

Higher Education Authority

Report of the 374th Meeting held on 29th September and 6th October 2015, in Brooklawn House, Dublin 4.

- Present: ¹
- Mr. Brendan Byrne (items 1-13)
 - Dr. Mary Canning (items 1-22)
 - Professor Maeve Conrick (items 1-13)
 - Mr. Kevin Donoghue (items 14-22)
 - Mr. Eamonn Grennan (items 1-22)
 - Ms Siobhán Harkin (items 1-10, 14-22)
 - Professor Eileen Harkin-Jones (items 1-17)
 - Mr. John Hennessy, Chairman (items 1-22)
 - Dr. Stephen Kinsella (items 15-22)
 - Dr. Maria Meehan (items 3-13)
 - Mr. Gordon Ryan (items 1-9, 14-22)
 - Professor Anthony Staines (items 1-22)
 - Mr. Declan Walsh (items 1-5, 14-17)
- Apology:
- Mr. Bahram Bekhradnia
 - Mr. John Dolan
 - Dr. Jim Mountjoy
 - Dr. Brian Thornes
- In attendance:
- Mr. Tom Boland (items 2-22)
 - Mr. Andrew Brownlee (items 2-5, 7-9, 11-22)
 - Mr. Fergal Costello (items 2-5, 6, 8, 14-19)
 - Mr. Padraic Mellett (items 2-22)
 - Mr. Muiris O'Connor (items 5, 7, 15, 16, 17)
 - Dr. Gemma Irvine (items 5)
 - Mr. Tim Conlon (items 6, 14, 19)
 - Ms Sarah Fitzgerald (items 6, 14, 19)
 - Ms Nicki O'Connor (items 7,17)
 - Mr. Peter Brown (item 17)
 - Dr. Eavan O'Brien (item 17)
 - Mr. Damien Kilgannon (items 20-21)

Items 1-13 were addressed on 29th September
Items 14 – 20 were addressed on 6th October

¹ Members present for all items unless otherwise indicated.

1. Members only session

1.1 Issues discussed included;

- a. Reputation of the HEA arising from recent events – PAC meeting, WIT/IT Carlow engagement and resignation of HEA consultant
- b. Minutes of meetings – while accurate, not always reflecting the tone of the meeting
- c. UCC unauthorised allowances
- d. Appointment by HEA of consultants
- e. Risk of two tier communication in members expressing views
- f. CEO Succession Planning

It was agreed to consider items a-d further under the CEO's report.

1.2 The Board agreed the setting up of a Task Force to oversee the search, selection and appointment of a new CEO. The agreed task force will be formed from the Chairpersons of the Audit, Policy and Planning, System Development and Performance Management Committees, the Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary to the Board.

1.3 Members considered recent e-mail correspondence from a member in relation to the CIT land purchase. The Chair confirmed that Board members must carry out their functions in accordance with the legislative provisions and good governance practice, and that there cannot be a two tier communication in relation to members expressing views. The nature of the correspondence would be raised next time the member concerned was in attendance.

2. Report of meeting held 26th May and follow-up actions

Decision: The minutes were approved.

3. Matters Arising & Follow-up actions

3.1 Item 4.5 – Members were advised that GMIT has provided assurances to the HEA that its Governing Body has been fully briefed on developments relating to legal costs incurred investigating allegations of plagiarism. The Institute committed to addressing all outstanding issues.

