

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

**Wynn's Hotel, 2pm**

**Tuesday 18 February, 2020**

*Refer to Annex 1 for list of Attendees*

### **Introductions**

The Chair welcomed the members of the group and outlined the format of the meeting. This was followed by a tour de table.

### **Minutes of the last meeting for approval**

The minutes of the previous HLG meeting of 2nd May 2019 were circulated prior to the commencement of the meeting with the request that observations be returned to DES by COB 21<sup>st</sup> February 2020.

### **EI Update**

The Chair gave the floor to EI asking that they provide the group with an overview of the work that has been carried out since the last meeting.

EI are currently conducting their annual business review. They have circulated a survey to HEIs to assist them with this, the closing date for which was Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February. Last year they received a 100% return rate and stressed the importance of this exercise and the information collected. EI advised that the survey is sent directly to colleges and is geared exclusively around revenue.

Planning for 2020/2021 is underway and EI welcome the review of the strategy to assist with their efforts internationally. A piece of research on South East Asia was conducted before Christmas. EI advised that the dynamics within the international education field are changing rapidly, and Ireland must ensure it stays competitive.

Ireland is entering new markets, including Mexico and Columbia, and is continuing engagement with Brazil, USA, Canada and the Middle East. Currently EI is working to build new relationships in Africa including Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, with a workshop having taken place recently in the latter.

EI has focused on relationship building with alumni groups and continues to build future connections for business.

The Chair queried whether the issue of student accommodation is being raised when EI are promoting Ireland in-market.

EI advised that accommodation cost is a matter of concern and noted also that issues around the current *stay back* policy have also been raised. EI suggested that Ireland needs to tackle these issues in order to remain competitive and not be left behind.

### **International Education Mark**

DES updated the group on the current issues relating to the International Education Mark (IEM). The two main issues identified are the legislative measures necessary for the introduction of the IEM and issues around employment rights in the English Language sector.

Legislation was passed and signed into law on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2019. To date, sections 15, 36 and 37 of the act have been commenced and a working group has been established, chaired by QQI, to coordinate and oversee the implementation of this legislation. The priority of the group is the development of the Corporate Fitness and PEL element in 2020 while addressing QQI's funding model and resource requirements for the roll out of its new functions. The aim is to have Regulations ready in the second half of 2020. This will lay the foundations necessary for the implementation of the IEM in 2021.

### **International Student Health Insurance**

DES updated the group on the matter advising that developments in this area are dependent on the decision of the High Court with regard to the appeal made by CHUBB insurance.

D/Health, D/IE and DES have continued to meet to discuss the issue and to explore possible solutions. Some work has been completed by DES in an effort to ascertain what type of information would be required to implement and support policy change in this area. A number of information gaps have been identified. DES will circulate a list of questions to the group to assist with data gaps in this regard.

THEA advised that they had contacted Laya, VHI and Irish Life regarding quotations for student health insurance. They did not receive a response from Laya. DES noted that there is a willingness from the insurance companies to quote for cover. However the Department has been unable to obtain necessary information on premium, claims history and age cohorts specific to international students.

DES advised the need to establish this information before a full evidence-informed policy analysis and recommendation can be made.

DES stressed the importance of having the sector's cooperation in gathering the required information in order to resolve this issue.

## **Strategy Review**

A briefing note on the Strategy review was circulated to all HLG members.

DES advise that the tendering process has been completed and that the contract has been awarded to Indecon International Consultants. Indecon will be in contact with all HLG and Sub Group members in due course. DES appealed to all members to engage fully with the review process.

DES advised that the next step following the completion of the review will be consultation in relation to the drafting of a new strategy and noted that any new strategy cannot be signed off on until a Government is in place.

MEI suggested a focus on language skills. IUA raised the point that there should be a focus on employability within the new strategy. IUA advised that the *stay back* policy is an issue and Ireland will be unable to remain competitive if this is not reviewed. Employers need to be educated on Ireland's immigration policy in relation to employment conditions for international students.

IUA queried what Indecon's form of engagement will be; will they approach employers such as IBEC? DES advised that Indecon would not be engaging with employers/employer associations but that these stakeholders would be consulted during the drafting of the new strategy.

TUD raised the issue of sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals and noted that travel for international students coming to Ireland, accounted for 25 tonnes of CO2 emissions last year. TUD suggested that we need to look at ways of reducing this number.

USI requested that supports for students be considered (such as accommodation) and requested that a broader consultation with students outside the USI conversation should be undertaken.

A number of members raised questions around the type of stakeholder engagement that will be carried out by Indecon. DES advised that a meeting with Indecon will take place on Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> February where this will be discussed. DES welcomed any suggestions from the group in relation to same.

## **Brexit**

DES provided an update on the current status of Brexit negotiations. The UK exited the EU on 31 January when the Withdrawal Agreement was finalised. An Education Common Travel Area MOU between Ireland and the UK is being discussed and will be signed at the earliest opportunity. On the future relationship, the EU is expected to agree a mandate for talks shortly. The UK has been stating that the transition period will end on 31 December. This means that a hard exit is still possible if an agreement on future relations cannot be secured before then. On EU Programmes such as Erasmus and Horizon, the participation of the UK will be decided in the negotiations. A decision to extend the transition period and the negotiations is required by the end of June. Ireland continues to stress the importance of continuing to ensure good North/South relations.

## AOB

MEI are launching a booklet on the mental health and wellbeing of international students.

TUD informed the Group that China has suspended the English Language testing for students seeking to study abroad due to the COVID-19 crisis and asked that D/Justice facilitate efforts to get these tests completed in an acceptable form.

ICOS is dealing with issues around two recent agency closures. They advised that USIT is currently only working with agencies that are registered and vetted.

## Next Meeting

June was suggested as the date for the next HLG.

## *Annex 1*

### Attendees

Keith Moynes	DES
Vincent Landers	DES
Alan O'Callaghan	DES
Roseann Gilligan	DES
Meadhbh Devilly	DES
Angela Long	DES
Joseph Gleeson	DES
Lilianna O'Reilly	QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland)
David O'Grady	MEI (Marketing English in Ireland)
Jennifer Cleary	IUA (Irish Universities Association)
Holly Cowman	C.H.o.I.C.E (Conference of Heads of Irish Colleges of Education)
Miriam Ryan	THEA (Technological Higher Education Association)
Diarmuid Hegarty	Higher Education Consultants Association (HECA)
Megan Reilly	USI (The Union of Students in Ireland)
Maria Melia	DTTS (Dept. Transport, Tourism and Sport)
Lorna Fitzpatrick	USI

Maria Keane	ASAPI (Assoc. of Study Abroad Providers in Ireland)
Maev Nic Lochlainn	DES
Sarah Lennon	ICOSIRL (Irish Council for International Students)
Giles O'Neill	Enterprise Ireland
Robert Flood	TUD
Aileen Marron	HEA
Niall Brady	DFA
Bryan Maguire	QQI

### Apologies

Daniel Liddy	Justice
Gerry O'Sullivan	HEA
Ciaran O'Flaherty	DFA
Micheál Rooney	Justice