



**Independent Review of the  
Higher Education Academy  
A report to HEFCE by Capita  
Consulting**

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**CONTENTS**

- 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....5**
  - 1.1 Key findings.....5
  - 1.2 Strategic role, contribution and impact .....6
  - 1.3 Working with the sector .....9
  - 1.4 Working with the funders and across home nations .....9
  - 1.5 Organisational capacity, sustainability and future focus.....10
- 2 SCHEDULE OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....13**
  - 2.1 Summary of recommendations .....13
  - 2.2 Direction of travel and progress from previous evaluation .....15
- 3 INTRODUCTION.....19**
  - 3.1 Background to the review.....19
  - 3.2 Steering group.....19
  - 3.3 Remit for this review .....19
  - 3.4 Methodology .....20
  - 3.5 This report .....23
- 4 THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY .....25**
  - 4.1 Form and function.....25
  - 4.2 Mission, vision and objectives .....25
  - 4.3 Funding model .....26
  - 4.4 Governance and accountability .....28
  - 4.5 Organisational effectiveness.....29
  - 4.6 Distribution of funding.....40
  - 4.7 Summary.....49
- 5 STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS.....51**
  - 5.1 The HEA’s core activities – what it does .....52
  - 5.2 Working with the sector .....64
  - 5.3 Working across home nations .....73
  - 5.4 HEA’s structures, leadership and people .....78
  - 5.5 Summary.....78
- 6 CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECTOR .....82**
  - 6.1 Introduction .....82
  - 6.2 Evidencing impact.....82
  - 6.3 Impacts and benefits of the HEA.....83
  - 6.4 Findings from institutional case study visits .....85

6.5	Evidence from the HEA.....	87
6.6	Evidence from other sources .....	88
6.7	Summary.....	90
<b>7</b>	<b>FUTURE DIRECTION AND FOCUS .....</b>	<b>92</b>
7.1	Stakeholder perceptions.....	92
7.2	HEA’s work on sustainability .....	94
7.3	Summary.....	100

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AoA	Action on Access
BD	Business development
CPD	Continuing professional development
CLL	Changing the Landscape initiative
DELNI	Department of Employment and Learning Northern Ireland
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
ELT	Educational Learning Technologies
ESDGC	Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship
FEC	Further education college
FTE	Full time equivalent
HE	Higher education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEAR	Higher education achievement report
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI	Higher education institution
HE in FE	Higher education in further education
HEPI	Higher Education Performance Indicator
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HE Wales	Higher Education Wales
IAF	Impact Assessment Framework
JISC	Formerly the Joint Information Services Committee
KPI	Key performance indicator
LLUK	Life Long Learning UK
MEG	Mixed Economy Group
NTF	National Teaching Fellowship
NTFS	National Teaching Fellowship Scheme
NUS	National Union of Students
OER	Open Educational Resources initiative
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
PVC	Pro Vice Chancellor
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency

SHEEC	Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee
SMT	Senior management team
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
sparqs	Student Participation in Quality Scotland
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects
TQEC	Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee
UKPSF	UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning
UUK	Universities UK
VC	Vice Chancellor
VIA	Value Impact Assessment
VP	Vice Principal

## **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report sets out the findings of an independent effectiveness and efficiency review of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). It has been informed by an analysis of existing evidential sources, an examination of the HEA's financial model and sector stakeholder consultation involving representatives from 122 providers of higher education (HE), including those offering HE in further education (HE in FE), 30 sector bodies and other key stakeholders. The review was conducted between August 2013 and January 2014 and covers the period 2011-2013.

In this section we present the key findings of the review followed by an exploration of the review's key lines of enquiry. Thereafter, the body of the report presents the evidential basis and detailed analysis underpinning the report's recommendations and wider findings.

The views expressed in this report are those of Capita Consulting Ltd and not necessarily those of the Independent Steering Group for whom this report has been prepared.

### **1.1 Key findings**

The HEA has come through a period of significant change born out of the need to establish a more effective organisational model that would offer a sustainable platform following a major reduction in its annual budget. It is a more efficient, effective and valued organisation as a result.

Our analysis of the available evidence indicates that the HEA:

- Provides services, knowledge and expertise that are important to the sector.
- Has, at both the level of the Board and the executive team, a clear vision and a grounded appreciation of the priorities the HEA must pursue if it is to continue to improve the value it offers the sector, funders and other stakeholders.
- Is an increasingly efficient and effective organisation that has secured, especially in the last three years, improved levels of confidence from the wide range of different stakeholders and communities it exists to serve.
- Has devised and, for the most part, successfully implemented a new and more resilient business model as a consequence of the need to operate more effectively and establish a sustainable structure following a 30% reduction in funder grants – though there remain aspects that require development and refinement.
- Has not established a clear approach to demonstrating value for money and the impact of its work to the sector. This is despite the fact that evidence of its positive impact is readily available to the HEA from individual projects, institutions and consultees.
- Has to better communicate, to institutional leaders, the impact and value of its work with their institutions. A minority (circa 15%) of institutional stakeholders surveyed have told us that they are unsure about the impact of the HEA's work (citing either a lack of evidence or because they are unconvinced of the value of its work per se).
- Needs to fine tune its organisational model to enable both greater responsiveness to institutional requirements and improved stakeholder relationship management.
- Needs to narrow its focus onto fewer key strategic priorities and be more effective in evidencing the outcomes it delivers for individual institutions.

- Needs to address, together with its funding bodies, how required outcomes can be better stated in grant letters to provide a basis for more informed dialogue and reporting on priorities for its work.
- Has established challenging targets to build sustainable, alternative and additional sources of income from both domestic and overseas activities, which it needs to build capability and capacity to realise.

For the most part we believe the sector and funders can be confident that the HEA is aware of and responding to the many different challenges it must face. These include:

- Having to deliver its services within a significantly reduced operational budget.
- Facing the reduction in public funding for HE, which is already influencing the dynamic of the HEA's relationships with its subscribing higher education institutions (HEIs) which are increasingly likely to question the value for money of its services.
- The need to meet policy objectives in response to both funder initiatives and the priorities of individual institutions whilst managing the inherent tension between providing a service and contributing to and stimulating debate on issues of importance to the success of UK HE.
- Balancing the needs and expectations of four funders representing the interests of four home nations.
- Delivering support that is valued by institutional leaders, disciplines and individuals.
- The need to diversify and increase its income stream and build the capacity to develop new lines of service both domestically and overseas.

What may be valued by individual academics and disciplines does not necessarily reflect the pre-occupations of institutional leaders and it is clear that the HEA needs to give more attention to how it adds value to institutions' senior teams – without diminishing its work with and support to disciplines and individuals.

Striking such a balance is one of many tensions the HEA must manage. Another is that of being responsive to institutional need whilst also being a source of valued expertise and knowledge. In this matter we are clear; if the HEA is to genuinely add value, it must blend a capacity to be responsive to institutions' calls for advice or expertise with being a source of new ideas – a repository of expertise which also seeks to provoke reflection and stimulate debate. Contributing towards research into policy and practice is one means to this end. If the HEA is to have a credible voice as an agent of insight, improvement and innovation it must place itself at the heart of meaningful debate on matters relating to its core mission.

## **1.2 Strategic role, contribution and impact**

### **1.2.1 Most valued services**

Of all of the HEA's activities professional accreditation, and the support provided through the UK Professional Standards Framework, is identified by a majority of stakeholders across all consultation routes as central to their perceptions of the HEA's proven value to UK HE. A majority of institutions, of all types, were positive about the HEA's role in furthering the professionalisation of individual teachers, in providing a framework around accreditation of professional development and in supporting institutions to develop this within their own organisations.

### 1.2.2 Discipline support

One of the most significant areas that the HEA has changed in the period is its model of support to discipline communities. In doing so, it has sought to address the need for greater consistency and oversight across discipline networks and address cross-disciplinary priorities. While 'Academic Practice' still represents the largest of the HEA's sector-facing services in terms of budget, the staff base has been reduced as a result of restructure and appears to be spread fairly thinly. This perception is shared by a number of its stakeholders and there is clearly concern as to the HEA's capacity to deliver consistently across such a broad agenda which includes discipline-specific support, (including professionals working alongside academic teaching staff), commissioning and funding research within and across disciplines and work around cross-cutting themes (such as employability, education for sustainable development, internationalisation, and flexible learning).

There are some clear messages for the HEA from the sector consultation:

- The perceived value of the HEA and its services is felt most strongly at the individual level – notwithstanding the substantial investment the HEA has made in the period to offer a variety of services at the level of academic departments.
- Strong historical links, between individuals, institutions and the HEA in relation to subject areas (and this includes links with the former subject centres) still influence attitudes and behaviours.
- In a number of institutions (identified notably through case study visits) there are material differences in perspective and opinion between senior staff and those of academics who have been involved in HEA activity – the latter being generally more vocal in their positive opinion of the impact that the HEA had on their own practice and that of colleagues.
- There is a perception, expressed by some consultees, that the HEA is overly focussed around an established 'HEA community' that does not necessarily represent views of staff working more widely across academic disciplines. However, institutions themselves have a role here too and a number of those consulted acknowledged this i.e. "*You get out (of the HEA) what you put in*".

### 1.2.3 Influencing policy

Views on the HEA's work in the period to '...influence policy, future thinking and change' are more mixed across different types of institution and roles within the sector. Consultees were less persuaded of the evidence for the HEA's influence and profile around sector-wide policy formation and change, although notable examples of the HEA's activities and services were cited positively by some. Examples are the Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Network and input into topics of sector-wide interest such as the HEA's facilitation of discussions around the use of a Grade Point Average (GPA) system.

The research work that is valued by the sector has some common characteristics:

- Well planned collaboration with key partners
- Clear, practical applicability of findings
- Shorter, contextualised research briefings
- Effective dissemination through a wide range of routes

Whilst many consultees were very supportive of the HEA's activities in the sourcing, commissioning and publication of research, several reported their concerns that the HEA's research does not always provide a clear focus to help academics and senior leaders formulate practical solutions to address key issues. The 'What Works' student retention and success programme was cited positively by a number of consultees as evidence of where the HEA can work successfully in this respect.

#### 1.2.4 Demonstrating value for money and impact

The HEA has yet to establish a clear approach to demonstrating value for money and the impact of its work. This is despite the fact that evidence is starting to be collated by the HEA itself in a more systematic fashion than hitherto and there is a wealth of supporting data as to its positive impact from individual projects, institutions and consultees. A majority of institutions and sector bodies consulted for this review indicated that there had been a moderate or stronger level of contribution from the HEA to their organisations in terms of:

- Raising awareness on the importance of learning and teaching
- Increasing levels of understanding or knowledge in respect of learning and teaching enhancement
- Enabling positive changes to practice or policy

Similarly, a majority have confirmed the uniqueness of the HEA's services and that the same outcome could not have been achieved without the HEA's support. We note that this is more pronounced amongst Post-1992 institutions in comparison with others.

It is not clear how this evidence is being systematically used by the HEA to inform its conversations with subscribing institutions and the wider sector. Institutions have told us there is more that the HEA could be doing to use the information that it has to inform dialogue and productive planning.

For stakeholders, contribution through the HEA's work is most evident where there is a clear focus for recognisable HEA activity with clearly defined outcomes, be it support to the creation of continuing professional development (CPD) frameworks, through change programmes within institutions, or individual recognition and reward.

Follow-through on post-project activity and, therefore, the longer-term outcomes and changes from initial investment, is also perceived as not always being clearly set out, either in the agreement between the HEA and its clients, or within the HEA's operational plans.

Stakeholders also wish to see the HEA better evidencing its contribution to shaping sector thinking around the effects of investing in furthering excellence in learning and teaching across the sector.

*"Its message about the importance of professional recognition is strong, but less clear is how the HEA sees HE teaching as being different once more academics have achieved this."*

The HEA would benefit from:

- Re-visiting its underpinning key performance indicators (KPIs) and placing more emphasis on the systematic tracking and measurement of short- and long-term, direct and indirect outcomes from its work.

- Consolidating and simplifying the types of outcome that are emerging and can be evidenced, and tailoring this information for its different 'audiences'.

These are all key issues because alongside the generally positive findings summarised above a minority of institutional stakeholders have also told us that they are unsure about the impact or value for money of the HEA's work (either because they are unconvinced of the value, or because though the value and impact is present it is not possible for stakeholders to discern).

### 1.3 Working with the sector

#### 1.3.1 Building a reciprocal relationship

It is clear that *how* the HEA works with institutions, individuals and other groups is as critical as *what* it does, in influencing stakeholder perceptions of its value and contribution to the sector.

At their most successful, the HEA's partnerships with institutions and sector bodies are fully reciprocal and use sector intelligence to inform planning and to frame presentation of the HEA's services in a way that is tailored for specific audiences. This provides a basis for maturing of the relationship and for institutions and other organisations to gain additional value from ongoing partnership.

The majority of institutional consultees for the review were broadly positive in their perceptions of the character of their relationship with the HEA and the effectiveness of its management by the HEA. There are some variations within this, and we note that Post-1992 institutions were, in general, more positive in their assessment than Pre-1992 and other types of institution.

However, there is scope for the HEA to consider other common areas of interest and institutional characteristics in reviewing its model of relationship management. For example: the particular interests and preoccupations around learning and teaching enhancement for research-led institutions; advice and guidance for newer institutions (including new subscribers) who are developing their approaches; and ongoing targeted support for those institutions who already have established their own strategy and approach to learning and teaching enhancement.

The HEA's investment in developing services for the HE in FE sector has clearly been welcomed by HE in FE providers. We have found evidence that where these services are made available they are greatly appreciated and have impact. However, there are some areas for the HEA to direct its attention in future, such as better representation of further education-specific activity around research and scholarly activity.

### 1.4 Working with the funders and across home nations

Consultees across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have, in the main, noted an improvement in the relationship with the HEA in the past three years.

In England, much of the HEA's work is realised through UK-wide priorities although there are specific priorities for England, such as postgraduate education, that are reflected in the HEA's planned activities and in grant letters. England is the one home nation for which there is no separate named lead within the HEA; instead this work is spread across the HEA's operational teams. Findings from this review, in particular from the survey, reflect more mixed

perceptions of the HEA amongst England consultees in comparison with those of other home nations, although still broadly positive.

In Wales, the HEA is considered, by institutions and sector stakeholders alike, to have been instrumental in leading, developing and supporting the Future Directions enhancement themes. Future Directions needed one organisation to lead and own it, and in doing so the HEA has made a significant contribution to the sector.

In Scotland, whilst the HEA's position with the sector is considered to have strengthened, it is still perceived as one of many and is yet to establish its unique position in the area of quality enhancement. The HEA's more recent efforts to consolidate and showcase what it is doing in Scotland is welcomed; for example, in its recent Scottish event in September 2013 setting out its plans and focus for this nation. Similarly its work around the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland has been well received.

For Northern Ireland, the HEA has been able to demonstrate that it is working in a number of the sector's areas of strategic interest and the HE strategy 'Graduating to Success' is reflected in HEA's current grant agreement with the Department of Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI). The HEA would benefit from further clarifying for stakeholders how it is working with the funding body and with institutions to further work around 'enhancing employability'.

The review team found that identification of how and where the HEA has deployed its resources in support of services provided at a national level to be challenging given the current reporting structures. Consequently, we strongly endorse the actions being taken by the HEA and its funding bodies to review the existing grant letter structures to incorporate a defined set of outcomes on which the HEA can report in line with funding body expectations.

### **1.5 Organisational capacity, sustainability and future focus**

The HEA has put considerable effort into reviewing and revising key elements of its structure, processes and systems, following its re-organisation in 2011. The 30% funding cut over a 3-year period necessitated a comprehensive review of the scope and extent of its operations. The HEA has made significant progress in the period to refocus its strategic aims as outlined in its Strategic Plan 2012-16, to communicate these to the sector and to maintain the core of its services. Progress includes:

- An increase in the number of subscribers to the HEA's services from 166 in financial years 2010/11 to 200 in 2012/13.
- Revision of the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning (UKPSF) in 2011 following sector consultation.
- Recognition of over 43,000 individuals against the UKPSF, in comparison with 15,000 recognised at the end of 2004/05.
- Creation of its Partnership Team, responsible for supporting subscribing organisations and providing a sector 'listening' role.
- Rollout of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) to Wales in 2011/12.
- Increases in HEA website visitor numbers, from just under 96,000 in February-July 2010, to just under 339,000 in February-July 2013.

