

Higher Education Authority**Report of 420th Meeting held on 25th January 2022 via teleconference**

Present: Ms Clare Austick (agenda items 1-10)
Mr Tony Donohoe (agenda items 1-10)
Dr Judith Eaton (agenda items 1-10)
Professor Orla Feely, Deputy Chair (agenda items 1-10)
Dr Sharon Feeney (agenda items 1-10)
Mr Michael Horgan, Chairperson (agenda items 1-10)
Ms Darina Kneafsey (agenda items 1-10)
Dr Deirdre Lillis (agenda items 1-10)
Dr Ronan Lyons (agenda items 1-10)
Dr Jim Mountjoy (agenda items 1-10)
Dr Sinéad O'Flanagan (agenda items 1-10)
Mr Pól Ó Móráin (agenda items 1-10)
Dr Lynn Ramsey (agenda items 5-10)
Dr John Wall (agenda items 1-2, 4-10)

Apologies: Dr Bahram Bekhradnia (agenda items 1-10)

In attendance: Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-10.1)
Ms Orla Nugent (items 1-9)
Mr Padraic Mellett (agenda items 1-9)
Mr Tim Conlon (agenda items 1-9)
Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 1-9)
Mr Peter Brown (agenda items 1-9)
Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 1-9)
Ms Caitríona Ryan (agenda items 1-6)
Dr Louise Callinan (agenda items 4)
Ms Suzanne Walker (agenda item 4)
Ms Valerie Harvey (agenda item 5)
Dr Janice Lau (agenda item 5)
Mr David Horan (agenda item 5)

Conflicts of Interest

The Chair reminded all Board members of potential conflicts of interest and asked members to highlight any items that may require attention. Dr Wall advised that he would absent himself from item 4 as an employee of WIT.

Quorum

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

1. Report of 419th Board meeting

1.1 The minutes were approved subject to an amendment to paragraph 9.1

2. Matters arising

2.1 HEA Nominations Committee

Members were advised that the Committee has yet to meet as its establishment was only approved at the December meeting.

3. Committee Reports

3.1 Audit and Risk Committee

3.1.1 Dr Lillis introduced the Committee's report. The main items for consideration by the Committee were the Report on the System of Internal Controls and the Corporate Risk Register. In relation to the former there were 1 one medium level findings and 3 low level findings. The Executive has commenced work on addressing these. The Committee considered the Corporate Risk register and noted in particular the following high category risks;

- Adequacy of staff resources, particularly for capital programmes
- Quality of data collected from the HEIs
- Resources to upgrade IT systems across the HEA/IRC

Mr Conlon advised that the Policy and Strategic Planning Committee would be considering a paper from the Executive on the impact of Covid 19 on the Erasmus + programme at its next meeting.

Mr Mellett advised that the Data Protection Commissioner has closed the case relating to the data breach involving the Irish Research Council's Smart Simple system. The DPO and IRC have, or are currently addressing, the DPC's recommendations.

In relation to the integration of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning Dr Feeney noted that the Forum's procedures are already broadly consistent with those of the HEA.

Decision: The Board approved the report on the System of Internal Controls. The Board agreed to consider the Corporate Risk Register at its March meeting. The Board noted the Committee's report.

4. South East Technological University¹

4.1 The Chair introduced this item outlining developments since the Board's last meeting. He advised that the Board sub-committee, consisting of Judith Eaton, Clare Austick, Tony Donoghue and the Chair, met the SETU consortium over two days. On behalf of the sub-committee, the Chair particularly thanked the CEO, Mr Conlon and Dr Callinan for their significant work in engaging with the consortium throughout the process and securing the additional material which greatly facilitated the sub-committee in its deliberations.

The sub-committee was very impressed with the consortium's presentations and the quality of the documentation it provided. The recommendation of the Board sub-committee is that the HEA should advise the Minister that the proposed designation on 1st May 2022 should proceed.

The Chair highlighted the challenge facing the consortium in securing approval for the name of the proposed TU (required, for example, to progress ICT related projects). He proposed that the Board recommend to the Minister that he give early approval to the proposed name for the new TU.

4.2 The following issues were raised;

- The proposed name might be less attractive to international students. The Chair advised that the name was chosen following a public opinion survey in the region and consultation with staff, students and wider regional interests. It is envisaged that the TU will in the immediate future be focusing on attracting students from the south-east.
- The importance of the consortium being able to execute its plan. The Chair noted that the consortium was asked about its retention of external expertise post designation. Key to implementation of the masterplan will be the appointment of a Board and President. Mr Conlon noted the importance of enhancing the capacity of leadership in the TUs with the assistance of TURN funding. The forthcoming OECD report will also be important as there are legacy issues that will need to be addressed. The ability of the HEA to intervene will be enhanced following the enactment of new legislation.
- The importance of TU governing bodies playing a leadership role was noted. It was noted that funding has been allocated to THEA and IUA to assist with this.
- Other issues considered included the need to consider the changing landscape arising from the establishment of TUs and the need to consider the type of research being undertaken in the TUs.

