

Higher Education Authority

Report of 407th Meeting held on 4th June via teleconference

Present¹:

- Mr Tony Donohoe (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Bahram Bekhradnia (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Judith Eaton (agenda items 1-13)
- Professor Orla Feely, Deputy Chair (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Sharon Feeney (agenda items 1-13)
- Ms Lorna Fitzpatrick (agenda items 1-13)
- Mr Michael Horgan, Chairperson (agenda items 1-13)
- Ms Darina Kneafsey (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Deirdre Lillis (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Ronan Lyons (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Jim Mountjoy (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Sinéad O’Flanagan (agenda items 1-13)
- Mr Pól Ó Móráin (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr Lynn Ramsey (agenda items 1-13)
- Dr John Wall (agenda items 1-13)

In attendance:

- Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-13.1)
- Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 1-12)
- Mr Padraic Mellett (agenda items 1-12)
- Mr Tim Conlon (agenda items 1-12)
- Ms Caitriona Ryan (agenda items 1-12)
- Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 1-12)
- Mr Peter Brown (agenda items 4-12)

Conflicts of Interest

The Chair reminded all Board members of potential conflicts of interest and asked members to highlight any items that may require attention.

1. Report of 406th Meeting held 28th April 2020

- 1.1 The minutes were approved subject to minor amendments in par. 4.1 and 8.1. Members agreed that the reports of the 404th-406th meetings could be published on the HEA website.

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

2. Matters arising

2.1 Technology for Board teleconference meetings

The Executive agreed to explore alternatives to Skype for future Board meetings.

2.2 Governance Ireland Report

The Chair advised that the working group of Committee Chairs, CEO and Deputy CEO established to consider the Governance Ireland report will meet next week.

2.3 National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

Members were advised that a paper from the Executive will be submitted for consideration at the July meeting.

2.4 CEO Review Process

The Chair advised that a consultant has been engaged to assist the review group with its work.

3. Executive Report

3.1 The CEO updated members on the following developments since the last meeting.

- Covid 19 – The Executive continues to engage with all HEIs, IUA, THEA, TU Dublin as well as the various DES working groups on arrangements relating to Covid 19. A submission was made to the DES on the overall quantum of funding required by the sector because of the Covid-19 disruption. The DES has requested more granular detail and the Executive is engaging with each HEI in relation to same.
- Munster Technological University was approved by the Minister for Education and Skills.
- The DES has agreed that the HEA will manage TURN and the Board will approve TUTF funding allocations.
- Submissions have been made to the DES in relation to Springboard and the Human Capital Initiative pillar one.
- The HEA is actively recruiting new staff including a Head of Communications. Currently HEA media coverage has improved due to involvement with the Leaving Certificate arrangements.

- 3.2 Members were advised that the Executive continues to work from home in accordance with Government guidelines. The Executive will follow guidelines outlined in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation's Return to Work Protocol and guidance issued by D/PER before a decision is taken to resume working from the HEA's offices.
- 3.3 The CEO advised that the DES has confirmed that the review to be undertaken by the European Commission DG Structural Reform Support Programme on increasing the future sustainability of higher and further education provision is proceeding as planned.

4. Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

- 4.1 Dr Feeney introduced the Committee's report. In relation to the Internal Audit advisory report on Third Party Dependencies, the Committee noted the importance of a dedicated financial expertise for System Funding.

The Committee noted the need to secure approval for the tender of a new finance system as soon as possible.

Mr Mellett advised that he has spoken to the Internal Auditors and it was hoped that the terms of reference for the 2020 IA reviews would be finalised shortly.

4.2 Business Continuity Plan

Dr Feeney noted that the plan had been well tested arising from the current pandemic.

Decision: Members approved the Business Continuity Plan

4.3 Corporate Risk Register

Members welcomed the updated Corporate Risk register. The absence of GDPR was raised. Mr Mellett advised that data protection can be added to the Corporate Risk register, he added that data protection featured in a number of the sectional registers, in addition Mazars have developed a risk register on data protection.

Decision: Members approved the risk register.

Decision: Members approved the Committee's report.

5. Report of the Research and Graduate Education Committee

5.1 Professor Feely introduced the Committee's report. She noted that the main agenda item, a submission on a successor to Innovation 2020, was deferred as the consultation process has been paused due to Covid 19. The Committee plans to undertake a review of its own effectiveness. The Chair advised that the working group set up to review the effectiveness of the Governance Ireland report would be reviewing all of the standing Committees. He also raised oversight of the National ORCID project. Mr Conlon outlined other oversight elements in addition to the National Steering group.

