

Higher Education Authority

Report of the 370th Meeting held on 27th January 2015, in Brooklawn House, Dublin 4.

Present ¹ Mr. Bahram Bekhradnia
Mr. Brendan Byrne (items 1-12)
Dr. Mary Canning
Professor Maeve Conrick
Mr. John Dolan
Mr. Eamonn Grennan
Ms Siobhan Harkin
Professor Eileen Harkin-Jones
Ms Laura Harmon (items 1-12)
Mr. John Hennessy, Chairman
Dr. Maria Meehan
Dr. Jim Mountjoy (items 1-10, 12)
Mr. Gordon Ryan
Professor Anthony Staines
Mr. Declan Walsh (items 1-4, 6, 8, 12)

Apology: Mr. Paddy Cosgrave
Dr. Stephen Kinsella
Dr. Brian Thornes
Professor Marijk van der Wende

In attendance: Mr. Tom Boland (items 2-14)
Mr. Padraic Mellett (items 2-14)
Mr. Fergal Costello (items 2-4, 6)
Mr. Muiris O'Connor (items 5, 12, 14)
Dr. Eucharia Meehan (item 5)
Ms Nicki O'Connor (item 5)
Ms Louise Sherry (item 6)
Dr. Mary-Liz Trant (item 7)
Mr. Malcolm Byrne (item 8)
Ms Caitriona Ryan (item 11)
Ms Orla Christle (item 11)
Mr. Kevin Forkan (item 11)

1. Members only session

1.1 Members raised the quality of board documentation, the structure and composition of documents, the short timeframe in issuing some papers, and the lack of document control procedures. Important papers sometimes lacked sufficient clarity of thought, perspective and context. Ms Harkin will work with Mr. Mellett to resolve the matter.

¹ Members present for all items unless otherwise indicated. The meeting concluded at 4.30pm

Succession Planning and Upskilling: The Board sought to have the succession of senior management and upskilling made more visible for the board.

1.2 The Board identified a number of priorities for 2015 as follows;

- 1) Funding, a timely strategy to address the vulnerable institutions – this had been the subject of extensive discussion at the Board’s meeting on strategy held on 26th January, formalisation of communication between institutions and controller in HEA, review of RGAM;
- 2) An agreed cluster vision, strategy and governance framework;
- 3) Quality, and relationship with QQI;
- 4) Relationship, role and interdependencies between DES/C&AG/HEA;
- 5) Long term scenario setting and impact trends in higher education over the next 5-10 years;
- 6) Risks to reputation, gender equity, PAC;
- 7) TU Process at all stages;
- 8) Governance of institutions;
- 9) Research Strategy;
- 10) Communications Strategy.

2. Reports of meetings held 30th September 2014, 10th October and follow-up actions

Decision: The minutes were approved subject to some amendments. The amended decision in relation to the Cork/Tralee IT plan for a TU is as follows -

“The HEA will write to the MTU. In doing so, the role of the HEA in the process, as clarified by the Minister will be set out - in particular the fact that the report of the expert panel is the decision in stage 3, with the HEA exercising no role other than to manage the process. The letter will set out the issues of concern to the HEA, flagging considerations for Stage 4 – all of which are covered by existing criteria.

- *The HEA will write to the Minister, copying her with the letter to the MTU.*
- *These letters will be subject to consultation with members of the Board. A group of members will meet on 4 December to give their views on the content of the letters. Other members may give views by e-mail.*

This decision was arrived at following clarification provided by the Minister for Education and Skills as to the role of the HEA in Stage 3 of the TU Process and given the legal position as clarified at the meeting. It followed lengthy and detailed discussion revolving principally around the role of the Board and the process itself with serious reservations expressed by most members.”

