



Chairs Report for 2008-2009

This report was presented at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held during the FACE conference at Staffordshire University on the 2nd July, 2009.

Introduction and Context

In thinking about my report to members on the work and activities that FACE has been involved with since the last AGM, I have been mindful of the exceedingly difficult economic situation. I know that FACE members have been equally concerned with this situation and how this has and will impact on our existing and prospective learners. Across the UK, funding for HE is reducing and is likely to continue to do so. Recent reports suggest that the gap between HE applicants and places available is set to grow over the coming years. The increase in applications for full-time courses has risen by almost 10% over the previous year. The prospect of promoting and delivering HE opportunities to learners against a backdrop of no expansion has come up repeatedly in one form or another over the year. The arguments for not only continuing the investment in HE and as part of this the need to support and indeed develop further the funded activity and programmes to support widening participation and inclusion will need to be made at every opportunity. For FACE, this means supporting and working with members to ensure continuing government funding and that institutional commitment is maintained in these as core values for HE as a whole. It also recognises the importance of FACE to be even more creative in finding ways to support members.

Over the last year, the Executive has been identifying and putting in place services which members see as increasingly important. I shall highlight some of these in different sections of this report.

The trend towards policy divergence continues between the different constituent parts of the UK. Members from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have made important contributions to FACE during the year which have proved an effective way of sharing the range of policy and practice in access and lifelong learning taking place in different parts of the UK, despite the different approaches. This year, the government commissioned nine reports on HE as part of a future looking exercise to develop a framework for HE. Professor Christine King, VC at Staffordshire University wrote the report on 'Part-time Studies in Higher Education', an area of much interest to FACE members. Professor King will be addressing our 2009 annual conference, and will no doubt share the major points from this report in the course of her presentation. Taken together, this series of reports will help contribute to a policy framework for HE for the next 10-15 years, so it is critical for FACE through its members and their institutions to contribute to this debate. Throughout the year, FACE members throughout the UK and beyond have been making a major contribution within the sectors and organisations in which they operate widening participation and lifelong learning developments. I therefore thank members for all their hard work

during the year. This collectively is making a significant difference, not only at national policy level, but on a day to day basis to the experience of thousands of both current and future HE learners throughout the UK.

Executive Committee

Executive Committee meetings have taken place this year with an excellent level of attendance on each occasion. As Chair, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful contribution made in different aspects of the forum's work by each member. The quality of discussion and range of experience and expertise amongst the Executive is, I believe, one of the keys to FACE's success and future development. As always, our gratitude to Graeme Atherton and the University of Westminster for hosting meetings. The impressive lists of areas covered by the work of the Executive both at meetings and in between include:

- ❖ Research funding
- ❖ National developments
- ❖ E-bulletin
- ❖ FACE to FACE
- ❖ Administration
- ❖ Partnerships
- ❖ Funding opportunities
- ❖ Membership
- ❖ External relations
- ❖ Conference planning
- ❖ Finance
- ❖ Publications
- ❖ Member services
- ❖ Web activity and development

Recognising the financial climate will make for difficulties in the different education sectors that FACE members work within. The Executive have therefore been exploring how we should work differently to support members in the year to come. Services to members will be critical in the year ahead and some of the changes made are detailed in the next section of my report.

Services to Members

The services we provide are at the heart of what we do as a network. The services will offer, together with their relevance and quality are not only critical to maintaining existing members, but also to growing membership. As I have already hinted, the difficult financial situation that members and their institutions will be facing over the coming period means that we will not only have to deepen our understanding of members needs but to be able to respond to these with an appropriate financial model in place. Some examples will illustrate what this has meant during the course of the year.

- ❖ FACE to FACE Network Journal: Two editions have been delivered in the new format which is now from part of electronic platform. Pete Jones has done an excellent job in his Editor role, securing a wide

range of high quality contributions. I am sure Pete will be delighted to hear from you if you would like to submit a piece for the next edition.

