



Chair's Report for 2009-2010

This report was presented at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held during the FACE conference at Southampton Solent University on the 1st July, 2010.

Introduction and Context

The UK has seen its first coalition government elected in peace time at least since the 1930's. As I write this annual report to members, it is without the benefit of hearing the new government's budget or two other key pieces of information, which are the outcome of the comprehensive spending review and the report from the Browne Review of HE funding and student finance. Between them, these financial plans and policy proposals will be critical to the context that FACE members and their institutions and organisations will be operating in the coming year and beyond. This past year we have seen HE application figures up 16% with applications massively outstripping available places. All the indications being that the number of places are set to fall against applications to an excessive degree over the coming period. This will bring with it considerable challenges to much of the work covered by FACE.

As many FACE members have said to me during the year, developing access and widening participation in HEIs against a national backdrop of reducing HE places and the threat or actuality of funding cuts for programmes such as Aimhigher, Lifelong Learning Networks puts in jeopardy the progress in WP that has been made to date. Extending and building on such progress will not only contribute to overcoming the recession but also provide the kick start for social mobility that the new government seems committed to taking forward.

During this year, FACE members have been continuously making the argument and case for ongoing investment by the government in widening participation, HE access and more widely lifelong learning provision. One important argument here is that creating an excellent HE system requires widening participation and HE access to be a central part of policy. In other words, as many FACE members have said excellence and access mutually reinforce each other. The changing political and economic context is and will produce enormous challenges for the agenda that FACE and its members have done so much to advance. This rapidly changing context in turn needs FACE as a network to change and work more intensively to support members and provide that confident and member driven voice that will be so critical to progressing social mobility and economic recovery – both of which are major concerns of the new government.

The outcome of the Browne Review expected in late summer 2010 will be critical to access and widening participation to HE. However, perhaps more important and something that FACE will be keeping a watchful eye on will be the degree of 'cherry picking' of proposals from the report by government. On this issue, the Coalition Agreement makes interesting reading as it states that the following will be used to judge Browne's proposals against:

Increase social mobility

Take into account the impact on student debt

Ensure a properly funded university sector

Improve the quality of teaching, advance scholarship, and attract a higher proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

So, if I were to choose a word to characterise the current position, it would be uncertainty. There are too many unknowns at present as we await the outcomes of, in particular, the CSR and the Browne Review. However, what is clear is that the role of FACE becomes increasingly important in relation to:

Supporting members

Lobbying for progressive policy

Challenging regressive policy

Providing a forum for knowledge and practice exchange

Contributing to evidence base through our publication output and the member research we fund.

These are areas that, through the Executive, FACE is addressing and will no doubt become a bigger focus for FACE over the year ahead. I will now turn to the key operational areas of the forums work and give a brief summary report.

Executive Committee

Executive Committee meetings have taken place throughout this year and we have welcomed a number of new members. We now have members from every part of the UK represented on the Executive. The work and commitment of the Executive makes a critical contribution to FACE and we are fortunate to have such a talented and committed membership. As Chair, I would like to acknowledge and thank each and every member of the Executive for their inputs during the year. 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. Thank you to Graeme Atherton and the University of Westminster for hosting meetings. The impressive list of areas covered by the work of the Executive both at meetings and in between include:

Web activity and development

Member services

Publications

Finance

Conference and seminar planning

External relations

Membership

Funding opportunities

Partnerships

Administration

FACE to FACE

E-bulletin

National developments

Research funding

The difficult financial climate will make for challenges 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 increasingly critical and some of the developments made are detailed in the next section of my report.

Services to Members

Member services are central to what we do as a network, and by implication, our ability to retain and recruit members and our capacity to make our voice heard. The difficult financial situation that members and their institutions have been and will continue to face means that we will not only have to deepen our understanding of members needs but to be able to respond to these in an appropriate way. The sections which follow give a brief summary of the services provided and developed over the year.

FACE to FACE Network Journal: Three editions of the FACE to FACE journal have been delivered as part of the electronic platform that has been created. Pete Jones has done an excellent job in his Editor role. He is always looking for articles for the journal, so why not send something to him for future editions. Thank you to all those that have contributed to this during the year.

