

**Higher Education Authority****Report of 404<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in the HEA's Offices, 3 Shelbourne Buildings, Dublin 4.**

- Present<sup>1</sup>:
- Dr Bahram Bekhradnia (agenda items 1-10)
  - Mr Tony Donohoe (agenda items 1-10)
  - Professor Orla Feely (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, by teleconference (agenda items 1-10)
  - Dr John Wall (agenda items 1-10)
- Apologies:
- Dr Judith Eaton
  - Ms Lorna Fitzpatrick
- In attendance:
- Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-10.1)
  - Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 1-9)
  - Mr Padraic Mellett (agenda items 1-9)
  - Mr Tim Conlon (agenda items 1-9)
  - Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 1-8)
  - Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 1-9)
  - Ms Caitriona Ryan (agenda items 1-7)
  - Mr Peter Brown (agenda items 1-9)
  - Ms Nicki O'Connor (agenda items 1-4)
  - Dr Ross Wood (agenda item 7)
  - Dr Denise Frawley (agenda item 8)

The Chair thanked Dr Feeney for chairing the last Board meeting and noted that her term as Deputy Chair has now finished. He thanked her for work as Deputy Chair and congratulated Professor Orla Feely who now takes up the role of Deputy Chair.

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<sup>1</sup> The quorum for HEA Board meetings, six members, was met.

## 1. Report of 403<sup>rd</sup> Meeting held 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019

1.1 The minutes were approved. Members noted that the minutes for September to December 2019 will now be posted on the HEA website.

## 2. Matters arising

### 2.1 *Role of HEA in relation to capital*

The CEO briefed members on discussions he has had with the DES. He will shortly meet the Assistant Secretary General in the Department responsible for capital to work on an agreement that will provide clarity as to the role of the HEA, including the Board, on capital projects. He also confirmed that in accordance with the Board's decision, he will require full disclosure from the DES before the HEA acts on requests from the Department.

### 2.2 *IT Tralee*

Members were advised that the HEA is awaiting the Institute's response to information requested as part of the due diligence work Deloitte is carrying out on behalf of the HEA. The HEA is following up on the recommendation that the terms of a voluntary redundancy scheme be offered to staff in the Institute and other HEIs as needed.

### 2.3 *Review of landscape funding*

Ms Nugent advised that additional funding will be required to undertake this review, as well as agreement as to whether it should be sponsored by the DES or HEA Members suggested that this should be provided through a top-slice from the fund. The importance of lessons being learnt from the current programme before further funding is allocated was stressed.

### 2.4 *Financial Risk*

Following discussion on a proposal from the Chair and CEO, as a follow-up to discussions at previous meetings concerning the Financial Analysis and Trends document, Members were advised that the HEA would write to Audit and Risk Committee in each HEI and request that they provide to the HEA their top five risks. The HEA will request that this information be provided by March so as to feed into the strategic dialogue meetings scheduled for March/April. It would be important that the HEA's request issues in a timely manner to ensure that responses are received in time for the strategic dialogue process. Assurances may need to be given to the HEIs that individual institutional risks will not be

published. There may be a reluctance to divulge information that could be viewed as 'commercially sensitive'. The CEO indicated that this proposal represented an opportunity to make the strategic dialogue process more meaningful and deepen the HEA's relations with the HEIs. The Chair also suggested that this exercise might be developed into a risk profile for the system.

## 2.5 Other issues considered by members under this heading;

- Staff student ratios – the difficulty with using national ratios is that there can be significant variations within institutions. The freedom HEIs have to set student numbers needs to be recognised. The HEA did not direct how growth in student numbers should apply.
- Lack of control HEIs have over their pay costs. It was noted that the HEA sought greater institutional flexibility over HR matters in its submission on new HEA legislation. Institutions can seek approval to offer the terms of a voluntary redundancy scheme to staff.
- Funding per student. Ms Cunningham advised that the executive could arrange this information, student numbers would include international (EU and non-EU) students.

**Decision:** Members agreed that the Financial Trend Analysis report will not be published on the HEA website at this time, as further analysis and review of the report was necessary. The HEA will write to each HEI to submit their 5 keys risks.

## 3. Executive Report

### 3.1 Teacher Education – Upskilling priority areas

Reference was made to a global glut of Spanish teachers and if some could be provided with teaching opportunities in Ireland. The CEO advised that he understood that the Teaching Council was reviewing its qualification rules which might facilitate this.

### 3.2 TURN

The CEO advised that Ms Nugent was engaging with the DES in relation to the terms of reference which in turn will inform the level of resources required.

### 3.3 Human Capital Initiative

The issue of whether or not staff appointed arising from the HCI call will come under the ECF in HEIs was raised. Dr Patterson advised that she has sought

clarification on this from the DES. She hoped clarity can be provided over the next few days.

