio-economic profile of students accessing and completing higher education. The current methodology that the HEA uses to identify students from under represented socio economic groups (SEGs) is based on a modified version of SEGs and is consistent with the socio-economic classification used in the CSO Census of Populations. The target groups are non-manual workers and semi-skilled, unskilled and agricultural workers. These are the groups that are currently most under-represented in higher education at 23% and 26% of 18-20 year olds respectively. It is recognised by the HEA that this methodology may not be the most appropriate in the future. Through the consultation process that informed the development of the National Plan, the potential for geographic analysis to assist identification of students from under-represented backgrounds was raised in a number of submissions.

3 REQUIREMENTS FOR WHICH TENDERS ARE INVITED

3.1 Introduction

This study will be carried out by an independent body under the terms of a contract for services. The review process will remain under the oversight of a small steering group consisting of members of the HEA and representatives of the DES. The appointed reviewer shall be answerable to the steering group during the period of the contract. Responsibility for the day-to-day management of the review will sit with the HEA Executive.

3.2 Requirements of the study: Terms of Reference

The overarching requirement of this study is a Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. The Plan must clearly identify the data needs to support the implementation of the National Access Plan and the suite of activities and data sharing between organisations that will be required to meet these data needs.

The Data Plan should be concerned with enhancing the overall evidence-base for future policy development and performance indicators in the area of the access and retention of students from the equity of access target groups.

Specifically, the Data Plan will be required:

- 1. To recommend the data indicators required to understand the socio-economic profile of students accessing and completing higher education, based on current best practice nationally and internationally, including data protection considerations. A priority is to understand the student population at the following stages: school leaver, CAO applicant and HEI attending student.**

Areas to address will include the current SEG approach and the drawbacks and how they could be overcome; DEIS schools, geo-coding analysis; maintenance grant and top-up grants; approach to measuring completion rates, Irish Survey of Student Engagement, Eurostudent Survey etc. The outcome should be a clear recommendation on the quantitative indicators that should be used to assess the student profile in this area and the future development of qualitative indicators. The outcome should also be clear in terms of how these indicators should be combined to assess a HEI's performance in this area (as part of the HEA's strategic dialogue process).

- 2. To advise on how the data to support each of the recommended indicators should be collected.**

Areas to cover include how existing data sources can be better utilised, analysed, cross referenced and shared. It would be expected that there would be a number of outcomes from this section of the study including an implementation plan on the changes to data collection and analysis that should be made to support the data requirements in relation to the agreed indicators of performance. It would be expected that this plan would recommend ways in which data from existing sources such as the SRS, DES, SUSI, CAO, ISSE and Eurostudent Survey etc. can be better utilised and cross referenced as well as what new data should be routinely collected and at what point and ways in which data should be shared between key stakeholders. The data plan should address how data should be collected in respect of emerging target groups e.g. lone parents.

- 3. To set out in clear terms the implementation steps that will enable the above requirements to be delivered. The final Data Plan should be a working document that will provide the HEA, DES and other stakeholders with a clear road-map for meeting the data collection needs required for implementation of the National Access Plan. Potential resourcing issues should also be considered in the Data Plan.**

The Successful Tenderer

The successful tenderer would need to have a thorough understanding of the existing data sources and the nature of data collected, e.g. HEA SRS data, DES data, CAO, SUSI data, HEAR data, etc. Two levels of expertise are required:

- Policy context and policy thinking. The successful tenderer would need to have a policy expertise in the area of social inclusion and access to, and retention in, higher education. It would be necessary to also draw on international models of good practice in the recommendation of appropriate indicators.*
- Detailed knowledge and understanding of the data sources across the relevant agencies and bodies combined with an understanding of how these can be developed and utilised to meet policy needs.*

3.3 Output of the review

A Data Plan for Equity of Access, written to a publishable standard, that sets out the steps to implement the data collection, analysis and sharing requirements of the National Access Plan. The study should facilitate immediate improvements in the richness of data collection and analysis while also setting out a defined road map for more medium term changes.

3.4 Indicative methodology

It is expected that this review will be primarily desk-based. However, it is envisaged that some consultations with relevant stakeholders would be required. It is anticipated that the review should take up no more than 25 consultancy days.

3.5 Timeframe

Timelines for this project are as follows:

Stage	Target Date
Request for tender issues	21 December 2016
Closing date for receipt of tenders	1 February 2017
Preferred candidate appointed	End February 2017
Review process begins	March 2017
Draft Data Plan	End of May 2017
Final Data Plan presented to working group	June 2017

The appointed reviewer will be expected to conduct a quality review and adhere to tight timeframes.

3.6 Information and Resources available to Contractor

Designated staff in the HEA will be available to the successful candidate over the duration of the project to provide guidance and answer questions and queries arising.

4. PROPOSED FORMAT FOR TENDERS

Tenders submitted under this RFT should be structured as follows:

(1) Proposal overview

An overview of the structure of the proposal. Outline the key features of the proposal, as well as any other relevant information.

(2) Profile

An overview of the organisation, including area(s) of expertise, current and completed projects, staff and management numbers and roles.