Website: The FACE web development has continued and Jim Tate, our web manager, has made a number of improvements to the site. Plans to provide members-only sections are being considered by the Executive under Jim's guidance. As always, the work that our web manager has done on both the website and the eBulletin has been exceptional. So much gratitude to Jim Tate for his contribution and the quality of the work he has done for FACE. Feedback on the site has been very positive and the introduction of moving graphics has added a new dimension to the site.

Monthly eBulletin: 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 eBulletin, the FACE website gives details of how you can in future. Please do keep your news and views coming into Jim Tate and a big thank you to those who contributed during the past year.

Research and Development Fund: The Executive awarded two member research grants this year. Presentations on each of these pieces of research will be given at the annual conference and full written reports will be available on the FACE website to the wider membership. 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. Thank you also to those Executive members who took part in the selection panel.

Membership: There has been an increase in the overall membership during the year. The take up of individual membership places has gone up reflecting the growing importance and value of actively engaging with FACE. The Executive, through the work of the membership sub-group which it set up and is led by Zita Eckett, has been developing and improving various aspects of our membership services including the setting up of a new database. Our Administrator, Jackie Leach, has been working with the Executive on 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 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 an administrative base for FACE. Thank you also to Zita for her ongoing work with the membership sub-group.

Finance: The Executive has made good progress with balancing income and expenditure. The Executive, with advice from the Treasurer, Mike Goodwin, took steps to rebalance the budget and ensure that our finances are on a solid footing. Mike will give details in his report. I would like to express my thanks to Mike for all his efforts over the year. His Treasurer report will provide the detailed position on our finances for members' consideration. Audited accounts will be available once

these are forwarded to the treasurer. Membership fees will remain at the same level making FACE membership, in the words of one member, 'wonderful value in comparison to other networks'. Income remains strong and we have hosts in place up to 2012.

External Relations: The Executive have represented FACE at a variety of events and conferences throughout the year. 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.

International relations continue to develop with our sister organisations. Executive members Tony Acland, Mike Hill and I represented FACE at the 2010 NADE Annual Conference which took place in Columbus, Ohio. Mike Hill was appointed as co-Chair of the NADE International Committee during the NADE Conference. We welcomed the NADE President to our 2009 Annual Conference and look forward to the President Elect joining us for our 2010 Annual Conference and providing a keynote presentation. Our links with our sister networks in Sweden and France has also been developing during the year, and we will be welcoming a representative of the Swedish INCLUDE network to our 2010 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: Staffordshire University were the hosts for our excellent 2009 annual conference. The conference proved very popular indeed with delegates. The conference team were lead by Executive member Pete Jones, so big thank you to Pete for his work. The 2010 conference will be hosted by Southampton Solent University. In April, we joined forces with the Educational Access Research Network to run a very successful seminar entitled, 'At what cost? The impact of finance on access to HE'. Thanks to Executive member Graeme Atherton for organising this event.

Publications: In July 2009, we launched our annual publication with the title, 'Challenging Isolation: The role of lifelong learning '. This book was on a collection of papers given at our 2008 annual conference. Copies are available through the website. Thank you to the editorial team and contributors for all their efforts. Our 2010 publication will be launched at the annual conference in Southampton. FACE populations are proving ever popular, and we are exploring a possible distribution arrangement with a major book distributor.

Concluding Comments

In conclusion, my view is that FACE has made good progress during this last year with continuing improvements being made to key membership services. The financial position also continues to be strong with healthy reserves and expenditure, and income being closely managed by the Executive. The Executive has put in place a membership sub-group to help improve arrangements for membership, working alongside the FACE administrator.

I began this report by commenting on the degree of uncertainty that characterises both the policy and future funding for the areas of work of direct concern to FACE members and their institutions and organisations. The Executive will be constantly reviewing this in the months ahead to see how best we can support and work on behalf of members in these challenging times. More than ever, we need a strong and confident forum to ensure that HE access, widening participation and lifelong learning continue to move forward. I believe that FACE has a vital role to play to ensure this, and partnerships and networking – both key aspects of FACE – will be crucial to achieving this.

John Storan, Chair of FACE