

Higher Education Authority

Report of the 336th Meeting held on 28th July in Brooklawn House.

- Present
- Professor Tom Boylan
 - Dr. Mary Canning
 - Ms Grace Corcoran
 - Mr. Michael Cotter
 - Mr. Martin Cronin
 - Professor Mary Daly
 - Mr. Noel Davern
 - Ms Doreen Delahunty
 - Mr. Michael Kelly (Chairman)
 - Ms Kathleen Lough
 - Mr. Peter Mannion
 - Professor Frances Ruane
 - Dr. Jim Ruane
- Apologies:
- Dr. Cepta Brougham
 - Dr. Tommy Cooke
 - Mr. Martin Cronin
 - Mr. Louis Dockery
 - Ms Sheila Drum
 - Professor Sarah Moore
- In attendance:
- Mr. Tom Boland
 - Ms Mary Kerr
 - Mr. Peter Brown
 - Dr. Eucharía Meehan
 - Ms Caitriona Ryan
 - Mr. Muiris Ó Connor
 - Mr. Padraic Mellett
 - Mr. Stewart Roche
 - Mr. Malcolm Byrne
 - Ms Mary Armstrong
 - Ms Jennifer Gyax
 - Ms Sheena Duffy

The Chair welcomed Mr. Peter Mannion to his first meeting of the Authority.

1. Report of 334th Meeting held 26th May 2009

Decision: The minutes were agreed.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 No items were raised.

3. Chief Executive's Report

3.1 Matters raised;

Open & Distance Learning – a report will be submitted to the Authority in September.

Office of Data Protection Commissioner Audit – The HEA has now received the ODPC's final report, which has no major reservations and implementation of the Commissioner's observations will present no operational difficulties.

3.2 The Chief Executive briefed Members on the Report of the Special Group on Public Sector Numbers and Expenditure Programmes and in particular recommendations in relation to the HEA itself, expenditure on research and the architecture of the funding system, and the SIF programme. It was noted that the entire set of recommendations were now to be considered by government and it was agreed that the Authority should adopt a position of 'business as usual' unless and until notified of some change. It was agreed that clearer information needed to be put into circulation on the outcomes being achieved from research investment and the Executive are to examine the best ways of doing this.

4. HEA Board Evaluation

4.1 This session was confined to Members and consisted of a presentation by David Duffy, Prospectus followed by a question and answer session.

Attendance for this item was confined to the Authority members. The Chair welcomed David Duffy, Prospectus Consultants. His presentation summarised the outcome of the evaluation process based on analysis of questionnaire responses, follow up phone interviews with a sample of members and additional comments based on his knowledge of best practice and experience with other boards.

While the overall verdict on the Board's performance was very positive, the evaluation did point up a number of matters which, if addressed could yield further improvement.

Agreed Actions: The Board agreed that each of the items identified should be followed up. The Chair is to discuss further with Prospectus and with CEO and will present an implementation plan at a subsequent meeting. It was agreed that policy on attendance at Authority meetings and the production of a Calendar could be progressed immediately.

5. Evaluation of Strategic Innovation Fund

5.1 A proposal for the evaluation of SIF was before the Authority. Issues raised;

- Format of the evaluation and the extent to which it presented practical and resourcing difficulties for the HEA and higher education institutions.
- The extent to which the scale and focus of an evaluation now must have regard to the likely future of the SIF following the government's decisions arising from the Report of the Special Group on Public Sector Numbers and Expenditure Programmes.

Agreed Actions: The Executive will discuss with the DES the format of the evaluation having regard to issues raised by Members and will revert back to the Authority in September with a view to the evaluation commencing in October.

6. Technological Sector Research Initiative Review

6.1 Members considered that given the importance of this report and its implications for the future structure of research funding and activity in higher education that it merited more detailed consideration than was possible at this meeting...

Agreed Actions: The Research Task Force will be convened in early September to consider the report and the HEA's response to the recommendations. The Task Force will report to the Authority at its next meeting with a view to the report being submitted to the DES by late September. Members will in the meantime submit comments to the Executive.

