

# HEA

Strategic Plan

2012 - 2016



Higher Education Authority

The graphic features a red vertical bar on the left containing the text 'HEA Strategic Plan 2012 - 2016'. To the right, a stylized graduation cap is shown in shades of green and yellow, with a line graph overlaying it. The graph has two circular markers labeled '2012' and '2016'. The background consists of abstract geometric shapes in various shades of green, yellow, and red.

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### Foreword

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This Strategic Plan of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for the five year period 2012 to 2016 is launched at a time of great tumult and uncertainty in Irish society. As we struggle to deal with the twin challenges posed by our economic difficulties and the need to reinvent our public services, so as to better support society and the economy, the HEA is acutely aware of the pivotal role education, and, in particular, higher education plays in meeting those challenges. As a society we have a choice; to bemoan our fate and look to others to sort out our problems or to confront the challenges head on and be masters of our own future and destiny. The HEA is clear in its choice; to be in the vanguard in confronting those challenges by moving from a role that was focused mainly on funding and managing existing activity in individual higher education institutions to one of leading change and encouraging innovation in and across a whole coherent system of higher education.

This change in role requires the HEA to set out an ambitious vision for the future of Irish higher education; to underpin that vision with a clear roadmap as to how this is going to be achieved; to ensure that the HEA's own policy and planning, governance and operational arrangements are up to the task of leading the transformation. To date, the vision for the higher education system has been laid out in 'Towards a Future Higher Education Landscape' and the means by which the road will be travelled has been signalled as including collaboration, clustering, strategic dialogue at institutional level, rationalisation and consolidation, where necessary, and the possible establishment of new types of higher education institutions. This Strategic Plan lays out clearly the HEA's priorities for ensuring its own planning, governance and operational arrangements are up to the task of leading the transformation. The HEA cannot expect the higher education institutions for which it has responsibility to undergo radical change and transformation without itself undergoing similar transformation and, accordingly, as this plan is released is undergoing significant internal re-organisation so as to better meet the demands imposed by the plan for the future of higher education.

The plan, prepared in consultation with the HEA's wide group of stakeholders, radically re-orientates and clarifies the various roles and responsibilities of the HEA. The HEA, now charged with the responsibility of leading the development of a higher education system, must focus on **System Development** activities that are underpinned by a robust framework for **Policy and Planning** while **Excellence in Higher Education** must be supported by a clear understanding of how **Sustainability in Higher Education** will be achieved. These highlighted strategic objectives will be supported by clear and transformative **Governance and Performance Management** arrangements and the targeted use of **Strategic Programmes**. For each of these strategic objectives activities, timeframes and key performance indicators have been identified for which the HEA wishes to be held accountable.

As *Chair* of the Higher Education Authority I welcome the opportunity created by the seismic changes in Irish society to be part of a transformative process and a transformed organisation that is at the heart of Ireland's education system. On behalf of the HEA I look forward to working with those who benefit from our education system, namely, students and employers, the higher education institutions that are at the heart of the system and the Minister for Education and Skills and his Department in realising the ambition laid out in this plan.

John Hennessy

Chair,  
Higher Education Authority  
March 2012

## Section 1: Introduction

**This strategic plan has been developed and adopted by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for the period 2012 to 2016. It is a fixed period plan, with a mid-term review in 2014.**

The plan is ambitious and reflects the quantum change that will occur in the higher education system and the HEA itself as we take on the new system direction and leadership roles and responsibilities, which have been assigned to the HEA in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (the National Strategy). We have prioritised the key challenges for higher education and for our organisation and outlined how each will be addressed in terms of activities, timeframes and key performance indicators. Rigorous measurement and review of our progress in relation to each of our priorities will be an on-going activity. The formal mid-term review of the strategic plan in 2014 will also ensure that we remain focused on our priorities and committed to achieving our targets.

The publication of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 in January 2011 has ensured that there is now a clear policy framework and context for higher education in Ireland, and for this HEA Strategic Plan. It is important to reflect that there are a number of stakeholders working together on the implementation of the National Strategy. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) is leading the implementation and the HEA is committed to fully supporting the implementation process and to delivering on all areas of implementation where the HEA has a lead responsibility, working constructively with all other stakeholder agencies and organisations.



## Section 2: Operational and Policy Context

### The Contribution of Higher Education

Higher education contributes to the individual and society at multiple levels – economic, social, cultural and civic.

Higher education is concerned with the development of individuals so they can realise their full potential, lead prosperous and fulfilling lives and contribute to society in meaningful and holistic ways.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) foster informed debate and provide solutions and directions in response to major challenges and to economic, social and ethical questions in society. HEIs perform an integral role in the community, in assisting in the formation of public policy which is in addition to, and informed by, their teaching and research functions. HEIs and their students engage with the community, and are an important element in the vibrancy of daily life in the community.

Higher education was an essential contributor to Ireland's period of economic growth and success in the 1990s and early 2000s. More importantly, higher education will be fundamental in the coming years in ensuring that Ireland has the skilled labour force and research base necessary for the country to rebuild itself as a thriving, innovative, knowledge driven economy.

### A Challenging Environment

Ireland faces a period of unprecedented challenge, economically and socially. Great demands are placed on our citizens. Our fiscal situation is in crisis. Our unemployment levels are at a very high level and, potentially, represent a chronic economic and social problem. The higher education system has a responsibility to respond effectively and urgently. The system needs to prepare students so that they emerge as "life ready" graduates equipped with the array of skills needed to continually adapt to new ways of working and living. It must engage our regions to collectively position ourselves globally and enable us to compete successfully at all levels internationally.

This strategic plan, while identifying our roles and responsibilities, is our statement about how we can contribute to addressing that challenge and how we will lead and support the higher education system in making its contribution.