3. Matters Arising & Follow-up actions

3.1 In relation the Cork/Tralee IT plan for TU and the letters sent to the Minister and the consortium, the following members requested that it be formally recorded that, in their view, the letters did not adequately reflect the concerns and reservations they had about the MTU proposal particularly about the absence of a long term sustainability analysis, a coherent proposed governance framework and a credible plan, operational or financial, upon which to advance to the next

stage – Dr. Mary Canning, Professor Maeve Conrick, Dr. Maria Meehan, Professor Eileen Harkin-Jones and Professor Marijk van der Wende.

3.2 The legal advice provided relating to Stage 2 of the TU process will be circulated.

4. Report of the Chief Executive

4.1 Professor Tom Collins has agreed to chair the working group on student engagement. Nominations from the IUA and IoTI are awaited. The HEA will provide executive support to the working group which is expected to complete its work by mid-2015.

4.2 A report on the Student Access Fund was circulated at the meeting.

4.3 The CEO briefed members on a new apprenticeship call. The deadline for applications was mid-March with the Minister expected to make an announcement of places provided in June. The call was being led by SOLAS who are working in partnership with the HEA. The range of apprenticeships to be offered would extend from further-education to higher-education, similar to the German model. A decision has not been taken as to which of the traditional apprenticeship programmes would continue to be offered in the IoTs.

4.4 The CEO updated members on the strategic dialogue process and the TU process. An issue that requires particular attention for future iterations of the process is the extent to which the Board would have a direct engagement.

Decision: It was agreed that the Board would review how it engages with the TU process. The Executive will develop operational procedures for the TU process.

4.5 Members were briefed on the C&AG review of the HEA's governance role. To date there has been one scoping meeting with the C&AG. This review has the potential to ensure better understanding on the part of the C&AG and the Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) of the HEA's governance role. The CEO noted that the Board had undertaken a review of the HEA's governance and regulatory role at the September meeting. He will keep the Board advised of developments and any further changes emerging from the review. The importance of engaging the DES in this exercise was raised, to ensure a common understanding between the HEA and the DES as to the HEA's role. The HEA should also highlight the importance of HEI autonomy.

Decision: The Executive will prepare for the March meeting a paper setting out the respective roles of the HEA, DES and C&AG in relation to governance oversight. It was also agreed to give members a copy of the document provided by the HEA to the C&AG together with the minutes of the inaugural meeting with the C&AG.

4.6 The proposed 2015 HEA-DES SLA was raised. The CEO advised members that the agreement largely reflects the 2015 work plan approved by the Board last December.

Decision: The Executive noted a number of amendments proposed by members and indicated these would be discussed with the DES.

4.7 The Board discussed the importance of ensuring that there was a shared and widely held understanding of its vision and strategy for regional clusters, as well as clear governance arrangements. The CEO indicated that a paper on the future strategic development of the clusters would be prepared for the Board. The paper will address the question how performance funding will impact on cluster development.

Decision: The Executive will prepare for the March meeting a paper for the Board which will present the Mission, Vision and Strategy for Regional Clusters which will set out the strategic direction for the next 5 - 10 years. These will include a set of strategic objectives which will embrace current short term and more medium term objectives so that there can be a common perspective on Clusters

4.8 Members raised the ICT information campaign and at whom it was targeted. Members were advised that the aim was to influence 2015 CAO applicants. The importance of involving career guidance staff in this campaign was noted.

4.9 The reporting of institutional matters of concern to the Board was raised.

Decision: It was agreed that there would be a new standing section in the CEO's report which would outline any potential governance or funding risks in the HEIs.

4.10 The CEO advised members that the question of a review of equality policies in the HEIs is under consideration by the Executive. Members were advised that NUIG has written to the HEA and IUA proposing that the Irish Human Rights Commission carry out a review.

Decision: The Executive will prepare for consideration by the Board proposals for a review of equality policies and their implementation in the HEIs.

4.11 Members noted that a new Springboard call has issued. Having regard to improvements in the unemployment numbers, it may be timely to consider if the scheme should be amended. The CEO undertook to have this matter pursued.