4. Report of the Chief Executive

- 4.1 THES Rankings - The CEO briefed members on a confidential basis on how Irish institutions performed in the latest THES rankings survey to be published on 30th September.
- 4.2 Expert Group on Funding - The CEO advised members that the Expert Group was meeting on Thursday, 1st October. The group would be holding a consultation meeting later in October on funding options. Members will be advised once the date has been finalised. While a significant body of work remains to be done, the chair of the group is committed to finalising the report by the end of the year. It is understood that the report will outline various funding options and the pros and cons associated with these.
- 4.3 Board and Committee reports - The Chair raised concerns members had in relation to the accuracy of minutes. In particular there were concerns with the reports of two of the standing committees. While the actual content was correct, there was a concern over issues which were omitted. The minutes did not always adequately reflect the concerns of members in relation to particular issues and in particular there was a failure to reflect the tone of the discussion which it was important to convey. The CEO stated that the minutes of all meetings of the Board and Standing Committees are issued in advance for input/correction by members. The Executive has always been willing to amend minutes where issues were raised. This was the first time that the matter of the tone of the minutes not reflecting the tone of the discussions had arisen. The Executive would have regard to this in drafting future minutes.
- 4.4 UCC allowances (Mr. Walsh absented himself from this item) – The CEO advised members that the DES is still in dialogue with UCC. While the precise facts remain to be finalised, it would appear that this matter is no longer as serious as previously thought. Most of the allowances would appear to be in line with practice elsewhere in the public service. Members noted the CEO’s briefing but were concerned with the reputational risk both to the HEA and the system that there could be a perception that some universities continue to pay unauthorised allowances. The Executive will request the DES to clarify whether these allowances were subject to the appropriate tax deductions.
- 4.5 Process for engagement of external consultants² – Harwyn Ltd., Mr. T. S. Roche, and Professor Ellen Hazelkorn – The CEO outlined the background to the engagement of Harwyn Ltd. The HEA had made a submission to the DES seeking additional posts having regard to its increased responsibilities under the National

² All members of the Executive except the CEO and Secretary to the Board left for the discussion on external consultants

Strategy for Higher Education. It emerged from discussions between the DES and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (D/PER) that there was a concern that the HEA Executive did not have adequate resources to oversee the major programme of change management underway in higher education. Mr. Pat Harvey, t/a Harwyn Ltd., was proposed by the DES having regard to his significant change management experience in the health sector. The HEA subsequently procured the services of Harwyn Ltd. for the year 2014 following a tender placed on e-tenders. This was renewed in 2015. Once the CEO became aware of Mr. Harvey's tax settlement it was agreed that the arrangements between Harwyn Ltd. and the HEA would be terminated with immediate effect. The CEO advised members that the HEA had at all stages a valid tax clearance certificate for Harwyn Ltd. He also confirmed that no payment was made to Harwyn Ltd. in respect of the remainder of the contract. He indicated that the duties which Mr. Harvey had been undertaking would now be absorbed by other members of the Executive, primarily Mr. Costello.

4.6 In outlining the contractual arrangements for consultants the CEO stressed his objective of ensuring the HEA was fully compliant with public procurement requirements. Having regard to the experience with Harwyn Ltd., he would in future make it a requirement that consultants trading as part of a limited company were tax compliant both as an individual and at company level.

4.7 The CEO advised members that Mr. Roche continues to be engaged as a management accountant as the HEA has not received sanction to recruit his replacement. The HEA had a clear succession plan for the post of Management Accountant which would see Mr. Roche work in tandem with his successor for a six month period. Given Mr. Roche's extensive knowledge of the higher education system, ESF/ERDF audit requirements, and the increased importance of ensuring HEIs adhere to the highest standards of governance, there is a strong case for engaging Mr. Roche for a longer period. This however would be a matter for the new CEO to determine. He assured members that the HEA had other members of staff who have detailed knowledge of aspects of the work Mr. Roche was involved in such as ERDF/ESF audits and the RGAM. Members requested the Executive to expedite the process for filling this post and other senior management vacancies. The CEO updated members on the current position in relation to the filling of vacancies noting that the DES has not yet secured delegated sanction from D/PER for the filling of posts in its agencies.

4.8 The CEO briefed members on the arrangements with Professor Hazelkorn (Ms Harkin absented herself for the discussion on this item), the process under which her services were acquired, her date of retirement from DIT, her role internationally and the fact that the 20% reemployment provision that applies in respect of academic reappointments was not relevant in this case.

