



Forum for Access  
and Continuing Education

## **FACE Chair's Report 2011/12**

### **Introduction and Context**

This report was presented at the Annual General meeting (AGM) which took place as part of the FACE Annual Conference at the University of Ulster, 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012. The report will also be made available to FACE members through the web site. Covering the period July 2011 to July 2012 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. More detailed reporting on areas such as finance and organisation will be provided in additional reports from the Treasurer and Secretary respectively.

There is little doubt that the period that this report covers has seen far reaching and large scale changes to higher education across the UK. However, because HE is part of the devolved political arrangements for the four countries in the UK we have a very complex policy environment as the broader context in which FACE members and institutions operate. Despite or perhaps because of the different approaches to access and widening participation in HE between Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland FACE has been a valuable and important site through which both commonalities and differences can be explored and debated in a cooperative and purposeful forum. This is achieved in many ways including for example through the work of the Executive Committee with its cross UK membership but also in the fact that the annual conference takes place in a different part of the UK each year. So although there are policy differences there is nonetheless a UK wide emphasis on extending HE access to underrepresented groups, a continuing focus on partnership and collaborative working and a growing link between widening access to HE and social mobility. The exchange of experience and the value of cooperating across the UK is all the more important because of the policy divergence but this in turn is part of the reason why FACE is the vibrant and successful network it is.

It is therefore difficult to overestimate the extent of policy change taking place in HE in the UK at the present time. This year for example has been a transition year for funding arrangements. In England we are seeing the move from a public funded HE system to one that is based substantially on student fees and income contingent loans. Changes in the mix of financial support for access and widening participation is becoming fragmented and less strategic at the national level. Such changes in funding and student finance are therefore having significant consequences for all aspects of access to HE. Although the position of part-time students for example as a consequence of funding reforms has been largely brought in line with the principle that there should be no upfront tutor payments, FACE has highlighted how the operation of student numbers control (SNC) is pulling in the opposite direction. Furthermore, in response to the SNC consultation FACE argued the case for access to HE Diplomas to be included in the AAB equivalents listing. This would mean that access to HE learners who comprise over 25,000 HE entrants in any one year would, if achieving the requisite grade, be funded at an equivalent level to their high scoring 'A' level counterparts. FACE was in a unique position to lead this call precisely because it has a membership which is at the forefront of this provision and has a multi-sector base. We believe this inequity needs urgent attention and

action. The Government has yet to produce a clear policy on access and WP which is surprising given the commitment it has to social mobility.

The publication of the Coalition Government's White Paper 'Students at the Heart of the System' in June 2011 which has yet to become legislation caused considerable debate and concern among FACE members and their institutions. The absence of any parliamentary scrutiny of the White Paper means that there has yet to be the opportunity for a full debate of the major changes it contains including access and lifelong learning. An important section of the White Paper for many FACE members was the proposed new framework for widening participation and fair access. This framework, it is proposed, will place more responsibility on universities and colleges to widen participation but it is not clear precisely where the Government's responsibilities for the framework actually lie. In our response to the White Paper which can be found on the web site under *FACE Comment* we made the following statement:

'FACE welcomes the opportunity that this White Paper presents to contribute to the critical debate in respect of access to and participation for those under-represented in higher education. FACE supports the widening access and social mobility aims of the White Paper, including recognition that measures are needed to support continuing education as well as meeting the needs of younger learners. We hope that the following comments and recommendations for the development of the Higher Education Policy are helpful.'

The role of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) is somewhat strengthened by the White Paper with increased expectations of strategic collaboration between HEFCE and OFFA. It is important to note that the new director of OFFA recently appointed by the Coalition Government in the midst of considerable opposition and press hostility is from a FACE member university. I met with Professor Ebdon shortly after his appointment and assured him of FACE's commitment to work closely with him and his team at OFFA.

FACE directly as well as through its members' activities and inputs has not only challenged those regressive parts of Government policy but has also sought to influence and shape the wider development of policy. An excellent example of this during the year was the support and input we gave to the highly successful first annual Access to HE Summit in November which provided a crucial platform for FACE members and others to highlight the importance of access to HE and maintain this as a key policy objective. It also highlights the value FACE places on collaboration and cooperation with other stakeholder groups to maximise its impact. A pan UK network established for twenty years, FACE is a vitally important site for the exchange of policy, practice and research regarding access to HE and fairer participation within it. However, despite the divergence of HE policy between the constituent parts of the UK there is conversely an ever increasing need for cooperation between FACE members across the UK. FACE is committed to fostering and maintaining cooperation whilst respecting the different approaches and perspectives that exist in different parts of the UK.

