

Higher Education Authority**Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of the HEA held on 16th September 2025**

Present: Dr Niall Connors, Interim Chairperson (agenda items 1-11)

Dr Fiona Killard-Lynch (agenda items 1-11)

Dr Rory O'Sullivan (agenda items 1-11)

Dr Rosemary Day (agenda items 1-11)

Ms Paula Fyans (agenda items 1-11) via MS Teams

Professor Anne Scott (agenda items 1-11) via MS Teams

Mr Dermot McCarthy (agenda items 1-11)

Ms Nessa McEniff (agenda items 1-11)

Professor Mark Rogers (agenda items 1-11)

Mr Bryan O'Mahony (agenda 1-11) via MS Teams

Apologies: Professor Marie Clarke, SETL Committee Chair

Ms Orla Christle, Head of System Governance

In attendance: Ms Laura Magahy, Forvis Mazars (agenda item 10)

Dr Alan Wall, CEO (agenda items 1-11.1)

Ms Orla Nugent, Deputy CEO (agenda items 1-10)

Mr Trevor Purtill, Board Secretary & Head of Corporate Affairs
(agenda items 1-10)

Ms Éilis Noonan, Deputy Board Secretary, Corporate Affairs
(agenda items 1-10)

Mr Tim Conlon, Head of Policy & Strategic Planning (agenda items
1-10)

Dr Vivienne Patterson, Head of Statistics, Skills & Engagement
(agenda items 1-10)

Ms Pearl Cunningham, Head of Finance (agenda items 1-10)

Ms Caitríona Ryan, Head of Research Policy (agenda items 1-10)

Ms Sheena Duffy, Head of International, Communications and EDI
(agenda items 1-10)

Dr Louise Callinan, Head of Access Policy (agenda items 1-10)

Mr Dean Masterson, Research Policy (agenda item 8)

Ms Soledad Fernandez, Research Policy (agenda item 8)

Quorum

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

1. Report of meeting held 1st July

Sections 3 and 13 of the minutes will be amended as per the Board's recommendations.

Decision: The Report of the July Board meeting was approved subject to the above amendments.

2. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

3. Matters arising*3.1 CEO appraisal*

The Chair confirmed that the CEO's performance appraisal has been completed.

3.2 Offsite Board Meeting

The Chair confirmed that arrangements have been made to host the next meeting of the Board on 4th November on the campus of IADT, in line with usual practice of holding one Board meeting per year offsite in a HEI.

3.3 Meeting with the Board of Taighde Éireann

The Chair confirmed that the Board of the HEA will meet the Board of Taidghe Eireann in November.

3.4 Appointment of new Chair

It was confirmed that Professor Mark Rogers was appointed by the Minister as Chairperson of the HEA on 12th September. Members congratulated Prof. Rogers on his appointment and thanked Dr Connors for his work as interim Chair.

4. Memo 33/25 Future Funding Model

Dr O'Sullivan presented this Memo. The Board were requested to approve the membership of the Future Funding Model working group which will consider the development of a future funding model proposal to assist the Board in formulating its advice to the Minister.

The Working Group consists of members of the Board of the HEA, representatives from the HE sector, members with international expertise, and nominees from DFHERIS and the HEA Executive. This is a competency based working group not a representative one.

A draft Terms of Reference has been prepared for consideration by members at the first meeting of the group, which is scheduled for 30th September.

A meeting was held with the IUA and TUA to provide an update s regarding the establishment of the working group.

Dr O'Sullivan thanked the Deputy CEO and Dr Andrea Valova, System Funding for their work on the group thus far.

Members raised the following queries:

- Where the working group's international expertise was being drawn from. Confirmation was provided that this is being drawn from members with experience at the OECD, HE systems in Northern Ireland, Wales and the Netherlands.
- Whether all institution types within HE had members participating in the group. Dr O'Sullivan confirmed that the group's HE sectoral membership is drawn from universities, technological universities and colleges.

Decision: The Board approved the membership of the working group.