4.9 PAC Meeting – The CEO advised members that the main areas discussed were the GMIT legal costs arising from plagiarism allegations, the TU for the South-East, the HEA’s own accounts, and WIT campus companies. He outlined the background to the GMIT case noting the key problem was the Institute’s failure to cap legal costs. The chair of the PAC was critical of the HEA over its failure to become aware of the facts sooner. Members were advised that all institutions were now required to notify the HEA should they incur significant costs associated with investigations. In relation to the TU for the South-East, he had advised the PAC that the HEA could not play an active role in assisting the two institutes merge and secure TU status given its advisory role in assessing TU applications. The PAC sought additional details in relation to HEA expenditure and consultancy and travel and subsistence. Other issues raised were the vulnerable institutions, transitions and points and the UL Protected Disclosures case.

4.10 WIT-IT Carlow – The CEO outlined the background to Mr. Michael Kelly’s report. He noted there was strong regional stakeholder support for a TU. Both institutes have different strengths but do not have a history of engagement with each other. Following on from Mr. Kelly’s report, Ms Jane Williams has been appointed by the DES to facilitate the development of good working relationships between the two institutes.

4.11 Members expressed reservations as to the feasibility of a WIT- IT Carlow merger. The fact that there was a need for a facilitator at this stage was not encouraging. The necessity of gaining co-operation below top management in both institutes was noted. Concern was also expressed over the potential impact decisions being taken by IoTs in pursuit of TU status were having on quality - in particular the capacity of many of the institutes to accommodate an increase in PhD students was noted.

4.14 Members were advised that a sum of €350m has been provided for the sector under the capital development fund. Details will be provided as they become available.

5. Review of Gender Equality in the Higher Education Sector

5.1 The chair welcomed Ms Máire Geoghegan Quinn and thanked her for agreeing to chair the Gender Equality Review Group. Ms Geoghegan Quinn thanked the Board for its confidence in her, she and her fellow group members were fully committed to producing a report which would be provocative and contain serious recommendations. Her meeting today was the first of a series of engagements with stakeholders which included institutional heads, DES, trade union representatives and the Chief Scientific Adviser. She would like to hear from the

Board the reasons why they felt it necessary to carry out this review and whether there were any specific questions they would like the review group put to the HEIs.

5.2 Members raised the following issues;

- Gender equality at all leadership positions, not just academic positions. The lack of female Professors and Associate Professors contributed to the lack of female Heads of Schools/Departments. These positions play a critical role in setting the tone when it comes to gender equality. The position in the IoTs was particularly acute with some Departments being very male dominated.
- The QQI, in HEI reviews at Department/support unit level, to include gender equality as part of their self-evaluation.
- The challenge of unconscious bias.
- Lessons to be learned from the first cycle of Athena Swann reviews.
- Recognition, such as a reduction in administrative duties, should be given to those women who achieve leadership positions. They are often expected to serve on multiple committees.
- The role of culture was critical, changing culture can take time and must be driven from the top.
- The pursuit of high rankings is not conducive to family friendly work policies. It was noted, however, that many women without families are not promoted.
- Promotion criteria need to be examined. The way a promotion notice is drafted can encourage or discourage female applicants.
- The provision of mentoring can help encourage females to put themselves forward for promotion.
- There are a number of leadership traits which can be off-putting to females.
- Quotas may have a role to play but would not in themselves fully address gender equality. There would be practical difficulties when it comes to filling different prescribed positions on governing bodies.

5.3 Members suggested that the following specific questions be put to the Presidents;

- Would they subscribe to a common code of practice for recruitment?
- How would they implement recommended changes?
- What benefits have they experienced from participating in the Athena Swann initiative?
- Both UCD and UCC participate in an Australian initiative to promote more female leaders. Both universities should be asked whether their participation has proven effective.

5.4 Members welcomed the appointment of Ms Geoghegan Quinn as chair of the review group and complimented the Executive on their work to date. The CEO

advised members that Dr. Gemma Irvine has been assigned to head the review group secretariat.

