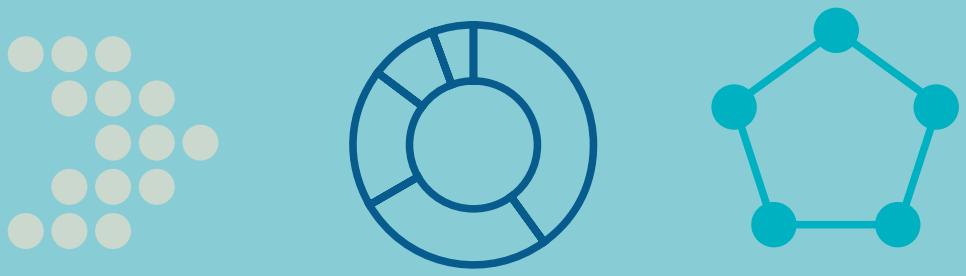
HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Higher Education Authority

2018-2022 Strategic Plan



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I. FOREWORD

Education and, within that, higher education is central to Ireland's prosperity and progress. It prepares people for the workplace, helps them to realise their potential and develop as global citizens: contributing to society and building cultural capital. Higher education in Ireland also serves as the locus for public research, supporting research that tackles societal issues like climate change, equality of opportunity and an ageing population. The higher education institutions are important hubs across Ireland for regional development and innovation.

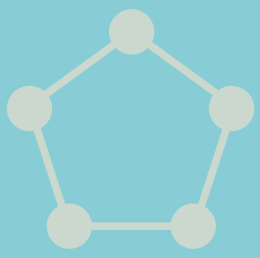
The value that we attach to higher education can be seen in Irish educational attainment rates. In 2016, the tertiary attainment rate for 25-34 year olds stood at 52%, compared to an OECD average of 42%. Having a higher level of education reduces the chance of unemployment (in Q4 2017, graduates with at least a third level honours degree had an unemployment rate of just 3.3%, compared with the national average of 6.7%), and tertiary graduates get higher salaries when they enter employment. Our institutions contribute to civic society through the rounded education that they offer to students, the role they play in addressing social inequity through education, and in advancing research with community partners rather than for them. Talent is a critical element of our international competitive advantage and our public research capability enhances our attractiveness to international students, researchers, firms and entrepreneurs.

The institutions are an integral component of the wider Irish education system. It is only through all parts of the system working cohesively together that we can offer students of every age the best possible chance to progress. The strong relationship between further education and higher education will maximise the opportunities for post-secondary students in Ireland. Improved support and clarity on transitions options from school into higher education will help people choose what is right for them and will help them get there. Research undertaken in higher education can serve as educational tools for schools across the country. Increased use of technology will provide more choices and make it easier for people to access higher education wherever they are based and at all stages of their life. Ireland has a significantly lower lifelong learning rate than the EU average and this is even more pronounced among people in employment.

The next five years will bring major change to this country and the rest of the world. The HEA's mission is to help the higher education system to navigate the years ahead, by overseeing its performance and allocating funding that encourages excellence and delivers value for money. It will support the system's development in accordance with national economic and societal objectives and with international good practice.

Michael Horgan
Chairman
Higher Education Authority

II. REMIT



The HEA's remit is set out in the Higher Education Authority Act 1971 as follows:

A Furthering the development of higher education;

B Assisting in the coordination of State investment in higher education and preparing proposals for such investment;

C Promoting an appreciation of the value of higher education and research;

D Promoting the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education;

E Promoting the democratisation of the structure of higher education.

III. CONTEXT

The Irish higher education environment today

Operational context

After nearly a decade of tough recessionary times, Ireland's economic performance has moved towards stability and unemployment has fallen beneath 6%. The development of a sustainable funding model for Irish higher education will help it to support Ireland's future balanced regional development and international competitiveness.

The Irish higher education landscape is itself undergoing a major transformation. The process of landscape reform initiated under the last HEA Strategic Plan is now well underway. The restructuring of 19 initial teacher education providers into six groups is approaching completion. Progress is being made across the country by some Institutes of Technology towards Technological University status, with significant strides expected during this Plan. The first application for TU designation under the new Technological Universities Act 2018 was submitted on 27 April 2018.

As this Plan commences, a snapshot of the sector shows that there are over 225,000 (fulltime and part time) students enrolled throughout Ireland. Four out of every five study on a full-time basis and there are high levels of Irish student satisfaction with their educational experience, as evidenced in the 2016 Irish Survey of Student Engagement. 82% are at undergraduate level and 18% at postgraduate level. The overall gender split is almost equal. Roughly one quarter of graduates emerge from STEM courses. There are over 15,000 international students and nearly 10,000 research students, most of these at doctoral level. Collaborative projects are being undertaken with enterprise and community partners. Irish international research success continues, with our institutions securing over €0.32bn so far from Horizon 2020. Outwardly the system may appear to be resilient in the face of the resourcing constraints being faced, however inwardly institutions are making tough decisions on priorities and there is a fear that the system may be taking on more risk than is desirable. A system priority during the next Strategic Plan will be to get onto a financially sustainable footing.

