

Higher Education Authority
Report of Meeting of the Board of the HEA held on 20th May 2025

Present: Dr Niall Connors, Chairperson (agenda items 1-17)

Dr Fiona Killard-Lynch (agenda items 1-17)

Dr Rory O'Sullivan (agenda items 1-17)

Dr Rosemary Day (agenda items 1-17)

Ms Lianne Patterson (agenda items 1-17)

Ms Paula Fyans (agenda items 1-17)

Professor Anne Scott (agenda items 1-17)

Mr Dermot McCarthy (agenda items 1-17)

Apologies: Professor Mark Rogers

Ms Nessa McEniff

Mr Chris Clifford

In attendance: Professor Marie Clarke, SETL Chair (agenda items 1-17)

Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-17.1)

Mr Trevor Purtill (agenda items 1-16)

Ms Éilis Noonan (agenda items 1-16)

Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 4-16)

Ms Caitríona Ryan (agenda items 5-16)

Ms Sheena Duffy (agenda items 9-16)

Ms Orla Christle (agenda items 8-16)

Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 6-16)

Dr Louise Callinan (agenda items 8-16)

Mr Maurice Moynihan (agenda items 11,12)

Ms Linda Darbey via MS Teams (agenda item 14)

Ms Maura O'Shea via MS Teams (agenda items 9, 10)

Ms Catherine Halloran (agenda items 9,10)

Quorum

The quorum for HEA Board meetings, six members, was met.

1. Report of meeting held 25th March

Under item 11, Memo 12/25 Annual Plan 2025, the section on Members' observations should be amended to include a reference to a suggestion from a member that the KPIs

would benefit from greater clarity in terms of what is being achieved and how it is being measured.

Decision: The Report of the March Board meeting was approved.

2. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

3. Matters arising

3.1 Log of actions

The log of actions as agreed at Board meetings was reviewed and it was noted that all actions, including additional items suggested by Ms McEniff (Policy for use of GenAI in the HEA, and clarity around inclusion of Cybersecurity assurances in the Annual Governance Statements), had been actioned and closed off by the Executive.

4. Verbal Report of the Audit, Risk and Finance Meeting 12th May

Dr Killard-Lynch presented the Report of the Committee.

4.1 Risk Management

The Committee reviewed the updated Corporate Risk Register, and noted the updated Sectional Risk Registers, and noted the Risk Management Framework and Risk Appetite Statement.

Decision: The Board approved the updated Risk Registers.

4.2 Internal Audit Schedule

The Committee recommended approval of three internal audit reviews for 2025:

- Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control.
- Protected Disclosures.
- Human Capital Initiative.

Decision: The Board approved the IA Schedule for 2025.

4.3 Funding Support for Student Consultation & Public Engagement

The Committee recommended Board approval of the continuation of the use of vouchers to support student consultation and the use of honoraria to support public engagement subject to C&AG not raising any issues and provided that the issuance of vouchers is reviewed as part of 2025 review of internal controls.

Decision: The Board approved this decision.

The Committee Chair also noted:

- An update from the Data Protection Officer.
- The Management accounts for March 2025.
- That the May meeting was the last meeting for both Lianne Patterson and Anne Brady, and thanked them for their contributions.

Members noted the Committee's Report.

5. Report of the Research Committee 29th April

Dr Day presented the Report of this Committee.

5.1 Letter to Research Ireland

The Committee approved the issuing of a letter to the Chairperson of Taighde Éireann from the Chair of the Research Committee on the development of the HEA and Taighde Éireann relationship at Board level. A discussion was then had around the frequency of contact that would be appropriate between the two Boards. The Board felt that twice yearly may be too much, and decided that the first meeting should go ahead and the Board could reassess from there.

A Member queried the protocol whereby a Committee Chair writes directly to the Chair of the Board of another body. The Executive confirmed that the protocol is for the Chair of the HEA Board to write to the Chair of another Board unless the decision was specifically delegated to the Chair of the Committee in question, which was the case in this instance.

