

Higher Education Authority**Report of the 390th Meeting held on 24th April 2018
HEA Offices, 3 Shelbourne Buildings**

- Present¹:
- Dr Bahram Bekhradnia
 - Mr Tony Donohoe
 - Dr Sharon Feeney
 - Mr Michael Horgan (by teleconference)
 - Mr. Michael Kerrigan (by teleconference)
 - Ms Darina Kneafsey
 - Dr Deirdre Lillis
 - Dr Ronan Lyons
 - Dr Sinéad O’Flanagan
 - Dr Jim Mountjoy
 - Mr Pól Ó Móráin
 - Dr Lynn Ramsey (items 5-9 only, by teleconference)
 - Dr John Wall (by teleconference)
- Apologies:
- Dr Judith Eaton
 - Professor Orla Feely
- In attendance:
- Dr Graham Love
 - Mr Padraic Mellett (items 1-8)
 - Dr Gemma Irvine (items 1-8)
 - Ms Caitriona Ryan (items 1-8)
 - Dr Vivienne Patterson (items 1-8)
 - Ms Sheena Duffy (items 1-8)
 - Mr Tim Conlon (items 1-8)
 - Mr Ciaran McCaffrey (item 4)
 - Mr Victor Pigott (items 6-8)
 - Ms Valerie Harvey (items 6-8)

The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Chair, Dr Sharon Feeney.

Members at the start of the meeting considered any potential conflict of interest.²

¹ The quorum for HEA Board meetings, six members, was met.

² Dr John Wall is an employee of WIT recused himself from item 3.1, discussion on WIT under the CEO’s report. Dr Lynn Ramsey, an employee from LyIY was not present for item 4 – proposed property purchase by LyIT.

1. Report of 389th Meeting

1.1 The minutes were approved subject to one sentence being deleted from paragraph 5.1 (WIT report) and the words 'and enabling technologies' being added to par. 9.2.

2. Matters arising

2.1 It was confirmed that the Engineering Ireland report will be considered at a future Board meeting together with the cost of engineering courses.

3. CEO's Report

3.1 The CEO updated members on Mr McLoone's report into IP commercialization matters at Waterford Institute of Technology. The Executive is now in a position to send the report to a number of stakeholders. They will have 2-3 weeks to reply. The report will also have issues for consideration by the Institute's governing body. He outlined the next steps in the process. Ms Duffy advised members that the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) was undertaking its own report into WIT. Its terms of reference were narrower than the HEA's report.

3.2 The CEO advised members of three reviews being carried out by the C&AG;

- Payments to certain staff in UL and IT Sligo
- Timeliness of HEI accounts
- Non-progression rates in higher education

He indicated the Board may need consider a financial deduction from UL should the C&AG confirm an undisputed amount of unauthorised payments. Members noted that this decision may be necessary but that ultimately it may be students who will suffer if a financial penalty is applied or if performance funding was withheld. Was there any other option open to the HEA such as sanctioning specific individuals? The CEO indicated that this was likely to be open to challenge. Any decision to apply a financial penalty will be considered by the Finance and Governance Committee. It was also agreed that the HEA should prepare a communications response for each of the three reports.

3.3 Members were informed that Eurostat has confirmed that borrowings by universities will continue to be excluded from national debt.

- 3.4 The CEO advised members that interviews for the posts of Deputy CEO/Head of System Funding and Performance and the Head of Finance and System Governance will take place at the end of May/early June. He also advised members that the HEA had received a high number of applications for the recently advertised Executive Officer competition.
- 3.5 Members were advised that the HEA will be organising a higher education summit on 10th/11th January 2019, with MIT partnering for one of the days. The theme for one of the days will likely be the future of work. The HEA has also received an invitation from Boston College to attend a future IAHERO colloquium.
- 3.6 Mr Conlon updated members on the landscape reform funding call. In addition to the four TU consortia there may be interest from other institutions seeking to enhance partnership with neighbouring institutions. Members requested that the timing of future calls be scheduled so that the executive is in a position to brief members at Board meetings.
- 3.7 Members were updated on progress on developing an MoU with SFI. It is hoped to have a draft ready for consideration at the Research and Graduate Education Committee meeting on 15th May.

4. Proposed property acquisition by Letterkenny Institute of Technology

- 4.1 Mr McCaffrey advised members that this proposal was prepared following the agreed procedures. There was a slight downward reduction in the proposed price. The executive was satisfied the Institute could afford the property. The Institute is proposing small surpluses over the next five years so is in a position to meet running and development costs.

Decision: Members approved the proposed purchase. The executive was requested to include in future documentation whether a proposed land/property acquisition formed part of an overall capital development plan.

5. Creative Arts Review 2013 and Report of impact assessment follow-up 2017

- 7.1 Mr Conlon outlined the background to this item noting there was greater support for the arts in the current political environment. Following the Bamford review issued in 2013, the executive commissioned Dr Gary Granville to carry-out a progress report. There are five recommendations outlined in his report, one on a possible IADT-NCAD merger goes further than recommendations in the former report. He noted both institutions were currently commencing a new strategic planning cycle. He acknowledged the report required some edits before it could be released.

5.2 Members raised the following points;

- Is there an expectation that the report will be issued? Concern was expressed over the language in the report and that it appeared to go beyond its terms of reference. Members were advised that the two institutions in particular have enquired as to when the report will be issued.
- The origin of the report and whether there were other outstanding reports commissioned by the HEA which the Board needed to consider. The CEO confirmed there were none.
- There has been an acknowledgement since 2009 that the creative arts sector had potential to increase revenue for the country. A number of HEIs have taken initiative in this area but there has been little joint action other than Uversity. Members noted a number of other more recent initiatives impacting on the creative arts which are not reflected in the report.
- What is the view of the Department having regard to its views on the binary divide?
- In whose name would the report be issued? Members were advised that it was open to the Board to accept the report as is or with HEA observations attached.
- Students were not consulted before this report was finalised unlike the earlier Bamford report.
- There was a concern that the report may be proposing a solution to a problem that does not exist. There may be other ways to address NCAD's current financial and governance difficulties.

