



Opening Statement to Public Accounts Committee, 18 October 2018

Dr Graham Love, Chief Executive, Higher Education Authority

Good afternoon Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Today I am joined by the Chairman of the HEA, Michael Horgan, my colleagues Sheena Duffy and Neil McDermott from the HEA's System Funding and Governance sections and Stewart Roche, Management Accountant.

The HEA's accounts for 2017 were recently presented to this Committee. These were certified by the C&AG at the end of June and I am pleased to note that once again our accounts have been certified with no issues arising therein. In 2017 the HEA allocated over €1 billion in funding to the higher education sector. This covers the traditional core grant to institutions but also targeted initiatives such as Springboard which provides free places on courses for the unemployed and people returning to education and the Irish Research Council that acts as the key national funder of basic research across all disciplines.

This allocation of funding is a significant responsibility for the HEA but one that it performs effectively.

I would also like to update the Committee on other developments since we last appeared in May.

Independent Review of the Spin-Out and Sale of Companies from Telecommunications Software and Systems Group (TSSG) at WIT

In May I briefed the Committee on the status of the report arising from the Independent Review of the Spin-Out and Sale of Companies from Telecommunications Software and Systems Group (TSSG) at WIT and the reasons why it has not been published. I want to assure the Committee that the HEA and Department of Education and Skills are working together in order to progress this matter as soon as possible and I am happy to brief you in further detail today.

University of Limerick

In November 2017 the HEA published Dr Richard Thorn's report on the University of Limerick. The report made 36 findings and 10 recommendations to be implemented by the University. The HEA continues its monitoring of UL's implementation of the recommendations arising from the Thorn report. 8 out of the 10 recommendations have been implemented and the remaining 2 are on course for completion by the end of the year.

Rolling Governance Review

At the meeting in May I also briefed the Committee on the HEA's rolling governance reviews. Our first such review dealt with procurement and our second with intellectual property policies. This year's rolling review will focus on employee remuneration and other benefits. As with previous reviews, the rolling review is based on a sample range of universities, IOTs and other colleges.

The institutions to be examined as part of the review have been notified, and fieldwork for the review will commence shortly.

Procurement

Procurement rightly remains an area of focus for this Committee.

Our first rolling review in 2016 focussed on procurement and led in part to the HEA's annual Higher Education Procurement Summit. This year's summit in April saw the launch of a Corporate Procurement Plan template that will help higher education institutions to better plan their procurement requirements and ensure better compliance with national procurement guidelines. The plan has generated a lot of interest and there is a commitment by institutions to adopt the templates and complete this work to ensure and improve compliance in this area.

Financial Reporting

In relation to financial reporting, earlier this year the C&AG published its annual report on Public Sector Financial Reporting and I am pleased to note that there continues to be improvement in the timeliness of the production of financial statements for higher education institutions, particularly for universities.

Technological Universities

2018 has seen not only the passing of the Technological Universities legislation but also our first TU designation. In July the Government announced that the application for TU status from the TU4Dublin consortium would be granted and it is on course to officially become a University next January. Other TU consortia continue to make progress with their respective applications.

Strategic Dialogue

Next week the HEA will commence its annual round of Strategic Dialogue meetings with higher education institutions. At these meetings institutions will receive feedback from the HEA and a panel of external advisors on their mission-based Performance Compacts. These compacts set out each institution's strategic priorities and its contribution to overall system objectives.

In closing this statement, and as I finish up my role as Chief Executive, I wish to acknowledge the work of the HEA staff and their contribution in supporting and overseeing the development and growth of the higher education sector. I also wish my successor Paul O'Toole the very best in taking up the role of Interim Chief Executive and am confident that he will bring a valuable insight and experience from his time in SOLAS.

I and my colleagues are happy to answer any queries the Committee may have.