

## **Minutes of the High Level Group Meeting on International Education**

**Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 at 11:30am**

*Refer to Annex 1 for list of Attendees*

### **Launch of strategy consultation process and Indecon review**

The Chair advised that DFHERIS is currently developing a new International Education Strategy and now received the Indecon review.

The consultation paper is almost finished and it is envisaged that it will be published before Christmas, following approval by the Management Board and the Minister. DFHERIS will be inviting stakeholders to contribute, - guidelines on how to make a submission will be published. Once approved a copy of consultation paper will be published on the Departments website along with the Indecon report.

IUA welcomed the consultation process and queried if there will be alignment with the strategy and the National Research Strategy. IUA requested to see the Indecon review before the consultation process starts. The Chair responded by advising that the preference would be allow both documents to issue concurrently and expressed confidence that they would issue before Christmas. DFHERIS stated that Cabinet has been asked to note the Indecon report and the intention to launch consultation.

In response to the HECA query about the timeline for responses, the Chair suggested that this could be up to two months running up to mid-February. The Chair advised that strategy would take account of the Covid period and the Indecon Report and that priority of the strategy would be built on the achievements made before the pandemic occurred. The Indecon data was limited to the period to early 2020 and that the DFHERIS Working Group would have a more comprehensive perspective on the effects of Covid on the sector.

HECA noted that the UK international student (non EU) cohort has increased two years in a row and referred to a Higher Education Policy Institute report showing that International Students generate £28.8 billion annually for the UK economy, for an estimated £2.9 billion cost. The increased stay back and streamlined visas is making it a hard sell for Ireland. Furthermore, online education no longer seen as optional and Ireland needs to consider increasing provision of blended if not a complete online education to International Students.

The Chair advised that HECA's views will be reflected in the draft document. While we need to be conscious of competitive developments in the UK, Ireland must devise a unique Strategy which identifies actions needed to build on the achievements to date. be approved by cabinet and will be a whole of government and sector strategy including all key players - Department of Justice, Department of Social Protection, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment etc. Initiatives that will benefit the overall strategy. HECA thanked DFHERIS and D/Justice for the support over the past 20 months.

HEA agreed with HECA regarding the importance of timelines, as it will be 2023 at earliest again before any meaningful impact can begin to take hold. They have recently launched the call for the next GOI scholarships programme review. Erasmus continues despite Brexit, and there will be another Erasmus programme call with a deadline of February 2022. Emerging issues include the European Universities and the Teacher Academies. It had been anticipated that the UK would be included in the rest of the world category so that we could have a relationship under International credit mobility in the Commission document, which will not be the case if they are not included. HEA thanked DFHERIS for meeting the funding gap in the 2021 call for Erasmus mobilities.

HEA queried if the further education sector would have a role in the strategy. The Chair responded that this would be subject to further consideration. There has not been a history of international activity, but it does not prevent further education from engaging under Erasmus scheme in terms of developing its own international perspective, which is something Minister Harris wants to encourage. For example, Minister Harris communicated with the French Minister with regard to encouraging co-teaching, apprenticeships spending time abroad as part of an agreed technology programme with France.

HEA agrees but feels it is in a much bigger picture with the development of DFHERIS and the closer alignment of higher education working with SOLAS, the inclusion of further education information and apprenticeship information on the CAO form which will bring attention from international students. DFHERIS agrees that further education should be same level as with higher education. The consultation process will be the time to evaluate this.

IUA welcomes the consultation process. The challenge to set a new strategy within a context which is constantly shifting. Recruitment in these uncertain times has presented challenges with regard to decision making. The role of internationalisation influences and supports all aspects of higher education activity.

ICOS said that the student voice should be central to any consultations and would be keen to organise some sessions directly with students to get their view on the strategy. ICOS will publish some research on 9 December 9<sup>TH</sup> with regard to international student perspectives post-pandemic on visas, and racism. ICOS also requested an update with regard to the International Education Mark. The Chair welcomed student participation in the consultation process.

THEA spoke on student experience, safety and quality on the longer term good will towards Ireland. Building a strategy at the time of recovery is difficult, with limitations on what can be achieved. Shared Island and cross border issues need to be included. DFHERIS holistic approach to education and research brings a focus to internationalisation and working closely with other relevant departments will help Ireland compete in a competitive environment. The Chair re-affirmed the whole of government approach.

QQI is launching a new strategic statement Nov 30<sup>th</sup> 2021, with the International Education Mark to which the codes of practice for ELE and HEI's will be closely aligned. The aim is to have structures in place next year to enable applications for the authorisation of the International Education Mark to take place at the end of 2022/ early 2023. It will be engaging in full consultation process with colleagues in HEIs and the English Language Sector..