Decision: Members approved the following steps;

- The report should be sent to the NCAD and IADT for their comments.
- The Department of Education and Skills should be consulted as regards the policy implications.
- The views of students should be sought.
- The report to be considered by the SDPM Committee in September having regard to the feedback received.

6. A Study on Progression in Higher Education 2014/15-2015/16

6.1 Mr Pigott presented the draft report to members. He noted the key factor impacting on student progression was student leaving cert points. When control is made for leaving certificate points there was no significant difference in the progression rates between a university such as UCD and an IoT such as ITTD. Ms Ryan briefed members on work being undertaken by the Student Success Working Group as part of the National Access Plan. She noted that 60% of students on low points do progress so there are steps that can be taken to

improve progression. Dr Patterson briefed members on other policy developments in relation to student progression including providing support to THEA and specific steps to improve retention in ICT courses. The executive also plans to look at progression rates for part-time students.

6.2 Members complimented the executive on the report and raised the following issues;

- It was important that the HEA focused on factors that contribute to better progression.
- The study on part-time progression was welcomed. Open University data suggested such a study needs to be looked at over a longer period.
- The status of the C&AG's report on non-progression. Members were advised that the C&AG has yet to send a revised draft following the HEA's observations on its first draft. The focus of the report was on the financial cost of non progression.
- Some non-progression may not be bad if it is as a result of poor career choice. Members were advised that the HEA is represented on the DES working group on career guidance.
- Are there specific courses or institutions with high non-progression rates? Members were advised that there were some STEM courses with particularly high rates but the HEA does not publish this level of detail.
- Has the review looked at progression rates by ethnicity? Mr Pigott indicated the study looked at domiciliary origin, there was no significant difference between Irish and non-Irish students.
- The implications for level 6 and 7 courses with low points entry needs to be considered.

Decision: Members approved the publication of the report which should include a foreword from the CEO.

7. Higher Education demand in England to 2020

7.1 Dr Bekhradnia in his presentation noted that some of the policy decisions facing England could also be relevant for Ireland which is also facing a significant growth in demand. In his presentation he outlined the two key factors driving the increase in demand;

- Demographics – the steep decline in the population aged 18 is about to end.
- Growth in participation rates – rates have grown despite the rise in fees.

If past rates continue there could be an increase in demand of 100,000 per annum by 2030, this would mean an additional 300,000 places in total. He

outlined a number of disrupter factors that could impact on participation. These included;

- Delayed response to fee increases.
- Brexit and number of overseas applications.
- Impact of other non higher education options such as apprenticeships.
- Potential for male participation rates to rise closer to female rates – sex imbalance was a global phenomenon.

He concluded his presentation by outlining the policy options facing England. These were;

- Ask the HEIs to do more with no significant additional resources – however this might not be sustainable.
- Cap student numbers – the was policy in the 1990s and might be the most likely option again.
- Increase fees.

Decision: Members thanked Dr Bekhradnia for his presentation and noted the HEPI report.

8. CAO Applications

8.1 Dr Patterson introduced this item noting the fall in applications – 4.5% was the highest since 2003-04. This fall was due to a decline in mature applications (12%) and better employment opportunities generally. The biggest drops at level 8 were in ICT and services while there were small increases in applications for Education and Engineering courses. All level 6/7 disciplines showed a decline in applications.

8.2 The following issues were raised;

- Impact of large companies who run their own certified courses.
- Implications of the decline in mature applications will have for performance targets.
- Decline in applications from Northern Ireland.
- Cost of student accommodation.
- It was noted that the CAO data included applications to a number of private colleges – could the HEA collect more data from these institutions? Members were informed that the quality of such data can vary, an added complication is the forthcoming GDPR. Private institutions account for c. 8% of undergraduate numbers and c. 2% of postgraduate numbers.
- The executive agreed to monitor the impact the drop in applications and changes in non-progression rates.

Decision: Members noted the report on CAO applications.

9. Members only session

9.1 Review of CEO Performance

The Authority was informed that the sub-committee on CEO Performance and Review had met with the CEO and agreed a satisfactory rating for 2017. Targets for 2018 were agreed and these would be brought to the next meeting for the information of members.

9.2 Email from Chair on resources

The meeting was informed that the Chair of the Authority had written to the CEO concerning a number of matters that could be addressed by outsourcing some aspects, until our new recruits were employed and up to speed. In this way, further delay in implementing initiatives could be avoided. The CEO indicated that he was considering the suggestions.

9.3 Strategic Plan

The Authority was advised that the Minister had informed the Chair that he was reviewing the draft Strategic Plan 2018-2022 of the Authority and would meet him in the near future to discuss.

The CEO left the meeting at this point.

9.4 CEO's Memorandum at previous meeting

The Deputy Chair asked if there was some unfinished business relating to the CEO's memo at the last meeting. The members felt that there was not, but noted that all issues raised at the previous meeting were also discussed at the CEO Performance and Review sub-committee. The CEO had agreed to take on board a number of suggestions made by the sub-committee.

9.5 Board review

The Chair undertook to circulate the draft questions for the next Board review for discussion at the next meeting.

9.6 Deputy Chair

The Chair and Authority members congratulated the Deputy Chair on a very efficient and effective Board meeting.

10. Any other business

10.1 No issues raised.

Next Meeting

29th May, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2

Padraic Mellett

8th May 2018