

## Higher Education Authority

### Quality Customer Service Plan

A high performing higher education system is an essential requirement in the development of creative, entrepreneurial people and the creation of new knowledge to support social, cultural and economic development.

The HEA leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system with the objective of creating a coherent system of diverse institutions with distinct missions, which is responsive to the social, cultural and economic development of Ireland and its people and supports the achievement of national objectives.

The HEA has a statutory responsibility, at central government level, for the effective governance and regulation of higher education institutions and the higher education system.

In exercising our mandate the HEA works to ensure that –

- we have due regard to institutional autonomy and academic freedom;
- institutional strategies are aligned with national strategic objectives,
- agreed objectives (detailed in compacts with institutions) are delivered through effective performance-management at institutional and system- levels.

Objectives span the enhancement of teaching and learning, the promotion of equity of access to higher education, the enhancement of institutions' responsiveness to the needs of wider society, research capacity-building, and the internationalisation of Irish higher education. The HEA leads in developing the evidence-base which underpins strategic planning and strategy implementation at institutional, regional and national level.

In support of our mandate the HEA exercises functions in respect of -

- Funding
- Accountability
- The quality of outcomes
- Policy research and advice to the Minister
- Data analytics and knowledge management
- Advocacy and communicating higher education
- Co-ordination of interaction between public bodies and the higher education system.

The HEA is accountable to the Minister for Education and Skills, through his Department, for the achievement of national outcomes for the higher education sector. The HEA has agreed a service level agreement with the DES

reviewed annually. Taken overall, the HEA exercises a central oversight role in the higher education system and is the lead agency in the creation of a co-ordinated system of higher education institutions with clear and diverse roles appropriate to their strengths and national needs; it acts as a catalyst for change in the higher education system, requiring higher levels of performance while demonstrating an appropriate level of accountability, consistent with institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

The Authority allocates funds to the 7 universities, the 13 institutes of technology and DIT, Mary Immaculate College, Mater Dei Institute, NCAD, RCSI, St. Patrick's College Drumcondra, and St. Angela's College.

The Authority has been assigned new functions under the National Strategy for Higher Education.

The HEA is the administrative agency for the Irish Research Council.

The Authority consists of 18 part time members (at least seven members must be academic members and at least seven members must be other than academic) and a part-time Chairman who are appointed by the Government on the advice of the Minister for Education & Skills.

The Mission Statement of the Higher Education Authority is

*The HEA will support the higher education system to achieve the defining characteristics identified in the vision for the HEA. We will lead a process of system reform characterised by sound governance, regulation, strategic dialogue, collaboration, consolidation, and potential new relationships with private sector higher education providers. We will implement HEI funding in a fair and transparent way so that, combined with a process of strong strategic engagement and dialogue, we can ensure well-functioning, well-governed, accessible and accountable HEIs, providing high quality education, training and research. We will guide national, evidence based higher education policy development through the conduct of research; the development of comprehensive and reliable data sets and the provision of well developed, cogent advice to the Minister for Education and Skills and his Department. We will act as a strong and objective advocate for higher education and research, publicising benefits and strengths, supporting institutional autonomy and academic freedom, identifying risks and opportunities and arguing the case for higher education and research convincingly to Government, enterprise, and society generally. Our over-riding mission will be that, in performing our functions, we do all that is practicable to ensure that students are engaged in a rich and rewarding higher education experience and emerge as high quality graduates equipped with the skills to pursue successful lives and careers.*

## **Commitment of the Higher Education Authority to Quality Customer Service**

The Authority's strategic plan 2012-16 sets out a medium term work programme underpinned by the mission, vision and strategic objectives of the Authority. In achieving these objectives the Authority is committed to delivering quality services which meets the needs of its stakeholders and clients. The Authority will seek to ensure this commitment is met by putting in place a comprehensive training programme under its Performance Management Development System and utilising efficient and effective IT systems.

### *Equality/Diversity*

We will ensure that the rights established under equality legislation are reflected both in terms of service delivery and reviews of policy.

We will through the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education work with the universities and designated institutions to identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to higher education. The National Office's current plan covers the period 2015-19.

We will continue to be an equal opportunities employer.

We will seek to ensure that staff are fully aware of its commitment to equality and diversity and ensure that its Dignity at Work Policy is adhered to in respect of all staff.

### *Physical Access*

We will provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and facilitate access for people with disabilities and other specific needs.

We will continue to work with staff to ensure that office facilities meet their requirements.

### *Information*

We will seek to ensure that information it provides is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact and that the needs of people with special needs are catered for.

We will ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and will ensure that its website conforms to the web accessibility initiative guidelines for public websites.

We will ensure that our websites ([www.heai.ie](http://www.heai.ie), [www.research.ie](http://www.research.ie), [www.springboardcourses.ie](http://www.springboardcourses.ie) and [www.eurirland.ie](http://www.eurirland.ie)) are kept under review. Our publications will be published on the website in addition to being made available through post or by collection from our offices in Brooklawn House.

