

HEA

Higher Education Authority
An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas

Strategic Plan 2008-2010



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Foreword by Mr. Batt O'Keefe, T.D. Minister for Education and Science



Higher education has never been more important to individual, societal and economic development. Society looks to higher education and research to deliver on important national goals, including enhancing social inclusion, skills levels and promoting economic, regional and cultural development.

The Government set out its commitment to higher education in the Programme for Government, 2007 - 2012. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2007 - 2013 places higher education at the heart of national policy, and follows through with an investment of €13 billion in the sector over the lifetime of the Plan. This investment will facilitate the achievement of priority objectives in key areas such as equality of access, quality teaching and learning, flexible provision and the growth of our fourth level sector.

The NDP provides €510 million under the Strategic Innovation Fund. The Fund, managed by the HEA on behalf of my Department, is specifically supporting reform and modernisation in our higher education system. It is also supporting higher education institutions to focus on their individual strengths and to form the strategic partnerships and collaborations that will build world class quality and capacity across the entire higher education system.

The enactment of the Institutes of Technology Act, 2006 in February 2007 was a milestone in the sector. The designation of the institutes under the HEA provides new opportunities for their continued development and of the sector as a whole. Its effects will be increasingly evident over the coming years.

Against a background where higher education is increasingly important to all of us and in a context of reform and increased investment, I am happy to welcome this new three year Strategic Plan developed by the HEA. The HEA's strategic priorities are fully consistent with Government objectives, as articulated in the NDP, and set ambitious, but realisable, targets.

I, and my Department, will also work closely with the HEA in the development of a National Strategy for Higher Education which will outline our national ambitions and provide clear strategic guidance for the development of the sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Batt O'Keefe". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font. The initials "BO" are prominent at the end of the name.

Batt O'Keefe, T.D.

Minister for Education and Science.

Introduction by Mr Michael Kelly, Chairman, HEA.



This Strategic Plan of the Higher Education Authority for the period 2008 - 2010 has been prepared following extensive consultation and reflection, both within the HEA and also with our external stakeholders. I would like to thank all who gave generously of their time, experience and insights. We believe that the Plan is challenging and ambitious, setting a range of important strategic priorities, which we believe are essential to Ireland's continuing development, and delivery on which will require action by a number of key actors, in addition to the HEA.

The publication of this Plan comes at an especially significant time, following the designation of the institutes of technology under the HEA. This designation presents an unprecedented opportunity for the development of a unified strategic framework for Irish higher education, which the HEA is enthusiastic to pursue.

Higher education has never been more important - it fosters the development of a society enriched by active, well-educated citizens; it helps individuals develop to their full potential, and it provides the economy with skilled human capital. The evidence is overwhelming of significant returns from investment in formal education and training for the individual, and OECD countries that have invested well in higher education have enjoyed positive growth rates.

Our vision for higher education, as articulated in this Strategic Plan, is the development of a sector that contributes to the advancement of society through empowered, dynamic, entrepreneurial, well-resourced and autonomous higher education institutions. These institutions are fully accountable to Government for expenditure of public funds and the delivery of national objectives.

A key strategic priority over the period of this Plan is the completion of a National Strategy for Higher Education. The higher education sector that we see today is very different than the sector a decade ago, and we will see even more changes in the coming decade. A National Strategy that will provide clarity to higher education institutions as to the overall framework within which they should operate is essential.

The HEA is committed to continuing to work with the Minister for Education and Science and his Department, the higher education institutions and all our stakeholders. Achieving the strategic priorities of any of us depends on others achieving their strategic priorities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Kelly
HEA Chairman

Section 1

Introduction

This Strategic Plan has been developed and adopted by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) for the period 2008 - 2010. It has been the subject of widespread consultation with the higher education sector and with other stakeholder bodies.

We have sought to produce a plan that is challenging and stimulating and which reflects the importance of higher education to the development of Irish society and our economy.

Our higher education sector has demonstrated its capability and success in the past. There are now new challenges and the sector will be required to deliver on even more demanding objectives over the next decade. Delivering this performance will require the combined commitment of all parts of the education system - primary, post-primary, further and higher education, but achievement of this higher-level performance is not just desirable - it is a necessity.

The HEA will play a key role, helping to ensure that the supports needed by the sector are provided and that the higher education institutions, collectively, deliver on the national objectives required from the sector. The HEA will also evaluate the resources required by the institutions to meet national objectives on an on-going basis and ensure that these requirements are communicated effectively to the Minister for Education and Science and his Department.

While this Plan covers just the next three year period, it is drafted with an eye to the longer-term (to 2013) expectations of the sector. A key task over the period immediately ahead will be to chart a course for longer-term development. We have set ourselves realistic, but challenging, goals for achievement over the lifetime of this Strategic Plan. We have also identified key outputs to be delivered over that period. Progress in relation to these outputs will form part of the framework for judging the performance of the HEA over this period.

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Section 2

Context of Strategic Plan 2008 – 2010

POLICY CONTEXT

Higher education is, first and foremost, concerned with advancing and pursuing knowledge. This is achieved through teaching, by the transmission of existing knowledge and, through research, by the discovery of new knowledge. The connection between teaching and research is an integral and fundamental one. The values of a higher education institution centre on the quest for knowledge in a culture of scholarship and learning and an ethos of academic integrity and freedom. Through the fulfilment of their many roles, our higher education institutions play a key part in developing individual students with a spirit of enquiry, and in ways that help them to realise their full potential, both in careers and as citizens in a democratic society.

Increasingly, however, governments and policy makers are recognising that the positive effects of higher education extend far beyond those to the individual. Higher education is now recognised as an essential contributor to national well-being. The Government has set out its commitment to higher education in its Programme for Government, 2007 - 2012, and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007 - 2013 places higher education at the heart of national policy and has allocated increased levels of investment towards the sector. The NDP prioritises higher education as central to the continued development of the country - "The future capacity and quality of Ireland's higher education system is vital to our social, cultural and economic well-being".¹

POLICY OBJECTIVES

The NDP states that the national objective for Ireland's higher education system is to be at the front-rank of performance within the OECD² (see Appendix 1 for our current positioning on the OECD graduation benchmarks).

The NDP has identified the following as development needs to be addressed over the lifetime of the plan:

- Increased participation and improved access;
- Encourage a greater flexibility of course offerings to meet diverse student population needs in a lifelong learning context;
- Promote the quality of teaching and learning;
- Significantly increase PhD numbers and research activity;

¹ Government of Ireland (2007) National Development Plan 2007 - 2013: Transforming Ireland - A Better Quality of Life for All. (p. 202)

² Government of Ireland (2007) National Development Plan 2007 - 2013: Transforming Ireland - A Better Quality of Life for All. (p. 204)

- Effective technology transfer; and
- Safeguard and reinforce the many roles of higher education in providing independent intellectual insights and in contributing to our broader social, human and cultural understanding.

The above priorities are reflected in numerous other public policy documents. For example, the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, 2006 - 2013 (SSTI) has a target to double the number of PhD graduations (from a base of 647 in 2003); the National Skills Strategy has recommended that the participation rate in higher education should increase from 55%³ to 72% by 2020 in order to meet the consistently increasing demand for higher education graduates.

The NDP objectives for the higher education sector are challenging and ambitious. Their achievement will require commitment from all stakeholders across society, and particularly from all stakeholders within the education sector, through an integrated and mutually supporting set of policy responses in the primary, post-primary and further education sectors.

RESPECTIVE ROLES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE AND THE HEA

The Minister for Education and Science and his Department, as part of central Government, set policy for higher education, oversee the implementation of that policy and evaluate outcomes. The HEA is a body established by the Oireachtas, under the aegis of and accountable to the Minister and with substantial responsibilities in higher education and research. The statutory functions of the HEA are included in Appendix 2. While the HEA Act, 1971 confers substantial autonomy of action, the HEA must nevertheless, as a matter of practicality and democratic accountability, operate within the policy framework decided by the Minister and/or the Government.

The HEA is distinct in that it is, what is known in international higher education terms, as an intermediary body – intermediary between Government and higher education institutions. It ensures to the former that the institutions are accountable and to the latter, academic freedom and a significant level of institutional autonomy. The unique positioning of the HEA in the overall structure of the sector is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Within this administrative and legal context, the following are the key responsibilities of the HEA:

- To adopt a leadership position in advising the Minister for Education and Science on higher education and research policy;

³ Ireland's higher education participation rate is 55% (source: *Who Went to College in 2004? A National Survey of New Entrants to higher Education*, HEA 2006). The rate was calculated by taking the number of new entrants to higher education in 2004 as a proportion of the age population cohort from which 70% - 80% of new entrants are drawn (this was 17-19 year olds in 2004).