- Launch of a number of new schemes and services including: the Student Advisory Forum, Teaching Development Grants and a new online platform for HEA academic journals (in 2013).

The HEA has implemented a more resilient and sustainable business model in the period covered by this review and we have found evidence of the application of a continuous improvement approach e.g. various internal reviews of processes, policies, systems and the use of stakeholder feedback to inform changes to practice and services.

Evidence from this review shows that the HEA is seen by most stakeholders as an organisation that has undergone, and come through, a period of significant change for the better.

### 1.5.1 Future support

Consultees to this review have told us that in future they anticipate seeking a range of support from the HEA including:

- Providing and drawing on robust evidence bases for HE development; staff incentives and promotion criteria to improve teaching; support to research training; in developing and using new technologies and advance intelligence of sector developments both UK and globally e.g. *“The international input and peer comparison of strategy would be hugely helpful, not least on innovative practices”*.
- For the development of the HE in FE agenda including: QAA review and alignment of practice with the UK Quality Code; student engagement; and support for tutors delivering college-based HE.
- For collaborative working and resources to develop teaching practice and curriculum provision.
- For a sector-wide voice on good practice in learning and teaching and quality enhancement, with the continuing need for “the leverage of accreditation” and something of a “critical friend” role.

### 1.5.2 Perceived capacity and capability to deliver

Consultees are broadly confident in the ability of the HEA to respond to the sector’s future needs. Generally positive perceptions encompass the HEA’s overall direction of travel, its role in sponsoring key research and in supporting cross-institution networking, its role as an external partner to support individual recognition for teaching excellence and career development, and in its effective strategic partnerships, for example with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

Areas of concern have encompassed:

- The importance of demonstrating that it can provide services of value to institutions, *“...to the extent that they are willing to pay for them”* and being sufficiently flexible to, *“...adapt its practice to suit the needs of different kinds of users”* be this specific communities of practice or types of role outside disciplinary structures within institutions.
- A need to increase its profile amongst sector strategists, including government and heads of institutions, *“...in order to retain credibility with its subscribing institutions and individual members”* and *“...do more to be proactive in leading debate involving the best thinkers from overseas and the UK, rather than just ‘servicing’ HEIs – important as this is”*.

- Its ability to be responsive to different types of need across institutions (based on strategic priorities around learning and teaching).
- That in developing its reach internationally and in progressing business development the HEA ensures that there is a balance between these areas and core services.
- The ability of the HEA to adapt from a predominantly government-funded organisation to a more commercial enterprise responding to individual client requirements.

### 1.5.3 Sustainability

The HEA has established a very stretching target for increasing income in its current Business Development (BD) plan and, while increased income has been secured through greater numbers of subscribers and domestic and overseas consultancy, it has not done so at the rate required to meet the 2012/13 plan.

The key challenge is for the HEA to build the capability and capacity to drive growth in alternative sources of income from both domestic and overseas sources. This is recognised in the HEA's own plans for sourcing associates and increasing overseas subscriptions.

The HEA requires highly effective leadership and skills to grow its business (not least in the international arena). While we note the very recent appointment of a new senior member of staff charged with reviewing the HEA's international strategy there remains further need to enhance the HEA's core business development capabilities and clearly express its value proposition for different markets.

The next section provides a schedule of the recommendations made in the body of the report and summarises the direction of travel and progress since the previous review.

## 2 SCHEDULE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### 2.1 Summary of recommendations

Below in Figure 1 we provide a summary of all recommendations arising from the review. The basis for each recommendation is fully detailed in the body of the report and, where the HEA has evidenced that it is already progressing the points raised, we acknowledge this in the text. These have been grouped in line with the key themes from the Executive Summary in Section 1 above.

**Figure 1 Summary of recommendations**

Ref	Section	Recommendation
<b>Strategic role and contribution</b>		
4	5.1.1	The HEA should be clear, for institutional subscribers and its Fellowship network, what it is able to offer individuals and institutions in promoting excellence in teaching and how it is developing its support to Fellows. This could include ‘repackaging’ of services to individual Fellows following the launch of the Code of Conduct for Fellows and also further developing its research capabilities to provide individual practitioners with an evidence base around innovation.
5	5.1.3	The HEA should (i) better evidence the impact and outcomes of its work with discipline communities and (ii) improve its communications with institutional leaders and those wider academic communities that have not had regular interaction.
6	5.1.4	The HEA needs to adopt a tighter focus on fewer strategic priorities and deploy its resources accordingly.
7	5.1.6	In relation to the profile and breadth of its contribution to sector-wide policy development, the HEA needs to better demonstrate where the outcomes from this engagement are represented in its own work, such as: the next steps being taken following HEA-led research; providing an informed ‘challenge’ role with institutions and sector leaders; and further development of its global presence on learning & teaching.
8	5.1.6	The HEA should:  (i) Revisit the current balance around dissemination routes to make more effective use of online and remote technology to share its research work where this is not already being done.  (ii) Build upon the existing characteristics of valued research activity and capability, namely: well-planned collaboration and selection of key partners; clear and practical applicability of findings; and shorter, contextualised research briefings to provide ‘springboards’ into topics of strategic interest

Ref	Section	Recommendation
13	6.4	In its communications with the sector the HEA should leverage and consolidate its evidence being collected on the outcomes of key activity led, supported and funded by the HEA including providing feedback on those current and past projects where there is an opportunity to follow up subsequent actions taken by those involved.
<b>Working with the sector and working with the funders and across home nations</b>		
1	4.5.12	The HEA should further develop the stakeholder engagement system and associated processes to capture and report a full, qualitative picture of its engagement with institutions and with sector bodies. This should include the use of information to identify scope for further targeting and marketing of existing services (we note that the HEA has already started to produce 'Sector Voice' reports for its senior management team based on partnership engagements with the sector).
2	4.5.13	HEA activities in relation to its Student Advisory Forum should be promoted more actively (where not already being done so) as part of its general and specific communications with the sector. This would be to i) promote participation and ii) to affirm to the sector how the HEA is seeking direct input from students to inform its work on student engagement.
9	5.2.2	The HEA should develop its model for relationship management with institutions to ensure common areas of interest across groups of institutions are represented and addressed through their services, such as: research-led institutions; new and smaller institutions developing their approaches to learning and teaching enhancement; and institutions with mature, well-embedded approaches. This also relates to Recommendations 7 and 10.
10	5.2.3	The annual institutional reports should be developed to (i) communicate the HEA's 'value proposition', (ii) respond to and recognise individual HEI context and (iii) include actions and next steps agreed between the HEI and the HEA as part of ongoing engagement.
11	5.2.5	The HEA should consider the scope for supporting networks of new communities of practice (such as institutional leads on the student experience) to reflect strategic interests across institutions, in addition to the existing networks (i.e. PVC; discipline networks).
12	5.2.6	The HEA should engage more fully with the representative forums to establish and address the HE in FE agenda including definitions and criteria for National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) membership and the role of scholarly activity and action research.

Ref	Section	Recommendation
<b>Organisational capacity, sustainability and future focus</b>		
3	4.6.8	The HEA should consolidate monitoring and reporting against intended outcomes from activities, in conjunction with further development of presentation and sharing of outcomes with funders and subscribing institutions.
14	7.2.1	The HEA should continue to prioritise investment in developing capacity and capability in non-core income generation, particularly consultancy. Alongside this we would also endorse the HEA's investment in realising its internationalisation strategy, and in building capacity to meet its business plan ambitions for overseas income generation.

## 2.2 Direction of travel and progress from previous evaluation

A previous evaluation of the HEA was commissioned in 2007<sup>1</sup>, three years after its formation, by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on behalf of the four funding bodies. The evaluation acknowledged that the HEA had had to overcome significant challenges from the start, not least, in establishing and differentiating itself as a unique organisation with a specific purpose and balancing expectations from a wide-ranging and demanding stakeholder base. The earlier evaluation found there to be evidence to support the positive impact of its work but that it had yet to realise its full potential.

The evaluation identified that the HEA had further work to do on aspects that were less clearly delineated including roles within its own organisation, services provided, and engagement with partners and other stakeholders. The main recommendation areas from the earlier review are summarised in Figure 2 below, together with a brief assessment of progress made by the HEA in the period in scope for this review (i.e. since restructure).

The recommendations from this report are cross-referenced to these areas.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2008/heainterimevaluation/>

**Figure 2 Summary analysis of progress made against previous evaluation**

Recommendation areas from previous review	Progress made by the HEA	Reference to recommendations in this report
<p><b>Strategic focus:</b> more emphasis on its role as sector ‘champion’ for learning and teaching (both as an ‘observatory’ and a network)</p>	<p>Evidence shows that the HEA has strengthened and refocused its strategic direction and that greater clarity on its strategic role has been recognised by many institutions and sector bodies alike.</p> <p>Where there is further work to be done it relates to the HEA’s contribution to sector-wide policy formation and change.</p> <p>The HEA’s work in funding, supporting and disseminating key research is viewed as critical by institutions and sector organisations. We endorse the HEA’s stated intent to refocus its work in this area in the next phase.</p>	<p>Recommendations: 6,7,8,11,14</p>
<p>More sophisticated approach needed to <b>relationship and communications management</b> – with HEA’s customers and partners</p>	<p>The HEA has put in place an extensive range of key resources, processes and systems in response to the recommendation in the area of relationship management with subscribing institutions and other organisations with which it works.</p> <p>These include: creation of its Partnership Team and renewing its approach to institutional liaison; establishing its Stakeholder Management system and using this data to inform reporting back to institutions; and refreshing of its website and resources centre.</p> <p>The HEA has also increased its numbers of institutional subscribers, including new affiliates, HE in FE, and others.</p> <p>There remain a number of areas requiring development that are the subject of specific recommendations including developing its Stakeholder Engagement system, the HEA’s model for relationship management and the form and content of annual institution reports.</p>	<p>Recommendations: 1,2,5,9,10,11,12,14</p>

Recommendation areas from previous review	Progress made by the HEA	Reference to recommendations in this report
<p><b>Business strategy</b> and own approach to impact evaluation needed to be strengthened</p>	<p>The HEA has started to focus on its approach to demonstrating value for money and the impact of its work. Evidence is starting to be collated by the HEA in a more systematic fashion than hitherto and there is a wealth of emerging supporting evidence of the positive impact of its work, from across individual projects, institutions and consultees.</p> <p>However, consultees have indicated an appetite for more evidence of outcome, both from the HEA's own work and the work which it supports. Stakeholders wish to see the HEA better evidencing its own contribution and that of others, in shaping sector thinking around the effects of investing in furthering excellence in learning and teaching across the sector.</p>	<p>Recommendations: 3,13</p>
<p><b>Subject network</b> – greater consistency needed in how this should be configured and managed to leverage the areas of strong practice across the whole of the HEA's customer base, and balance resources with demand</p>	<p>The HEA has put considerable effort into reviewing and revising key elements of its structure, processes and systems, following its re-organisation in 2011.</p> <p>The HEA's model of support to discipline communities is one of the most significant areas of change in the period, and this has been in response to both substantial reductions in its core funding and addressing the need for greater consistency and oversight across the networks as a whole.</p> <p>Although the area of academic practice is still substantial (in terms of HEA's allocated resources), the reduction of the staff base has necessitated an approach of 'doing the same with less'. A number of the HEA's stakeholders (institutional and other) have raised the concern that the HEA appears to be spread fairly thinly across its support to disciplines. We note that the HEA is aware of these issues and is seeking to address these.</p>	<p>Recommendations: 5,6,8</p>

Recommendation areas from previous review	Progress made by the HEA	Reference to recommendations in this report
<p><b>Support to individual academics:</b> development of the ‘value proposition’ of HEA Fellowship and better approach to engagement with individual practitioners</p>	<p>The HEA has made strong progress in this area. A majority of institutional consultees for this review were positive about the HEA’s role in furthering the professionalisation of individual teachers; in providing a framework around accreditation of professional development and in supporting institutions to develop this within their own organisations.</p> <p>Findings from the review do, however, indicate that whilst there is an established community of academics that are well-engaged with the HEA who are very positive in their perceptions of the benefit of its contribution to their own practice, through their discipline or independently, there is still a mix of views amongst academic staff of the wider benefits to practice. This is more marked amongst the Pre-1992 institutions consulted, although not unique to this group.</p> <p>Some consultees have observed that there is scope for further development around Fellowships, providing current and new Fellows with more structured ongoing support.</p>	<p>Recommendations: 4,11</p>

### 3 INTRODUCTION

#### 3.1 Background to the review

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned, on behalf of all the UK Funding Councils, a formative independent review of one of its major funded bodies, the HEA. All four funding bodies provide grant to a number of related bodies to carry out work that supports the higher education (HE) sector and work that is in line with each funding body's strategic priorities. This includes the HEA, which is funded, largely, to contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education.

The overarching aim of the review was to evaluate whether the HEA is effectively achieving the general priorities set by the funding bodies and its wider aims and objectives. The review was also asked to consider whether the HEA is providing the funders and the sector with value for money.

#### 3.2 Steering group

A steering group<sup>2</sup> was established to oversee the progress of the review and provide direction to the consultants on the focus of the review and nature of any recommendations emerging. The group carried out its responsibilities by:

- Steering the review to a successful conclusion by ensuring a relevant and independent evaluation of the HEA's performance and value for money that can be used to inform the 2014-15 and subsequent grant letters to the HEA.
- Advising the consultants on all aspects of the methodology of the review.
- Acting as a sounding board in relation to emerging findings and the direction of recommendations.
- Monitoring progress against the timetable, objectives and deliverables of the project.

#### 3.3 Remit for this review

The aims and scope of this review were as follows:

The review should cover the period from 2011 to 2013 (the restructuring and post restructuring period) in order to assess '*...whether the restructured organisation is achieving the general priorities set by the funding bodies and its wider aims and objectives*' (2012-13 HEFCE grant letter, paragraph 12).

The focus of the evaluation should be on:

- Analysing and assessing the strategic role and contribution of the HEA in the sector through the lenses of reputation, relevance and reach (including a focus on the outcomes of activities and not just the volume and range of activities) and, in particular, looking at impact and benefit.

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<sup>2</sup> The steering group's membership comprised Nigel Seaton, University of Abertay Dundee, Principal (Chair), Gill Nicholls, University of Surrey, Deputy-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs), Paul White, University of Sheffield, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching, Ellie Clewlow, HEFCE, Head of Learning and Teaching, Simon Foster, HEFCE, Senior Policy Advisor, Cliona O'Neil, HEFCW, Head of Student Experience, Gus Macleod, SFC, Senior Policy Advisor, Judith Shaw, DELNI, Head of Higher Education Policy, Helen Bowles, Guild HE, Deputy Chief Executive, Greg Wade, Universities UK, Policy Advisor and Kate Wicklow, NUS, Head of Quality and Student Engagement.

- The role the HEA plays in enhancing learning opportunities and promoting excellence in the view of:
  - Institutions;
  - Students, including their representative body, the National Union of Students (NUS);
  - Funders.
- Reviewing the reorganisation of the HEA, in particular analysing the organisational capacity and effectiveness of the HEA since its restructure and implementation of related changes. Governance issues and the role of the Board and its sub-committees should also be considered.
- Assessing progress since the 2007-08 review: have the issues raised in the 2007 Oakleigh report been fully addressed?
- The success of the HEA in meeting the priorities and objectives set by the funding bodies and in dealing with the challenges of increasing policy divergence between the four nations.
- Performance against the HEA's Strategic Plans – 2008-2012 and 2012-16.
- Efficiency and effectiveness of the distribution of funds and value for money; i.e. are funding levels appropriate, is funding being appropriately allocated internally (i.e. are funding body grants are spent in proportion to other sources of income, such as subscriptions and contracted services, and that the latter are not being used disproportionately to build reserves), and is the duplication of funding being avoided?
- Sustainability of the HEA – including the potential for diversifying or strengthening income streams.

The review's findings relate to the whole of the UK, unless otherwise specifically stated.

### 3.4 Methodology

The approach for the review included:

- Comprehensive desk-based review of relevant, evidential sources from the HEA and from its funding bodies which provided detailed background information on the HEA and its relationship with funders, owners and partners. These also informed the development of an evaluation framework.
- Review of the HEA's current operations and governance structures, based on documentary review and onsite fieldwork at the HEA's offices in York, including interviews with key HEA teams and reviews of systems and processes relating to activities within scope.
- A programme of stakeholder consultation across the UK HE sector, covering all areas of scope and key lines of enquiry.

Overall we engaged with 122 institutions and 30 sector bodies in the course of the review.

