

## Higher Education Authority

### Report of 409<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2020 via teleconference

Present: Mr Tony Donohoe (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr Bahram Bekhradnia (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr Judith Eaton (agenda items 1-13)  
Professor Orla Feely, Deputy Chair (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr Sharon Feeney (agenda items 1-13)  
Ms Lorna Fitzpatrick (agenda items 1-13)  
Mr Michael Horgan, Chairperson (agenda items 1-13)  
Ms Darina Kneafsey (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr Deirdre Lillis (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr Ronan Lyons (agenda items 3, 7-9, 12-13)  
Dr Jim Mountjoy (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr Sinéad O’Flanagan (agenda items 1-13)  
Mr Pól Ó Móráin (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr Lynn Ramsey (agenda items 1-13)  
Dr John Wall (agenda items 1-13)

In attendance: Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-13.1)  
Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 1-12)  
Mr Padraic Mellett (agenda items 1-12)  
Mr Tim Conlon (agenda items 1-12)  
Ms Caitriona Ryan (agenda items 1-12)  
Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 1-12)  
Ms Siobhan Sleeman (agenda item 4)

#### 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. Two conflicts of interest were raised with the Chair prior to the meeting – Ms Lorna Fitzpatrick re item 11 and Dr Lynn Ramsey re item 8. As Dr Ramsey manages a programme in receipt of PATH 3 funding it was agreed she would recuse herself from this item. It was agreed it was not necessary for Ms Fitzpatrick to recuse herself from the discussion on National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework. It was agreed that members belonging to institutions eligible to apply for funding under the Technological Universities Transformation Fund did not need to recuse themselves as specific proposals as regards allocation will be considered in the first instance by the Finance and Governance Committee.

## **Quorum**

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

## **Disclosures**

No disclosures were raised

### **1. Report of 408<sup>th</sup> Meeting held 7<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

1.1 The minutes were approved.

### **2. Matters arising**

2.1 No issues were raised.

### **3. Executive Report**

3.1 The following issues were raised;

- Provision and funding of additional places in higher education. The CEO advised that the HEA has been engaging with the HEIs identifying additional places over above the 1250 places already announced at the request of the Minister and Department. He noted institutions will finalise the additional places this week. A difficulty has arisen in relation to the funding of these places which was notified late to the HEA. The Department indicated that the funding required for 2020 must be provided from existing resources through reprioritising existing allocations, on the understanding that this funding will be an additional allocation provided by the Department 2021.
- Protected disclosures – the CEO advised that he has not brought these to the Board but noted they are often quite complex and time consuming.
- Will the HEA be making a submission on apprenticeship education? It was understood the deadline was 18<sup>th</sup> September. It was agreed that the HEA would seek an extension on the timeframe for submissions given the importance of this review for the HEA and the HE sector.
- HEA role on capital projects – the CEO advised he still awaiting an agreement from the Department which he will be in a position to sign.
- It was agreed that the evaluation of cycle 1 of the SALI will be considered by the PSP Committee.

#### 4. Allocation of Technological Universities Transformation Fund

4.1 Ms Sleeman introduced this item outlining the process to date and next steps. She advised that 8 submissions have been received with the total request of €44m, (€30m is available in the fund). Following consideration of the applications, recommendations will be brought to the Finance and Governance Committee. Mr Conlon advised that the Executive will take a collaborative approach and seek in so far as possible provide funding for each submission.

4.2 The following issues were raised;

- To what extent did the funding sought align with other funding provided to the HEIs? Mr Conlon advised that the Executive were conscious of the need to avoid any duplication of funding. The focus of this fund was on capacity building, so as to enhance the ability of HEIs secure new research funding.
- Will the review of the landscape fund inform the allocations? Mr Conlon advised that the review will not inform this allocation but the expectation was that it would inform future TUTF calls.
- Will funding be held back to review the outcome of this call? Members were informed that funding will be held back in year 2 for this purpose.
- What was the focus of research in the TU sector? Members were informed that the expectation was that research in the sector would be predominantly applied in nature.

**Decision:** Members approved the proposed process for allocation of the TUTF.

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

5.1 The Chair introduced the Committee's report. The meeting was concerned with the 2021 estimates process. He highlighted concern which was expressed over the widening gap in funding being provided to the universities to meet pension liabilities. The Committee suggested that this should be brought to the attention of the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

**Decision:** Members approved the Committee's report

#### 6. Report of Policy and Strategic Planning Committee

6.1 Ms Kneafsey introduced the report of the Committee's meeting held 17<sup>th</sup> July. The Committee subsequently met twice to consider (1) the Governance Ireland report and (2) Strategic Planning.

