



Chair's Report for 2010 - 2011

This report was presented at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held during the FACE conference at University of Glasgow.

Introduction and Context

In the introduction to my report to members last year, I made the point that we were all awaiting two pieces of information. First, the report of the Browne Review on HE funding and student finance, and second, the outcome of the comprehensive Spending Review. A year on, and we know the contents of both these, but are still left waiting. This year it is because the much awaited and much speculated over White Paper, which is to be published imminently. In fact, it may be published by the time you get to read this report, which will be annoying to say the least on my part, but as I say, we have been here before. What can be said is that the combination of the Browne Report and the CSR have delivered HE into unknown territory.

Internationally, the level of public investment in UK HE is set to become among the lowest in the OECD. Although this level of disinvestment in HE is explained by the Coalition Government in large part because of the austerity measures they have introduced to deal with the financial crisis, there has been no indication that when this comes to an end, public investment will return. Indeed, I am not aware that any of the main political parties have made such an undertaking. Add to this the tripling of tuition fees, with most universities in England expected to align their fees with the upper limit of the £9k figure set by the Coalition Government. The net impact of this on the treasury through the level of loans will, in the opinion of a number of financial commentators, prove unaffordable. It will be the job of the White Paper, presumably to come up with measures, both of dealing with the additional costs, and a means of controlling demand. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA), UCAS Tariff and core/ margin have all had at different times surfaced in the governments pre-White Paper kite flying. So, we will have to see what the White Paper brings. The cuts in funding for teaching, announced by the government for almost all subjects will effectively mean that this will come to an end by the 2014/15 academic year. Combined cuts of around 80% in the teaching budget are expected over the next four years.

In the wake of this enormous and, in my opinion, substantially irreversible change, the role of FACE becomes ever more important. Discussion at the FACE Executive has, for example, highlighted the value of FACE in putting forward the views, concerns and alternatives to policy changes which are likely to be detrimental to the agenda of HE participation and inclusion that FACE members and institutions support. The challenge to be an effective voice on behalf of members is ever present in

the discussions of the Executive. Given the context, I have sketched out this will be an even bigger aspect of the work of FACE over the coming year. This year we have worked hard to take forward the six key aspects of this role which are:

- Supporting members and their institutions
- Lobbying for progressive policy
- Challenging regressive policy
- Providing an effective and confident forum for knowledge and practice exchange
- Contributing to the evidence base on HE access and lifelong learning
- Maintaining and extending partnerships and collaborations

The mix and emphasis of these aspects of our role will, I am sure, vary but between them they provide a very important strategic role for FACE to develop.

Before I leave the context which FACE is operating in, it is critical to note the UK situation. Essentially, in relation to HE access and lifelong learning, we have been seeing a divergence of policy and approach between the four countries in the UK. In comparison to England, for example, the position of Scotland and Wales is not to charge students anymore. In Northern Ireland, students are also unlikely to face a rise in fees. So we are continuing to see significant differences in HE policy in different parts of the UK. However, for a UK wide organisation like FACE, the need to be a forum for all to come together to exchange experience and practice has perhaps never been greater. The role of the FACE Executive is particularly important in this, and we currently have representation from all parts of the UK which means Executive meetings have the benefit of contributions from all four countries. The FACE Executive will keep a watchful eye on this and build this into planning going forward.

Summary information on the main aspects of FACE's operational work follows. As ever, it will only be possible to give a small amount of information on each of these, but hopefully this gives an update of both progress and issues since my last report to members.

Executive Committee

I am enormously grateful as ever to all members of the Executive for all their work and commitment to FACE throughout the year. As chair, it has been a great pleasure to work with members and FACE is fortunate indeed to have such dedicated and conscientious Executive Committee.

The range and quality of debate at Executive meetings reflects the collective experience and expertise of members. This year, two sub-groups were created to progress respectively membership and the annual conference 2012 host institution. Thank you to all those members who kindly took part in the sub-groups. Executive meetings are very busy events with packed agendas. The topics and issues regularly appearing on the Executive's agendas include the following:

- UK policy developments
- Web activity and development
- Member services
- Publications

- FACE Finance
- Conference and seminar planning
- External relations
- Membership
- Funding opportunities
- Partnerships
- Administration
- FACE-to-FACE
- E-bulletin
- National developments
- Research funding

The fast changing HE landscape for FACE members and institutions has meant that the Executive has continuously looked very carefully at how it can best support and represent members concerns and interests and what this means for the services we provide and the role we play. As a result, we have refocused a number of our activities and services and will continue to do this over the coming year.

All Executive Committee meetings have been hosted by the University of Westminster and we are grateful to Executive member Graeme Atherton for organising this.

Members Support and Services

Member support and services continue to be central to what we do as a network, and our ability to retain and recruit members and our capacity to make our voice heard. The enormously challenging financial position 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 and effective way. The summaries give a snapshot of the work and issues in each of FACE's areas of operation.

- **FACE-to-FACE Network Journal:** The FACE-to-FACE journal has been delivered as part of the electronic platform that has been created. Pete Jones has done an excellent job in his Editor role. Pete 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:** This continues to be a major part of FACE's services and is excellently managed by Jim Tate. The site is continuously being updated and improved. The introduction of a range of new pages and information has added further value to the site. The work that our web manager has done on both the website and the e-bulletin has been exceptional. Feedback on the site has been very positive but websites are hungry for regular information so please do forward anything you would like to see on the site to Jim.
- **Monthly E-bulletin:** This has become a rich source of information and news about national and indeed international developments in areas of interest to members. More thanks to Jim Tate for producing every single month both an informative and interesting bulletin. Please do send news items and other information that could be shared with members to Jim.

