

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2018 – 2023

Lead the development of centralised applications systems

Build on the existing strengths of CAO in delivering successful shared services to the sector; support HEIs in the promotion of education in Ireland and overseas; and, proactively provide application processing services for categories of application that are currently un-serviced and/or under-serviced.

Enable greater access to and use of data to support HEIs

Continue to build on the accessibility of data through enhancements to the CAO interface for HEIs. Make self-service reporting tools available to HEIs to allow for data interrogation in a user-friendly manner.

Enable the CAO to be the portal of choice for all applications and all HEIs for all entrant access points

Explore how to channel diverse applicant types through the CAO application system, reducing the need for local application processing by HEIs.

Build mechanisms for more systematic and strategic consultation and engagement with HEIs

Streamline processes and reduce duplication of effort through a combination of knowledge sharing and cooperation e.g. HEI visits and group sessions with HEIs to define common goals.

Advance ICT and system usability

Enhance interaction between CAO and applicants, and CAO and admissions officers, exploiting technology to improve the service.

Development and training

Enhance opportunities for staff development and training; build on the existing cohesion of the staff and management team; create opportunities for staff to grow their involvement in achieving the strategic objectives of CAO.

Maintenance of self-funding model

Continue to maintain a self-funded model and ensure that all monies are expended with consideration of value for money, regularity, and propriety. Perform a cost benefit analysis and financial impact assessment prior to engaging in any new activity.

Mechanisms of handling emerging issues

CAO will monitor the environment it operates in and prepare for changes that might impact on the activities of the Company, e.g. regulatory change, changes to the education environment, etc.

Central
Applications
Office

STRATEGIC PLAN 2018/2023 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"The mission of the CAO is to be the leading provider of centralised application processing services for Irish post-secondary education providers; this Plan explores how the CAO can continue to realise this vision. Stakeholder needs, and the ways that various stakeholders interact with CAO, are changing. This Plan identifies both the challenges and the opportunities, and presents a set of strategic priorities designed to reaffirm CAO's position as a leading provider of shared services for the Irish higher education sector.

Mar Chathaoirleach ar an Bhord Stiúrthóirí, táim ag tnúth le tacafacht a thabhairt do bhainistíocht agus d'fhoireann CAO agus an Plean seo a chur i bhfeidhm".

Professor Pól Ó Dochartaigh, MRIA
Chairman, Central Applications Office

The CAO has launched the *Central Applications Office Strategic Plan 2018 - 2023*.

For the full version of the *Strategic Plan* please go to www.cao.ie and click on '**About CAO**'. ↗

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the CAO's Strategic Plan is to guide the Central Applications Office (CAO) through the major developments in the changing higher education landscape to 2023. The Plan builds on the strategic objectives of its predecessor, the *Central Applications Office 5 Year Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017*.

This *Executive Summary* has been prepared to provide a brief overview of the strategic planning process, and the priorities emerging from the plan. **The full plan is available in the About Us section, on www.cao.ie.**

The *Central Applications Office Strategic Plan 2018–2023* explores the challenges and opportunities facing the company. It also sets out the organisation's key priorities to ensure continued success as a shared service provider for the Irish higher education sector.

Founded in the mid-1970s, the CAO is widely regarded as the principal working example of shared services within the higher education sector in Ireland. With just under 15,000 applicants, five participating institutions and 69 courses on offer in 1977, the organisation experienced significant growth over a 40 year period with over 81,000 applicants, 39 institutions and 1,323 courses on offer in 2017. The primary role of the CAO has traditionally been the processing of applications for first-year admission to a range of undergraduate courses in the Republic of Ireland; there is potential for delivering further services employing this model.

The CAO has a permanent staff of 13, and up to 35 seasonal staff are engaged each year to deal with peaks in clerical work. The organisation is governed by a board of directors drawn from the membership, which is representative of the higher education sector.

STAKEHOLDERS

Strong stakeholder relationships have been essential in helping CAO to continually deliver on its mission and values for over 40 years. Figure 1.1. provides a summary of these different stakeholders.

