

FACE Chair's Report 2014/15

Introduction and Context

One purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the work and activities that FACE had been involved in over the course of last academic year. As a short summary of a productive and challenging year for FACE – there will, I am sure be aspects which I have not included here for which I apologise in advance. However, I am happy to deal with any omissions, questions and issues that members may have directly by email. FACE members and the issues and concerns that members have are critical to the mission and services provided by FACE as a member-led network. Much work has gone into improving and developing our services including for example the introduction of a new and improved member database and administrative platform which when it goes live in the next academic year will mean we can better support the growing membership as well as upgrade membership administration. It is vital for FACE to maintain and continually work to improve member services and to do this in a financially and organisationally effective way. I am pleased therefore to report we continue to do this and one important consequence is that the Executive has been able to maintain membership fees at the current value for money rate for yet another year. At a time when finances are tight for members and their institutions FACE is committed as ever to managing its resources to support members in any way we can. I shall return to some examples of this in other sections of this report. More detailed information on both the finances and administration of FACE will be provided by the treasurer and secretary respectively in their reports to the AGM. Both will also be more than happy to deal with any particular questions members might have.

Broader Context

The general climate and broader context within which FACE has been operating over the last year has been characterised by a combination of continuing uncertainty about the sustainability of access and WP funding and therefore the policy direction going forward, despite the fact that there has been a general election. Disappointingly there was no real debate or policy discussion about HE access and WP during the recent election campaign. Indeed there was hardly any serious debate about Higher Education as a whole for that matter. There has however been considerable concern from FACE members that specific funding streams for example the Student Opportunity funding in the case of England might be subject to significant reduction or possibly being completely withdrawn. FACE member institutions therefore have been at the forefront of generating the evidence and argument to keep the Student Opportunity funding allocation which is vital to widening access to HE and for ensuring student success and progression which makes a vital contribution to WP and by extension to social mobility. FACE has worked closely with OFFA and HEFCE in a number of different ways over the year and this has provided opportunities to share views and as appropriate evidence of effective practice and impact that is making a major difference to the progress of the aims set out in the joint strategy.

Representing FACE and contributing to national level meetings, conferences and similar events during the year has kept Executive members and myself very busy and proved impactful in terms of FACE's profile and networking capacity building. I believe FACE's role and national profile through networking with funders, policymakers and politicians will be critical to sustaining focus on the access and WP agenda I would urge members to take every opportunity to also do this.

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The value of partnership and collaboration working has always been central to FACE, something that the Executive believe will be of increasing importance over the coming years. By working in this way we have increasingly built organisational resilience into the way FACE operates. In the current uncertain policy context for HE FACE has been collaborating and cooperating with sister organisations and taking a leadership role in developing “common cause” partnerships and alliances. One example of this in action was this year's annual Access to HE Summit event which brought together all the major stakeholders for what has become a key national event and which I was delighted to chair. This joint event with UUK and Action on Access amongst other stakeholders, provides a vital platform for a major debate and set of action papers which argued the case for a political and policy consensus on WP and HE access. Another example of this approach in action has been the continuing work of the Executive with a number of sister organisations as part of the ‘Access Alliance’ which aims to provide a cooperative framework which will enhance partnership working at a national level and provide a mechanism through which for example information can be signposted and exchanged as well as informing and influencing the new government going forward.

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. At a national level this was further reinforced by the outcome of the general election result in different part of the UK. The Executive have worked closely with members in Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland to ensure that we fully align all 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, events and developments in all four countries in the course of the year working closely with other Executive members in doing so. Executive members from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have provided a short summaries on the HE access and WP development from their part of the UK. So thank you to each contributor for their summary.

Scotland (Bernadette Sanderson):

The Scottish Government continued to support the widening access to HE agenda in 2014-15 and has pledged additional funding to the various educational sectors (school/ local authority; college; higher education), in respect of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce agenda (part of Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy). A partnership approach has been advocated to achieve this, with funding being allocated for joint working across schools, colleges, universities and employers.