¹ Dr John Wall recused himself from this item

Decision: The Board agreed to advise the Minister that the criteria necessary for the designation of a TU in the south-east have been met. The Board also agreed to request the Minister to give urgent consideration to the proposed name for the new TU.

The Chair thanked the members of the sub-committee for their time commitment and engagement in this very important matter.

5. Graduate Outcome Report

5.1 Dr Patterson advised members that Ms Janice Lau has replaced Mr Victor Pigott as Senior Manager, Statistics. Members wished her well in her new role. She advised the Board that the non-progression data has not been published as it was felt that it would be inappropriate at this time as students were currently completing their applications to the CAO. Work was underway on the 2019/20 to 2020/2021 progression rates which show significant improvements in progression rates for the first year of the pandemic. Dr. Patterson recommended that all three years would be published together in the coming weeks.

Decision: The Board agreed to wait until the next set of progression data was finalised and to the publication of a composite report with three years data.

5.2 Ms Harvey outlined the context for the Graduate Outcome Report noting that there was no survey of the class of 2019 due to Covid. This meant that the survey of 2020 graduates was being compared with pre-pandemic data. The pandemic impacted in particular on graduates with service qualifications and graduates with no previous labour market experience.

5.3 Ms Lau and Mr Horan in their presentation focused primarily on undergraduate degrees the largest category of award recipients (52.6%) but noted that the report covered all awards. Members were advised that the report will be available in the form of an interactive, digital report, to be published on the HEA website. The report will include the use of interactive tables, and a detailed dashboard accompanying the national report, facilitating more detailed analyses by field of study and geographical region. The report would also be accompanied by “Info-Bytes” – delivering an in-depth analysis into specific areas of interest. The first bulletin focuses on barriers to employment and further study. Both presenters outlined data from the interactive tables. The presentation covered the following;

- Overview – There were 64,858 graduates across 23 HEIs, 53.3% identify as female and 46.7% identify as male.

- Employment - overall, 75.9% of graduates are in employment nine months after graduation (down from 80.1% for the Class of 2018). Employment was highest amongst Education graduates (93.2%) and lowest for Arts & Humanities graduates (53.1%). Unemployment rates rose from 4.7% in 2018 to 8.1%. This reflected the impact of Covid, with the unemployment rates for graduates from the services field of study increasing by 7.5%.
- Earnings - average earnings nine months after graduation was €37,104. The forthcoming report includes a new section focusing on earnings over time. Between 2017 and 2020 overall earnings increased by 2%, mean earnings for males went up 5% while for females it went up by 6% meaning there has only been a marginal reduction in the gender pay gap. There was a variation in earnings across the fields of study with ICT up 8% and services down 5%.
- Info-Bytes – the first bulletin focuses on barriers to study and employment. Amongst the factors inhibiting graduates access employment were covid, lack of opportunities and lack of prior experience. Geographical location was also mentioned. Cultural barriers were cited to a much greater extent by international graduates (19%) than Irish graduates (4%).

5.4 The Chair congratulated the Statistics Unit for producing this very informative report. The interactive features and dashboards was particularly helpful. The following issues were raised;

- The Chair relayed an email from Dr Bekhradnia who could not attend today's meeting. He felt it was important not to focus just on graduate employment outcomes, as there are other positive outcomes from higher education also. Could a further study be considered to consider the impact of higher education on wider matters such as its impact on public health and justice? The Chair noted that it was understandable that the state as the main funder of higher education would have a legitimate interest in the employment outcomes of graduate but a wider consideration of the impact of higher education should also be considered. Ms Harvey noted the CSO collects a considerable body of data on health, religion etc by education level so consideration could be given to undertaking a study of this data in the first instance. The Chair suggested the HEA consider engaging a PhD student to undertake this research.
- What was the response rate to the survey? Ms Lau advised the response rate was 49% in line with previous years.
- Is the data comparable with CSO studies? Ms Lau indicated that the HEA did undertake a comparison with CSO data, the latter is very accurate as the CSO have access to Revenue data. In the case of the HEA survey 25% of respondents did not divulge their earnings. The CSO survey is particularly important in relation to long term data on graduate earnings. Ms Harvey

noted the HEA has a very productive relationship with the CSO and would be sharing this report with them.

