Public Sector Equality & Human Rights Duty Implementation Plan

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Eliminate discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services; and
- Protect the human rights of its members, staff, and the persons to whom it provides services.

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

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

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

(b) **report** in a manner that is accessible to the public on developments and achievements in that regard in its annual report (howsoever described).

The identified groups for the Duty are:[1]

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

The HEA established a cross sectional working group facilitated jointly by the Corporate Affairs and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Units. This plan has been developed having regard to the HEA's Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026, specifically goal 7, the HEA as an Organisation - Improve the organisation's equality, diversity & inclusion affairs

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

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

• Incorporate our commitment to embed Human Rights into how we conduct our business; and lead, develop and manage our staff through inclusion of Public Sector Duty in our HEA Corporate Strategy,

• Develop a framework of living and behaving in a manner that underpins Human Rights and our Public Service Duty,

• Develop a culture in which the Public Sector Values are embedded by ensuring the Values are known by all; how they are demonstrated is informed by our stakeholder engagement and staff are trained and developed to live these in the course of their work,

and

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

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[1] Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2019.

2. HEA Equality and Human Rights Values

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

- Equality and Diversity

- Inclusion & Accessibility

- Community & Engagement

- Person-Centered Approach

- Dignity & Respect

- Transparency & Integrity

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

FUNCTIONAL UNIT	ACTIVITY	RELATED VALUE
ACCESS POLICY	Increasing diversity of student population	Equality & Diversity
ACCESS POLICY	Funding programmes for Access	Inclusion & Accessibility
ACCESS POLICY	Policy development	Equality & Diversity
ACCESS POLICY	Disseminate best practice	Communication & Engagement
ACCESS POLICY	Consultation with stakeholders	Transparency & Integrity
CENTRE FOR EDI	Gender Equality, Race Equality initiatives	Equality & Diversity
CENTRE FOR EDI	Ending sexual violence and harassment	Dignity & Respect
COMMUNICATIONS	Access to information, available to everybody (visually, plain English, etc.)	Transparency & Integrity
COMMUNICATIONS	Internal communication	Communication & Engagement
COMMUNICATIONS	FOIs, DSARs, PQs	Transparency & Integrity
CORPORATE AFFAIRS	Recruitment and promotion	Transparency & Integrity
CORPORATE AFFAIRS	Staff wellbeing	Person-centred approach
CORPORATE AFFAIRS	Staff consultation	Communication & Engagement
CORPORATE AFFAIRS	Staff development	Person-centred approach
CORPORATE AFFAIRS	Provision of safe environment/workspace	Inclusion & Accessibility
CORPORATE AFFAIRS	Data protection/staff data	Dignity & Respect
CORPORATE AFFAIRS	HEA Protected Disclosure	Transparency & Integrity

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL	Assessment Process	Transparency & Integrity
CROSS-FUNCTIONAL	External stakeholder engagement	Person-centred Approach
FINANCE	Ensuring transparency, fairness and open competition for suppliers in procurement processes	Transparency & Integrity
FINANCE	Financial monitoring and oversight of core funded HEIs	
HR / CORPORATE	Diversity of workforce	Equality & Diversity
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES	Equality of access to mobility opportunities	Equality & Diversity
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES	Clear rules, geographical balance	Transparency & Integrity
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES	Access to Erasmus for students with disabilities, students from lower socio-economic demographics	Equality & Diversity Inclusion & Accessibility
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES	Availability of information (to students and staff)	Communication & Engagement
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES	Information required from applicants (intrusive)	Dignity & Respect
POLICY	Monitoring and developing policy (how does E & HR fit in?)	Equality & Diversity
POLICY	Identifying and responding to transversal issues across system	Equality & Diversity
POLICY / STATISTICS / ACCESS	Monitoring and promoting social inclusion	Inclusion & Accessibility
SKILLS & ENGAGEMENT	Empowering people through upskilling and reskilling	Inclusion & Accessibility
SKILLS & ENGAGEMENT	Linking education to the economy (investing in human capital)	Inclusion & Accessibility
SKILLS & ENGAGEMENT	Engagement with employers and learners	Communication & Engagement
SKILLS & ENGAGEMENT	Valuing different education to Universities	Dignity & Respect
STATISTICS	Diversity of students in system	Equality and Diversity
STATISTICS	Collection of statistics to measure the profile and outcomes of education	Equality & Diversity
STATISTICS	Gathering data for evidence-based policy making	Transparency & Integrity
UNITS WHO FUND HEIS	Fair allocation of funds	Transparency & Integrity
ALL UNITS	Accountability & good governance	Transparency & Integrity
SYSTEM GOVERNANCE	Oversight of HEI governance	Transparency & Integrity
SYSTEM GOVERNANCE	HEI protected disclosures	Transparency & Integrity
ALL UNITS	Consultation with stakeholders	Communication & Engagement

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE	Monitoring performance of HEIs	Transparency & Integrity
SYSTEM PERFORMANCE	Focus on regional development and access to higher education	Inclusion & Accessibility
SYSTEM PERFORMANCE	Strategic dialogue process	Communication & Engagement
SYSTEM PERFORMANCE	Promoting accountability across the system	Transparency & Integrity
TEACHING & LEARNING & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	Promoting and funding education for sustainable development	Equality & Diversity
CAPITAL FUNDING	Universal design access for buildings	Inclusion & Accessibility