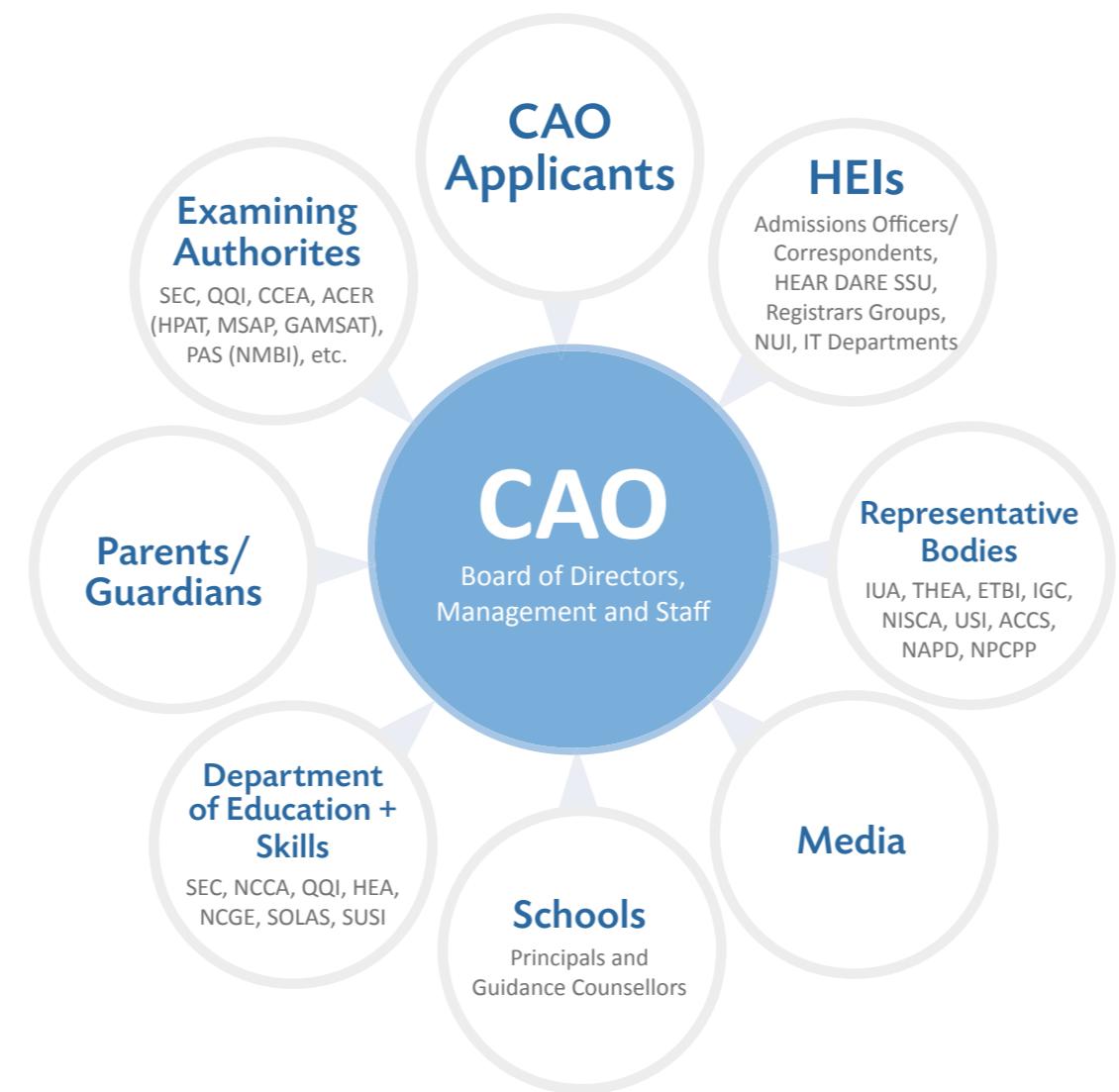
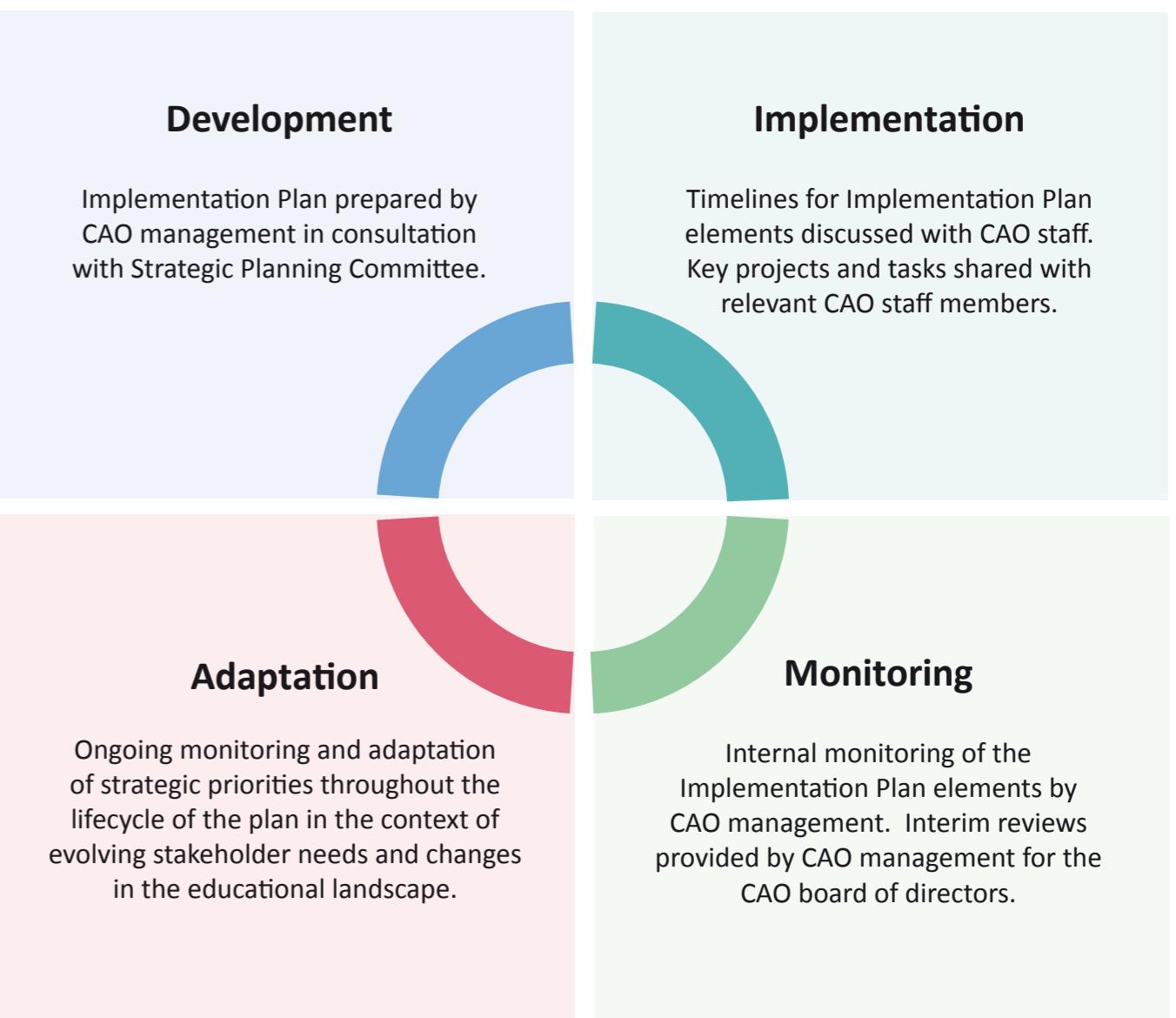


Figure 1.1. Summary of CAO Stakeholders

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A detailed Implementation Plan will be prepared by CAO management in consultation with the Strategic Planning Committee. The implementation and internal monitoring of this plan will be the responsibility of CAO management.



CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The CAO has successfully completed a strategic cycle 2013 to 2017 and has accordingly created internal capabilities to take greater control and ownership of the next strategic plan. For this strategic plan, the company decided to draw upon the knowledge base within the CAO staff, as well as feedback from admissions officers. Recommendations were also sought from Registrars Groups and other key stakeholders including the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, the Union of Students in Ireland, the Department of Education & Skills, and the State Examinations Commission.

Progress reports will be provided by management to the CAO board of directors. During the lifecycle of this plan it is expected that the Implementation Plan will evolve in line with changes to the landscape and changing stakeholder needs.