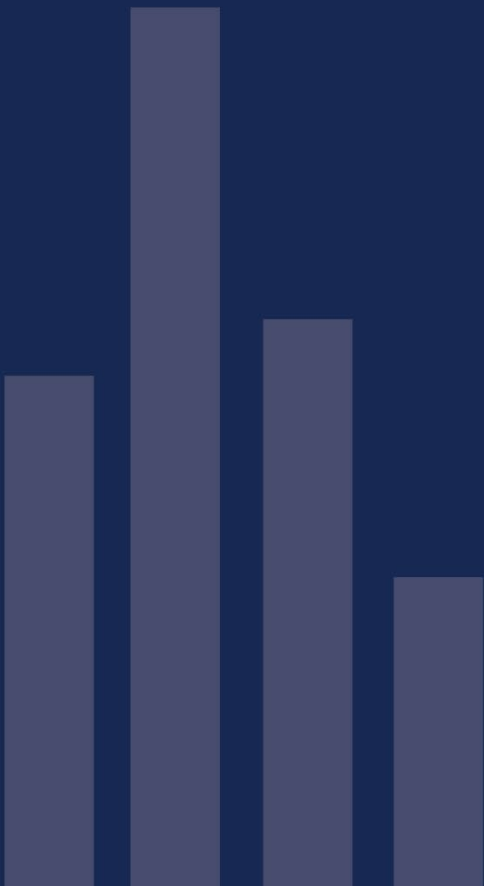


**HEA**

An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas  
The Higher Education Authority

# Public Sector Equality & Human Rights Duty Implementation Plan





## 1. Introduction

This implementation plan establishes the ambition, approach, and steps to be taken by the HEA to implement the public sector equality and human rights duty (the Duty), across all of our function areas.

The implementation of this plan was approved by the HEA Board in early 2024. This version of the Implementation Plan was adopted by the HEA Senior Management Team in April 2026.

The Duty requires public bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights for service users, policy beneficiaries, and employees, across all function areas.


The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is a statutory agency under the aegis of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. It leads the strategic development of the Irish higher education and research system. The HEA is the statutory funding body for the universities, technological universities, institutes of technology and a number of other higher education institutions providing annual funding of c.€2bn. It has responsibility for the oversight of governance and effective accountability of the HEA funded higher education institutions. The HEA plays a key leadership role in driving change in the higher education system and ensuring strong performance across institutions.

The key internal stakeholders of the HEA are the Board and staff of the HEA. Key external stakeholders would include the staff and students in designated HEIs, and other institutions funded by the HEA. It is important to note that each of these institutions has a responsibility to develop their own policies and procedures to promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of staff, students and other stakeholders.

### **Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014**

(1) A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to

- 
- whom it provides services; and
  - Protect the human rights of its members, staff, and the persons to whom it provides services.

Public bodies are required to: undertake an “assessment of the equality and human rights issues” facing the identified groups for the Duty that would have a relevance for their functions; to identify the steps being taken or proposed to be taken to address the issues as assessed; and to report annually on their progress in addressing these issues and implementing the Duty.

#### **S42.2 (a) and (b) establish two key steps that public bodies should follow, in regard to implementing the Duty**

- (2) (a) set out in a manner that is accessible to the public in its strategic plan (howsoever described) an **assessment** of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to the functions and purpose of the body and the policies, plans and actions in place or proposed to be put in place to **address** those issues, and
- (b) **report** in a manner that is accessible to the public on developments and achievements in that regard in its annual report (howsoever described).


The identified groups for the Duty are:<sup>1</sup>

- groups covered by the nine protected grounds under equality legislation: gender (including gender identity); civil status; family status (including lone parents and carers); age; disability; sexual orientation; race (encompassing race, colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins); religion; and membership of the Traveller community; and
- groups covered by the ground of socio-economic status, who are at risk of or experiencing poverty and social exclusion, including working class people, people experiencing rural disadvantage, and ex-offenders.

The HEA established a cross-sectional working group facilitated jointly by the Corporate Affairs and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Units. This plan has been developed having regard to the HEA’s Corporate

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<sup>1</sup> [Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty](#), Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2019.



