

**Higher Education Authority**  
**Report of Meeting of the Board of the HEA held on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

- Present:
- Mr Michael Horgan, Chairperson (agenda items 1-13)
  - Mr Dermot McCarthy (agenda items 1-13)
  - Dr Fiona Killard-Lynch (agenda items 1-13)
  - Dr Niall Connors (agenda items 1-13)
  - Dr Rory O’Sullivan (agenda items 1-13)
  - Dr Rosemary Day (agenda items 1-13)
  - Ms Lianne Patterson (agenda items 1-13)
  - Ms Nessa McEniff (agenda items 1-13)
  - Ms Paula Fyans, Deputy Chairperson (agenda items 1-13)
  - Professor Anne Scott (agenda items 1-13)
  - Professor Mark Rogers (agenda items 1-13)
  - Mr Chris Clifford (agenda items 1-13)
- In attendance:
- Professor Daniel Carey, IRC Chair (agenda items 1-13)
  - Professor Marie Clarke, SETL Committee Chair (agenda items 1-13)
  
  - Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-13.1)
  - Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 1-12)
  - Mr Padraic Mellett (agenda items 1-12)
  - Ms Caitriona Ryan (agenda items 1-12)
  - Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 1-12)
  - Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 1-12)
  - Mr Peter Brown (agenda items 1-12)
  - Ms Sheena Duffy (agenda items 1-12)
  - Ms Orla Christle (agenda items 1-12)
  - Mr Ciaran Mc Caffrey (agenda items 1-12)
  - Ms Eilis Noonan (agenda items 1-12)
  - Dr Victoria Brownlee (agenda item 1-12)
  - Ms Valerie Harvey (agenda item 6)
  - Dr David Reilly (agenda item 6)
  - Dr Deirdre Quinn (agenda items 6,9)
  - Ms Alexia Sammarco (agenda item 9)
  - Mr Michael Duffy (agenda item 9)
  - Ms Teresa Gallagher (agenda item 10)
  - Mr Phillip Mulvaney (agenda item 11)

## **Conflicts of Interest**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## **Quorum**

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

### **1. Report of previous meeting**

The Report of the Meeting of the HEA Board on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024 was approved. Additional information was sought by Members on the IRC Assessor payments item at the March meeting, this will be provided by the Executive.

### **2. Matters arising**

#### *2.1 Outstanding Items for Board Member Awareness Sessions*

As part of ongoing Board induction, the remaining sessions on Corporate Affairs, Access Policy, System Governance and System Performance will be arranged in advance of the July Board meeting. Cybersecurity will also be discussed further as part of the Corporate Risk Register discussion (Item 11 below).

#### *2.2 Section 64 Proceedings*

The CEO provided a detailed update to Members on the Section 64 reviews which are ongoing in three higher education institutions (HEIs). Reports produced by the HEIs on foot of these reviews will be brought to the HEA Board for review and discussion once completed.

In relation to the ongoing matters at the University of Limerick, in conjunction with the S64 review, the HEA is also undertaking three supporting reviews with the consent and co-operation of UL, focused on capital programmes, culture and protected disclosures, respectively.

### **3. Report of the Student Engagement and Teaching & Learning Committee 18th April- Verbal Report**

Professor Clarke presented this report.

#### *3.1 Update on Strategy Day*

Professor Clarke updated Members on the recent Strategic Planning Day, which sought to arrive at a final understanding of definition of Student Engagement and explored different kinds of metrics to measure student engagement, taking into account the entire environment. Active participation in learning and enabling the student to reach their potential were also emphasised.

#### *3.2 Other items*

- Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (SATLE) reports have been submitted and are being reviewed.

- An update was provided on the ongoing secondment process, which will be for 18 months from various institutions. Professional development, AI and student development are the areas of focus.
- There will be a session on 12<sup>th</sup> June, with Sharon Flynn from NTUTOR project, who will provide updates on the programme.
- There will also be a Disciplinary Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Assessment (DELTA) award event in Cork on 29<sup>th</sup> May.

3.2 The following query was raised:

- Will a report follow from the Strategy Day? It was confirmed this will be available after the next Committee meeting.

