

Higher Education Authority

Report of the 383rd Meeting held on 28th March 2017¹ in Croke Park Conference Centre

Present: ² Mr Tony Donohoe
Professor Orla Feely
Dr Sharon Feeney
Mr Michael Horgan, Chairman
Ms Darina Kneafsey
Dr Sinéad O’Flanagan
Mr Pól Ó Móráin
Dr Lynn Ramsey
Dr John Wall

Apology: Dr Judith Eaton
Ms Annie Hoey

In attendance: Dr Graham Love
Mr Andrew Brownlee
Mr Fergal Costello
Dr Gemma Irvine
Mr Padraic Mellett
Dr Vivienne Patterson
Ms Caitríona Ryan
Mr Stewart Roche
Dr. Eucharía Meehan (item 6)
Mr. Peter Brown (item 6)
Ms Brid Horan (item 11)
Ms Siobhán Harkin

1. Report of 382nd Meeting

1.1 The minutes were approved.

2. Matters Arising & Follow-up actions

2.1 The Chair welcomed Dr Love to his first meeting as CEO and advised the Board were happy to guide and assist him. He thanked the Minister and Ms Brid Horan for their presentations to the Board yesterday.

¹ Item 11 was taken on 27th March.

² Members present for all items unless otherwise indicated.

2.2 The Chair proposed that in future minutes of both Board and standing Committees be circulated to members within a reasonable timeframe for approval. The minutes presented to the Board will then be taken as read and agreed allowing discussion to focus on matters arising.

2.3 Members were advised that a review of the standing Committees would be carried out once the new strategic plan is completed. The Chair requested that the question of which members may attend the Finance and Governance Committee, and of how members of the Authority, who are not members of that committee, be made aware of the work overseen by that Committee, be included in the review.

3. HEA-DES Service Level Agreement

3.1 Members considered the key changes since this matter was considered at the January Board meeting. It was agreed that the proposed framework for Royalty Payments would be submitted to the Board before finalisation.

Decision: The Board approved the draft HEA-DES Service Level Agreement.

4. Finance and Governance Committee

4.1 The Chair raised the discussion on item 3 of the report, Capital Prioritisation Review and IoT STEM Business Case. It would have been preferable if this matter has been presented to the Committee for information as the Executive had already submitted the HEIs' submissions to the Department. The Executive should consider this in preparing documentation for future Board and Committee meetings. Other issues arising from the meeting were;

- Risk that the submission from the HEA could be perceived as having been agreed by the Board.
- The need for separate Codes of Governance for the HEIs
- Consideration should be given to finding an alternative wording to 'vulnerable institutions'
- Provisions of information to Board members not serving on the Committee. It was agreed that the information contained in the Governance Statement traffic light document be circulated to all Authority members.

4.2 Mr. Brownlee outlined the background to the Capital Prioritisation Exercise. He informed members that the DES continues to make the key decisions in relation to capital investment. Members acknowledged the importance of this exercise particularly in light of the forthcoming mid-term review on capital expenditure

being undertaken by D/PER. They stressed the need for a transparent assessment process having regard to the needs of the system as a whole.

Decision: Members noted the minutes of the Committee and approved the 2016 recurrent grant allocation outturn and the 2017 recurrent grant allocation.

5. Report of Audit Committee

Decision: Members noted the minutes of the Committee and approved the 2016 accounts for Audit and subject to there being no fundamental changes, the accounts should be signed at the end of the audit by the Chair and CEO.

6. Report of Research and Graduate Education Committee

6.1 Members received two presentations from the Irish Research Council. Dr Meehan presented a review of the Council's activities in 2016. Her presentation focused on the following;

- Role of the IRC and its position in the Irish research funders landscape
- IRC schemes and awards made in 2016
- IRC activities under Horizon 2020 and other international programmes
- Frontier basic programme
- Outcomes from investment in frontier research – the Council estimates that €1.2m IRC investment has leveraged €18.5m in ERC Starter Grant Funding
- IRC engagement with enterprise
- Love Irish Research Campaign
- Innovation for social progress and the economy

6.2 Mr. Brown presented on the Council's work programme for 2017. His presentation focused on the following;

- Key priorities for 2017 – launch new Frontiers, securing sufficient funding for Frontiers and other programmes and cultivating and enabling interdisciplinary research.
- National and global challenges
- Addressing priorities under Innovation 2020, National Skills Strategy
- Researcher early-career development
- Enhancing international opportunities for the research community
- Gender equality
- Indicative timetable for IRC calls in 2017

6.3 In response to a query on Brexit, Dr Meehan outlined the implications for Irish higher education research arising from this development. There may be

opportunities for UK based researchers to move to Ireland under the Frontiers Programme. The HEA has submitted a number of other proposals to the DES.