Strategic Plan 2023–2026, specifically goal 7, the HEA as an Organisation - Improve the organisation's equality, diversity & inclusion affairs

**Strategic Goal – HEA to publish and report on a Public Section Equality and Human Rights Action Plan and report annually on the delivery of its commitments**

Our Strategic goal for implementing the public sector duty is to:

- Incorporate our commitment to embed Human Rights into how we conduct our business; and lead, develop and manage our staff through inclusion of Public Sector Duty in our HEA Corporate Strategy,
- Develop a framework of living and behaving in a manner that underpins Human Rights and our Public Service Duty,
- Develop a culture in which the Public Sector Values are embedded by ensuring the Values are known by all; how they are demonstrated is informed by our stakeholder engagement and staff are trained and developed to live these in the course of their work,

and

- Create an awareness of diversity and inclusion and how individual views may be challenged.

## 2. HEA Equality and Human Rights Values

The HEA Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty Working Group identified the following values which should underpin this plan

- Equality and Diversity
- Inclusion & Accessibility
- Community & Engagement
- Person-Centered Approach
- Dignity & Respect
- Transparency & Integrity

The working group documented how these values are mapped across the functional areas of the HEA.

<b>FUNCTIONAL UNIT</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>RELATED VALUE</b>
<b>ACCESS POLICY</b>	Increasing diversity of student population	Equality & Diversity
<b>ACCESS POLICY</b>	Funding programmes for Access	Inclusion & Accessibility
<b>ACCESS POLICY</b>	Policy development	Equality & Diversity
<b>ACCESS POLICY</b>	Disseminate best practice	Communication & Engagement
<b>ACCESS POLICY</b>	Consultation with stakeholders	Transparency & Integrity
<b>CENTRE FOR EDI</b>	Gender Equality, Race Equality initiatives	Equality & Diversity
<b>CENTRE FOR EDI</b>	Ending sexual violence and harassment	Dignity & Respect
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>	Access to information, available to everybody (visually, plain English, etc.)	Transparency & Integrity
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>	Internal communication	Communication & Engagement
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>	FOIs, DSARs, PQs	Transparency & Integrity
<b>CORPORATE AFFAIRS</b>	Recruitment and promotion	Transparency & Integrity
<b>CORPORATE AFFAIRS</b>	Staff wellbeing	Person-centred approach
<b>CORPORATE AFFAIRS</b>	Staff consultation	Communication & Engagement
<b>CORPORATE AFFAIRS</b>	Staff development	Person-centred approach
<b>CORPORATE AFFAIRS</b>	Provision of safe environment/workspace	Inclusion & Accessibility
<b>CORPORATE AFFAIRS</b>	Data protection/staff data	Dignity & Respect
<b>CORPORATE AFFAIRS</b>	HEA Protected Disclosure	Transparency & Integrity
<b>CROSS-FUNCTIONAL</b>	Assessment Process	Transparency & Integrity
<b>CROSS-FUNCTIONAL</b>	External stakeholder engagement	Person-centred Approach
<b>FINANCE</b>	Ensuring transparency, fairness and open competition for suppliers in procurement processes	Transparency & Integrity
<b>FINANCE</b>	Financial monitoring and oversight of core funded HEIs	
<b>HR / CORPORATE</b>	Diversity of workforce	Equality & Diversity
<b>INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES</b>	Equality of access to mobility opportunities	Equality & Diversity
<b>INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES</b>	Clear rules, geographical balance	Transparency & Integrity
<b>INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES</b>	Access to Erasmus for students with disabilities, students from lower socio-economic demographics	Equality & Diversity Inclusion & Accessibility