Policy context

The stability of the institutions matters for the success of a range of Government policies. The vision of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 places the sector at the heart of Ireland's development: economically, culturally and societally. It recognises the need for strong, autonomous institutions. It equally connects autonomy with accountability and this is being driven through the performance compacts and Strategic Dialogue process between the HEA and the institutions. The Action Plan for Education considers the whole of the education system and intends to deliver for Ireland the best education and training system in Europe by 2026. Internationally, important strategic developments include the Open Science agenda and the EU's 2021-2027 budget. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals articulate shared global ambitions across a range of issues such as gender equality and decent work and economic growth. Realisation of this includes many threads common to the higher education sector's mission, including the continuing drive to improve the student's experience, to help under-represented groups, to cultivate excellent research and researchers and to build bridges between education and the wider community.

Such external engagement is essential. Numerous Government strategies reinforce the importance of the engagement between higher education and enterprise, for instance, the National Skills Strategy 2025, Enterprise 2025, Innovation 2020 and the National Statement for Entrepreneurship. And enterprise is not limited to business: it also encompasses civic society organisations and the voluntary sector as important stakeholders. Higher education institutions are also engaging externally with other key constituencies: for example, under the auspices of the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019.

And what it may look like in the future

The vision of the Action Plan for Education is that Ireland will have the best education and training system in Europe within a decade. To achieve this, some sense is needed of what the future may hold. And while there are many uncertainties and instabilities, there are several major global trends on which there is widespread agreement and for which Ireland must be ready.

Our National Skills Strategy 2025 identifies trends that are consistent with OECD and EU predictions. The global population continues to grow and patterns change. The UN predicts that it will rise to 9.7bn by 2050 with over half of this expected to occur in Africa. In Ireland, our population has grown by more than one million since the 1990s and is forecast to reach 5.8m by 2050. We have the highest proportion of young people in the EU, as well as an ageing population. Urbanisation proceeds apace: by 2050 around 70% of the world's population will live in cities, families will be smaller and people will live longer. Such demographic changes will need to be managed carefully in the context of grand global challenges like climate change. The quest for energy efficiency and security also triggers evolving geopolitical dynamics. For everyone across the globe, technology is fundamentally altering how we live, work and learn.

The nature of Irish higher education will – and indeed must – evolve to reflect this environment. The system's responsiveness will be key to its success and to the extent of its contribution to Ireland's future societal and economic growth. The student will of course remain at the heart of future developments. Who that student is will change, with a shift towards greater numbers participating in lifelong learning, regardless of whether they are working or not.

For such participation to happen, students' expectations of what they will gain through higher education need to be reflected in what they experience on the ground. The National Skills Strategy identifies key future skills needs including ICT, languages, entrepreneurship and core transversal skills like communications, innovation and critical thinking. Students will also be supported to develop as rounded citizens through engagement with civic society and exposure to international cultures. Relevant employment training through placements will be key to preparing work-ready graduates.

Technology will be crucial to what, how and where students learn. Developments like big data, smart devices and cybersecurity mean that technological literacy is no longer confined to technology courses. It infuses all of what we do and therefore features right across the spectrum of disciplines. We are also likely to see the rise of STEAM: greater integration of Arts with STEM content in keeping with the increasingly complex world in which we live. Digital transformation will also play an expanding role for example, in how and where higher education courses are delivered, how student success is monitored, and the achievement of open access to higher education and research publications and data.

The quality of the teaching provided remains essential to the educational experience and thus to student outcomes. Educators will undertake continuous professional development that is informed by international good practice. Research activity in the institutions will see an improving balance between basic and applied research, between societal needs as well as economic drivers and in the portfolio of public research investments across the disciplines and across large-scale and more individual endeavours. At all times, excellence and added value will be pursued. Research will also enrich teaching quality through up-to-date course design, informed educators and student access to the research experience. This will be helped by the bridges that are built between higher education and enterprise (ranging from large multi-nationals to SMEs, as well as NGOs) across the country. It will also support the fostering of a creative and entrepreneurial culture on campuses.

This picture of the future is of course dependent on several factors. The most obvious of these is the sustainability of the sector and material progress on this will be a priority during the timeframe of this Plan. The HEA will continue to support the Department of Education and Skills in informing the budgetary process in this regard. Related to this, capital investment will be an important enabler of a higher education system that is responsive to skills needs, internationally competitive and delivers a high-quality experience for the growing student numbers. The 2018-2027 National Development Plan signals a significant ramping up of Exchequer capital investment over the coming decade.

This work will be complemented by enhanced institutional governance and by the new Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020. It will also be assisted by improved data collection. Institutional leadership will drive this forward and the HEA looks forward to working closely with the institutions' leaders to advance this shared agenda.

The potential for higher education to transform Irish society and the economy

Today's enrolment levels of over 225,000 students illustrate the distance travelled by Irish higher education over the last fifty years: in 1965, enrolments were just one tenth of that. A generation of people in Ireland have participated in higher education for the first time, shaping their individual development and prosperity, as well as wider economic and societal growth.