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- To articulate national objectives in a coherent framework to higher education institutions, and develop and manage funding programmes in order to incentivise and support the achievement of those objectives;
- To provide Government with information on the scale of the resource implications of achieving stated national goals for the sector. For example, achieving a front rank OECD graduation performance with a 72% participation rate by 2020 is an ambitious objective, and will require additional investment;
- To ensure that the sector makes the best use of resources and that the sector is accountable and is seen to be accountable. Increased Government investment to the sector is predicated upon the sector demonstrating that this investment is contributing to the achievement of national objectives. Strong accountability measures are already in place, but we have a key responsibility to ensure that they are monitored, redefined and strengthened; and
- To support the development of critical mass in our higher education system by incentivising higher education institutions to become more strategic and build collaborations with each other and with other partners nationally and internationally.

It is within this context of a rapidly changing environment, national policy objectives and long-standing statutory responsibilities that we set out our mission statement and define our key areas of activity and objectives for the period of this Strategic Plan.

FIGURE 2.1: HIGHER EDUCATION STRUCTURE

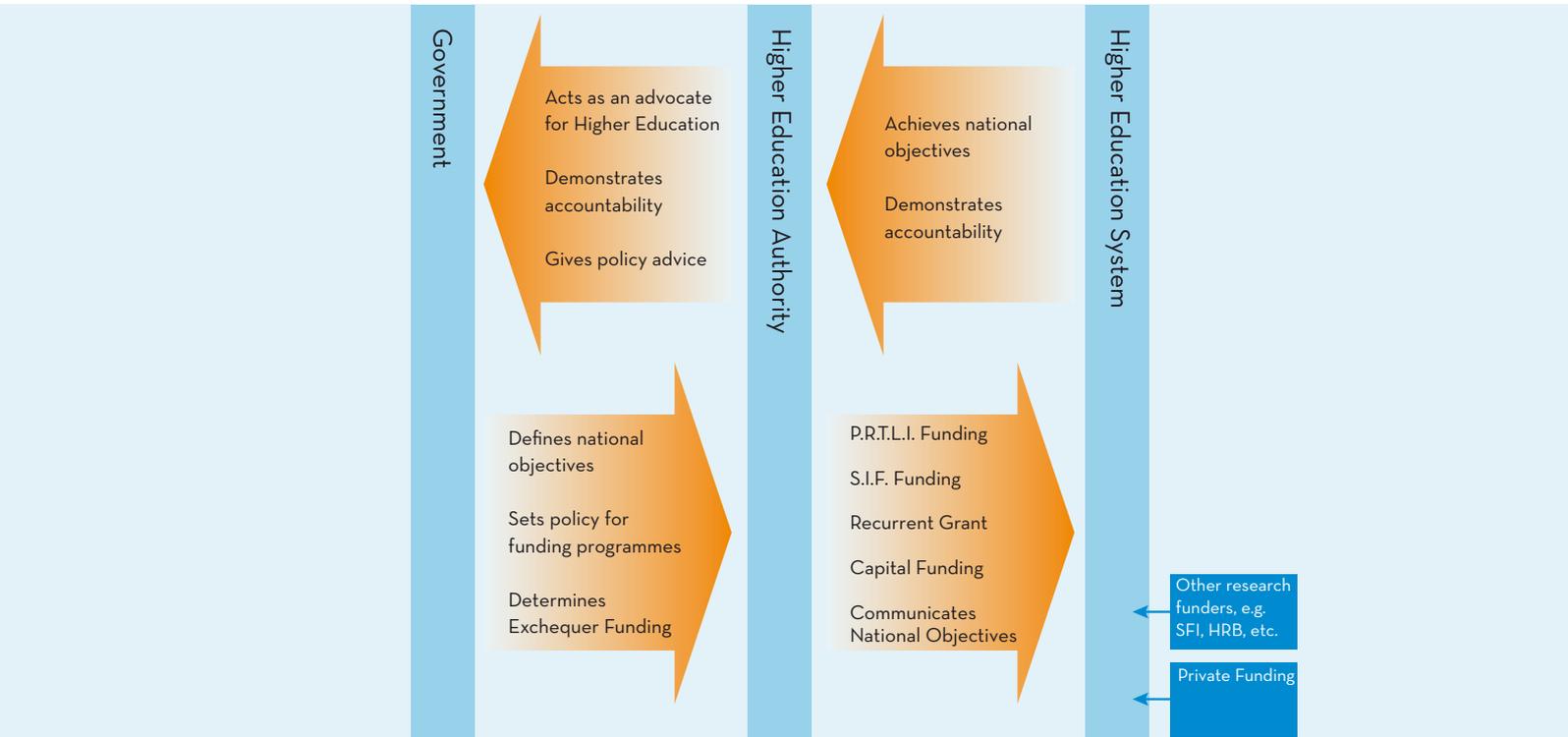


Figure 2.1 is intended to be a broad representation of roles and responsibilities within the higher education system.

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Section 3

Our Vision for Higher Education

OVERVIEW

Although this Strategic Plan covers a three year period, it is prepared as an integral part of a longer-term vision for the higher education sector that will enable it to deliver on the range of national objectives set out in section 2. In the intervening period to 2013, and the end of the current National Development Plan, we will work to create a higher education system that contributes to the development of our society and economy through empowered, dynamic, entrepreneurial, well resourced and autonomous institutions, that are fully accountable to the HEA and Government in relation to the expenditure of public funds and the delivery of national objectives as defined by Government.

The OECD Review of Higher Education recommended the retention of continuing distinct roles for the university and institutes of technology sectors with a clear differentiation of mission between the two. The National Development Plan re-emphasised this view and proposed that our existing universities and institutes of technology should be supported in developing and enhancing their roles according to their existing strengths, as part of a unified higher education system that achieves world-class standards.

HEA VISION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is central to Ireland's development and the student is the central focus of all higher education activities. Quality teaching and learning, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, are at the core of the mission of the higher education institutions, which form a sector which should also be internationally recognised for:

- a vibrant research and innovation culture that is quality driven, addresses a broad spectrum of disciplines and is closely connected to teaching and learning;
- its contribution to social inclusion by providing the opportunity for all to participate to their full potential;
- the provision of the innovative and creative graduates equipped with the skills needed to perform successfully in a competitive environment and contribute to fostering an enterprise culture and the nurturing of entrepreneurs;
- flexibility in provision, offering multiple opportunities for educational progress through mechanisms such as modularisation, part-time study, distance learning, and e-learning thereby bringing reality to the concept of lifelong learning; and
- a spirit of enquiry and as a source of independent insight into matters that impact on our society.

Our higher education institutions are the infrastructure through which the vision for higher education will be achieved. The vision, while challenging, does not represent an entirely new departure for the higher education sector, where institutions have already had much success in moving in this direction - Appendix 3 details some of the areas of key achievement over the last number of years, while also highlighting some important challenges that must be addressed. However, the institutions will need to step up to a new level of performance; manage increased participation levels at undergraduate and postgraduate levels; enhance the quality of teaching and learning and deliver higher education using more innovative and flexible approaches.

Achieving the vision is also contingent on the institutes of technology operating with levels of institutional autonomy consistent with those in universities and within a strong accountability framework, an outcome which will enhance their performance generally. The HEA will support the institutes in achieving this goal over the period of this Strategic Plan.

There is a special challenge to the sector in enhancing further the quality of our higher education system as we grow our participation rate from 55% to 72% by 2020. This growth will be accompanied by a greater diversity in our student population, including diversity in terms of previous academic attainment, which will create challenges regarding the development of new and appropriate teaching and learning methodologies. This growth must be managed so that high levels in quality teaching and learning and in assessment continue to drive the system. The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) have important roles to play in this regard, while the HEA and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQA) have key overseeing responsibilities⁴. A growth in the participation rate from 55% to 72% by 2020 does not have to have negative consequences in terms of quality, provided the necessary supports are adequately resourced - a fact well demonstrated by other leading OECD countries which have already achieved such participation levels (e.g., Finland).

Higher education institutions must increasingly adopt a strategic approach in all their activities; demonstrate greater levels of accountability and efficiency and engage in more collaboration. Close working relationships will be required with other education providers in order to ensure that the supply of students for the higher education sector is maintained and that students have the opportunity to access higher education from a diversity of routes.

Achieving our vision for higher education is also contingent on achieving commensurate levels of resourcing for the sector - and these must be of significant magnitude. Ireland is not unique in seeking to address the challenge of securing sufficient investment to meet ambitions for higher education and of establishing how best the costs of a quality higher education system should be distributed across the various stakeholders.