Decision: Members noted the minutes of the Committee.

7. Review of Athena Swan Pilot

7.1 The CEO introduced this item noting the Executive was seeking approval to enter in to negotiations with a view to continuing the extension of the UK's Equality Challenge Unit's Athena SWAN Charter to Ireland. He referred to consultations with stakeholders which highlighted areas for improvement.

Decision: Members approved the proposal.

8. Budget for Database Developer Consultancy

8.1 Dr Patterson outlined the background to this proposal and listed the range of projects the HEA required assistance with. The recent General Data Protection Regulation has increased the importance of the HEA having in place robust systems for collection and processing of data. It was also pointed out that an enhanced data management capacity will be in a position to assist those HEIs requiring assistance.

Decision: Members approved the budget. The Executive was requested to ensure the expertise of Board members was availed of in seeking proposals. The Executive was requested to report back with its plan for data collection and analytics.

9. Board of HEAnet Ltd.

Decision: Members approved the nomination of Dr Orla Flynn to fill one of THEA directorships on the Board of HEAnet Ltd.

10. Report of the CEO

10.1 The CEO advised members that the HEA was meeting the Public Accounts Committee on 29th March. Members were informed that the next Forward Forum event will take place on 31st May.

10.2 The following issues were raised;

- Forward Look Forum – the Board should be consulted on topics and speakers for future events. Members were advised that the next two events will focus

on Higher Education futures: which issues and trends are most significant for Ireland and the HEA and, secondly, Internationalisation. The former will input into the HEA's process for developing a new strategic plan. Members will be consulted in relation to speakers and topics. It was important that lessons were learned from such events. Consideration should also be given to seeking feedback from participants. It was noted that the Executive prepares a very informative consultation paper in advance of Forward Look events.

- Employment of Persons with Disabilities – it was important that the HEA ensured it operated a culture of inclusivity.
- Development of a new System Performance Framework – Members were advised that the DES was proceeding with work in this regard, with a view to seeking Ministerial approval for a new framework.
- QQI Reviews – It was suggested that there was potential scope for overlap between the QQI's reviews and the HEA's strategic dialogue process.
- SFI review of governance in HEI Research Centres – The CEO updated members on this exercise. The HEA is engaging with stakeholders with a view to agreeing a considered response to the review. The HEA is progressing the negotiation of an MoU with SFI.

11. Update on the Review of the Funding Allocation Model for HEIs: Address by Ms Brid Horan, Chair of the Expert Group.

11.1 The Chair thanked Ms Horan for agreeing to chair the Expert Group. Ms Horan thanked the HEA for giving her the opportunity to serve on the Expert Group. It was an interesting opportunity following her participation on the Cassells Funding Group. She covered the following in her address;

- Other members of the Expert Group
- Context underpinning the work of the group. It was important that the funding mechanism underpinned national objectives
- The need for additional funding. She explained that this was outside the remit of the group but it was conscious of other developments such as consultations with employers on an increase in the employer's levy.
- Three phases of the group's work
- The need to balance transparency and institutional autonomy.
- Consultation process – the group has met 12 stakeholders to date and anticipate they will have met 20 by the end of the process.
- Getting the right balance between the various components of the grant – core, top-slices and performance funding. How to incentivise innovative behaviour. Risk of having too many levers
- Importance of the strategic dialogue process – this was perhaps not adequately understood by players outside the system

- How do you balance funding for growth while maintaining quality? She noted Ireland was unusual in not having a cap on student numbers.
- She concluded by outlining a number of concerns conveyed to the group which, while outside the group's remit, were worth noting.

11.2 The following issues were raised;

- Working paper 5 suggested that the universities had clearly the capacity to generate additional non-exchequer funding to replace the loss in state funding.
- A perception that the paper seemed to be warning against change
- Role of private providers.
- Progress on implementation of the Cassells' recommendations e.g. income contingent loans.
- Capacity of institutions to borrow.
- Standardisation in undergraduate provision across the sector.
- Role of further education.
- HR-IR constraints.
- Quantum of top-slices.
- Concern was expressed that working paper 5 appeared to suggest that institutions can have different roles in delivering on equity of access. Ms Horan indicated this was not the intention.
- Funding of research and teaching and learning.

12. Any other business

12.1 No issues raised.

Next Meeting

16th May 2017

Padraic Mellett

31st March 2017