5. Memo 34/25 DFHERIS Tertiary Strategy

The Head of Policy & Strategic Planning and the Head of Statistics, Skills & Engagement presented this item. Members were requested to consider a draft of HEA input to the DFHERIS Consultation on a Tertiary Education Strategy. The Head of Statistics, Skills & Engagement noted that the NAO and NTO will be making submissions separately.

The Board raised the following comments and suggestions:

- Under the Strategic Objectives section, it was suggested to reference international competitiveness, and to add a reference to wider society in the list of stakeholders.
- Under the section “An Adaptive and Responsive System”, it was suggested to add a reference to advising on funding requirements.
- It was noted that there is no standard definition of tertiary education.
- It was suggested that the development of a single QQI pathway for HE should be called for.
- It was suggested to add a reference to analysis of financial metrics to ensure adequate funding is in line with international comparisons.

The Board noted this item.

6. Memo 35/25 CSP Midterm Review Update

The Head of Policy & Strategic Planning presented this item. The Board had previously approved the midterm review report on 1st July 2025. Subsequent additions were made to the report under ‘Areas for Consideration’ prior to it being shared and finalised with DFHERIS on 14th July 2025. The memo outlined the additional wording.

The Board noted this update.

7. Memo 36/25 Draft HEA Statement on Research Role

The Head of Research Policy presented this item. The Board was requested to approve the draft Statement. Following feedback from Members at the July meeting, the statement was updated by the Research Committee.

Members proposed further amendments to the text. Regarding the HEA and RI Board to Board meeting, Dr Day invited Members to submit any proposed topics for the meeting, and a proposed agenda will be presented at the November Board meeting.

Decision: The Executive will redraft the statement based on Board feedback and consult with DFHERIS. Following this, the document will be presented to the meeting of the Boards of RI and HEA on 19th November.

8. Memo 37/25 Update on North South Research Programme

Mr Masterson, Research Policy HEA provided a presentation on the ongoing work of the NSRP, including a status update on the 62 projects funded under Call 1, and their subsequent impact, and an overview of the four projects funded under Call 2.

Members raised the following queries and comments:

- It was queried how the success in meeting the stated objectives of the programme can be measured. The Executive outlined that this is done through analysis of people development, partnerships, collaborations, early career researchers being supported, and cross-border working opportunities that would not otherwise have been achieved without the funding provided by the programme.
- It was noted that a strength of the programme was its support of projects across all disciplines.

The Board noted this presentation.

9. Corporate Risk Register

The Deputy Secretary presented the Risk Register and noted that no substantial changes were made since the last review in July.

Members raised the following queries and suggestions:

- It was noted that the Corporate Risk Register did not encompass risks experienced by the sector by design. It was confirmed that separate sectoral risks reporting mechanisms are in place.
- It was suggested that it may be useful to include expertise in oversight of large capital infrastructure projects in the recruitment booklet for new Board Members.
- It was queried whether the challenges in recruitment of staff were being experienced in any sections in particular. The Head of Corporate Affairs confirmed that the challenges in recruitment of IT staff were being managed and the ARFC will receive further updates on this by the end of the year. The other main area experiencing challenges is the Capital section. It was noted that this is a systemic issue and not unique to the HEA. The Head of Corporate Affairs noted that the routine exit interviews undertaken identified other career opportunities as the major reason for staff mobility.

The Board noted the Corporate Risk Register.

10. Presentation on Target Culture

Ms Laura Magahy from Forvis Mazars delivered a presentation on the ongoing Organisational Culture Review.

The Board raised the following observations:

- Members noted the response rate received to the staff survey was highly positive and constructive.
- It was confirmed that a multi-year roadmap will be prepared and will be shared with the Board for their information as establishing and embedding the target culture will take time. The collaboration between Forvis Mazars at the Board, SMT and Focus groups in co-creating the desirable and undesirable behaviours underpinning the Target Culture exemplified the approach to be taken.
- Members noted that it would be useful for the Board to demonstrate its commitment to achieving the target culture.

The Board noted this presentation.

11. Members Only Session

Next Meeting: The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 4th November.

Chairperson

Date