

**Higher Education Authority  
Report of Meeting of the Board of the HEA held on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

- Present:** Mr Dermot McCarthy (agenda items 1-11)  
Dr Fiona Killard-Lynch (agenda items 1-11)  
Dr Rosemary Day (agenda items 1-11)  
Ms Lianne Patterson (agenda items 1-11)  
Ms Nessa McEniff (agenda items 1-11)  
Ms Paula Fyans, Deputy Chairperson (agenda items 1-11)  
Professor Anne Scott (agenda items 1-11)  
Professor Mark Rogers (agenda items 1-11)  
Mr Chris Clifford (agenda items 1-11)
- Apologies:** Dr Niall Connors  
Dr Rory O’Sullivan
- In attendance:** Professor Daniel Carey, (agenda item 4)  
Professor Marie Clarke, SETL Committee Chair (agenda items 2-11)
- Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 2-11)  
Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 2-11)  
Mr Padraic Mellett (agenda items 2-11)  
Mr Tim Conlon (agenda items 2-11)  
Ms Caitriona Ryan (agenda items 2-11)  
Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 7-11)  
Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 2-11)  
Mr Peter Brown (agenda items 2-11)  
Ms Orla Christle (agenda items 2-11)  
Mr Ciaran Mc Caffrey (agenda items 2-11)  
Dr Louise Callinan (agenda items 2-11)  
Ms Valerie Harvey (agenda items 7)

**Conflicts of Interest**

No conflicts of interest disclosed.

**Quorum**

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

## **Chair vacancy**

Mr Mellett advised that the HEA Act requires that members attending a board meeting shall choose one of their members to be Chairperson of the meeting. The Act requires this action at each meeting while the position of Chairperson remains vacant or where the Chairperson is not present for a meeting.

Members enquired what steps could be taken to expedite the filling of the post of Chairperson. Mr Mellett advised the PAS process would likely take 6 months, and it is open to the Board to request an acting Chair be appointed in the interim. The CEO advised he raised the Chair vacancy with the Department.

**Decision:** It was agreed that the Executive would write to the Department requesting the appointment of an acting Chair until the selection of a new Chair has been completed.

Members agreed that the meeting today should be chaired by Ms Paula Fyans.

### **1. Members only session**

No substantial items discussed under this item.

### **2. Report of meeting held 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024**

**Decision:** Members approved the report.

### **3. Matters arising**

3.1 The CEO briefed the Board on the three S 64 reviews in UCC, UL and TU Dublin. Reports are expected from UL and TU Dublin by the end of the month and members noted it may be necessary to engage before the next meeting scheduled for 22<sup>nd</sup> October. He advised that the PAC will be meeting UL in October. Members noted the recent C&AG report relating to the purchase of two properties by UL and were briefed on the C&AG's audit of TU Dublin.

3.2 The CEO confirmed following completion of the current reviews noted in 3.1 the HEA plans to collate lessons learned and share these with the Chairs of Governing Authorities and the staff with responsibility for governance in institutions.

3.3 The status of issues raised by members at Board meetings will be circulated in a table in the supporting folder. It was agreed that this would be included as a standing item on future agendas.

### **4. Report of the Irish Research Council**

4.1 Professor Carey presented the final report of the Irish Research Council which met on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2024. The Council ceased to exist following the establishment of Research Ireland (RI) on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024. He raised the following matters;

- Composition of the Board of the new agency

- Transitional arrangements pending the transfer of IRC staff to Research Ireland, he noted the difference in terms and conditions between IRC and SFI staff now in RI
- Variation in stipends between IRC/SFI/RI and other bodies such as HRB and the planned Innovate for Ireland. Ms Ryan advised that she anticipates funding being provided in the budget to increase Research Ireland stipends, there will be no provision to increase stipends funded directly by HEIs. Mr Brown indicated that a pilot Innovate for Ireland programme was likely to be announced soon.
- Important role of the HEA in overseeing HE research

Professor Carey noted he enjoyed his time on the Council and thanked the HEA Board, IRC Council members, Mr Brown and Dr Callinan and the other staff in the Council.