**Decision:** Members noted the Committee's Report.

#### **4. Report of the Audit and Risk Committee of Meeting 13th May - Verbal Report**

Dr Killard-Lynch gave a verbal update of the Committee meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

##### *4.1 Committee Terms of Reference*

The Committee recommended that the proposed addition of the Committee Chair's term lasting for a period of two years would be accepted.

##### *4.2 Corporate Risk Register*

The Committee wishes to allocate additional time at their next meeting for a workshop on the Corporate Risk Register, to develop a common understanding of how the HEA arrives at the risk ratings and description.

The Committee reviewed the Risk Appetite Statement and Risk Management Framework and recommended these be approved when the Report of the meeting is circulated.

##### *4.3 Internal Audit Workplan*

The Committee discussed the proposed culture review in the context of the Internal Audit Workplan for 2024. It was decided that the Executive will refine the review further on receipt of additional feedback and revised terms of reference can then be circulated to the Committee for electronic approval. The Committee also noted that the review should be considered the first phase of the culture review process, and the implementation phase should be considered of equal importance.

##### *4.4 Other Items*

The Committee approved the proposed approach to the pensions errors and the next steps.

The Committee agreed to monitor training requirements for members on an ongoing basis.

**Decision:** Members noted the Committee's verbal report.

## 5. Report of the Irish Research Council Meeting 22nd March

Professor Carey presented this report.

### 5.1 *Update on Research & Innovation Bill*

The Bill was debated in the Seanad recently and the principle of parity of esteem was reiterated. No opposition amendments have been accepted. The issue of precarity is also recognised as an issue.

### 5.2 *Other Items*

- The Council recommended that Ireland should review the potential for participation in the seal of excellence from Marie Curie.
- A very successful AHRC-IRC conference on digital humanities took place in late February in Belfast. This will be a matter of priority for the new agency.

5.3 The following queries were raised;

- Members supported the Council's recommendation in relation to the Marie Curie Seal of Excellence, and agreed to bring a recommendation to the Minister.
- It was queried whether the Minister could clarify the meaning of the phrase "parity of esteem", as there appear to be differing interpretations.
- It was reiterated that the HEA will continue to have a role in Research Policy, including as part of the ongoing performance dialogue meetings. The HEA is actively engaged with HEIs on research metrics, this includes AHSS.
- Members asked the CEO to keep them informed as to the estimates process and its impact on research funding.

**Decision:** Members noted the Report of the Irish Research Council.

## 6. Memorandum B26/24 'Findings from CSO Analysis of PhD Graduates Outcomes' report and recommendations of the National Framework for Doctoral Education Career Tracking Working Group

6.1 Ms Ryan introduced Dr Quinn, Mr Reilly and Dr Harvey who delivered a presentation on the report. Members were requested to approve the publication of the report and to progress implementation of recommendations in the report of the Career Tracking Working Group (CTWG).

The report was produced by the Research Policy and the Statistics sections of the Executive with data analysis completed by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and identifies the potential for how data gathered through the CSO's Educational Longitudinal Database (ELD), could be further utilised by the HEA. The ELD as an administrative dataset, is reliant on PPSN coverage, but has no reliance on response rate and therefore is not as labour intensive as a traditional survey. However, it doesn't capture overseas work or study. It also lacks qualitative information.

The analysis carried out by the CSO as part of this report was promoted by discussions held by the Career Tracking Working Group (CTWG) on the volume of data on research graduate outcomes available through the ELD. The CTWG is a working group of the National Framework for Doctoral

Education Advisory Forum comprised of HEI representatives, the CSO, the HEA Executive and research funders.

The CTWG report made the following five recommendations:

1. Refocusing the objective of the project on “career outcomes”.
2. Developing a dual-pronged approach, building on an administrative dataset approach and qualitative approaches.
3. Allocating dedicated resources and personnel to achieve a project of this scale.
4. Establishing an Advisory Committee representing key stakeholders in the national system.
5. Adopting appropriate dissemination channels for the promotion of key findings and reports.