Recent global political developments will shape many parts of people's lives for years ahead and higher education will be affected as part of this. For example, the international education market will be monitored closely to ascertain the impact of Brexit. The value attaching to expertise and scientific facts is being challenged by some. Future EU research funding programmes may be affected, both in budgetary levels and research emphasis.

Many are understandably concerned about what all of this may mean for Ireland. Ireland's small open nature renders it vulnerable to global events and shifts. It is imperative that we play to our strengths as a nation and identify our optimal positioning in a fast-changing world. While publically funded higher education is facing risks, the sector is an essential part of Ireland's future success. Its role in the development, attraction and retention of talent will be pivotal. A stable, sustainable higher education system is key to tackling challenges and to forging exciting new opportunities for this country.

The role of the HEA in 'navigating the future' for Irish higher education

As with the last Strategic Plan, the student will remain at the heart of our objectives and activities. The definition of who that student is and how best they learn throughout their lifetime will evolve during this Plan. The HEA will work to ensure that the student voice is heard and their needs are met by the system.

The policy direction of the system itself will continue to be grounded in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. It will advance in accordance with the Higher Education System Performance Framework 2018-2020 whose system goals comprise:

1	Providing a strong talent pipeline combining knowledge, skills and employability which responds effectively to the needs of our enterprise, public service and community sectors, both nationally and regionally, and maintains Irish leadership in Europe for skill availability.
2	Creating rich opportunities for national and international engagement which enhances the learning environment and delivers a strong bridge to enterprise and the wider community.
3	Excellent research, development and innovation that has relevance; growing engagement with external partners and impact for the economy and society and strengthens our standing to become an Innovation Leader in Europe.
4	Significantly improves the equality of opportunity through education and training and recruits a student body that reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.
5	Demonstrates consistent improvement in the quality of the learning environment with a close eye to international best practice through a strong focus on quality and academic excellence.
6	Demonstrates consistent improvement in governance, leadership and operational excellence.

It will maximise its contribution to the Action Plan for Education and other relevant Government strategies. The HEA will guide the system's strategic development through the new 2018-2020 System Performance Framework. It will continue and embed the work started under the last Plan on institutional performance compacts and through the Strategic Dialogue process. It will be accountable to the Minister for Education and Skills for the achievement of system outcomes.

Through its central oversight role, it will continue its regulatory function and work to improve institutional governance and accountability across the system. Such regulated autonomy is core to public trust in the institutions. It is also an essential condition for increased investment in them, whether that is public or private. The HEA will work with the sector and stakeholders on the fundamental issue of sustainability.

It will lead the system's development as a coordinated and cohesive offering of inter-connected institutions. Further progress will be made on landscape reform and on the relationship between higher education, further education and other providers across the regions. The HEA will lead in advocating a balanced higher education and research eco-system and facilitate the co-ordination of a national approach to higher education and research policy implementation.

The HEA will continue to advocate, as appropriate, for higher education and to communicate its value both at home and abroad. The capability of the organisation's intelligence-gathering, both quantitative and qualitative, will inform its success in this regard. A robust, rich evidence base will underpin the policy advice provided to the Minister, enhance the story communicated of the sector – nationally and internationally – and enable the HEA to support all institutions as they navigate the future.

IV. VISION

In 2022, the HEA is overseeing and guiding the performance of the Irish higher education system which is:

- Delivering excellence and innovation;
- Accessible, sustainable, autonomous and accountable;
- Fit-for-purpose, stepping up to achieve – and exceed – national ambitions: economically, societally and culturally;
- Globally connected and internationally renowned for the experience that it offers students and the outcomes it delivers, whilst protecting valuable institutional diversity.

V. PRINCIPLES

In its overarching pursuit of the best possible student experience and public research system for Ireland, the HEA – internally and externally – is guided in its activities by the following principles:

- Consultative and engaged;
- Open and effective in the pursuit of continuous improvement;
- Fair and objective;
- Equality and inclusion;
- Accountable and transparent;
- Evidence-based and results-driven;
- Respectful of institutional autonomy – while holding institutions to account for high performance.

VI. MISSION

The HEA's mission is to:

1	**Oversee** the sector's performance through a fair balance of institutional accountability and autonomy;
2	**Fund** the institutions transparently, encouraging excellence, value-for-money and maximum impact;
3	**Develop** the Irish higher education system in accordance with national societal and economic objectives, and international best practice;
4	**Advise** the Minister and the Department of Education and Skills based on robust evidence, to further enhance system performance, and lead internationally in higher education and research policy development.

VII. HEA STRATEGIC THEMES 2018-2022

For the period 2018-2022, eight strategic themes have been identified for the organisation. These support the institutions' implementation of the 2018-2020 Higher Education System Performance Framework. They also reflect the HEA's particular position within the system, for instance its growing role in governance oversight and its policy advisory support to the Department of Education and Skills.

A. Institutional Governance, Leadership and Operational Excellence

Institutional governance and management across the system will approach a more consistent standard through improved leadership capability and management information systems and structures. The HEA will work with the sector to enhance the leadership capability of the institutions (including their Governing Bodies' capacity) to undertake their governance functions with respect to strategy setting and accountability. It will also hold them to account for high performance and financial transparency.

