HEA | An tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas
The Higher Education Authority

Higher Education Authority
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of the HEA held on 27th January 2026
10am, HEA Offices

Present:	Prof Mark Rogers, Chairperson (agenda items 1-14) Dr Fiona Killard-Lynch via MS Teams (agenda items 1-14) Dr Rosemary Day (agenda items 1-14) Ms Paula Fyans (agenda items 1-14) Mr Dermot McCarthy (agenda items 1-14) Ms Nessa McEniff via MS Teams (agenda items 1-14) Dr Niall Connors (agenda items 1-14) Dr Rory O'Sullivan (agenda items 1-14) Prof Anne Scott (agenda items 1-14) Mr Bryan O'Mahony (agenda items 1-14)
Apologies:	Ms Sheena Duffy, Head of International, Communications and EDI Mr Tim Conlon, Head of Policy & Strategic Planning Ms Elaine Vaughan, Head of Capital Programmes Unit
In attendance:	Professor Marie Clarke, SETL Committee Chair (agenda items 1-14) Dr Alan Wall, CEO (agenda items 1-14.1) Ms Orla Nugent, Deputy CEO (agenda items 1-13) Mr Trevor Purtill, Board Secretary & Head of Corporate Affairs (agenda items 1-13) Ms Éilis Noonan, Deputy Board Secretary, Corporate Affairs (agenda items 1-13) Dr Vivienne Patterson, Head of Statistics, Skills & Engagement via MS Teams (agenda items 1-13) Ms Orla Christle, Head of System Governance (agenda item 1-13) Ms Pearl Cunningham, Head of Finance (agenda items 1-13) Ms Caitríona Ryan, Head of Research Policy (agenda items 1-13) Dr Louise Callinan, Head of Access Policy (agenda items 1-13) Ms Linda Darbey, Policy & Strategic Planning (agenda items 6, 7, 10 & 11)

Quorum

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

1. Conflicts of Interests

Prof. Scott declared a potential conflict of interest in relation to Item 12 – HEAnet Governance Update.

2. Minutes of meeting held 2nd December

Prof. Clarke noted she was present at the December meeting and should be noted as such.

Decision: The minutes of the December Board meeting were approved subject to that amendment.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 Board Actions Table

The Chair noted that the action concerning the Culture roadmap has been updated and will be brought to the ARFC in March.

3.2 Head of Capital Programmes Vacancy

The Chair noted that an appointment was made to fill this vacancy and wished the incumbent well.

4. Report of the Audit, Risk and Finance Meeting 17th December

Dr Killard-Lynch presented this item.

4.1- Biannual Review of Risk Management (AU 29/25)

The Committee recommended approval of the recommendations set out in the risk management review.

Decision: The Board approved this recommendation.

4.2-Report on the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Controls (AU 30/25)

The Committee recommended approval of the Report on the 2025 Review of the Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control.

Decision: The Board approved this recommendation.

4.3- Internal Audit Plan 2026-2028 (AU 31/25)

The Committee recommended approval of the Internal Audit Plan 2026-2028, noting that this will remain flexible.

Members raised the following query:

- Given the extensive list of potential audit topics, it was noted that it was unlikely that each would be addressed within the lifetime of the contract with the current Internal Auditors. This was confirmed as there are mandatory audit topics that need to be addressed annually and previous audit topics that need to be revisited as best practice.

Decision: The Board approved this recommendation.

4.4- Internal Audit Charter (AU 32/25)

The Committee recommended approval of the Internal Audit Charter.

Decision: The Board approved this recommendation.

4.5- HEA Transformation Proposed 2026 Programme (AU 34/25)

The 2026 plan and associated budget for the HEA Transformation Programme was recommended for approval by the Committee.

Members raised the following query:

- Clarity was sought on the scope of the project, and whether the figure is the total budget for the project. It was clarified that the 2026 budget requested is for the following projects working with the Change Partner encompassing the development and implementation of data dashboard(s) and identification of requirements for a HEA enterprise system. Yearly budgets for the programme will continue to be brought for Board approval via the ARFC. Members were supportive of the Executive's change management-focused approach to this phase of the Transformation Programme.

Decision: The Board approved this recommendation and associated budget of €200k for 2026 subject to funding available.

The Chair of ARFC also provided an update on the discussion of fraud prevention measures that took place at the last Committee meeting and confirmed that the recruitment of an external Committee member is ongoing.

The Board noted the Committee's Report.

5. Report of the Future Funding Model Working Group- Memo 10/26

Dr O'Sullivan provided an update on the work of the Group. Dr O'Sullivan held meetings with the HEA Senior Management Team and System Funding Managers, respectively, on 7th January. The key themes which emerged were:

1. Evolving Modes of Delivery and Basis of Funding
2. Key Priorities and Values
3. Performance
4. Alignment of Sectors and a Single Funding Model
5. Governance

The Working Group is scheduled to reconvene at an in-person event in February.

The Board was requested to approve a HEA Executive nominee for membership of the Future Funding Model Working Group, replacing a current member who is moving to another section.

Decision: The Board approved this decision.