So the context within which FACE has been operating over the last twelve months has been extremely turbulent resulting in much uncertainty and increasingly challenging circumstances for members to work in. The Executive has worked hard to ensure not only that FACE continues to operate in an effective and sustainable way for its members but also that it confidently puts the case both directly but also through its members for a fully accessible HE system which delivers to all learners. The challenge articulated by a fellow Executive member at a recent meeting is to redistribute HE opportunities in relation to potential. The UK setting needs to redefine itself as aspiring to world class standards for HE access and participation just as it already does for academic research excellence. FACE was established in large part to achieve this and we will continue to take a leadership position on this issue.

Over the last year FACE has continued to be guided by six key strategic concerns which are kept constantly under review by the Executive Committee. These are:

1. Lobbying for progressive policy.
2. Supporting members and their institutions .
3. Challenging legislative policy.
4. Providing an effective and confidential forum for knowledge and practice exchange.
5. Maintaining and extending partnerships and collaborations.
6. Contributing to the evidence base on HE access and lifelong learning.

These strategic concerns have very much framed the work of the Executive Committee which I shall now briefly comment upon before reviewing member support and services.

### **The Work of the Executive Committee**

To begin with I would like to thank and acknowledge the fantastic contribution made by each and every member of the Executive. FACE is fortunate indeed to have such a creative, dedicated and committed Executive who give so willingly of their time and expertise. As Chair I have greatly enjoyed working with and being so well supported and informed by Executive members. Executive meetings are very busy affairs and this year has been no exception. Executive meetings have been in two parts. Part one of the meeting has been devoted to our business agenda and tends to be the formal part of the meeting organised around an agenda and a set of corresponding papers circulated in advance of the meeting. 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. To give some sense of the areas dealt with by the Executive during this year, these included:

- Member services
- FACE finance
- Membership
- National development
- Publications
- Annual conference and other events
- Administration
- External relations and partnerships
- Communications
- Social media
- Funding opportunities
- E-bulletin/website

In addition to the business section of the meeting the second half of the meeting this year has been devoted to work on membership and also our new three year development plan for 2012-15.

For the latter work the Executive was organised into four working groups, each with a lead member. These working groups are:

- Policy and Positioning – Lead, Steve Kendall

- Communications and Events – Lead, John Storan
- Membership – Lead, Jeff Braham
- Finance – Lead, Zita Eckett

Thanks to all the leads and members of the working groups and in particular the Vice-Chair, Steve Lake, for coordinating the development plan overall. The final version of the plan will be progressed through the AGM before being fully actioned. During the last twelve months the Executive has met on five occasions including the AGM. This year our meetings have been hosted through Executive member Paul Grainger at the Institute of Education in central London. Many thanks indeed to Paul and the IOE for this and being such good hosts.

As I have already noted, FACE owes a great debt to the members of the Executive for all their support and creative input. This year we have added a number of new members to the Executive including Stella Lees from Bournemouth University and Ross Renton from the University of Hertfordshire. Let me finish this section of my report to members by congratulating a longstanding member of the Executive who I am delighted to say was awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours list. Tony Acland received the MBE for his services to higher education which of course includes his tremendous contribution to FACE for almost twenty years. I know I speak for everyone connected with FACE in saying how greatly deserved this award is and how much we owe to Tony for all he has done. 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 begin to implement the new three year development plan and manage its various component parts. It will also be important to stand for the Executive and I would strongly encourage you if you are interested in being involved to do so. Please get in touch with me or the Secretary, Mike Hill, if you have any questions about joining the Executive and we will be delighted to help. A major part of the Executive's work has focused on support and services to members. So let me now offer some brief comment on this central aspect of our work.

### **Member Support and 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 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. The following are essentially headline comments and I would refer you to the separate reports from both the Secretary and the Treasurer for more detailed information in these two areas.

