

FACE Chair's Report 2012/13

Introduction and Context

This report was presented at the Annual General meeting (AGM) which took place as part of the FACE Annual Conference hosted by Plymouth University 3rd – 5th July 2013. The report will also be made available to FACE members through the web site and I am happy to deal with any questions that may arise from members by email or telephone. Covering the period July 2012 to July 2013 the report provides a summary account from my perspective as Chair of the activities and work of FACE including the progress and developments relating to the services provided to members. Detailed reporting on areas such as finance and the secretariat will be provided through additional reports from the Treasurer and Secretary respectively. Let me begin with some general remarks on the broader context that FACE members and institutions have been operating in over the last 12 months.

General remarks

The climate and broader context within which FACE has been operating over the last year has been one of continuing change and uncertainty, FACE members and institutions have had to manage the consequences of this for fair access and widening participation work. Despite the many positive references to access and widening participation in the yet to be enacted White Paper we have seen little in the way of explicit policy objectives. The collapse of part time HE applications, down by 40% is a major blow to the educational opportunities of many mature students. FACE members and their institutions have been working hard to urgently address this. FACE contributed to the UUK enquiry into P/T HE and has been working with BIS making its views known. The role of OFFA and the significance of funding through the Access Agreements in England has become increasingly important for progress to be made sector wide on access, retention and success. FACE has worked closely with OFFA and I have as a Chair met with the OFFA director during the year to discuss concerns and offer advice. FACE has also contributed to OFFA events and sector guidance.

As a Chair I have had a busy year representing FACE and contributing to national level meetings, conferences and similar events. This has certainly been a growing aspect of FACE's role and one which is regularly discussed by the Executive. The importance of partnership and collaboration working has always been central to FACE. In the current context this way of working is crucial and therefore FACE has been taking a leading role in developing "common cause" partnerships. An excellent example of this in action was this year's annual Access to HE Summit event which brought together all the major stakeholders for this important event which was chaired by FACE. The Executive has also been actively working with a number of sister organisations on the establishment of an Access Alliance which will enhance collaboration at national level and promote joint planning, activities and so forth.

Despite the divergence of policy and funding relating to the access and WP agenda in the different countries of the UK and indeed within them FACE has been making a vital contribution to ensure these continues to be at least one forum where practice and knowledge can be shared. Our Annual Conference has become increasingly the major platform for this. This was notably acknowledge and highlighted by the Minister for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland who in his opening address to our 2012 annual conference hosted by the University of Ulster made the following comments:

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“This is the first time that the FACE conference has been hosted here in Northern Ireland and we are delighted that, in partnership with the University of Ulster, it was decided to hold what I believe is it's 19th annual conference here in this historic city...Over the years the FACE has become the premier annual networking opportunity for all concerned with, and involved in, higher education access, widening participation and lifelong learning. This conference has attracted, as it always does, delegates not only from every part of the UK but also from many other parts of the world...I know that FACE members and their institutions have been at the forefront of exciting developments concerned with widening participation to higher education...This year's conference is therefore a very valuable opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and best practice in this area...Importantly, the conference presents an opportunity to hear from colleagues from a wide range of different backgrounds and contexts, coming together to contribute valuable insight in relation to the conference's theme of Widening participation in divided communities.”

Extracts from Dr Stephen's Farry's Keynote speech at the 2012 FACE Annual Conference.

Executive Committee

I would like to thank and acknowledge the enormous contribution made by each and every member of the Executive. FACE is fortunate indeed to have such a creative, dedicated and committed Executive who gives so willingly of their time and expertise. As Chair I have enormously enjoyed working with and being so well supported and informed by Executive members. Executive meetings are very busy and this year has been no exception with five meetings taking place during the year. Executive meetings have been in two parts. Part one of the meeting has been devoted to a briefing session for the Executive delivered by an external speaker from a stakeholder group or organisation. Briefings have included the following organisations:

- Teach first
- NUS
- UUK
- UWS (international briefing)

Part two is given over to the business agenda. As well as regular items members have the opportunity to bring their own agenda items. All arrangements for the organisation and content of Executive meetings, including the taking and distribution of minutes, go through the FACE Secretary, Mike Hill, who has done an excellent job supporting the Executive. The work of the Executive has covered a wide range of areas and activities including the following:

- Member services
- FACE finance
- Membership
- National policy and funding developments
- Publications
- Annual conference and other events
- Administration

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- External relations and partnerships (National/ International)
- Communications
- Social media
- Funding opportunities
- E-bulletin/website

During the last twelve months the Executive has met on five occasions including the AGM. This year our meetings have continued to be hosted through Executive member Paul Grainger at the Institute of Education in central London. Our gratitude to Paul and the IOE for this and being such good hosts.