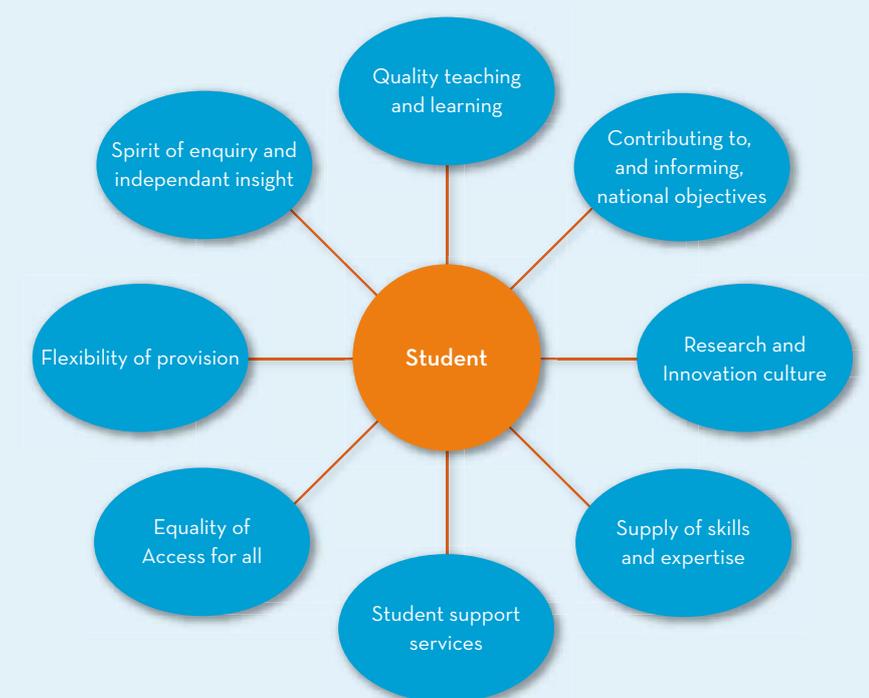
⁴ The NQA has completed quality reviews of HETAC and the DIT.

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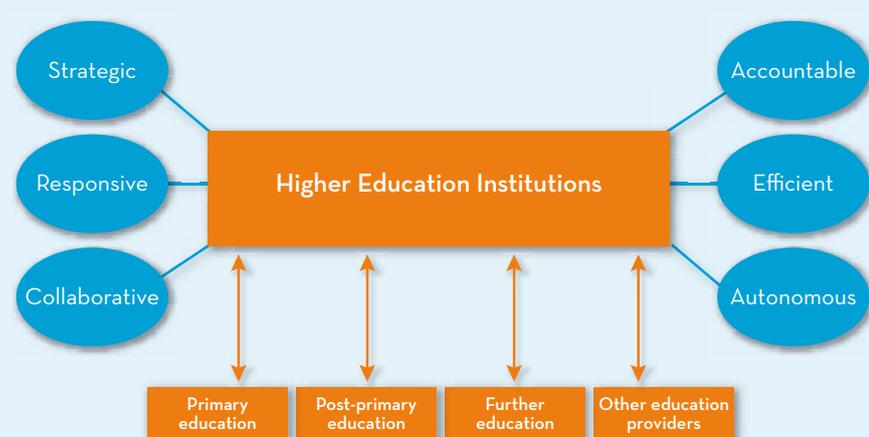
Our vision for higher education is summarised in Figure 3.1.

FIGURE 3.1: VISION FOR IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION

Student at the centre of Higher Education



Higher Education Institutions delivering the Student Experience



Section 4

HEA Mission Statement: How will the HEA contribute to the achievement of this vision?

The HEA is the body that both the higher education institutions and Government look towards to effect change and influence direction in our higher education sector. Through our statutory responsibilities and functions, we are centrally and uniquely placed to lead the development of the higher education sector towards the achievement of the vision for higher education set out in section 3.

The HEA has proven capacity to effect change. Key challenges for the period of this strategic plan include refining our funding approaches to ensure better alignment with national objectives and strengthening our policy advice and advocacy roles. The following is a statement of our mission:

We will be a leader in policy development for the sector and our policy advice to the Minister for Education and Science will be proactive and evidence-based. As an advocate for higher education, we will promote its benefits and its needs to the widest possible public. The HEA will, through funding and other mechanisms, further the development of a higher education sector noted for high-quality teaching, learning and research; which is accountable to all stakeholders, students and their parents, staff, the wider community and Government, and which contributes fully to national social and economic needs through a diversity of provision.

Our mission is characterised according to three key action areas:

- Policy Advice and Planning
- Funding and Accountability
- Advocacy

While we describe our activities under these three key action areas, the reality is that our activities do not fit neatly into any particular area and that there is considerable overlap and integration of activity across all areas. The public accountability of the higher education institutions underpins all areas of our activity and is central to our statutory mission.

POLICY ADVICE AND PLANNING

The HEA carries out a policy advisory role in the higher education sector. We have responsibilities across the higher education sector and, outside of the Minister's own Department, are the principal advisors to the Minister for Education and Science in respect of higher education policy. Our policy function directly informs our approach to funding, as it is principally through our funding and accountability mechanisms that we influence the achievement of goals and policies.

We have a responsibility to be leading policy thinkers in the higher education sector and we commit to providing the Minister for Education and Science with innovative, objective, proactive and evidence-based policy advice.

As a sub-set of the policy advisory function, the HEA has the responsibility to plan for the successful development of the higher education and research sector. The success of the sector is crucially dependent on its capacity to anticipate, and plan for, change. The planning function is concerned too with monitoring developments nationally and internationally; conducting research into models or particular aspects of higher education and developing and articulating new and challenging approaches to higher education and research.

Planning for the sector's development is currently at a particularly important juncture. The designation of the institutes of technology under the HEA provides a unique opportunity for the development of a co-ordinated higher education sector, operating under a unified strategic framework, comprising a diversity of institutions. The HEA has a responsibility to ensure that development occurs within a strategic and planned context.

FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The HEA is responsible for the allocation of exchequer funding in the higher education sector. We manage a range of funding programmes that are allocated strategically and support the delivery of higher education policy goals. The principles that guide our approach to funding are set out in Box 4.1. Our funding is designed to support high-quality, cost-effective teaching, learning and research and institutional reform, where appropriate. Our aim is to ensure that exchequer funding is spent in an efficient and effective manner, consistent with public policy objectives.

BOX 4.1 APPROACH TO FUNDING - INFORMING PRINCIPLES:

- The principles of quality and excellence underpin all higher education and research activities that are publicly funded;
- Accountability for, and efficiency in, the use of the public funding is expected;
- Funding allocations are made in a fair and transparent way;
- Funding allocations are linked to performance and the achievement of national objectives for the higher education sector;
- Higher education institutions that engage in collaborative, added value activities with other higher education institutions are rewarded;
- Institutional autonomy is preserved within a context of accountability for public funds and the achievement of national objectives; and
- Where appropriate, funding is allocated on a competitive basis, with clear criteria and involving the advice of independent, expert panels in the evaluation of proposals for funding.

ADVOCACY

Building on its policy advisory and funding roles to develop a quality, higher education system, the HEA also serves as an advocate of that system. We advocate the essential contribution that higher education institutions make to national social, economic and cultural development. We play a key role in promoting higher education as part of an integrated education system that enables individuals to reach their full potential and participate as active citizens. The advocacy role is multi-faceted -

- To Government, we demonstrate the value and importance of higher education to the country and demonstrate the accountability and performance of the sector through the outcomes that it is achieving.
- To students, parents and the general public we showcase the personal benefits that are achieved through a higher education and encourage participation.
- To industry, we promote the importance of higher education to employers, foster higher education and industry links and encourage industry investment in higher education.
- To higher education institutions, we engage in ongoing constructive critique of our higher education system in support of continuous improvement of performance.
- To society generally, we demonstrate the key role that higher education plays in the advancement of society and in addressing emerging societal problems and challenges.

In fulfilling our advocacy role, we make the case for the sustained and additional investment in the higher education sector that is required to enable the achievement of new and growing national priorities. In fulfilling this role, we must ensure that the higher education sector is not viewed in isolation, but that we advocate a coherent approach across all education sectors as part of a unified Government approach to education.

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Increasingly, our advocacy role requires that we maintain a strong national and international profile and that we are actively involved in appropriate networks. International relations are becoming an increasingly important part of the work of the HEA. This comprises both formal agreements (as recently with China) which need to be serviced, and more informal work involving meeting delegations and contributing to Irish delegations going abroad. The HEA ensures that Ireland is aware of, and connected with, various networks at EU level and internationally.

Section 5

Strategic Priorities 2008 - 2010

Over the period of this Strategic Plan we have set ourselves key strategic priorities under each area of activity. Achieving these tasks will facilitate our education sector to deliver the vision set out in section 3.

Within each strategic priority, we have also set ourselves key outputs for assessing progress and performance.

TABLE 5.1: OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Policy Advice & Planning	Funding & Accountability	Advocacy
Development of National Strategy for Higher Education	Evaluation of overall sectoral funding levels	HEA annual reports
Development of a unified strategic framework for higher education	Strategic allocation of funding	Annual sectoral accountability report
Equality of access and lifelong learning	Accountability through performance funding	Policy reviews
Diversity of discipline provision	Strengthening of other accountability measures, including measures within higher education institutions	Development of stronger relationships with stakeholders
Building the research system		Monitoring higher education in an international context
		Media and communications strategy

POLICY ADVICE & PLANNING

The HEA's policy role is outlined earlier and Section 2 sets out the higher education environmental context within which the HEA seeks to develop and strengthen the higher education sector and to advise the Minister for Education and Science.