5. Report of the Standing Committee on Research and Graduate Education. New National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation

5.1 Mr. O'Connor presented the Committee's report noting that the main agenda item was the new National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation. He also referred to the documentation included in the papers issued for the HEA strategy meeting. Members were advised that the HEA and Irish Research Council worked closely with the DES in preparing a paper in response to a background document issued by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (D/JEI) on 19th December. Both IUA and IoTI were also consulted. The Committee had considered the draft paper and their views were incorporated in the document

issued by DES to D/JEI on 16th January. The paper welcomed the development of a new SSTI. However, it highlighted the need for a clearer understanding of the international environment and the need to recognise the importance of the human capital dimension in research and innovation. While recognising the need for prioritisation, the DES/HEA/IRC paper highlighted the importance of having a vibrant research base so as to allow for inter-disciplinary research and future adaptations to prioritisation.

5.2 The DES/HEA held a bilateral meeting with D/JEI in advance of the IDC meeting. At the IDC meeting itself, a number of other Departments had reservations about the D/JEI approach. D/JEI reported that it was now working on a revised background document and developing a wider scoping document. Mr. O'Connor indicated that the HEA and IRC will continue to engage with the DES, IUA and IoTI on the development of the SSTI. The Executive was also developing a paper on human capital development at the request of the Research and Graduate Education Committee. Dr. Meehan indicated that the IRC was working on a new publication which would focus on the contribution of research in the humanities and social sciences.

5.3 Members welcomed the approach taken by the HEA/IRC to date and made the following points;

- The risk of the D/JEI approach was that the focus would be just on applied research in prioritised areas to the disadvantage of curiosity driven research.
- The HEA has a legitimate role to play in research and it needs to play a proactive and supportive role in the development of a new strategy.

Decision: Members approved the report of the Committee's report.

6. Report of Finance Committee. 2015 Recurrent Grant Allocation

6.1 Mr. Costello presented on the documentation before the Board. Subsequent to the Finance Committee meetings held on 4th and 11th December, the HEA was notified of the 2015 grant allocation. The proposed allocation is set out in memorandum F 1/15 and has been circulated to the Committee. He noted that the significant difference in the fee levels between the university/colleges sector and the IoT sector has resulted in a difference in the bottom-line core grant between the two sectors. He stressed there was no reallocation of resources between the two sectors.

6.2 Members made the following points;

- The risk that an increase in the student contribution would increase in unpaid fees which will have to be written-off as bad debts? Mr. Costello indicated a number of institutions have reported an increase in bad debts, with some institutions introducing new mechanisms to make it easier for students to pay.
- The difference in the fee levels between the two sectors. Mr. Costello noted that the HEA decided last year to equalise fees between levels 6/7 and 8 to eliminate any incentives institutes had towards enrolling more level 8

students. The Executive has submitted to the DES a proposal to review the fee structure in the IoTs.

- The cut in the core grant for the universities appears to be greater than the 1% previously signalled by DES and D/PER. Members were advised that this was due to the impact of additional students which has resulted in the need to increase provision for the grant in lieu of fees.
- Having regard to the funding being provided to An Cheím, could savings be expected arising from its establishment as a company under HEAnet Ltd. The importance of achieving value for money was noted. Mr. Costello undertook to revert back with a note on the merger. He noted that it has not yet taken place but that it was imminent. Mr. Roche indicated that he reviewed the cost base of An Cheím a number of years ago and did not find any issues of concern.
- Members agreed on the importance of ensuring that top-slice allocations are used effectively. It was noted that these included a number of historical top-slices, allocation towards particular skills/disciplinary provision and some which were determined by the DES. The €4.7m allocated for the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy will be the subject of further discussions with the DES but is likely to be allocated to those institutions who run primary education programmes.
- Members were advised that the increase in the allocation for e-journals in the Universities came at the request of the IUA and followed a decision by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation to cease supporting this initiative. While provision is being made for the full cost, the HEA has not conceded the principle that the full cost should be carried by HEA funding.
- Mr. Costello clarified that the €5m provision for pensions related just to the costs arising from the unfunded schemes in UL, DCU, and the colleges. There was a new sub-head in the Book of Estimates to meet the liabilities of the closed universities funded schemes.
- It was confirmed that no decisions have been made on the allocation of €4m set aside for system development. The Executive will revert back with proposals in March.