In May 2015 the 2nd Scotland Social Mobility Conference took place at the University of Strathclyde. This was organised in partnership with FACE, FOCUS West and the Equality Challenge Unit. The event, which was attended by 110 delegates, and which covered diverse themes, including the attainment gap in Scottish education, corporate parenting, and the impact of contextualised approaches to HE Admissions, will be continued in 2016 and organised by the University of Edinburgh.

The Scottish Funding Council also established a Commission for Widening Access in 2015, chaired by Dame Ruth Silver. The Commission, which is due to complete its work and report by April 2016, is intended to support the Scottish Government's ambition that at least 20% of university entrants in Scotland should come from the most disadvantaged 20% of society.

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Wales (Robert Payne):

The biggest policy change in Wales has been the enactment of the Higher Education (Wales) Act 2015. The Act: maintains regulation of higher education in the context of the funding and student support arrangements introduced in September 2012, gives the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) powers to regulate certain institutions and providers without having to rely on terms and conditions of funding and ensures the quality of higher education in Wales, that equal access to higher education is prioritised, that fee limits are enforced and that the HEFCW continues to provide assurance about the financial management of higher education providers.

Further details can be found at:

<http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Id=9722>

The HEFCW national Widening Access Conference in December 2014 provided an opportunity for cross-sectoral, multi-agency discussions on widening access policy and practice. The conference provided a forum for the Minister for Education and Skills to set out his ambitions for, and challenge the sector to do more to, widen access to higher education. The Minister recognised the positive progress made in widening access to higher education and received a copy of Widening Access: Delivering for Wales which illustrates the breadth of widening access provision in Wales.

Following the Widening Access conference the Welsh Government has asked HEFCW to prepare and submit a Widening Access Programme of Action. The Programme of Action includes an audit of universities' relationships with schools and colleges. At the Widening Access conference the Minister for Education and Skills emphasised the importance he placed on university/school partnerships. Following the conference HEFCW have agreed to undertake an audit of university/schools partnerships in Wales and to include partnership working with Welsh Colleges.

Colleagues in Wales are delighted that FACE 2015 annual conference is coming to Wales and in particular returning to the Treforest campus of the University of South Wales. Colleagues may remember the 2002 FACE conference at the same venue when the institution was the University of Glamorgan. The conference themes of Crossing boundaries through partnership working, routes out of poverty through lifelong learning, learning journeys and careers, lifelong learning for local, regional and national developments and part-time and full-time learning, align very well with the widening access aspirations of the Welsh Government and especially with the Welsh Minister for Education.

Northern Ireland (Deirdre Lynskey):

The first annual statement on progress made in relation to the 2012 Access to Success strategy has just been published. This is the first year that NI institutions are reporting separately from the UK and Stephen Farry, Minister for Education has therefore expressed that we view this very much as a transitional year. Institutions in NI invest in WP from pre entry support, to support for student retention and progression from HE and therefore the progress statement covers all aspects of the full 'student lifecycle'.

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In relation to targets, DEL will from now on be using Multiple Deprivation Measure quintiles (MDM) and will be asking institutions delivering HE to provide targets although initially estimates of anticipated numbers are requested as opposed to targets. Institutions are also being asked to produce targets in relation to the other categories as outlined in the Access to Success strategy including young males from the lowest IMD 5 -7 including protestant and catholic boys.

DEL are still looking at ways as to how Institutions can report of on outputs including attainment raising and employment outcomes.

DEL want to increase opportunities for adult learners especially in the workplace (e.g. funding available for 1 year 2015-16 to introduce higher level apprenticeship). DEL also wish to expand the number of foundation degrees. A culture of collaboration between institutions is also being encouraged by DEL. How this will work in practice is also yet to be decided, however there is already evidence of good practice with the HE care leavers group set up following the ending of the Buttle Quality Mark.

Looking forward the 2016 FACE annual conference will be hosted by Queens' University Belfast and will provide an excellent platform for further discussion of WP developments in NI.