- ❖ Research and Development Fund: The Executive sponsored two places at this year's annual conference for early career members. 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. Feedback on the value of this support can be found on the web site. The Executive is committed to providing as much support as we are able and through growing our membership base we shall be able to do this.
- ❖ Web Site: During the year we said goodbye and a big thank you to Jim Tate for all his work as he decided to stand down as web master and e-bulletin editor. Jim, has as I know many members are aware, made a tremendous contribution to FACE over the many years he worked with us. I know everyone will want to join me in wishing him every good wish for the future. However, the good news is that we have gone from strength to strength with the appointment of Dr Jamie

Mackay based at Southampton Solent University as our new web master and e-bulletin editor. Jamie presented his operational plan to the Executive and this was approved and we have already seen the impact of this on the web site. Following a detailed review and redesign, the new look web site will be formally launched at the 2012 annual conference. 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. At the time of writing for example there is an exclusive offer available to FACE members with more to come over the months. So welcome to Jamie and watch out for all the new features and offers available to members. 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.

- ❖ Monthly E-Bulletin: I hope members agree with me that the monthly e-bulletin has become a must read when it arrives in your 'in-box'. Jamie has done a tremendous job since taking on the editorship. Not only does it now provide a 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: Yet another area for the development of new services for members this year has been the setting up of 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 I am sure will add significant value to FACE over the coming year and get tweeting!
  
- ❖ 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: Recognising how important retaining and developing our membership is, the Executive asked Jeff Braham to lead in this vital area. Jeff wasted no time in reviewing different 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. 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. Working directly with members and dealing with applications and renewals will be Pamela Lawson. This is a pilot arrangement and the Executive will keep this under review to monitor progress and administration over the year. A big thank you to both Jeff and Jackie for all their work on membership and a warm welcome to Pamela. There can be no doubt that we need to ensure that we are not just meeting the needs of members but exceeding these wherever possible. Institutions are looking hard at all their costs in the current climate. 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. The Executive believes that through service improvements coupled with encouraging members to use the full range of services we can continue to build membership. So please, members, do make use of the range of services available and make use of our social media to give us your views. Please make sure that you register your full allocation of registrations if you are an institutional member. There has never been a 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.

❖ External Relations: It has been a busy year in this area of work. Essentially, our external relations falls 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)
- Third sector organisations

As Chair I have represented FACE through giving formal inputs to conferences, seminars and similar events throughout the year and have also been involved in a significant number of meetings and discussions. The Executive meetings as I hinted at earlier provide an opportunity for me and other members to process and share these contacts as part of steering the direction of travel for FACE in these challenging times. I think we will need to be doing much more of this over the coming year and this will partly be addressed in the new operational plan.

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 Orlando. As this year marks ten years of cooperation between FACE and NADE a short history of our partnership with NADE and its value was prepared and circulated to all NADE members attending the annual conference. Thanks to Mike Hill for representing FACE at this event and maintaining this partnership. Excellent links have continued to be built with our sister organisation in Sweden. I have had the pleasure of leading on this collaboration and worked with a number of colleagues from INCLUDE throughout the year. Representatives from INCLUDE contributed to our annual conference last year in Glasgow and I would like to warmly acknowledge these highly valued links. Finally, during the year FACE joined forces with several European national networks involved in continuing education on funding a bid to the EU to build a wider networking capacity. We are currently awaiting the result of this bid.

❖ Annual Conference and Seminars: The University of Glasgow played host to our very successful 2011 annual conference. As well as delegates from every part of the UK the conference also attracted a large number of international delegates. Thank you to Executive member Professor Mike Osbourne and his conference team who did such a superb job in hosting the conference. FACE joined forces in November with a member of national stakeholder organisations to organise the first annual Access to Higher Education Summit. I had the pleasure of representing FACE at this event which demonstrated the value of such collaborative events. The intention is to support this event again in the coming year. We are always interested to collaborate on events so if you would like to partner with FACE on a conference or seminar please contact me.

- ❖ Publications: Drawn from our 2011 Annual Conference our publication this year is entitled '*Which Way Now to Widening Participation: Lifelong Learning, Economy and Society*'. 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 will be launched at the 2012 conference and can be ordered through the web site. Many thanks to Peter Jones and Tom Ward for their editorial work. FACE joined forces with John Smith's bookshop and agreed a distribution contract. This has meant that our publication has been available in John Smith's bookshops in universities across the UK. Our book sales were up significantly on previous years.

### **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.

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**