- **Research and Development Fund:** The Executive decided due to budget management to replace the small research grants with sponsored conference places. Two sponsored places will therefore be allocated to early careers members for the 2011 conference. Successful candidates will receive full conference registration and submit a conference paper.
- **Membership:** Membership numbers have remained stable and this may be a sign of the difficult financial times confronting prospective members. The Executive has therefore been working hard through the work of the membership sub-group which it set up and has been led by Zita Eckett. This has been developing and improving various aspects of our membership services including the setting up of a new database and the quality of member data. 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 work throughout the year. The Executive has identified membership as a major priority and good progress has been made but with more to do. Zita Eckett has been leading on this and we are grateful to Zita for her work. Jeff Braham has agreed to lead on this area in future.
- **Finance:** The Executive continues to make good progress with balancing income and expenditure. The Executive have taken steps to rebalance the budget and ensure that our finances are on a solid footing. I would like to express, on behalf of the Executive, thanks to Mike Goodwin for all his efforts over the year, as he has now retired. Mike has done an excellent job and our finances are in very good order as a consequence. Full details of our financial performance will be given in the audited accounts to be presented at the AGM. Following Mike Goodwin's retirement, Zita Eckett has kindly agreed to take on the position of Treasurer.
- **External Relations:** FACE continues to put great importance on the value of building and sustaining effective external relations. This applies not only to the UK, but also internationally. This year, Executive members have engaged with the full range of stakeholder groups throughout the UK including, for example:
 - Government departments – all parts of the UK
 - Funding bodies – all parts of the UK
 - Representative organisations (UUK, AoC)
 - Third sector organisations
 - HEIs, FECs, schools
 - Trade unions and social parties

These contacts have taken a variety of forms and involve Executive members in different capacities. As Chair, for example, I was invited and spoke at the AoC national conference: HE in FE and also wrote a formal letter to the Times Higher Education highlighting the decision to end the Aimhigher programme. The Executive see this as a major priority area over the coming year, and is very much part of the six strategy steps listed earlier.

In addition to UK focussed external relations, FACE has also worked hard on its international partnerships and links. This year, Executive members Tony Acland, Mike Hill and myself represented FACE at our sister organisation in the USA, NADE. The FACE delegation played an active role in the NADE Annual Conference 2011, which took place in Washington DC.

Thank you to Mike and Tony for their input and also to NADE for the warm reception we enjoyed. We look forward to welcoming the NADE President Elect to our annual conference. We have maintained close contact throughout the year with the Swedish INCLUDE network for WP and will also be welcoming a representative to our annual conference.

Finally, I was invited to represent FACE at the French Continuing Education Network annual conference. Thank you to the network's president for the invitation, who will also be attending this year's Glasgow conference.

- **Annual Conference and Seminars:** this year's annual conference with the telling title, 'Which way now to widen participation: lifelong learning, economy and society' was hosted by the Vice-Chair Steve Lake and his excellent team at Southampton Solent University. This was a memorable conference in every sense, so a big thank you to Steve and the team. The 2011 conference will be hosted by the University of Glasgow, and we have also selected our annual conference host for 2012, the University of Ulster. Two very successful FACE seminars took place during the course of the year which were both a response to changes taking place in policy and funding for HE access and widening participation. Executive member Deirdre Lynskey led a seminar at the University of Liverpool entitled, 'Navigating the System: How Universities can learn from Aimhigher to make outreach count'; and Executive member Graeme Atherton organised a second seminar at the University of Westminster with the title, 'Can universities still widen access?' These were both well attended and supported events bringing FACE members and others together to share experience and practice around key issues for HE access and participation. It is intended that these seminars will feed into an 'Access to HE' summit event, which the Executive is looking to organise for later in the year.
- **Publications:** the 2010 annual conference hosted the launch of our latest publication entitled, 'Towards a new agenda for lifelong learning: access, diversity and participation'. This book, with Executive member Pete Jones as lead Editor, was based on a selection of papers from the 2009 annual conference. Conference sales of the publication were very good indeed. If you would like to order a copy, please see the FACE website for ordering information.

Concluding Comments

Perhaps more than any other year, I can recall this year has witnessed the start of a programme of public disinvestment in HE in England on a scale unprecedented and with consequences which are irreversible. The impact on HE access and participation for those less likely to have the opportunity is for the most optimistic members, uncertain, and for many more set to jeopardise the progress that has been made, and could well put widening participation in full reverse. As I said in the introduction, we are all still awaiting the detailed policy from the white paper, but all indications are that the withdrawal of public funding for HE will be replaced by private sector investment and of course student fees. With graduate debt levels expected to rise to £70 billion by 2015, the impact on HE access for low income students will be enormous. FACE as a member driven network will need to work closely with members against the backdrop of changes I have outlined. The work to develop services, the strong financial position noted and the strategic thinking of the Executive, I strongly believe, means that we are in a good position to support members and their institutions as they

adapt to these enormous changes and the effects they are having on access, widening participation and lifelong learning.

In doing this, we need to be a confident and proactive network looking to build membership and collaborative partnerships. We need to develop and improve services and align these to the changing needs of members and their institutions. There is therefore an opportunity for FACE, in the ways mentioned, to become a more influential and challenging organisation, whilst continuing to deliver member services and be what has always been and that is the Forum for Access and Continuing Education, FACE.

John Storan, Chair of FACE