Over the course of this Strategic Plan, we have identified the following areas where we believe the sector will require policy direction, while acknowledging that other priorities are likely to emerge over the lifetime of the Plan:

1. Development of National Strategy for Higher Education;
2. Development of a unified strategic framework for higher education;
3. Equality of access and lifelong learning;
4. Diversity of discipline provision; and
5. Building the research system.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Overview:

One of the key messages that emerged from the consultation process undertaken in the development of this Plan was the need felt by stakeholders for a national strategy for higher education. There is a widely held view that a national strategy, bringing together all of the strands from relevant policy documents (e.g., the Report of OECD Review Team, the SSTI, the Enterprise Strategy Group, the National Skills Strategy, etc.) into a single strategy for higher education, is required. Such a strategy would provide clarity to higher education institutions as to the overall framework within which they should operate.

The sector that we see today is very different from the sector that existed just a decade ago. Key changes have included substantial increases in participation, unprecedented increases in research capability, the establishment of major collaborative ventures among higher education institutions and shifts in student numbers in various disciplines, programmes and institutions. In planning for the future, it will be particularly necessary for all stakeholders, including Government, agencies and institutions to work within a commonly-understood framework.

The development of a National Strategy requires a collaborative approach involving key stakeholders and agencies in the higher education sector. Over the course of this Strategic Plan, the HEA is willing to play a central role in working with the Department of Education and Science in advancing this exercise.

Key Outputs:

- A national strategy for higher education will be developed. This will be an output of the Department of Education and Science but the HEA looks forward to working with the Department in its development.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIFIED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Overview:

The enactment of the Institutes of Technology Act, 2006 has transferred exchequer funding and other responsibilities for the institutes of technology from the Department of Education and Science to the HEA. This is a significant opportunity for the development of a unified strategic framework for both the universities and the institutes of technology in Ireland. A first priority for the HEA is to develop solutions for the successful integration of the institutes of technology into its funding and other processes, on the basis of consistency of approach between universities and institutes.

A further priority will be to devise and implement appropriate policy initiatives to ensure the successful management of the institute of technology designation. The objective is the development of a coherent, strategic and collaborative higher education sector, comprising diverse institutions of equal status pursuing a variety of missions and that collectively deliver on a wide range of national objectives. A key element of successful designation will be to assist and support the institutes of technology to operate with increasing institutional autonomy, within a strong accountability framework. In advancing the development of a unified, but diverse, strategic framework for higher education in Ireland, it will be important to recognise that the institutes of technology and the universities have developed differently and to establish greater clarity on the diverse role of institutes of technology and the universities in such areas as, teaching and learning, research, regional development, links with industry, social inclusion and meeting skills needs.

Key Outputs:

- Review of institute of technology strategic plans and report on sectoral strategy; The Institutes of Technology Act provides a role for the HEA to review institutes' strategic plans, and to report on that review. This role provides an important opportunity to foster and deepen the relationships with the institutes, and to develop an agreed, strategic roadmap towards the ongoing development of the sector.
- Development of a system-wide, strategic, performance-based funding element for overall grant allocation; This new funding instrument will set out national goals to be addressed by all higher education institutions, and will provide a basis for assessing both their individual contribution to those goals and to system-wide performance.

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3. EQUALITY OF ACCESS AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Overview

Equality of Access

Achieving equality of access to higher education is a strategic priority for the Government. Learners of all backgrounds must have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education and to play a full part in a dynamic society and economy. People with a disability, adult/mature students and those facing social, economic and cultural barriers still do not have adequate opportunities to participate in higher education and to reach their full potential. It is the HEA's objective, through its National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, to remove the barriers to participation that currently exist. The higher education institutions are key players in ensuring that equal educational opportunity is a feature of the system. Hand-in-hand with equality of access is access to the highest quality of education. This involves, in addition to financial resources, innovation in teaching methods and ongoing work on the structures and culture in higher education institutions, so that there is a supportive and inclusive environment for students. Modularisation and a framework of transferable credit-based learning must become the norm, and enable adequate, part-time education opportunities. The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQA), through its National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), plays a key role in facilitating access, transfer and progression in the higher education system. A national access plan is currently being implemented by the HEA and work is underway on a new plan for 2008-13. The vision for 2013 is that equality of access will be a vibrant and visible feature of higher education provision.



The HEA made a submission to the Government Taskforce on Active Citizenship. At the consultation meeting were (from left) Mr. Michael Kelly, HEA Chairman, Ms. Mary Davis, Chair, Government Taskforce on Active Citizenship and Mr. Richard Riley, former US Secretary of Education.

Lifelong Learning

An integral part of the access agenda is the ideal of lifelong learning to which Ireland has been committed since the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996. In higher education, lifelong learning has a particular meaning for adults who have few or no advanced qualifications and who wish to re-engage with the education system. The scale of higher education graduates that Ireland requires for achieving OECD front rank graduation levels and further social and economic progress cannot be sourced from the school leaving population alone. There is a need for significant and sustained increases in the numbers of mature students in order to upskill our adult population. Adult participation in higher education in Ireland is very low by international standards. The National Skills Strategy has reiterated this point. It has recommended upskilling 500,000 of the workforce by one level of education over the period to 2020. Such targets can only be achieved through increased opportunities and incentivisation for part-time, higher education participation.

Possible interventions - Modular Accreditation Programme (MAP)

To progress part-time education opportunities, the HEA is currently developing a framework for a national Modular Accreditation Programme (MAP) to upskill those in employment. The aim of the programme is to allow individuals to undertake discrete modules of learning which will be individually accredited. It will allow people to continue their learning by adding modules at their own pace, in their choice of institution, and by grouping those modules together to create a national award.

Possible interventions - Open and Distance Learning

Open and distance learning approaches, including e-learning, are also part of strategies to achieve equality of access and lifelong learning. There are numerous innovations in the area of teaching and learning that facilitate greater flexibility. The opportunities provided by ICT and e-learning are clear examples. However, e-learning is just one model, and there are others. A national policy perspective on distance learning is required.

Key Outputs*Equality of Access & Lifelong Learning*

- Review performance on 2005-7 national access plan;
- Publish a new action plan 2008-13 to achieve equality of access and promote lifelong learning;
- Set local and national targets for participation in higher education by students with a disability, adult/mature students, and those facing social, economic and cultural barriers;
- Provide policy advice on adequate financial support for students;
- Ensure that all higher education institutions have an access and lifelong

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- learning plan that is an integral part of their overall institutional strategy;
- Review the recurrent grant allocation model so as to better support equality of access, lifelong learning and part-time education;
- Working with the further education sector in order to promote further education and training as a mainstream route of access to higher education; and
- Use systematic data collection and monitoring of progress to secure continued and increased funding to achieve equality of access to higher education.

Modular Accreditation Programme (MAP)

- Implement the Modular Accreditation Programme (MAP).

Open and Distance Learning

- Complete a policy advisory study on the future development of open and distance learning in Ireland.

4. DIVERSITY OF PROVISION

Overview:

Higher education programmes should meet both student demands and national needs and institutions should continually review their programmes with this in mind. The balance between provision and skills needs will not always be exact of course, e.g. the medium to long-term skills needs of an economy do not always match the immediate economic needs. This is particularly true of a country like Ireland, where our national strategy is to move towards a knowledge-based society, implying a continual increase in knowledge and skills levels in all citizens, as well as continuous upskilling of occupations within the economy.

Government will also, on occasion, seek to put in place priority courses to ensure that critical sectors of the economy have sufficient skill supply to continue to develop. For example, Government has allocated dedicated funding to create new places in ICT, therapies and medicine. It is important that the sector continues to meet these requirements into the future.

In addition to the institutions, the HEA also has a role in managing diversity of provision as follows:

- To ensure that quality and value for money is achieved in the allocation of exchequer funding, especially towards high-cost areas of provision, such as architecture, medicine and others, and, in particular, that unnecessary duplication is avoided and beneficial collaboration is fostered;

- To assist the institutions generally in their strategic planning and, in particular, in incorporating programme provision as part of that planning; and
- To support institutions in generating a new supply of skills in response to urgent requirements.

There is a need to put in place a planning framework to guide institutions in the management of programme provision. This framework should provide a set of guidelines, that would apply across the higher education sector, for the periodic review of existing courses and for the establishment of new courses. It would recognise the work already undertaken by institutions to manage their programme balance, and would go further to create a more systematic approach for the future. The HEA has already undertaken a pilot exercise in this area with the development and application of a framework for architectural education.

Key Outputs:

- In consultation with the relevant stakeholders, the establishment and implementation of procedures (in association with developments in the funding model) to ensure that the higher education system as a whole, through the combined provision of strategically focussed institutions with diverse missions, can meet the diversity of needs in society and the economy.