6. Memo 2/26 Corporate Strategic Plan 2027-2030: Proposal

Ms Darbey presented this item which outlined the proposed methodology around the preparation of the next Corporate Strategic Plan. Milestones include the recruitment of an external consultant, the formation of an internal steering group, an internal analysis phase to include ongoing engagement with the Executive and the Board (May), external consultation phase, and engagement with the Executive and the Board (July to September)on the development of strategic priorities and objectives following consideration of the findings of the stakeholder consultation process, with the preparation of an initial draft of the CSP expected by Q4 2026. Ms Darbey also confirmed that suggestions on the list of stakeholders to consult with are welcome. It was suggested that the Arts Council should be included in the stakeholder list.

Members raised the following queries:

- Clarity was sought on the format of the Board's involvement. It was confirmed that the Board's engagement will be ongoing, and there will be a full-day session arranged with Board Members later in the year.

Decision: The Board approved this item.

7. Memo 3/26 Funding for National Research on Third Level Irish Language Provision

The CEO noted that HEA representatives were in attendance at the Joint Committee for Irish Language, Gaeltacht and the Irish-speaking Community, which was taking place at the same time as this meeting.

Ms Darbey presented this item and noted that due to timing issues, this request was being brought to Board directly rather than being considered by the System Development Committee in the first instance. She provided an overview of the due diligence undertaken by the Executive in relation to the proposed research. Members were requested to consider and approve funding for National Research on Third Level Irish Language Provision proposed by the University of Galway, subject

to finalisation of the project proposal, and provision of funding from DFHERIS. Linda Darbey advised that DFHERIS had since confirmed the availability of funding of €250,000 for the purposes of the research through grant funding (B.4.).

Members raised the following queries:

- Clarity was sought on the oversight arrangements of the project. It was confirmed that the University will convene an Advisory Board (External Stakeholders) and an Executive Committee (University representatives) to oversee and manage the project and provide advice and strategic direction.
- Additional detail was sought on the scope of the project proposal. It was outlined that the proposal was quite broad with a mixed methodology, comprising interviews/focus groups/surveys, engagement with post-primary schools and guidance counsellors, and consultation with the public sector to examine potential demand and provision issues.

Decision: The Board approved this item.

8. Memo 4/26 Revised 2026 Board Meeting Dates and Agenda Outline for 2026

The Deputy Board Secretary presented this item. The Board were requested to approve a revised date for the December 2026 Board meeting and note the indicative list of agenda items for the year.

Decision: The Board approved the revised date and noted proposed agenda items.

9. Memo 5/26 Results of Board Self-Evaluation

The Chair suggested that substantive discussion on this item be deferred until Members Only, noting a positive evaluation overall.

The Board noted this Memo.

10. Memo 6/26 Annual Plan 2025: Q4 and End of Year Reports

Ms Darbey presented this item. Members were requested to consider the HEA Annual Plan 2025: Quarter 4 and End of Year Reports.

The Board noted the extent of the work undertaken by the Executive.

Members raised the following queries:

- Was there an update on the review of the Technological Universities Transformation Fund? It was confirmed that this review was delayed due to resourcing issues.
- Did the sale of No.3 Shelbourne Buildings have any effect on the HEA's lease arrangements? It was confirmed that it did not.
- Clarity was sought on the status of the HR Strategy and PMDS review. It was confirmed that the draft HR strategy will be revised to reflect the ongoing Culture work in the organisation and be brought forward as a People Strategy in 2026. The PMDS review was completed in January.
- Clarity was sought on the HEA's approach to resourcing. It was confirmed that the HEA works within a set Employment Control Framework (ECF), engages in ongoing workforce planning, and is required to submit its workforce plans to DFHERIS. Within the context of this discussion, it was noted that the HEA's ICT Manager will be leaving his role in February. The difficulty of attracting and retaining specialised skillsets remains a significant challenge for the organisation.

The Board noted the contents of the Memo.

11. Memo 7/26 Annual Plan 2026: Key Objectives

Ms Darbey presented this item. Members were requested to consider the initial draft of Key Objectives for the HEA Annual Plan 2026, noting that the final draft of the Plan will come to Board in March for approval.

Members provided suggestions on how the objectives could be drafted.

The Board noted the contents of the Memo.

12. Memo 8/26 HEAnet Governance Update

The Board noted the contents of this Memo.

13. Memo 9/26 Executive Report

The CEO and the Head of Statistics, Skills and Engagement provided an update on the ongoing engagement with SOLAS and QQI on apprenticeships. Following receipt of a transition plan prepared by the three organisations, the Minister has requested a more detailed report on the subject. The Head of Statistics, Skills and Engagement confirmed that the HEA would be briefing TUs in the coming weeks. A detailed discussion on the matter followed.

The CEO confirmed that Section 64 discussions with TU Dublin, UCC and UL would be taking place in February.

Members noted the HEA's positive gender pay gap report and suggested that the organisation consider publicising it.

The Board noted the Executive Report.

14. Members only session

The Board reviewed the results of the Board Self-Evaluation. The Board noted the generally positive views of the members. The Board reflected on the need to maintain a clear differentiation between the role of the Board and that of the Executive, and that effective governance requires that Board time is focused on strategy, oversight, and fiduciary matters rather than operational management. The agenda, committee reporting and approach to ensuring members were appropriately informed were considered in relation how this balance might better be achieved.

Next Meeting: The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 24th March 2026.

Chairperson Date