<b>INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES</b>	Availability of information (to students and staff)	Communication & Engagement
<b>INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES</b>	Information required from applicants	Dignity & Respect
<b>POLICY</b>	Monitoring and developing policy	Equality & Diversity
<b>POLICY</b>	Identifying and responding to transversal issues across system	Equality & Diversity
<b>POLICY / STATISTICS / ACCESS</b>	Monitoring and promoting social inclusion	Inclusion & Accessibility
<b>SKILLS &amp; ENGAGEMENT</b>	Empowering people through upskilling and reskilling	Inclusion & Accessibility
<b>SKILLS &amp; ENGAGEMENT</b>	Linking education to the economy (investing in human capital)	Inclusion & Accessibility
<b>SKILLS &amp; ENGAGEMENT</b>	Engagement with employers and learners	Communication & Engagement
<b>SKILLS &amp; ENGAGEMENT</b>	Valuing different education to universities	Dignity & Respect
<b>STATISTICS</b>	Diversity of students in system	Equality and Diversity
<b>STATISTICS</b>	Collection of statistics to measure the profile and outcomes of education	Equality & Diversity
<b>STATISTICS</b>	Gathering data for evidence-based policy making	Transparency & Integrity
<b>UNITS WHO FUND HEIS</b>	Fair allocation of funds	Transparency & Integrity
<b>ALL UNITS</b>	Accountability & good governance	Transparency & Integrity
<b>SYSTEM GOVERNANCE</b>	Oversight of HEI governance	Transparency & Integrity
<b>SYSTEM GOVERNANCE</b>	HEI protected disclosures	Transparency & Integrity
<b>ALL UNITS</b>	Consultation with stakeholders	Communication & Engagement
<b>SYSTEM PERFORMANCE</b>	Monitoring performance of HEIs	Transparency & Integrity
<b>SYSTEM PERFORMANCE</b>	Focus on regional development and access to higher education	Inclusion & Accessibility
<b>SYSTEM PERFORMANCE</b>	Strategic dialogue process	Communication & Engagement
<b>SYSTEM PERFORMANCE</b>	Promoting accountability across the system	Transparency & Integrity
<b>TEACHING &amp; LEARNING &amp; STUDENT ENGAGEMENT</b>	Promoting and funding education for sustainable development	Equality & Diversity
<b>CAPITAL FUNDING</b>	Universal design access for buildings	Inclusion & Accessibility

### 3. HEA Public Duty Action Plan 2023-2026

#### Actions focusing on HEA Employees/Internal Stakeholders, (Goals 3 & 7, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)

The HR team within Corporate Services team lead out on the majority of goals focused on HEA employees below, collaborating across the organisation as relevant. Public Sector Duty (which includes gender equality) is included in the responsibilities of the HEA Head of Corporate Affairs, Head of HR and Senior Manager EDI. In addition, the HEA’s Public Sector Duty Working Group includes expertise in gender equality and wider EDI issues through the HEA Centre of Excellence for EDI.

Action	KPI	Delivery Date	Owner	Related Value
3.1 Review of key HEA HR Policies	Updated policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dignity at Work</li> <li>• Recruitment &amp; Promotion</li> <li>• Probation Policy</li> </ul>	Q3 2024 Q4 2024 Q3 2024	Head of Corporate, Head of HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> <li>• Dignity &amp; Respect</li> <li>• Transparency &amp; Integrity</li> </ul>
3.2 Training in equality, diversity and inclusion and on mitigating bias	HR to arrange training each year. At the end of this plan staff and decision-makers will have been offered appropriate training on gender equality, particularly focusing on mitigating bias.	Q4 2024 Q4 2025 Q4 2026	Head of Corporate Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> <li>• Dignity &amp;</li> </ul>

				Respect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency &amp; Integrity</li> </ul>
3.3 Attract and retain a diverse workforce through making current staff and job applicants aware of the HEA's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion for staff.	<p>Continue to ensure HEA policies and communications are written in unbiased, accessible language.</p> <p>Include proactive diversity statement in all recruitment advertisements.</p> <p>Include information on reasonable accommodations in job advertisements.</p> <p>Training for interview board members</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Annual training in interview skills</p>	Head of Corporate Affairs/Head of HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centred Approach</li> <li>• Dignity &amp; Respect</li> </ul>
3.4 Raise awareness and understanding of various forms of disabilities and to create a dialogue regarding meeting the needs of people	<p>HR to participate in DFHERIS Working Group on Disabilities.</p> <p>Continue to meet requests for reasonable accommodation as requested</p>	<p>Quarterly</p> <p>As requested</p>	<p>Head of HR</p> <p>Head of Corporate/HR/IT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centred Approach</li> </ul>