5.2 Gender Balance

The Committee Chair raised the issue of the Committee not currently being gender balanced, which was noted by the Board.

The Committee also noted:

- The workplan and schedule of meetings were agreed at the meeting.
- The Committee received a presentation on the North South Research Programme.

Members noted the Committee's Report.

6. Verbal Report of the System Development Committee 7th May

Dr Connors presented the Report of this Committee.

6.1 Socio-Economic Profiles 2021/22-2023/24

The Committee recommended approval of this report for publication.

Decision: The Board approved publication of the Socio-Economic Profiles report.

6.2 Development Funding for Technological Sector and Specialist Colleges

The Committee recommended approval of the approach to the application, assessment and post-award processes set out in the draft call document.

Decision: The Board approved the proposed approach.

- The Committee also noted the HEA's response to DFHERIS's Statement of Strategy, and noted that the timeframe for response was short (one week), and that the Strategy did not specifically refer to tertiary education.

Members noted the Committee's Report.

7. Report of the SETL Committee 23rd April

Professor Clarke presented this Report.

7.1 Publication of Reports

The Committee recommended that the HEA Board approves for publication the following reports:

- Working Group Report on the Review of Consultation and Reporting Arrangements: Student Services Expenditure and Student Levy;
- Review of the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework;
- Expert Group Report on the Irish National Framework for Student Success in Higher Education.

The Committee extended their thanks to Linda Darbey and Ross Woods for this work.

Decision: The Board approved the publication of these reports.

8. Report of the System Funding and Oversight Committee - Special Meeting 30th April

Dr O'Sullivan presented the Report of this Committee.

The Committee recommended to the Board to establish a working group to consider the development of a future funding model, and considered the key principles and suggested membership of the group.

The proposed composition of the working group is as follows:

- At least three members of the HEA Board, one of whom will be the Chair of the working group.
- Two external members with international expertise who preferably have experience of working with higher education funding models in other jurisdictions similar to Ireland.
- Three to four representatives from across the higher education system. These representatives should span the university, technological and specialist colleges sectors and ideally should hold a relevant senior position (i.e. Bursar, Registrar or Dean). To reinforce the independence of the working group, these representatives should not be nominees of any representative groups but rather selected on the basis of their expertise.
- Two members of the Executive.

Additionally, it was suggested asking an official from DFHERIS to act as a member of the working group. All present agreed that this would be useful.

Decision: The Board agreed the next steps as per the following:

- The Chair of the System Funding and Oversight Committee will gather expressions of interest from Board members that wish to participate in the group, and will appoint a Chair of the group;
- The Chair of the group and the Executive will identify individuals to approach to become members of the group.
- The Executive will request a DFHERIS nominee for this group.

Members noted the Committee's Report.

9. Memo 17/25 HEA Branding

Ms Duffy presented this item. The Board were asked to note the new HEA branding guidelines. Ms Duffy noted that the expected guidelines in relation to the obligations under the Official Languages Act are not yet available. However, an Irish version of the logo has been designed and an Irish language website domain has been secured.

It was queried as to whether the HEA was required to adopt the Government of Ireland branding guidelines. The Executive confirmed that public sector agencies are not mandated to adopt these guidelines. It was noted that the green colour selected for the new branding aligns with the GOI colour scheme.

The Board noted the revised branding guidelines.

10. Memo 18/25 HEA Annual Report

Ms Halloran presented this item. Members were asked to approve the content of the Report in advance of translation, design and publication.

The Board noted the following:

- Dr O'Sullivan was absent for one Board meeting in 2024 - this is to be corrected.
- The date of Dr Connors' appointment as Interim Chair is to be added.
- It was agreed to add a sentence in the FOI section to clarify that the HEA will often – in cases where requests can be granted - propose to provide the records outside of FOI for efficiency.
- It was confirmed that an infographic with the key pieces of information from the Report will be included.
- It was queried whether the HEA had both an internal and external Protected Disclosure Policy, and this was confirmed to be the case.