The report on Evaluation of Access Programmes was launched on the 10th of October 2006. At the launch were (from left) Mr. Tom Boland, HEA Chief Executive, Ms. Cynthia Deane, author of the report (Options consulting), Mr. Michael Kelly, HEA Chairman and Dr. Mary-Liz Trant, Head of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education.



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5. BUILDING THE RESEARCH SYSTEM

Overview:

The Government's Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006 - 2013 outlines a strategy for transforming Ireland into a knowledge-based economy, in line with the Lisbon Agenda and continuing on from the National Development Plan (NDP). The aim is that "Ireland by 2013 will be internationally renowned for the excellence of its research, and will be at the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress, within an innovation driven culture."⁵

To achieve this goal, there are two interlinked strands. First, to build a sustainable system of world-class research teams across all disciplines, and second, to double the number of PhD graduates by 2013. Currently, there is no career structure in place for researchers, and this has been identified as a barrier for achieving the objectives of the SSTI.

The HEA will play a key role in the implementation of the SSTI through its dual role of policy body and research funder. The HEA, through its policy advisory role, assists higher education institutions in their strategic planning, and will support institutions in the development and provision of a sustainable career structure for researchers, as a key step in the next stage of research capability building.

The HEA provides several funding opportunities to facilitate a strategic approach to the issues in question. The Strategic Innovation Fund supports HEA-funded institutions in new developments in areas of strategic importance. Through the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL), the HEA supports research capacity building and enhanced graduate education in the sector generally and the development of research and innovation activities in a planned, strategic way in each higher education institution. The Programme requires prioritisation of research areas by the institutions and supports collaborations between them which add value to national research capacity.

The HEA is also a member of the Higher Education Research Group (HERG), which has been established as part of the implementation structure for the SSTI, with a particular remit to develop cross agency solutions to any barriers in the attainment of the objectives of the SSTI. The HERG has established a number of working groups, to be composed of key stakeholders from the higher education and research domain. These groups are to address specific aspects of the SSTI, such as research careers, key performance indicators, capacity development, extracting value and coherence.

⁵ Government of Ireland (2006) *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, 2006 - 2013* (p.21)

Key Outputs:

- The HEA will contribute to the implementation of the SSTI through the SSTI implementation structures, specifically the Higher Education Research Group (HERG). HERG has agreed research careers, research infrastructure and the development of key indicators for the SSTI as priority areas;
- Following on from the HEA/Forfás “Review of Research Infrastructure in Ireland”, and taking into account developments for infrastructure in the European context, the HEA will continue to monitor, assess and advise on research infrastructure and capacity requirements for the higher education sector in Ireland;
- In addition to managing research programmes on its behalf, the HEA will advise the Department of Education and Science on the evolution of research-funding instruments, such as the PRTL, and the Technological Sector Fund (TSF), so as to achieve SSTI objectives;
- An all-island approach to the development of research and innovation capacity is a key objective of the SSTI. The HEA will advise, and work with, the Department of Education and Science on north/south collaboration initiatives; and
- As part of the ongoing reviews of the impact of PRTL, and other national research funding, the HEA, in collaboration with other stakeholders, will map the networks and hubs for strategic research activity in the Irish higher education system.

The Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, launched cycle 4 of the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTL) on the 3rd of August 2007. HEA Research Programmes at the launch back row (left to right): Dr. Abigail Chantler, Ms. Sheena Duffy, Mr. Tim Conlon, Dr. Gemma Irvine, Ms. Olive Walsh, Ms Eileen O'Malley (absent Ms. Sarah Dunne). Front Row: Mr. Michael Kelly, HEA Chairman, Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin and Dr. Eucharia Meehan, HEA.



FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The key areas of activity under this strategic priority are:

1. Evaluation of overall sectoral funding levels;
2. Strategic allocation of funding;
3. Accountability through performance funding; and
4. Strengthening of other accountability measures, including measures within higher education institutions

1. EVALUATION OF OVERALL SECTORAL FUNDING LEVELS

Overview:

A priority for the HEA over the period of this Strategic Plan will be to make a detailed assessment of funding required for the sector if national objectives are to be achieved, and to advise the Minister accordingly. There is a need to better consider the cost base for the sector by establishing the actual full economic cost of different higher education programmes, so as to better inform policy on funding and investment. Assessment of funding needs should be conducted on a systematic basis and linked closely with national planning cycles.

The NDP has allocated significant funding to the higher education sector over the period to 2013. It is the responsibility of the HEA to continually monitor the needs of the sector in light of national objectives and to make the case for the investment required.

In securing the necessary level of resources to match policy goals, higher education institutions must be encouraged and supported to raise funding from non-exchequer sources, i.e. private funding and philanthropy, and the HEA has a role in this regard. Many jurisdictions, including Ireland, rely to a greater or lesser extent on specific features of the taxation system to encourage philanthropy. The HEA in 2006 published a report from an expert group which looked at practice internationally.⁶ The HEA believes that there are some elements of international practice which would enhance the features already in place in Ireland. We will continue to develop policy proposals which support private funding and philanthropy, as one means of addressing the investment needs of higher education as the system works to achieve national policy goals.

⁶ HEA (2006) *Supporting Investment in Higher Education: Report of the Working Group*.

Key Outputs:

- Formal annual submission of sectoral resource needs to the Minister for Education and Science, taking account of national targets with respect to OECD front rank performance; and
- Develop and promote policy proposals which develop and support sources of non-exchequer funding, such as philanthropy,

2. STRATEGIC ALLOCATION OF FUNDING**Overview:**

The HEA has a responsibility to ensure that it allocates exchequer funding strategically, accountably and transparently, and that value for money is assured. Funding allocations need to be made in a timely manner from the perspective of higher education institutions and students.

The HEA manages funding programmes covering a broad spectrum of objectives:

- Institutional core recurrent funding;
- Capital funding;
- Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF);
- Funding to achieve equality of access, i.e. Student Assistance Fund, Millennium Partnership Fund, Fund for Students with a Disability;
- Research funding, i.e. PRTL, North South Research Programmes, Irish Aid Programme of Strategic Cooperation; and
- European Programmes.

The HEA manages these funding programmes in accordance with the principles set out in Section 4. An explanation of each of the funding programmes is included in Appendix 4.

Key Outputs:

These are the key priority outputs that will be achieved in our funding programmes over the period of this Strategic Plan:

- Full implementation of the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM) incorporating necessary adjustments;
- Reviewed and adjusted access weightings included in RGAM;
- Development of a full, economic costing model (FEC) in co-operation with the Irish Universities Association (IUA);

- Development of a grant allocation model for the institutes of technology:
The intention is to create a model that provides for transparency and equity in funding allocations, and that supports institutional and national, strategic objectives, as well as institutional excellence. The model will also be designed to provide incentives for institutions to generate non-State income and will address other policy objectives, such as the role of the institutes in lifelong learning and in supporting local and regional development;
- Development of up-to-date benchmarks regarding international models of higher education funding;
- Continued implementation and further development of the SIF to enhance the capacity, and support reform of the higher education sector, together with a review of the extent to which the SIF meets its objectives;
- Agreement on, and implementation of, a devolved set of procedures for the management of capital projects;
- Continued implementation and further development of the PRTLTI, and
- Review of research performance in institutions and of the extent to which the PRTLTI is meeting its objectives and is contributing to the objectives of the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH PERFORMANCE FUNDING

Overview:

To better link the allocation of funding to the achievement of national objectives, further work is required to define and articulate these national objectives. This will be a priority for the HEA and we will advise the Minister for Education and Science in this regard. The HEA proposes to allocate funding in part by reference to the achievement of these outcomes. As part of the review process to determine institutional achievement of national outcomes, the HEA will review institutional strategic plans and provide feedback to individual institutions, as well as provide sectoral guidance.

Key Outputs:

- Agreement on and implementation of performance funding as an integral element of the funding model for universities initially and all other HEA funded institutions ultimately;
- Measured improvement in institutional performance and accountability through performance funding;
- Conduct of performance reviews post initiation of funding under PRTLTI Cycle 4; and
- Performance reporting in the higher education sector, as part of the SSTI and NDP implementation and reviews.

4. STRENGTHENING OF OTHER ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES, INCLUDING MEASURES WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Overview:

The HEA is fully committed to institutional autonomy and believes that to flourish, institutions require the autonomy to manage their own budgets. Autonomy must be balanced by strong accountability measures for the use of public funding. A number of frameworks for accountability already exist:

- External, quality-assurance reviews have taken place in the higher education system and have contained very positive findings, though areas for improvement were also identified;
- Higher education statistics demonstrate that the higher education sector has accommodated significant increases in student numbers and that it produces graduates at all levels that are held in high regard, both by Irish and international employers;
- Surveys of students entering higher education show that considerable progress has been made in improving equality of access to higher education, e.g. the number of higher education students with a disability has increased from 0.8% in 1998 to 2.4% in 2005, the admission rate for the skilled manual socio-economic group increased from 32% in 1998 to c. 55% in 2004; the admission rate for the semi- and unskilled socio-economic group increased from 23% in 1998 to c. 37% in 2004. The targets set out in the Report of the Action Group on Access to Higher Education (2001) have been achieved. While indicative of significant progress, much still remains to be done towards the achievement of equality of access to higher education for all groups in society; and
- A revised code of governance and financial memorandum/agreement has been agreed with the universities and implementation has commenced.