#### 4.2 The following issues were raised by Members;

- Transfer of IRC staff, Dr Wall advised that they remain HEA staff until 4<sup>th</sup> November when they would transfer to Research Ireland under TUPE.
- Transitional arrangements including payments, this was addressed in the Minister's letter which was circulated to Members. Dr Wall confirmed he is engaging with Research Ireland's interim CEO.
- Impact on HEIs of SFI funded research centres.

4.3 Dr Wall briefed members on transitional arrangements between the HEA and Research Ireland pending the transfer of IRC staff to RI on 4<sup>th</sup> November noting these were addressed in the letter from the Minister. He noted the need for a mechanism for Board oversight on research now that the IRC has ceased to be in place. It was agreed that the Executive would draft proposals for a new Committee on Research for consideration at the next Board meeting. Members highlighted that in order to facilitate creation of a new Committee, it may be necessary to reduce the number of Members on existing Committees.

**Decision:** Members thanks Professor Carey and noted the report.

### 5. Report of the Student Engagement and Teaching & Learning Committee

5.1 Professor Clarke introduced the Committee's report. Issues considered at the meeting included;

- Report of the Student Progression Conference, members endorsed the Executive's next steps, publication of the report, and supported the establishment of the Policy Forum
- Funding for student wellbeing and mental health, Members welcomed this provision
- SATLE funding allocations which were announced by the Minister at the National Forum Associates Assembly in Mary Immaculate College
- Appointment of 4 secondees to assist with the work of the National Teaching & Learning Forum
- Preparations for a National Conference on 12<sup>th</sup> December

**Decision:** The Board approved the following allocations;

- (1) Mental Health funding €5m - €4.9m will be allocated directly to HEIs, with the remaining €0.1m to be used to support national projects
- (2) SATLE Impact Awards (4 at €25k each) - €0.1m

Members noted the verbal report presented by Professor Clarke.

## **6. Report of the System Development Committee**

6.1 Mr Conlon introduced this item in the absence of the Committee Chair, Dr Connors. Mr Conlon updated members on the proposal to establish a sectoral representative body to be funded through the Technological Sector Advancement Fund. The Committee approved the proposal to fund the project and the establishment of such a body, however further information was requested (e.g. objectives underpinning Work Package 6). Subsequent to the Committee's meeting the Executive received an updated work programme package from the participating HEIs, this will be considered at the Committee's next meeting. It is envisaged the participating institutions will be the five TUs, DkIT and IADT. Members were advised that there were particular challenges facing the institutions such as staff contracts and Executive Management Teams which are best addressed at sectoral level through such a body.

**Decision:** The Board approved the Committee's Governance Document and the recommendation that one external member be appointed to the Committee.

Members noted the Committee's report.

## **7. Graduate Outcomes Survey Review**

7.1 Ms Harvey introduced this item noting the proposed review was considered by the Board at its November 2023 meeting. Her presentation addressed the following;

- Background to the annual survey which has been in place since 2017/18, prior to that the HEA had since 1982 issued a First Destinations Report
- Data contained in the annual survey
- Media coverage of the HEA's graduate outcome survey reports
- Reasons for undertaking a review of the survey now – HE landscape changes, changes to the graduate tracking landscape with the CSO undertaking a graduate longitudinal survey and the EU undertaking a review of graduate tracking policies and practices across the EEA.
- Approach to the review which entailed consultation with stakeholders and a data validity assessment
- Findings and recommendations
  - Data is high quality and representative of the graduate population
  - Survey questions were valid – there was scope to add a small number of additional questions
  - The distributed approach to the survey was acceptable

