

HEA Strategy for Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing





Introduction

Since 2019, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) has been engaged with policy development and implementation in the area of health and wellbeing in higher education. Primarily, this has centred around the implementation of two frameworks, the [HEA National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework](#) (NSMHSPF) and the [HEA Healthy Campus Charter and Framework](#), as well as the annual allocation to publicly funded higher education institutions (HEIs) of €5m in funding for mental health and wellbeing supports for students. To support the strategic objective of supporting staff and students in higher education, the [HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2026](#) includes a performance measure to develop a HEA Strategy for Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing.

National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework (2020)

As part of the Department of Health's [Connecting for Life – Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020](#), the HEA was tasked with developing 'national guidelines for HEIs in relation to suicide risk and critical incident response, thereby helping to address any gaps which might exist in the prevention of suicide in higher education'.

In 2018, the HEA convened a working group on suicide prevention in higher education to achieve this goal. Members of the working group were drawn from the HEA, the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention, the Union of Students in Ireland, Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education Ireland; the Irish Student Health Association and the National Suicide Research Foundation. The group also included nominees from the Irish Universities Association, the Technological Higher Education Association, Mental Health Ireland, the Irish Research Council, the Department of Education and Skills, and the Mental Health Division of the HSE.

The working group took the view that suicide prevention in higher education cannot be viewed as a stand-alone issue and must sit within wider national guidelines for student mental health, and for that reason the scope of this framework was expanded to cover wider mental health issues. The *National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework* (NSMHSPF) was published in 2020, alongside detailed implementation guidelines for institutions.

The framework identifies nine key themes, with accompanying goals, for institutions as follows:

1. Lead: “Build and support national and institutional strategies for student mental health”
2. Collaborate “Develop partnerships on campus and in the community with health services to support student mental health”
3. Educate “Build campus knowledge and skills on student mental health and suicide prevention”
4. Engage “Create campus communities that are connected, safe, nurturing, inclusive and compassionate”
5. Identify “Prioritise awareness training for all staff and students to enhance recognition and referral”
6. Support “Provide students with safe, accessible and well-resourced mental health support”
7. Respond “Ensure that institutions have the critical incident protocols required for varying levels of student mental health crisis”
8. Transition “Establish student supports throughout the higher education journey”
9. Improve “Collect and analyse data to inform measures to improve student mental health”

HEA Healthy Campus Charter and Framework

In 2022, the HEA formally took over the implementation of the Healthy Campus Charter and Framework. This Framework aims to embed health and wellbeing more broadly within institutions and provides strategic direction on developing a whole-campus approach to health and wellbeing. The HEA Healthy Campus Charter and Framework is a framework through which institutions can address locally identified needs and national health priorities using a whole campus approach.

The Framework was cocreated, through a consultative process, by Higher Education Institutions, the Department of Health, and the HSE. In 2022 the Framework was officially transferred to the Higher Education Authority (HEA), supported by Healthy Ireland.

A Healthy Campus adopts a holistic understanding of health, takes a whole campus approach and aspires to create a learning environment and organisational culture that enhances the health and wellbeing of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential. The Healthy Campus Framework aims to:

- create a shared understanding of a Healthy Campus to guide and inspire action by Higher Education Institutions;
- support and recognise the work of Higher Education Institutions in improving the health and wellbeing of campus communities;
- generate and disseminate knowledge for promoting health and wellbeing in Higher Education Institutions.

The Healthy Campus Process contained in the Framework is an inclusive, co-ordinated approach to improving health and wellbeing which includes 5 stages: Commit, Co-ordinate, Consult, Create and Celebrate and Continue. The process is cyclical and provides a 'how to' when implementing the Framework.

A whole campus approach is defined in the Framework across four pillars:

Leadership,
Strategy and
Governance

Campus
Environments
(Facilities and
Services)