Decision: Members approved the reports of the Finance Committee and the 2015 recurrent grant allocations as set out in memorandum F1/15. The Executive will continue to engage with the D/JEI in relation to the funding of e-journals.

7. Draft Plan on Enterprise Engagement in Higher Education 2015-17

7.1 Dr. Trant presented this item. The objective was to link enterprise engagement to the objectives of the national strategy and develop links with employers so as to ensure that the system is developing graduates with the required skills.

7.2 Members welcomed the draft plan and made the following observations;

- Consideration should be given to developing a protocol which would address the relationship between the academic and the HEI in the area of innovation and a protocol which would outline what a local business could expect from a HEI.
- It was noted that activity in the area of enterprise engagement was increasingly a criteria for promotion.

- The language in the plan should avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Some institutions, particularly the IoTs, can already point to good performance in this domain. This could be addressed through framing the consultation document with reference to good practice already in place.
- Some of the actions may be difficult to measure.
- This initiative may take time before the benefits emerge, there will need to be ongoing persuasion and dialogue.
- The risk that the Enterprise Engagement Plan might add to the burdens of HEIs was noted. In this regard it would help if the HEA made it clear that it was seeking to support HEIs in this key results area and providing a framework which they may use as part of their compacts.
- Consideration should be given to exploring whether there was scope for involving student unions in some of the actions.

Decision: It was agreed that these observations would be incorporated into the plan which will then be circulated to stakeholders for their observations.

8. HEA Communications Strategy

8.1 Mr. Martin Mackin from Q4 consultants made a short presentation on the stakeholder audit carried out by his firm. His presentation addressed the following;

- Process – Q4 had conversations in person or by ‘phone with 38 stakeholders. All were engaged with the process and had opinions on the HEA and higher education.
- Key findings – there is a lack of clarity over what the HEA’s key mission should be. The stakeholders in general had a positive image of the HEA, one issue which surfaced in the discussions was the importance of funding. The overall conclusion was that the HEA needs to construct a much more coherent message.

8.2 Members raised the following issues;

- The HEA’s key message? Mr. Mackin suggested that there needs to be absolute agreement across the Board and Executive as to the value of higher education. In reply to a question he confirmed that none of the stakeholders questioned the value of higher education, but some had only a vague appreciation of its benefits.
- Members noted that the HEA is recognised as having considerable data on higher education. Mr. Mackin agreed and suggested that the challenge for the HEA was to decide how it could use this data to carve a strategy.

8.3 After Mr. Mackin left members considered the draft communications strategy presented by Mr. Byrne. Members made the following points;

- The Q4 presentation and the slides circulated with the Board papers were very unsatisfactory.
- The HEA should update its website - while there is a lot of material on the site it can be difficult to find what is required.
- Clarity was sought as to what the key message of the HEA should be. Q4 seem to suggest that it should be about the value of higher education. Should

it be that the HEA is the authentic voice of higher education? The HEA has been given a mandate and the HEA's communications strategy should aim to support implementation of the strategy and earn the respect of other stakeholders. If the HEA is seen as a trustworthy body, an appreciation for higher education should follow from that.

- The HEA will earn respect through clarity of its message which is in turn backed up by hard facts.

Decision: The CEO agreed to address the inadequacy of the stakeholder audit report. He also agreed to revert back to the Board with a shorter, more focused communications strategy. The Executive will review the HEA's website.

