

**Higher Education Authority
Report of Meeting of the Board of the HEA held on 25th March 2025**

Present: Dr Niall Connors, Chairperson (agenda items 1-16)
Dr Fiona Killard-Lynch (agenda items 1-16)
Dr Rory O’Sullivan (agenda items 1-16)
Dr Rosemary Day (agenda items 1-16)
Ms Lianne Patterson (agenda items 1-16)
Ms Nessa McEniff (agenda items 1-16)
Ms Paula Fyans (agenda items 1-16)
Professor Anne Scott via MS Teams (agenda items 1-16)
Professor Mark Rogers via MS Teams (agenda items 1-16)
Mr Chris Clifford via MS Teams (agenda items 1-16)

Apologies: Mr Dermot McCarthy

In attendance: Professor Marie Clarke, SETL Chair (agenda items 1-16)

Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-16.1)
Mr Trevor Purtill (agenda items 1-15)
Ms Éilis Noonan via MS Teams (agenda items 1-15)
Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 4-15)
Mr Tim Conlon (agenda items 4-15)
Ms Caitriona Ryan (agenda items 8-15)
Ms Sheena Duffy (agenda items 8-15)
Ms Orla Christle (agenda items 8-15)
Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 8-15)
Dr Louise Callinan (agenda items 8-15)
Mr Ciaran McCaffrey (agenda items 8-15)
Mr Maurice Moynihan (agenda item 10)
Ms Linda Darbey via MS Teams (agenda item 11)
Dr Victoria Brownlee (agenda item 15)
Ms Teresa Gallagher (agenda item 15)

Quorum

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

1. Report of meeting held 28th January

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

2. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

3. Matters arising

3.1 Letter to Minister FHERIS

Members queried whether a letter had issued to the Minister inviting him to attend a future meeting of the HEA Board and if an update on the appointment of a permanent Chairperson had been sought. The CEO confirmed a letter had been sent to the Minister and that DFHERIS indicated that a response on the appointment of a Chairperson is pending, but no timeframe was given.

3.2 Offsite Board Meeting

Members queried the location of the offsite Board meeting, tentatively scheduled for May. The Executive confirmed that a HEI in Dublin is the most likely location.

3.3 Agenda

Ms Fyans noted that she felt the agenda was quite busy and that additional time should be allocated, in particular for Item 11. The Chair noted that additional time could be allocated for that item.

3.4 Log of actions

Ms McEniff noted that she felt there were additional actions that should be reflected on the log, and that the Board would appreciate sight of the closed actions. Mr. Purtill clarified that actions that are closed should be reflected as such on the log for the following meeting, and that he can engage further on additional actions to be reviewed.

4. Report of the Audit, Risk and Finance Meeting 3rd March

Dr Killard-Lynch presented the Report of the Committee.

4.1 2024 Financial Statements

The Committee recommended approval of the 2024 Financial Statements, subject to no material change being identified by the audit. The HEA reported a deficit of €805k in 2024 compared with a surplus of €170k in 2023. This was a planned deficit to reduce accumulated

reserves and cash holdings as requested by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

Decision: The Board approved the 2024 Financial Statements.

4.2 2025 Administration Budget

The Committee recommended approval of HEA's 2025 Administration Budget based on funding of €18.2m provided. No additional funding was provided for additional posts or other operating expenditure. The Committee expressed concern with the lack of adequate resources and highlighted this as a key risk to the organisation.

Total budget Grant Income for 2025 is €2,179m. This compares with €2,409m received in 2024 and an original budget of €2,193m for 2024.

Decision: The Board approved the 2025 Administration Budget.

4.3 Appointment of Internal Auditor

The Committee recommended the appointment of Forvis Mazars as HEA's internal auditors following a procurement process.

Decision: This was approved by the Board.

4.4 HEA Transformation Programme

The Committee recommended approval for the proposed Higher Education Authority (HEA) Transformation Programme for 2025.

Decision: This was approved by the Board.

4.5 Extension Request for IT Resources and Services

The Committee recommended approval for an extension of IT Contractor Services until 31 Dec. 2025 at a total cost of €386,200 (ex VAT). The additional support has enabled the IT Team to reduce the risks of capability, key person dependency and capacity to remediate issues in parallel with supporting internal business-as-usual activities.