#### 3.4.1 Modes of consultation

The review took a 'mixed modes' approach to consultation to ensure a sufficiently broad reach to the sector. The primary consultative routes and main priority stakeholder groups for the review are detailed in Figure 3 overleaf.

**Figure 3 Modes of consultation per stakeholder group**

Stakeholder group	Priority Stakeholders included	Modes of consultation
Senior managers within institutions responsible for learning and teaching strategy (Pro Vice Chancellors (PVCs), Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs), Vice Principals (VPs) and equivalent roles)	<p>Invitations were issued to all UK HEIs and FECs with HE provision via: the HEA's subscriber network; the four funding bodies and owners (UUK and Guild HE); and sector agencies including Universities Scotland, Mixed Economy Group (MEG),</p> <p>Invitations to a selection of HEIs for visits</p>	<p>Written responses to structured lines of enquiry</p> <p>Telephone interviews</p> <p>Online survey</p> <p>Focus groups for HEIs and FE providers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (co-facilitated by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and HE Wales; Colleges Wales; Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Universities Scotland; and DELNI)</p> <p>Focus group for FE providers in England (co-facilitated by MEG)</p> <p>Face to face interviews at visits to a selection of HEIs (x 6)</p>
Heads of Institutions	<p>Invitations via: HEA's networks; Universities UK (UUK); and GuildHE; Mixed Economy Group</p>	<p>Written responses to structured lines of enquiry</p> <p>Telephone interviews</p> <p>Face to face interviews at visits to a selection of HEIs (x 6) – completed for selected Heads of Institution</p>
<p>Other institutional consultees including:</p> <p>Heads of Educational Development/Learning and Teaching units</p> <p>Academics working within specific disciplines</p> <p>Individual Fellows and staff involved in HEA activities and projects</p>	<p>Invitations via: HEA's subject networks</p> <p>Invitations to a selection of HEIs for visits.</p>	<p>Telephone interviews</p> <p>Online survey</p> <p>Face to face interviews at visits to a selection of HEIs (x 6)</p>
Funders	Funding Councils	Face to face interviews
Owners	UUK and Guild HE	Face to face or phone interviews
Other sector agencies, professional bodies and interested parties	<p>Invitations via: HEA's networks; publication of routes for consultation via the four funding bodies</p>	<p>Written responses to structured lines of enquiry</p> <p>Telephone interviews</p> <p>Online survey</p>

### 3.4.2 Consultation routes

#### **Survey**

An online survey was conducted as part of the consultation between mid-September and end of October 2013. A targeted sample group of respondents was collated comprising HEA institutional subscribers and HE sector related stakeholders. The HEA issued an email with a link to the survey to their subscribers, while Universities UK and GuildHE notified all their members. Recipients were invited to respond themselves and/or circulate the survey invitation to colleagues, so as to create the widest possible sample group. They were also offered the alternative of contacting the evaluation team if they preferred to take part in a telephone interview instead, which a small number opted to do.

In total, 224 individuals responded to the questionnaire, from 81 organisations, 72 of which were HE providers, and 9 were sector representatives, professional or discipline bodies. A small number of institutional respondents had collated and submitted collective responses on behalf of their faculty, department or organisation, but the majority were completed by individuals.

Responses were broken down as:

- 35% from Pre-1992 HEIs
- 26% from Post-1992 HEIs
- 17% from HE in FE providers
- 1% from a private sector provider
- 10% from small and specialist institutions
- 11% from sector representative bodies

#### **Interviews and written responses**

A total of 24 sector bodies (including the four funding bodies and the owners of the HEA) were interviewed or provided written responses to the consultation. Nine sector bodies also responded to the survey, of which four had already been interviewed. Further details are provided in Appendix 2.

Personnel at 28 institutions were interviewed or provided written responses to the consultation (comprising a mixture of heads of institution and senior management responsible for institutional learning and teaching strategy). This comprised:

- 11 Post-1992 institutions
- 13 Pre-1992 institutions
- 3 HE in FE providers
- 1 private sector HE provider

Interviews were also held with the HEA's Executive Team, team leads, various other staff including staff council members and, individually, members of its Board.

#### **Focus groups**

Five separate focus groups were held during September, October and November 2013:

- In Northern Ireland, hosted by DELNI – 3 HEIs and 4 FE colleges in attendance.

- In Scotland, hosted by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) – 3 HEIs and Universities Scotland in attendance.
- In Wales, hosted by HE Wales (for their Learning & Teaching Advisory Group) – 9 HEIs in attendance.
- In Wales, hosted by Colegacymru – 6 HE in FE providers, 3 HEIs, and 4 sector bodies in attendance.
- In England, hosted by the Mixed Economy Group – 27 HE in FE providers and 4 sector bodies in attendance.

### **Case study institutional visits**

Interviews were conducted during visits to the six institutions selected for institutional case studies. Interviews were conducted onsite with a mixture of the following:

- Senior staff with remit and oversight for the institution's learning and teaching enhancement strategy.
- Other key staff involved in HEA-supported or funded activity (such as change programmes).
- Staff involved in institutional projects and programmes to support the enhancement of learning and teaching and/or the student experience.
- Staff involved in the accreditation of HEA-endorsed programmes.
- Heads of School and Programme leads (those who had engaged with HEA activity).
- National Teaching Fellows at the institution (if applicable).

#### **3.4.3 Sector representation**

Overall, we have engaged with 122 institutions in the course of this review, comprising:

- 33 Post-1992 HEIs
- 39 Pre-1992 HEIs
- 42 HE in FE providers
- 8 Other (including 2 private providers and 6 specialist institutions)

By nation, this comprised 90 institutions from England; 9 from Scotland; 16 from Wales; 7 from Northern Ireland.

By mission group, they were:

- Russell Group: 16 of 24 members engaged (1 case study visit; 2 via focus groups alone; 5 via survey alone; 4 via survey and written responses from the Senior Management Team (SMT); 1 via survey and focus group; 3 via interview or written response alone).
- University Alliance: 13 of 22 members engaged (6 via survey alone; 5 via survey and interview/written response; 1 via survey and focus group)
- Million +: 9 of 17 members engaged (1 case study visit; 5 via survey alone; 1 via survey and interview; 1 via survey and focus group; 1 via interview alone)

### **3.5 This report**

This is the final report for the review and was completed in February 2014 for consideration by the steering group and, thereafter, publication.

The remainder of this report is organised as follows:

- **Section 4** examines the organisation of the HEA, the outcomes of the restructuring and the effectiveness of its current structure.
- **Section 5** provides a full analysis of stakeholder perspectives and perceptions on the HEA: its provision of services, its approaches to working with the sector, of the relevance, quality and value of its work, and how it has demonstrated that it is meeting the needs of the sector at large.
- **Section 6** considers the evidence available, from consultees for this review, from the HEA and elsewhere, on the contribution that the HEA is making to the sector and the approaches that the HEA has taken since 2010 to evaluating and evidencing the impact of its work.
- **Section 7** provides an analysis of stakeholder views on the HEA's future direction and focus, and observations on the HEA's work to date in considering ongoing sustainability.

Appendices are included as a separate document and include:

- Full terms of reference, key lines of enquiry and analysis of consultees (Appendices 1 and 2)
- Full survey quantitative and qualitative analysis and questionnaire (Appendices 3 and 4)
- Findings from the six institutional case studies (Appendix 5)

## **4 THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY**

This section examines the organisation of the HEA: its governance and operations, the outcomes of reorganisation since 2010 and the effectiveness of its current structure.

### **4.1 Form and function**

The HEA was officially incorporated in 2003 following a review of the support for quality enhancement across the sector by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC), a joint committee of HEFCE<sup>3</sup>, UUK and the Standing Conference of Principals (now GuildHE), which recommended the establishment of a single agency.

It is a registered company, limited by guarantee, and a registered charity in England, Scotland and Wales. It is owned by UUK and GuildHE and is funded by the four UK HE funding bodies and by subscriptions and grants, operating across the four nations.

The HEA champions excellence in learning and teaching in HE. It was set up to support institutions, discipline groups and all staff in the sector in providing the best possible learning experience for their students. It is committed to improving the student learning experience by:

- Raising the status of teaching.
- Adding to the body of knowledge relating to pedagogy.
- Enhancing professional teaching practice.
- Facilitating networks and communities of practice.

#### **4.1.1 Developments since 2008**

The HEA has undergone substantial changes to its structure and funding in recent years. Since 2009, all the funding bodies have reduced their core funding by approximately 30%. This led to major organisational change, including a new executive structure, the replacement of the subject centres with Discipline Leads<sup>4</sup> and considerable staffing changes.

Professor Craig Mahoney was chief executive of the HEA from July 2010 until his appointment as principal of the University of the West of Scotland in summer 2013. From 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013 the chief executive has been Professor Stephanie Marshall (who was formerly deputy chief executive, research and policy).

### **4.2 Mission, vision and objectives**

The mission of the HEA is:

To use its expertise and resources to support individual staff, disciplinary and interdisciplinary teams, and HE communities and institutions in general to enhance the quality and impact of learning and teaching.

The vision of the HEA is:

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<sup>3</sup> The current sub-committee is: Teaching, Quality and the Student Experience (TQSE)

<sup>4</sup> Discipline Leads were introduced in August 2011, with the work formerly conducted by the subject centres within HEIs now being undertaken by subject specialists directly employed by or on secondment to the HEA, but working flexibly and based in HEIs around the UK. The HEA now takes a cluster approach to the disciplines, which are organised into the four clusters of Arts and Humanities, STEM, Social Science and Health and Social Care.

For UK HE to be recognised and valued by students, staff and wider society for its provision of consistently excellent learning and teaching.

The current Strategic Plan (2012-16) sets out four strategic priorities:

- Inspire and support effective practice in learning and teaching – supporting disciplines, interdisciplinarity, professional staff, and thematic challenges; encouraging innovation through funded initiatives, networks, events and research.
- Recognise, reward and accredit excellent teaching – through the HEA's recognition and accreditation services, and its support for teaching awards such as the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and Student-led Teaching Awards.
- Influence policy, future thinking and change – through institutional change programmes, the HEA's postgraduate enhancement surveys and influencing national policies.
- Develop an effective, sustainable organisation that is relevant to and valued by HE – through effective governance, providing a client-focused service, engaging HEA staff and securing financial sustainability.

### 4.3 Funding model

The HEA's total income for financial year 2011/12 was £22.7 million.

It is funded predominantly through public sources, with approximately 85% of its core and ring-fenced income from its four funding bodies (the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and for Wales (HEFCE and HEFCW), DELNI, and the SFC. also funds the HEA to host Jisc TechDis, a UK advisory service on technologies for inclusion.

A further 10% of its income is received from subscribing institutions and affiliates and the remaining 5% from other income including consultancy and events.

#### 4.3.1 Income from funding bodies

Income is confirmed through annual funding agreements based on a proportion of core grant funding plus ring-fenced funding for specific initiatives (for example, the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) which is now supported by the England, Wales and Northern Ireland funding bodies).

HEFCE is the only one of the four funding bodies to identify specific funding for its 'general objectives and priorities for England' (representing approximately 10% of its total grant funding to HEA, based on core funding).

The HEA's funding bodies included, in grant agreements for 2010/11, a request for the HEA to make savings of 30% on the 2009/10 core grant, by 2012/13. Savings of 10% per annum on the earlier core grant were, therefore, proposed in each financial year until 2012/13. Grant funding for 2013/14 remains static on the previous year totals.

Income from HEFCE represents the largest proportion of that received from the four funding bodies (81% of total funding body grant income for 2011/12, compared with 12% for SFC, 5% for HEFCW and 2% for DELNI).

### 4.3.2 Income from subscribers

Subscriber income for 2011/12 totalled £2.16 million.

Subscriber income is based on monies received from 200 subscribers (per the HEA's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2013, an increase of 34 subscribers in the year), predominantly UK HEIs but, from 2012, including further education providers (HE in FE), private providers and one non-UK provider (Australian National University). Further education colleges (FECs) are able to subscribe to the HEA if they have at least 500 full time equivalent (FTE) students enrolled on their HE courses. The HEA has recently modified its subscription package for smaller HE in FE providers through an Affiliate College subscription. Since 2011, subscription charges for new subscribers are based on the numbers of FTE HE students at the institution; charges for existing subscribers continue to be based on historic teaching grant levels.

For subscribing institutions<sup>5</sup> the benefits of subscription include:

- One submission for professional development programme accreditation over a 3-year period.
- Application for individual professional recognition on completion of an HEA accredited programme or discounted via the individual recognition route.
- Eligibility to apply for grant funding from the HEA.
- Discounted event attendance and participation in the Change Academy or other change programmes.
- Participation in the Postgraduate Research Experience and Postgraduate Taught Experience Surveys.
- One day of bespoke consultancy support from the HEA.

Over the period 2010/11 to 2012/13, the HEA has increased its overall numbers of subscribers by just over 20%, from 166 at the start of this period.

### 4.3.3 Other income

Other income, excluding institutional subscriptions for 2011/12, totalled £1.1 million (with a further £52,000 received for investment income). This includes UK and international consultancy income, income for events, Change Academy and change programmes.

The HEA's key performance indicators (KPIs) for its Strategic Plan 2012-16 include a specific KPI relating to income: 'Income generated from restricted grant funding, subscriptions, other income, but excluding core grant funding'.

The target total income for these categories for 2011/12 and 2012/13 was £6 million. This was achieved in 2011/12, with a shortfall from target in 2012/13 attributed to a number of restricted grant funding sources ending in 2012/13.<sup>6</sup> The HEA's strategic plan target for other income is set at £8 million for 2015/16. The target is based on:

- Increases in income through international routes (including professional recognition, programme accreditation, UKPSF projects, subscriptions from international providers and international consultancy).

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<sup>5</sup> HEA UK Subscription Terms and Conditions (version 7, February 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Per HEA Report and Financial Statements year ended 31 July 2013

- Increases in UK income through: professional recognition, UK consultancy, increases in the numbers of FE provider and private provider subscribers (albeit at a more moderate rate than for international subscriptions).

This is explored in more detail in Section 7 – Future Direction and Focus.

## 4.4 Governance and accountability

### 4.4.1 HEA Board of Directors

The HEA is governed by a non-executive Board of Directors, currently chaired by Professor Sir Robert Burgess, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester. The Board has direct responsibility for:

- Approval of the annual estimates of income and expenditure.
- Approval of the annual business plan and the key objectives of the HEA ensuring the solvency of the HEA and safeguarding its assets.
- Ensuring the continued charitable status of the HEA.
- The appointment and dismissal of the Chief Executive.

The Board currently comprises 12 Directors (who are also charitable trustees) including eight representatives from UK HEIs.

Composition of the Board is determined by the HEA's Articles of Association, which specify the appointment of four of its members by the HEA's owners (UUK and GuildHE) and two by the four funding bodies. Two persons are also co-opted by the Board, to include representation of the student voice. Six other members are appointed by the Board itself (chosen for their skills and experience relevant to the HEA).

The Board has four sub-committees chaired by individual Board members: Finance and General Purposes; Audit; Governance and Nominations; and Remuneration.

Analysis of the Board's operations and of stakeholder feedback (including from Board observers) demonstrates that the Board is operating effectively and provides an appropriate level of governance and challenge to the HEA Executive, through its programme of quarterly meetings and individual Board member engagement through the Board's sub-committees. In our view the Board includes a reasonable balance between institutional representatives and those from outside the sector who have a knowledge and experience of HE.

A concern was raised by some Scottish institutional stakeholders over whether the Board is effective in its coverage of the HEA's work in Scotland. We note that there is both regular formal and informal contact between the Scottish Funding Council and HEA's executive team and the HEA lead for Scotland. It is also the case that one of the Board members currently is a senior lead for learning and teaching in a Scottish HEI. Consequently, we make no recommendation on this issue though we suggest the HEA be mindful of these perceptions.

As part of the HEA's Internal Audit programme for 2012/13, the internal auditors (PwC) carried out a review of governance, with particular reference to Board structure, processes to support Board effectiveness, support for the Board and staff awareness of its roles and responsibilities. This review found no issues of major concern and made a number of minor recommendations including that of increasing the visibility of the Board to the HEA's staff.

#### 4.4.2 Funder and owner oversight

The HEA reports to its funders and owners as set out in its annual grant letters through:

- Annual operating plans (including details of key performance measures for areas set out in the grant agreement).
- Annual reports – a full report for each academic year.
- Annual reports of performance against funding body grant letters – reporting on matters of particular interest to each funding body as per its grant agreement.