Decision: The Board approved the content of the Annual Report.

11. S64 Updates- Memo 19/25 and Memo 20/25

11.A Memo 19/25 Publication of Report by UL

Mr Moynihan presented this item. The Board were asked to consider and approve the publication by the University of Limerick of a report prepared by them, in accordance with the terms of S64 of the HEA Act 2022.

Decision: The Board approved the publication by UL of the report.

11.B Memo 20/25 Appointment of a Reviewer to TUD

Mr Moynihan presented this item. The Board were asked to approve the appointment of a reviewer under the terms of S68(1) of the HEA Act 2022 for Technological University Dublin.

Decision: The Board approved the appointment of a reviewer.

12. Memo 21/25 Review of HEA Act

Mr Moynihan presented this item. The Board was asked to note a submission on the review of the HEAA 2022 by the HEA Executive to DFHERIS.

The Board discussed the review in detail. Members noted the work undertaken by the Executive but were clear that the content of the review was not entirely representative of their views as a Board, and they would therefore welcome an opportunity to develop and agree a separate Board submission on the review of the Act to be made to DFHERIS.

The Board noted the Executive's response to DFHERIS's review of the HEA Act 2022.

13. Memo 22/25 Procedure on Committee Reports

Mr Purtill presented this item. Members were requested to approve the following changes to the procedure for Committee Reports:

- A change to the existing terminology where minutes arising from Committees and Board meetings are referred to as 'Reports'.
- The adoption of a revised Issuing and Approval Process for Committee Minutes and Reports.

It was also noted that Committee minutes are to be approved at Committee level only. Members suggested clarifying a minimum timeframe for approvals, and Mr Purtill confirmed this should be agreed at a local level at each Committee, and noted that a degree of flexibility is required. The proposed changes would take effect for all meetings post the July Board meeting.

Decision: Members approved the proposals as set out in the Memorandum.

14. Memo 23/25 HEA Annual Plan 2025 Q1 Report

Ms Darbey presented this item. The Annual Plan 2025 was submitted to the Minister for FHERIS, who can propose amendments within 30 days.

Ms Darbey noted that the reporting template contained format changes made in response to Board feedback. These include the reports being on the main agenda at Board meetings, greater granularity in reporting on the status of deliverables, and the inclusion of an additional 'impact' column to capture information on the impact of delays.

Members noted the improvements to the communication and measurement of KPIs that have been introduced since the March Board meeting. The Board thanked Ms Darbey, Mr Conlon and their team for their work on the Report.

Members noted the Q1 Report.

15. Memo 24/25 Executive Report

The following queries were raised on the Report:

- it was clarified that the 4th floor would accommodate 48 desk spaces, four individual offices, four shared offices, and several project/breakout rooms.
- It was confirmed that the majority of open CPU roles are sanctioned positions that have not been filled before owing to difficulties finding suitably skilled applicants.
- It was confirmed that the current IT headcount, excluding contractors, comprises the following: Head of IT, two senior executive officers, and two executive officers.
- It was confirmed that the level of SEO departures was not specific to a particular section and that they were primarily a result of individuals securing positions of a higher grade elsewhere.

16. Corporate Risk Register

Ms Noonan presented the Risk Register.

- There are currently two high risks (Cyber & Resources) and one high rated issue, Loss of Specific Expertise (in relation to pensions).
- It is also proposed to raise the residual risk level of Issue 3, PSN return, from 6 to 10 (moderate), due to lack of progression on the planned staff database because of budgetary and resource challenges.
- Following a suggestion at the ARFC meeting, human resources risk will be transferred to the issue log, budgetary risk will remain on risk register.

The Board noted the Corporate Risk Register.

17. Members Only Session

Next Meeting: The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 1st July.

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Chairperson

Date