

Higher Education Authority

Report of the 355th Meeting held on 24th July in Brooklawn House

Present ¹

- Mr. Bahram Bekhradnia
- Dr. Mary Canning
- Professor Maeve Conrick
- Mr. Paddy Cosgrave
- Mr. Eamonn Grennan
- Ms Siobhan Harkin
- Professor Eileen Harkin-Jones
- Professor Ellen Hazelkorn (items 3-12)
- Mr. John Hennessy, Chairman
- Ms Kathleen Lough
- Dr. Maria Meehan
- Mr. Gordon Ryan
- Professor Anthony Staines
- Dr. Brian Thornes
- Professor Marijk van der Wende

Apology:

- Cllr. Brendan Byrne
- Mr. John Dolan
- Mr. John Logue
- Dr. Jim Mountjoy

In attendance:

- Mr. Tom Boland
- Ms Mary Kerr
- Mr. Padraic Mellett
- Mr. Fergal Costello (items 4, 7, and 11)
- Dr. Eucharika Meehan (item 5)
- Professor Alan Kelly (item 5)
- Mr. Malcolm Byrne (items 9 and 10)

1. **Members only session**

The members considered the sustainability report and agreed that the Executive should be requested to prepare a report on the outcomes from higher education. A draft of this report should be circulated to members by the end of August.

Members also agreed to request the Executive to prepare HEA data strategy. The strategy should include what data the HEA collects from the HE sector, how it is collected, processed and retained. A number of members indicated they would be willing to assist the Executive with this task.

¹ Members present for all items unless otherwise indicated. The meeting concluded at 4.00pm.

2. Report of 354th Meeting

Decision: The minutes were approved subject to the following two changes;

Item 10 – Ms Harkin absented herself from discussions on this item

Item 13 – The Minister confirmed that he was willing to consider other forms of funding in addition to student loans.

3. Matters Arising

The following issues were raised:

Item 3 – Springboard - Members were advised that the Department of Social Protection has been positively engaged with the HEA in relation to Springboard.

Item 4 – Legislative reform process - Members were advised that the Task Force on the National Strategy has now completed its work and this matter will now be considered by the new Policy and Planning Committee.

Item 9.1 – Sustainability of funding of higher education – It was agreed that the Authority working group would be convened in August. The group will consist of two academic and two non academic members. It was agreed that the Executive would prepare a note on applications under the Student Assistance Fund.

4. Chief Executive's Report

4.1 The Chief Executive briefed Members on a number of developments relating to system development.

International Review Panel – The panel met the previous week and their report is expected to be completed in 3 weeks time.

ESRI Study – A preliminary report was made available to the Review Panel. The Institute's final report is expected at the end of August and will be circulated to members. The Chief Executive will be in touch with the Institute.

Teacher Education Review – this report, which was compiled at the request of the Minister for Education and Skills, will shortly be finalised and submitted to the Minister. Members will be given advance notice should the Minister decide to publish the report.

Creative Arts Review – Lord David Putman and Professor Anne Bamford have agreed to serve on an International Review Panel. Members were requested to forward the names of persons from mainland Europe or Canada who might be

suitable for the panel. It was planned to convene the panel in September with a view to having their report finalized by the end of September.

- 4.2 Entry to medical education – Members were briefed on a review of the HPAT test undertaken by the Deans of Medicine. Amongst the key findings were – the test has resulted in fewer entrants to medical education who repeated the leaving certificate, no change in the gender balance entering medical school and no change in the socio-economic background of new entrants. The Deans have recommended a reconfiguration of the scores within the HPAT tests.
- 4.3 2012 work plan – Members were advised that satisfactory progress has been made on the 2012 work plan KPIs. There was some delay on a number of items. (1) PhD education framework – this has been delayed due to the delay in setting up QQAI. (2) Sustainability of funding study – there has been some delay due to a change in the focus of this exercise and resource restraints (3) Review of IRCHSS – the amalgamation of the two Research Councils has contributed to the delay in this review but it is still intended to carry out a review of the impact of the investment in humanities and social sciences research programmes. (4) Enhancing engagement – this was discussed at the last Board meeting. Work will continue on this having regard to other priorities. (5) Capital space survey – behind schedule but consultants have now been engaged to assist with the preparation of a tender specification.
- 4.4 Apprenticeship review – members were advised that this matter was still under consideration within the Department of Education and Skills (DES). FÁS has in the meantime requested the HEA to assist it review the demand for future places. It was agreed that the Executive would write to the Department requesting that it progress the apprenticeship review.

On a related issue the Board discussed the role of further education in the overall post second level education system and requested the CEO to convey to the DES concerns relating to the structure, organisation and funding of FE.