The reforms needed include significant and rapid reform of the public service. The HEA is a body with important leadership, accountability and regulatory responsibilities for a significant area of the public sector - the HEA manages a state spend of circa €1.1 billion recurrent funding in HEIs plus €71 million in recurrent research funding and some €84 million in capital funding (includes research capital funding).

A particular challenge for higher education is the sustainability of funding for the system. In an environment of diminishing resources, the HEIs are nevertheless called on to deliver higher levels of performance, provide more students with quality teaching and learning opportunities and provide the labour force with the skill sets required to build and sustain economic growth.

To-date the higher education system has responded well to this challenge as evidenced by the fact that:

- Over the period 2004/05 to 2009/10 full-time student numbers have increased by circa 20% while public funding per full-time student has fallen by 16%.
- Since 2009 more than 10,500 part-time places have been provided in the HEIs for persons who have become unemployed as a result of the economic recession.

Other factors in our operational environment that will impact on the higher education system include the Croke Park Agreement and the Employment Control Framework. In addition, changes to the fee regime in England may have implications in the Republic, with a potentially significant increase in applications from English students.

A particular concern for the future funding and development of the system arises from the fact that competition for students, staff and graduates takes place in an international environment. Higher education increasingly involves collaboration between institutions across the world, students taking all or parts of their studies abroad and staff mobility between institutions. This presents opportunities for Irish HEIs but it also presents risks if we do not meet rising standards of performance and outcomes. In order to ensure that we remain abreast with international developments, Ireland must be effective in international higher education networks and actively engage in peer-to-peer international relations and peer learning groups. Continuous learning is essential.

### Reflections on Past Performance

An important element in the development of this plan was a reflection of the HEA's performance to date and particularly in relation to the strategic priorities of the HEA Strategic Plan 2008 – 2010.

Considering the period of the previous strategic plan brings to the fore the enormity of the economic challenges that Ireland is currently facing. At the time of writing the HEA Strategic Plan 2008 – 2010, the full scale and gravity of Ireland's challenges were not clearly envisaged and the reality began to emerge only as the period of the plan unfolded. Inevitably, assumptions underpinning our approach in the previous plan regarding matters such as the funding environment and participation have required radical alteration.

One of the most central developments over the previous planning period was the publication of the National Strategy for Higher Education in January 2011. The HEA played a central role in working with the DES and engaging in a wide process of stakeholder consultation in the development of the National Strategy. The National Strategy has ensured that there is now a clear policy framework, a clarified role for the HEA and a vision for the higher education system to flourish in a more co-

ordinated way without impacting negatively on institutional innovation and responsiveness. Many of the strategic priorities identified by the HEA in 2008 regarding the development of a unified strategic framework, performance funding and accountability can now be achieved and are part of the HEA's responsibilities in the implementation of the National Strategy.

At a high level the HEA has been effective in realising important achievements in the higher education system. These include increased student participation including increased participation from students from non-traditional backgrounds through the management of the funding allocation model; the growth of the research agenda through the management of a number of funding streams most notably the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL) which has developed a research infrastructure across the higher education system; the development of the quality agenda through effective funding mechanisms (Irish Universities Quality Board) and relationships with the relevant quality bodies. However, a key concern has been that while the higher education system has consistently responded to strategic challenges, it has developed in a somewhat uncoordinated fashion leading to concerns regarding value for money, accountability, efficiency and duplication. In addition, there is a long-term concern that there may be something of a policy mismatch between funding mechanisms that support increase participation but that, in a declining funding situation, lead to decreased funding levels per student thereby raising questions regarding system quality and sustainability.

Arising from these experiences the strategic actions identified in this Strategic Plan emphasise a range of issues covering strategic dialogue, performance funding; sustainability; increased collaborations between HEIs that will lead to better use of resources; enhanced relationships with the further education system, and greater use of quality metrics and standards notably in the area of PhD provision.

## Government Policy

The key policy statement underpinning this HEA Strategic Plan is the National Strategy which sets out a challenging and ambitious vision and plan for the development of the higher education system. It details the changes that are needed to build a modern, flexible and responsive higher education system in order to enable individuals realise their full potential, to ensure an inclusive society and to achieve sustainable economic growth.

There are several other relevant strategies in place or in advanced stage of development which also underpin this Strategic Plan. These include the International Education Strategy 2010 – 2015; the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008 – 2013; the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006 – 2013 and the Research Prioritisation Exercise. Other developments are also relevant such as the establishment of SOLAS<sup>1</sup>, the new further education and training authority; the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Bill, 2011, which includes provision for the amalgamation of bodies dealing with qualifications and quality assurance in education and training and a Code of Practice for the provision of educational services to international students.

Government policy envisages a reformed HEA, acting in a leadership position in the development of the higher education system and adopting a strong, proactive role in ensuring accountability from the system and individual institutions. This will involve a significantly different and higher level of performance from the HEA itself. This Strategy is about "doing & delivering".

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<sup>1</sup> Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna

## Section 3: HEA Vision, Values and Mission

### VISION for the HEA

The HEA will take a proactive, leadership role in the development, regulation and governance of a coherent and well co-ordinated system of interconnected higher education institutions with each -

- making a clearly defined contribution, agreed with the HEA,
- directed to achieving national academic, social and economic outcomes,
- funded sustainably and on the basis of performance against national outcomes,
- committed to the development of world class graduates.

Delivery of our vision is underpinned by a value system that characterises all our interactions and actions and that we commit to uphold at all times.

### HEA VALUES

The HEA is:

- mindful of its responsibility, in its policy leadership role, to the development of evidence based input to higher education policy development;
- respectful of the independence and autonomy of higher education institutions within an appropriate framework of accountability;
- committed to an open and inclusive approach to the formulation and implementation of policy through a process of constructive consultation;
- committed to ensuring that funding responsibilities are undertaken in a manner that is fair and transparent, and
- accountable to the Minister for Education and Skills and his Department for performance and the achievement of agreed objectives.