## 6.2 Governance Ireland Report

In relation to the former the Committee agreed to review the committee membership competency requirements and to undertake a mapping of the various committee terms of reference. The Chair thanked the Committee and requested each committee review their own terms of reference and required competencies noting it was open to committees to co-opt non-Board members.

## 6.3 Strategic Planning

At the meeting on planning the Committee noted the establishment of the new Department and pending legislation. It was noted that the new Department was required to develop a workplan, this should in turn inform the HEA's strategic plan review. The Committee also agreed to undertake a SWAT analysis of the HEA.

## 6.4 HEA legislation

Members noted the new Minister's recent Dublin Chamber of Commerce event, in which he outlined his key priorities. The Chair proposed that the Board arrange a dedicated meeting on the forthcoming legislation. Members queried the likely timeframe for having the legislation enacted. The CEO advised that the Chief Whip will shortly identify legislative priorities for the forthcoming Dáil term. The only legislation under consideration by the new Department was the HEC Bill. The Department may wish to have legislation in place by the summer of 2021 having regard to the term of existing Board members. It was agreed in the first instance to focus on the paper which was considered by the PSP.

**Decision:** Members approved the Committee's report. It was agreed to arrange special meetings on the planned legislation and strategic planning before the year end with the former to be scheduled for October.

## 7. Mid-term review of HEA Strategic Plan 2018-22

7.1 The Chair noted that significant progress has been made in meeting the plan's key strategic actions. The CEO noted the Board away day on strategic planning will enable him contextualise the current level of progress. He noted in particular the impact of COVID 19 and the need to manage additional access, recurrent and research funding. He noted the delay in securing approval for additional staff which may now come up against a public sector embargo.

7.2 Members queried what level of staff were being targeted under goal A 1.1 (HEI management and leadership capability)? It was noted also that attainment of goals under theme A was a little behind the other themes. COVID 19 has limited the capacity of some HEIs to focus on development initiatives. The expectation is

that development programmes will target staff at a senior level. The Chair noted the Minister spoke recently of his desire to strengthen HEI leadership capacity.

**Decision:** Members noted the report.

## 8. Report on PATH Strand 3<sup>1</sup>

8.1 Ms Ryan introduced this item noting that strand 3 was introduced to complement strand 1 (access to Teacher Education) and strand 2 (1916 Bursaries). However, it was noted that the link between strands 2 and 3 was not always obvious with many students in receipt of the 1916 Bursaries not necessarily coming through the type of initiatives supported by strand 3. The Department which has provided €7.5m over a three year period requested that the HEA undertake an evaluation of the strand after two years. She noted that COVID 19 has impacted some of the projects, however sufficient progress has been evident to warrant a recommendation that funding be continued for a further three years.

8.2 Members welcomed the report and made the following points;

- The Department should be advised to share the report with other stakeholders who have an interest in supporting equity of access such as Aontas. Ms Ryan agreed with this proposal noting the importance of enhancing capacity at pre entry levels.
- Do we have baseline data which would help measure the impact of PATH? Ms Ryan advised that when PATH was launched some high level targets were set for Access. The HEA has a rich source of SRS data which points to progress being made in reaching these targets. The SRS now has access to the deprivation index which enables the HEA to measure socio economic participation rates in great detail. It is difficult to state whether this progress is attributable specifically to the PATH strands. The clusters in receipt of funding under PATH 3 have been requested to provide data.
- To what extent are students coming from the new immigrant communities being supported through access initiatives? Ms Ryan advised that they were not specifically listed, however in so far as such students fell within the Access plan target groups they stood to benefit. The current access plan expires at the end of 2021 so it will be possible to review target groups then.

**Decision:** Members agreed that the report should be submitted to the DFHERIS.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Ramsey absented herself from this item

## 9. COVID 19 Grant to assist disadvantaged students access ICT devices

**Decision:** Members noted this item.

## 10. HEA nomination to the Legal Services Regulatory Board

**Decision:** Members approved the re-nomination of Dr Don Thornhill to the Legal Services Regulatory Authority.

## 11. National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework

11.1 The Chair welcomed this report noting its increased importance given the current pandemic. Mr Conlon noted that the Minister has signalled his interest in this work, additional funding has been provided by his Department. It was hoped the report would be launched by the Minister on 14<sup>th</sup> September – World Suicide Day.

**Decision:** Members approved the publication of the report.

## 12. HEA 2019 Annual Report

**Decision:** Members approved the draft report subject to any further observations to be submitted to Mr Conlon.

## 13. Members only session

### 13.1 CEO Review

The Board was informed that the CEO review had been completed satisfactorily. Ms Siobhan Browne is completing a draft document on future reviews which will be considered by the Board next month.

### 13.2 Space requirements post Covid-19

The Board raised the question of space / office requirements post Covid if remote working continues to be available to staff

## Next Meeting

20<sup>th</sup> October 2020

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Chairperson

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Date