9. HEA Administration Budget – 2014 draft outturn and 2015 budget

9.1 Mr. Mellett presented the 2014 outturn and 2015 budget. The 2014 outturn was better than what was projected in the 2014 budget. The outturn remains draft and a clearer picture will emerge when the 2014 draft accounts are finalised for audit in March. The grant for 2015 shows a slight drop on the 2014 allocation despite the fact that the HEA will have to meet the full year cost of the recently sanctioned posts. The HEA's budget for 2015 has been helped by the significant reduction in office service charges and the agreement of the HEA's landlord to reduce the rent, a further reduction from the figure outlined in memorandum A 6/15. The anticipated budget outturn will see the HEA's accumulated surplus fall to c €83,000. It will be necessary accordingly for the HEA to secure an increase in its 2016 grant to reflect the fact that it has virtually eliminated its accumulated surplus.

9.2 Members welcomed the reduction in rent and raised the following issues;

- An alternative premises with a lower rent. Mr. Mellett indicated that the OPW had been consulted on the rent levels for property in this part of the city. The OPW did not anticipate the HEA being able to secure a reduction in rent given market trends. The CEO accepted that the HEA could have considered moving offices to a new location. There were however considerable once-off costs associated with moving and the HEA was not currently in a position to meet such costs.
- The HEA should look at its investment in ICT given the fact that its ICT fixed assets now appear to have been largely depreciated. Mr. Mellett said this would be looked at within the constraints of a limited budget for capital items.
- The HEA should consider hosting conferences, such as the forward look seminars, in the HEIs.
- It was important that the HEA ensured that its PR expenditure on Springboard had the required impact.

Decision: Members noted the 2014 draft outturn and approved the 2015 budget.

10. Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education – Consultation Paper

10.1 The CEO advised members that the paper was released by the Expert Group only on 23rd January – hence the relatively late delivery to members. It was important that the Board developed a meaningful way of engaging with the

process, especially when it turns to addressing potential options for funding later in the year. A possible approach could be a dedicated Task Force of members for a short period. The Expert Group has now set out a work plan, with the first consultation session on 30th January. The HEA was asked to nominate three Board members – Professor Conrick, Dr. Mountjoy and Mr. Ryan have agreed to attend. Ms Harmon will also attend in her capacity as USI President. The other consultation events, which are of special interest to the Board, are those dealing with efficiencies and long term funding options.

Decision: Members noted the consultation paper, noting that it builds on work previously undertaken by the HEA, and agreed to consider further how it will engage in the process.

11 National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19

11.1 Ms Ryan made a presentation which focused on the following;

- Background to new plan – previous plan, equity of access is a priority area in the System Performance Framework, access objectives in the HEIs compacts and regional cluster objectives
- Process of development for this draft plan – a partnership approach was taken with the DES. Consultation paper issued August 2014 which led to 57 submissions/meetings with stakeholders.
- Issues emerging from consultation process – support for a whole of education access strategy, need to take account of communities perspectives, post entry support, funding.
- Seven priority areas.
- Supporting actions – more mainstreaming through involvement of faculty, role of regional clusters, developing a standard FE entry route, early mentoring and guidance, role of National Teaching and Learning Forum
- Six target groups – target socio-economic groups, mature students, people with disabilities, part-time and flexible learners, FETAC award holders, Irish travellers.
- Some of the targets could be more ambitious, other actions may take time to achieve but have the potential to make a big impact.
- Making it happen through interrogation of objectives and targets in compacts and undertaking a mid-term review
- Finalising the plan at the March meeting, taking into account members' comments and further consultation with the Access Advisory Group and DES.

11.2 The following issues were raised;

- The question of funding and costs including funding for further education students, accommodation costs. The changes in how non-adjacent grants are defined has had a negative impact on access.
- There is still considerable progress to be made, having regard to the HEA's remit under its enabling Act to promote the democratisation of higher education. Ireland may well have to account in future for the lack of higher education access opportunities for students with disabilities. The opportunity

cost of not enabling students with disabilities to access higher education could be considerable.