### MISSION for the HEA

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.



## Section 4: The Role of the HEA and Strategic Objectives

This section provides a detailed description of our role in relation to key strategic objectives for the higher education system over the period of this strategic plan.

### Role

At the core of the HEA's role is the objective to create a higher education system that maximises the opportunity and experience for students from access through to each student's desired level of graduation. It is only by placing the student at the centre of all activity, that the HEA and the higher education system can deliver on its responsibilities to the individual, society and the economy.

The HEA is the statutory funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and a number of other designated institutions and is an advisory body to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to the higher education sector. The roles of the HEA are provided for in legislation (see Appendix 1).

The National Strategy states that its successful implementation will require strong central oversight and proposes a key role for a reformed HEA in leading the higher education system in the

achievement of higher levels of performance (see Appendix 2). The National Strategy underpins the role set out for the HEA in this strategic plan.

The HEA is the regulator of the higher education system and we are required to implement our funding responsibilities and a process of effective strategic engagement to ensure well-functioning, well-governed, accessible and accountable HEIs, operating to high standards in all areas.

The HEA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on the objectives to be set for the higher education system and performance indicators to be applied. It is the HEA's responsibility to ensure that national objectives are aligned with institutional objectives, that performance is measured against these and funding allocations made accordingly.

The HEA performs an advocacy role for higher education to students, Government, employers and the general public. We make the case for the contribution that higher education makes to personal development and to social, economic and cultural development and we promote higher education as part of an integrated education system that enables individuals to reach their full potential.

The HEA has responsibilities to input into the national policy agenda through the provision of high quality, research and evidence based policy advice to the Department of Education and Skills and other agencies and Departments with significant interaction with the higher education system.

The HEA also has an inter-agency co-ordinating role in supporting the Department's responsibility for the higher education system, e.g. Forfas and SOLAS are examples of agencies with missions that are relevant to the higher education sector.

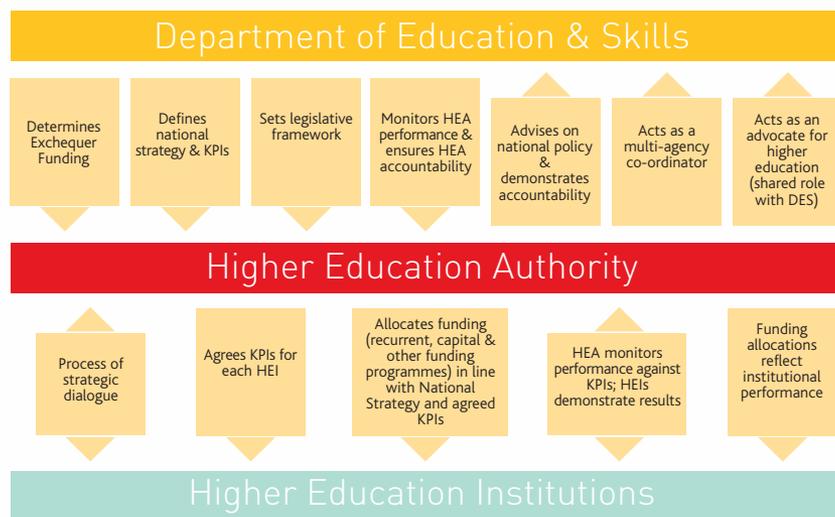
The HEA is accountable to the Minister for Education and Skills, through his Department, for the achievement of national outcomes for the higher education sector.

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.

Figure 4.1 depicts in a graphic the interfaces between the roles of the HEA and its primary stakeholder, the DES, and between the HEA and its other primary stakeholders, the HEIs.



Figure 4.1: Interfaces between Department, HEA and HEIs enabling higher education system to deliver successfully at national and international levels



## HEA Strategic Objectives

Our strategic objectives are grouped under the following headings:

- System Development
- Sustainability of Higher Education
- Policy and Planning
- Governance of Higher Education
- Excellence in Higher Education
- Strategic Programmes

### Strategic Objective 1: System Development

The HEA will lead the development of a higher education system comprising HEIs, each with significant scale and capacity, and complementary and diverse missions that, operating in a coherent and co-ordinated way, collectively achieve national objectives.

This will require increased levels of inter-institutional collaboration, effective clusters of institutions working together at regional level and consolidation of the sector as well as the creation of specialist institutions where appropriate and that meet rigorous criteria. Private higher education institutions that have met the quality standards set by the QQAI will have a role to play as part of the system in meeting national objectives within a framework to be developed by the HEA. The HEA will also continue to engage with our colleagues in Northern Ireland to explore opportunities for increased collaboration for mutual benefit. The HEA will set the direction for the system in line with national objectives through guidelines and demanding criteria, rigorous appraisal of proposals and effective implementation of the strategic dialogue process and related funding allocations.

### Strategic Objective 2: Sustainability of Higher Education

Key objectives of the HEA under this heading are to fund HEIs in a sustainable way at a level appropriate to their objectives; that funding is used efficiently and effectively at both institutional and system level, and to ensure that institutions understand the outcomes expected from public investment and are accountable for those outcomes.

In pursuit of those objectives the HEA will -

- Provide the Minister with up-to-date and timely data on student numbers, current and projected student numbers and the associated funding needs.
- Develop and implement revised funding arrangements to more closely align public investments with strategic objectives.
- Reform our funding allocation model so that it can take systematic account of mode of delivery (i.e. parity between part-time versus full time, on campus or blended learning)
- Allocate a part of core funding on the basis of performance by reference to pre-set metrics, providing enhanced accountability.
- Incentivise institutions to be more creative and successful in diversifying their sources of income.