6. Report of the System Development and Performance Management Committee

6.1 Mr. Costello briefed members on the strategic dialogue process noting that the HEA has met 24 of the 26 HEIs. He confirmed that there was evidence of the impact of the process beginning to cascade down through the institutions. The CEO indicated that 7% performance funding was at stake in 2016, while consideration was being given to a model for the additional 3% performance funding based on inter-institutional comparisons. If this proved undesirable or impractical the 3% would be added back to create a 10% performance funding element.

Decision: Members approved the revised minutes.

7. Report of the Research and Graduate Education Committee

7.1 Mr. O'Connor advised members that the RGE Committee focused on developments relating to a new SSTI. He updated members on developments since the Committee's last meeting. A draft strategy has been circulated. There was a stronger recognition of the need to develop human talent and a clear role for the Irish Research Council. There was, however, a lack of a specific commitment to additional investment and the document did not fully reflect a whole-of-government approach. As matters currently stand, the new strategy will serve as a framework for each Department to seek to secure additional funding.

7.2 Members raised the following issues;

- Current level of R&D investment is well below similar sized countries. The gap between the EU target and current Irish investment was €600m.
- Are there metrics for basic research as distinct from applied research? The Executive indicated that was not readily available.
- The extent to which investment goes towards prioritised areas. The point was made that the country needs to invest in research that addresses societal challenges in addition to economically relevant research. This included research of interest to a number of Departments such as Justice & Equality, Children & Youth Affairs and Social Protection. It was noted that the IRC has been assigned a role in this regard.

7.3 The Executive will continue to work with the IRC and DES on inputting a response to the draft strategy. Any observations members wish to make would be welcome having regard to the tight deadline. The issues to be included in the response include;

- More emphasis on societal challenges;
- Greater visibility for higher education;
- Human capital talent needs to be addressed in all chapters (largely confined to chapter 2 in the draft);
- More emphasis on inter-disciplinary research;
- The proposed streamlining of governance will be welcomed, the argument will be made that the strategy would benefit from a having a whole of government perspective.

Decision: Members approved the report.

8. Report of the Finance Committee

8.1 Mr. Brownlee presented the Committee's report. Following the meeting the Executive revised the Policy Framework for Engagement with Institutes of Technology with operating deficits. He advised members that both DkIT and GMIT were projecting balanced budgets for this year. He also updated on the funding situation in IT Tralee, WIT, NCAD and LyIT. The former three have produced plans projecting balanced budgets within three years. He advised members that he, together with the CEO, met the new chair of NCAD who outlined clear plans to improve governance in the College. He anticipates a positive response from the DES to a request from the College that its fee levels be realigned.

8.2 The position in Letterkenny remains a serious concern with the funding problem extending beyond the Killybegs Campus. The DES has been advised that the HEA is of the view that stage 2 intervention is now required. There are two ways this can be achieved - the Institute can voluntarily agree to this or the Minister can invoke her statutory powers. The Executive will shortly be meeting the Institute's President and new Secretary/Financial Controller. Members expressed serious concern over the time it was taking to resolve this matter, and while the Institute had reserves for that be assist in the short-term, this may not be the best use of them over the long term.

Decision: Members approved the report and the revised policy framework subject to members' comments.

9. Report of the Audit Committee

9.1 Professor Staines presented the report. He reported that the Committee met the senior auditor from the C&AG's office who was very complimentary of the Executive. The Committee continue to be concerned with the risks associated with land purchases and requested that this be reflected in the minutes. The

Committee would like the HEA to be firm on its accountability processes and deal firmly with institutions who fail to adhere to the required standards. The Chair noted that non-compliance with governance standards can be addressed under performance funding. The need for gender balance in membership of the Audit Committee was raised. This will be resolved when new members are appointed.

Decision: Members approved the revised report of the Audit Committee.

10. Proposal for Board Self-Evaluation

10.1 The following suggestions were made in relation to the terms of reference;

- The review should include provision for benchmarking the Board against other state boards.
- The review should include both qualitative and quantitative data.
- The review should include an exit interview for those members whose term ends in November.