FACE owes a great debt to the members of the Executive for all their support and creative input. As I have indicated, the work of the Executive is critical to the continued health and capacity of FACE as a national network. Over the coming year an important task for the Executive will be to continue to implement the three year development plan and manage its various component parts. If you would like to join the Executive and we strongly encourage members to do so please get in touch with the Secretary, Mike Hill who will be delighted to help.

Member Services

The support and growing range of services that FACE provides is at the heart of its operational work. The Executive is constantly looking to improve existing and develop new services for members. In doing this we need to be mindful of the changing needs of members and also the resources we have at our disposal to fund these. So there is a continuing responsibility to balance these two factors in order to ensure we deliver our services in a sustainable way consistent with our charitable status and with regard to our income. The following headline comments provide brief reports on key services. I refer you to the separate reports from both the Secretary and the Treasurer for more detailed information in these two areas. However if there is any additional information you would like about any aspect of our services please let me know.

- ❖ Research and Development Conference places: The Executive sponsored two places at this year's annual conference for early career members as part of its support for member development. A small sub-group of the Executive scrutinised applications and the two successful applicants not only received free registration but also the opportunity to contribute to the conference publication.
- ❖ Web Site: A big thank you to Dr Jamie Mackay based at Southampton Solent University our web master and e-bulletin editor for all his excellent work through this year. Following a detailed review and redesign, the new look web site was formally launched at the 2012 annual conference and has proved a great success. If you are not a regular user of the web site I strongly recommend you make a visit to the site in the near future. Also, please try the multiple news feeds page on the site as it is a good place to get the latest education news and it is one of my favourite bits of the site.

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- ❖ Monthly E-Bulletin: The monthly e-bulletin has become a must read when it arrives in your 'inbox'. Jamie has done a tremendous job since taking on the editorship. Not only does it now provide a highly effective channel for members' news, events and views but it is also an invaluable source of wider information on all aspects of access to HE and lifelong learning. If you haven't signed up for the monthly e-bulletin you are missing an important aspect of FACE services. To sign up simply follow the instructions on the FACE web site.

- ❖ Social Media Presence: We have continued the development of our social media services for members this year through our Twitter and Facebook presence. This is proving increasingly popular and provides another important means of communication for members with each other and the wider world. Again, thanks to Jamie for his work on this which is adding significant value to FACE as a network, and contributing significantly to our communication capacity.

- ❖ Finance: The Executive with lots of good advice and guidance from Zita Eckett, our excellent Treasurer, has worked hard to ensure that FACE finances are well managed. Our Treasurer provides financial updates to the Executive at every meeting and works closely with both the Chair and the FACE Administrator in between meetings so any urgent matters are dealt with promptly. As is our practice, full audited accounts are provided each year. This is not required by the Charity Commission but the Executive has taken the view that we should do this as part of our accountability to members and general good housekeeping. Through the various measures we have put in place over the last year combined with improved finance data and our ever vigilant Treasurer I am pleased to report to members that we are in good financial health. Zita will provide the detailed position in her report to members. Thank you again to Zita for her work throughout the year.

- ❖ Membership: We have seen the first full year of online application. Recognising how important retaining and developing our membership is, aspects of our membership arrangements with a view to identifying needed improvements. Two examples illustrate some of the measures which have been actioned. The first is that we now have the membership application on our web site so that prospective members can access this directly. This should speed up the application process considerably. We will also look to build on this in future for membership renewals. The second example has involved a reorganisation of the membership support arrangements. Jackie Leach, the FACE Administrator, will now focus on financial support and generally overseeing membership and overall administration. Supporting and working directly with members and dealing with applications and developing the members database is Aga Spytowska based at UEL and working with Jackie. Aga has been busy developing the online members application system so new members can join. I believe this year through a combination of adding value, improving services and keeping membership fee levels the same that FACE membership is better value for money than any other similar organisation including the various pop groups. The Executive believes that through service improvements coupled with encouraging members to use the full range of services we can continue to build and extend membership. We have consolidated our member numbers with some new members. So please, members, do make use of the range of services available and in particular make use of our social media to give us your views and proactively encourage others to join FACE. Please make sure that you register your full (10 members) allocation of registrations if you are an institutional member. There has never been a

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more important time to be a FACE member so do encourage others to join so we build an even stronger independent not for profit network that is member lead and is rooted in 20 years of sustainable service.