Also provided for monitoring purposes to its funding bodies are:

- Quarterly management accounts.
- Bi-annual operational reports – covering a breakdown of activities across various areas of operation.

Funding bodies and owners hold bi-annual meetings with the HEA to review half-year and full-year progress and other key matters arising. These are attended by the HEA's Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and other representatives as required.

The funders and owners of the HEA are also invited to Board meetings as observers.

The funders have told us that these meetings and reports, in general, provide an appropriate degree of scrutiny from their perspective. Where concerns have been expressed by the funders these have been in relation to:

- Presentation of some aspects of reporting information, which from the funders' perspective, does not easily enable differentiation between streams of funding directed to certain areas of operational activity. We understand the HEA and its funders have recently been in discussion about the presentation of progress against activities.
- Structure of the funding agreements and how these might better reflect the outcomes that the HEA is seeking to achieve.
- Whether the longer term presence of funding bodies as observers on the HEA Board is desirable (this is not reflective of the view of the HEA itself or of all funders).

We explore these issues more fully in Section 4.6.5.

#### 4.5 Organisational effectiveness

The HEA has undergone substantial organisational change in the period since 2010, influenced heavily by the 30% reduction in funding from the four funding bodies. One of the most substantive of these changes was the cessation of grant funding to the HEA's 24 subject centres, implemented in 2011/12. The HEA moved its distributed model for discipline-based support to a more centralised model, across four subject 'clusters', managed from its head office in York. In doing so, the HEA aimed to develop a new model to support academic practice through disciplines which was flexible, cost-effective and efficient.

Alongside this, the HEA developed a new strategic plan for 2012-16, which was launched in January 2012.

#### 4.5.1 Organisation structure

At the time of the review the HEA's senior executive team comprised:

- Chief Executive supported by:
- Two Deputy Chief Executives with oversight respectively for:
  - The HEA's four subject clusters and its Leadership and Strategy team (including areas of cross-cutting thematic work).
  - The HEA's Reward and Recognition area; its institutional partnership liaison team; its Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland leads; its Research and Policy team and its international strategy.
- An Assistant Chief Executive with responsibility for the HEA's corporate functions (HR, Finance, Planning and Reporting, Communications and Marketing, Business Development and events, Governance and Information Services).
- Company Secretary.
- Head of Finance.
- Head of Communications.

Below the level of the Deputy Chief Executives, a team of Assistant Directors head up the HEA's main outward-facing areas of operation and these, in turn, are supported by a wider team of Discipline Leads (covering each of the disciplines within the subject clusters), Academic Leads (covering thematic cross-cutting work), and Academic Development Officers.

#### 4.5.2 Discipline support

Under the banner of 'Academic Practice', the HEA now operates its support to academic disciplines through four subject clusters: Social Sciences; STEM; Arts and Humanities; and Health and Social Care.

Each cluster is led by an Assistant Director and all of the current incumbents were recruited into post from summer 2011. Expectations of the role of each cluster lead are:

- To be budget-holder for their cluster and responsible for its strategic direction, aligned to HEA strategic objectives and priorities.
- To manage and lead their teams.
- To act as key point of liaison with the main discipline stakeholders.
- To develop and provide support as needed to the discipline teams in delivery of services.
- To lead cluster strategic projects.
- To manage and lead the awards schemes, journals service and resource centre.

Assistant Directors are part of the senior management team (SMT) and meet monthly with the HEA's Executive Management Team.

The Discipline Leads are responsible for managing the two-way communications between their discipline communities and the HEA's subject clusters. The nature of their work will depend on the volume and type of stakeholders within their discipline network but primarily they are focussed on relationship management and on delivery (including events and visits to

individual institutional departments). They also commission work, including research, and provide facilitation of and support for subject networks.

Two of the current Discipline Leads<sup>7</sup> were drawn from the former subject centres; others have been recruited into post following restructure. A number of staff hold short-term secondment posts (typically 2-year).

Each subject cluster produces regular newsletters for its networks although the pattern differs across clusters. For example, in Social Sciences, they are moving to a single cluster newsletter; for Arts and Humanities there is a single cluster letter plus communications for each discipline.

The HEA also supports academic discipline communities and individual practitioners through its accreditation, recognition and reward, and research and communications teams. In the period since 2011 this has included:

- Ongoing recognition of individuals against the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting (UKPSF). (From 15,000 recognised individuals in 2005 this had increased by 2012/13 to over 43,000.)
- Developments to the HEA's website and creation of an online platform for HEA academic journals. (The HEA reported an increase of over 250% in unique visitor numbers to its website between 2010 and July 2013, noting an increase from recorded visits in the period February to July 2010 of under 96,000 to just under 339,000 recorded visits in the period February to July 2013).
- Expansion of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) to Wales during 2011/12.
- Launch of Teaching Development Grants, International Scholarships, Travel Grants and Doctoral programme.

#### 4.5.3 Academic Practice Advisory Group

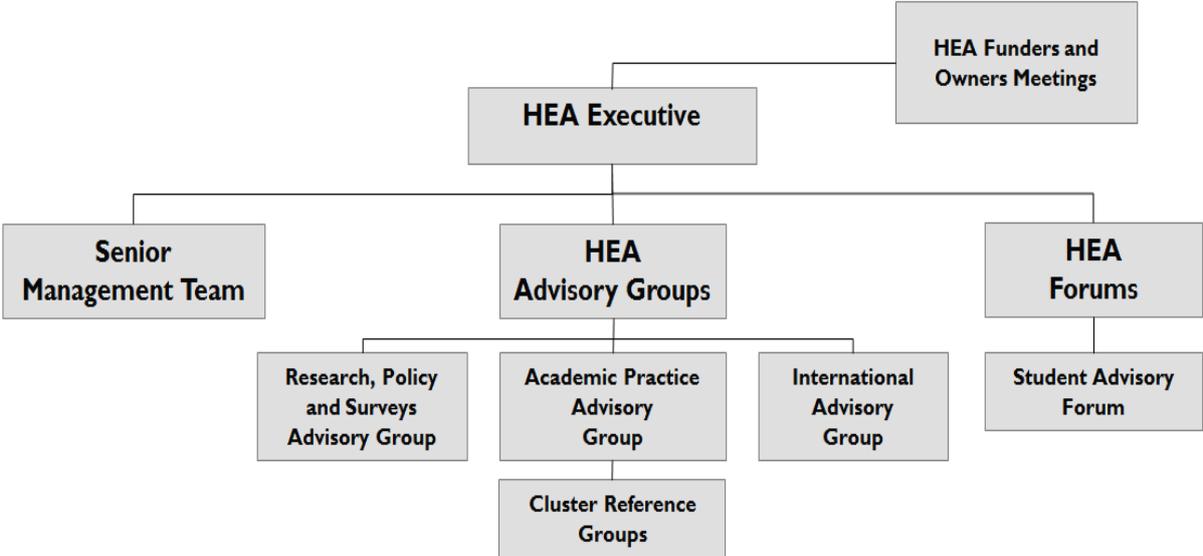
The HEA has recently established an Academic Practice Advisory Group to inform strategic planning and to help strengthen horizontal integration across the work of the four subject clusters. It meets three times per year (with its first meeting held in March 2012) and includes internal HEA membership from across its Academic Practice cluster teams, plus four external members (currently from the Universities of Lincoln, West London, the Institute of Education and the NUS).

Each subject cluster has established a reference group (a network of key discipline contacts). Figure 4 overleaf shows the HEA's Advisory Group structures.

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<sup>7</sup> Originally there were three discipline leads from the subject centres, but one returned to their host HEI. In addition there are four other former subject centre staff at the HEA (one Academic Lead and three academic development officers). One Subject Centre Director was part of the Executive team for the first two years of the new structure.

**Figure 4 – HEA Management Structure – Advisory Groups**



**4.5.4 Team planning**

All clusters follow a similar pattern for activity planning as part of the annual cycle. At the start of the cycle (October/November) each cluster team identifies specific themes and priorities, in alignment with the HEA’s overarching strategic objectives. These are shared and refined with the cluster reference groups and final priorities are also informed by sector reports plus feedback from departmental contacts across institutions.

**4.5.5 Challenges and priorities**

From our consultation with HEA staff and our own observations it would appear that the major continuing challenges for the HEA in managing its support to the discipline networks encompass:

- Focussing resources on activities that are demonstrably able to create clear outcomes and are recognised by discipline communities as having greatest impact.
- Determination of the key primary clients for HEA’s activities – be these conduits into institutions or into the wider discipline communities. The HEA recognises that there are still large numbers of academics that it does not reach and, with finite resources must achieve clarity around who it can work with most effectively and how.

Further findings relating to stakeholder perceptions on the HEA’s support to academic disciplines are explored in Section 5.1.2.

**4.5.6 Institutional liaison and the Partnership team**

In August 2011 the HEA introduced a reconfigured Partnership programme for institutions. The HEA’s Head of Partnerships role has been in existence since the 2011 restructuring although the current individual in role joined the HEA in 2009. The Head of Partnerships is supported by a team of 5 Partnership Managers (all permanent staff) each of whom maintains a network of key contacts across the UK subscribing institutions. Each HEA

Partnership Manager is responsible for acting as a focal point of contact within the HEA for each institution: providing information on the HEA's services, building knowledge and understanding about the institutions with which they work, and providing an annual overview and summary report on the various HEA-related activities in which staff at the institution have been engaged.

Allocation of institutions to Partnership Managers is partly based on regional portfolios, with two members of the team picking up the newer relationships with further education and with private providers.

The Partnership Team meets monthly and works with other HEA teams to obtain 'business intelligence' on activities underway across the sector and on forthcoming events, funding opportunities and other forms of engagement made by academic staff within their institutional portfolio clients.

Since restructure the HEA has introduced a Stakeholder Engagement system to enable all individual engagement entries to be logged – this applies to every front-facing HEA staff member, not only those in the Partnership Team. The Partnership Team uses this system to search by institution, allowing the creation of reports per institution created by extracting information on engagement with the institution within the last six months.

The HEA completes a quarterly analysis (along with a mid-year and annual analysis) of all Partnership Managers' entries of discussions that have taken place, including the identification of emerging key priorities and stakeholder views. More recently the team has started to develop an internal 'Sector Voice', a monthly digest of team meetings that have taken place in the preceding month, including any actions have been taken or are planned.

#### 4.5.7 Challenges and priorities

The key challenges for the HEA in managing its institutional liaison programme include:

- The need to be responsive and to continually adapt in order to address sector demands.
- Ensuring the ongoing success of the partnership liaison activity, in part dependent on how effectively and efficiently the Partnership Management team can tap into wider HEA expertise – and that of its wider networks – on specific matters of interest raised by institutions.
- Making the HEA's systems and processes (including its Stakeholder Engagement system) work optimally for HEA delivery of its services to institutions. This includes both inputs, the quality of information captured, and outputs from the system for the HEA itself and for its client base.

Further findings relating to stakeholder perceptions on the HEA's institutional liaison activity are examined in Section 5.2.1.

#### 4.5.8 Nation support

Currently two Assistant Directors cover targeted support to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: the lead for Scotland also fulfils the lead role for the STEM subject cluster and the lead for Wales and Northern Ireland also covers the role of Head of Partnerships.

For Wales and Northern Ireland the lead is supported by a team of 1.5 FTE with activities managed through a satellite office in Cardiff, co-located with HE Wales.

For Scotland, the team has recently undergone some restructuring and now includes, in support of the Assistant Director, a Policy Officer, two Academic Development Officers (covering Employability and Equality & Diversity – in response to provision made by the SFC on ring-fenced funding in 2013/14), plus student interns providing administrative and website development support.

The Assistant Director for Scotland also fulfils the Partnership Manager role for all Scottish HEIs.

The team's main base is in Edinburgh, shared with Universities Scotland who currently provide administrative support as part of the annual rental charges.

Observations relating to the HEA's provision of services for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including stakeholder views on its performance and progress made, are considered in Section 5.3.

#### 4.5.9 Cross-cutting themes

The work of the HEA's Leadership and Strategy Team falls within the wider remit of 'Academic Practice', which encompasses this team and the four subject clusters. The rationale for grouping these teams within the broader area of academic practice is to further align discipline and cross-cutting thematic work.

Prior to restructure, this team was grouped with the institutional partnership work, with support to the home nations and work around sector surveys (under the 'Institutional Strategy and Change' area).

The themes covered by the team include:

- Employability
- Internationalisation
- Retention and Success
- Assessment and Feedback
- Online Learning
- Flexible Learning
- Students as Partners
- Education for Sustainable Development.

A team of 21 staff support the thematic work in relation to these: approximately 1 FTE per area (a mix of Academic Leads and Academic Development Officers). Some of the Academic Leads work part-time within HEIs and have a specific interest in their theme; others work full-time at HEA but on a mix of thematic areas. Associates are drawn in as needed both on the thematic work and in the disciplines (e.g. for work on the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) or on the 'What Works' programme on retention and success).

#### 4.5.10 Challenges and priorities

From our consultation with HEA staff and our own observations, the HEA's main challenges and priorities for its cross-cutting work encompass:

- Assisting the sector and other teams within HEA in identifying cross-theme ideas and opportunities of relevance and concern to institutions and academic communities.

- Looking to work outside the HEA's more established relationships – with individuals, institutions and other sector bodies – and taking more of a sector 'lead' voice.
- Better clarity for the various 'audiences' of the HEA on how thematic work fits with discipline and institutional support.

#### 4.5.11 Resources – staffing

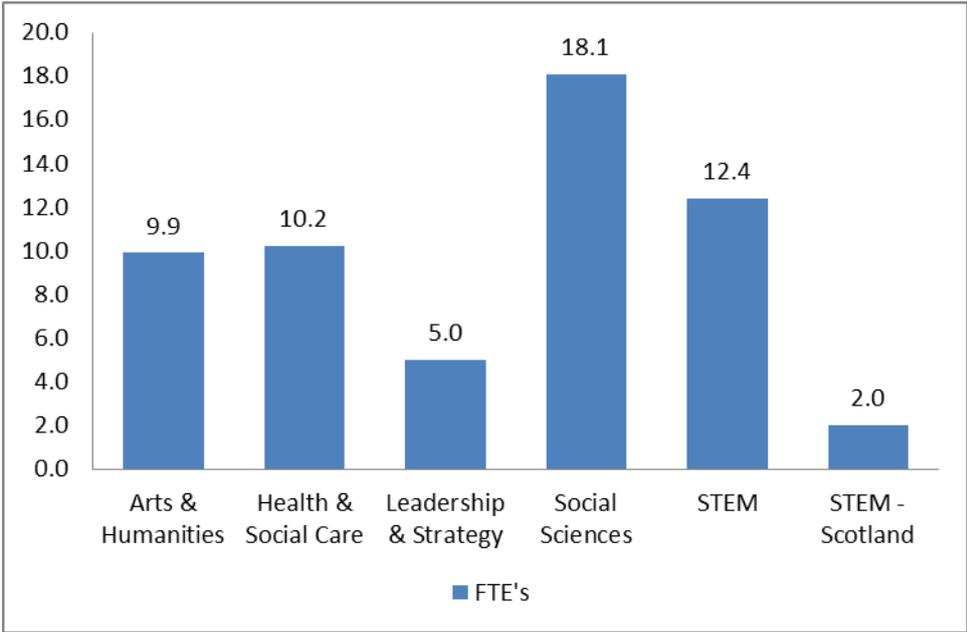
As at January 2014 the HEA employs 202 individuals (182.2 FTE). Of these, 24% of staff are part-time and 35% are home-based. Figure 5 below shows how FTEs are spread across the HEA's areas of operation. Grades are shown from B upwards (where B represents the most junior grade):

**Figure 5 – HEA FTEs by Grade and Business Area**

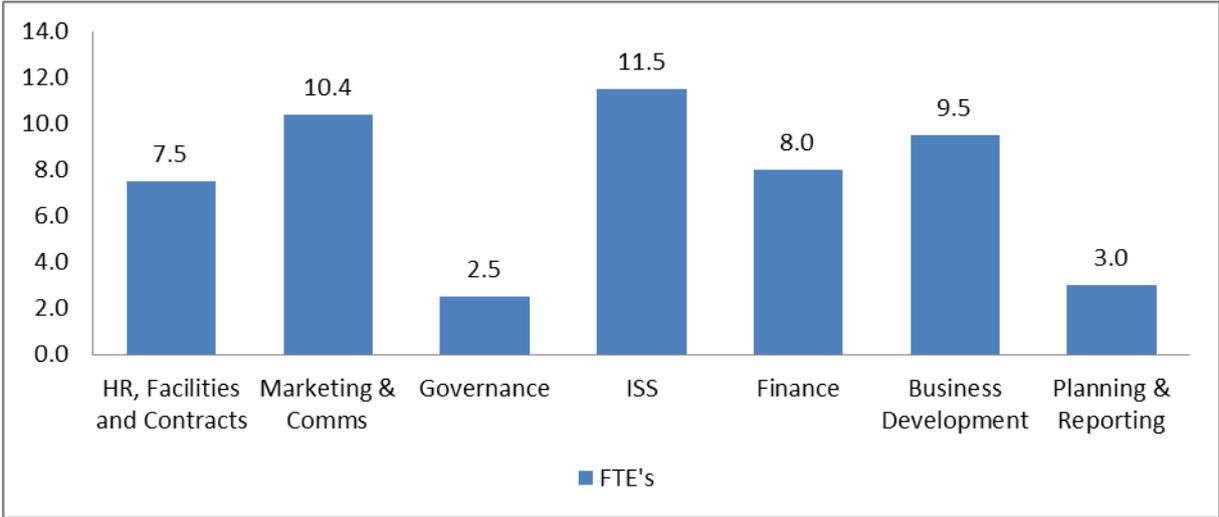
Area	B	C	D	E	E-F	F	F-G	G	G-H	H	I	SPH	SPOT	Total
Academic Practice (includes Scotland team)	6		2	1.8	14.8		26.9	0.9		5			0.2	57.6
Chief Executive Office	2	1										3.8		6.8
Leadership & Strategy	4				5.6		4.6							14.2
Surveys, Research & Policy		2	1	1	2.5		1	1		1				9.5
Wales, NI & Partnerships	1			1	2				3	2			2	11.0
Organisational Effectiveness	5.5	2	17.2	15.4	2	3	2.6	4.7						52.4
TechDis	1.4	1	1.6	2.6		1.8		1			1			10.4
Accreditation & Recognition	6.8	1			5		2.4	1						16.2
International Strategy			1		1									2.0
Planning & Reporting / Services	2													2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>21.8</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>37.5</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>182.1</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Further breakdowns of FTEs across the two largest areas are shown in Figures 6 and 7 below.