Decision: This was approved by the Board.

The Committee Chair also noted:

- The letter of engagement from the Comptroller and Auditor General for their 2024 Audit had been presented to the Committee for information.
- The Committee was satisfied with the actions taken by the Executive to stabilise IT Security and the Committee did not feel an external member with cyber expertise was necessary at this time. The Committee welcomed the upcoming training for the Board on cybersecurity.
- The Committee acknowledged significant challenges being experienced by the Executive due to resource constraints.
- The Committee expressed a strong desire to further extend the term of their external member but noted this was not possible due to the length of their term. The Executive is now assisting with seeking alternative expertise for the Committee.

Members noted the Committee's Report.

5. Report of the System Funding and Oversight Committee

Dr O'Sullivan presented the Report of this Committee.

5.1 Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Funding and Mental Health and Wellbeing Funding

The Committee recommended approval to the Board of the proposed approach to the allocation of €5m in Mental Health and Wellbeing Funding and €5m in Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) Fund.

Decision: The Board approved this proposed approach to allocation.

5.2 Student Assistance Fund and Fund for Students with Disabilities 2025 Budget and 2024 Outturn

The Committee noted the 2024 Outturn for the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities and recommended approval to the Board of the approach to the allocation of these funds as announced in Budget 2025. The proposed 2025 SAF allocation is €9.1m and is in line with the SAF budget received for the previous year. The proposed 2025 FSD allocation is c.€9.5m which includes an increase of €1.5m from the 2024 allocation.

Decision: The Board approved this proposed approach to allocation.

5.3 Report on B09 Funded Institutions

The Committee recommended that the Board write to DFHERIS to express its concern regarding the recently transferred B9 Institutions, and in particular, their financial sustainability and the significant associated corporate risks.

Decision: The Board agreed that the Executive would draft a letter to DFHERIS to be agreed by the Chair of System Funding and Oversight Committee and the Chairperson.

5.4 Future Funding Model Exploratory Model Discussion

The Committee recommended that the Board consider options regarding the development of a future funding model. Members discussed and agreed that the best way forward would be for the Committee to scope out potential options and present to the Board at the next meeting with a recommendation. The Committee Chair noted that the Committee may schedule an additional specific Committee meeting before the next meeting of the Board.

Decision: The Board agreed to consider the Committee's recommended options for a future funding model at its next meeting.

Members raised the following query:

- Ms Fyans queried the process for the approval of Committee Minutes. The Head of Corporate Affairs outlined that the approval of Committee Minutes is the responsibility of the Committee, and that approved Minutes are presented to the Board for noting. If the written Minutes are not available before the Board meeting,

a verbal Report will instead be presented, and the Committee will approve the written Minutes at the next Committee meeting. Ms Patterson noted that there was a clear understanding that Minutes that have been circulated electronically to Committee members for review - and that haven't taken account of comments arising from members - should be considered as the approved Minutes without having to wait for a subsequent Committee meeting to approve them. Additionally, Ms Patterson remarked that only those present at the Committee meeting should be responsible for approving the minutes of the meeting, so she would support gaining clarity on the order of this process. Dr Day suggested that the terminology should be looked at to avoid confusion between a Report of the Committee and the Minutes of a Committee. The Chairperson asked the Head of Corporate Affairs to examine the process and respond with a document for the Board.

Members noted the Committee's Report.

6. Report of the System Development Committee 5th March

Dr Connors presented this Report.

6.1 EDI Enhancement Fund 2025

The Committee recommended approval of the proposed approach to the allocation of funding under the EDI Enhancement Fund 2025.

Decision: The Board approved the proposed approach to the allocation of this funding.

6.2 Annual Progression & Completion Report

The Committee recommended approval to publish the Non-Progression and Completion Report.

Decision: The Board approved publication of the Report.

The Committee also noted the publication of Performance Agreements.

Members noted the Committee's Report.

7. Report of the SETL Committee 20th February

Professor Clarke presented this Report.

7.1 Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Committee recommended approval of the proposed HEA Strategy for Health and Wellbeing and acknowledged the Executive's work in this area.

Decision: The Board approved the Strategy for Health and Wellbeing.

Members noted the Committee's report.