Decision: Members approved the proposal subject to comments outlined above by members.

11. Future Meetings of the Authority

Decision: Members agreed the dates outlined in memorandum A 36/15.

12. Nomination to the Board of HEAnet Ltd.

Decision: Members approved the nomination of Ms Collette McKenna to the Board of HEAnet Ltd.

13. Nomination to the Board of CAO

Decision: Members approved the nomination of Mr. Michael Hannon and Dr. Derek O'Byrne to the Board of CAO.

14. Technological University Process – Connacht-Ulster Alliance Stage 1 Expression of Interest

14.1 Mr. Costello introduced memorandum A 41/15. The memorandum was prepared following consideration of the CUA submission at the last SDPM meeting and had regard to the Minister's letter of 21st July 2015. He noted that it was important that the HEA was consistent in its approach to all stage 1 expressions of interest.

14.2 Members expressed serious reservations about this proposal from both a national strategic viewpoint and the viewpoint of the current strengths of the consortium. The following specific issues were raised;

- Importance of having diversity in the system. There was a concern that many IoTs were moving in a particular direction to meet TU criteria. Others not seeking TU status may move in a similar direction so as to not be left behind. In particular there was a concern that provision at levels 6 and 7 and progression from further education will lose out.
- Given the distance the alliance was from securing TU designation criteria other ways of fostering collaboration should be considered - such as through the regional cluster. This would ensure that learners in the region had comprehensiveness of provision and pathways to meet their particular needs. The pursuit of TU status carried the potential to distract from the positive work currently underway in the cluster.
- The HEA should highlight the importance of lifelong learning to this region given expected demographic decline. Sligo IT in particular could play a lead in developing distance learning opportunities for the region.
- Concern was expressed whether the region could absorb more level 9 and 10 graduates.
- The financial difficulties of two of the consortium.
- HR matters will need to be given sufficient attention early on in any merger process to avoid over-staffing and other resource issues.
- The category of PhD best suited to the teaching needs of a TU – industrial rather than academic PhDs.

14.3 The Executive noted the potential of the regional cluster to meet the region's needs although it could be argued that the collaboration of the three CUA institutes may have contributed to the regional cluster's success to date. It was also noted that the Minister is seeking a merger of the three institutes over time. This objective is less likely to be met if the possibility of securing TU status was ruled out. There was a risk that the absence of a TU in the Connacht-Ulster could result in an outflow of some students in the region were the other regions to secure a TU.

14.4 Members were advised that the Board was required to advise, but the decision rested with the Minister. The concern as regards diversity was noted, however a precondition of TU status was the continuation of level 6 and 7 provision. The HEA in the meantime can continue to direct this through the strategic dialogue process. Mergers can assist prospective TUs achieve the necessary scale and help financial sustainability, they need however to be entered into voluntarily. The CEO acknowledged the need to maintain diversity and noted that the TU criteria

may need to be revisited before legislation is enacted - there may be an undue emphasis on certain quantitative data.

Decision: It was agreed that the Executive would draft a letter to the Minister which would reflect the positive discussion both at today's meeting and the SDPM Committee meeting. The letter should address the reservations and particular concerns raised at both meetings and outline possible options. The draft letter would be circulated to members before the end of the week.

15. Presentation by Dr. Padraig Walsh, CEO QQI

15.1 Dr. Walsh noted that his address to the Board was his first since the HEA and QQI signed an MoU earlier this year. His presentation focused on the following;

