

Higher Education Authority

Report of the 382nd Meeting held on 24th January 2017 in Brooklawn House, Dublin 4.

Present: ¹

- Mr Bahram Bekhradnia
- Dr Mary Canning
- Mr Tony Donohoe
- Dr. Judith Eaton
- Professor Orla Feely
- Dr Sharon Feeney
- Ms Siobhán Harkin
- Ms Annie Hoey (items 5-11)
- Mr Michael Horgan, Chairman
- Dr Stephen Kinsella
- Ms Darina Kneafsey
- Dr Jim Mountjoy
- Dr Sinéad O’Flanagan
- Mr Pól Ó Móráin
- Dr Lynn Ramsey
- Dr John Wall
- Mr. Declan Walsh

Apology: Mr. Gordon Ryan
Dr Brian Thornes

In attendance: Dr Anne Looney
Dr Graham Love
Mr Andrew Brownlee
Mr Fergal Costello
Mr Padraic Mellett
Dr Vivienne Patterson
Ms Caitriona Ryan
Mr Stewart Roche

1. Report of 381st Meeting

1.1 The minutes were approved.

¹ Members present for all items unless otherwise indicated.

2. Matters Arising & Follow-up actions

- 2.1 UL Protected Disclosures - Members were advised that the matter was now with the Minister of Education and Skills.
- 2.2 Board Succession Planning – The Chair advised members that no decision has been made by the Minister.
- 2.3 Letterkenny Institute of Technology – Members were advised that Mr. Michael O’Connell who was engaged to assist with other IoTs operating with a deficit is engaging with the institute. Additional funding for LyIT is being considered in the context of the 2017 grant.
- 2.4 It was confirmed that that the recent decision taken by HRB, IRC and SFI to require HEIs to have Athena Swan bronze level accreditation in place by 2019 to remain eligible for research funding was taken by the agencies themselves. The decision was informed by the HEA’s Expert Group report and recommendations on gender equality.
- 2.5 Members requested an update on the proposal to provide HEI governing bodies with guidelines on governance. The Executive will revert back to the Board with specific proposals.

3. Appointment of New CEO

- 3.1 This item was discussed by the members only.

Decision: The Board confirmed the appointment of Dr. Graham Love as CEO effective from 13th March 2017. The Board noted and thanked Dr. Anne Looney for agreeing to continue as interim CEO until Dr. Love takes up his post.

4. Application of Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies

- 4.1 The Chair noted that the new Code includes a Board evaluation questionnaire. It includes questions about the extent to which Board members were familiar with the schedule of reserved functions and the extent to which the Board is receiving documentation in a timely manner, and in a format that would support the Board in discharging its responsibilities.

The interim CEO noted that the on-line Board facility will support the provision of shorter, more focused papers with detailed background information as supporting documentation.

It was clarified that papers submitted to the standing committees may be more detailed and that committee documentation will be available to all Board members.

The Chair proposed consideration of the role and composition of the standing committees at the next meeting of the Board. The current arrangement whereby the Finance and Governance Committee has a member from outside the Board is working very well and consideration should be given to extending this to the other standing committees. It was noted that it was common practice to include non-members on Audit Committees to ensure that Committee had the full range of expertise required.

4.2 Other issues raised included;

- The need for Board training should be considered collectively and at individual Board member level. The board evaluation survey should help to inform the training needs.
- A reflection paper on the reserved functions would be useful. This should consider the categories of reserved functions, those which are a priority, those which are technical, and those which are rarely, if ever exercised.
- It was noted that many of the reserved functions derive from existing legislation.

Decisions: It was agreed that the Executive would prepare a contextual paper on the schedule of reserved functions, which will include an outline on the extent to which the function has been recently exercised.

The timing of a Board survey will be discussed with the Chair but will be offered to the Board before the Summer 2017.

A decision on any changes to authorization and signing limits was deferred until the new CEO is in post.

5. 2017 Work Programme and report on implementation of the 2016 Work Programme

5.1 The interim CEO introduced this item noting that revisions were made to the document based on feedback from the Board in November. Revisions included

- Better alignment with the high-level objectives in the HEA strategic plan
- More detail on timelines
- Sharper and more focused KPIs.

- Budgets identified in three areas initially.

There will be a mid-year report on implementation of the work-plan.

5.2 The following issues were raised in the discussion;

- Including a column showing when the Board would be engaging with a particular action would be useful. Some of the KPIs are still vague and difficult to measure. The inclusion of more verbs was suggested. KPIs should be indicators rather than just deliverables.
- It was clarified that the Board has no role in respect of individual cases of protected disclosures, but should determine the HEA's policy and process for responding to disclosures made to the Chief Executive under the legislation. A revised policy is in preparation that might allow for a more streamlined response, taking less executive time. The role of Transparency Ireland in such a process is also being explored. In response to a query, Mr. Brownlee reported that the HEA and C&AG were working on resolving a number of outstanding matters including the reporting of pension funding in universities accounts.
- The importance of the capital prioritisation review exercise was emphasised, as was the need for any submission to be underpinned by detailed analysis. The interim CEO noted the importance of the HEA availing of every opportunity to make the case for investment in higher education.
- The idea that HEIs have employability statements for their courses was raised. These could reflect the particular skills a graduate can bring to the work place. This was particularly the case for arts and humanities graduates. The Irish Survey for Student Engagement (ISSE) data may provide useful feedback to HEIs on student perceptions of the relevance of course outcomes.
- It was suggested that work programme should address how the HEA is contributing to the objectives set out in the National Strategy for Higher Education and the Action Plan for Education. The interim CEO indicated that this will be added to the work programme.