(3) Proposal

This section should set out how the organisation will deliver the project according to the specification set out in Section 3 of this document. It should include:

- The steps that will be followed by the organisation from contract award stage to project completion.
- Proposed arrangements on how the organisation will manage the project to ensure quality outcomes and adherence to tight deadlines.
- Details of the personnel that will be assigned to the project, including by level of consultant (whether partner, senior consultant or otherwise), and their qualifications, skills and experience.
- Other resources (if any) which will be brought to the project.
- A breakdown of proposed cost, clearly indicating whether including or excluding VAT. The tender should provide an estimated daily cost based on the timeframe given in Section 3 above.

(4) References

Provide two references, to include a contact name and contact details. References should, where possible, be for completed projects similar to this one.

(5) Contractual Arrangements

Tendering parties must provide a copy of any proposed terms and conditions for the contract with their tenders. This should include the provision of appropriate working papers and files being made available to the HEA, if requested.

(6) Appendices and additional information (optional)

5. SELECTION

5.1 Qualifying criteria

- 5.1.1 It will be a condition of the award of any contracts that the successful candidate produce a valid tax clearance certificate from the Irish Revenue Commissioners. In the case of a non-resident organisation or person tendering, a statement of suitability on tax grounds from the Revenue Commissioners will be required.
- 5.1.2 The candidate must be in business for a minimum of two years and with a track-record of at least two years in completing similar review work for publicly funded programmes.
- 5.1.3 The award of contract is also conditional on the successful candidate providing evidence of good financial standing. In this regard, copies of audited accounts for the last two years will be requested from the successful candidate.
- 5.1.4 The candidate must demonstrate in its submission a clear understanding of the HEA's requirements for the project.

5.2 Award criteria

- 5.2.1 The extent of the successful tenderer's policy expertise in the area of social inclusion and access to and retention in higher education **(25 marks)**
- 5.2.2 The extent, relevance and quality of the experience and track-record of the tenderer in completing similar review work, and the resources and skills, including the number, experience and seniority of personnel, to be applied to the project **(15 marks)**
- 5.2.3 Stated methodology in reviewing the available data including project management, co-ordination and reporting arrangements. **(30 marks)**
- 5.2.4 Overall cost and value for money **(30 Marks)**.

The following costs should be identified

- i. main project costs
- ii. costs for specified enhancements or follow-up work or options not stated in the RFT.

5.3 Interviews

- 5.3.1 The HEA will invite the successful post qualifying tenderers to an interview to clarify certain aspects of their tender before awarding final marks. The costs of attending any such interviews will be borne by the tendering party.

6. TAXATION AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

6.1 Price

This request for tender is made on the basis of a fixed price lump-sum contract. Tenderers must provide a firm fixed price in euro ex-VAT for the supply of deliverables requested in the tender. All payments will be made in Euro.

6.2 Withholding tax

Professional Services Withholding Tax (PSWT) will be deducted from certain payments for services provided by the contractor. It shall be the responsibility of interested parties themselves to obtain all necessary documentation and to ensure that they comply with all relevant Irish taxation requirements.

7. INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERESTED PARTIES

- 7.1 Organisations or persons wishing to tender must provide all the information requested in this request for tender.
- 7.2 This tender process is being managed via the etenders.ie website. Completed tenders must be submitted to the HEA by post to the following address:

Jane Sweetman
Data Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education - Proposal
Higher Education Authority
Brooklawn House, Crampton Avenue
Shelbourne Road
Ballsbridge
Dublin 4
DO4 C2Y6

You must provide **FIVE** copies of each document in a sealed envelope.

- 7.3 **Closing date for receipt of tenders by post is 1 February 2017 Tenders received after this time will not be considered.**
- 7.4 Any queries regarding the tender process must be emailed to Jane Sweetman at jsweetman@hea.ie. The responses to these queries will be uploaded to etenders.ie in the form of a questions and answers document and on the HEA website.
- 7.5 The Awarding Authority will not be liable for any costs incurred by interested parties in the preparation and submission of response(s), including any work, effort or expenses required to complete the proposal. Any materials submitted as part of the proposal shall not be returned save where there is an expressed request for same and any expense incurred for such return shall be borne by the tendering party.
- 7.6 The Awarding Authority reserves the right to amend or alter any information contained in these documents at any time. Parties registering an interest will be informed of any amendments or alterations.
- 7.7 Unwarranted or inappropriate attempts (including canvassing) to influence the decision of the Awarding Authority by an interested party, or by any organisation or person acting on behalf of an interested party will automatically disqualify said party.

7.8 Information provided in proposals and in subsequent discussions and written communications, prices, availability dates and services offered by the tendering party will be considered to form part of the basis of any contractual arrangements in the event of a tender or tenders being accepted by the Awarding Authority.

7.9 The following will form part of the contract document for the proposed service:

This tender documentation and

- Tenders submitted by interested organisations or persons.
- Modifications and amendments to the above documents formally agreed between the parties to the contract.
- The final terms and conditions agreed between the parties to the contract.
- The official letter of contract issued by the Awarding Authority.

**Higher Education Authority
December 2016**