Campus
Culture and
Communications

Personal and
Professional
Development

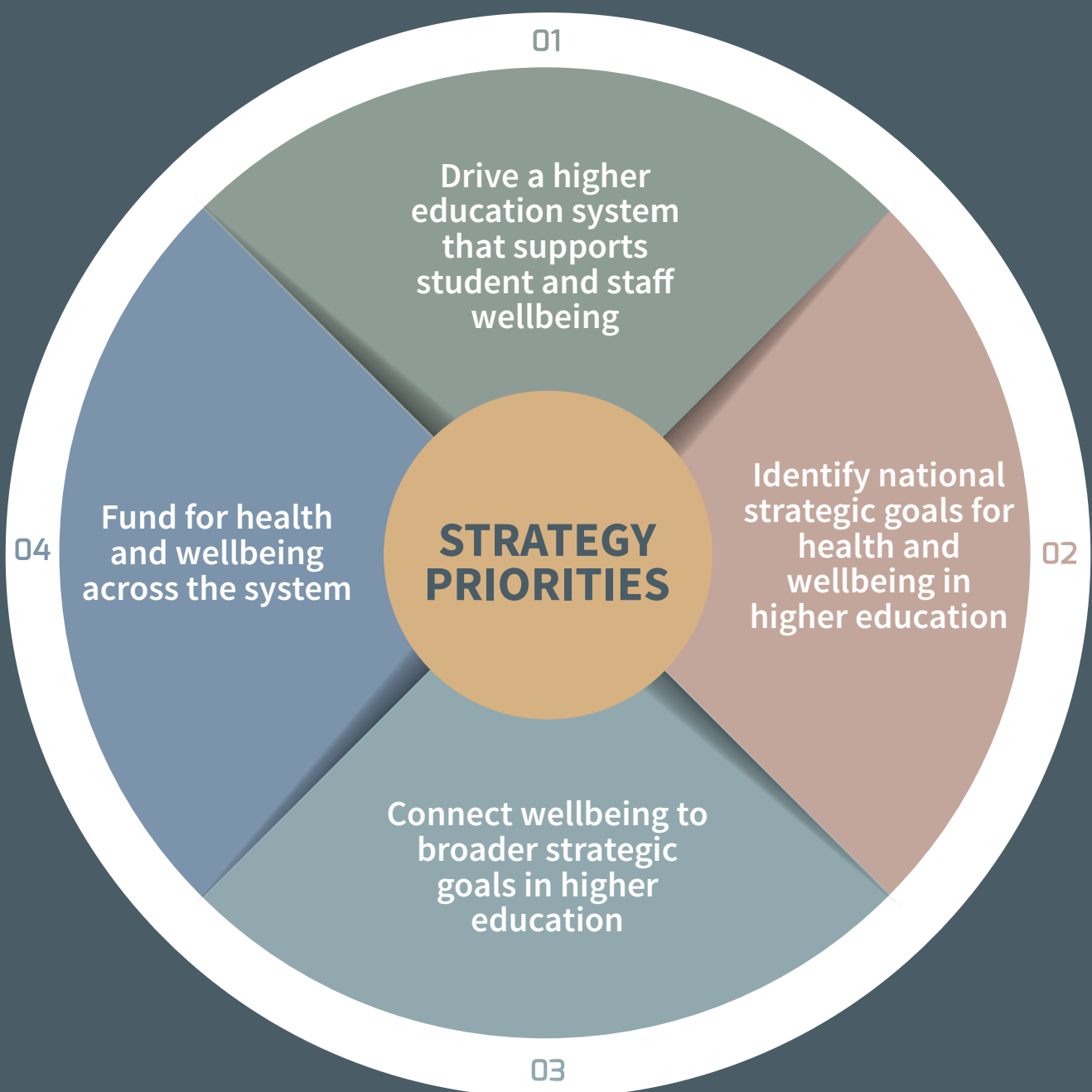
HEA Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group

A HEA Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group was established to advise the Higher Education Authority (HEA) executive on policy relating to whole-campus student and staff health and wellbeing across higher education institutions (HEIs), including but not limited to, the implementation of the *Healthy Campus Charter and Framework* and the *National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework* (NSMHSPF).

The advisory group includes representation from relevant higher education stakeholder groups, relevant government departments/agencies, and specialist external organisations as they relate to student and staff health and wellbeing. These include: Healthy Ireland, HSE Education, Health and Wellbeing, HSE National Office of Suicide Prevention, Students, Student Services, HEI Counselling, HEI Health Services, Occupational Therapy, Access and Inclusion, Equality and Diversity, Youth Mental Health, Youth Health and Wellbeing, Human Resources, Physical Activity and Wellbeing, Healthy Campus Network, Private Higher Education Institutions. The group also includes 4 Academic Experts, in the areas of Health Promotion, Health and Wellbeing, and Mental Health, one of whom is an international representative.

Working with the HEA Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group, the HEA has now developed a strategy to guide the development and implementation of HEA policy in the area of health and wellbeing. This HEA Strategy for Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing identifies four strategic priorities for the HEA over the next 3-5 years. In turn, these priorities are underpinned by a number of strategic priorities and related actions.

HEA Strategy for Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing



Drive a higher education system that supports student and staff wellbeing

#	STRATEGY PRIORITIES	STRATEGY OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
1	Drive a higher education system that supports student and staff wellbeing	<p>1.1 High-level HEI support for health promoting campuses (i.e. HEI Presidents)</p> <p>1.2 Support for staff at all levels through relevant national fora and initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Continue to support and monitor implementation of both Frameworks ■ Review the NSMHSPF and implement and monitor national action plan ■ Promote and evaluate use of the Healthy Campus Self-Evaluation Tool ■ Identify and share strategic best practice ■ Facilitate knowledge sharing events ■ Enable peer support through Healthy Campus Network and a MH community of practice ■ Act as a centralized resource to support the sector

Identify national strategic goals for health and wellbeing in higher education

#	STRATEGY PRIORITIES	STRATEGY OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
2	Identify national strategic goals for health and wellbeing in higher education	<p>2.1 Development of an evidence-based narrative around both mental health and health promotion in HE</p> <p>2.2 Development of timebound action plan for health and wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Agree definitions for student and staff wellbeing etc. ■ Develop metrics to measure health and wellbeing ■ Identify models of practice ■ Map the continuum of support across HEIs and develop a standardised national approach ■ Publish a multi-year action plan

Connect wellbeing to broader strategic goals in higher education

#	STRATEGY PRIORITIES	STRATEGY OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
3	Connect wellbeing to broader strategic goals in higher education	<p>3.1 Collaboration across agendas locally and nationally</p> <p>3.2 Alignment of work of health and wellbeing unit with other areas of work in the HEA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Convene HEA Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group meetings ■ Organise cross-functional sectoral events ■ Continue to work with other government departments, agencies and NGOs (e.g. DoH, HSE, Jigsaw, AsIAM, etc.) ■ Identify potential synergies with other HEA policy areas

Fund for health and wellbeing across the system

#	STRATEGY PRIORITIES	STRATEGY OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
4	Fund for health and wellbeing across the system	<p>4.1 Identification of funding priorities to support student and staff health and wellbeing</p> <p>4.2 Expansion of funding for health and wellbeing beyond mental health supports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify and fund strategically relevant national projects ■ Identify value for money interventions ■ Develop position paper for DFHERIS on funding needs and priorities in health and wellbeing