England:

In England there has been an ongoing emphasis on social mobility and the contribution that HE can make to economic renewal. As a consequence the government has maintained both pre and post-election the broad direction of travel. However there has been great concern that the 'Student Opportunity' funding stream which is such a vital part of access and success funding to the sector will be a target for the newly elected government as the HE budget is not a protected budget in contrast to the schools budget. It is expected that BIS will need to cut its HE budget by £500m.

FACE with its members will be working hard in every way it can to safeguard the funding streams for WP and access to HE in all parts of the UK. However early this year HEFCE provided £22m to both institutions and regional networks to collaborate on HE outreach with schools and other partners. The aim being to create a national network for collaborative outreach. FACE members in England have welcomed this funding but also recognise it is for a limited time and was administered in haste in the run up to the election. The FACE Executive has established a sub-committee led by Executive member to support this initiative and mobilise the enormous FACE network expertise in outreach.

Executive committee:

This year has been a busy and productive year for the FACE Executive committee and I would like to thank and acknowledge each member of the Executive for their work for FACE over the year. FACE is extremely fortunate indeed to have such a committed and talented Executive committee with such a wide range of skills and knowledge. Particular thanks to Executive member Paul Grainger and the UCL IOE for being such excellent hosts for our Executive meetings throughout the year. The Executive has maintained its established structure for meetings which involves a briefing session for the first part of the meetings followed by the business agenda in part two. The briefing sessions this year we have included:

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- Presentation and dissemination led by Paul Rasch – BIS Team Leader for Higher Education Access, Quality, and Governance Unit
- FACE business Plan 2015-2020 (Ross Renton Vice Chair)
- Developing our electronic members services (Aga Szytkowska- Administrator and Simon Collins- Treasurer)

Items and areas in Executive Agendas included:

- Social media use and developments
- Annual Conferences
- Website/e-bulletin feedback and analytics
- Marketing and promotions
- Member services/systems
- External relations and partnerships- National/International
- FACE finance
- Business planning
- Build networking capacity

Each Executive meeting has been supported by the excellent work of our Executive Secretary Mike Hill to whom many thanks.

The high quality and creative work of the Executive is at the core of the sustainability and resilience of FACE 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 sincerely thank again both Executive members and also their institutions and organisations for this tremendous level of support and dedication throughout the year.

Website:

The FACE website provided a much valued and used source of information for members and non-members alike under the watchful eye of our web manager and e-bulletin editor Dr Jamie Mackay. The site has been updated and enhanced during the year to make it even friendlier to members. Jamie provides a report at each Executive meeting on the user metrics for the site and this helps in guiding the future development of the site. Member feedback received is very positive indeed. Thanks as ever to Jamie for all his creative and dedicated work on the website.

Monthly e-bulletin:

Essential monthly reading for members, the e-bulletin provides an essential mix of news and views that ensures you are always up to date on the latest policy change or opinion piece. If you aren't currently receiving the e-bulletin you can sign up for it through the website. Big thank you to Jamie once more on a brilliant job supporting the e-bulletin. Can I also thank members and others who have contributed content to the e-bulletin. Let me also take this opportunity to encourage more contributions from members over the coming year as I know Jamie would be delighted to hear from you.

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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 and market the FACE annual conference is growing year on year and again through Jamie's careful management and development FACE is growing its social media capacity more generally contributing to the electronic dimension of FACE's networking resources.

Finance:

FACE finances remain strong and healthy under the careful management of new treasurer Simon Collins who took over the role from Zita Eckett following the last AGM. Zita did an excellent job over many years and on behalf of the Executive and all members I would like to acknowledge and thank her for the massive contribution she has made to not only the management of FACE finances but also to the organisational development of FACE. Zita and Simon have been working together closely during the year to ensure a smooth transition from outgoing to incoming treasurer. Thanks to Simon for his work this year and doing such a good job in taking on this important role. Simon will report separately and present the audited accounts to the AGM.

Membership Administration:

FACE Administrator Aga Spytzkowska took over the position from Jackie Leach during the course of the year. On behalf of the Executive I would like to thank and acknowledge the enormous contribution Jackie made to FACE over the years. Aga has undertaken a full review and update of membership information and has provided regular reports to the Executive on all aspects of her work. Membership subscription arrangements have been upgraded to take account of our growing membership base and also to ensure that we have up to date information.

