



Chair's Report for 2007 - 2008

This report was delivered at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held during the FACE conference at York St John University on the 3rd, July 2008.

I am pleased to present to members my report as FACE chair for 2007-2008. FACE is an increasingly busy network and much has happened since the last AGM. So I apologise in advance for any omissions or inaccuracies both of which I am happy to deal with if readers would be kind enough to inform me of these. As I hope my report will convey it has been a year of good progress in respect of member services and a year which has required the Executive to review carefully the financial position of the network to ensure we can continue to sustain and grow both services alongside our membership and activities. In many ways this has been a year in which FACE has been moving up a gear both organisationally and financially and this has in turn required the Executive to work through a range of key issues and plan accordingly for the coming year and beyond. This year my report has a slightly extended section on the wider international and UK context. I hope this is a useful addition and would be grateful for any feedback from members on this. Following the wider context section I offer a series of summaries on key areas of work for FACE.

Wider Context

As a way of providing a broader context for my annual Chair's report I begin by drawing on some of the headline comments from the 2007 report on the UK's progress towards the Lisbon objectives. This is a wide ranging report which reviews progress made against the key performance indicators towards a national lifelong learning strategy in each member state. The following extract from the report offers a summary of progress specifically in relation to widening access and improving equity of participation treatment outcomes, especially for disadvantaged learners.

Addressing equity in higher education is one of five strands in the 2006-11 Strategy of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which seeks to: increase demand and opportunities for access; to clarify and simplify progression routes into higher education (including vocational routes); and to embed widening participation in the corporate policies of individual HE institutions. This is delivered through formula funding incentives to institutions, local *Aimhigher partnerships*, which bring together Universities, Schools and Colleges to promote higher education to young people and their parents from communities and groups where HE participation has been low; and systems of financial assistance to students from low income backgrounds.

In England, Universities are only permitted to charge higher level student fees if their arrangements for support for disadvantaged students satisfy the independent Office of Fair Access. To protect students and graduates on low incomes, full time undergraduate students are able to defer payment through a fee loan, provided on a non-commercial rate of interest linked to the rate of inflation. Loans are only repaid when income exceeds the threshold level.

It was widely feared, when higher student fees were introduced in England that enrolments would fall. Although they did so in the first year (2006 entry) applications for entry in 2007 have returned to the long term growth trendline.

Scotland and Wales share the overall policy objectives of widening participation and addressing social exclusion in HE, and have broadly similar approaches to this. However, neither has chosen

to charge student fees on the English basis and the financial arrangements and incentives are different. However, from Academic Year 2007/08, Universities in Wales and Northern Ireland will be able to charge fees on the same basis as England, again subject to approval of plans to protect those on low incomes and from non-traditional groups. However, WAG is introducing a fee remission grant and bursaries to limit the maximum charge payable by the Welsh domiciled students (Education and Training 2010: 2007 Report on the UK's progress towards Lisbon objectives, Nov 2007).

FACE members will no doubt have their own views about this summary however for us as a network it is useful as a way of situating our particular concerns and views in a wider context. Although there is as noted previously a degree of policy divergence between the different parts of the UK in relation to both HE access and lifelong learning this illustrates the need and reinforces the significance of FACE as a UK wide network with international links. The opportunity and need to exchange practice, explore policy, promote and disseminate research and development activity in the areas of access and lifelong learning has therefore never been greater. FACE makes a unique contribution to this as an independent member driven network and I believe this is an aspect of FACE's role which needs further development.

Before I provide a summary on the work of the network since the last AGM let me mention a couple of other UK developments which have also impacted on FACE members and their institutions over the last twelve months. Part-time HE provision has been severely effected by the ELQ policy. Provision for part-time HE study is crucial to both developing access and increasing learning opportunities for adults. FACE and its members from a number of HEI's have been working to challenge this policy. There have been two important reports from the National Audit Office during the year both of which FACE has contributed to in different ways. The first report focussed on student retention in HE and the second and more recent on widening participation in HE. FACE will keep a close watching brief on what happens with these issues over the coming year. FACE made a submission to the review of OFFA and many thanks to those members that fed in their comments to this. Let me now provide a brief summary of the main areas of FACE's operations and activities since the last AGM.