- Background and role of QQI – it was important to note that the remit of QQI covered qualifications, awards, standards, recognition and quality assurance in both the further and higher education sectors. QQI was also responsible for authorising use of the International Mark Standard. QQI works with both publicly funded and private providers.
- QQI's quality assurance work with higher education institutions. Institutional reviews have since 2010 been published on the QQI website. The format of these reports has been reviewed with institutions now outlining challenges to quality. QQI is currently consulting stakeholders on the reviews, having inherited the review processes of FETAC, HETAC and IUQB.
- Impact the financial cuts have had on quality in the HEI. Common themes which have emerged from the institutional reviews include;
 - Impact on building maintenance/equipment replacement.
 - Uncertainty over funding due to an element being performance related.
 - Deteriorating staff: student ratios.
 - Inability to fill specialist academic posts.
 - Difficulties in offering promotional posts.
 - Increased workload within the institution means academics have less time for external examination.
 - Increasing regulations in particular having regard to international students.
 - Increasing administrative burden arising from requirements from bodies such as the HEA and QQI.

Dr. Walsh acknowledged the need for increased funding. He has been impressed with the work of the Cassells group to date. There may be scope

for some course rationalisation, however this necessitates addressing complex HR problems.

- Is QQI undertaking any work on the extent to which graduates meet the needs of business? Dr. Walsh referred to the current HE Innovate review being undertaken by the OECD. One of his colleagues, Ms Barbara Kelly, had suggested the OECD include Ireland in this review. Ms Kelly has also taken an interest in the content of new programmes. Dr. Walsh suggested institutions should focus more on graduate longitudinal surveys rather than first destination surveys.
- Indicators which measure the student experience. Dr. Walsh stressed the need for clarity as to what constitutes a high quality experience and suggested the following;
 - Contact with academic staff – this went beyond simple staff-student ratios. Students need to have contact with senior academics.
 - Number of laboratory sessions
 - Quality of facilities including equipment
- The absence of objective metrics which would highlight the impact cuts were having on quality was of concern to members. While HEIs might be reluctant to publicise such material, QQI as a neutral body should be able to raise such concerns. Dr. Walsh indicated that quality metrics were discussed with the HEIs. It was up to the HEIs to measure themselves against such metrics. Some clear metrics include the following;
 - Increased reliance on part-time staff
 - Reduction in support staff numbers
 - Reduction in the number of laboratory contact hours
 - Inability to replace equipment
 - Dropping final year projects
 - Use of crude assessment methods
 - Student unfriendly timetables
 - Academics being asked to teach outside their core area
- Should minimum standards be set for entry to higher education? It was noted a number of institutions have lowered their points to expand intake. Dr. Walsh indicated that it probably was not a good idea for institutions to admit students who have attained fewer than 300 points to level 8 courses. QQI did not have the authority to set minimum entry points.

16. Presentation from SOLAS

16.1 The chair welcomed Mr. Paul O’Toole, CEO of SOLAS. Mr. O’Toole welcomed the opportunity to brief the HEA on the key structural and strategic developments facing SOLAS. His presentation focused on the following;

- Establishment of SOLAS and challenges implementing a new further education structure.
- SOLAS Strategic Plan 2014-19 which has five overarching goals;
 - Meeting the skills needs of the economy.
 - Ensuring active inclusion.
 - Ensuring quality provision – SOLAS is currently leading a consultation process. It commissioned ESRI to carry out research on its current provision.
 - Introduction of an integrated planning and funding model – driven from the top but ensuring flexibility in provision at local level.
 - Enhancing the standing of further education – further education should be seen as a valid option.
- Progress made over the last two years – good progress implementing the structural changes, SOLAS needs space to further progress its strategic goals.
- Challenges – a key challenge has been managing the different expectations – further education as a public good, a facility to address social inclusion, pipeline for enterprise, and a solution to unemployment. Further education has a role in relation to all of the above.
- Relations with higher education – SOLAS has good relations with the HEA, relations with HEIs will continue to develop and evolve.