7. Study on participation in higher education by non-manual socio-economic group.

7.1 Ms Selina McCoy and Ms Delma Byrne of the ESRI made a presentation to the Authority which covered the research methodology, key findings and policy implications.

7.2 Matters raised;

- The tracking of the distinctive subgroups within the overall non-manual group in future censuses.
- The extent to which a student contribution to the cost of higher education might impact on the participation of these sub-groups.
- The need for measures to enhance the participation of this at second level education.

Actions agreed: Following consultation with the Department of Education and Science, the report to be published, with consideration given to doing so in conjunction with the HEA commissioned ESRI Report on the cost of participation in higher education. The Chair's foreword will address the policy implications arising from this study.

8. Task Force on Institutional Budgets and Accountability

8.1 The Task Force met before the Authority meeting and considered –

- a commissioned report from an expert consultant on funding and governance systems which compared Ireland's accountability structures with those in England and Scotland. In general there was a high level of consistency.
- a report on the budgets of the HEIs for this year. Ms Daly withdrew from the meeting during discussions on the UCD budget.
- a report on progress towards the development of shared services in higher education, and
- a report on the public sector staffing moratorium and the framework put in place for higher education institutions.

8.2 Matters raised

The divergence between institutional budgets as originally submitted to the HEA and actual agreed budgets.

The necessity for close monitoring of the budgetary situation in each institution and ensuring adherence to budgets.

The extent to which the model of governance in Irish HEI's compared unfavourably with that in England, in particular with respect to the size, role and composition of governing bodies.

Actions Agreed: The Chairman to write to all chairs of governing bodies with a view to meeting them in early autumn with the CEO of the HEA and presidents.

The Executive will commence work leading to the putting in place of a financial memorandum between the HEA and the institutions.

The report on accountability structures will be referred to the National Higher Education Strategy Group.

In the case of shared services, institutions will be asked for clear timelines and challenging targets for savings.

9. Student Assistance Fund Allocation 2009-10

- 9.1 The growing demand for the fund for students with disabilities has placed considerable pressure on overall funding available under the third level access measure. It was now proposed to give early notice to institutions that the student assistance fund in 2009-10 will be maintained at 2009-09 levels i.e. €5m. The Finance Committee will consider at its next meeting the proposed approach for the fund for students with disabilities for 2009-10 with a view to ensuring institutions are given early notification.

Action agreed: The proposed allocation of €5m was approved.

10. HEA 2009 Work Plan

- 10.1 Members noted that satisfactory progress is being made on the 2009 work programme. Areas where progress was slower than anticipated were;
- Collation of staff statistics – preparatory work has commenced, this exercise however requires significant resources in terms of funding and staff.
 - Funding & Accountability Study – some of this task has been subsumed into the shared services review being undertaken by IUA and IoTI. The HEA has also commissioned some related work from Dr. Jim Port and Ms Grace Dempsey.
 - PRTL Impact assessment – proposals will be submitted to the HEA later in the year.

Action agreed: The Chair will discuss with the Executive the format of report which would facilitate the Authority in its oversight of

implementation of the HEA's strategic and annual work programme objectives.

11. National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008-13 Progress Report

11.1 Significant progress is being made on the plan's objectives. The main challenge continues to be funding for part-time provision. The Student Support Bill has offered some grounds for optimism in this regard.

12. Update on Labour Market Activation Programme

12.1 Call A places at part-time undergraduate level have been announced. It is anticipated that call B places (part-time postgraduate) will be announced later in the week.

13. Any other business

13.1 Correspondence from Open College – Members agreed that the Executive should respond to the Open College on their behalf.

13.2 HEA Bank Accounts – Members reviewed and approved the list of bank accounts currently in operation. They approved the process for opening of new accounts subject to confirmation from the HEA's solicitor that this is compliant.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 22nd September.

Padraic Mellett
29th July 2009