**Figure 6 – Distribution of FTEs among Academic Practice Areas**



**Figure 7 – Distribution of FTEs among Organisational Effectiveness Areas**



As a consequence of the substantial restructuring undergone by the HEA there has been a degree of ‘churn’ in respect of a number of senior and middle management roles since 2011, in part relating to the structural changes around discipline support but also as a result of a number of departures. We note that where some posts have been combined within the period there is a potential natural synergy (as for the role of Head of Partnerships also covering nation responsibilities for Wales and Northern Ireland, enabling closer management of both institutional and sector relationships). The rationale for other structural arrangements is less clear, however, and we understand that this will be subject to consideration by the new Chief Executive.

On the available evidence it is our view that the HEA has made strong progress in its approach to managing its people, including:

- Updating the structure of key roles (in particular the Academic Development Officer role) with the aim to create greater consistency of capability and expectations amongst its staff base.
- Undertaking a 'skills audit' across its staff and associates base and revising its associate contracts.
- Creating more frequent opportunities for staff to work together – the HEA held two organisation-wide 'away-days' during 2012/13 and every team now holds monthly meetings. Staff working predominantly offsite are encouraged to be based onsite at York at least once a month.
- Changes to its performance management processes – to provide more of an emphasis on professional growth and development and to simplify ratings.
- Changes to the staff engagement survey and review of the Staff Council which is responsible for providing a staff 'voice' including establishing a staff survey working group who tackle some of the cross-cutting themes from the survey.

In our engagement with the HEA it is clear that senior managers recognise and are seeking to actively manage some of the ongoing challenges it faces including:

- Managing a broad and partly remote staff base (35% of staff are remote workers).
- Attracting and developing a complex balance of capabilities around sector, discipline or specialist expertise and commercial and client awareness.
- Creating a clarity of purpose that is recognised, is effectively communicated to staff and forms the basis of staff's own individual development and performance objectives.
- Supporting managers to get the most from their teams in delivery of services.

For the HEA, one of its key challenges has been determining the primary capabilities it needs from its core staff and how it can adapt its staff development and attraction and recruitment to create a flexible network of 'trusted experts'.

A proportion of the HEA's wider resources are sourced through its Associates Network and we have examined how it manages these key resources.

In March 2013, the HEA produced a paper based on an internal review of its use of associates. This found that:

- The HEA had (between August 2011 and January 2013) issued over 900 associate contracts, to the value of over £3.45m, with some 450 individuals. This was built upon the extended network of academic associates (the development of which was approved by the HEA Board in November 2010). As at January 2013 there were 1,500 associates registered with the HEA's network.
- The HEA's use of associates in delivering services and activities against its strategic plans was viewed as essential to maintain an 'agile' and flexible approach to meeting resourcing needs.
- There is an inherent risk to be managed around ensuring quality of output through the wider network of resources available to the HEA via associates.
- The need to review the HEA's approach was particularly timely given the HEA's current Business Development Plan and, related to this, the organisation's aspirations to extend its income generation routes in the next few years. The ability to effectively and

efficiently deploy associate resources (as well as internal staff) to consultancy work was viewed as a critical requirement.

- The review noted a number of issues which had arisen over the period between establishing the new extended network to the point of the review, namely, reported concerns on the process for selecting associates for specific projects; the quality of associates registered, the ability to search effectively for associates and need for more clarity around pay and expense reimbursement. It also noted that there were significant costs involved in administering and managing associates.

The internal review considered these areas in detail, along with consideration of the areas and types of activity for which associates were typically utilised by the HEA and findings from other sector organisations using associate networks to support their work.

The review made a number of recommendations, some of which have already been addressed, with others being progressed. Progress against recommendations to date includes:

- Review of all associates on the register (in line with expected future HEA needs) – this commenced in March 2013.
- Gap analysis of associates reviewed against HEA needs and recruitment of new associates as required.
- Defined policies and processes for: associate selection via the gateway system; use of contracts, standard day rates and inclusion of expenses; monitoring of assignments and obtaining feedback on associate performance.
- Policies and processes in progress for selection and recruitment of associates.
- Implementation of a feedback process for all assignments using associates (although we note that, as at January 2014, no feedback has yet been sought as all assignments are still in progress). All approved associates are listed within the gateway database and this is reviewed annually. This database is used for resourcing all associates and negative feedback means an associate is removed from the system.
- Skills audit of existing HEA staff – all staff are listed within a database with their skill set – in the same format as the external associate database.
- Requirement for all staff to consider the use of internal staff before selection and deployment of associates – HEA staff are required to search for suitably skilled internal staff with availability before using the associate list.
- Financial targets to each of the Assistant Directors: each team has a requirement to generate income of £20k from external consultancy through using their staff.

The HEA has also provided evidence of its revised selection mechanisms for deploying either associates or its own staff to work on core funded projects or consultancy activities. From the evidence viewed these appear to be working in line with recommendations made.

There is evidence to suggest that the HEA has already started to address and develop its approach to the identification of suitable internal (and external) resources in the provision of services to the sector.

#### 4.5.12 Management information, planning and target setting

In relation to its Strategic Plan for 2012-16, the HEA has established a series of KPIs covering four areas: Impact, Quality, Reach and Income. Performance targets have been set annually and KPI performance is reported quarterly to the Executive and bi-annually at funders and owners meetings.

The KPIs have been developed in consultation with staff and sector representatives and, after a period of initial running, the HEA is now starting to review these; for example, they have expressed an interest in extending the current 'Reach' targets to show numbers of academic staff achieving Fellow status at the discipline level to address potential under-representation in some discipline areas.

Further analysis of the HEA's targets relating to 'Impact' is given in Section 6.5.

Operational planning and the prioritisation of activities for 2012/13 was based on initial preparation of team plans by individual teams, followed by scrutiny of all plans by the Executive. For the 2013/14 cycle the HEA has sought to refine the process by:

- Further building in impact measures.
- Involving a greater spread of staff in the process and co-ordinating team meetings prior to planning sessions to get teams to work together and plan activity.
- Using the UKPSF as a focus for planning activity (this having been revised in 2011 with input sought by the HEA from the sector to inform its development).

The HEA has established a management 'dashboard' which is fed from its Stakeholder Engagement system and allows the creation of fixed and ad-hoc reports. This has been in operation for three years. Its Stakeholder Engagement survey (October/November 2012) included a question for institutions on feedback relating to their annual institutional reports in terms of content and layout. Feedback received indicated that institutions wanted more graphical representation of data and information and the HEA has responded to this in the design of its 2012/13 reports.

It is evident that progress has been made since 2010 in the HEA's approach to developing plans and processes to capture and manage information on its client and partner base. Some of the main areas remaining now for development relate to:

- Adapting the Stakeholder Engagement and dashboard systems and processes to capture and present both quantitative and qualitative information of value to the executive. This includes a need to review the type and quality of information that is captured into the stakeholder engagement calendar and system by staff across the HEA.
- Reviewing (with user input) the form and content of online information made available to its institutional client base, in conjunction with developments on content for institutional reports.

We also note that the Stakeholder Engagement system is not yet being used as a means of identifying potential customers or stakeholder contacts. The HEA should consider how it can be developed in future to support marketing activity.

#### **Recommendation 1**

The HEA should further develop the Stakeholder Engagement system and associated processes to capture and report a full, qualitative picture of its engagement with institutions and with sector bodies. This should include the use of information to identify scope for further targeting and marketing of existing services (we note that the HEA has already started to produce 'Sector Voice' reports for its senior management team based on partnership engagements with the sector).

#### 4.5.13 Student liaison

The HEA's Board includes representation from the NUS with whom it also works to run the Student-Led Teaching Awards Scheme and two new 'partnership awards' first made in July 2013 (one award for student and staff partnerships and one for Student Union and institutional partnerships). It has involved student input through its 'Students as Partners' programme and, as part of this, recently established a pan UK Student Advisory Forum.

The Forum includes approximately 20 student members selected through a competitive recruitment process. Student members of the Forum are not a 'formally' representative group but were recruited because of a shared interest in learning and teaching enhancement.

The Forum met three times during 2013 and members have provided planning input for the HEA's annual conference and annual subscribers' meeting and participated in a panel discussion. This group is still in its formative stages and the HEA intends to explore how to best use the Forum in its next planning phase. The Student Advisory Forum is managed through the HEA's Leadership and Strategy Team.

It is our view that the establishment of such a Forum is a positive development in that it enables the HEA to broaden its reach and engage with a wider audience in its capacity as a 'sector listening voice'. From our consultation it was clear that the existence of the Forum is not yet widely known and we would encourage the HEA to communicate its activities and intentions in this area to institutional stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 2**

HEA activities in relation to its Student Advisory Forum should be promoted more actively (where not already being done so) as part of its general and specific communications with the sector. This would be to i) promote participation and ii) to affirm to the sector how the HEA is seeking direct input from students to inform its work on student engagement.

#### 4.6 Distribution of funding

In considering the HEA's approach to the distribution of its core grant funding we have reviewed the HEA's current approach in respect of:

- The planning cycle and allocation of resources from income receivable to activity streams.
- Establishing processes and systems to track and monitor spend against funding streams.

##### 4.6.1 Income sources – overview

The HEA is primarily funded by grant income. This includes both ring-fenced grants for specific projects and general grant income to fund normal operations. The HEA has agreed a three year plan with funders to reduce the total general grant income by 10% per annum, a

30% total reduction. The financial year 2012/13 was the final year of these reductions. In 2012/13, grant income equated to 83% of the total income received. This is a reduction from 85% in 2012 and 88% in 2011. Figure 8 below summarises the main income sources for the HEA.

**Figure 8 – Income Extract from HEA’s Audited Financial Statements 2012/13 and 2011/12**

	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
	£000	£000	£000
<b>Income</b>			
Funding body grants	16,580	19,395	24,357
Other income	3,374	3,273	3,196
Investment income	54	52	66
<b>Total income</b>	<u>20,008</u>	<u>22,720</u>	<u>27,608</u>

‘Other income’ includes HEA’s external consultancy activity and institutional subscriptions.

#### 4.6.2 Core grant funding income – from funding bodies

The HEA receives both specific purpose grants as well as grants for general operations. Its core grants are funded through grant agreements with the four funding bodies (HEFCE, HEFCW, SFC and DELNI).

A proportion of the HEA’s funding is for ring-fenced project areas. Jisc as well as other funding bodies provide grants for specific project activity. A summary of the HEA’s grant funding is shown in Figure 9 below.

**Figure 9 – Extract from HEA’s Audited Financial Statements 2012/13 and 2011/12, Note 2**

	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
	£000	£000	£000
<b>Funding Body Grant</b>			
HEFCE	13,096	15,446	20,328
SFC	1,586	1,866	2,090
HEFCW	668	782	813
DELNI	247	286	318
Jisc (formerly Joint Information Services Committee)	681	638	793
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills <sup>8</sup>	-	-	10
Other funding body grants	302	377	5
	<u>16,580</u>	<u>19,395</u>	<u>24,357</u>

<sup>8</sup> Now Department of Business, Innovation & Skills

The level of grant income awarded to the HEA is set by agreement between the four main funding bodies. Awards are then outlined in an annual grant letter which is sent from each funding body to the HEA. These letters contain both the UK-wide and national priority areas the HEA is required to address as part of development of its own strategic priorities.

**4.6.3 Other income**

The HEA’s other primary income streams include both external consultancy activity and subscriptions from institutions. A summary extract from the HEA’s financial statements is shown in Figure 10 below.

**Figure 10 – Extract from HEA's Audited Financial Statements, Note 3**

	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2010/11</b>
	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>
Institutional subscriptions	2,258	2,164	2,183
Other income	1,116	1,109	1,013
	3,374	3,273	3,196

These income streams are growth areas for the HEA. As the organisation seeks to increase financial stability it has identified the need to increase other income streams. This is evidenced through a specific objective within the 2012-16 Strategic Plan:

***Securing financial sustainability***

... we will seek to secure new sources of revenue, for instance by providing services to international institutions or agencies and expanding our subscription base.”<sup>9</sup>

Subscription income increased by 4% between 2011/12 and 2012/13, with 34 new subscribers during the year. Other income, including events, consultancy and investments increased overall by 1%.

The HEA’s financial statements for 2012/13 also report on outturn against their strategic key performance targets, including their target for income generated from restricted grant funding, subscriptions and other income but excluding core grant funding. The total outturn for 2012/13 is £5.265 million. The HEA’s Business Development plan forecasts on non-core income are considered further in Section 7.

**4.6.4 Annual planning cycle**

The HEA allocates funds to its activities on the basis of its annual Operating Plan cycle. This is the process through which the HEA’s key priorities for the coming year are set. Each of the HEA’s business areas then set out their response to those priorities and budgets are allocated.

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<sup>9</sup> HEA Strategic Plan 2012-16

There are no conditions attached to allocation of the non ring-fenced income. All income streams are centrally pooled and can be allocated to any activity prioritised and agreed within the HEA's agreed Operating Plan.

The main stages of the annual planning cycle are set out in Figure 11 below.

**Figure 11 – HEA Annual Operating Plan Cycle**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Output</b>
Nov-Dec	Supporting evidence to inform the Operational Plan's development gathered and reviewed.  This includes: subscriber needs, sector context, customer feedback and the HEA's Strategic Plan.	HEA Planning Priorities and External Context Scoping Paper
Jan	Broad priorities and key risks defined for each Assistant Director's area.	HEA Priorities Paper
Feb	First iteration of the Team Operational Plans, including: objectives, performance indicators, impact and indicative budgets.  These contain the specific information on how each of the HEA teams will respond to the HEA priorities. The plans are prepared by the Assistant Directors for review at Board level.	First version of the Operating Plan
Early March	Team Operational Plans and indicative budgets – approved.  The Team Operational Plans are challenged and agreed at HEA Board level.  Funding is allocated to the teams on the basis of contribution to the overall HEA priorities. Each team is required to identify how their activities will contribute based around the strategic performance indicators of Income, Reach, Quality and Impact. The indicative budgets set out in the draft plans will be agreed, reduced or increased.	Agreed Team Operational Plans
Mar-May	Additional information is added to the agreed Operational Plans to cover the specific activities and the monitoring mechanism.  This includes: Performance Indicators, Task Owners, date and budget.	Team Operational Plans (table version)
Jun-Jul	Implementation of Annual Operational Plan, including:  Detailed financial costing and profile.  HEA services and call deadlines communicated externally.	