### Strategic Objective 3: Policy and Planning

The HEA is the agency advising the Minister for Education and Skills on higher education and research policy and is the independent authoritative source of data and analysis on higher education and research, as both an evidence base for policy and accountability of the sector.



We will also perform our advocacy role by making the case for higher education and research to students, Government, enterprise and society generally.

As part of its planning responsibilities, the HEA actively engages in labour market analysis and will provide guidance to the sector in anticipating and responding to skills needs in the economy. This will relate both to areas of skills shortages (current and forecast) and to the relevance of programmes to the needs of the economy. Proactive labour market scanning, active engagement with employer views and surveys and responding to student surveys are essential elements of HEA responsibility.

#### **Strategic Objective 4: Governance of Higher Education**

The HEA will ensure, through our funding mechanisms, that HEIs are appropriately governed and collectively delivering on national policy goals; that unnecessary duplication of programmes is minimised, and that consolidation of activity occurs where appropriate. We will work with the institutions to support them adopting a forward looking strategic approach that contributes to the development of the higher education system as a whole, as well as the individual institution. We will deploy state funding in a manner that drives increased performance and make institutions accountable for funding received and related outcomes.

An immediate priority over the period of this strategic plan will be to advise the Minister on national deliverables for the higher education system and the definition of performance metrics, for both the system and individual institutions. We will engage in a process of strategic dialogue arising from which we will identify performance requirements for each institution. These requirements will cover key national priorities such as retention, financial stability, quality of teaching and research, engagement and internationalisation. Other important areas including governance (i.e. meeting the requirements of agreed codes of governance), autonomy, accountability and timely data provision will also be addressed in this process.

#### **Strategic Objective 5: Excellence in Higher Education**

Delivering excellence in higher education requires management of the following three priorities:

- Teaching and Learning
- Research and Innovation
- Engagement with Community and Enterprise

#### **Teaching and Learning**

The HEA's responsibility in this respect is concerned with creating the policy framework and the funding/accountability environment that ensures institutions provide high quality teaching and learning. Through the strategic dialogue process we will ensure that teaching and learning indicators are key components of performance measurement and funding and that institutions are accountable to the HEA for the delivery of teaching and learning epitomised by the following standards -

- up-to-date research into teaching and learning and a high-quality learning environment,
- feedback from students to inform institutional and programme management,
- an environment that is informed by research,
- high levels of student retention,
- clear routes of progression and transfer, as well as non-traditional entry routes,
- specific programmes for first-year students,
- education for generic skills,
- teaching staff who are qualified and competent in teaching and learning.

#### **Research and Innovation**

The higher education system is the bedrock of the Irish research and innovation system, while scholarship and research within the higher education institutions underpin the quality of education provision at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The HEA has a key role to play in ensuring the benefits of investment in research impact on the quality of education delivered, on the quality of the higher education system as a whole and on the economy and society.

The HEA will continue, in encouraging diversity in institutional missions, to encourage strategic focus by institutions on particular research areas and will continue the drive towards concentration and consolidation of research performance around particular themes so as to (a) develop critical mass in research performance in key national priorities, (b) encourage work across the disciplines in addressing the challenges which require the skills and expertise across many fields of research and (c) develop a coherent higher education system. These actions will underpin the implementation of the outcome from the Research Prioritisation Exercise. In fulfilling its mission, the HEA will engage in the assessment of the performance of the higher education sector, and the particular institutions in research and innovation. We will regularly and systematically commission independent reviews and assessments so as to (a) assist the strategic dialogue process, of which performance metrics will form part, (b) inform the performance based allocation model for core funding and (c) inform the direction of higher education and research policy.

In fulfilling its mission in this regard, the HEA is mindful that all that it does must deliver benefit to students. So in addition to leading the system and developing the conditions in which research can flourish, and education enhanced, the HEA will have a particular focus at the research and graduate level on human capital development. The core principle is to enable in particular postgraduate students to create knowledge and develop their skills and competencies so as to enable them to have the widest possible opportunities for utilising their skills on completion of their studies.

The HEA and the newly constituted Research Council (amalgamating the Irish Research Council for Science, Engineering and Technology and the Irish Council for the Humanities and Social Science) will work together to support the development of high quality human capital. The development of high quality PhD education, and the establishment of structured PhD programmes, will be a core focus for the HEA and the Council. To address concerns from employers in relation to the development of transferable, employment-relevant skills at postgraduate level, structured PhD programmes are designed at the outset to meet the needs of an employment market that is wider than academia.

The Research Council is unique in the Irish research system in its focus and thus plays an essential role in our research ecosystem. It is the only agency that provides targeted support for individual postgraduates studying for a Masters or PhD degree across the spectrum of academic disciplines. This organic, bottom-up support for individual researchers will be maintained as an essential component of the overall research and innovation ecosystem.



The Research Council will operate under the aegis of the HEA, with members appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills, and will focus on early stage researcher career formation and skills development, and on encouraging independent exploratory research. The HEA will set the parameters subject to overall national policy and will monitor progress in the implementation of its work and liaise with the Irish Research Staff Association (IRSA), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) and other stakeholders to progress objectives.

### Engagement with Community and Enterprise

Higher education is an essential contributor to national economic success and to Ireland's economic recovery. It is imperative that Ireland has a supply of well-educated people that have the necessary skill sets, including a capacity for entrepreneurship. The HEA will, through the strategic dialogue process, work to achieve enhanced performance in the domain of engagement and to ensure that it is a meaningful element in institutional strategies and activities.

HEIs become a focal point in their communities and contribute to the direction of public policy which is in addition to, and informed by, their teaching and research functions. In communities, HEIs and their students engage with the community, and are a pivotal element in the vibrancy of daily life in the community.