6.2 The following queries were raised:

- Does the definition of PhD within the report include professional doctoral programmes? It was confirmed all level 10s are included.
- Why is Graduate Outcomes Survey performed 9 months after graduation? This period is to allow 1-year Masters’ programmes be captured in the “Further Study” category.
- Does this dataset capture individuals with caring responsibilities? Yes, if they are in receipt of carers allowance. It was acknowledged not all carers may be in receipt of an allowance.
- Gender disaggregated data was requested, and the HEA Executive will seek this from CSO.
- Are individuals who take up post-doctoral programmes classified as continuing with education? It was confirmed they are categorised as in employment as they are employed by an HEI.
- How is “employment” defined? Employment is defined as 12 weeks of insurable work, with €100 euro per week from main employment. It was noted this was a very low income threshold, but that is the definition used by the CSO.
- It was recommended that the context of PhD enterprise skills was set out at the start of the report.

**Decision:** Members approved the Report publication subject to the inclusion of a context section and further analysis that will address the points raised by members.

## **7. Memorandum B27/24 HEA Standing Committees**

7.1 Mr Mellett presented this item. Members discussed proposed changes to the Committee structure and the following was agreed:

1. Finance Committee to be renamed System Oversight, Funding and Governance Committee to include financial and governance oversight. Financial matters relating to HEA’s administration activities to be removed from this Committee.
2. Audit and Risk Committee to be expanded to include financial matters relating to HEA administration activities including administration budget, management accounts and procurement.
3. Establishment of a new standing Committee – System Development, to cover areas of System Development & Performance, Research, Policy and Data as these areas do not currently fall within the remit of the existing Committees.

It was also proposed that Members may wish to review the number of Board members appointed to the Committees, the issue of quorum and provision for non-Board members on the Committees.

**Decision:** Members approved the establishment of one new standing Committee, and the proposed changes to the existing Finance and ARC Committees. The Chair will consult members on membership of Committees via email. The Chair of the new Committee will also be selected and confirmed at the next meeting.

## **8. Memorandum B28/24 Springboard+ Contract for Technical Support**

8.1 Dr Patterson presented this Memo. The Board were requested to approve the appointment of Vidatum Technologies who have been selected by the evaluation team to provide Technical Support and Maintenance for the Springboard+ Online Application System. The estimated cost of this contract is €57,000 per annum (plus VAT) in line with current expenditure. The contract is for 12 months with the option to extend the term for periods of up to 12 months, with a maximum of 2 such extensions. Therefore, the potential contract value including all extension options is €171k.

The HEA requires ongoing and dedicated support for the maintenance of the Springboard+ online application system and website. Two suppliers submitted tenders in response to the Request for Tender (RFT) which were reviewed by an in-house evaluation team. It was confirmed there was a considerable cost difference between the recommended proposal and the other proposal.

- Did the evaluation team encounter any risks when considering the submissions? As part of the overall evaluation process a robust risk review was carried out and several risks were identified with both tender responses. However, in order to ensure a continued business process, it was agreed that Vidatum Technologies could guarantee the continuation of service. The risks associated with the successful tenderer Vidatum Technologies will be mitigated and managed through the use of both the legal contract and the development of a detailed Service Level Agreement.

**Decision:** Members approved the appointment of Vidatum Technologies for maintenance and support of the Springboard+ application management system and website.

## **9. Memorandum B29/24 North South Research Programme (NSRP) Year 2 Progress Report**

9.1 Mr Duffy and Ms Sammarco delivered a presentation on the North South Research Programme Year 2 Progress Report. The North South Research Programme (NSRP) is a collaborative scheme being delivered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and the Shared Island Unit at the Department of the Taoiseach. Sixty-two projects across three Strands were funded under Call 1 to the value of €37.28m, including €5.6m of HEA co-funding. Funding was awarded on the basis of excellence, and all eligible applications received were assessed through a rigorous and independent international peer-review process.

9.2 The following queries were raised;

- What differentiates this programme from other research funding programmes?  
Relationships and collaboration between institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland will

stretch beyond NSRP Call 1. HEA can see from site visits that the programme is connecting those who may not have met otherwise.