#### *Timeliness and Courtesy*

We will seek to deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and where possible with the minimum of delay.

#### *Written Correspondence*

We will seek to ensure that queries are responded in a timely, relevant and accurate manner. A full reply to all written communications will issue within 15 working days. If this is not possible, the HEA will send an interim reply explaining the position before the 15 days expires.

Contact names and details including an e-mail address and a direct dial in number of the appropriate section will be provided with all HEA communications.

#### *Telephone Calls*

Where voicemail is in use, we will return your call within one working day of receipt of your message.

Voicemail messages will state if the person you are calling is away for more than one working day and will provide an alternative contact number.

If we are unable to deal with your query we will try to put you in contact with someone who can assist you.

#### *Complaints*

If a person is dissatisfied with the standard of service received he/she may contact the Head of Corporate Affairs who will pass the complaint on to the Head of the relevant section who will investigate the matter. The outcome of the investigation will be reviewed by the Head of Corporate Affairs who will issue a written response to the person who made the complaint. In handling complaints

from the public the Authority will adhere to the principles set down by the Office of the Ombudsman in relation to an internal complaints system.

### *Appeals*

If a person is unhappy with a decision which has been made he/she may write to the Chief Executive who will investigate the matter. He/she will examine whether the decision made was in accordance with existing laws, rules, practice or policy or the generally accepted principles of equity and good administrative practice.

### *Consultation and Evaluation*

We will develop an effective relationship and engage with the other major actors in the higher education domain. We will manage such relationships through making submissions to these agencies/stakeholders and consulting them on specific issues of mutual concern.

### *Choice*

We are committed to providing choice, where feasible, in service delivery. We will use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

The public may contact the HEA and Council as follows;

- **Telephone** HEA 353/1/2317100 : Lo-call 1890 200637  
Irish Research Council 353/1/2315000

The HEA switchboard operates from 9.15am-1.00pm and 2.00pm-5.30pm (5.15pm on Friday) from Monday to Friday. Outside of those hours you may leave a message on the answering service. Your message will be conveyed to the appropriate person without delay. The HEA and IRC operate a joint switchboard.

In addition to contacting the HEA through its main switch the public may contact individual sections through direct dial-in. A direct dial-in number for each section will be provided on the HEA website and in correspondence issued by the HEA.

- **By Fax** – HEA 353/1/2317172  
IRC 353/1/2315009
- **By e-mail** – HEA - [info@hea.ie](mailto:info@hea.ie) , other e-mail addresses are available on the HEA website. HEA e-mail addresses follow the following format: first name initialssurname@hea.ie

Irish Research Council [info@research.ie](mailto:info@research.ie). IRC e-mail addresses follow the following format: first name initialsurname@research.ie

□ **By post** – HEA, IRC

Brooklawn House,  
Crampton Avenue,  
Shelbourne Road,  
Dublin 4.

Clients/members of the public may call to Brooklawn House. The reception is on floor one.

We will assist members of the public with special needs.

*Official Languages Equality*

We are committed to meeting its obligations under the Official Languages Act, 2003. We will in particular;

- Reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish
- Publish our annual report and key policy documents in Irish and English
- Publish as much material as possible on our website in Irish

Éascóidh an tÚdarás um Ard Oideachas gnóithe daoine a sheoladh trí mheán na Gaeilge más mian leo. Beidh oibrithe dátheangacha ar fáil chun comhfhreagras a dhéanamh nó glaonna gutháin a fhreagairt i nGaeilge. Oifigeach na Gaeilge an tÚdarás: Gearóid Ó Súilleabháin.

*Better Co-ordination*

We will continue to work with the Department of Education and Skills and other key stakeholders in the higher education domain with a view to achieving a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to the delivery of services. The HEA will engage with the Department in developing a performance framework that will allow for the adoption of both annual and multi-annual targets, and the development of output and outcome indicators including milestones to measure delivery.

The HEA has concluded a memorandum of understanding with QQI.

### *Internal Customer*

We value the dedication of staff and will actively engage with them through the Partnership Committee in relation to the delivery of services. In particular we will focus on the following;

Internal Communications: We will undertake to ensure that staff receive timely and accurate briefings through the staff intranet and staff briefing seminars.

Consultation and Evaluation: Staff will be fully consulted in relation to the development of our strategy statement, associated business plans, customer service plan and ongoing developments relating to the modernisation of the public services.

Staff Training and Development: We will through our staff development plan ensure that staff are provided with the necessary skills to carry out their work. We have put in place a Performance and Development System that assists staff in understanding their role in the organisation and provides feedback in relation to performance.

Equality and Diversity: We will ensure that the processes and services involving staff comply with the provisions of the equality legislation. We will promote a culture of respect for diversity among all staff.

Facilities: We will seek to ensure that staff work in a pleasant and safe environment and that staff are provided with the facilities necessary to carry out their duties.