Higher Education Authority

Report of the 337th Meeting held on 22nd September in Brooklawn House.

Present	Professor Tom Boylan Dr. Mary Canning Dr. Cepta Brougham Dr. Tommy Cooke (items 1-12) Ms Grace Corcoran Mr. Michael Cotter Mr. Martin Cronin Professor Mary Daly Mr. Noel Davern (item 4 onwards) Ms Doreen Delahunty Ms Sheila Drum (item 5 onwards) Mr. Michael Kelly (Chairman) Ms Kathleen Lough Mr. Peter Mannion Professor Sarah Moore Professor Frances Ruane (items 1-5) Dr. Jim Ruane
Apologies:	Mr. Louis Dockery
In attendance:	Mr. Tom Boland Ms Mary Kerr Dr. Eucharia Meehan Dr. Mary-Liz Trant Ms Caitriona Ryan Ms Mary Armstrong Ms Jennifer Gygax Mr. Muiris Ó Connor Mr. Padraic Mellett Mr. Stewart Roche Ms Sheena Duffy (item 7) Mr. Oliver Mooney (item 8) Mr. Pat O'Connor (item 10)

1. Report of 336th Meeting held 28th July 2009

Decision: The minutes were agreed. It was agreed that the minutes should reflect where members were not present for particular items due to late arrival/early departure. This is in addition to the current practice whereby the minutes record where members are not present having absented themselves for items where they are conflicted.

2. Matters Arising

2.1 No items were raised.

3. Chief Executive's Report

3.1 Matters raised;

Staffing Moratorium and Employment Control Framework – members were briefed on discussions taking place with the Departments of Education & Science and Finance in relation to the operation of the framework. A number of possible adjustments to the framework which would result in more discretion being granted to the institutions are being explored. Posts funded through the student registration fee are subject to the moratorium.

Foresight in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences – Members were briefed on the steering committee meeting which took place on 21st September. It is expected that the report will be finalised in November and will inform to the national higher education strategy discussions. The report will be considered by the Authority at either its November or December meeting.

Preliminary CAO Acceptances – Members were advised that the increased intake was particularly high in the IoT sector. An increase in the retention rate will also impact on the overall numbers in the sector.

HEA Staffing –the Executive had given careful consideration to each of the career break applications that were approved. The Department has also been advised of the numbers involved and that further staff reductions would have an adverse impact on the Authority to deliver on its work programme.

Audit Committee – Dr. Ruane briefed members on the Committee's meeting held on 21st September - savings have been secured on the service

charge for Brooklawn House and satisfactory progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the recent review on internal financial controls. In relation to the 2008 audit the C&AG was happy with the accounts but further consideration is necessary in respect of the processes in place relating to credit cards and travel & subsistence expenses. This matter will be considered further when the C&AG issues its management letter. The Committee approved policies on Fraud and Whistleblowing.

Organisational Review – The consultants made a presentation to the senior management team who will now consider the proposals. The matter will be considered by members at the November meeting together with follow up actions arising from the Authority's own self evaluation.

4. Report of Finance Committee

4.1 The report of the Finance Committee held on 15th September was before the Authority. Ms Kerr outlined the Committee's recommendations which came under the following headings;

- Approval of three frameworks under the Universities Act, 1997
- Approval of TCD and NUIM pension schemes and a pensions appeals mechanism to the HEA for universities staff
- Format of Institutes of Technology accounts
- Fund for students with disability
- Erasmus Programme Grant Allocation 2009-10

4.2 Issues raised;

- The extent to which the borrowing framework covered all potential options for borrowing including public private partnerships involving the HEIs.
- In relation to the TCD and NUIM pension schemes, Members noted the due process followed by the Executive and the assurances received that the amendments were carefully considered in consultation with the Departments of Education & Science and Finance.
- In relation to the format of HEI accounts it was proposed that provision be made for 5 yearly financial trends analysis.

Agreed Actions: Members approved the recommendations as set out in the Finance Committee report F 17/09.

5. Evaluation of Strategic Innovation Fund

5.1 A proposal for the evaluation of SIF was before the Authority. Members were advised that the C&AG had recently notified the HEA of its intention to carry out a review of SIF also. The C&AG carried out a similar review on PRTLI in 2004 parallel with the impact assessment of that programme. Issues raised;

- Sustainability to feature more in the review.
- Avoid duplication with the C&AG's exercise.
- Site visits in respect of the larger projects should not be confined to the lead institution.
- Emphasise the capacity-building nature of SIF.
- The review should recognise that the benefits of SIF were likely to become most evident in the longer-term.
- The desirability of some early feedback being fed into the national strategy discussions.