- Better accessibility to the survey data should be considered by the HEA and HEIs and a need for more focus on engagement and communications with stakeholders
- HEA may need to provide more guidance to the HEIs e.g. what type of awards should be included in the survey
- Designation of private institutions will require further consideration having regard to the provisions of the 2022 HEA legislation.
- Next steps – The HEA Executive will prepare a plan for an updated graduate survey to be in place by 2026

7.2 Members thanked Ms Harvey for her comprehensive report and raised the following issues;

- Response rate to the survey – 50% which was considered very satisfactory. Members discussed how the response rate might be improved including providing notice to students at graduation ceremonies.
- Difference in data between this survey and the CSO longitudinal survey? Ms Harvey noted the HEA's survey provided more granular data than that of the CSO.
- Nature of qualitative data? Ms Harvey indicated these covered questions such as relevance of course to graduate's employment.
- Courses covered in the survey, Ms Harvey advised the survey covered courses level 6-10 but not CPD study or study linked to microcredit awards.
- Plans to designate private institutions. The CEO advised that the HEA was awaiting proposals from the Department.

**Decision:** Members noted the report.

## 8. HEA Procurement

### 8.1 Change Management Tender

The CEO advised members that this tender relates to external consultancy services to support the transformation programme across people, processes, technology and data. The Executive implemented a new Financial Management System (FMS) and is in the process of implementing a Stakeholder, Risk and Issues management system. The HEA 2024 workplan sets out the following objectives which include the specification and development key data dashboards, and the implementation of a Grant Management system. The estimated value of this contract is €200k per annum (excluding VAT) and the contract will be for 2 years with the option to extend for a further 2 years.

**Decision:** Members approved the appointment of Grant Thornton and expenditure of up to €200k per annum (excluding VAT) for a maximum period of 4 years for the provision of Change, Project and Programme Management and ICT Consultancy Services.

## **8.2 Fit-out of Floor Four Offices**

Mr Mellett advised that 6 tenders have been received and these are currently being assessed by the HEA's project manager, Currie Brown. Approval of the Board will be required prior to final sign-off by the Department. The recommendation will be issued electronically to Members. Mr Mellett also advised members that the HEA is seeking to extend the lease on its floors in 3 Shelbourne Buildings by a further 5 years. Once negotiations have concluded with the HEA landlord representatives, the approval of the Department will be sought prior to final approval being sought from the Board.

**Decision:** Members noted this update.

## **9. Appointment of Board Secretary**

9.1 Mr Mellett advised the Board that he will be retiring with effect from 4<sup>th</sup> October. Following a public recruitment campaign an interview panel consisting of Professor Mark Rogers, Ms Orla Nugent and Ms Moira Walsh, Head of People, Solas recommended the appointment of [REDACTED] to the post of Head of Corporate Affairs. This role encompasses the post of Secretary to the Board and authorised signatory for HEA bank matters and in accordance with the provisions of the State Code approval of the Board is requested. The CEO confirmed that Ms Éilis Noonan will look after Board matters, reporting to him, until [REDACTED] up the post on 4<sup>th</sup> November.

**Decision:** Members approved the appointment of [REDACTED] Board Secretary and authorised signatory for HEA bank matters.

The Board conveyed its thanks to Mr Mellett for his contribution to the work of the HEA.

## **10. Corporate Strategic Plan – Mid-term review**

10.1 Mr Conlon introduced this item noting a mid-term review is a requirement under the HEA's Corporate Strategic Plan. The following points were raised;

- Active verbs should be used where possible
- Members would welcome the opportunity to get more oversight on the HEA's external environment. It was agreed that there would be an opportunity to consider this at a Board away day which the Executive will arrange early in the new year.

**Decision:** Members approved the proposed format for CSP mid-term review

## **11. Risk Management**

11.1 Mr Mellett introduced this item noting that the next formal review of the Corporate Risk register will be considered by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee in December. The internal auditors will be providing training on risk management to the Committee at its meeting later this month. It was agreed that a summary of the key points will be provided to the Board.



**Decision:** Item noted

**Next Meeting:** The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024.

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Chairperson

Date