16.2 Members raised the following issues;

- What is SOLAS looking for in terms of measurable outcomes? Mr. O'Toole indicated that it was important that the learning outcomes for each course were clear.
- Is SOLAS now in a position to link funding with programme outcomes? SOLAS is at the early stages of performance funding. It has to be realistic and recognise that some costs are fixed. SOLAS was endeavouring to move away from supply led provision to provision which met the needs of enterprise and the socially excluded.
- Did the merger of VECs give rise to any additional costs? Mr. O'Toole indicated the mergers were achieved largely within existing budgets. Costs have been incurred in synergising systems. A key challenge SOLAS is endeavouring to deal with now is the absence of a middle management structure in the ETBs.
- Apprenticeship education – new developments and costs. Mr. O'Toole indicated that the existing apprenticeship model will apply to the new apprenticeship programmes. A key feature of the Irish model is that they are employer driven. There were 86 proposals for the new apprenticeship call, with 25 approved initially. In relation to costs there were a number of factors including the need for up to date equipment, another key cost is the

requirement that the state pay the training allowance while the apprentice is on study placement.

- Any element of co-funding? Mr. O'Toole indicated there was no central arrangement, however tutors at local level may have particular arrangements with enterprise. SOLAS was proposing to ask the employers to carry the training allowance while the apprentice is on study placement.
- Do the apprentice programmes provide for transferable skills? Mr. O'Toole indicated that the current 27 programmes are being reviewed. It is planned to include embedded transferable skills.
- Is there anything more that HEA, QQI and SOLAS could do to facilitate access, transfer and progression? Mr. O'Toole indicated further education needs to ensure there is consistency across all programmes. Higher education needs to have an open mind in facilitating progressing from further education.

17. Presentation from Science Foundation Ireland

17.1 The chair welcomed Professor Mark Ferguson noting that now was an important time for research in Ireland as we move towards a new national research strategy. Professor Ferguson in his presentation to the Board focused on the following;

- How Ireland benchmarked against five other small advanced economies – Denmark, Finland, Israel, New Zealand and Singapore. He benchmarked the countries under the following headings;
 - Published research arising from collaboration with industry.
 - Global downloads of publications.
 - Trend analysis of quality and quantity published articles.
 - Changes in output by discipline 1996-99 vs 2008-11 – it was noteworthy that Ireland had uniform performance across all disciplines, while Singapore focused on areas of importance to its economy.
 - Patents output – Ireland performed particularly poorly under this heading.
 - Private funding of public R&D – while Ireland has seen growth in private funding it continues to lag behind Denmark, Finland and Israel.
- Move from inputs to measuring the impact of research – SFI now uses a six pillar model developed with agencies in five other countries to measure impact.
- SFI research centres programme – currently there are 12, this is likely to grow to 20 at most.
- SFI programmes for industry – he highlighted the importance of industry co-funding.
- SFI international programmes.

In his concluding remarks Professor Ferguson focused on possible areas of cooperation between SFI and HEA. This included a national database on researchers. This would help the country plan its manpower needs. Another area the organisations could work on would be streamlining their administrative requirements.

17.2 Members thanked Professor Ferguson and raised the following points;

- Workforce planning is important but has proven to be quite complex in the health sector.
- Publication citation data is not always reliable. Professor Ferguson acknowledged there are issues in the case of certain subjects, particular in the humanities, but overall at a macro level they were a useful indicator.
- The recent drop in PhD numbers. Professor Ferguson indicated that employment statistics for PhDs suggest they are fully employed. He accordingly concluded that Ireland did not over-produce PhDs in the recent past.
- Industry contribution towards costs. Professor Ferguson noted that industry was increasingly seeing the benefit of investing. SFI has increased the cash element of industry co-funding from 10% of total to 30%. Ireland's largest H2020 application was from industry – Analogue has submitted a €96m proposal. If successful there will be small contributions from IDA and SFI.

18. University of Limerick – Protected Disclosures

18.1 The CEO briefed members on allegations made by two members of staff in UL. He has met both staff and will be meeting a former member of staff who had made allegations a number of years ago. His principle concerns were that there was no inappropriate transactions in the university and that the university did not suffer reputational damage. The DES is being kept advised on developments. He advised members that the two members of staff are seeking the HEA to undertake an investigation into their allegations. The HEA needs to be careful it does not set a precedent which could result in the HEA having to undertake similar investigations in other HEIs. One possibility would be to appoint appropriate expertise to carry out a review of UL's investigation processes. The following points were made by members;

- The HEA should consider a protocol which would outline how HEIs should manage protected disclosures.
- The extent to which internal auditors were best suited to review protected disclosure allegations.
- It was noted that terms of reference for such reviews should not be unduly narrow.

