

FACE Chair's Report 2013/14

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 the University of Salford 2nd – 4th July 2014. The report will also be made available to FACE members through the web site and I am happy to deal with any questions or clarifications that may arise from members by email or telephone. Covering the period July 2013 to July 2014 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. This year the report also incorporates summary updates from FACE colleagues in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to whom I am much grateful. Let me start with some general remarks on the broader context that FACE members and institutions have been operating in over the last 12 months.

Broader Context

The academic year 2013/14 was I am proud to say FACE's 20th anniversary as a network. This is some achievement and so we marked the occasion with a celebratory dinner at the annual conference in Plymouth and we also produced a special FACE publication. The publication included a selection of individual and organisational reflection and commentaries looking back but also looking forward. In addition to the collective voices of members over the years we also included contributions from our sister networks and organisations both UK based and also our international partners. Professor Les Ebdon – Director of Office for Fair Access provided the preface and highlighted the critical role and value as a network.

I would like to thank each of the contributors for their contributions to what is an outstanding publication. If you haven't had an opportunity to read this it can be found on the FACE website.

The climate and broader context within which FACE has been operating over the last year has been characterised by a combination of uncertainty about the sustainability of access and WP funding coupled with an equally strong uncertainty regarding the direction of policy given that we are in the run up to a general election in the UK. FACE members and their institutions have been working hard to address range of specific issues despite the level of uncertainty. FACE has continued the efforts to address the P/T HE recruitment crisis both through institutional work as well as national contributions to for example the high level seminar jointly organised by NIACE/Action on Access. FACE has also worked closely with OFFA and as a Chair I have had regular contact met with the OFFA director during the year to discuss concerns and raise issues and provide the FACE input. FACE has also contributed to the OFFA annual conference held at UUK and also the annual guidance.

Representing FACE and contributing to national level meetings, conferences and similar events during the year has kept me busy. We have been a growing FACE's role and national profile through networking with funders, policymakers and politicians. The value of partnership and collaboration working has always been central to FACE something that the Executive believe will be really important over the coming years. A key part of the FACE agenda has been to work towards a consensus politically and more broadly on a sustainable funding base and policy diversion for WP and HE access. In the current context this way of working is crucial and therefore FACE has been taking a leadership role in developing "common cause" partnerships with its sister networks and organisations. 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 key national event which I was delighted to chair. Another aspect of this approach in action has been the continuing work of the Executive with a number of sister organisations on the establishment of an 'Access Alliance'

collaborative framework which will enhance collaboration at national level and provide a mechanism through which for example information can be signposted and exchange.

The divergence of policy and funding relating to the access and WP agenda in the different countries of the UK has been a specific challenge for FACE this year. The Executive have worked closely with members Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland to ensure that we align the different aspects of FACEs role and activities to the broader changes happening across the UK. In my role as a Chair I have contributed to conferences and other events in all four countries in the course of the year working closely with others executive members. The following summaries have been contributed by the members from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and provided a snapshot on the HE access and WP development within that part of UK.

Scotland:

Scotland's Government remains committed to a policy whereby Scottish-domiciled and EU students do not pay tuition fees for their undergraduate studies. This policy is one of a number of measures that Scottish Ministers have taken to widen participation in higher education.

The Scottish Funding Council's Learning for All Strategy continues to be the main vehicle for developing widening access activities and outcomes in Scotland. As part of Learning for All, SFC has committed to its national Schools for Higher Education Programme, its specialist programmes supporting access to the professions (Reach) and creative education (ACES), its work with adult returners to education (SWAP) and its work with the university sector, through Outcome Agreements. Individual universities are currently required to update their Outcome Agreements regularly, particularly regarding their work in widening access and participation. A further important development to note is that SFC also provided universities with just over £10 million in 2013-14 to pay for additional places for students from access backgrounds, including over 700 on widening

access schemes, more than 1,000 for young people moving on from college to university and around 300 on the Skills for Growth scheme. The success of these schemes has yet to be determined.

Wales:

The appointment of the new minister for Education and Skills in June 2013 has seen a significant refocusing on Widening Access and Participation in HE by the Welsh Government. The minister, Huw Lewis AM, had previously been the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty. As a native of, and assembly member for, Merthyr Tydfil, one of the areas where HE penetration has traditionally been low, the minister has brought a fresh impetuosity to the agenda in Welsh HE.