The implications of the additional 2700 places being provided under pillar 2 was raised. Dr Patterson advised that the HEIs would receive the usual funding under the funding model, fees and an additional €2500 per place. Members were advised that the additional funding is being provided for demographic growth.

The capacity of HEIs to respond to the HCI was raised. Dr Patterson acknowledged this may be a challenge, there are currently three open calls, soon to rise to five. Ideally some programmes such as Springboard should be mainstreamed with activity being reported through the strategic dialogue process. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform requires separate processes and reporting mechanisms for additional funding being provided through the National Training Fund.

### *3.4 New national research strategy*

Reference was made to the correspondence from the Assistant Secretary General in DES with the SFI. The CEO advised that he recently met the Director General of SFI and is scheduled to address the SFI Board next month. A meeting involving the DES, DBEI, HEA and SFI is to be arranged shortly.

### *3.5 Rolling review on pay, pensions, travel & subsistence and leave*

Members were advised that the Executive was awaiting responses from a number of the HEIs, these are expected by March at the latest. The previous rolling reviews were published on the HEA website and it was anticipated this review would also be published.

### *3.6 New International Education Strategy*

The CEO advised that this is still under consideration in the DES.

## **4. 2020 Business Plan**

4.1 Ms O'Connor introduced this item noting that 75% of actions were completed by the year end. This was in line with the mid-year report. Key lessons learned were that some actions were more complex than originally envisaged. With this in mind the Executive will seek to right-size actions set for 2020. In 2020 the plan provides for 26 actions which are aligned with the 18 themes outlined in the 2018-22 strategic plan. Four additional items were added to the 2020 plan having regard to the Board discussion last December. These are (1) a White Paper series

(2) Financial sustainability of the HE system (3) HEA legislation and (4) Capital monitoring.

#### 4.2 Members raised the following issues;

- Proposal to expand the remit of the Centre for Gender Equality. Should this cover both staff and students? Mr Conlon and Ms Ryan noted there was National Access Plan with targets to improve equity of access for students.
- The implications of a new action plan that the DES will be required to prepare following the general election. Ms O'Connor noted that this will be factored in the mid-term review of the strategic plan which is scheduled for later in the year.
- The need to keep the HEA legislative reform as a key objective. The CEO agreed on the importance of this, members will be kept informed of developments.
- The need for objective based metrics to report on the KPIs. The CEO and Ms O'Connor advised that they are working on a framework.
- The need to move away from specific codes for the universities and institutes, all HEIs should adhere to the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. There should be a commitment to adhere to this Code by the end of 2020. Ms Nugent noted this is on the agenda of both IUA and THEA.
- The wording around the Teaching and Learning Forum should be reviewed to reflect its relationship with the HEA.

**Decision:** Members noted the 2019 workplan report and 2020 reporting template and approved the 2020 workplan subject to amendment above in relation to the Code of Governance.

### 5. Report of the Finance and Governance Committee

5.1 The Chair introduced the Committee's report.

#### *5.2 Proposed approach to finalisation of the 2019 recurrent grant*

**Decision:** Members approved the proposed approach as set out in memorandum F48/19.

#### *5.3 Proposed approach to the allocation of the 2020 recurrent grant*

**Decision:** Members approved the proposed approach as set out in memorandum F49/19.

#### *5.4 Reappointment of Deloitte as external providers of process reviews, accounting, audit and financial services*

**Decision:** Members approved the reappointment of Deloitte for a period of up to one year. It was noted that a new tender is underway. The Chair advised that wording on this item may need to be amended at the Committee's next meeting for clarity purposes.

#### *5.5 2021 Estimates*

Members were advised that the Finance and Governance Committee will be briefed on the HEA's 2021 estimates submission, as they were in 2020.

**Decision:** The report of the Finance and Governance Committee was approved.

### **6. Programme of Access to Higher Education – Strand 1 – Assessment of early stage implementation**

6.1 Ms Ryan introduced this item. The following issues were raised;

- Members noted that an estimated 40 additional students from National Access Plan target groups were now enrolled on teacher education courses with funding of €2.7m being provided over the three years. Concern was expressed that this might be regarded as an expensive intervention. Ms Ryan advised that these initiatives have laid foundations that will have a positive impact on equity of access over the coming years and a higher enrolment over the next 3 years is anticipated. She noted the long-term impact that teachers coming from the access target groups will have as role models.
- How is progress monitored? Members were advised that HEIs are required to submit progress reports to the HEA every six months.

**Decision:** Members approved the report being forwarded to the DES.

### **7. Evaluation of the Athena SWAN Charter 2019-21**

7.1 Members considered conflict of interest declarations raised by Professor Feely and Dr Feeny and agreed that they should not preclude their presence for this item. Dr Ross introduced the memorandum and evaluation report. The following issues were raised;

- Is there an alternative to the Athena SWAN charter? Dr Ross advised there currently was no alternative scheme.