Decision: Members approved the Committee's report.

6. Report of the Finance and Governance Committee

6.1 The Chair introduced this report. He noted much of the discussion focused on Covid 19 (dealt with under item 9).

6.2 *Rolling Governance Review on Pay, Pensions, Travel, Subsistence and Leave*

It was agreed that the Executive would request each HEI Audit and Risk Committee to include in their internal audit workplan a review on one or two areas to be proposed by the HEA.

Decision: Members approved publication of the Report and the next steps outlined in memorandum F12/20.

Decision: Members approved the Report of the Finance and Governance Committee.

7. Report of the System Development and Performance Management Committee

7.1 The Executive has been in contact with the DES on a new Framework following Board discussions and is preparing a further paper on this matter. Members enquired as to how meaningful the strategic dialogue process and compacts could be in the current climate and also if the metrics would need to be reviewed in light of the pandemic. While the Board also queried if the HEIs be asked to submit progress reports Mr Donohoe noted the need for a process to allocate in a fair manner the 2020 performance funding. Finally, members welcomed the Department's decision on TURN and noted the need for the HEA to ensure that it maximises its potential.

Decision: Members approved the Report of the System Development and Performance Management Committee.

8. Report of the Policy and Strategic Planning Committee

8.1 Ms Kneafsey introduced the Committee's report. She reported that the Committee considered a DES paper on Tertiary Education. While it has been withdrawn, it was proposed to prepare a draft HEA response. The remit of the Centre of Excellence for Gender Equality has now been extended to race equality as the intersection of gender and race is a part of advanced Athena SWAN awards. The Committee is planning an additional meeting to review the HEA's strategic plan.

Decision: Members approved the Report of the Policy and Strategic Planning Committee.

9. Post Covid 19 Scenario Planning

9.1 The Chair outlined the background to this paper noting that the Policy and Strategic Planning Committee considered this matter at its last meeting and the Executive had submitted a paper on the quantum of funding required by the sector. The Finance and Governance Committee had also considered this matter and recommended a scenario paper be prepared for consideration by the Board. The paper before the Board was prepared against a background of uncertainty, three scenarios were presented.

9.2 The following issues were raised by members;

- It was suggested that the paper should outline the growth in student numbers and decline in funding per student. This decline in funding has limited the capacity of the system to manage the current crisis.
- The need for a clear HEA voice to be articulated in the paper, recommendations need to be evidence based and prioritised. The paper should be used by the HEA to outline the overall objectives of the HEA including to the need to preserve the capacity of the sector, as an opportunity to promote change in the system while upholding institutional autonomy.
- Student supports particularly in light of the move to more on-line teaching needs to be considered. It was noted that SUSI does not currently provide funding for students enrolled on courses taught through distance learning. Reference was made to the steps taken in other countries such as Germany where increased funding is being made available to students, including international students. Some reference to the Minister for Higher Education's announcement of €2m for Mental Health should be considered.

- Are HEIs including interest repayments on borrowings and the next public sector pay increase in their financial projections? Ms Nugent advised that she assumed this was the case but would seek confirmation.
- The paper should reflect that the country will be borrowing for some time and that the EU had lifted borrowing constraints for the duration of the current crisis.
- Reference to the needs of students undertaking research including PhD stipends and the need to support new forms of research.
- Reference should be made to the support the sector has provided to the state during the current pandemic.
- How might the objective of ensuring equity in student intake be achieved having regard to institutional autonomy?
- The impact on individual institutions is likely to vary considerably with some HEIs more dependent on international student fees. Mr. Conlon advised that more information on likely international student enrolment will become available in mid-July when requests for payment for fees issue.
- Impact on the pandemic on gender equality in particular female researchers having regard to the need for many to take on additional caring responsibilities.
- Clarification was requested on the proposal around a redundancy scheme. The Chair advised that the intention was to provide HEI with a range of options to deal with the crisis. There was no specific redundancy programme in mind.
- The paper should outline savings the HEIs are achieving as well as outline where additional costs might arise e.g. costs associated with the need to provide virtual reality technology for certain courses.
- The need for the HEA to engage with other state agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and the IDA in relation to measures being taken to ensure the continued supply of high quality graduates.
- Concern was expressed over the reference to HEI financial data being confidential.