It is the responsibility of the HEA to ensure that appropriate accountability measures are in place and operate effectively. The implementation of the new approach to performance funding, outlined in the previous section, will be a significant development in the enhancement of accountability measures, as it will directly link institutional funding with institutional strategy, contribution to national outcomes and priorities and compliance issues, e.g. data returns and governance requirements.

The HEA has an oversight role in relation to the obligations placed on the higher education institutions to comply with all legal and other HEA accountability requirements. Over the course of the strategic plan, the HEA will enforce the collection and return of information from institutions that will enable it more clearly to measure the extent to which outcomes are being achieved. Particular emphasis will be placed on compliance with codes of governance and the development of enhanced data-

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collection systems and prompt return of designated datasets in the agreed format.

Key Outputs:

- Full implementation of revised code of governance and financial memorandum / agreement in universities;
- Development and implementation of revised code of governance in colleges of education, National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and St. Angela's College;
- Review of borrowing framework;
- Annual sectoral accountability report (see Advocacy strategic priority for further details); and
- Institutional compliance with data requirements.



HEA Chairman Michael Kelly, Head of Research Programmes, Dr. Eucharía Meehan with the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin, at the launch of Cycle 4 of PRTL1

ADVOCACY

We have identified the following key areas for action over the period of this plan. They are directed at furthering our advocacy responsibilities to our key stakeholders – students, Government, employers and the public:

1. HEA annual reports;
2. Annual sectoral accountability report;
3. Policy reviews;
4. Development of stronger relationships with stakeholders;
5. Monitoring higher education in an international context; and
6. Media and communications strategy.

Underpinning these key areas of actions is the range of advocacy work undertaken by the HEA on a daily basis in the form of collaborative and advisory work with policy making bodies and expert groups. Given the relatively small size of the HEA and the breadth of the higher education sector, much of the advocacy work of the HEA is conducted through working with other organisations and active inputting into the work of policy bodies and expert groups. Examples include our work with the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, the Enterprise Advisory Group, the Competition Authority, the Interdepartmental Committee for SSTI, the Higher Education Research Group, the IDA and SFI, etc. The HEA will proactively continue to make this input throughout the period of this Strategic Plan.

1. HEA ANNUAL REPORTS

Overview:

A key element of our overall advocacy work will involve providing greater transparency and clarity about the work of the HEA. This will be achieved through the production and publication of reports of progress in a timely manner on an annual basis.

Key Outputs:

Publication of annual report covering:

- Key policy developments;
- Summary of the outputs of HEA relative to annual plan;
- Statistical summary
- Financial report and accounts; and
- Governance statement.

2. ANNUAL SECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Overview:

The HEA will produce a report on the higher education sector on an annual basis. The purpose of this report will be to provide a commentary on the performance of the higher education sector by reference to a range of agreed key performance indicators. The report will be presented to the Minister for Education and Science and will be published. It will represent a public statement of the outcomes that have been achieved by the higher education sector, in return for the public investment made in the sector.

This annual sectoral report is intended as an accountability measure for the sector. It will focus on the outcomes of the sector and should provide a basis for evaluating the contribution being made by the sector and also, a firm basis on which more informed decisions can be made about future allocation of resources.

Key Outputs:

- Annual sectoral report outlining the performance of the higher education and research sector.

3. POLICY REVIEWS

Overview:

The HEA will build on the success of recent HEA analytical reports (e.g., An Overview of Applications and Acceptances to Higher Education, 2006; HEA Facts and Figures 2004/05) by using all of the datasets available, and particularly the HEA's own data-collection tool (the student records system), to produce regular analytical reports on topics of particular interest to policy makers and the general public.

Key Outputs:

- HEA will use the datasets available to it to produce policy relevant analysis reports; and
- Robust, data-collection systems that can be adapted and modified according to emerging, information requirements.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Overview:

Developing and maintaining effective networks and working relationships with stakeholders in higher education and research is an important activity for the HEA. The consultation exercise that was undertaken as part of the development of this strategic plan was very fruitful in informing our understanding of key issues facing the sector.

A key relationship of course is that with the Minister for Education and Science and his Department. Our objective is to ensure that we work together, coherently and synergistically so as to bring greatest benefit to the higher education and research sector.

The last decade has seen a transformation in the Irish research landscape, with the PRTL playing a central role in this transformation. We are now at a point where a national research strategy has been launched that is investing significantly in research and allowing us to meet our commitments under the Lisbon Agenda. The HEA is playing an important role in the national structures set up to support the implementation of the SSTI, contributing as a member of the secretariat to the Inter-Departmental Committee, as an observer at Technology Ireland and as a member of the Higher Education Research Group (HERG).

There are a number of public agencies and bodies involved in higher education and research. A priority for the HEA over the term of this strategic plan will be to deepen inter-agency collaboration and coordination in the delivery of the targets set out in the SSTI, and to ensure that a broader, education perspective is accepted by all agencies and remains at the core of the research system which is now being built.

The HEA proposes to convene a consultative group within the higher education sector, comprising those working in policy-related areas. This group will meet annually on a formal basis, but will also be available to enhance co-ordination and collective engagement with key challenges on an ongoing basis. While this group will be led from the higher education sector, it is proposed that its membership will include stakeholders from across the education system. This will ensure that all issues are addressed from the joined-up perspective of all education sectors.

Key Outputs:

- Effective working relationships and consultation processes in place with a range of stakeholders in the higher education and research sector generally; and
- Convene inaugural meeting of consultative higher education group and subsequent meetings.

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5. MONITORING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Overview:

The advocacy and policy advisory role of the HEA involves placing the performance of Irish higher education in an all-island and international context. Active monitoring and analysis of the experiences of other countries can yield valuable lessons and policy insights.

Over recent years, through the work of the Department of Education and Science and the HEA, Ireland has been actively involved in successful international efforts to improve the scope, quality and comparability of international indicators of higher education. This work provides an increasingly solid basis on which to benchmark Irish higher education in an international context.

The HEA has managed a number of north south research programmes including the North South Programme for Collaborative Research and The Cross Border Programme for Research and Education contributing to Peace and Renconciliation. The HEA is also active in a range of international policy fora relating to higher education policy, for example, the OECD, the IMHE and European networks. We are represented on the national committee for the implementation of the Bologna Agreement. The HEA is also taking a leading role in supporting the OECD/IMHE in the development of an International Higher Education Policy Portal (IHEPP).



The HEA celebrated the 20th anniversary of Erasmus Programmes at Farmleigh House on the 24th of April 2007 attended by President Mary McAleese with Mr Tom Boland, HEA Chief Executive and Mr. Gerry O'Sullivan, Head of European Programmes, HEA.

The HEA is the National Agency for the Erasmus Action of the EU Action Programme for Lifelong Learning 2007 - 2013. The purpose of Erasmus is to improve the quality of higher education and strengthen its European dimension. The HEA is also the National Structure for the Erasmus Mundus Programme, as well as the contact point for Tempus.

In the research and development domain, the HEA is the national contact point and delegate for research infrastructures under FP7 and a national delegate to the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures.

In 2005, the HEA and George Mason University, Virginia (GMU) established the Irish American Higher Education Research Organisation (IA HERO). The objective of IA HERO is to provide a medium through which research, publications and conferences will examine challenges in higher education in both Ireland and America. Key priorities identified for further exploration include higher education funding approaches; private fundraising; commercialisation of research and governance, and management of higher education institutions.

We will continue our active involvement in European and other international fora and will assist, as appropriate, the implementation of international agreements and understandings of co-operation in the area of higher education.

In addition to the benefits of our international work for benchmarking, policy development and the exchange of best practice, there are other important benefits. For example, we rely on international expertise to ensure objectivity in the assessment of funding proposals from institutions under programmes such as the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) and the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLII).

HEA European Programmes at the 20th Anniversary of Erasmus Programmes. Back row (left to right) Mr. Tom Boland, HEA Chief Executive, Ms. Mary Dunne, Mr. Gerry O'Sullivan; Front row (left to right) Mr. Graham Barry, Ms. Eileen O'Connell, President Mary McAleese, Mary Kerr, HEA Deputy Chief Executive and Ms. Mary May.



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Key Outputs:

- Annual publication providing briefing on the comparative performance of Irish higher education;
- Continue work in all-island and international policy development and research networks; and
- Full participation in the IHEPP, as developed by the OECD/IMHE.