The recently enhanced governance arrangements within the institutions, and between them and the HEA, will be fully embedded during the 2018-2022 period. This will improve transparency and public trust. It will also facilitate enhanced regulated autonomy for the institutions that will, in turn, empower them to function more sustainably. The HEA will analyse and report to the Department on the appropriateness of the existing legislative basis for its governance oversight of the sector and improvements that should be progressed to enhance governance arrangements.

As part of good governance practice, improved equality with a particular focus on gender equality, will be accelerated by the HEA during this period.

B. Funding, Sustainability and Performance

Agreement and implementation of a sustainable funding model will be imperative and is all the more critical given the demographic trends. It will reflect the full portfolio of financing options available to the institutions. This will be complemented by the revised funding allocation model and the new Higher Education System Performance Framework from the Department of Education and Skills.

The future funding allocation model will be driven by the following key characteristics:

- Recognising institutional autonomy;
- Supporting institutional sustainability;
- Promoting innovation;
- Driving institutional and system performance to meet Government and higher education objectives;
- Maintaining integrity as an independent and robust allocation system.

The 2018-2020 Higher Education System Performance Framework will support the alignment of institutional activities with national policy objectives. It will provide a channel through which institutions will play to their strengths by prioritising activities in the context of their specific strengths and capabilities. It will also act as a mechanism through which institutional performance can be monitored, incentivised and corrective action taken where necessary. This will all take place against the backdrop of a reformed higher education landscape, including the new Technological Universities and enhanced regional cooperation.

The 2018-2027 National Development Plan provides for a significant ramping up of capital investment in the higher education sector over the coming decade. The HEA will play a key role in ensuring that maximum value is delivered from this investment and that funding is prioritised in accordance with policy objectives for the sector as a whole.

C. Evidence, Policy and Strategic Planning

The HEA's data collection and analysis capability will underpin its role as the central evidence hub for the Irish higher education system. This evidence ranges from enrolment numbers to graduate outcomes and the quality of physical facilities. The organisation will use this intelligence to provide robust policy advice to the Minister and Department and to support the sector in its own development, as well as in the evolution of Irish post-secondary provision. The HEA will serve as the 'go-to' strategic higher education expert for other stakeholders (e.g. other Government Departments, research funders, enterprise agencies, international bodies).

It will communicate clearly to them, as well as the wider public, the value and impact of Irish higher education. As well as the achievement of national targets as set by Government, this will manifest itself in the production of case studies and other qualitative material that clearly explain how Irish higher education is making a difference, both here and internationally. The HEA will also continue to include appropriate data in the Government's Open Data portal, thereby making it as accessible as possible.

D. Digital Transformation

The digital transformation of Irish higher education can – for the better – change dramatically:

- How it is delivered, e.g. through online options and in a range of flexible ways;
- Who it is delivered to: widening its reach to more and less traditional higher education students;
- What it teaches with increased open access to cutting-edge research developments in all disciplines.

Such a transformation will render the system's service to Ireland (and globally) more impactful and more equitably accessible.

The HEA will champion a national approach to developing a digitally transformed sector over the period of this Plan. The development of a Higher Education Digital Transformation Framework will bring together and advance the work already started in the sector including: identifying infrastructure deficits and the need for targeted investment; opportunities for shared services and platforms to progress the digital agenda nationally (e.g. HEAnet, EduCampus); improving online learning and blended models of delivery; how to better use the data we currently have to improve student success; how to achieve open access to higher education and research publications and data. The ability of institutions, their staff, students and their systems to embrace digital transformation will underpin their future success. The technological capability of the HEA will continue to be enhanced to underpin its role in digital transformation across the Irish higher education sector.

E. Quality and Academic Excellence

The activities of the institutions themselves will improve during 2018-2022 with the aid of system-level support from HEA initiatives. At all times, the driving objectives will be improved student experiences and outcomes. Consistency in the quality of teaching and learning will be supported by the *National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning* and the HEA's strong working relationship with QQI.

The reach of higher education back into the wider education system will be further developed through continuing work on the transitions reform agenda. Institutions have made progress in broadening entry routes from secondary schools and the HEA will continue to support them and the Department on this important agenda during the course of this Plan. It will also work with Solas to improve connectivity between higher education and further education and training, thereby increasing the coherence of the post-secondary education environment in Ireland.

Completion rates will improve with the aid of focused strategies and supports. Ireland's lifelong learning levels will also improve as the profile of the Irish higher education student evolves to reflect our evolving learning requirements and opportunities.

The HEA's investment, through its core grant, will help to embed excellent research across the system, including in the new Technological Universities, enabling institutions to better compete at home and abroad. For example, this core funding allows institutions to:

- Offer permanent tenure to their leading researchers;
- Put the research support infrastructure in place that facilitates the securing of competitive grant funding;
- Free-up the time of academics to conduct research across all disciplines.