- It was remarked in terms of criteria that the retention of connections is important but quality of outcome is still primary.
- If there are changes to the programme from the Shared Island Unit, the Board should be kept informed of this.
- It was noted that enhancement of Lead Partners in NI would be welcome.
- What is the split between AHSS and STEM? 50.50, the majority of AHSS projects were in social sciences.
- Members noted the progress report.

## 10. Memorandum B30/24 System Performance Framework and Strategy & Performance Dialogue

Dr. Brownlee presented this item.

10.1 The Board were asked to approve timelines for HEI reporting on Performance Agreements and approach to the strategy and performance dialogue process for 2024, which will focus on the implementation of Performance Agreements. From 2025, HEIs will submit an annual report capturing progress towards Performance Agreement objectives and targets for the proceeding academic year (i.e. 2025 reporting will focus on academic year 2024/25). The timelines for the strategy and performance dialogue process 2025-2028 are as follows:

| Action   | Timing            |
|--|-------------------|
| Impact Assessment Case Study submission                      | April             |
| Performance Agreement Annual Report, Part 1: Indicator data  | August            |
| Performance Funding outcomes communicated                    | September         |
| Performance Agreement Annual Report, Part 2: Self-Evaluation | October           |
| Bilateral dialogue meetings                                  | October/ November |
| Written outputs of meetings shared                           | December          |

**Decision:** Members approved the timelines for HEI reporting and the proposed approach to the strategy and performance dialogue process for 2024.

10.2 Members were also asked to approve the Impact Assessment Case Study process for the allocation of €5 million in Performance Funding in 2024, which will operate as a pilot.

It was noted that the purpose of the Impact Assessment Case Studies was:

- To inform the allocation of performance funding;
- To showcase exemplary initiatives where institutions have successfully delivered on national policies and strategic priorities;
- To evaluate and demonstrate the impact of the higher education system in national priority areas;
- To enhance dissemination of learning across the system;
- To gather evidence to inform policymaking and to identify areas for potential further

development and investment in the system.

To align with the new System Performance Framework and support process improvement, the Executive has revised the Impact Assessment Case Study (IACS) process for the award of Performance Funding. These revisions include updated eligibility requirements, simplification of the template, and defined evaluation criteria.

The following queries were raised;

- Are the Impact Assessment Case Studies an effective way of monitoring performance? Dr Brownlee noted that Impact Assessment Case studies provide HEIs with an opportunity to demonstrate impact beyond academia. Previous case studies have demonstrated HEIs' contribution to a range of national and regional initiatives, such as prevention of domestic violence, development of knowledge of sexual consent, and sustainability. In this way, case studies, alongside the strategy and performance dialogue reporting, capture HEIs' contribution to national policy and priorities, informing understanding of good practice and future opportunities for policy development and investment.

**Decision:** Members approved the Impact Assessment Case Study process.

10.3 Members were also provided with an update on the development of Performance Agreements with HEIs under the System Performance Framework 2023-28, which are currently being developed through engagement and dialogue between the HEIs and the HEA Executive. Performance Agreements will be published when finalised.

**Decision:** Members noted this update.

## **11. Corporate Risk Register**

11.1 Mr Mulvaney delivered an overview of the cybersecurity risk which was identified on the Corporate Risk Register.

11.2 The following queries were raised;

- Completion rates for cybersecurity training should be at 100%, and this should be built into performance measurements and employment contracts where possible. Mr Mulvaney confirmed full completion of training is mandatory for new staff members. The Head of Corporate Affairs will discuss the issue of ongoing training with the CEO.

Members noted this Item.

## **12. Executive Report**

12.1 Members noted the Executive Report.

## **13. Members Only**

### **13.1 Findings from CSO Analysis of PhD Graduates Outcome**

Members revisited Item 6 above, in relation to the analysis of the data, correlations made and conclusions reached. Differing views were expressed and it was agreed, given that the publication



of the report is not an urgent matter, that the views of the CSO should be sought to ensure all was in order.

**Next Meeting:** The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

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Chairperson

Date