There is a long tradition of higher education engaging with enterprise in the area of research. This engagement must be continued and strengthened. Engagement would facilitate input from non-academic stakeholders to inform the content of programmes. Approaches that can have impact include expansion of work placement opportunities for students, enterprise representation on advisory boards and ongoing validation that programmes meet the needs of the employment market. Such engagement will enhance the higher education system's capacity to develop work relevant and work ready graduates. The HEA will work with the HEIs to forge effective relationships between academia and enterprise. This will form part of our strategic dialogue with institutions and the key performance indicators against which institutional performance will be assessed.

We regard the strengthening of engagement as a central element of the system reconfiguration now proposed. The development of regional clusters are particularly relevant in this context. Regional clusters must serve the communities and enterprise in their regions with a seamless spectrum of further and higher education, training, intellectual property and research opportunities. A particular focus should be on the small and medium sized enterprise (SME) sector so that SMEs can do business in well-functioning regions where all necessary supports are available and readily identified and accessed.

#### *Strategic Priority 6: Strategic Programmes*

The HEA will lead two priority strategic programmes:

- Equity of Access and Lifelong Learning
- Internationalisation

### Equity of Access and Lifelong Learning

Promoting equality of opportunity in education continues to be a priority for the HEA. A mid-term review of the National Access Plan 2008 – 2013 showed that a number of participation targets for 2010 were not met and a recovery strategy is now in place. In addition, the challenges of achieving equality of access to higher education are increasing as new access cohorts are emerging. It is no longer only the traditional cohorts that are finding access difficult. People who have become unemployed and wish to engage with the education system either to retrain or access higher education for the first time encounter specific challenges while practical implementation of the philosophy of lifelong learning is a growing challenge – both demand institution wide, and system wide, approaches.

The HEA will continue to prioritise equity of access and lifelong learning. We will intensify work that will build progression routes involving the second level and further education sectors; we will further the development of credit transfer across the higher education system to maximise student flexibility and mobility, and we will effectively manage programmes such as the Springboard initiative.

## Internationalisation

The internationalisation of higher education holds hugely positive potential for the HEIs and for Ireland. The quality of our system is greatly enhanced by the inward and outward movement of students and staff. Internationalisation enhances the quality of learning, teaching and research in our campuses and contributes significantly to the student experience. It represents an investment in future global relationships as it helps to build relationships with our future trading partners and supports our national goal to become a global innovation hub. These benefits are in addition to the revenue that is generated for the country from every international student.

The Department of Education and Skills published Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010 – 2015 and the HEA is working closely with relevant stakeholders in the implementation of key recommendations. We will prioritise the internationalisation agenda in the development of strategic dialogue with HEIs. We will require institutions to set targets linked to their individual capabilities. The internationalisation strategy sets challenging targets for the higher education system, so we will incentivise performance through our funding model.

We will manage two prestigious scholarship schemes – Government of Ireland International Scholarships and New Frontiers Programme. We will ensure that high calibre students and staff participate in these schemes and that they serve to market Ireland as a high quality education hub that is the destination of choice for international students from all over the world. The management of these scholarships will build on the HEA's already deep involvement in international higher education particularly at the European level. The HEA is the National Agency for the Lifelong Learning Programme - Erasmus; National Contact Point for the Tempus Programme; National Structure for Erasmus Mundus and plays a key role in furthering the aims of the Bologna process. Over the period of this plan we will aim to meet our EU targets for Erasmus students - by 2013 Ireland to have 3,000 outgoing students.

Our internationalisation agenda also encompasses the leading role we play in participating in international higher education networks, actively engaging in peer-to-peer international relations and international learning groups and supporting initiatives such as the Irish Undergraduates Awards which now have an international dimension.



## Section 5: Implementation and Work Plan 2012 - 2014

### HEA Board and HEA Executive

The HEA, its Board and executive, must be "fit for purpose" in order to achieve our objectives as set out in this Strategic Plan. Implementation will also depend on effective relationships between the HEA and a range of other stakeholders. As a public sector organisation, the HEA operates, and is likely to operate for the period of this plan, within the confines of employment control frameworks for the public service. In the circumstances the organisation is in a classic situation of needing to "do more with less". This will require organisation change and, in addition, we must ensure that our human resources are further developed, so that we can work more effectively and so that we have necessary skills and capacities required of our new role. In addition to our own resources, the HEA will also, as needed, engage expertise, including from the higher education sector, to bring additional skills and perspectives to the executive. Enhanced data systems will play an important role in the effectiveness of the executive in delivering on objectives.

Reform of the Board will ensure that, at Board level, the HEA has, as members, people with appropriate expertise and experience. Combined with a focus on strategy and high standards of corporate governance, focussed training where needed and regular review of Board performance, this will ensure maximum effectiveness for the Board.

Crucial to successful implementation, will be a constructive relationship with the Department of Education and Skills, based on mutual trust and clarity in our roles and responsibilities. Such clarity will facilitate more effective and efficient management of the higher education system; will assist in the implementation of national policy and help to ensure that there is no duplication of effort. This is consistent with the Government's priority to create a more efficient public service. The HEA will agree a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department by early 2012, as an important support to implementation of this plan and the National Strategy for Higher Education.

In carrying out our functions, the HEA is also required to work with a range of other agencies and the HEIs themselves. Our objective is always to operate in a constructive and open way. Where appropriate we will enter into formal agreements with other agencies.

The key actions and timeframes that will support the HEA Board and Executive to deliver on our strategic objectives are the following:

- Carry out a re-organisation of the executive to provide a better alignment with role and responsibilities and conduct a review of the skills sets of the executive and identify any gaps; co-operate with the DES in an external review (early 2012) and implement recommendations.
- Develop a strategy for addressing identified competence deficiencies. (2012).
- Review and clarify the respective roles of the Authority and Executive (early 2012)
- Agree and implement a memorandum of understanding between the HEA and DES (early 2012).
- Advise the DES on the skills sets desirable at Board level (2012).
- Further develop the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS), to include in particular the introduction of a system of upward feedback (2012).
- HR compliance with best practice (on-going). This work will be informed by the internal audit on HR undertaken in Q4 2011.
- Biennial Review of HEA Board's performance (2013, 2015).