An Internal Audit review on the HEA's financial planning and budgeting process was completed in 2013. This considered the HEA's overall budgetary controls and the design and operational effectiveness of processes for budgeting and forecasting. The review identified no significant issues with the existing structure and framework.

The HEA was found to be operating a clear timetable around budget setting, with budget monitoring at appropriate levels and satisfactory review and reporting to address any significant variances month on month. We understand that recommendations made during the audit on providing additional training to staff and timely scheduling of budget review were addressed by the HEA by autumn 2013.

#### 4.6.5 Links to funding body grant letters

The grant letter priorities feed into the first stage of the planning process in November. They feed into the Planning Priority Areas that the HEA will adopt for the following year – sitting alongside the HEA's Strategic Plan and other factors within the external context.

The funding outlined within the letters is assumed to be pooled.

A change in grant funding will impact the overall level of funds the HEA has to allocate across all of their activities. There is no single direct link between funds received from any one funding body and the work of the HEA – the majority of projects cut across several different outcomes and nations.

The HEA provides an annual monitoring report of impacts delivered against the grant letter requirements.

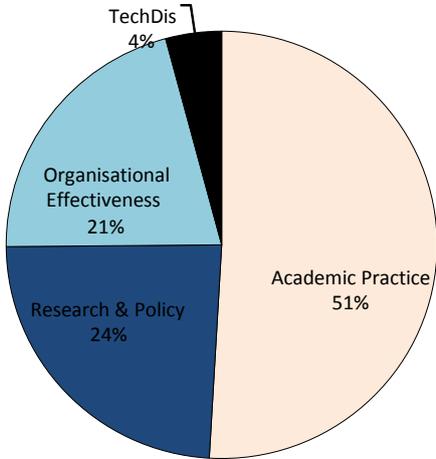
Potential issues with this process are:

- HEA operates UK-wide. We understand it has been agreed that HEA will focus on maximising contribution to the wider UK rather than any nation specifically. Therefore, nation-specific priorities set out in the letter become one of the considerations in the wider view that HEA takes in the annual planning process. For the financial year 2013/14, HEA are able to present indicative information on national performance but this will be based purely on percentage of income received from each of its four funding bodies rather than an accurate split, based on the actual use of that income. This means it is not possible to identify where the income from each of the national bodies has been allocated on the basis of the current structure of the grant letters.
- The timing of receipt of grant letters can fall well into HEA's annual planning cycle (i.e. after spring). This means that any significant or unexpected changes can disrupt the standard planning process. However, the content does not significantly vary year on year so this is not currently a major issue.

4.6.6 Allocation of resources and monitoring of spend

The HEA’s allocation of funding per team (based on 2012/13 financial accounts data) is shown in summary in Figure 12.

Figure 12 – Allocation of Funds by Team<sup>10</sup>



A further breakdown of the allocation of resources within the Academic Practice team (from the 2012/13 budgets) is shown in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13 – Academic Practice – Breakdown of Funds Allocation<sup>11</sup>

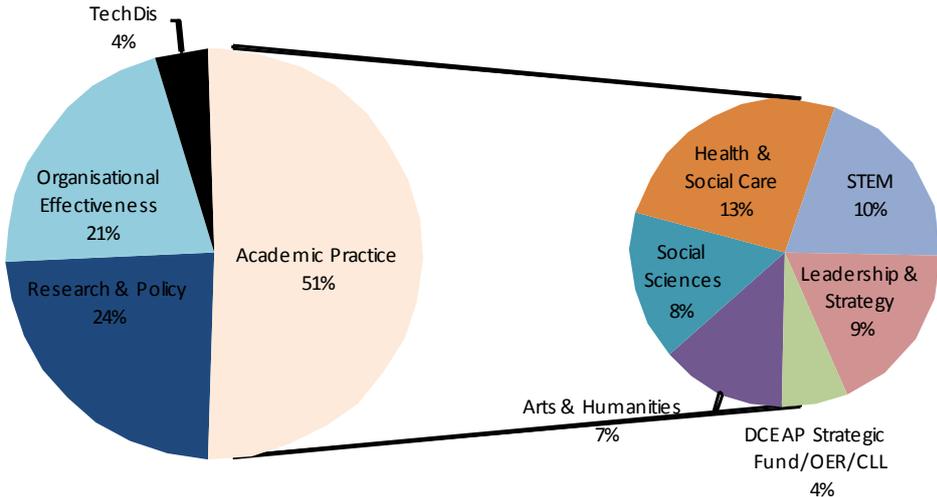


Figure 13 shows the spread of funding allocated to activities across the four discipline clusters (STEM; Health & Social Care; Social Sciences; Arts & Humanities), as well as additional allocation to other areas grouped within Academic Practice, i.e. Leadership &

<sup>10</sup> Taken from 2012/13 Final Management Accounts – HEA Budgeted Expenditure

<sup>11</sup> Taken from 2012/13 Final Management Accounts – HEA Budgeted Expenditure

Strategy (thematic cross-cutting area) and the HEA’s work on the Changing the Learning Landscape (CLL) and Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives.

**Figure 14 – Research & Policy – Breakdown of Funds Allocation<sup>12</sup>**

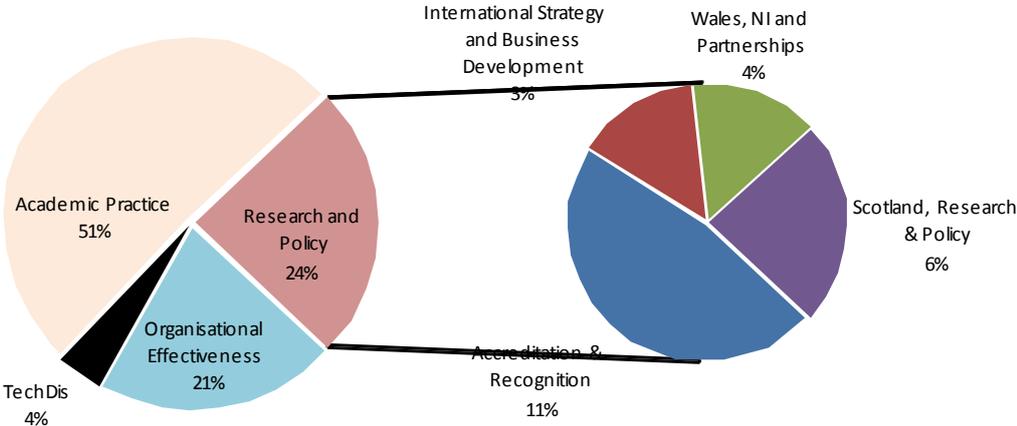


Figure 14 shows the spread of allocated funding across the areas within the HEA’s strategic plan outside discipline-based support (outside the area of Organisational Effectiveness, which covers primarily corporate and business functions, such as HR and Finance), namely:

- Specific support allocated to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Accreditation and recognition activities.
- Specific support provided via the HEA’s Research & Policy team (grouped together in 2012/13 with the team supporting Scotland).
- Resource allocation to the Partnership and Institutional Liaison team (grouped together with the Wales and Northern Ireland cost centres).

The main observations we would make in respect of these areas are that:

- The cost centres for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do not necessarily reflect wider activity that is benefitting stakeholders across these nations. As noted in section 4.6.5 above, it has not been possible to identify, through the HEA’s current management accounting and reporting structures, where activities within discipline areas, through research or through institutional liaison, can be attributed to each nation.
- The resources deployed to supporting partnerships and institutional liaison reflect the moderate size of this team (currently five full-time staff, plus the Head of Partnerships).
- Collectively, the HEA’s allocated funding across the four discipline clusters represents the largest area of deployed resource out of all of its strategic priorities.
- The main area of expenditure for the HEA is payroll. For 2012/13 this was £7.4m of total expenditure. Other significant areas are project grants and third party contracts.

Figure 15 overleaf maps HEA’s support areas (i.e. primary areas of its services to the sector) to its 2013/14 UK-wide priorities (as reflected in its Operating Plan):

<sup>12</sup> Taken from 2012/13 Final Management Accounts – HEA Budgeted Expenditure

Figure 15 – Report Category Mapping

Internal Monthly Management	Strategic Report to Funders (UK wide priorities, plus Organisational Effectiveness)	HEA Area of Support
Academic Practice	Academic Practice	Disciplines
	Institutional Strategy and Change	Thematic Priorities
Research and Policy		Change Services
	Research	
	Partnerships	
	Teacher Excellence	Recognition
		Accreditation
		Reward
		Business Development & Events
	Organisational Effectiveness	Organisational Effectiveness
Chief Executive's Office, Governance		

The HEA manages expenditure at project or activity level. Costs are recorded against specific projects or activities. Activity, as set out within the annual Operating Plan, is based on a team-by-team “bid and challenge” process (as described above according to the annual planning cycle).

Reporting on spend is completed at three levels:

- **Monthly internal accounts:** reporting at this stage is centred on the structure of the HEA – to provide information on team performance.
- **Quarterly report to funders:** this provides added information through the split between pay and non-pay of expenditure against each of the UK-wide priorities within grant letters.
- **HEA support area:** this covers each of the HEA’s operations. These include: Discipline Areas, Nations, Services and Themes.

Reporting on expenditure against the HEA’s UK-wide priorities is compiled by aggregating relevant HEA Support Areas.

#### 4.6.7 Operating plan and monitoring of activities against the plan

The HEA's latest annual Operating Plan (as seen for 2013/14) brings together, for each service area:

- Total staff and non-staff budgets (for target income and expenditure).
- Aims and intended means of quantification of each area of activity, i.e.:
  - Objectives (intended achievements).
  - Performance Indicators (linked to the KPI areas of Income, Reach and Quality).
  - Impacts (outcomes) together with their intended evidence source.

The Operating Plan for 2012/13 set out operational priorities against each strategic priority, although these were not set out at the level of individual teams.

Assistant Directors and Operations Managers (leads for each of the major areas of service) meet with the finance team on a monthly basis to review actual expenditure and income receivable against budget.

Assistant Directors are also responsible for providing evidence of impact against the operating plan for their areas. For 2012/13, the Assistant Directors provided an end-of-year narrative report on outcomes for their areas (this included a mixture of descriptive outcomes and selective citing of outputs, e.g. numbers of events or activities completed in year). The Planning and Reporting team provided, alongside this, the quantitative data on activity against HEA's strategic KPIs.

Performance indicators in the 2013/14 Operating Plan comprise input and output measures, such as level of positive feedback received on specific services; volumes of event attendees; website and other online resource visits/downloads; and income receivable, such as external project funding.

Proposed sources of evidence of impact comprise, for example, impact case studies evidencing positive changes to practice; feedback from customers accessing HEA services reporting improvements to practice; citations of journal articles; increased uptake of services and awareness of HEA services and activities.

We understand that, for 2013/14, the HEA is developing a more systematic review process including:

- Monthly highlight reports (summary reports per service area).
- Quarterly reviews of KPIs and activities.
- Six-monthly reviews of impact.

#### 4.6.8 Conclusions

Based on this evidence it is our view that the HEA has made substantive progress in developing its operational planning to encompass outcome measures. Further work is still to be done to embed the active management and review of performance into regular operations (we note that this is already starting to be addressed by the HEA).

#### **Recommendation 3:**

The HEA should consolidate monitoring and reporting against intended outcomes from activities, in conjunction with further development of presentation and sharing of outcomes with funders and subscribing institutions.

#### 4.7 Summary

The HEA has put considerable effort into reviewing and revising key elements of its structure, processes and systems, following its re-organisation in 2011. The 30% funding cut over a 3-year period necessitated a comprehensive review of the scope and extent of its operations, and evidence reviewed indicates that the HEA has made significant progress in the period to refocus its strategic aims (as outlined in its Strategic Plan 2012-16), to communicate these out to the sector and to maintain the core of its services to the sector, including:

- An increase in the number of subscribers to the HEA's services from 166 in 2010/11 to 200 in 2012/13.
- Revision of the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning (UKPSF) in 2011 following sector consultation.
- Recognition of over 43,000 individuals against the UKPSF, in comparison with 15,000 recognised by the end of 2004/05.
- Creation of its Partnership Team, responsible for supporting subscribing organisations and providing a sector 'listening' role.
- Rollout of the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) to Wales in 2011/12.
- Increases in HEA website visitor numbers, from just under 96,000 in February-July 2010, to just under 339,000 in February-July 2013.
- Launch of a number of new schemes and services including: the Student Advisory Forum, Teaching Development Grants and a new online platform for HEA academic journals (in 2013).

There is clear evidence too that the HEA is continuing to review and improve its operations to respond to identified issues and we would cite its internal reviews of its deployment of resources (including associates), its work to develop and refine strategic and operational planning cycles and recent introduction of 'task and finish' groups to address matters of key concern as examples of this.

One of the most significant areas that the HEA has changed in the period is its model of support to discipline communities, not least in response to its substantial reduction in funding. In doing so, it has also sought to address the need for greater consistency and oversight across the networks as a whole and made a start to looking at cross-disciplinary interests. We would note that the area of 'Academic Practice' still represents the largest in terms of budget in respect of the HEA's sector-facing services. Nevertheless, the HEA's resource base has been reduced as a result of restructure and the allocation of personnel to a number of its priority areas (cross-cutting themes; disciplines) appears to be spread fairly thinly. This perception is shared by a number of its stakeholders and some concerns have been raised (see Section 5 for more details) on its ability to deliver consistently across such a broad range of areas.

Identification of how and where the HEA has deployed its resources in support of services provided at a national level is challenging given the current reporting structures. We observe that there is scope for the HEA and its funders to improve on the existing reporting

(preferably on an outcome basis), to allow the HEA to demonstrate how it is achieving against its own strategic priorities and the priority areas of its funders.

We strongly endorse the actions being taken by the HEA and its funding bodies to review the existing grant letter structures to incorporate a defined set of outcomes on which the HEA can report in line with funding body expectations. This should allow each funding body to identify and monitor the outcomes intended through core grant funding. We understand that this is being considered by the funders and HEA for the forthcoming annual cycle.

The organisation demonstrates an awareness of many of the important challenges ahead and where it wishes to focus its attention in the next stages. In doing this it is supported by a Board which provides a good level of both challenge and expertise and a number of key staff with strong links into the wider sector.

## 5 STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

This section provides an analysis across the HEA's wider communities of interest of sector perceptions and experience of the HEA's provision of services, its approaches to working with the sector, of the relevance, quality and value of its work and how it has demonstrated that it is meeting the needs of the sector at large.

For the purpose of this review, the following have been defined as primary stakeholders of the HEA:

- The HE and further education learning and teaching communities, including:
  - Heads of institutions.
  - Senior managers within institutions responsible for oversight on institutional strategy relating to learning and teaching.
  - Discipline specialists and academics working within and across specific discipline areas.
  - Staff working in learning and teaching development within and across institutions.
  - Professional services staff with a role in learning support.
  - Practice educators in work-based learning settings.
- Policy makers in government departments and agencies with an interest in the areas of learning and teaching enhancement.
- The funders and owners of the HEA (HEFCE, HEFCW, SFC, DELNI, UUK and GuildHE).
- HEA partner bodies (sector agencies and others with whom HEA is or has planned joint delivery of services and activities).
- The HEA Board.

The findings in this section are drawn from:

- Responses to a survey conducted in September and October 2013, issued via the HEA's institutional subscriber network, and publicised via UUK and GuildHE.
- One-to-one interviews (by telephone and face to face) held with:
  - Vice Chancellors, Principals and other heads of institutions.
  - Pro Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors with strategic remit for learning and teaching in their institutions.
  - Other institutional representatives nominated on behalf of the above.
  - Senior representatives from sector bodies, government departments and agencies.
  - Funders and owners of the HEA.
- Written responses submitted in response to the review key lines of enquiry from heads of institutions and senior managers with strategic remits for learning and teaching.
- Feedback from HEIs and HE in FE providers across a series of five focus groups held during September, October and November 2013.

- Interviews conducted during visits to six institutions selected for institutional case studies. During our visits, we conducted interviews onsite with a mixture of the following:
  - Senior staff with remit and oversight for the institution’s learning and teaching enhancement strategy.
  - Other key staff involved in HEA-supported or funded activity (such as change programmes).
  - Staff involved in institutional projects and programmes to support the enhancement of learning and teaching and/or the student experience.
  - Staff involved in the accreditation of HEA-endorsed programmes.
  - Heads of School and Programme leads (those who had engaged with HEA activity).
  - National Teaching Fellows at the institution (if applicable).