- 4.5 Irish Centre for High End Computing – it was confirmed that the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation has agreed to provide €700,000 funding for the period to 31st January 2013. A review of ICHEC is currently underway and should be finalised by October. Members noted the importance of having a single national facility which would be accessible to all institutions.
- 4.6 Members considered the role of information technology in achieving efficiencies in higher education. A UK study in the 1990s confirmed that investment in IT contributed to enhanced efficiencies but did not lead to financial savings. The following issues were raised.

- Ø IT facilitates alternative delivery modes

- Ø Distance learning is more suitable to certain types of students who require less institutional support. Any evaluation of distance education needs to have regard to the background of students undertaking such courses.
- Ø There were a number of developments in the US – MIT and Stanford were offering on-line courses for free. Other models mentioned were the University of Phoenix, the University of London and the UK's Open University.
- Ø The importance of ensuring the quality of on-line courses was noted.
- Ø On-line courses if run properly are not cheap, providing feedback and support to students can be costly. The cost of Open University courses can be more expensive than campus based courses run by Irish or UK institutions. This reflects the cost of providing tutor support.

5. Structured PhD Education – current status and barriers to implementation

5.1 Professor Alan Kelly, Dean of Graduate Studies made a presentation which focused on -

- Ø The challenges set for Irish PhD education – numbers have doubled, need for diverse career path
- Ø The response – Irish structured PhDs and supports – the thesis remains the core element of the award with students taking 30-90 ECTS credits of formal education. Four years the norm for registration. Funding provided from a number of sources including PRTL, IRC and HRB. National guidelines have been published.
- Ø Lessons learned – significant progress made since 2008 – intersectoral, interdisciplinary and international programmes have been developed but they are costly.
- Ø Ongoing challenges – sustainability of funding, need to mainstream, parity of esteem for humanities and social science, evaluating impact of structured PhDs

5.2 The following issues were raised;

- Ø The Dublin Regional Higher Education Area (DRHEA) has proven to be a useful model of collaboration.
- Ø The process has forced faculties and departments to collaborate.
- Ø Has the introduction of structured PhD programmes had an impact on the demand for Masters by thesis awards? Professor Kelly indicated there continued to be a strong market from Masters by research graduates.
- Ø To what extent has the introduction of structured PhD programmes been influenced by European developments, including the Salzburg principles? Professor Kelly indicated that Irish developments have very much been influenced by developments at EU level. Ireland is represented on the European Council for PhD education and has hosted a number of events.
- Ø Is teaching seen as an important skill for PhD candidates? It was confirmed that most institutions highlight the importance of communication skills and preparing for tutorial sessions. A booklet reflecting on the experience postgraduate

students gained from teaching was funded under a Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) initiative.

- Ø Has there been any significant change in time taken to complete PhD programmes? It was confirmed that the average completion time was 4.2 years. The restriction in the availability of funding is a factor that has prevented completion time from increasing. It was noted that the completion time for HSS doctorates on the continent was 6 to 8 years.

6. Establishment of HEA- NCCA working group

6.1 The following issues were raised;

- Ø Reference should be made to literacy and languages in the paragraph on shared challenges. It was confirmed that the list in the memorandum was not intended to be exhaustive.
- Ø Was it intended to include further education? Members were informed that as a reorganisation of further education was currently underway, it would be prudent to await completion before including that sector, but the importance of doing as soon as practical was noted.
- Ø Should the terms of reference include a number of specific issues which emerged from the transitions conference in 2011? Members were informed that while the terms of reference are reasonably broad, the work programme to be agreed would include a number of specific actions.
- Ø The group should consider a move towards more generic undergraduate programmes. Members were advised that the IUA is to submit proposals on this matter.

Decisions and agreed actions:

Members approved the following:

1. Establishment of a working group with the NCCA. - Members who wished to serve on the group should notify the Secretary.
2. The working group would initially focus on the standard route of progression from secondary to tertiary education with further education routes being introduced at a later date when that sector's change programme has been completed.
3. The group should agree a work programme that focuses on actionable outputs.
4. The Executive, in reviewing institutional landscape submissions, should evaluate the extent to which institutions have made provision for alternative progression routes.

7. Report of Finance Committee

7.1 The items for consideration were – agreement of a framework for payments by corporations to university employees; proposed allocation of €500,000 to the

smaller institutions, and an extension of the deadline for submissions under the sectoral development fund to 2013 with the allocation of the €10m set aside in 2012 for the fund going back into the recurrent grant to be allocated through the RGAM process.

7.2 Members were informed that the purpose of the framework was to enable universities to enhance their ability to generate more revenue. Academics were allowed to spend up to 20% of their time on private research/consultancy activities. Under the framework an academic could get paid for work which would also generate income for the university. The types of activities the corporations would be involved in would include delivery of academic programmes overseas. Members were advised that the Executive has sought legal advice on the framework following the Finance Committee's deliberations.