❖ External Relations UK: It has been a busy year in this area of work. Essentially, our external relations fall into two broad categories – UK or domestic relations and international links and relations. In the UK category as well as operating formally for example through the inputs of the Executive officers and Executive members, FACE also works through its membership and other institutions. I can only capture a small part of our activity here as we have engaged effectively with the full range of stakeholder organisations across the UK. These have included:

- Funding bodies UK wide
- HEIs, FECs, Schools, Employers, LEAs
- Trade unions and social partners
- Stakeholder and representative organisations (AOC, UK ECU, OFFA)
- Third sector organisations

As Chair and with the two Vice Chairs we have represented FACE through giving formal inputs to conferences, seminars and similar events throughout the year and have also been involved in a considerable number of meetings and discussions. The Executive meetings as I hinted at earlier provide an opportunity for myself and other Executive members to process and share these contacts as part of steering the direction of travel for FACE in these challenging times. My belief is that we will need to be doing much more of this over the coming year and we will work with the Executive to develop our capacity further to do this. Our work to develop the 'Access Alliance' will be central to much of our external relations in the country.

❖ External Relations – International

Turning to our international links and relations we continue to maintain our formal partnerships with our international sister organisations, notably NADE in the USA and the INCLUDE network in Sweden. On the former Mike Hill, our Secretary, represented FACE at the NADE annual conference this year which took place in Colorado. Thanks to Mike Hill for representing FACE at this event and maintaining this important partnership. Mutual links have continued to be built with our sister organisation INCLUDE in Sweden. I have had the pleasure of leading on this collaboration and worked with a number of colleagues from INCLUDE throughout the year including the Chair. Representatives from INCLUDE took part in our annual conference last year in Northern Ireland and I would like to warmly acknowledge how important these links are for both networks. On the wider European front I gave a keynote input at a dissemination conference for the ExpandO project in Sweden earlier in the year and also at seminar in Belgium.

❖ Annual Conference: Our Annual Conference continues to go from strength to strength and is the premier event of this kind in Europe. The University of Ulster hosted our very successful 2012 annual conference at their Magee Campus in Derry/Londonderry. I would like to thank everyone from the University of Ulster who made this such an outstanding and memorable conference. We have been wanting to have the conference in Northern Ireland for many years so it was wonderful that the University of Ulster came forward with an invitation. We were delighted to have Northern Ireland Minister for Employment and Learning Dr Stephen Farry to give the

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opening keynote speech. Dr Farry made particular mention of the importance of the FACE annual conference and also the leadership and innovatory work that FACE has been responsible for. A summary of his remarks are below with the full version of his speech available to members on the FACE website.

"This is the first time that the FACE conference has been hosted here in Northern Ireland and we are delighted that, in partnership with the University of Ulster, it was decided to hold what I believe is it's 19th annual conference here in this historic city...Over the years the FACE has become the premier annual networking opportunity for all concerned with, and involved in, higher education access, widening participation and lifelong learning. This conference has attracted, as it always does, delegates not only from every part of the UK but also from many other parts of the world...I know that FACE members and their institutions have been at the forefront of exciting developments concerned with widening participation to higher education...This year's conference is therefore a very valuable opportunity for the exchange of knowledge and best practice in this area...Importantly, the conference presents an opportunity to hear from colleagues from a wide range of different backgrounds and contexts, coming together to contribute valuable insight in relation to the conference's theme of Widening participation in divided communities."

Extracts from Dr Stephen's Farry's Keynote speech at the 2012 FACE Annual Conference.

Finally on the 2012 annual conference I would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions that were made by Dr Damian O'Kane and Sylvia Alexander. It was with great sadness that we learned that Sylvia died after a sudden illness later on in the year.

- ❖ Publications: Our 2011 Annual Conference provided a rich set of papers for our annual publication. The title for this publication was 'Lifelong Learning and Community Development'. With a wide range of excellent papers the collection provides rich insight into key areas of access and continuing education policy, practice and research. The book was launched at the 2012 conference in Northern Ireland and can be ordered through the web site. Many thanks to Peter Jones, Tom Ward, Tony Hudson and Jeff Braham for all their editorial work.

Concluding Comments

There is no doubt that these are challenging and rapidly changing times for further and higher education and consequently for FACE members and their institutions, many of whom are based in FHE. The impact of the changes *in the funding of HE for example and in particular the move in England to an earnings contingent loan system for student fees* brings with it much instability for both learners and providers alike. The impact that these changes will have for prospective HE learners and their communities raises serious concerns for access and lifelong learning. My headline comments on the different services we provide to members illustrate how important these are in such turbulent times. At a time of increasing fragmentation of policy the networking capacity of FACE through its services to members is crucial to existing members and I believe equally also to attract new members.

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Building on a firm financial and organisational base with the oversight of a committed and talented Executive Committee, FACE has had a very successful year and coupled with the new three year plan being prepared by the Executive we will be in a good position to further develop our role and services in response to the changing context I have indicated. I would again like to thank members and their institutions for their continuing support and also the Executive Committee and our support staff and everyone connected with FACE for all their efforts which in turn makes for a confident and vibrant member-led network.

John Storan – Chair