Research performance will develop in accordance with national economic and societal priorities and in line with *Innovation 2020* as well as – at global level – the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The HEA will advocate for a balanced research funding eco-system that effectively combines prioritised areas with support for all disciplines and all types of research, thereby ensuring Ireland's ability to respond to emerging and unforeseen areas of opportunity in the future. The Irish Research Council, under the aegis of the HEA, will act as a key enabler supporting research across all disciplines, and funding bottom-up, non-directed research from early-career stage.

Internationalisation activities will develop in line with the aims of the International Education Strategy. Institutions will adopt a holistic approach to internationalisation using it as a strategy for quality enhancement, inter alia: the student learning experience at the host institution, inter-culturalism and the curriculum, the nature of the services and support provided, and recognition of learning outcomes. Ambitions for growth will be met, and will bring direct financial benefits. This will also create links and relationships between Ireland and many partners at individual, institutional and country level. The HEA will support HEIs to embed internationalisation in their strategic plans and across their core roles – teaching and learning, research and engagement, as well as providing increased opportunities for staff and student mobility through targeted funding initiatives.

F. Equity of Access

The institutions will achieve the targets of the 2015-2019 National Plan for Equity of Access and will engage with the HEA and the Department in the setting – and delivery – of ambitious future targets in this regard. In doing so, equality of opportunity will become mainstreamed across all HEI activities. Clear access, transfer and progression pathways as well as flexible modes of learning will also support the equity of access objective. The HEA will work with the Department and institutions to advance longer-term higher education access policy formulation in Ireland.

G. Skills and Employability

Project Ireland 2040 states that "the way in which skills and talent are nurtured, developed, deployed and retained is central to both national and regional ambitions". In keeping with this, across the regions, the HEA will support the institutions to address identified skills needs through mainstream provision and targeted upskilling initiatives (like Springboard+ and apprenticeships), leading to enhanced graduate employability. Employers will work collaboratively with institutions, for example, through the provision of work placements, programme design, the facilitation of their existing employees' upskilling, and enterprise-facing research schemes. Institutions will also provide an entrepreneurial environment in which innovation is fostered.

HEIs will be responsive to social and economic needs. Their engagement with enterprise throughout the regions will grow and mature, and employer participation in skills development will deepen. The relationship between higher education and civic society will be further strengthened with the aid of Campus Engage, and the cultivation of research collaborations between researchers and the civil society sector.

H. HEA as an Excellent Organisation

The HEA will continuously improve how it functions to maximise its effectiveness and efficiency as a public service organisation. It will support the capacity of its Executive and Authority to play a key part in the evolution of the Irish higher education landscape. It will work to retain and attract excellent staff to the HEA, ensuring the right mix of skills and competencies and providing opportunities for meaningful work experience and continued professional development. Its people will be supported by ongoing technological enhancement, strong communications both internally and externally, and clear lines of engagement and accountability with its parent Department.

VIII. CRITICAL WIDER ENABLERS

The organisation's progress under these eight strategic themes will be influenced by several wider enablers. The HEA will engage with all relevant stakeholders to support these developments which include:

» Increased funding for higher education

The Cassells report, *Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education*, made clear the need for increased levels of investment in higher education and from differing sources. The 2018-2027 National Development Plan has signalled a ramping up of capital investment in the sector over the coming decade.

» Improved regulatory frameworks

For the system to be able to maximise the use and deployment of its resources, progress on the following during the 2018-2022 Plan will be key:

- Greater human resources discretion over recruitment, etc.
- The borrowing framework for the institutions, in particular the Institutes of Technology;
- The corporation framework for institutional use of more flexible company structures.

This would be dependent on an assessment to ensure institutional capability was in place before being facilitated.

» Technological advances

Advances in technology, while sometimes appearing to make the world more complex, can also enable progress previously not thought possible. In the higher education sphere over the course of this Plan, this could have implications for what, how and where education is delivered it, and indeed who delivers it. It also has the potential to change wider management and information processes.

» Balanced regional development

Balanced and sustainable regional growth is a national goal across several Government Departments. Higher education, in collaboration with other education and training providers, is a key element in any region's competitive strength. The ability – and visibility – of institutions to support regional performance will contribute to their future success and stakeholder buy-in, both at regional level and nationally.

» Intergovernmental cooperation

The HEA is one part of a highly connected and, at times complex, public system of Departments and agencies engaged with the Irish higher education system. The success of its collaboration with other actors, both bilaterally (such as with Solas; Quality and Qualifications Ireland; and Science Foundation Ireland) and multilaterally (for example under the auspices of the new National Skills Council) will affect the success of the institutions. Coordinated data collection is one instance of this: where cross-governmental improvements should reduce the institutional burden and, at the same time, improve the evidence base.

IX. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Under each of the eight strategic themes (e.g. A) for the period 2018-2022, strategic priorities (e.g. A.1) have been identified with key strategic actions (e.g. A.1.1), associated Key Performance Deliverables and a timeframe specified for each in the table below. Flagship initiatives representing new or key deliverables for the period 2018-2022 are also highlighted.