Our engagement with representatives across each of these groups considered:

- The nature and characteristics of their own and their organisation or institution’s relationship with the HEA and how this has evolved in the period since 2010.
- Their overall assessment of the HEA as an organisation (and for specific areas of its remit) in terms of:
  - Its performance, capability and responsiveness to its stakeholders.
  - Relevance and reach in what it does.
  - Extent of its contribution to their organisation, discipline and/or to the wider sector in the period since 2010.
- Observations on any comparative influences on learning and teaching practice, strategy development and the development of policy.
- Observations on how well the HEA is perceived as having demonstrated its ‘value for money’ to the sector.
- Their assessment on how well the HEA is positioned to respond to future sector needs.

We have sought to show where the views across different stakeholder groups are similar in relation to certain topics and also where there are patterns of variation that appear to be associated with different groups or types of consultee.

### **5.1 The HEA’s core activities – what it does**

As outlined in Section 4, the HEA’s Strategic Plan for 2012-16 sets out four strategic priorities, against which it has developed its programme of work.

Those consulted for the review were asked to comment on their assessment of the relevance and quality of the HEA’s approach to each of the first three strategic priorities.

### 5.1.1 Recognising, rewarding and accrediting excellent teaching

#### **Survey responses**

Survey respondents were asked to provide their assessment of both the level of relevance and the quality of the HEA's approach to the three strategic priorities, namely: 'Supporting learning & teaching practice and strategy (for their institution or organisation)'; 'Supporting individual recognition, reward and accreditation for excellent teaching'; and 'Influencing policy, future thinking and change'.

Across all respondents, the area of 'Supporting individual recognition, reward and accreditation' was highlighted as of greatest overall relevance. Just under 71% of all those surveyed identified the HEA's approach to be 'Completely' or 'Very' relevant in this area, compared to 58% for 'Supporting learning and teaching practice and strategy' and 48% for 'Influencing policy, future thinking and change'. Similarly, 71% of respondents to the survey scored the quality of the HEA's approach to this area as 'Excellent' or 'Good'.

*"The UKPSF has raised the bar in terms of individual recognition."*

This general pattern of views was confirmed from analysis of responses by type of institution or organisation; by nation; by type of role of individual respondent; and by discipline, although there is some variation of the perceptions of relevance by type of organisation. For all types of organisation 'Supporting individual recognition, reward and accreditation for excellent teaching' is the most relevant of HEA's objectives, but this is less relevant for Pre-1992 HEIs than other organisational types. Pre-1992 institutions also rate the relevance of the other two strategic aims comparatively lower than the other types of institution or organisation.

Overall, individuals from sector bodies perceive all objectives as more relevant than those from HE providers. Academics consider them to be less relevant than other groups. Respondents from England perceive the HEA's relevance in respect of each strategic objective to be higher than those from the other home nations. There is some variation evident in the perceptions of HEA's relevance across the disciplines (though the numbers were low and need to be treated with caution). Arts & Humanities and Cross-disciplinary respondents rated these higher than others. STEM and Health & Social Care rated the relevance of HEA for all objectives lower than other discipline areas.

#### **Interviews and written responses from institutions**

Survey results are supported by the views of senior leaders within institutions for this area of the HEA's work. 28 institutions responded through this route, of which 11 were from Post-1992 institutions; 13 from Pre-1992 institutions; 3 HE in FE providers and 1 private provider of HE.

For these consultees, the areas of professional accreditation and reward are those in which the HEA's profile is most prominent and it is generally perceived to be performing strongly in this respect.

Cited most frequently as evidence:

- Clarity and focus in the HEA's work around the development of the UKPSF and, through this, enabling institutions to shape links to career progression. This is also

supported through the recent evaluation of the impact of the UKPSF<sup>13</sup> which found evidence of its influence through the development of accredited courses, institutional continuing professional development (CPD) frameworks and in supporting wider reward and recognition for excellent teaching.

- Promotion and support for the NTFS.
- The HEA's Fellowship scheme and its relevance both to individuals and institutions interested in personal development and reflection and in raising the profile of learning and teaching.

*"The introduction of the portfolio/self-accreditation route is a sign of the maturity of the relationship between the HEA and institutions."* (Vice Chancellor (VC), Post-1992 institution)

*"The professional standards framework is of strategic interest in terms of offering the organisation the opportunity to benchmark ourselves on a national basis."* (HE in FE provider and recent subscriber to HEA)

*"The professional framework... is enormously helpful both to individual academic staff and to institutions."* (VC, Pre-1992 institution)

### **Case studies**

All six case study institutions cited the HEA's support for professional accreditation and individual teaching career progression as a positive influence and the HEA's services were welcomed in these areas.

Where concerns have been raised (through all consultation routes) in relation to the HEA's work for this area they relate to:

- Some perceptions of ambiguity around the process to be implemented for 'good standing' from 2016.
- Interest in seeing further work to explore how the UKPSF can be related back to the broader context of academic work (including research, doctoral supervision, knowledge exchange etc).
- A perceived lack of clarity on the relationship between the UKPSF and the NTFS.
- Some concerns around the extent and depth of feedback provided to unsuccessful candidates for the NTFS.
- Some concerns that the HEA does not offer a route to recognised 'excellence' beyond the NTFS and a perception that the profile of successful candidates for the NTFS is limited beyond that of a specific group.
- Concerns from some areas of the sector (for example: postgraduate institutions) that the UKPSF whilst of some relevance does not align directly with typical staff careers in these institutions.
- A perceived conflict between a 'sector-owned' UKPSF and requirement for institutional subscription to the HEA to participate.

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<sup>13</sup> Measuring the impact of the UKPSF (SEDA, June 2013)

We note that the 2012 evaluation of the NTFS, commissioned by the HEA,<sup>14</sup> also raised queries relating to the NTFS and its relationship with the UKPSF. In its December 2012 response to recommendations, the HEA confirmed that it would be taking a series of phased actions to address sector concerns.<sup>15</sup>

Some case study consultees have observed there is scope for further development around Fellowships, building on what has already been achieved and providing current and new fellows with the means for more structured ongoing support.

*“There need to be clearer directions about, engagements with and support for, fellows at all levels – encouraging colleagues to engage is fine but they need to see longer term responsiveness and support, as well as the opportunity to make a difference from their own experience.”*

Other academic staff consulted have expressed the view that the HEA would benefit from greater clarity on the types of support for institutions to promote excellence (“...a conflation of ‘teaching excellence’ with ‘promoting HEA Fellowship’ does not really answer this point”). Section 6 reviews the work undertaken to date by the HEA in evidencing the impact and outcomes of its activities.

Given that these perceptions and comments arise from a broad range of consultees we make the following recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

The HEA should be clear, for institutional subscribers and its Fellowship network, on what it is able to offer individuals and institutions in promoting excellence in teaching, and how it is developing its support to fellows. This could include ‘repackaging’ of its services to individual fellows following the launch of the Code of Conduct for fellows, and also further developing its research capabilities to provide individual practitioners with an evidence base around innovation.

##### **5.1.2 Supporting effective practice (including discipline-based support)**

This strategic area covers a broad range of activities: within and across institutions and agencies; relating to both the HEA’s discipline-focussed work and to its work on cross-cutting priorities.

As can be seen in Section 4.6 above it also represents the largest proportion of the HEA’s allocated budget (as covered in the budget area ‘Academic Practice’).

The HEA’s Strategic Plan for 2012-2016 identifies the primary areas of activity for this area as:

- Supporting individual disciplines and promoting interdisciplinarity:
  - Subject-specific support, impact-focussed events and resources for teaching staff.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ntfs/evaluation>

<sup>15</sup> HEA response to the evaluation of the NTFS:  
[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/alldisplay?type=news&newid=2012/NTFS\\_review&site=york](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/alldisplay?type=news&newid=2012/NTFS_review&site=york)

- Working closely with discipline associations and networks and ensuring opportunities for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary developments.
- Supporting professional staff:
  - Providing support to staff working alongside academics, including librarians, student support services, careers staff and e-learning specialists.
- Addressing challenges:
  - Supporting the HE community to rise to contemporary challenges, such as satisfying greater expectations with less resource, flexible delivery, equality and diversity, assessment and feedback, education for sustainable development, reward and recognition, employability and internationalisation.
- Encouraging reflection and innovation:
  - Commissioning pilot projects, research syntheses or new research into learning and teaching and disseminating the findings to enhance practice and shape policy.

### **Survey responses**

A majority (58%) of survey respondents viewed as ‘Completely’ or ‘Very’ relevant the HEA’s approach to the sector for: ‘Supporting learning and teaching practice and strategy’ and 64% of respondents identified the approach as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’ quality.

When looking at variances across responses, some patterns emerge:

- There is a moderate variance in responses by type of respondent role. These have been classified as roles relating to an institution (Senior management; Academic; Professional support) or as non-institutional (Sector agency; Representative body; Professional body). Non-institutional respondents rate more highly, on average, the relevance and quality of the HEA’s services compared to institutional respondents. Of the latter, respondents categorised under ‘Academic’ roles show the lowest average scores.
- Respondents from Pre-1992 institutions rate the relevance and quality of the HEA’s services slightly lower compared to Post-1992 institutions and those categorised as ‘Other’ (which include small and specialist institutions and one private provider).
- Variances based on disciplines with which respondents are affiliated show a more marked difference between the subject cluster areas. Given that, for some discipline areas, there are only a small number of responses (Arts & Humanities and Health & Social Care in particular) it is difficult to draw conclusions from the findings. However, there are a higher overall number of responses relating to the STEM and Social Sciences discipline areas. Of these, the quality of the HEA’s overall approach to ‘Supporting effective practice’ is viewed equally; the relevance of its approach (to their institution or to them as an individual) is viewed more favourably by the group of respondents from Social Sciences disciplines.

The survey also invited responses on perceived relevance and quality of the HEA’s approach to supporting individual disciplines. Of a total of 77 and 72 survey respondents who chose to assess the relevance and quality of the HEA’s support to their discipline respectively, just under 50% viewed the HEA as ‘Completely’ or ‘Very’ relevant (a further 22% identifying the HEA as ‘Moderately’ relevant). Of these respondents, 48% viewed positively the quality of

the HEA's support to their discipline (33% as 'Good' and 15% as 'Excellent') with a further 35% considering its support to be 'Average' or 'Fair'.

Of these responses, the largest number came from the STEM and Social Science cluster areas. The largest single discipline area (per numbers of responses) was 'Education', and in the survey analysis these have been shown separately (the results are more favourable for this single discipline compared to the average for Social Sciences as a whole).

Of a minority of respondents (12) citing the HEA's level of support as 'Poor', six identified their discipline area as Economics. The Economics Network was cited favourably by a number of these consultees as an alternative source of disciplinary advice and support.

A minority of Arts & Humanities responses (7) were comparatively much more positive on the quality and particularly the relevance of the HEA's support to their discipline in the period covered by this review.

### ***Observations from case studies***

We asked selected groups of academic staff, consulted as part of case study visits, for their perspectives on the HEA's support to their disciplines.

We also asked senior staff interviewed for their views of the HEA's approach to supporting all disciplines under its new structure.

Four of the six institutions made observations on the perceived variability of engagement with the HEA across the discipline areas within their own institutions (as represented through academic faculties and schools).

A common observation was that individuals, rather than academic departments, tend to be most consistent in engaging with the HEA's discipline cluster teams and that the perceived value of the HEA and its services is felt more strongly at the individual level. This is despite the fact that HEA offers a variety of services at the academic departmental level (for example, Teaching Development Grants – both departmental and collaborative schemes).

Some of this is a matter of visibility of activity across the institution as a whole and we note that the HEA's Annual Institutional reports do not always allow for capture all aspects of engagement between disciplines within an institution and the HEA's subject cluster teams.

In certain institutions (for example, within one of the research intensive HEIs), consultees perceived links with the HEA at the discipline level to have been stronger historically with certain subject networks. This was attributed in part to strong relationships formed and remaining with the former subject centres in these areas (STEM), and partly to stronger cultural emphasis on professional development, for vocational subject areas in particular (Health).

For other institutions, the strength of links between academics working within disciplines and the HEA is sustained through involvement in national programmes (for example, on Assessment).

In some institutions, the views of senior staff differ from those of academics with links to the HEA. In one Pre-1992 institution, for example, senior managers felt there had been a gap in support to certain disciplines with the demise of the subject centres; yet staff, working within

faculties with established links with the HEA were more positive on the resources and events that they had accessed.

For one institution, it was observed that many academics had engaged with the HEA at the level of the cross-cutting enhancement themes, rather than through subject networks.

A minority of staff consulted (at all levels of seniority) told us that they perceive the HEA as being overly focussed around an established 'HEA community' that does not necessarily represent views of staff working more widely across academic disciplines. It was argued that this can, in some institutions, militate against a wider 'reach', although we have also seen evidence that poor perceptions of the HEA amongst certain groups of staff does not preclude positive engagement with others.

### **Observations from interviews and responses from institutions**

There were no marked differences of view by type of institution among the case study group. Positive perceptions of the HEA's approach to supporting disciplines for their institution identified a range of factors including:

- Valued support provided at the individual and departmental level (including for example Teaching Development Grants, change programmes).
- Uniqueness of approach "...that there is a subject lead and that there that there is more awareness of the very different approaches that we take to teaching in our various disciplines make the HEA unique." (Pre-1992 institution)
- Greater visibility of the HEA's activities working across disciplines through convergence of subject clusters (although views on this were mixed across the group).

Concerns (mentioned specifically by four of the HEIs in this group) in this area related to:

- The perception that there is a lack of visibility for 'outsiders' on where to seek information within the HEA – and a potential disadvantage where institutional staff are not already proactively involved with discipline teams within the HEA.
- Perceived imbalance (for some discipline areas) on the type of institution predominantly involved in HEA activity. This is countered with the acknowledgement that for other aspects of service (e.g. Change Academy projects) the HEA is able to engage with a range of HEIs both by type and geographically.
- Perception amongst some institutional staff consulted for the review that the closure of subject centres had lowered the HEA's profile within their institution and that uptake for HEA discipline-based services were low: "*Staff feel that the one part of the HEA with which they engaged has been removed*" (Pre-1992 institution); "*Some colleagues who formerly engaged with subject centres still feel that the HEA is more remote than under the previous arrangements.*" (Pre-1992 institution)
- Perceived tardiness of response from the HEA in responding to calls for support (for instance, one Post-1992 institution cited an example of delays in receiving a response from the HEA to a request for consultancy support for one of their academic departments – following which the institution eventually found internal resources).

#### **5.1.3 Working with disciplines and sector specialists**

A challenge in gauging the HEA's influence across the academic community is that of reach. Whilst those who have been consulted through this review will have some degree of visibility

of and engagement with the HEA's work, their perspectives will inevitably reflect only a small proportion of the sector as a whole.

Nevertheless, there are a number of common messages evident through consultation across institutional and discipline specialists:

- The HEA would appear to have a significant impact on a cross-disciplinary network of individuals. This is reinforced where specific individuals have sought to promote Fellowship status within their departments.
- Engagement with the HEA is often variable across disciplines within the same institution: this is in part attributable to historically stronger links which have 'stood the test of time' and where disciplines (such as some of those within health and social care for example) had established professional development as part of their approach to learning and teaching.
- Links with disciplines are perceived in some areas (not necessarily for the same disciplines across all consultees) to have been lost with the restructuring. Where links are stronger, the quality of key individuals is often cited as a contributing factor:

*"Dynamic and beneficial, largely as a consequence of the close liaison between ourselves and the Discipline Lead."* (Head of Learning & Teaching Strategy)

*"The discipline specific support has helped contextualise the HEA for our specialist staff."* (Education development specialist)

- Reduction in personnel resources with the cessation of the Subject Centres is noted by some consultees as a contributory factor in their perceptions of a reduced range and depth of service available for their discipline; others observed that the services provided and their use by the sector were not always of consistent quality or reach:

*"The subject centre approach was excellent and focused on the needs and identities of academics in the disciplines. However, some were more developed and used than others."* (Head of Learning & Teaching Strategy, Pre-1992 institution)

- Notwithstanding the degree of variability that persists, and the reasons behind this, one clear view is that suitable and targeted communications are essential in continuing to raise the HEA's profile in the area of discipline support:

*"There is... the perception that perhaps the support for disciplines is not as strong as it used to be through the subject centres and I think that is a matter of reaching the practitioners through the appropriate communication."* (PVC, Post-1992 institution)

The feedback from consultees suggests that, despite continued investment and re-profiling of its model of support to disciplines, there is further work to be done by the HEA to evidence what positive impact this is having across individuals, departments and faculties, for institutional leaders, in particular, but also for wider academic communities that may not be regularly engaging with the HEA.