- The needs of students with sensory disabilities vary considerably.
- In relation to a whole of education approach, due regard has to be taken of other factors including cost, housing and transport.
- Consideration should be given to attempting to identify the potential demand in the case of some of the target groups.
- Access should not be an optional extra left just to Access Officers to deal with. HEI Governing Bodies and senior management have a role to play including ensuring that adequate resources were made available.
- The extent to which the QQI framework facilitates progression from further education.
- The need for better mentoring and guidance - many students select the wrong course.
- The document would benefit from having sharper language which was free from jargon. Some of the actions need to be harder hitting and should be linked to the actual plan.
- Reference was made to the UK report “Access to what?” It was noted that few access students gain entry to the high point and professional courses.
- It would be helpful if a review of the lessons learned and achievements from the first two plans was undertaken.

Decision: Members agreed to the next steps outlined in memorandum A 8/15.

12. Presentation from National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

12.1 Mr. O'Connor introduced this item noting that the HEA has concluded an MoU with the Forum which provides for an annual presentation. This was an opportunity for the Forum to outline how the funding provided is being used. Professor Sarah Moore, Chair and Dr. Terry Maguire, Director of the Forum noted the importance of an entity such as the Forum demonstrating the value for money being achieved. The Forum has been able to take over a number of activities previously carried out at institutional level but more needs to be done. The presentation focused on activities under the Forum's work plan;

- Partnership and collaboration in teaching and learning – the Forum is supporting subject groups and is now reaching out to senior management/Heads of Departments in the HEIs.
- Professional development – progress is being made on the development of a framework - a pilot framework issued last year. It is hoped that professional development activities can be driven through the regional networks.
- Learning impact awards. The process in place is very robust, student led but facilitated by the Forum. 53 awards were made in 2014. The next phase will be to identify teaching experts who will be benchmarked internationally.
- Scholarship in teaching and learning. The Forum was collaborating with the IRC in progressing this action. Seven collaborative projects have been identified, four of these were informed by suggestions from the HEA Board.

- Building digital capacity – a preliminary digital roadmap issued in May 2014. Following a call issued in 2014, 10 projects were supported. A further call will issue in February 2015 with awards to be made in June.
- Strategic priorities for 2015 includes an impact analysis review and developing links with Europe

12.2 Issues raised by members;

- It was noted that the bulk of learning impact awardees did not hold a PhD. This seems to go against the trend to have more academic staff with a PhD. Professor Moore indicated that the academic qualifications of an academic did not appear to be of relevance to students.
- The characteristics of the learning heroes. Professor Moore noted that students highlighted the fact that the heroes engaged with their students and listened to their needs. She suggested that the emotional aspects of teaching should not be ignored. Dr. Maguire indicated the three words which featured most prominently were – care, help and time.
- Have any lessons being learned in relation to work on the development of a professional development framework? Dr. Maguire indicated that the Forum plans to publish a report on this - she noted there was a considerable amount of non-accredited CPD.
- Research led teaching – Professor Moore pointed out that research led teaching was important. Students want their teachers to be informed.

Decision: Members thanked the Forum for the presentation and noted the excellent progress made in implementing its work plan.

13. Presentation from HEAnet Ltd.

13.1 Item deferred to the March meeting.

14. Working Paper Series

14.1 The CEO introduced this item. The intention was to develop a platform for thinkers in higher education. This would entail the publication of a series of policy papers. A good benchmark was the work of the Higher Education Policy Institute in England. The initial paper drafted by Professor Hazelkorn is broader and accordingly longer than the papers which will follow – the intention being that it would provide a baseline. The Forward Look seminars may provide other themes. A number of other countries such as Netherlands and Finland publish a similar series.

14.2 The following issues were raised;

- The use of the HEA logo on the paper?
- The paper should indicate more prominently that the views did not represent those of the HEA.
- Peer review
- Identify the target audience for the series.

- The paper might benefit from being split into a number of shorter papers.
- The question of oversight in the form of an editorial board.

Decision: It was agreed that the Executive would review the process for overseeing the paper series before publishing papers.

15. Any other business

15.1 It was confirmed that the Athena Swan launch will take place on 5th February. An invitation will issue to all members.

Next Meeting

Tuesday 24th March, Brooklawn House.

Padraic Mellett
Secretary to the Board
3rd February 2015