8. Memo 9/25 Research Committee

Ms Ryan presented this item. The Board were asked to:

- Approve the establishment of the Research Committee.

Decision: The Board approved the establishment of the Research Committee.

- Approve the Research Committee Governance document, noting the quorum of two members.

Decision: The Board approved the Governance document of the Committee.

- Approve Dr Rosemary Day as Chair of the Committee.

Decision: The Board approved Dr Day as Chair of the Committee.

The Board noted that ideally in future, the membership of the Committee would have a greater gender balance.

9. Memo 10/25 Committee Membership

Mr Purtill presented this item. Members were requested to approve the revised membership of the HEA standing committees, given the establishment of the Research Committee.

Members were also asked to consider ensuring a quorum of at least 2 Board members for each Committee. The Chair of the SETL Committee agreed to review this in the context of that Committee, and also to review the minimum of four Board Members stated in the SETL Governance document, given the resignation of one Member.

Decision: Members approved the revised membership of the Committees.

10. Memo 11/25 UL S64 Report Recommendations Publication and S64(7) of the HEAA 2022

Mr Moynihan presented this item. The Board was asked to consider and approve the publication by the University of Limerick of recommendations contained in the UL Plan for Renewal, which was prepared following the submission of a report under S64 of the HEA Act 2022.

Decision: The Board approved the publication by UL of this document.

11. Memo 12/25 Annual Plan 2025

Ms Darbey presented this item. Members were requested to approve the HEA Annual Plan 2025, which is aligned with the HEA Corporate Strategic Plan 2023-2026, and the process around the Performance Delivery Agreement with DFHERIS.

Members provided the following observations:

- There should be additional actions under the Culture Review in Q4 - the Deputy CEO confirmed more detail will be added in relation to the implementation of the recommendations from the review.

- It was noted that this Plan was ambitious given the impact of resourcing issues, both human and financial. The CEO agreed and confirmed further engagement with DFHERIS is happening in this context.
- Further detail was sought on planned research activities - this includes developing capacity in TUs, and advocacy activities.
- It was noted that further detail on activities in the tertiary space would be welcomed in the future, and perhaps this can be supported by the System Development Committee.
- It was noted that further refinement of the KPIs should be considered by the Executive.

Decision: The Board approved the HEA Annual Plan 2025.

12. Memo 13/25 Unreasonable Conduct Policy Update

Mr. Purtill presented this item. Members were requested to note that the Unreasonable Conduct Policy may be applied following several engagements by an individual with the HEA, and should an appeal arise, a Member of the HEA Board shall consider this appeal as per the Policy.

Members noted this update.

13. Memo 14/25 Executive Report

The CEO confirmed to Members that a draft aggregated output on defining a target culture for the HEA arising from the SMT and Board sessions will be circulated for feedback following the meeting, and Members are invited to provide any observations. The next steps for the Culture Review will be a staff survey and focus groups.

14. Corporate Risk Register

Ms Noonan updated the Board on the Corporate Risk Register, noting that a risk that was previously medium, concerning Resources, has been escalated to high given the budgetary constraints and resourcing challenges.

The Board noted the Corporate Risk Register.

15. Update on Performance Agreements

Dr Brownlee and Ms Gallagher provided the Board with an update on the Performance Agreement Process and preliminary results of analysis of the performance objectives and indicators as they relate to national priorities and outcomes. Members noted the usefulness of these data and analysis for understanding opportunities and challenges in the higher education and research system, and informing future development and implementation of national policy.

Members raised the following queries:

- What were some of the learnings the Executive took away from this process? It was a longer process than expected, and some institutions were more advanced than others in their capacity to identify strategic objectives and measurable targets in line with the requirements of the Performance Agreement template requirements. It was also noted that HEIs were thinking about key challenges and opportunities in the system, including those relating to student progression, widening participation, and climate and sustainability.
- Will these agreements be published in the hope of sharing best practice across the system? Yes, PAs are published, and HEIs' annual reports on PAs will also be published. The Executive also intend to publish some visualisations from the initial analysis of PAs. The Executive noted that further information arising from the analysis of the PAs and annual reports will be shared with members when available.

Members thanked the Executive for the presentation.

16. Members Only Session

Next Meeting: The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 20th May 2025.

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Chairperson

Date