A. Institutional Governance, Leadership and Operational Excellence

A.1	**Enhance the capability of HEIs' leadership, including their Governing Bodies', to undertake their institutional governance roles in terms of strategy setting and accountability and to hold the Governing Bodies accountable in that regard.**			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
A.1.1	Oversee the development of a management and leadership capability framework and upskilling programme for the system, and disseminate best practice.	Number of leaders/senior managers engaged in the upskilling programme	2018/19	**New management and leadership programme**
		HEI strategic management representatives network established to share best practice.	2018 – Twice annual meetings	**New strategic management network established**
		Improved strategic management by HEIs as demonstrated in management of compacts, budgets	2022	
A.1.2	Work with Governing Bodies to support understanding of responsibilities and reinforce their role in challenging institutional performance and accountability.	Full engagement by all Chairs of Governing Bodies.	2018	
		Regular meeting with GBs, or chairs of GBs on compact and strategic dialogue outcomes	Twice annually to 2022	
A.1.3	Identify international good practice for staff contracts in institutions that are similar to the Institutes of Technology in other countries	Enhanced understanding of type of contract appropriate for IoTs/TUs	2018	

A.2	Strengthen institutional governance and accountability for public funding.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
A.2.1	Establish and monitor compliance with new Codes of Governance for Higher Education	New Codes in place and reflected in HEA governance reporting requirements	2018	**Codes of Governance in place**
A.2.2	Develop good practice across particular governance themes via annual rolling review	Reviews undertaken and recommendations implemented	Ongoing	
A.2.3	Establish penalty system for institutional governance non-compliance as final step in full implementation of Governance Framework for Higher Education System	Penalty system established	2018	
A.2.4	Develop governance unit with clear processes for HEI reviews and securing disclosures	Full new HEI review framework launched	2018 (subject to new legislation)	
A.2.5	Analyse and report to the DES on appropriateness of existing legislative basis for robust governance oversight by the HEA, and improvements that should be progressed to enhance governance arrangements	Analysis completed, and report given to DES on appropriateness of existing legislative basis for robust institutional governance oversight by HEA	2018/9	

A.3	Improve equality in higher education.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
A.3.1	Implement the recommendations of (1) the Report of the Expert Group: HEA National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions and (2) the Gender Equality Taskforce	The recommendations outlined for the HEA in the report are progressed	2018-ongoing	
		HEA is leading implementation of the review and has engaged other stakeholders to progress their recommendations.		
A.3.2	Commence a review of institutional equality policies and their implementation – S36 Unis Act, S 22 & 47 IoT Act	A review of other forms of discrimination (e.g. race, disability) in higher education has been completed and a report generated outlining specified actions for key stakeholders	2020	

B. Funding, Sustainability and Performance

B.1	Allocate public funding to the institutions and support system sustainability and development.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
B.1.1	Allocate public funding through a reformed funding allocation model and implement new management and costing systems.	New funding allocation model implemented.	2018-2022	**A new, well-communicated transparent funding model**
		Performance funding allocated on basis of evaluation of institutional strategic compacts with HEA – clear feedback to institutions on areas where improvement required	Annually over 2018-2022	
		Common management information system established across the system	2019	**New shared management information platform**
		New costing system developed	2019	
B.1.2	Support an agile, responsive and financially stable system	Capital funding priorities identified and full accountability for Exchequer capital spend provided.	Ongoing	
		Increased funding base for the system (additional funding from NTF, State, non-exchequer).	Ongoing	
		Move from ECF to more flexible budget-based HR accountability system.	2020	
		Number of institutes with sustained deficits reduced from 9 to 4.	2020	

B.2	Drive system performance by implementing the System Performance Framework 2018-2020.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
B.2.1	Agree compacts with HEIs	Publication of agreed compacts	2018	**Enhancing strategic capacity of the HEIs**
B.2.2	Monitor institutional performance against compacts annually and on a risk informed basis	Publication of outcomes annually.	Annually	
B.2.3	Use compact evaluations to provide feedback to HEIs and disseminate good practice.	Feedback communicated to institutions on areas for improvement. Evidence of improvement identified in subsequent compact evaluations	Annually	

B.3	Grow talent and innovation in the regions through system reconfiguration and thematic reviews.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
B.3.1	Support landscape reform processes (i.e. TU mergers & initial teacher education mergers) and provide policy advice to DES on regional cluster development	Allocation of funding & report on progress being made (incl. completion of mergers & applications/designations as TUs; clear policy position and goals established for cluster activity)	Annually to at least 2020	
B.3.2	Complete thematic reviews	Publication of reports, including Initial Teacher Education, Creative Arts Education and Engineering – identification of successes to date and strategies for further development	Ongoing	