- How do we know it is having an impact? Dr Ross advised that its main impact has been raising awareness of gender equality in the sector. Various assessments have been carried out in the UK, a lot of the benefits are intangible. The charter focuses on awareness and the policies and procedures which support gender equality.
- There is a significant workload associated with securing an Athena SWAN institutional and faculty award. Consideration should be given over the next three years on how the administrative burden can be reduced.
- Could a separate Irish office be set up which might tailor the requirements specifically to Ireland? Dr Woods advised that the cost of this would be in excess of €200,000 per annum and we would need to pay for a licence to use the Advanced HE methodology. A number of other countries are moving in that direction.
- Consideration over time might be given to developing an Irish system using open source technology.

**Decision:** Members approved the extension of the Advanced HE Athena SWAN charter for another three years. The Executive was requested to undertake a review of the bureaucratic burden associated with the charter with a view to seeing if can be reduced.

## 8. System Performance Key Performance Indicators

8.1 Dr Frawley introduced this item. She advised that following consultation with the SDPM Committee and DES the number of KPIs in being reduced from over 200 to 25. The intention is that the HEA will publish the information in dashboard format similar to the New Zealand practice. She advised that U Multirank methodology was examined and a number of difficulties were identified including (1) some of the criteria were not well defined (2) not all Irish HEIs use U Multirank. Mr. Donohoe outlined discussions the SDPM Committee had in relation to the development of a set of performance indicators. Key was that the data would be readily available and outcomes based.

8.2 The following issues were raised by members;

- The research metrics needed some revision, including the need to identify the source of publications.
- A definition of research is required, with members discussing the ongoing definitional issues associated with the TU process.
- International students should be clearly defined and the possibility of reporting on EU/Non-EU students was discussed.

- The proposed metrics for employer engagement was very narrow and may not be particularly relevant for some HEIs. Could other indicators be used such as;
  - Employer satisfaction rates – this data is not currently available at HEI level
  - Student work placement rates – this would need to be clearly defined.
  - Revenue generated from innovation vouchers
  - Availability of data from LinkedIn

A number of options were discussed as regards this heading including redefining the heading, allowing HEIs the option of including additional metrics and ensuring this heading would not inform decisions on performance funding.

- Members were advised that the intention was to discuss these with the HEIs under the strategic dialogue process.
- Dr Frawley advised that the HEA does not conduct an analysis of completion rates annually, but the most recent statistics can be included. It was confirmed that the bulk of this data will be collected by the HEA and will not pose a significant administrative burden for the HEIs.

**Decision:** Members approved the list of metrics as presented. These will be the subject of discussions with the HEIs under the strategic dialogue process.

## 9. Authorisation to dismiss staff

9.1 Because of an administrative gap in delegation of powers to the CEO, it was identified that a particular authority needed to be formally delegated by the Board.

**Decision:** Members approved the delegation to the Chief Executive the right to dismiss staff up to Assistant Principal Officer level in the HEA and IRC. This is on the understanding that due process in accordance with relevant HEA policies and the law is strictly adhered to.

## 10. Members only session

### 10.1 International Student Recruitment

The Board were advised of an issue that has arisen in Canada regarding returning medical graduates from Ireland. It appears the Canadian authorities now require all returning doctors to have completed an internship in the country of qualification. Ireland, generally, does not provide such internships. It was felt that this anomaly could have very serious consequences for international student



recruitment by Irish medical schools. The HEA's international office was asked to investigate the matter

#### 10.2 Mr Paul O'Toole

The Chair informed the Board that Mr Paul O'Toole had been in contact to inform us that he had been appointed Chair of the Grangegorman Development Agency and Chair of a QQI steering group. Mr O'Toole and the Chair had agreed that no conflict with his previous role as Interim CEO arises. The Chair thanked Mr O'Toole for his courtesy.

#### 10.3 Student Accommodation

It was suggested by Professor Lyons that a review of student accommodation numbers might be timely, as it appeared the demand for accommodation is still a major issue for students, both Irish and International.

#### 10.4 Corporate Governance

A number of issues were raised concerning the functioning of the Board in relation to the tone of the meeting, respect for all (board and staff) members and staff involvement. It was agreed that these issues would be discussed at the next meeting when the Governance Review would be presented by the Consultants.

#### 10.5 Review Group

It was agreed that the CEO Review Group of the Chair, Dr Sinead O'Flanagan and Dr Jim Mountjoy should be increased to four members. Professor Orla Feely kindly agreed to serve and was appointed

### **Next Meeting**

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, DkIT

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Chairperson

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Date