RCSI considers Ireland to be lagging behind competitors such as Australia, New Zealand, UK and Canada. The UK is increasing its competitive offer and has capacity due to declining numbers of domestic students. They are clearly targeting the same markets as Ireland.

Countries which were previously been a source of students are now competitors, with Malaysia being cited. The Strategy will need to reflect the importance of what students want from Ireland in order to grow the sector.

DFHERIS advises the last strategy increased the number of priority markets to 20+ from six previously with the help of the members, EI and DFA. The Indecon report shows that International higher education and English language students increased by 33% over 5 years, in line with targets.

Mary I College sees accommodation as another challenge to our competitiveness.

HEA suggest that international national education is wider than fee income and suggests developing mutually beneficial relationships with priority countries. English language provision in Ireland could be leveraged to create pathways into higher education.

DFHERIS advises a strategic focus will include a transition from dependency on international student recruitment. The sector understands student and institutional needs. Ireland has the fastest growing demand for secondary level education in Europe over the medium term.

### **GOI Scholarships**

The Chair confirms with the HEA that the call for approximately 60 scholarship positions issued on 26<sup>th</sup> Nov 2021. HEA recommends increasing numbers to meet demand.

IUA thanked HEA for considering their earlier launch date.

### **Communications**

EII thanked the HEA on the GOI Scholarship information.

Ireland now has 90 joint partnerships in China alone. Since September 2021, there have been 9 events held, which seek to build awareness of Ireland as a third level study destination.

Campaigns to raise awareness are also being run in Asia, Middle East, Africa and North America. Additional resources include a new full time education specialist in based KL, a new social media expert in China and new social media and press resources in India and Mexico. In British Columbia, EII have a recruited new path finder.

The study abroad market has seen a 90% reduction. Despite this Ireland is still 6<sup>th</sup> most popular destination for study abroad for American students.

A number of research projects have taken place in Russia, Africa and in the Middle East.

EII are limiting the number of physical events in Ireland in Q1 and will seek agreement from senior leadership. EXPO Dubai activity was centred on knowledge and learning week with six HEI's travelling to Dubai.

ASAPI advises of a drop of nearly 12,000 US students from the previous year to around 4,700 students. Importance of summer students vital to include in any strategy particularly around the US market.

## **Semester 2**

The Chair acknowledged the good work undertaken during Covid, and specifically, the IUA, THEA, HECA and the RCSI. HECA thanked DFHERIS and D/Justice in relation to the good work done across the sector. A number of contributors mentioned the use of ‘meet and greet’ as a promotional and marketing tool – it illustrated institutions going above and beyond as a USP for Ireland.

IUA thanked NUIG for taking on the sectoral meet and greet this year which ran for just over 9 weeks. The project handled 13,840 students. Great feedback from students in terms of how they perceive Ireland. IUA feels it would need to be outsourced next time. Brand Ireland welcome is needed at the airport. IUA members asking that it would be implemented for Semester 2 arrivals. UCD have sent out their ISB early and have been overwhelmed by response to the meet and greet project.

HEA Erasmus programme closing dates in semester 2 will be in Feb/March 2022. €2.8 million to begin collaborations on every continent. In relation to GOI scholarships 75% are for post-graduate programmes. Need to look at facilitating online programmes. GOI central applications system data could be used in the consultation process.

## **AOB**

ICOS requested update on International Education Mark. The new corporate fitness function that QQI will be rolling out along with a new scheme for the protection of enrolled learners. QQI will lead communication activity around in early 2022.

The Chair on behalf of DFHERIS thanked Gerry O’Sullivan and for his contribution and wished him well on his retirement.

The Chair also thanked Alan O’Callaghan in the International Co-Operation Unit, DFHERIS for his contribution and wished him well in his new role.

The Chair thanked members for their contributions.

Meadhbh Devilly

Secretary

International Cooperation Unit

29<sup>th</sup> November 2021

*Annex 1*

**Attendees**

Ian McKenna (Chair)	DFHERIS
Alan O'Callaghan	DFHERIS
Roseann Gilligan	DFHERIS
Lisa Conway	DFHERIS
Padraig Hennigan	DFHERIS
Holly Cowman	Mary I
Catherine Linehan	D/Justice
Aileen Marron	HEA
Maria Nash	SFI
Adrian Devitt	RCSI
David O'Grady	MEI
Daniel Liddy	D/Justice
Gerry O'Sullivan	HEA
Giles O'Neill	EI
Patricia O'Sullivan	HECA
Beth O'Reilly	USI
Jennifer Cleary	IUA
Becky Whay	IUA
Joseph Ryan	THEA
Karl Dowling	ASAPI
Laura Harmon	ICOS
Jim Murray	QQI
Mary Grennan	QQI
Tanya Kenny	DFHERIS
Niall Brady	DFA
Stephen Hayden	D/Justice
Colm	ATC

**Apologies**

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