5.3 Members were advised that it was proposed to hold a strategy planning day in March.

5.4 Ms Ryan outlined the report on the 2016 work programme. Members were informed that the report included a number of additional actions not in the original programme. This report will be used as an input to the HEA's 2016 annual report.

Decision: Members approved the revised 2017 work programme. Members also noted the report on the 2016 work programme.

6. HEA-DES Service Level Agreement

6.1 The interim CEO introduced this item and noted that the HEA has yet to meet the DES to discuss the draft before the Board. The draft very much reflects the 2017 work programme. The intention was to present the final SLA to the Board in March for approval.

Decision: Members approved the draft SLA and noted that the Executive would revert back to the Board in March.

7. HEA Finance and Governance Committee

7.1 Mr. Brownlee introduced the Committee's report noting that the Committee recommended that the proposed approach to finalisation of the 2017 grant be approved. The HEA has not yet received the full details of the 2017 grant. Finalisation of the 2017 grant was proving more difficult due to a number of factors including the need to provide for pay restoration costs and possibly the costs for additional skills provision.

Once the details have been received by the HEA recommended allocation will be submitted to the Finance and Governance Committee for approval. The HEIs will be given a 5-6 week period to prepare their annual budget submission.

Decision: Members approved the recommendations set out in the Committee's report on the finalisation of the 2017 allocation, and the award of a contract to manage ISSE.

8. HEA Administration Budget – 2016 Outturn and 2017 Budget

8.1 Mr. Mellett introduced this item noting that the draft 2016 outturn was better than anticipated. The 2017 grant now includes the bulk of the funding previously provided through a separate grant to cover the administration costs of the National Access Office. Members raised the allocation for staff development noting that the proposed allocation, while higher than the 2016 outturn, was still lower than the 2016 budget allocation. Mr. Mellett indicated this could be kept under review. He noted the need to provide for the development both of Board members and staff.

Decision: Members noted the draft 2016 allocation and approved the proposed 2017 budget.

9. CEO's Report

9.1 The interim CEO provided the following updates;

- The DES has confirmed that students who enrol in an Irish higher education programme from September 2017 will remain eligible for EU fees for the duration of their course. The HEIs have been notified.
- The interim CEO presented details of purchase orders over €20,000 raised since the last meeting.
- The chair requested that members be advised of future events. The interim CEO indicated this could be done through the Sharepoint facility.

10. Review of the Approach to Funding Higher Education Institutions

10.1 Mr. Brownlee made a presentation which focused on the following;

- Developments since the Board approved the review last September
- Members of the Expert Panel appointed (Ms Brid Horan (Chair), Professor Sir Ian Diamond, Professor Philip Gummett, Ms Mary Kerr) in line with the approved criteria
- Fundamental issues which have arisen to date
- A vision and core principles which will underpin the future approach
- Structured consultation process to be undertaken
- How the Board will engage with the process – Members were advised that it was hoped to Chair of the Expert Panel would be available to address the Board at its next meeting

11. HEA Progression Analysis

11.1 Dr. Patterson made a presentation which focused on the following;

- Overview – how the HEA defines non-progression and how the HEA monitors progression – an annual analysis is undertaken.
- An analysis of the data was published by the Irish Times using information obtained from the HEIs under FoI legislation and HEA data.
- Analysis of 2013/14 vs 2012/13 rates demonstrated some improvement in the progression rates for level 7 and 8 IoT entrants. All other categories were showing no change.
- Non-progression rates were much higher for entrants who had lower CAO points. Where the entrants had higher points the difference between progression in Universities and IoTs was not significant.

- The highest rates of non progression were in construction and related studies, services and computer science, although there was a notable improvement in the rate for the latter field. There were some differences in the level 8 non-progression rates between universities and IoTs in a number of fields including construction, computer science and engineering.
- There were noticeable difference in the non-progression rates for level 6 and 7 males and to a lesser extent level 8 males in the IoTs.
- Other work and studies underway including the C&AG's study on non-completion. The next HEA study is scheduled to be issue in Q3 2017. It is hoped the HEA will be able to link in data provided by SUSI and Solas.

11.2 The following issues were raised;

- The high non-progression rates in construction and engineering disciplines in the IoTs suggest a need to increase the number of apprenticeship places.
- An update on other projects was provided. Dr Patterson indicated that the teaching and learning forum was undertaking some research on the factors underpinning drop-out rates. The C&AG review was focusing on 5 HEIs. The HEA is engaging with the C&AG on this review. The Access Office has commissioned a qualitative study on non-completion rates for the target groups.
- It was noted that the Irish non-progression experience mirrors international experience. Dr Patterson noted that making international comparisons was quite difficult as data are recorded differently The IoTs have however made progression in improving progression rates and should communicate this more widely

Decision: Members agreed that the Executive should work on a communications plan for this review.

12. Any other business

12.1 The Chair noted that this was the last Board meeting for Dr Mary Canning and Dr Brian Thornes. He thanked them for their contribution to the HEA during their time as members. Dr Canning thanked the Chair, her fellow members and the Executive.

Next Meeting

28th March 2017

Padraic Mellett

1st February 2017