*Visit of South African Minister for Education to the HEA 16th November 2006.
Back row (left to right) Mr. Tim Conlon, Dr. Mary-Liz Trant, Mr. Muiris O'Connor, Prof. Duma Malaza, CEO of Higher Education, South Africa, Dr. Barney Pityana, Vice Chancellor of UNISA and Chair of Higher Education, South Africa, Ms. Caitriona Ryan. Front row (left to right) Dr. Molapo Qhobela, Chief Director - Higher Education Policy, Department of Education, South Africa, Ms. Naledi Pandor, Minister for Education, South Africa, Mr. Michael Kelly, HEA Chairman.*

6. MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Overview:

We will devise explicit advocacy strategies for the period of this Strategic Plan. As previously discussed (section 4), we have advocacy responsibilities with respect to a range of key stakeholders - students, Government, employers and the public. While this has been implicit in our approach to communications to date, we propose adopting a more explicit and rigorous approach.

Key Outputs:

- Implementation of new communications strategy consistent with the advocacy objectives set out in this strategic plan and with clear and measurable performance indicators.

Section 6

Implementation

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This section sets out our approach for managing and monitoring the delivery of our strategic priorities over the lifetime of this Strategic Plan. Implementation will be managed in three key areas:

- Performance measurement;
- Ensuring HEA capacity; and
- Managing potential risks to implementation.

1. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

We have identified key outputs under each of our strategic priorities in this Strategic Plan. We will monitor the implementation of this Strategic Plan using these outputs as measures of performance and progress. We will use internal work plans which will identify and assign lead responsibility for the tasks and associated timeframes for the achievement of these outputs.

The annual sectoral accountability report will include a section assessing the performance of the HEA against the outputs identified in this Strategic Plan.

We also commit to commissioning an external independent review in the final year of the period of this Strategic Plan. The purpose of this review will be to objectively assess and report on the progress and extent of achievement of the objectives of this Plan.

2. ENSURING HEA CAPACITY

We will engage in a number of tasks aimed at ensuring that the capacity of the HEA executive is sufficient to deliver on the priorities and activities identified.

We will monitor and evaluate, on an on-going basis over the period of this Strategic Plan, the resources (both human and financial) that are available to the HEA to conduct its business. Higher education is assuming a complex and diverse role and it is imperative that the HEA has the capabilities to enable it to support the sector fully.

Human Resources Capacity

- We will maximise the use of our human resources through the implementation of a proactive and effective human-resource policy. This policy will cover human resources issues including:
 - Recruitment and selection;
 - Staff training and development;
 - Cross-section learning; and
 - Performance management and development system (PMDS);

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- We will review on an on-going basis the organisation of staff resources to ensure optimal delivery for the HEA. We will review our approach to staff allocation on an on-going basis and ensure that staff allocations are directed at the achievement of the HEA's strategic priorities. We will also endeavour to assign areas of responsibility to staff that are best suited to their skills and competencies;
- We will regularly review the extent of our staff resources in the light of our work programme. The HEA has taken on a range of new activities in recent years, for example, the Strategic Innovation Fund, implementation of performance funding, Irish Aid programme, new responsibilities in relation to statistical collections and the management of NDP programmes. It will be vital that stronger public investment in the sector is matched by stronger capacity to evaluate the impact of such investments as an important guide to future decision-making; and
- We will conduct a training-needs audit within the Executive of the HEA to ensure that staff are appropriately trained to address the work demands of the HEA. We are committed to implementing a training plan to ensure that such needs are met.

Work Environment and Facilities

- We will ensure that staff in the HEA work in an environment which is supportive of them personally and professionally, which celebrates diversity, supports enquiry and respects independence of thought. We are committed to implementing family friendly work policies; and
- We will provide staff with a pleasant physical environment and the necessary resources, including information technology resources, required for effective working.

Risk Management Framework

Risk management will be integral to the achievement by the HEA of its strategic and operational goals. The HEA's risk management framework seeks to ensure that there is widespread awareness within the organisation of the need to identify, evaluate, manage and report risks facing the organisation and is an integral part of the HEA's system of internal controls.

Review of HEA

Over the period of this Strategic Plan, the HEA commits to undergoing an independent, external, review process. The purpose of this review will be to evaluate the performance, structure and organisation of the HEA in the context of the changing policy environment in which it is required to function.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS TO IMPLEMENTATION

The Government's stated goals for the higher education and research system are challenging and will require full achievement by the HEA of the objectives set out in this Strategic Plan if they are to be met. In addition, meeting those objectives will depend on the actions and decisions of others, including Government itself. The following are the main potential risks which we see to achieving success.

- Achieving the objectives set for the HEA and the higher education and research sector is crucially dependent on commensurate levels of resources being made available to the sector. While the level of investment has been substantial, considerable additional on-going investment is necessary.
- The effective utilisation of resources is also a key determinant of success and while the HEA commits to fully utilising resources allocated to the sector to achieve the highest level of performance, responsibility also lies with institutional managements;
- The HEA is part of the Government's public service decentralisation programme. The implementation of the programme may have temporary implications for the capacity of the HEA (due to loss in existing expertise and experience) which could impact on the overall delivery of this Strategic Plan. The HEA is committed to minimising such risks and ensuring an effective and efficient transition;
- The capacity of the HEA to deliver on the range of demands that are made on it is dependent on an appropriate level of resourcing (financial, human and physical) been made available to it;
- Achieving the objectives set for higher education and research will require a collaborative approach on a number of levels, but especially between public bodies involved in the sector and within and between institutions. While there have been significant recent and very positive developments in collaboration, this needs to go deeper and broader. The HEA, for its part, is committed to working constructively with all relevant agencies; and
- The higher education and research system should be focussed primarily on providing individuals with a high quality education experience and to do so across a wide range of disciplines. Some see a higher education and research system as primarily an engine for economic growth. The objectives are not incompatible but a loss of balance between them poses an ever present risk to the capacity of the system to be effective.

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HEA Strategic Plan Consultation Seminar



From left to right, Mr. Art Hauptman, independent consultant, Ms. Jane Williams, Facilitator, SIA Group, Mr. Jon File, Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), Mr. Tom Boland, HEA Chief Executive, Ms. Cairtriona Ryan, Head of Policy and Planning HEA



Mr. Tom Boland, HEA Chief Executive addressing the participants at the HEA Strategic Plan Consultation Seminar, 25th October 2006



Mr. Jon File addressing the participants at the HEA Strategic Plan Consultation Seminar, 25th October 2006



Participants at the HEA Strategic Plan consultation Seminar 25th October 2006



Mr. Art Hauptman addressing the participants at the HEA Strategic Plan Consultation Seminar, 25th October 2006



Participants at the HEA Strategic Plan consultation Seminar 25th October 2006

Appendix 2

Statutory Functions of the HEA

The HEA is a statutory body established under the Higher Education Authority Act 1971. The principal functions of the HEA as set out in the 1971 Act are as follows:

- To further the development of higher education.
- To maintain a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education.
- To assist in the coordination of state investment in higher education and to prepare proposals for such investment.
- To allocate among universities and designated institutions the grants voted by the Oireachtas.
- To promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education and democratisation of higher education.

A number of additional functions were allocated to the HEA under the Universities Act, 1997 and the Institutes of Technology Act, 2006, including the following

- The review of university strategic development plans.
- The review of university quality assurance procedures.
- The review of university equal opportunity policies and their implementation.
- The promotion of the attainment and maintenance of excellence in learning, teaching and research in higher education.

The Institutes of Technology Act, 2006 also provides that in performing its functions, the HEA shall have regard to the national aims of maximising the contribution of higher education to social and economic progress, restoring the Irish language and preserving the national culture, and shall endeavour to promote attainment of those aims.

Appendix 3

Achievements and Challenges

INTRODUCTION

This Appendix aims to present a high-level overview of important recent achievements in the higher education and research sector and identifies key challenges for the coming years.

CONTINUING EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

The expansion of Irish higher education has continued over recent years with consistent growth, which raised the entry rate to higher education from 44% in 1998 to 55% in 2004⁸. This general increase in participation has been boosted by significant increases in participation among many groups that traditionally had very low participation levels, e.g. students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and students with a disability.

Notwithstanding the considerable progress that has been made, much work remains to be done in the area of achieving equality of access to higher education.

The economic demand for skilled graduates is also rising and the need for continuing expansion of higher education into the future is very clearly articulated in the National Skills Strategy, which aims to achieve a higher education entry rate of 72% by 2020. The importance of higher education for economic competitiveness is also recognised in the Enterprise Strategy Group's targets to secure a leading status in the OECD in terms of graduate output.

