

Chair's Report 2019-20

Introduction and context

Welcome to the 2019-20 Chair's report. I would like to begin by thanking you for your support and interest in FACE over the last year. The purpose of the report is to provide a summary overview of FACE's work and activities since the last AGM. In a summary report like this, it is impossible to do justice to all the various activities and issues that FACE as a network has been involved in throughout the year. Therefore apologies in advance for any important omissions but I am very happy as ever to include things if you drop me an email with the details: j.storan@uel.ac.uk.

Given the enormous impact that COVID-19 has had generally on all aspects of life it will be no surprise that it has had a significant impact on FACE and in particular the 2020 annual conference which unfortunately had to be cancelled. We shall be discussing with institutional partners over the coming months the prospects of finding a new date to run the conference and will keep members updated on any news or developments. To avoid confusion this report will focus largely on FACE's activities in the first part of the year and I will make reference to COVID-19 related matters where appropriate to any specific area of FACE's operational activity.

Despite the impact of the pandemic the first part of the year was a very active and busy period for FACE and one which has seen the network continue to deliver and develop its services to members as well as looking forward. FACE membership has continued to grow at a steady rate, and we have welcomed a number of new members since my last report. The FACE Executive committee has been working really hard throughout the year and has contributed enormously to the success and performance of the network throughout this period. In undertaking their role the members of the Executive Committee have been guided and informed by both the 2016-20 Strategic Plan and also by their collective experience and skill which FACE benefits from and values enormously.

FACE is a UK wide network with members from all four countries within the UK. The FACE Executive members from the four UK countries provide very valuable knowledge and insight on the different parts of UK higher education and in particular on devolved HE policy and funding arrangements.

FACE is therefore an important space where experience can be shared and exchanged. This knowledge exchange also feeds directly into the Executive meetings and informs and enhances the quality of our decision making.

An important aspect of our national level work is the hosting arrangements for our highly successful annual conference now in its 27th year. The conference is a key part of FACE's operational activities each year so the fact it has not proved possible to hold the 2020 conference was a great disappointment not only to the FACE Executive but also to all those members who planned to attend. However, the fact that the annual conference has been in 26 venues in nearly every part of the UK makes an important contribution to developing hosting arrangements for future conferences.

FACE members and their institutions are regular contributors to policy debate and development throughout the UK HE community and this knowledge and experience also feeds into the Executive discussions and planning. Through its network and partnerships FACE provides an independent and unique platform to shape and influence HE policy developments at all levels and this also helps to ensure that its voice is heard.

I will now provide some brief comments on each of FACE's key operational areas beginning with the work FACE Executive.

Executive Committee

I would like to begin this summary of the work and contribution of the Executive committee members by paying a special tribute and saying an enormous thank you to every member of the Executive for all their amazing work and ongoing commitment to the FACE and which in turn marks it out as a special and outstanding network. The last few months have seen HEIs moving to home based working and it has been a demanding time for Executive members who nonetheless have managed to continue to contribute to FACE for which we are very grateful indeed. The first three Executive meetings of the year were kindly hosted by FACE Secretary Mike Hill from the London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine with our May meeting and AGM taking place on-line. A special word of thanks to Mike and colleagues for providing such an excellent venue for the meetings.

At its busy Executive meetings the Executive Committee spend the first half of the meeting in a briefing session led by an invited external speaker which is followed by the business section of the agenda. Thank you to this year's Executive briefing speakers who contributed briefings on key areas of WP policy, practice and research and related. We also use this agenda slot to have planning discussions for events such as the annual publication and so make the most of the time we have. The business part of the Executive meetings involves a range of issues and subjects including a number of standing items such as the financial update and the annual conference and publication updates. I have listed below some of the issues and areas addressed by the Executive at its meetings:

- Member Services
- Annual conference update
- Special Interest Groups
- Marketing and promotion
- Social media
- Disability
- Partnership arrangements and developments
- Strategic plan 2016-20
- Membership growth and retention
- GDPR Phase 2 compliance
- Digital presence
- Monthly e-bulletin
- Finance
- International Partnerships
- Policy debates and developments

The administration of Executive meetings including the preparation of the agenda, minutes and AGM has been undertaken superbly by the FACE Secretary, Mike Hill. A big thank you to Mike for all his excellent work and support.

Website, monthly E-bulletin

I would like to thank Stephane Farenga for all his work and efforts in taking forward the FACE digital platform over the last few years. Stephane stepped down from his role in Nov 2019 but I am pleased to report that he will continue to contribute to FACE as a member of the Executive committee.

Stephane's replacement as Web and Digital Officer is Jessica Benson-Egglenton. Jess has done an excellent job since joining FACE and has amongst other things has introduced a new section to the website for blog type contributions called "Widening Participation during COVID-19 news, views and resources." If you haven't visited this part of the website I do encourage you to do so and also think about writing a blog post yourself. Jess will be delighted to hear from you as she is always pleased to receive members contributions both for the website as well as the monthly e-bulletin. The monthly e-bulletin has been greatly developed over the year and Jess has introduced a range of new features which make it a great platform for FACE members news, views and experience to be shared.

Looking forward the Executive have agreed to support the development of a new website during the coming year as part of its commitment to be continually extending member services and developing FACE's digital presence further.

Finance

I pleased to report that FACE's finances have proved to be more than adequate to cover the shortfall in income resulting from the cancellation of the annual conference and related loss of book sales due to the impact of the pandemic. Our Treasurer Andrew Rawson has done a great job working with the Executive to ensure we have a good margin of reserves and that these can be used to cover any loss of income in the financial year 2020-21.