- ❖ Website development has continued and during the year a new network provider has been appointed. This means enhanced capability for the range of services available through the site. These will be rolled out over the coming year. As always, the work that our web manager has done on both the website and the e-bulletin has been exceptional. So much gratitude to Jim Tate for his contribution.
- ❖ Monthly e-bulletin: Not only has this become a rich source of information and news about national and indeed international developments in areas of interest to members, it is also becoming a proactive communication tool for members to share knowledge and practice with each other. If you do not currently get the e-bulletin, the FACE website gives details of how you can in future.
- ❖ Research and Development Fund: This year, three member research grants were funded. Presentations on each of these pieces of research will be given at the annual conference and full written reports will be available to the wider membership through both the website and also in the conference publication. The Executive took the view that it was of great importance to continue providing funding to support our members research that would not otherwise get funded. This is another example of the way FACE is supporting its members at a time when research funding is being cut. Executive member, Graeme Atherton, has been managing this fund and I would like to thank Graeme for all his efforts over the year.
- ❖ Institutional members' quota increased: Recognising that member institutions may want to increase access to FACE services at a time when finances are becoming difficult, we have increased the institutional quota from 6 to 10 registered institutional individual members for each paid up institutional membership. Feedback on this development has been very positive.
- ❖ Administration: Our Administrator, Jackie Leach, will be working with the Executive on developing the membership database and related aspects of the network's membership arrangements, which has been identified as a priority by the Executive. During the course of the year, Jackie has kept the Executive up to date with any issues, and has in turn worked closely with the Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, providing support for their respective areas. Thanks to Jackie for her contribution and also to the University of East London for providing a home for the FACE administration base.
- ❖ Finance: In my report last year, I said that in managing our finances in the coming year, we would need to rebalance our income and expenditure. I am pleased to report that good progress has been made with, for example, a higher income from our conferencing and events activities than expected. Equally, through the careful management of

our prudent Treasurer, Mike Goodwin, and the work of the Executive, our finance remains in good condition. I would like to express my thanks to Mike Goodwin, our Treasurer, for all his efforts over the year. Mike's Treasurer report will provide the detailed position on our finances for members' consideration.

- ❖ External Relations: Both myself and other members of the Executive have represented FACE at a variety of events and conferences throughout the year. Two examples from my list of appointments are attending the HEFCE Annual Conference 2009 and also representing FACE at the NIACE House of Commons reception for Adult Learners Week. The Executive is increasingly aware of the importance of FACE being in a position to express its arguments and concerns with government agencies and other stakeholder groups. One way of doing this has been to invite representatives from key organisations and groups to attend Executive meetings. This influencing role is an area where there is considerable scope for development, particularly as funding gets tighter, as it looks like it will for many aspects of members work.

Our international relations continue to further develop. For example, Executive member, Tony Acland, and I represented FACE at the 2009 NADE Annual Conference which took place in North Carolina, USA. In exploring further ways in which the collaboration might be extended between the two organisations, we agreed with the NADE Council to pilot study visits', share material for our publications' and also to develop some joint research activity. We welcomed the NADE President to our 2008 Annual Conference and look forward to both the President and President Elect joining us for our 2009 Annual Conference. Our links with our sister networks in Sweden and France has also been developing during the year, and we will be welcoming the Chair of the French network to our 2009 Annual Conference.

External relations in the UK will, I believe, become an increasingly significant part of the network at a time when members and their institutions are finding that policy changes and funding conditions are becoming ever more challenging.

- ❖ Annual Conference and Events: FACE joined forces with ESCalate and other partners to run an excellent day conference with the title, 'Listening to Learners'. This conference was a great success attracting both FACE members and others from across the UK. Our 2008 conference was superbly hosted by York St John University and brought together not only a selection of outstanding key speakers, but also a rich range of workshop presentations. The conference publication from the York conference was produced in record time and considered feedback from readers suggest that it is the best publication to date. Copies can be ordered via the website. Special thanks, therefore, go to all those that contributed to its publication.

Concluding Comments

FACE is, I believe, well positioned to support its members through its range of services which have been enhanced by the improvements I have noted earlier. We should not pretend, particularly in the run up to a general election when all kinds of commitments to education provision are being made, that support for lifelong learning, HE access and educational opportunity will not be under threat. FACE members and their institutions' will no doubt be keeping a watchful eye on these national developments. As a network, we in turn need to ask how we can best support our members and help articulate their concerns and issues in a confident and persuasive way, through our conferences, publications, member services, lobbying activities, research and development funding and so on. Through this, FACE helps to embed and sustain its member driven agenda, and contribute to the development of a community of practitioners that will continue to challenge exclusion and promote full participation in lifelong learning in all aspects of our education provision.



John Storan
Chair