

**Higher Education Authority****Report of the 387<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2017  
in Maynooth University**

- Present<sup>1</sup>:
- Dr Bahram Bekhradnia
  - Mr Tony Donohoe
  - Dr Judith Eaton
  - Professor Orla Feely
  - Dr Sharon Feeney
  - Mr Michael Horgan, Chairman
  - Ms Darina Kneafsey
  - Dr Sinéad O’Flanagan
  - Dr Jim Mountjoy
  - Mr Pól Ó Móráin
  - Dr Lynn Ramsey
  - Dr John Wall
- Apology: Mr. Michael Kerrigan
- In attendance:
- Dr Graham Love (items 1-13)
  - Mr Padraic Mellett (items 1-13)
  - Dr Gemma Irvine (items 4-5, 8, 13)
  - Mr Fergal Costello (items 4-6, 9, 13)
  - Mr Andrew Brownlee (items 4-6, 9, 13)
  - Ms Nicki O’Connor (items 4-5)
  - Mr Tim Conlon (items 6, 9)
  - Dr Padraig Walsh, QQI (item 13)

All members confirmed at the start of the meeting that there was no item on the agenda that gave rise to a conflict of interest.

**1. Report of 386<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

1.1 The minutes were approved subject to a minor amendment to paragraph 4.1.

**2. Matters arising**

2.1 Mr Mellett advised that he would issue a link to the Board Terms of Reference as amended at the last meeting.

**3. CEO’s Report**

---

<sup>1</sup> The quorum for HEA Board meetings, six members, was met.

3.1 The CEO's Report was taken as read, but the CEO updated the Authority on the following specific items;

- Thorn Report on UL – discussions were taking place with the University on a mechanism for tracking implementation of the recommendations. Dr Thorn will shortly undertake a second report on severance payments in UL.
- WIT Review (Intellectual Property arising from Spin-Outs) – More time has been given to the consultant to complete this review.
- HEA staffing: an application had been submitted to the DES for an additional eleven (11) staff members.

3.2 Members raised the following issues;

- An update on a possible Eurostat ruling regarding universities borrowings and the state balance sheet. The CEO advised that the CSO was in discussion with Eurostat on the issue and a decision was expected soon.
- The Executive was requested to track the flow of staff between the Republic and North of Ireland.
- The Executive was requested to clarify the number of clusters involved in the PATH strand 3.
- Carlow College, members were informed that the College has been in discussions with TCD. Although the College has relatively few students, it has an infrastructure that would support growth.
- DIT land acquisition, members were informed this was approved by the Executive under the delegated sanction arrangement approved by the Board in September 2016.

#### **4. HEA Strategic Plan 2018-22**

4.1 The CEO made a presentation outlining progress to date. He indicated he was particularly anxious to ensure the Board was satisfied with the proposed oversight arrangements for the plan. He indicated the next step would be to consult the Minister and Department as required under the Code of Practice.

4.2 Members raised the following issues;

- Was the plan dependent on additional resources? The CEO indicated that the plan was developed on the assumption that additional staff will be provided. Should the HEA fail to secure all of the required additional staff commensurate reductions in scope would be factored into the annual implementation plans.
- The Executive should engage a professional editor to work on the plan.

- Some reference should be made to the role private providers can play in meeting demographic growth and contributing to the National Plan for Education
- The potential of digitization in higher education.
- Consideration needs to be given to what fundamentals underpinning higher education in Ireland might change over the next four years. The CEO acknowledged this noting the need to build in flexibility around the strategy through an annual review.

**Decision:** Members agreed, subject to any further amendments to be conveyed to the Executive, that the plan be presented to the Minister as having been approved by the Board. It was agreed to undertake an annual review of the plan. The copy of the document issued to the Minister and Department will be circulated to all members at the same time.

## 5. HEA Work-plan 2018

**Decision:** Members approved the 2018 work-plan.

## 6. Report of Finance and Governance Committee

6.1 The Chair introduced the Committee's report noting that the key item was the report on GMIT's Castlebar campus. Mr Brownlee noted that the RFAM review will recommend the provision of some funding for smaller satellite campuses. Members raised the following issues;

- The principle of providing additional top-slice funding for satellite campuses that cause a financial drain on the Institution.
- TCD presentation to the Committee. Members were advised the College has submitted a three year plan outlining how they will address the deficit. It was confirmed by the Executive that TCD has plans to increase its international intake.

**Decision:** Members approved the report and recommendations of the Finance and Governance Committee.

## 7. Report of Audit and Risk Committee

7.1 Dr Feeney introduced the Committee's report. The Committee met the C&AG to discuss the 2016 audit. There were no significant issues of concern in relation to the HEA itself.