9.3 The CEO welcomed the above comments. He noted that the Department's response to the HEA's document on funding was to seek more granular detail on the HEI's immediate cashflow position, this information is being collated. He made the point that it would be useful to consider that a suite of documents will travel to the Department, in relation to the Covid, one of which will be the one from the board now being discussed. The current paper was designed to elicit the views of the board and aid drafting. He did not accept that the paper represented a wish list from the HEIs, it represents the data provided by the HEIs which took account of savings the HEIs have made. The Executive still has to receive data

from a number of the universities however, members were advised of those HEIs who have indicated they are facing a serious cashflow position.

9.4 Members considered the next steps including the need to outline a number of scenarios given the current level of uncertainty. Arising from member's comments and suggestion the outline of the paper was summarized by the Chair as follows:

- Covid changing the world
- Impact on Ireland and economy
- Consequences for education in Ireland and higher education in particular
- Third level just emerging from ten years of financial instability due to reduced state funding and massive increase in student numbers
- System does not have the financial reserve to survive beyond a relatively short timeframe
- Ensure we preserve the capacity within the system
- Preserve the values and commitments within the sector
- Seize opportunities for change and innovation
- Protect the most vulnerable student groupings (Access, disadvantaged, disabled, international marooned)
- Protect physical and mental health of both students and staff
- Ensure Gender equality working from home and return to office

Scenarios (updated)

- Contribution of HE to Covid response and to economic recovery:
- Research input to emergency committees and public health
- Covid related research programmes on virus itself
- Graduate demand as economy recovers
- Impact on FDI and consequences

Decision: It was agreed that the Executive would prepare a further draft for consideration by members.

10. HEA Assessment of going concern in light of the Covid 19 Pandemic

10.1 Mr. Mellett advised that this paper was prepared following consultation with the C&AG.

Decision: Members approved the assessment.

11. New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission

11.1 Dr Lillis made a presentation on her visit to the New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). This was funded under the Government of Ireland mobility scheme. The focus of her visit was on data strategy and systems. Dr Feeney also visited New Zealand, she visited three universities and a number of agencies. Amongst the key features of the New Zealand system were;

- Its use of an integrated data system from primary school to 9 years post-graduation from higher education
- The TEC manages the database for all NZ further and higher education, it is available as a public resource to New Zealand inc.
- The data supplied by HEIs is standardised in accordance with TEC requirements, the HEIs supply the data, the Commission undertakes an analysis of this data.
- The Commission has a team of 50 data analysts. This together with the supply of standardised data greatly enables the Commission to inform further and higher education policy in New Zealand.

11.2 Members noted the legislation underpinning the TEC was stronger than the HEA's legislation. It was noted the Commission's CEO had visited Ireland in 2019 and it was suggested he be invited to address the Board at a future meeting if that was possible given the time differences.

Decision: Members thanked Dr Lillis for her presentation.

12. Springboard + and Human Capital Initiative²

12.1 Dr Patterson provided a verbal update on Springboard + and the Human Capital Initiative. Following an assessment of the applications from 44 providers, the Executive recommended to the DES that 9405 places be funded. The eligibility criteria will be the same as 2019.

12.2 There were 140 applications under the Human Capital Initiative pillar 1. A submission was made to the DES in mid-May recommending that 1500 level 8/9 places be funded for three years from September 2020. She advised that the DES had agreed to repurpose €10m HCI pillar 3 funding for HCI pillar 1 and Springboard places. The Executive is pressing the DES for a decision on its recommendations in relation to Springboard and pillar 1. The HEA will hire two careers guidance counsellors from mid-June and a media campaign will

² Dr Lillis absented herself from this item

commence later in the month. 90% of the courses will be available in blended format.

12.3 There were 62 applications under pillar 3. All were deemed to meet the eligibility criteria. The assessment process was delayed due to the pandemic. It is hoped to convene a meeting of the assessment panel chaired by the CEO in the next few weeks with a view to submitting recommendations to the DES in mid-July. It was confirmed that the HCI was only open to the HEIs. She confirmed that the Executive was managing this programme on behalf of the DES, with the final decision on funding resting with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Decision: Item noted

13. Members only

13.1 Verbal Reports

The members asked that verbal reports to the Board and its committees should be in exceptional circumstances only, rather than the more common occurrences they are now.

13.2 Appreciation of CEO, SMT and Staff

The Board asked that their appreciation be conveyed to the CEO, SMT and staff of the Authority for their efforts during the Covid-19 pandemic

13.3 Support for Chief Executive

The Board discussed ways in which it might provide additional support to the CEO. The Chair suggested that helpful information in this regard may evolve during the CEO review process and this would be reported back to the Board.

Next Meeting

7th July 2020

Chairperson

Date