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 tnuadhacht a bhainistíocht agus an Peann seo a thuilleadh.

Professor Pól Ó Dochartaigh, MRIA
Chairman, Central Applications Office
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.

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.

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.

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