7.2 Some concern was expressed in relation to the HEA's oversight role of HEAnet CLG having regard to the C&AG's Special Report on HEAnet. The CEO provided a brief overview on HEAnet. He confirmed it is not a subsidiary of the HEA. Mr Brownlee outlined the funding the HEA provides to HEAnet and the oversight arrangements in place. The Executive holds an annual Budget and Accountability meeting with HEAnet and has submitted a draft SLA to HEAnet. The Audit and Risk Committee has requested the Finance and Governance Committee to review implementation of the recommendations in the C&AG's report on HEAnet. Mr Brownlee confirmed that work has commenced on these and they will be the subject of discussion at the 2018 Budget and Accountability meeting. The Executive will clarify with the C&AG the HEA's oversight arrangements of HEAnet at its next quarterly meeting and report back to the Committee. Mr Mellett indicated he would circulate HEAnet's most recent value for money review.

**Decision:** Members approved the Committee's report and recommendations.

## 8. Report of Research and Graduate Education Committee

8.1 Professor Feely introduced the Committee's report. One issue of concern to the Committee was the fact that the Irish Research Council's stipends were lower than the awards paid by other research funders. The Council is in discussions with the Department.

**Decision:** Members approved the Committee's report and recommendations.

## 9. Report of System Development and Performance Management Committee

9.1 Mr Donohoe introduced the Committee's report noting the need for the HEA to be in a position to plan for TU applications. Mr Conlon presented an outline of the key messages in the forthcoming System Performance Report. Members were advised that it was hoped to get the report out before the end of the year. Members raised the following issues;

- Need to distinguish in terms of language in documentation, HEA corporate governance and governance in the HEIs and HE system.
- Members stressed the need for evidence based reporting. It is clear that the sector has grown significantly since the last report. Institutions have taken strategic decisions in relation to increased intake and increased research activity. The IoTs have however less flexibility than the universities.

**Decision:** Members approved the Committee's report and the outline and key messages of the draft System Performance Report. It was agreed that the draft

report would be circulated to board members before submission to the Department.

## **10. HEA Governance – Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies**

10.1 Members were advised that it was proposed to arrange induction for the new members on 29<sup>th</sup> January. Existing members are welcome to attend this.

**Decision:** Members approved the following papers;

- (1) Protocol on procedures for the provision of professional advice to Members
- (2) Role of the Board Chairperson
- (3) Role of Secretary to the Board.

## **11. Appointment to the Audit & Risk Committee and Finance & Governance Committee**

**Decision:** Members approved the appointment of Ms Anne Brady to the two Committees

## **12. Proposal for Governance Event for Members of HEI Governing Bodies**

12.1 This item was deferred to the next meeting.

## **13. Address by Dr Padraig Walsh, Chair QQI**

13.1 Dr Walsh referred to the HEA-QQI MoU which was working well. He outlined key activities of the QQI which were of interest to the HEA including;

- HEA-QQI conference on Internationalisation a driver of quality in Irish HE.
- Involvement with HEA on Student Engagement exercise.
- Introduction, pending legislation, of an International Education Mark for Ireland, the first in the world.
- Six-year Institutional Quality Review over the period 2017-23. QQI also has annual visits to the HEIs. He anticipated 4-5 reports being published annually.
- QQI has issued guidelines on a number of topics including apprenticeship education and research degrees. QQI expects HEIs to have regard to these guidelines in drawing up their own procedures.

13.2 Members raised the following issues;

- Review of international activities of Irish HEIs. Dr Walsh confirmed that QQI has taken a similar approach to that of the UK.
- Role of QQI in relation to subject reviews. Dr Walsh confirmed the QQI does not undertake reviews at subject level but encourages HEIs to publish such peer led reviews.

#### **14. Members only session**

The following topics were discussed:

- The extent to which growth in student numbers varied across different institutions.
- Identifying the role of the Authority and setting a plan in place to uphold and adhere to that role. The Board requested regular reports on the growth strategies of the HEIs noting as an example the different directions taken by MU and TCD.
- Complexity of higher education space and the many interactions between political and sectoral decisions.
- Although the arrangements for documentation for Board and Committees have improved, papers require improvement in quality and presentation.
- Paper on TU bill for January meeting.

#### **15. Any other business**

15.1 No matters raised.

#### **Next Meeting**

30<sup>th</sup> January 2018, HEA Offices, 3 Shelbourne Buildings

Padraic Mellett

29<sup>th</sup> December 2017