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 and we will set out recruiting strategy in the new development plan. But as well as recruiting new members it is equally important to retain existing members through the provision of relevant quality services which meet the needs of members. As a major aspect of this Aga has worked hard with our treasurer in specifying and fully costing the new membership database that will be introduced early in the next academic year. Thanks to both for all their work in this key aspect of FACE's operational infrastructure. This hasn't been without its challenges and problems but I feel confident that we will have in place a system which will greatly improve our services to members as a result.

External relations - UK:

The external links and networking in the UK has increased significantly this year. Executive members have been active through both their committee work but also in their institutional roles in promoting and building links with FACE. Below is summary list of just a few of the stakeholder, funding and governmental bodies and others engaged with over the year:

- Parliamentary contacts both HOC and HOL's
- Funding and regulatory bodies (HEFCE, SFA, SLC, SFC, DEL, HEFCW)

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- Stakeholders and representative organisations (UUK, ECU, OFFA, AoC, AonA, NIACE, EU)
- Third sector organisations
- Commercial sector

This area of FACE work has grown considerably over the year and is expected to continue to do so in the coming year. Both our hugely successful conferences and partnership events also add significantly to developing our external relations.

External relations- International:

As with our UK external relations we have seen a growth in our international links and contacts. Our links with our two sister organisations in the USA and Sweden have been greatly enhanced as result of contacts by the Executive. We have formal partnership arrangements in place with both Include and NADE with reciprocal fee waivers for representatives to attend conferences. We were delighted to have had for example reps from both networks at our annual conference in Salford and also to have excellent contributions from both networks during the conference. Recognising the valuable contribution that our international partners make the Executive has formally established an International Committee which met for the first time during this year annual conference. All international delegates attending the annual conference will be invited to participate in the International Committee which will take place during the annual conference each year. Executive members Bernadette Sanderson and Mike Hill represented FACE at the NADE annual conference in the USA and we are most grateful to them for doing such an excellent job. During the year, I have been active in my UK representative role on the Bologna Social Dimensions and Lifelong Learning working group. In this capacity I have drawn extensively on my long experience as FACE chair and taken the opportunity to raise awareness of FACE's work and explore mutual opportunities and to build links and contacts with the Bologna agenda.

❖ Annual Conference: Our fantastic annual conference was hosted by the University of Salford this year and was highly successful attracting high numbers of delegates from across the UK as well international delegates. Thanks are due to the conference team at the University of Salford for their support with a highly memorable conference. Such is the reputation and appeal of the conference that I am pleased to report that the Executive has signed agreements with host universities for the next two years 2015, 2016. Furthermore, I have recently been in discussion with a possible host for the 2017 annual conference. Having three future conference agreed up to 2017 would be an enormous achievement for FACE not least because it would provide a guaranteed income stream through the franchise fee to underpin the financial health for the next few years.

❖ Annual Publication: The 2013 Annual Conference provided a rich set of papers for our annual publication. The title for this publication was 'Learner Journeys- Origins, Experiences and Destinations'. The book was launched at the 2014 conference in Salford and can be ordered through the web site. Sales of the book have been very strong and there has been excellent reader feedback. Many thanks to Tom Ward, Tony Hudson and all the editorial team for

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their work. Each year there has been an incremental rise in the production values of the publication with our 2014 book being the latest example.

Final Thoughts

FACE has had another highly successful year building on its organisational strengths and continuing to support its members by providing a range of member facing services and activities. The Executive Committee has made a major contribution to FACE's success this year and I would like to thank both the Committee and also the membership for all their support throughout the year. During our most recent Executive meeting we begun work on the next five year development plan for FACE which will guide our work going forward to 2020. We shall be fully implementing this development plan as from the next academic year. I have no hesitation in commending this report to members and to add that it has been my pleasure and privilege to be Chair of such a special and extraordinarily network.

John Storan – Chair