We will assess our progress in the performance of these actions through reference to the following key performance indicators:

- A reformed organisation and Board that can fully meet the demands of our role.
- An executive with, or with access to, all of the required skills sets necessary to perform role.
- An agreed and successfully implemented MOU with the DES, and in any other relevant areas as they arise.
- A well functioning PMDS system, which has the confidence of HEA staff.
- Achievement of the other KPIs set out in this strategic plan.
- Implementation of recommendations arising from the internal audit on HR. The HR system to address employee engagement, work place practices, staff career development and performance monitoring.



## Potential Risks to Implementation

Having set a challenging programme, the following risks to achieving success are identified and the steps to be taken, where possible, to mitigate these risks:

- Achieving the objectives set for the HEA and the higher education system is, to a significant extent, dependent on the resources available. The current situation in the public finances requires greater levels of productivity but there is a point at which declining resources may prevent progress on the objectives of this plan. The sustainability work that the HEA is undertaking will inform these issues as they relate to the HE system.
- The combined programme of work deriving from this plan and the National Strategy will place major demands on a relatively small human resource base. There is a risk that the organisation will over-reach itself. To counter this, it is proposed to develop a rigorous approach to prioritising work programmes in the light of boundaries and time issues and to emphasise staff development, as well as recruiting on a needs basis expertise from outside of the HEA.
- Achieving many of our objectives requires a collaborative approach from Government departments and other public bodies involved in the higher education sector. To overcome the risk that such an approach is not forthcoming due to strains in the other agencies or for any other reason, the HEA will invest substantially in fostering good relationships and, where appropriate, agreeing roles and responsibilities in formal documents (memoranda of understanding).
- There is a risk that, in the light of the prevailing economic crisis and the increased emphasis on higher education as a contributor to economic growth, too many potentially conflicting demands are made on the sector. To mitigate this, the HEA will maintain close relationships with the institutions and the DES in particular to manage expectations.

## Work Plan 2012 - 2014

Our work plan 2012 – 2014 is directed towards the achievement of our six strategic objectives. We propose carrying out a mid-term review of progress on the achievement of our strategic objectives in 2014. It is expected that our strategic objectives and KPIs will remain consistent over the period of the strategic plan; the proposed actions and timeframes are primarily concerned with the next two years. An updated action plan will be produced following the mid-term review.

### Strategic Objective 1: System Development

#### Key Performance Indicators:

- Clear and measurable progress made towards the achievement of a co-ordinated and coherent higher education system.
- There is clarity and shared understanding of the future direction of the higher education system and in particular the future strategic direction of the HEIs.

#### Key Actions and Timeframes:

- Develop and implement a process of strategic dialogue (2012 – 2013) as a key instrument that will lead to system co-ordination.
- Develop a framework to facilitate a system approach to meeting national higher education objectives. The framework will include guidelines on mergers, consolidations, regional clusters and technological universities (2012). The application of this framework will form part of the HEA's strategic dialogue with HEIs (2012 & 2013).
- Broad and proactive monitoring and scanning of higher education and research developments both nationally and internationally as a means of informing the development of the Irish higher education system (on-going).

### Strategic Objective 2: Sustainability of Higher Education

#### Key Performance Indicators:

- The Minister for Education and Skills will be provided with robust and well researched data, analysis, advice and information to support policy decisions.
- Government and public information and accountability requirements are met by the HEA's accountability report, which will provide an overview of performance evaluation in higher education and of Ireland's performance internationally.
- A funding model that incorporates and supports strategic dialogue process, through the development of funding for performance.
- A funding model reformed to take account of wider mode of delivery of programmes.
- All HEIs that are in receipt of public funding at present through the Department of Education and Skills will be funded through the HEA.

#### Key Actions and Timeframes:

- An immediate priority will be the completion of a sustainability study which will establish the extent to which currently students can be provided with a quality education and how the system will provide for the large increases in demand for higher education expected in coming years.
- First sectoral accountability report will be published in 2012 and every other year thereafter.
- The funding model will be reformed to take account of recommendations arising from the National Strategy, including implementation of the strategic dialogue process (2012 and on-going).
- The funding model will be reformed to take systematic account of mode of delivery. This will also involve changes to the SRS to support this reform. (2012).
- Accept the transfer of responsibility for exchequer funding for HEIs currently funded by DES (2012 – 2013).



### **Strategic Objective 3: Policy and Planning**

#### **Key Performance Indicators:**

- HEA is the source of record for consistent and reliable data on the higher education and research system which forms the bedrock of our policy advice.
- HEA analyses and assesses national and international higher education policy developments and trends and develops policy proposals accordingly – this inputs into the work of the HEA across all of its strategic objectives.

#### **Key Actions and Timeframes:**

- Continue the development of HEA statistics database to support evidence-based policy making.
- Development of staff database – design and development by 2012 for implementation by 2013.
- Review of data needs to ensure that there is sufficient data capacity to meet the requirements of the strategic dialogue process.
- Continuing development of student record system (SRS) to ensure comprehensive coverage of flexible learning, international students and graduate numbers. The SRS now includes all students pursuing a full qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications in publicly-aided HEIs.
- A survey of HEIs to assess the efficiency of utilisation of existing higher education space will be conducted. Objectives of the survey will be to (a) determine if there is any spare

capacity within the sector (from the joint perspectives of actual campus space and spare capacity on programmes) that may be used to absorb increasing student numbers and/or contribute to a wider regional/national agenda to support the economic recovery (e.g. specific jobs initiatives); (b) provision of baseline information to contribute to the analysis of strategic needs/capacity institutionally and nationally and (c) allow benchmarking of space indicators between (i) HEIs within Ireland and (ii) between Irish HEIs and those in NI/England/Wales/Scotland in particular.