C. Evidence, Policy and Strategic Planning

C.1	Underpin the HEA's role as the central evidence hub for the Irish higher education system by building its data collection and analytics capabilities.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
C.1.1	Deliver the Data & Knowledge Management Strategy	Full implementation of strategy actions	2018	**New Graduate Outcomes Survey** **New Staff Database**
C.1.2	Analyse HE graduate outcomes in terms of employability and earnings potential	Publication of graduate outcomes in terms of salary, employment sector and longitudinal destinations	2018-ongoing	
C.1.3	Enhance interagency collaboration to support higher education oversight	MOUs in place leading to improved alignment with other agencies' data collection and policy making processes, e.g. QQI, SFI and Solas.	2018-ongoing	
C.1.4	Review good practice in impact assessment models	Review national and international models relevant to teaching & learning, research and engagement. Make recommendations to DES on appropriate metrics and model(s) for Ireland.	2018-2020	**New Impact Case Studies publication developed**
C.1.5	Enhance the evidence base for capital investment decisions.	Undertake a new survey of HE space.	2018-2020	

C.2	Support good practice and policy advice in Ireland by anticipating trends in higher education development nationally and internationally.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
C.2.1	Engage and consult with national and international stakeholders on emerging trends and action needed	Stakeholder Forums held to discuss emerging trends and their relevance to Irish higher education	Bi-annually to 2022	
C.2.2	Support the Department in relation to policy development and responding to the wider political system	Timely analysis and briefing reports generated	Ongoing	

D. Digital Transformation

D.1	Develop and Implement Higher Education Digital Transformation Framework.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
D.1.1	Develop a digital transformation framework for higher education	Framework developed and launched	2019	**New Digital Transformation Framework for Higher Education**
D1.2	Implement recommendations under the Digital Transformation Framework for Higher Education	Digital Transformation Framework for Higher Education recommendations implemented	2020-2022	

E. Quality and Academic Excellence

E.1	Improve the student experience and promote student engagement.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
E.1.1	Support the quality of teaching and learning through funding and oversight of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning	Recommendations of the 2017 independent review of the National Forum have been implemented.	2018-2021	
		New review conducted in 2020.	2020	
E.1.2	Use & enhance Irish Survey of Student Engagement	Data collected & results published. Latter to commence at institutional level in 2018.	Ongoing	**New ISSE Postgraduate Student Engagement Survey**
		100% of HEIs are using ISSE in their compacts	2018	
E.1.3	Work with USI & QQI to manage the National Student Engagement Project	Participated in national steering group.	Ongoing	
		Increased numbers of students trained to participate in Academic Councils.	2018	
		Digital Badge for Student Engagement developed.	2018	
		National Student Engagement Network established.	2018	
E.1.4	Support a better transition from second level to higher education by participating in Transition Reform Steering and Research Groups.	Broader undergraduate entry.	Ongoing	
		Research published on Leaving Certificate points system changes.	2018	
E.1.5	Assess the institutional approach to teaching and learning (as agreed in the compacts), relative to the overall institutional strategy and mission, and good practice, and provide feedback to the HEIs	Creation of more comprehensive and coherent HEI strategies for improving the student experience	2022	**New Strategic Dialogue National Teaching and Learning report**

E.2	Promote the balanced strategic development of the higher education research system.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
E.2.1	Deliver actions which the HEA is designated lead in Innovation 2020, and support implementation of other actions.	Joined-up approach to implementation of national research policy through participation in High-Level Group (HLG) meetings of Innovation 2020 (I2020)	Ongoing	
		Ireland's open research activities are informed by EU best practice with oversight by the National Open Research Forum	2018 ongoing	
		Large Items of Research Equipment (LIRE) database upgraded and maintained	2018 ongoing	
		National Doctoral Framework Advisory Forum set up and supporting consistent good practice in doctoral education in Ireland	2018	**New National Doctoral Framework Advisory Forum**
E.2.2	Support the development of a well-balanced higher education research system, particularly the development of people, infrastructure, and all types of excellent research across all disciplines.	Consistent approach to implementation of national research policy through participation in Higher Education Research Group (HERG) meetings.	Ongoing	
		Stakeholders are consulted and system-wide institutional indicators of research capacity and capability are agreed, tracked and improvement is seen.	2018-2022	
		Irish researchers supported by HEA European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) National Delegate (ND)	Ongoing	
E.2.3	Assess the institutional approach to research and innovation (as agreed in the compacts), relative to the overall institutional strategy and mission, and good practice, and provide feedback to the HEIs	Creation of more comprehensive and coherent HEI strategies for improving research and innovation performance	2022	**New Strategic Dialogue National Research and Innovation report**

E.3	Support internationalisation of the higher education system and ensure that institutions adopt a holistic approach to internationalisation as a strategy for quality enhancement.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
E.3.1	Support the DES in progressing the International Education Strategy for Ireland	Revised Government of Ireland International Education Scholarship Programme implemented	Annually until 2020	
		Academic Staff Mobility Programme implemented	Annually until 2020	
		Holistic approach to internationalisation adopted by HEIs	2020	
E.3.2	Increase student and staff mobility through our role as national agency for the higher education components of the Erasmus+ programme	Impact review of Erasmus+ completed	2018	
		Increased participation in E+ by students and staff	2020	
		Active participation by national agency in E+ international working groups	Ongoing	
E.3.3	Engage in BREXIT activities and represent HE perspective	Higher Education interests have been represented in BREXIT negotiations, potential opportunities realised, and risks to HE minimised.	Ongoing	
		Relationship with UK as well as European countries maintained.	Ongoing	
E.3.4	Assess the institutional approach to internationalisation (as agreed in the compacts), relative to the overall institutional strategy and mission, and good practice, and provide feedback to the HEIs	Creation of more comprehensive and coherent HEI strategies for improving internationalisation	2022	**New Strategic Dialogue National Internationalisation report**