The minister has said that he “believes that more needs to be done to ensure we are in a position to measure progress and pinpoint those areas where further work is needed.” (Funding Council Remit Letter 2014-15). He has tasked the Funding Council (HEFCW) to develop a systematic approach to measuring institutions’ progress in widening access supported by appropriate targets and measures.

He expects HEFCW and universities to work together to develop a higher education system that is sustainable and fair and provides opportunities for all those with the potential to benefit from higher learning.

This external mandate has ensured that institutions have reinvigorated approaches to Widening Access and Participation including a greater focus on transition into HE through Schools Partnerships and greater strategic alignment with FE partners both to support the FE provision and the College based HE provision. Internally institutions have focussed on changed models of support for learners, so that widening access leads to progression and success and not to failure and rejection. Widening access students are now as likely to successfully complete their degrees in Wales as are students from other better resourced backgrounds.

Developments across Wales are ensuring models of informal learning and RPL are increasingly being used to upskill mature learners in the workplace to address the higher levels skills gaps in the Welsh Economy, this is being supported by Open Educational initiatives as Welsh HE has committed Wales to be an OER nation.

Northern Ireland:

During academic year 2013/14 the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland has been implementing Access to Success its regional strategy to widen participation in higher education which was launched in September 2012. The strategy has a strong focus on the creation of a more accessible sector in which the people who are most able but least likely to participate are given every encouragement and support to apply to, and to benefit from, higher education.

Significant progress has been made on a range of measures in the strategy. These include:

- the launch in March 2014 of “Reach Higher” a single, centralised and co-ordinated higher education awareness and aspiration raising campaign to better communicate the benefits of higher education to under-represented sections of the community;
- work on the introduction the “Reach” programme which aims to expand the range of aspiration and educational attainment raising programmes at school, college, community and the workplace;
- the introduction of Widening Access and Participation Plans – an amalgamation of Access Agreements and Widening Participation Strategic Assessments into a single document which is produced annually 12-18 months in advance of the proposed fee year and includes a summary of the institution’s widening participation strategy, a review of its past achievement against regional benchmarks and a detailed programme of anticipated progress each year towards the institution’s own targets;

In England the much awaited and delayed National Strategy for access and student success in higher education was finally published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Produced jointly by both HEFCE and OFFA the strategy is and was designed to be a long- term view of access, students' success and progression. The strategy is divided into three parts: vision, overall approach and key actions.

I am pleased to note the strategy has taken on board many of the concerns and proposals that FACE members and their institutions put forward during the consultation process. It was particularly welcomed to see the support that the strategy gives to the establishment of a parliamentary consensus to achieve stable policy and funding base with which to support widening participation in HE over the next 10 years. This has been something FACE has been calling for many years but we would argue that the consensus should not be restricted to parliament. The new approach to Collaborative outreach included in the strategy is also very welcome again something that FACE been supporting.

I will now provide brief summaries of the main aspects of FACE's work and activities. Apologies in advance for any omissions.

Executive committee:

It has been an extremely busy and productive year for the FACE Executive and as ever I would like to thank each member for their work for FACE over the year. We have an extremely talented and committed Executive membership who collectively have made an enormous contribution to the development of FACE. Thanks to Paul Grainger and the IOE for being such excellent hosts for our meetings. The executive has maintained its established structure for meetings which involves a briefing session for the first hour followed by the business and development part of the meeting including a working lunch. In the briefing sessions this year we have included:

- Joint Executive meeting with our sister network in Sweden, Include

- Planning for our 2015 annual conference
- Briefing and discussion led by Lord Stonham Lib/Dem lead in the house of Lords for BIS
- Membership briefing session led by Executive member Kylie Hazeldine

The business and development agenda for Executive meetings covered a very wide range items including for example the following:

- Social media
- Funding and policy
- Conferences and events
- Website/e-bulletin
- Membership
- Member services
- External relations and partnerships- National/International
- FACE finance
- Business planning

Our Executive meetings have been supported by the excellent work of our Executive Secretary Mike Hill to whom many thanks.

The high quality of the work of the Executive is at the core of the sustainability and vibrance of FACE has as a network. Executive members travel from every part of the UK for meetings and also contribute much time and commitment in addition to this. I would therefore like to thank both Executive members and also their institutions and organisations for this tremendous level of support and dedication through the year.