- In relation to Info-Bytes was there any further insight into racism in the HEIs? Ms Lau advised there was no further data other than the qualitative data collected for the Info-Byte. This entailed a thorough analysis of responses to an open text question. Mr Conlon updated on developments since the race equality report was presented to the Board.
- Does the report influence students/parents as regards course choice? Ms Harvey noted the HEA provides data to each institution who used this data for marketing and validation purposes. This is particularly useful for the smaller institutions who do not have the same capacity to generate such data. Dr Patterson advised that the graduate earnings reports are also used by IUA and THEA as an input into their impact of higher education investment reports.
- Where reliance is placed on softer data consideration should be given to supplementing this information with case studies.

Decision: The Board approved the Graduate Outcomes Survey – Class of 2020 national report for publication.

6. Procurement of a CRM System for the HEA

6.1 Mr Mellett introduced this item and outlined the process to date. Members were advised that the CRM was part of the HEA's overall business transformation exercise which has been informed by the EY BPR exercise. The following issues were raised;

- Should the HEA have a business partner for each of the HEIs? The CEO advised that is planned to have a link team appointed for each HEI.
- The status of the EY exercise? Ms Nugent advised that it is planned to submit a report at the next Board meeting. The HEA plans to engage a change management consultant. The CEO advised that he hoped to obtain the help of a Board sub-committee to assist the Executive progress this work.
- What sort of data will the CRM be collecting? Members were advised that the intention was to use the CRM as a single record as regards interactions with the HEIs and other clients, whether by email, phone calls, meetings or letters. Integration with other systems such as the FMS or the SRS would be via the back-end interface.
- Who will have access to the data on the CRM. Members were advised that this would be dependent on the role and status of staff within the organisation. The HEA will be cognizant of its requirements under GDPR.
- The benefits of a CRM may not be as obvious as a system like the FMS. There may be push back if it is seen as over-management. Accordingly, the

importance of securing staff buy-in was important along with the benefit of a central repository and reporting system for data.

- The status of the installation of the FMS. Ms Cunningham advised satisfactory progress has been made with Sysco, the extent of developmental work has now been established. It is planned to go live later this year.

Decision: The Board approved the acquisition of a CRM, Microsoft Dynamics provided by BDO Eaton Square. The first year costs will be in the region of €285,812, excluding vat, with the total cost over five years estimated at €627,060

7. Report on 2021 Workplan

7.1 Mr Mellett introduced this item noting input from colleagues on the SMT and Dr Brophy in PSP section. Overall, 69 actions have been delivered and satisfactory progress has been made on the remaining 7. Members noted the very satisfactory progress that has been made in delivering the workplan. Mr Mellett noted the sanction of additional resources was a contributory factor. The CEO advised that work has commenced on the 2022 workplan, this and the Performance Delivery Agreement to be concluded with the Department will be submitted to the Board for consideration. These will have to have regard to the new HEA legislation.

Decision: Item noted.

8. HEI Developments

8.1 Irish Research Council

Mr Brown advised members that Professor Dan Carey, Professor of English and Creative Arts at NUI Galway has been appointed interim Chair of the Irish Research Council until the end of April 2022. He will attend the next RGE Committee.

8.2 President IT Carlow

Ms Nugent advised the Board that IT Carlow has consulted the HEA in relation to the post of President. The Governing Body has decided to extend Dr Mulcahy's term of President from 31st January until the date of TU designation.

8.3 Institutional Fraud

Members were advised of incidents of suspected fraud in two HEIs. The C&AG and the Gardai have been notified. Further details will be provided when they become available.

8.4 HEA Legislation

Mr Conlon advised he hoped to discuss the new legislation at the various standing committees over the next month. The legislation is scheduled for debate in the Dáil in March.

Members raised the following;

- How should the HEA engage with the legislation as it progresses to the Oireachtas? Members were advised that the Executive will most likely be present as the legislation is discussed at Committee stage. However proposed amendments to the legislation will be for the political process to agree.
- The timeframe for enactment? Members were advised that one factor that might delay progress on the bill was discussions at the CSO regarding the treatment of university debt.
- Is there room for further input? The CEO advised the current draft reflects the input of the Board and Executive. It is now down to the political process.

8.5 EU review on higher education funding

Members enquired whether the Executive has any knowledge on the content of the Minister's anticipated statement on this matter on 10th February? The CEO advised Members that the Executive has not been appraised of the Minister's thinking. He will endeavour to get a briefing in advance.

9. Correspondence from the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

9.1 Members considered the letter from the RCPI and agreed this was a matter for the Governing Body of each HEI to address separately.

10. Members Only

10.1 Meeting with Minister on National Apprenticeship Office

Members were informed of a meeting with the Minister together with the Chairs and CEOs of both Solas and the HEA concerning the establishment of the National Apprenticeship Office. It was agreed to invite Dr Mary-Liz Trant to a future Board meeting to obtain an update on progress and provide assistance if possible.

10.2 OECD Report on contracts

Members looked forward to hearing the outcome of this report.

Next Meeting

9th March 2022

Chairperson

Date