Agreed Actions: It was agreed to proceed with the evaluation as soon as possible. The Executive should ensure a joined-up approach with the C&AG review, where possible. The Executive should work to have initial findings for the Authority's December meeting.

6. Open and Distance Learning

6.1 Members welcomed Professor Aine Hyland who made a presentation with Mr. Muiris O'Connor. The presentation focused on the following;

- Development of open and flexible learning and new technologies
- Current provision in Ireland
- Possible scenario for higher education in the future
- Recommendations – at national/ institutional level and for staff and students

6.2 Issues raised;

- The importance of achieving equality of funding otherwise ODL will continue to be seen as an "add on".
- The importance of ensuring quality.
- The need for qualitative feedback from those currently engaged in flexible learning. The need to engage those staff not currently involved.
- Role of the National Distance Learning Repository
- Importance of investment in ICT at primary, secondary and third level.
- Accreditation where modules are taken from a number of institutions.

Agreed Actions: Members were invited to submit comments to the Executive on the draft paper. The draft paper will be considered by the Task Force on National Strategy in October with a view to it being finally considered by the Authority at its November meeting.

7. Task Force on Research – Review of Technological Sector Research Fund

7.1 Members were advised that the review of the TSR fund was a separate exercise to reviewing the role of research in the institutes of technology. The latter would be the subject of a future meeting of the task force with the outcome feeding into the national strategy discussions.

7.2 Matters raised;

- A need for clarity on the future direction of the fund which should be aligned with the outcome of the national strategy discussions.
- A stronger statement on the need for proper governance of the fund.
- The current status of the fund, while funding continues under strand 2, no new awards have been made.

Actions agreed: Members agreed that the report can issue to the Department. The letter will be amended in paragraph 3 (future direction of the programme) and a reference will be made to governance arrangements in the final paragraph.

8. Interim Framework for Academic Programme Offerings

8.1 The following issues were raised;

- The timescale for the review, as the CAO has already published a handbook for 2010/11 courses the proposed framework could not come into place until 2011. By then the national strategy should have been published with more clarity on the roles and missions of institutions.
- The application of the framework to part-time courses
- The framework will impose a new timeline on academics planning new courses.
- The definition of new courses? The proposed framework must not stifle innovative academic developments.
- IUA and IOTI should be consulted.

Actions Agreed: It was agreed that the task force on national strategy would consider the proposed framework having regard to the issues

outlined above, pending the agreement of a new framework the current process for approving new courses will continue.

9. Future Meetings of the Authority

Action agreed: Members approved the schedule of meetings for 2010. One of these meetings will be set aside for strategy. The likely agenda items will be notified to members once the 2010 work programme has been approved.

10. European Network for co-ordination of policies and programmes on e-infrastructure (E-InfraNet)

10.1 Mr. O'Connor briefed Members on the aims and objectives of the programme. The HEA has for the first time been appointed as the lead partner on an E-InfraNet policy programme and will be responsible for the disbursement of EU funds to other countries participating on the programme.

Action agreed: Members congratulated Mr. O'Connor and the Executive for securing this project. They approved the opening of a new bank account with AIB Bank in accordance with the existing bank mandate.

11. Irish Universities Quality Board

11.1 Dr. Padraig Walsh, Chief Executive of the IUQB made a presentation to Members focusing on the following;

- Status of the recommendations of the IUQB quality review programme published in 2008. The IUQB was approved as a member of ENQA last June.
- Timetable for institutional reviews. All 7 universities will have been reviewed by the end of the 2012/13 academic year.
- Guidelines of best practice published by IUQB.
- A quality review catalogue is now available on the IUQB's website. This includes the reports on all completed QA reviews which included virtually all of the academic departments and many of the support units in the 7 universities.
- A request was made to the HEA to assist external reviewers with the provision of data on student and staff numbers and the level of recurrent funding.

12. Task Force on National Strategy

12.1 The Chairman briefed members on progress to date.

13. HEA Board Evaluation

13.1 This item was addressed under par. 3.6 above.

14. Labour Market Activation Initiatives

14.1 Members were advised that significant progress has been made in filling the 1500 part-time undergraduate places and 1000 postgraduate places. Ireland was successful in securing funding under the EU's globalisation adjustment fund.

15. Any other business

15.1 Members agreed to convey their best wishes to Mr. Shane Kelly who has undergone major surgery.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 10th November 2009.

Padraic Mellett
28th September 2009