3. HEA Public Duty Action Plan 2023-2026

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

Action	KPI	Delivery Date	Owner	Related Value
3.1 Review of key HEA HR Policies	Updated policies • Dignity at Work • Recruitment & Promotion • Probation Policy	Q3 2024 Q4 2024 Q3 2024	Head of Corporate, Head of HR	• Equality and Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect •Transparency & Integrity
3.2 Training in mitigating bias	HR to arrange training each year. At the end of this plan all staff at SEO and above grades will have attended training	Q4 2024 Q4 2025 Q4 2026	Head of Corporate Affairs	• Equality and Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect •Transparency & Integrity

3.3 Attract and retain a diverse workforce through making current staff and job applicants aware of the HEA's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion for staff.	Continue to ensure HEA policies and communications are written in unbiased, accessible language. Include proactive diversity statement in all recruitment advertisements. Include information on reasonable accommodations in job advertisements. Training for interview board members	Ongoing Annual training in interview skills	Head of Corporate Affairs/Head of HR	• Equality and Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect
3.4 Raise awareness and understanding of various forms of disabilities and to create a dialogue regarding meeting the needs of people with disabilities within the workplace	HR to participate in DFHERIS Working Group on Disabilities. Continue to meet requests for reasonable accommodation as requested Develop reasonable accommodation guidelines	Quarterly As requested Q3 2024	Head of HR Head of Corporate/HR/IT	• Equality and Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect
3.5 Implementation of HEA Menopause Working Group Recommendation	Adopt Policy	Q4 2023	Head of HR	• Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect
3.6 Commit to the applicable principles and	HEA Gender Equality Action Plan developed which aligns	Ongoing Publish Action	Head of Corporate, Head of HR	• Equality and Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility

| requirements of HEI EDI policy frameworks (i.e. gender equality, ending sexual violence and sexual harassment, and anti-racism) | with Horizon Europe requirements and includes
 • preparation for Gender Pay Gap reporting requirements from December 2024
 • applicable recommendations from the 2nd Review of Gender Equality
 • commitment to Ending Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment
 • Commitment to Anti-Racism Principles | Plan in Q3 2024 | | • Person-Centred Approach
 • Dignity & Respect |

Actions Focused on External Stakeholders

Action	KPI	Delivery Date	Owner	Related Value
3.7 Support Equity of Access to Higher Education (Goal 2, Regulate & Oversight - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)	Implementation of A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028	Undertake a Progress Report Q4 2025	Head of Access	• Equality and Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect
3.8 Promote a 'data protection culture' across the organisation and provide clear accessible information on data protection policies for all HEA stakeholders including staff recognising the right to data privacy as an	Maintain and update ROPA and DPIAs • Staff training (Townhalls, Induction Training and on-line Training)	As required Q1 and Q3 each year	DPO	• Person-Centred Approach •Transparency & Integrity

important human right. (Goals 1 & 2, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)				
3.9 Equality, diversity, and inclusion (Goal 9, Develop - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)	Monitor and progress the implementation of equality, diversity and inclusion policy frameworks and initiatives across higher education, in relation to gender equality, race equality and ending sexual violence and sexual harassment.	Ongoing	Centre of Excellence for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion	• Equality & Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect
3.10 Student Health and Wellbeing Initiatives (Goal 12, Develop - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)	Monitor and progress the implementation of the Higher Education Healthy Campus Charter and Framework across higher education to support a whole campus approach to wellbeing. This includes the implementation of the HEA National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework. Support work on wellbeing across higher education through active membership of the International Health Promoting Universities and Colleges Network.	Ongoing Ongoing	National Healthy Campus Coordinator	• Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach • Dignity & Respect
3.11 Fair, Equitable and Sustainable Procurement (Goal 6, HEA as an Organisation - HEA	Implementation of HEA's Procurement Policy	Ongoing	Senior Manager Procurement	•Transparency & Integrity

Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)				
3.12 Accessible HEA website (Goals 7 and 8, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)	The HEA will upgrade its websites ensuring these meeting NDA accessibility guidelines	Q3 2024	Head of Communications	• Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach •Transparency & Integrity
3.13 Equity in Languages (Goals 7 & 8, HEA as an Organisation - HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023–2026)	Arrange training in the Irish Language Appoint an Irish Language Services Officer Arrange provision of ISL service	Q4 2024 Q2 2024 Q4 2024	Irish Language Services Officer Head of Corporate Affairs Head of Corporate Affairs	• Equality and Diversity • Inclusion & Accessibility • Person-Centred Approach

4. Delivering on the Plan

This plan will be delivered through the following steps;

Leadership

Delivery of the plan will be a commitment outlined in the HEA's Corporate Strategic Plan to be approved by the Board. This plan will be endorsed by the Senior Management Team.

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

Communications

The plan will be communicated through a staff town hall session, the HEA newsletter (In the Loop) and made available on the HEA hub.

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

The plan will be included in the induction plan for new staff.

HEA Public Duty Working Group

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

HEA Annual Report

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