### **Strategic Objective 4: Governance of Higher Education**

#### **Key Performance Indicators:**

- Agreed codes of governance fully implemented in HEIs.
- Strategic dialogue in place and fully informing institutional funding allocations and providing for institutional accountability, e.g. covering institutional mission, financial accountability, governance, quality, etc.

#### **Key Actions and Timeframes:**

- Monitor and report on implementation of revised code of governance for universities/other institutions and institutes of technology in 2012 and beyond.
- Initiate strategic dialogue process (Q1&2 2012) and refine process for further iteration in 2013.

### **Strategic Objective 5: Excellence in Higher Education**

#### **Teaching and Learning**

##### **Key Performance Indicators:**

- The quality of teaching and learning is maintained and improving.

##### **Key Actions and Timeframes:**

- Monitor on an on-going basis the quality and employability of graduates (from the perspective of both private and public sector employers).
- Take action to ensure that a system-wide approach to good practice in teaching and learning is implemented (2012 & 2013).
- Work closely with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Ireland (QQAI) following enactment of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Bill, 2011. Agree and implement a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the QQAI (2012).
- A focus on quality assurance, outcomes and processes, will be an element in our strategic dialogue with individual institutions, following development of an approach in consultation with the QQAI.
- In partnership with HEIs and student representatives, we will develop and implement a new national student survey system to monitor the student experience in higher education (2012).
- We will pursue consultations on the development and dissemination of best practice in teaching and learning (2012).

- In line with the recommendations of the National Strategy we will work towards the introduction of a new system for ab initio and continuous teacher education at third level (2013).
- We will participate in a review of apprenticeship provision leading to a revised apprenticeship system being put in place (2012).

#### **Research and Innovation**

##### **Key Performance Indicators:**

- A more effective process of quantifying the impact of research is developed, including engagement during the strategic dialogue process.
- The quality standards of PhD education are maintained and improving.
- Structured PhD education is embedded as a characteristic of the Irish higher education system.
- The quality and capacity of the national research system will meet high standards by reference to international benchmarks.
- A new research council is in place.
- Consolidation of the HEA's role as it relates to research and development.

##### **Key Actions and Timeframes Arising:**

- The HEA will work in partnership with the QQAI to establish a framework for Irish PhD education (2013). Specifically, the HEA will lead the development of a demanding framework for the provision of PhD programmes as a means of safeguarding and enhancing quality standards in Irish PhD education.



- We will make a case for the return of PRTL funding, as it relates to structured PhD education, to the Department of Education and Skills from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (2012).
- We will initiate a review of the status of structured PhD education in the higher education system and prepare proposals for further progressing and mainstreaming of structured PhD education (2012).
- Funding agencies will be requested to formally adopt the policy that all PhD students should have access to a structured PhD education (2012).
- We will prepare proposals for the establishment of industrial PhDs as a component of PhD education in Ireland and submit to DES (2012).
- We will support HEIs in the implementation of best practice for human resources for researchers as guided by the EU, including the attainment of the 'HR Excellence in Research Logo'.
- We will work towards implementation of the Researcher Career Framework as developed by the Higher Education Research Group and endorsed by the main funding agencies, the IUA and the IOTI, on a phased basis (2014).
- A research performance review of HEIs will be initiated based on metrics which will be determined as part of the strategic dialogue process. This review would be conducted regularly and would feed into the performance based funding model allocation process and to the Sectoral Accountability Report (2012).
- Further to the outcome of the Research Prioritisation Exercise, we will initiate if required a review of research infrastructure needs in the system – in particular specialised facilities (2012). This would build on work previously conducted including the establishment of a database of specialised facilities and large equipment.
- Implement the Government's decision in relation to the research council structure (2012).
- Implement a review of the former IRCHSS programmes (2012).

## Engagement with Community and Enterprise

### Key Performance Indicators:

- Achievement of a common understanding of engagement, with definitions and objectives agreed across higher education.
- Networks established to support engagement.
- Evidence of engagement is reflected in strategic dialogue with agreed metrics identified.

### Key Actions and Timeframes Arising:

- Develop, in consultation with the HE sector, and publish agreed definitions of key elements associated with engagement such as volunteerism, service learning, etc. (2012)
- Ensure that programmes are addressing skills needs and are enterprise relevant. This will be addressed through strategic dialogue and also in conjunction with the QQAI (2012 and on-going).
- The HEA will have a leading role in implementing a multi-agency action plan to address ICT skills needs for the Irish economy. This plan involves the development and refinement of skills conversion programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, action-oriented reviews of retention and work placement in ICT programmes and horizon scanning to anticipate emerging skills needs (2012).
- Publish criteria, based on pilot strategic dialogue, relating to consultation and engagement with students, business and other community interests in institutional strategic planning (2012).
- Collaborate, in partnership with enterprise, on a new national survey of employers on the practical connections between enterprise and higher education (2012)
- Develop and implement new guidelines and criteria on engagement between higher education and the community (2012).

- Administer SIF funding in a manner that supports the consolidation and mainstreaming of projects and supports the development of system level collaborations in the area of community engagement (2012).
- Develop a policy statement on the principles of knowledge transfer in its widest sense and as applied to all areas of research, building on work being conducted by the IP policy group working under the aegis of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. The adoption and implementation of such a policy will be a pre-requisite for admission to competitive funding rounds as administered by the HEA, and to access that proportion of the core funding to be allocated on the basis of knowledge transfer performance.