F. Equity of Access

F.1	Ensure that the diversity of the higher education student population reflects the diversity of the national population by leading the implementation of the National Access Plan.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTION		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
F.1.1	Successfully implement the National Access Plan	Implementation of the National Access Plan 2015-2019 completed	2018-2019	**Development of new National Access Plan**
		Where targets have been achieved by the interim report stage, they may be updated in conjunction with the NAP Implementation Group	2021	
		New National Access Plan 2020-2025 and initial components developed and implemented	2019-2022	

F.2	Manage Access funding programmes.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTION		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
F.2.1	Manage Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)	PATH funds delivering additionality with regard to equity of access participation and completion.	2018-2020	**New PATH Funding under Strands 1, 2 & 3**
F.2.2	Manage third-level Access measure funding programmes	Recommendations arising from review of Student Assistance Fund (SAF) implemented.	2018	
		Recommendations arising from review of Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) implemented.	2018-2019	

G. Skills, Employability and Engagement

G.1	Support HE sector responsiveness to workforce skills needs.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
G.1.1	Undertake next employers' survey	Third iteration of national employers survey completed	Medium-term	
G.1.2	Roll out targeted skills initiatives	New round of Springboard+ rolled out with increased provision for those in employment.	2018	**Springboard+ 2018**
		Increased HE apprenticeship enrolments through engagement with institutions and participation in National Apprenticeship Council	2020	**New Higher Education Apprenticeship Group**
		Development of new DES ICT Skills Action Plan supported by the HEA	2018	**New ICT Skills Action Plan**
G.1.3	Drive improved use of Institutional Employability Statements	Review of current activity conducted.	2019	
		Guidelines developed for HEIs at discipline/school/ department level.		
		Strategic Dialogue used to track statements.		

G.2	Support engagement with enterprise, as well as civic and community engagement.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
G.2.1	Active strategic bilateral engagement with relevant agencies & representative bodies	Enterprise needs reflected in relevant initiatives.	Ongoing	
G.2.2	Two-way HEA representation with enterprise bodies	HEA participation in National Skills Council.	Ongoing	
		Enterprise reps on Authority.		
G.2.3	Membership of Campus Engage Steering Group	Indicators developed to monitor community and civic engagement.	2018	
G.2.4	Assess the institutional approach to engagement (as agreed in the compacts), relative to the overall institutional strategy and mission, and good practice, and provide feedback to the HEIs	Creation of more comprehensive and coherent HEI strategies for improving engagement	2022	**New Strategic Dialogue National Engagement report**

H. HEA as an Excellent Organisation

H.1	Build internal HEA capacity to enable the organisation members and staff to maximise their contribution to the strategic development of the Irish higher education sector.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
H.1.1	Develop and implement HR Strategy to align HR activities with overall objectives of the organisation	HR strategy developed	Q1 2018 Reviewed Q1 2020	
H.1.2	Optimise staffing of the organisation and equip staff with knowledge and skills to respond to evolving requirements and opportunities	Sanctioned additional and vacant posts filled and new staff inducted. Staff will agree annually work and development objectives. This will include opportunities to be involved in cross functional teams.	2018 onwards	
H.1.3	The HEA will operate to the highest standards of Corporate Governance	Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies fully implemented.	2018	
		Review of System of Internal Controls.	annually	
		Annual report and audited financial statements published.	annually	
		Compliance with GDPR.	2018 onwards	
H.1.4	The Board will be operating to the highest standards of governance	Board self-evaluation		
		External Board evaluation		

H.2	Underpin the organisation's operations and enhance external interface through continuous improvement of its technological and communications capabilities.			
KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS		KEY PERFORMANCE DELIVERABLES	TIMEFRAME	FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE(S)
H.2.1	Enhance IT services in the HEA	IT Strategy 2018-22 to align HEA IT activities with the overall organisation strategic objectives	2018	
		HEA fully utilising MS sharepoint and is operating as a paperless office	2021	
H.2.2	Enhance HEA communications	Communications strategy developed for 2018-2022	2018	
		Website and social media used effectively by the HEA	2018 ongoing	

X. MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

Implementation of the 2018-2022 HEA Strategic Plan will be driven by the HEA Executive with oversight from the Authority. It will be supported by:

- The execution of annual work programmes to implement the Plan's Key Strategic Actions;
- Twice yearly reporting on these to the Authority;
- Annual service level agreements with the Department of Education and Skills;
- Quarterly meetings with the Department to review progress;
- An interim review of the Plan in 2020.

HEA | HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS

Contact Us

3 Shelbourne Buildings, Crampton Avenue
Shelbourne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
DO4 C2Y6, Ireland

Email: info@hea.ie
Phone: +353 1 231 7100
Lo-Call Number: 1890 200 637
Fax: +353 1 231 7172