The Executive Committee

The Executive Committee has met regularly throughout the year and we are most grateful to Graeme Atherton and the University of Westminster for hosting our meetings. The Executive have worked extremely hard and met additionally this year to work on the three year development plan. This is currently being finalised and will form the basis of the work and activities of the next three years. Some of the major items on the agendas for Executive meetings are listed below:

- Finance
- Website
- E-bulletin
- Marketing and publicity
- Working with partners
- Research Projects
- Conference planning
- Publications
- National policy development
- External relations
- Staffing
- Membership
- Services
- National/EU Policy

Executive meetings are an essential part of the operation of the network and we are really fortunate to have such a creative and dedicated Executive. I would like to thank and acknowledge the important contributions that each and everyone of the Executive has made to FACE throughout this year.

Services to Members

During the year excellent progress has been made in the development of services to members who are at the heart of the network. In particular the Executive put an emphasis on developing the networks electronic platform. Two examples of this are the further developments to the monthly E-Bulletin and website and we are grateful to Jim Tate for this in his new role. The second is the launch electronically of FACE to FACE under its new editor, Executive member Pete Jones. Member recruitment and retention ultimately depend on the relevance, quality and values which inform the services and activities we provide. These are also central to the work of the Executive and support staff.

The Research and Development Fund supported five member projects this year and the reports from each project will be presented at the annual conference and further made available on the website in due course. Particular thanks to Executive member Graeme Atherton for doing such a great job on this scheme.

Administration

Part-time administrator Jackie Leach has continued to provide a high level of service to members throughout the year and I would like to thank Jackie for her work. Jackie's work covers a wide range of tasks. Throughout the year, she has provided regular mailings to members, giving information on FACE activities and worked closely with the Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. Throughout the course of the year the administrative base deals not only with member questions and issues but also the processing of new members and liaison with the Executive Committee and the annual conference host. The University of East London has kindly hosted our administrative service and we are most grateful for this support.

Finance

The FACE Treasurer Mike Goodwin will provide details of our financial position in his report. Essentially the position is very strong with a good level of reserves. However, as mentioned in my report last year our expenditure has been growing. The Executive agreed a number of actions which I am sure will help in rebalancing things. These combined with a proactive membership drive and modest increase in membership fee will ensure a firmer financial footing for the network going forward. I would like to acknowledge the work of our treasurer Mike Goodwin for his work throughout the year.

External Relations

On the international front we are grateful to our Secretary Mike Hill for representing FACE at the NADE Annual Conference in the USA. We were delighted to welcome the NADE president to our annual conference at the University of East London. In my role as Chair I have been supporting and working with colleagues from various universities across Sweden to establish a network similar to FACE. The Swedish network is called INCLUDE and was only recently launched. The Chair of the steering group of INLCUDE has agreed to attend our 2008 annual conference and share developments with members. On the UK front FACE members continue to play a very active role with national, regional and local organisations and collectively have made major contributions to both policy and practice. Myself and other members of the Executive have worked closely with a range of governmental and non-governmental agencies to ensure the voice of FACE is both present and heard. The capacity of FACE to influence policy makers and policy in areas of relevance continues to grow and I believe will become an increasingly important aspect of our work over future years.

Annual Conference and Events

The team at Continuum and the colleagues involved from the wider University of East London were all delighted to host the 2007 annual conference with the title 'Lifelong Learning and Social Justice: Diversity, Globalisation, Transformation'. The conference drew a record number of delegates including sizeable numbers of international participants. The quality and variety of the papers and workshop sessions were excellent and have been edited into an equally impressive FACE publication. We look forward to the 2008 conference to be hosted by York St. John University. Two successful seminars took place during the year, one hosted by Executive member Danny Saunders and team at the University of Glamorgan on the Leith agenda, the other seminar was on England/ Africa Partnerships supported by the British Council at UEL. We are delighted that the 2008 conference is being hosted by York St. John University.

Concluding Comments

It has been an excellent year which has seen a continuing improvement to member services with particular reference to the electronic communications platform. Membership has remained stable and an executive sub-group has been set up to further develop the membership data base and management information. The three year plan has required a detailed financial review and also a reconfiguration of the budget. The annual conference was a great success with record delegates and a range of excellent workshops. This latter observation is illustrated further by the conference publication to be launched at the 2008 conference. I would like to thank in closing all Executive members for all of their efforts throughout this year and also our part-time support staff for their work. Finally, I would like to thank all members for their continued support and involvement in FACE.

John Storan, Chair