### Strategic Priority 6: Strategic Programmes

## Equity of Access and Lifelong Learning

### Key Performance Indicators:

- Increased access to higher education from underrepresented groups and the targets and actions contained in the National Access Plan achieved.

### Key Actions and Timeframes Arising:

- We will work with HEIs to ensure that integrated access and lifelong learning plans are in place and being implemented, and that local participation targets are agreed which collectively will lead to the achievement of 2013 targets (2012 - 2013).
- We will ensure that the Disability and Student Assistance and Dormant Accounts funds are used as progressively as possible to support students (2012 and ongoing).
- Proposals (to be implemented post-2013) will be developed on a more timely and transparent approach to reporting on

participation by students disadvantaged due to social and/or economic reasons and also on lifelong learning targets. (2012-2013).

- Establish the HEA's data-sharing needs, and engage in dialogue with partners that include the Data Protection Commission, the Department of Education and Skills and other relevant Departments to progress this matter (2012 - 2013).
- In partnership with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the HEA will make recommendations on improving the interface between second-level and higher education and will build on this partnership to achieve greater alignment in the learning outcomes and objectives at this critical transition (2012).
- Further develop, in partnership with other parts of the education system, alternative access, credit transfer and progression routes to higher education (2012 - 2013).
- Progress the new national research network on equity of access and equality of opportunity in higher education (2012).
- Review current policy and practice and propose a coherent system of provision for part-time higher education, including consideration of appropriate financial support for students with disability and low-income students (2012).
- Manage the labour market activation measure Springboard and assist on related programmes that include the European Globalisation Fund (2012 and ongoing).
- Develop and oversee implementation of a successor national access plan from 2014 that is aligned with the National Strategy and contains revised targets for participation that are sufficiently ambitious but achievable (2012, 2013 and ongoing).

## Internationalisation

### Key Performance Indicators:

- Measurable progress is made towards meeting the national targets for inward and outward student and staff mobility (Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010 – 2015).
- Scholarship schemes are in place as a key marketing and promotional tool.
- International students report positive experiences.
- Development and implementation of a plan for HEA engagement with EU Presidency 2013.

### Key Actions and Timeframes Arising:

- Manage two scholarship schemes (Government of Ireland International Scholarships for incoming students and New Frontiers Programme for outgoing students and staff). Institutional international strategy will be a key criterion in the awarding of scholarships to institutions (2012 and subsequent years).

- The HEA will continue to be the National Agency for the Lifelong Learning Programme - Erasmus; National Contact Point for the Tempus Programme; National Structure for Erasmus Mundus and will play a key role in furthering the aims of the Bologna process. These are key areas that must be addressed in institutional strategies (on-going).
- Student care will be required as an integral element of institutional internationalisation strategies and HEIs must identify a minimum set of standards for international students.
- HEIs must have international student feedback systems in place that are used to inform institutional policies.
- The issue of double and joint degrees will be given prominence in strategic dialogue. The HEA has a pivotal role to play in encouraging growth of these types of degrees (on-going).
- We will develop a HEA programme and support the DES in developing and implementing a programme of work for the Irish EU Presidency in 2013 where higher education features prominently and which demonstrates the attractiveness of Ireland as a destination for international students.

Appendix 1: Relevant Legislation

Appendix 2: Responsibilities assigned to the HEA by the National Strategy



## Appendix 1: Relevant Legislation

Relevant legislation assigning function to the HEA includes the Higher Education Act (1971), the Universities Act (1997) and the Institutes of Technology Act (2006). Under these Acts, the HEA's principal functions are:

- To allocate the moneys provided by the Oireachtas to publicly funded institutions.
- To assist in the co-ordination of State investment in higher education and the preparation of proposals for such investment.
- To further the development of higher education.
- To promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education.
- To promote the democratisation of structure in higher education.
- To conduct reviews of the strategic plans, equality policies and the quality assurance procedures of the universities and to publish the reports of such reviews (Universities Act, 1997).
- To promote the attainment and maintenance of excellence in learning, teaching and research in higher education (Institutes of Technology Act, 2006).

## Appendix 2: Responsibilities assigned to the HEA by the National Strategy

- To provide strong central oversight in the operational delivery of the strategic agenda.
- The role of the HEA is to be revised, governance structures revised, with clearer definition of key operation and implementation functions, and clearer definition of its relationship with the HEIs and its role in achieving and maintaining the necessary balance between institutional autonomy and accountability to the State.
- To be accountable to the Minister for Education and Skills in respect of delivery on agreed performance indicators for the sector.
- To exercise an inter-agency co-ordinating role.
- To lead the process of change in the system architecture.
- To collect and analyse data from the sector.
- To lead implementation of revised funding arrangements to align public investments with strategic objectives, and maintain quality through sustainable growth. Long-term revisions identified for the funding model include:
  - Revisions to RGAM to facilitate Access and Life Long learning
  - Expansion of Funding Sources, to include private contributions, restructuring of overall funding system, including student grants system
  - Move to a system of Service Level Agreements with the HEIs as part of a broader Strategic Dialogue – including
    - A performance incentive system
    - Dedicated funding to promote performance on key national priorities
- To engage in strategic dialogue with the HEIs and the sector to align the strategies of individual institutions with national priorities. The Strategy is very specific on what the dialogue must cover including:
  - How national priorities are to be implemented and the coherence of the HEI strategic plans with those national priorities
  - The development and agreement of KPIs and the assessment of performance against them
  - The sharing and mainstreaming of good practice
  - The review of overall system coherence and balance of diversity
- To lead the process of forecasting demand for higher education taking account of labour market skills needs.
- To ensure an appropriate balance between demand and supply with due regard to the maintenance and enhancement of quality.
- To analyse and fund capital infrastructural requirements.
- To co-operate and engage with international counterparts and in particular with higher education in Northern Ireland.

# HEA

Strategic Plan

2012 - 2016



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