During the lockdown period Andrew has also been busy setting up on-line banking services including purchasing card facilities which are needed to ensure we can continue to manage our finances in this difficult time. The Executive receive regular financial updates from the Treasurer at every Executive meeting and our accounts are annually audited prior to submission to the Charity Commission.

Andrew will provide further details on FACE finances in his Treasurer's report to members at the AGM and answer any questions.

Membership Administration and Services

A big thank you to Aga Spytowska for all her work as FACE Membership Administrator since the last AGM. Aga has done an amazing job in continually developing and improving our membership services including for example maximising the value of the salesforce operating system that FACE works with. This has involved integrating salesforce fully with membership services. In addition, Aga has also made important improvements to the tracking and payments parts of our membership services which has resulted in better fee collection rates. I am pleased to report there has been a steady growth in membership over the year and going forward the Executive will be developing a new approach to membership recruitment and retention as part of a wider piece work being undertaken for the new strategic plan. The lockdown situation has led to a delay in our plans for the second stage of our GDPR work which was planned for earlier in the year. This will be actioned at the earliest opportunity following the lifting of lockdown. One final point on membership is that the Executive has decided to maintain current fee levels for another year.

External Relations

FACE's work and contribution to external relations is guided by our strong belief and commitment to the importance of cooperation and building the best partnerships we can. Partnership working is a key feature of the way FACE operates and in many ways this marks it out as a not for profit network operating increasingly in a marketized HE system in the UK. How we develop this vital part of FACE will one of the central pieces of the new strategic plan that the Executive will be working on over the coming months. To give a flavour of the range of our external contacts and networks I have listed below some examples from a typical year:

- Government and Parliamentary contacts including; HOCs, HOLs, select committees, DfE, HE Minister, UK/BFUG,
- Funding and Regulatory Bodies including: OFS, QAA, SFA, SLC, HEFCW, Social Mobility Commission, UK/RI, Advance HE, Charity Commission
- Stakeholder and Representative Organisations including: Universities UK, NUS, AOC, AonA, Linking London, Learning and Work Institute, Guild HE,
- Commercial and Business facing bodies
- Growing list of Third Sector and not for profit organisations

In terms of FACE's international links and partnerships I am delighted to report that we continue to have excellent connections with our three sister international networks who are:

- Include Network (Sweden)
- National Organisation for Student Success (USA)
- Australian/New Zealand Association of Enabling Educators

As well as having reciprocal relationships covering areas such as information signposting, publications, attendance at annual conferences and so on we have also established the FACE International Committee which meets during the annual conference with invitations extended to all international delegates to participate. Feedback and comments are recorded and fed into FACE planning discussions. Another example of our international partnerships work is the International Roundtable which takes place within the annual conference. This session brings together a selection of international delegates from across the world with the opportunity to give a presentation in a plenary conference setting to share their home experience and knowledge with fellow delegates.

Annual Conference 2019

Our 2019 Annual conference was expertly hosted by Sheffield Hallam University who did a brilliant job on every aspect of the conference. The title of the conference was "Delivering the Public Good of Higher Education- Widening Participation, Place and Lifelong Learning" and the conference

keynotes, workshops and poster sessions all contributed to a highly memorable conference. FACE conferences have a well-deserved reputation for being special events and the 2019 conference certainly lived up to this reputation in every sense. Let me pick out just one recollection from the conference that really struck me. At end of the Gala Dinner I was delighted to present on behalf of FACE to the Sheffield Young Carers Charity a cheque for £600 all the money being generated by the conference delegates prize draw. This is I feel part of the way that FACE gives something back to the place that hosts the conference and it also illustrates in action the point I was trying to make earlier about the value that FACE places on partnership working. So well done to all the delegates for their generosity and kindness and also thanks to the Sheffield Young Carers Charity for all the great work they do.

Annual Publication

Each year at the FACE Annual Conference we launch the annual FACE publication which includes papers originally presented at the previous year's conference. Producing the annual publication is a very demanding process involving a great many people including authors, reviewers and the editorial team. The editorial team is led Dr Stephanie McKendry and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Stephanie and the team who between them do an outstanding job in bringing all the conference papers through to publication. I would also like to say a special word of thanks to proof-reader and copy editor Tom Ward who is stepping down from his role on completion of the current publication. Thanks to Tom for all your work over the years which has contributed so much to the quality of the ever-growing number of books that FACE has published. Giving a voice and platform to FACE members to share their amazing work with the wider community is at the heart of what FACE is all about as a partnership network.

As a result of the lockdown situation this year's publication will appear as a PDF on the FACE website and later on in the year we hope to produce a small number of publications in hard copy.

Concluding Comments

Despite the various challenges I have noted caused by the coronavirus pandemic to some aspects of FACE's work since the last AGM I am pleased to report that FACE has proved considerably resilient as a small networking charity. In the case of each of these challenges FACE has provided a creative response and found a way through. At the heart of this is the underpinning support, dedication and creativity of FACE members who have shown what a powerful and valuable combination of values this can be in such uncertain and threatening times. We have continued to provide as best we can our services to members despite having to cancel the annual conference which was very disappointing but inevitable. We have however, been able financially through a combination of careful management by the Executive and strong reserves to deal with this income shortfall without any major disruption to other parts of our services to members. This is in my view also a tribute to FACE's organisational resilience. Overall my report is on a very positive for FACE and in closing let me again thank all members for their enormous support and interest which in turn makes FACE the resilient, dedicated and cooperative network that it most certainly is and will continue to be going forward.

Prof John Storan, FACE Chair