The CEO undertook to keep members advised of developments.

19. Regional Clusters (1) Proposed allocation of €4m fund (2) Development of Regional Clusters – Consultation Document for the Sector

19.1 The CEO advised members that the consultation document before the Board was similar to the earlier draft considered at the July meeting. The Executive subsequently consulted the DES who were anxious that the document had regard to its enterprise activities and the eight NUTS III regional clusters. The chair noted that the Executive has been working on this document since the spring and there would be further opportunities to consider this matter once observations have been received on the consultation document. The following issues were raised;

- Some concern was expressed over the suggestion that there would be a move to three pillars. The CEO indicated that it was not the HEA's intention to be prescriptive. A number of institutions have argued that there should be a single regional cluster for Dublin. In addition there is currently cooperation between institutions in Galway and Limerick. The Executive agreed to review the language around the concept of three clusters.
- Scale was particularly important when it comes to drawing down EU funding.
- The Executive should seek the views of some experts on spatial strategy.
- To what extent was the HEA expecting the institutions in each of the clusters to collaborate in areas of research which met the particular needs of the region?

19.2 Members were advised that the proposed allocation of €4m reserved for cluster performance was not considered by the Finance Committee due to time constraints. The approach to funding was approved by the Committee last January. The Executive clarified that there were five regional clusters. This was noted and agreed by the Board. Mr. Costello outlined the process followed by the Executive in determining the recommended allocations. While all clusters were able to report progress on academic mapping and pathways, one of the clusters, Dublin/Leinster II demonstrated more initiative. The cluster proposed a project which has potential national application. The Executive was accordingly proposing that this cluster receive additional funding for this project, the additional funding coming from the Dublin/Leinster I and South clusters. The Executive was proposing that the Mid-west and West/North-west clusters receive their full allocation.

19.3 Concern was expressed that the proposed allocations may not be giving sufficient signal to the clusters as to whether they had performed well or not. It was agreed accordingly to provide a small additional allocation to the Mid-west

and West/North-west clusters in recognition of progress made. Members noted the proposed start-up funding for the NUTS region outlined in paragraph 7 of memorandum A 33/15.

Decision: (a) Members approved the consultation document subject to some revision in the language on the cluster configuration.

(b) Members approved the allocation of the €4m subject to adjustments outlined in paragraph 19.3 above. The revised allocations will be circulated to members.

20 Procedure for Approval of Institute of Technology Land Acquisitions

20.1 The CEO advised members that the Executive undertook a review of the protocol following the decision on the CIT land acquisition. Following the review it is proposed to make two changes – an additional requirement that land purchase proposals should have regard to future mergers and regional clusters and a requirement that the Executive provide feedback to the Board on previously approved transactions.

Decision: Members approved the revised protocol subject to the Executive providing feedback twice per annum.

21 Proposed acquisition by Carlow Institute of Technology of land in Wexford

21.1 The CEO advised members that this proposal from the Institute of Technology in Carlow had been reviewed by the Executive in accordance with the protocol and is being recommended for approval subject to the €1.8m purchase price being provided by the exchequer. The CEO confirmed that the proposal has not been discussed with WIT as the two institutes have no definitive merger plans at this time. He will as a courtesy advise WIT. It was confirmed that the land had the necessary planning permission.

Decision: Members approved the proposal subject to the €1.8m purchase price being provided by the Exchequer. In notifying the DES the Executive will indicate that this proposal was not a HEA priority.

22. Roll-out of Springboard 2015

22.1 Members noted memorandum A 40/15.

Next Meeting

24th November 2015

Padraic Mellett

12th October 2015