Continuing expansion of higher education will require significant progress on the lifelong learning agenda. The National Skills Strategy notes that *"Ireland's relatively low participation rate in continuous learning is cause for concern"*⁹. Enhancing the educational attainment of the existing workforce through the provision of meaningful lifelong education opportunities will be a key challenge for Irish higher education over the coming period.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

Infrastructural investments and strategic developments in research have resulted in a transformation of the research landscape in Irish higher education over recent years. Higher education expenditure on R&D (HERD) increased by almost 107% between 2000 and 2004; over the same period HERD as a percentage of GNP increased from 0.27% to 0.40%. There has been huge expansion in research infrastructure, including

⁸ The participation rate refers to the total number of new entrants to higher education as a proportion of the population at the average age of entry to higher education (17-19 years in the case of Ireland).

⁹ Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (2007) *Tomorrow's Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy*. (p. 6)

the creation of 97,000m² research space, 24 new research centres and 4,600 user spaces, all of which was made possible through the PRTLII.

The PRTLII has facilitated the emergence of institutional, research strategies and have encouraged specialisation in particular areas, as well as strategic collaboration between institutions. Further consolidation can be expected over the course of the SSTI, which has demonstrated the government's commitment to sustained and substantial investment in research and development. PhD graduations increased by almost 13% between 2003 and 2005. A key target of the SSTI is to achieve a doubling of PhD graduates by 2013. The key challenges into the future include ensuring that the renewed focus on research leads to enhancements of teaching and learning within higher education institutions and the achievement of greater levels of commercialisation of research outputs.

QUALITY AND RELEVANCE OF IRISH HIGHER EDUCATION

The higher education sector has demonstrated its relevance to the Irish economy by consistently producing graduates that are sought after by employers and also by adapting to emerging skills needs, e.g. skills needs in the medical therapies. The sector is characterised by a quality-assurance culture. The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) have facilitated the development of this culture. Among their other functions, the HEA and the NQAI carry out important overview functions in relation to quality assurance. Positive findings emerged from the independent European Universities Association (EUA) review of quality assurance procedures in Irish universities and also from the reviews of HETAC and the DIT. It is an on-going challenge to continually enhance quality and to promote a culture of sustained, quality improvement in the higher education sector. Of particular importance is the need for greater involvement of students in quality-assurance processes. A review of the IUQB will be an important task carried out over the period of this strategic plan.

REFORM OF THE GRANT ALLOCATION MODEL

The HEA seeks to fund institutions so that their contribution to national objectives are maximised. Our funding policies are based on the principle that institutional performance is enhanced when institutional autonomy is preserved within a context of strong accountability measures with respect to the use of public funds and the achievement of national outcomes. Our objective is to reward institutions that adopt a strategic approach, that collaborate with other institutions and that proactively seek out collaborative partnerships. Over the course of the last strategic plan, considerable achievements were made in building greater levels of accountability, fostering strategic approaches and enhancing institutional collaboration.

Key achievements over the course of the last strategic plan include the introduction of a system of consolidated accounts in the universities and the design and implementation of a revised, recurrent grant allocation model (RGAM) for the universities where funding very clearly follows the student. The model will bring greater accountability, transparency and coherence into the grant allocation system. In addition, there has been a greater emphasis on competitive, funding allocations which explicitly encourage collaboration – e.g. the SIF and the PRTL. Such funding processes have brought about significant shifts in institutional mindsets. There is now recognition throughout the sector that successful institutions are those that collaborate and engage in meaningful partnerships with other institutions.

In the coming period, it will be vital to build on these achievements and to further develop the funding model to facilitate transferable credit-based learning within a lifelong learning framework. This will support flexible provision, interdisciplinary studies and enable learners to combine subjects across disciplines and even across institutions. Immediate priorities include the development of a grant allocation model, built on comparable principles, for the institutes of technology. It must meet the needs of the institutes and also the transparency and accountability needs of the HEA and Government.

The HEA will also incorporate an element of performance funding into the core grant allocations to reward institutions according to their achievement of national outcomes. Finally, institutions will need to implement more strategic and innovative approaches to raising private funding. The HEA has a role to play in encouraging and supporting institutions to diversify their funding sources.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The PRTL and SIF processes have been highly successful in encouraging institutions to develop focussed and challenging strategies and supporting those institutional strategies. Higher education institutions that adopt a strategic approach to their activities and which seek to build on existing strengths and core activities rather than seek to become involved across the full spectrum of higher education activities have enjoyed success in these processes. While the principle of collaboration is now well embedded in research activities, there is a need for institutions to engage more collaboratively in relation to existing activities (rather than just collaborating on new activities) and fundamental teaching and learning functions.

There is much progress to be made in ensuring that our higher education institutions adopt a sectoral perspective, as well as an institutional perspective. Institutions need to identify their own unique strengths and seek to build on these strengths in contributing to the overall objectives of a higher education sector comprising a diversity of provision.



In realising their broader missions, higher education institutions should be encouraged to build relationships within society and the community, with a view to informing their strategies and consistent with national objectives. Facilitating the development and clear articulation of national objectives for the higher education sector will be a key task of the HEA over the period of this strategic plan. This will clarify national priorities and key outcomes which will provide institutions with a framework within which to develop their strategic plans.

Appendix 4 Funding Programmes

RECURRENT GRANT

The HEA receives a block grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science. The block grant is allocated by the HEA to the universities, institutes of technology and other designated institutions in respect of the recurrent activities of the institutions.

The recurrent grant to the institutions includes the following elements:

- (i) grant in respect of undergraduate tuition fees (allocated on the basis of certified student numbers);
- (ii) core grant, allocated to the institutions as a block grant to cover core teaching and research activities within institutions; and
- (iii) earmarked funding for specific purposes (e.g. medical education, identified skills shortages).

The recurrent grant for universities is allocated according to the Recurrent Grant Allocation Model (RGAM), which allocates the grant according to student numbers by area of study. The 2007 institutes of technology recurrent grant allocation model being used in the HEA is the one previously in operation in the Department of Education and Science. The development of a new grant allocation model for the institutes is a priority for the HEA.

CAPITAL FUNDING

The HEA manages two main funding programmes under its capital programme:

- (i) General Capital Programme - this covers:
 - the projects recommended in the Report of the Capital Prioritisation Report (2004);
 - new project proposals;
 - possible minor works;
 - health and safety projects;
 - possible equipment allocation;
 - medical education and training (graduate entry programme); and
 - any other emerging needs; and
- (ii) PRTLII/SSTI - this includes the projects associated with the finalisation of Cycles 1 & 2, Cycle 3, Cycle 4 and future Cycles of the PRTLII and other research infrastructure projects.

The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) is a multi-annual fund, which is directed towards support for innovation in higher education institutions. It supports new approaches to enhancing quality and effectiveness within higher education and research, incorporating the use of existing resources (including capital resources) more effectively, as well as new funding. Projects approved to date under SIF are aimed at enhancing collaboration between higher education institutions, improving teaching and learning, supporting institutional reform, promoting access and lifelong learning and supporting the development of fourth level education.

The Student Assistance Fund is available to students experiencing particular or unexpected hardship during their course of study. The fund is allocated on a per capita basis to publicly-funded, higher education institutions. Students apply for the Student Assistance Fund through their student services office or through the access officer within their institution.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities is allocated to students with a disability who require additional supports and services in further or higher education. The fund is also available to Irish students attending higher education in the United Kingdom. Higher education institutions apply for funding for individuals or groups of students. Funding is allocated to identified, individual students and spending through the fund is restricted to services or equipment directly linked to individuals.

The Millennium Partnership Fund provides community-based funding in support of retention and participation among under-represented groups of students in further or higher education. It is available to students in area partnerships and community groups which participate in the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP). Application for Millennium funding is made annually by organisations through Pobal Ltd, and Pobal administer the fund on behalf of the National Access Office within the HEA.

The Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTL) provides support for institutional research strategies, inter-institutional collaboration, large research programmes and infrastructure. It is allocated on a competitive basis.

The North-South Research Programmes provide support for cross-border collaboration so as to:

- (a) enhance capabilities on the island of Ireland; and
- (b) to contribute to peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland.

The Fund for Digital Research fosters collaborative, interdisciplinary research in media, materials and methods. It is administered by the HEA on behalf of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

The Programme of **Strategic Cooperation between Irish Aid and Higher Education and Research Institutes 2007-2011** seeks to promote innovative, research activity across a range of subject areas in support of Irish Aid's mission to reduce poverty.

The HEA is the National Agency for the Erasmus Action of the **EU Action Programme for Lifelong Learning 2007 - 2013**, which is the action associated with higher education and advanced training. The purpose of Erasmus is to improve the quality of higher education and strengthen its European dimension. It does this by encouraging transnational cooperation between higher education institutions, fostering the European mobility of students, teachers, and staff and contributing to improved transparency and academic recognition of qualifications and studies throughout the European Union. The HEA administers the following activities within the Erasmus programme:

- Student mobility;
- Student placements (from HETAC level 6 and above);
- Teaching staff mobility,
- Staff training;
- Organisation of mobility; and
- Intensive programmes.

The HEA is also the National Structure for the Erasmus Mundus Programme, as well as the contact point for Tempus.