with disabilities within the workplace	Develop reasonable accommodation guidelines	Q3 2024		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dignity &amp; Respect</li> </ul>
3.5 Implementation of HEA Menopause Working Group Recommendation	Adopt Policy	Q4 2023	Head of HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> <li>• Dignity &amp; Respect</li> </ul>
3.6 Embed the applicable principles and requirements of HEI EDI policy frameworks (i.e. gender equality, ending sexual violence and sexual harassment, and anti-racism) into wider HEA transformation work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to implement applicable recommendations from the HEA 2<sup>nd</sup> Review of Gender Equality</li> <li>• Commitment to Ending Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment</li> <li>• Commitment to Anti-Racism Principles</li> </ul>	Ongoing Revise Action Plan in Q1 2026	Head of Corporate, Head of HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> <li>• Dignity &amp; Respect</li> </ul>
3.7 Collect and analyze gender disaggregated data in line with gender pay gap reporting guidelines and other requirements	Gender-disaggregated data in the form of aggregated statistics by gender will be collected on an ongoing basis and reported in the HEA Annual	Q4 annually	Head of Corporate, Head of HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Transparency &amp; Integrity</li> </ul>

	<p>Report.</p> <p>Publish Gender Pay Gap Report annually in line with Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021.</p> <p>Include gender breakdown of staff by grade in Annual Report.</p> <p>Include gender breakdown of senior management team and HEA Board in Annual Report.</p> <p>Analyze aggregated responses to staff culture surveys by gender.</p>			
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### *Actions Focused on External Stakeholders*

<b>Action</b>	<b>KPI</b>	<b>Delivery Date</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Related Value</b>
3.8 Support Equity of Access to Higher Education	Implementation of A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher	Undertake a Progress Report Q4 2025	Head of Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp;</li> </ul>



(Goal 2, Regulate & Oversight - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)	Education 2022-2028			Accessibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> <li>• Dignity &amp; Respect</li> </ul>
3.9 Promote a 'data protection culture' across the organisation and provide clear accessible information on data protection policies for all HEA stakeholders including staff recognising the right to data privacy as an important human right.  (Goals 1 & 2, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)	Maintain and update ROPA and DPIAs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training (Townhalls, Induction Training and on-line Training)</li> </ul>	As required  Q1 and Q3 each year	DPO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> <li>• Transparency &amp; Integrity</li> </ul>
3.10 Equality, diversity, and inclusion  (Goal 9, Develop - HEA Corporate	Monitor and progress the implementation of equality, diversity and inclusion policy	Ongoing	Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality &amp; Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centred</li> </ul>



	Colleges Network.			
<p>3.12 Fair, Equitable and Sustainable Procurement</p> <p>(Goal 6, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)</p>	Implementation of HEA’s Procurement Policy	Ongoing	Senior Manager Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency &amp; Integrity</li> </ul>
<p>3.13 Accessible HEA website</p> <p>(Goals 7 and 8, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)</p>	The HEA will upgrade its websites ensuring these meeting NDA accessibility guidelines	Q3 2024	Head of Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> <li>• Transparency &amp; Integrity</li> </ul>
<p>3.14 Equity in Languages</p> <p>(Goals 7 &amp; 8, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)</p>	<p>Arrange training in the Irish Language</p> <p>Appoint an Irish Language Services Officer</p> <p>Arrange provision of ISL service</p>	<p>Q4 2024</p> <p>Q2 2024</p> <p>Q4 2024</p>	<p>Irish Language Services Officer</p> <p>Head of Corporate Affairs</p> <p>Head of Corporate Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality and Diversity</li> <li>• Inclusion &amp; Accessibility</li> <li>• Person-Centered Approach</li> </ul>

## 4. Delivering on the Plan

This plan will be delivered through the following steps;

### **Leadership**

Delivery of the plan will be a commitment outlined in the HEA's Corporate Strategic Plan which was approved by the Board in early 2024. This plan is a living document, and subsequent updates will be endorsed by the Senior Management Team.

The CEO will continue to sponsor the HEA's Public Sector Duty Working Group.

### **Communications**

This plan is currently available publicly on the HEA website and on the HEA Home Hub for staff.

Updates on aspects of the HEA's Public Duty Action Plan will be reported in the newsletter.

### **HEA Public Sector Duty Working Group**

The HEA Public Sector Duty Working Group will meet four times each year to review progress on delivery of the HEA's Commitments.

### **HEA Annual Report**

Progress in delivery of the HEA's Public Sector Duty Action Plan will be outlined in the HEA's Annual Report.