7.3 The following points were made;

- Ø There could be a public perception that the academics concerned were being paid on the double. Has consideration being given to employees undertaking such work as part of their normal duties? University employees would be perceived as being given the opportunity to earn more money without having to share in the risks associated with such corporations.
- Ø Have the universities established there is a demand from university employees for such payment in return for undertaking teaching activities overseas?
- Ø The monitoring arrangements to be put in place.
- Ø Consideration needs to be given to the duration of such assignments, accounting for such payments with revenue and the requirements of the working time directive.

Decision & Agreed Actions:

1. The Finance Committee will give further consideration to the proposed framework having regard to the discussion and legal advice. The Committee will decide at its next meeting whether to bring the framework back to the Board for approval in September or whether further consideration is required.
2. Members approved the allocation of €500,000 to MIC, SPD, NCAD, MDI and St. Angela's College as outlined in memorandum F9/12.
3. Members agreed to the recommendation in relation to the sectoral development fund.

8. Report of Audit Committee

8.1 Professor Staines reported on the Committee's last meeting held 19th July.

1. The Committee noted the universities were facing a deficit in excess of €30m on the pension control account. This amount could escalate. The Executive are in discussion with the DES to resolve this matter.

2. The Committee has discussed with the Executive and the internal auditors the necessary resources for the internal audit function.
3. The Committee considered a report from the Chief Executive on the management of risk within the organisation. The Committee was satisfied that robust processes are in place. The Committee intends to review the individual section risks.
4. The Committee agreed amendments to the terms of reference for the Audit Committee having regard to observations from the Comptroller and Auditor General.
5. The Committee considered a satisfactory internal audit review of the IoT recurrent funding.
6. The Committee discussed the internal audit work programme for the remainder of 2012 and 2013.
7. The Committee agreed a number of HEA bank account arrangements.

Decision/Agreed Action:

Members agreed the Audit Committee's report.

9. HEA Communications Strategy

9.1 Mr. Byrne introduced this item. The purpose of the Communications Strategy was to support the overall objectives of the HEA. The following issues were raised;

- Ø How to communicate with institutional staff, given the important part they play in achieving change? Mr. Byrne indicated that while it was not possible to visit each campus, the executive engages with institutional heads of communications and has had meetings with TUI and IFUT.
- Ø The list of stakeholders should include Board Members.
- Ø There should be some reference to social inclusion.
- Ø Consideration should be given to removing the HEA mission statement which was quite lengthy. A number of the underpinning principles could be merged.
- Ø The strategy was an opportunity to convey the message that Ireland was punching above its weight in higher education.
- Ø The risks of HEA being seen as an advocacy body. The HEA needs to earn the right to become an advocacy body through being diligent in its regulatory role. The HEA also needs to be an objective advocate for higher education.
- Ø HEA brand – Members were advised that a new HEA brand will be introduced in conjunction with the new HEA website which will be ready in October.
- Ø Use of social media – Members were advised that the HEA uses Facebook and twitter. Social media has been used in particular to promote Springboard.

Decision/Agreed Action:

Members approved the Communications Strategy subject to the above comments.

10. HEA 2011 Annual Report

10.1 A number of observations were made including;

- Ø Clarification to be made in relation to the Members fee
- Ø The reference to demand for higher education should be enhanced.
- Ø There should be clarity in relation to reviews which were completed in 2011 as distinct from those which just started.

Decision/Actions Agreed:

It was agreed that the Executive would amend and publish the annual report having regard to the above comments and any further comments members may wish to forward to Mr. Byrne.

11. Report on 2012 Accountability and Budget Meetings

11.1 Ms Kerr reported that the 2012 budgetary position was very satisfactory with institutions proposing break-even budgets and where necessary taking steps to reduce accumulated deficits. The Executive will be contacting the institutions in the autumn to see if they are still meeting their budgetary targets.

11.2 The following issues were raised;

- Ø It was noted that a number of institutions (ITB and AIT) were achieving a balanced budget only through accumulated reserves. This was this not sustainable over the long run. Mr. Costello reported that there were particular historical circumstances which applied to ITB, these have now been addressed and the institute was on the road to sustainability, while AIT has made a strategic decision to invest in 2012. He agreed to revert back to members on the general question of sustainability.
- Ø Data to be provided on the extent to which senior-junior ratios of staff have changed following the ECF.
- Ø Does the Executive undertake an analysis of institutional balance sheets? Members were advised that the Management Accountant has nearly completed this work. His report will be presented to the Finance Committee.
- Ø The Institutions appear to have managed their finances very well, have they indicated how this was achieved? Members were advised that the HEIs have been requested to indicate how the cuts have impacted on their activities. When all of the submissions have been received the Executive will compile a report.

Decision/Actions Agreed:

Members noted the Executive's report.

13. Any other business

13.1 No items raised.

Next meeting - Tuesday 25th September, Cork Institute of Technology

Padraic Mellett,
Secretary.
31st July 2012