[Website:](#)

The FACE website goes from strength to strength under the watchful eye of our web manager and e-bulletin editor Dr Jamie Mackay based at Southampton Solent University. The website is constantly being updated and developed and the data collected on usage which is reported to the Executive indicates over the year positive growth in all key metrics. To celebrate our 20th anniversary the website carried a special version of the FACE logo. Member feedback received is very positive indeed and the fact that we now have on-line membership through the website makes joining FACE easy. Thanks to Jamie for all his creative and dedicated work on the website.

Monthly e-bulletin:

Essential monthly reading for members the e-bulletin provides a rich mix of news and views that ensures you are always up to date on the latest policy change or opinion piece. If you don't currently receive the e-bulletin please sign up for it through the website. So a big thank you to Jamie for who has done a brilliant job supporting the e-bulletin and thanks also to all the members that have contributed to the bulletin through the year. If you haven't yet contributed please do so this coming year, I know Jamie will be pleased to hear from you.

Social Media:

This is a developing aspect of both our services to members and also as means of developing FACE with a profile in the virtual world. The use of Twitter for example to promote FACE annual conference and other FACE events had been particularly noteworthy this year and we will look to build on this for all are events. Our social media presence nationally supplements FACE's networking capacity. So again thanks are due to Jamie for his continuing working in building a growing social media presence for FACE.

Finance:

I am pleased to report that our finances remain strong and healthy under the careful management of our excellent treasurer Zita Eckett. Zita advises the Executive at every meeting on the latest position on FACE's finances. We have managed to operate within the balanced budget agreed at the beginning of the year. We have maintained reserve which actually exceeds the amount conventionally set aside for a charitable organisation of our size and turnaround. Areas of income that have performed well include both conference income and also annual publication income. Further information available to members in Zita's annual treasurer report.

Membership Administration:

The continuing development of membership services and administration has been the focus of much work throughout the year. In particular we have continued to strengthen and develop our membership database and management system to ensure that it is fully up to date and operating as effectively as possible. As well as the introduction of online membership for new members our membership. Administrator Aga Spytowska has been working hard on a new database management system which will eventually enable annual membership fees to be paid electronically where possible. The Executive will be receiving proposal on the next stage of work.

During the year I am pleased to say we have welcomed a number of new institutional members and we are looking to continue to attract further new members over the coming years as part of our marketing efforts. Jackie Leach and Aga Spytowska have worked together bringing these important developments to fruition. Thanks to both for all that work in this key aspect of FACE's operations.

External relations - UK:

As expected the external work in the UK has increased significantly this year. Below please see summary list of a stakeholder, funding and governmental bodies engaged with over the year:

- Parliamentary contacts both HDC and HOL's

- Funding and regulatory bodies (HEFCE, SFA)
- Stakeholders and representative organisations (UUK, ECU, OFFA, AoC, AonA)
- Third sector organisations

This area of FACE work has grown considerably over the year and in large part this reflects the ongoing development of the Access Alliance and our concern as a longstanding network to contribute to this partnership framework development which in turn is a response to fast changing context that FACE is operating in.

External relations- International:

As with our UK external relations we have seen a growth in our international links and relations. Our links with our two sister organisations in the USA and Sweden have been greatly enhanced as result of contacts by the Executive. We were delighted to have had for example reps from both networks at our annual conference in Plymouth and also to have excellent contributions from both networks to the 20th Anniversary publication produced earlier in year. Executive member Bernadette Sanderson represented FACE at the NADE conference in the USA and we are most grateful to Bernadette for doing such an excellent job. Our international links particularly in Europe are likely to develop further as a result of my recent appointment as the UK representative on the Bologna Social Dimensions and Lifelong learning.

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Annual Conference: Our Annual Conference continues to go from strength to strength making it the premier event of its kind in Europe. Plymouth University hosted our highly successful 2013

annual conference and did an excellent job. I would like to thank everyone from Plymouth University who made this such an outstanding and memorable conference as 20th annual conference.

- ❖ Publications: Our 2012 Annual Conference provided a rich set of papers for our annual publication. The title for this publication was 'Widening Access to Higher Education in Divided Communities'. The book was launched at the 2013 conference in Plymouth and can be ordered through the web site. Many thanks to Peter Jones, Tom Ward, Tony Hudson and all the editorial team for their work. We have sold record numbers of this publication and following the Executives agreement with NIACE on a distribution deal we expect additional sales.

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 attracting new members which we have been successfully doing this year.

Building on a firm financial and organisational base and with the oversight of a committed and talented Executive Committee, FACE has had a very successful year and is in a strong position going forward and I commend this report to members.

Thank you for continuing support.

John Storan – Chair