## Recommendation 5:

The HEA should (i) better evidence the impact and outcomes of its work with discipline communities and (ii) improve its communications with institutional leaders and those wider academic communities that have not been subject to regular interaction.

### 5.1.4 Work on cross-cutting themes

In general, where consultees have had direct involvement in HEA activity around cross-cutting work, responses have been positive on the quality and influence of HEA's input.

We note here the many clear examples (cited by institutions consulted for this review, and the separate case studies collated by the HEA itself) of the outcomes from involvement in change programmes, in collaborative projects working across schools, faculties and institutions and participation in sector-wide events facilitated or funded through the HEA (for example: the ASPIRE conference, Employability workstream, Changing the Learning Landscape programme).

A number of consultees, both institutional and from sector bodies, have however raised issues around the following areas:

- Concerns that the HEA is too broad in its remit and is 'spread too thinly' – encouraging a tendency to aim to become 'experts in everything'.

*"Regrettably, there is evidence that strategic priorities such as the explicit commitments to sustainability are being marginalised because of the way that the HEA uses the resources currently available to it."* (Sector agency)

*"The wide and diverse range of activities undertaken by the HEA means that senior managers at the Academy give the impression at times of being pulled in several different directions at once."* (Sector agency)

- A wish to see more evidence of the HEA's partnership work with related sector, professional and specialist bodies, and clear differentiation between what the HEA can offer both with and independently of these bodies (for example, cited in relation to employability and work with institutional careers services by one institutional consultee were the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services and Network of Employability Developers, both membership bodies).

In our view, there is merit in the HEA taking a tighter focus around its cross-cutting thematic work, concentrating on a smaller number of themes, or rotating themes on an annual basis, but to a greater level of detail.

## Recommendation 6:

The HEA needs to adopt a tighter focus on fewer strategic priorities and deploy its resources accordingly.

### 5.1.5 Support to professional staff

The HEA's work with professional associations, as well as its support to individuals working in these roles within institutions is valued, where this is visible or as a result of direct involvement by consultees.

Others (for example, agencies working cross-sector) have observed that the HEA's work would benefit from a renewed focus on the role of professional support and its relationship with learning and teaching outcomes:

*"The HEA has been a useful and valued source of support (especially financial) and professional guidance to many university libraries."* (Sector agency)

*"The HEA's recognition service and the NTFS are important to academic librarians who teach."* (Sector agency)

*"The HEA has tried to develop themes that run across disciplinary boundaries and we feel that some of these, e.g. Internationalisation, Sustainability, would merit greater recognition of the contributions of professional support staff."* (Sector agency)

### 5.1.6 Influencing policy, future thinking and change

#### **Survey responses**

The quality of HEA's approach in this area was rated positively by 51% of survey respondents (as either 'Excellent' or 'Good') and a majority rated the HEA's approach here to be 'Completely', 'Very' or 'Moderately' relevant. However, in comparison with the other two strategic aims of the HEA ('Supporting learning & teaching practice and strategy' for their institution or organisation; 'Supporting individual recognition, reward and accreditation for excellent teaching') this was rated by respondents lower on average (on both the relevance and quality of the HEA's approach).

Variances in ratings are fairly low across all types of respondent (by type of institution/organisation and by role type), although the relevance and quality ratings are both slightly lower for Pre-1992 institutions compared to other types of institution or organisation responding to the survey.

In analysing stakeholder perceptions of the HEA's work in support of this area, it is necessary to distinguish between:

- Contribution to sector-wide policy debate
- Contribution to institutional policy or strategy
- Research and policy work, including the work of the HEA's Surveys team

#### **Contribution to sector-wide policy**

Consultees were in general less persuaded of the evidence for the HEA's influence and profile around sector-wide policy formation and change. A minority were equally sceptical that the HEA should seek to have a substantive role in this area. Other consultees queried the visibility of the HEA's engagement in national policy work and how the HEA is consulting with the sector to shape this.

*"There is clearly a policy strand to the work of the HEA – policy think tanks, round table, consultation etc. However, it is not always clear what the outcomes of these are and how they are taken forward in the wider arena."* (VC, Post-1992 institution)

The areas of the HEA's work that were cited by consultees as of value, and that contribute to, this area include:

- Alliances with key sector partners on matters of sector-wide interest (for example: HEPI; UUK; NUS; work around the Grade Point Average scheme).
- Networks (including the PVC Network) as platforms for generating breadth and depth of sector debate.
- High profile research, for example the Dimensions of Quality<sup>16</sup> report (“*Some of the publications of the HEA (e.g. Gibbs) are very thought-provoking, and are clearly influencing policy, e.g. QAA's guidance on information*”).

Many consultees expressed a wish to see the HEA as more prominent in its position in key sector debates (one case study consultee cited as example the recent debate around contact hours) – a stronger ‘sector lead voice’ to complement its ‘sector listening’ role: “...*it would be helpful if the Academy’s presence and voice were heard more clearly in these debates*”.

In our view, it is important that the HEA continues to have a role in informing and challenging institutional and sector thinking, and in thought leadership around learning and teaching enhancement. We recognise that this will inevitably present a challenge for the HEA in managing the inherent tension between providing a service and engaging in policy debate. We also recognise that much of the HEA’s work on policy will not by its nature be fully visible to the wider sector. Nevertheless, in our view to be fully effective in this role, the HEA will need to continue to build its profile and credibility across the wider HE sector.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

The HEA should build upon the profile and breadth of its contribution to sector-wide policy development to better demonstrate where the outcomes from this engagement are represented in its own work (for example, next steps being taken following HEA-led research; providing an informed ‘challenge’ role with institutions and sector leaders; further development of its global presence on learning & teaching).

#### ***Contribution to institutional policy and strategy***

Where institutional senior teams were able to see clear affinities between the strategic themes of the HEA and those of their own institution, they tended to be positive about the potential for HEA support in this area. Examples cited included:

- Thematic national events.
- UKPSF development.
- HEA work around sector surveys (including the PRES and PTES).

This indicates that the HEA needs to clearly focus on how it can further demonstrate to institutional leaders and senior managers where these affinities exist. Recommendations 9 and 10 below also relate to this observation.

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Dimensions of Quality’ (Prof. G. Gibbs, HEA, 2010, 2012)

### **Research, policy and survey work**

The HEA's work in funding, supporting, collating and disseminating key evidence-based research was viewed by both institutional and sector body consultees as critical to the overall role of the HEA. This was viewed as key, both for support to effective practice and in raising the profile of learning and teaching across the sector and beyond.

*“Support for research into good pedagogical practice and its wider dissemination is one of the best features of the HEA.”* (VC, Post-1992 institution)

Individual practitioners in receipt of grant funding and institutional consultees who could see the positive impact of changes made as a result of investment through funding of grants to their organisations were particularly positive about the influence of the HEA in this respect.

Perspectives on the value of research and research syntheses provided through the HEA, and its dissemination were more mixed. Many consultees were very supportive of the HEA's activities in the sourcing, commissioning and publication of research. Issues were raised across various stakeholders, however, and these typically related to:

- Differences of opinion with regards to the degree of influence of research into practice.
- Confusion or lack of visibility on how to navigate through existing resources.
- Concerns that the HEA's research does not always provide a clear focus for understanding potential solutions for key issues. The 'What Works' student retention and success programme (a joint initiative funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and HEFCE and co-directed by the HEA and AoA) was cited positively by a number of consultees as evidence of where the HEA can work successfully in this respect.

*“The influence of the HEA on practice, from a research and development perspective, has made considerable impact on the sector. Institutions are now orienting themselves much more towards providing engaging learning experiences for students, and they are clear about the role the HEA plays in assisting them.”* (Sector agency)

*“Good teachers should be teaching well and attracting others to ideas that foster this – rather than trying to write ‘research’ articles that nobody in mainstream research and teaching academia reads.”* (Academic, Institutional consultee)

What is valued by sector stakeholders from the HEA's research work? Some of the characteristics of the HEA's most successful and well-received activity in this area appear to be:

- Well-planned collaboration and selection of key partners: (*“HEA works best when it is commissioning or working with great thinkers and experts to create a really plausible evidence base”* – Sector representative body).
- Clear and practical applicability of findings – in particular for discipline areas and senior leaders within institutions and clear synthesis of cross-sector findings (such as the 'What Works' report).
- Shorter, contextualised research briefings to provide 'springboards' into topics of strategic interest (particularly for institutional heads and senior management teams).

- Effective dissemination through a wide range of routes and to a wide sector audience including but not limited to events (“...webinars throughout the year on relevant areas have been good and made so much more accessible across the country” – Pre-1992 institution).

## Recommendation 8

The HEA should:

- (i) Revisit the current balance around dissemination routes to make more effective use of online and remote technology to share its research work where this is not already being done.
- (ii) Build upon the existing characteristics of valued research activity and capability, namely: well-planned collaboration and selection of key partners; clear and practical applicability of findings; and shorter, contextualised research briefings to provide ‘springboards’ into topics of strategic interest.

### 5.2 Working with the sector

A clear finding on what influences stakeholder perceptions of the HEA’s value and contribution to the sector is not only *what* the HEA does but *how* it works with institutions, individuals and the wider sector.

Views of heads of institutions, senior managers working within institutions on learning and teaching enhancement and those working in specific discipline or specialist areas were mixed in their perceptions on the level of success that the HEA had achieved over the period in building these relationships, yet all confirmed the importance that relationship management has to play in the HEA’s reputation across the sector.

#### 5.2.1 Working with institutions

The HEA’s work with institutions operates at a number of different levels and this is underpinned and reinforced through its own operational structures. A summary of the HEA’s reconfigured approach to managing institutional relationships is shown in Section 4.5.6.

At their most successful, these relationships are reciprocal, use information about current engagements to inform planning for future activity between the HEA and the institution, and provide institutional contacts with clear connections to other HEA work and sector work of potential interest, thus providing a basis for further maturing of both the HEA-institutional relationship itself, and for institutions to gain greater value from ongoing partnership with the HEA in the medium to longer term.

*“The annual meeting was helpful to put the services in context.”* (Pre-1992 institution)

*“We are pleased to see that engagement does not simply reflect ‘receipt’ of services/attendance at events but also involves engagement through service, such as reviewing Teaching Development grants, on committees, as associates, and through the delivery of research projects, publications.”* (VC, Pre-1992 institution)

Those factors, which appear to have most positive influence over the perceived strength and value of the relationship from institutional perspectives, include:

- The person who maintains and drives the relationship within the institution. For some institutions, this is a member of the SMT; in others the role is delegated to a Head of Learning and Teaching unit or similar.
- Stability of personnel in role – both for HEA Partnership Managers and within the institution.
- Proactive and responsive Partnership Managers and other HEA key contacts – in following up enquiries and providing access as required to named contacts in other areas of the HEA.
- Long-standing prior relationships between institutional personnel and the HEA, as part of the HEA's networks, as fellows (particularly Senior or Principal).
- A history of successful engagement activities between the HEA and the institution, including support for implementation of CPD frameworks; programme accreditation; and where the HEA's involvement has been structured and developmental – successful Change Academy programmes, for example. Of key importance here too is that senior managers within the institution can recognise where their own strategic priorities are reflected in those of the HEA, through services being provided.
- Active engagement via related networks such as the HEA's PVC Network.
- Clarity on what the HEA offers to the institution, and how this can be used to best effect: “...you get out what you put in”.

### 5.2.2 Relationship trajectory in the period since 2010

Of the six case study institutions interviewed, three offered observations on this, noting that there had been a significant improvement in the last two years in the clarity of presentation of the HEA's services to their institutions and in accessibility of HEA support. Also commented upon favourably by one institution was the more general observed improvement in focus demonstrated by the HEA, compared to its position with the sector prior to its restructuring.

Survey respondents were asked to comment on:

- The character of their relationship or partnership with the HEA.
- The effectiveness of HEA's management of the relationship.
- Any observed key changes in the period.

Qualitative responses received were classified by the review team as 'Positive', 'Mixed', 'Neutral' or 'Negative' overall in nature.

On the character of the relationship, of a total of 103 responses received, 53 were positive, 5 were mixed, 33 were neutral, and 12 were negative.

On the effectiveness of HEA's relationship management, of a total of 98 responses, 56 were positive, 10 were mixed, 22 were neutral and 10 were negative.

On observed key changes in the period, 16 of 49 consultees made specific reference to improvements in the nature of the relationship, by reference to either its management by the HEA, the extent of engagement by institutional staff, clarity around roles and responsibilities, or general effectiveness. A further three positive comments noted the HEA's supportiveness (e.g. in assisting with the institution's Fellowship award structures and through the HEA

Partnership Manager). Five comments were more negative, three of these citing issues around strength of support for disciplines; and two on the perceived workload of HEA staff.

There are some variations in responses according to analysis of responses by nation, by institution or organisation type.

Responses from English institutions were in general more mixed in their views, in comparison with those from the other home nations (for example: 52% of English institutions against 68% of those from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland provided a positive comment on the 'effectiveness of the HEA's management of the relationship' with their institution).

Responses from individuals from Post-1992 institutions and from sector agencies or sector representative bodies were notably more positive in their perceptions of 'effectiveness' of the relationship management and on the character of relationship with the HEA, compared with Pre-1992 and other types of institution.

Senior managers and professional support roles within institutions were more positive in their perceptions of the character and effectiveness of the relationship, as were individuals from sector agencies/representative bodies, compared with staff in academic roles across institutions.

Where institutional consultees have raised concerns about the quality of the relationship, these typically relate to:

- A perceived lack of clarity on the HEA's 'value proposition' to their institution and, in some cases, a concern that the HEA has not been able to adequately demonstrate an understanding of their strategic concerns, or of work already underway within the institution to further learning and teaching enhancement.

*"Staff often see the HEA as being aimed primarily at the newer institutions. HEA does not often appear to try to engage institutions such as [named] whose uptake and engagement is low. Rather, it expects us to compete with those institutions who are embedded in the HEA's culture and networks and we often lose out to these."* (Senior Manager, Learning & Teaching, Pre-1992 institution)

- Perceived concerns (from a minority of consultees) about the calibre of personnel tasked with developing the HEA-institutional relationship or of those offering services in other areas of HEA activity. In some instances, institutions have commissioned the services of those who are independent advisors or who have previously worked with the HEA and are seen as expert in their area, whilst resisting further direct engagement with the HEA in this regard.

## **Recommendation 9**

The HEA should develop its model for relationship management with institutions to ensure common areas of interest across groups of institutions are represented and addressed through their services. These might be research-led institutions; new and smaller institutions developing their approaches to learning and teaching enhancement; institutions with mature, well-embedded approaches. This also relates to Recommendations 7 and 10.

### 5.2.3 Reporting to institutions

The HEA provides, for each of its subscribing institutions, an annual institutional report summarising all of the engagements across the institution with the HEA over the period. Reports are shared via each key institutional contact and are used as a reference point for liaison meetings between Partnership Managers and the institution.

A range of institutional consultees remarked upon the HEA's approach to sharing information about its activities and, whilst the visibility of activity is welcomed (as is the approach taken by the HEA in using such information as a springboard for more in-depth discussion), the reports are still viewed by many as being a representation of a 'snapshot in time'. Institutional reports represent a summation of 'outputs' of activity (funding received, awards and Fellowships gained, programmes accredited, numbers of staff who are HEA fellows).

What is felt to be lacking from the current reports is a sense of how the actions being taken as a result of institutional liaison are reflecting a depth of understanding of the institution's own priorities and where the outcomes of both institutional and HEA activity are being realised over time.

*"The annual report on activity has improved over time...the annual partnership meeting perhaps needs a little more clarity and purpose."* (Post-1992 institution)

We are clear from the consistent feedback provided by institutional consultees that the HEA would benefit from further consideration of the audience(s) for both these reports and for the liaison activity undertaken with institutions.

#### **Recommendation 10:**

The annual institutional reports should be developed to (i) communicate the HEA's 'value proposition', (ii) respond and recognise individual HEI context, and (iii) include actions and next steps agreed between the HEI and the HEA as part of ongoing engagement.

### 5.2.4 Activities with institutions

#### ***Interviews and written responses from institutions***

As is outlined above, the HEA works across a wide range of areas, themes and disciplines in line with its strategic priorities. The activities that have been most frequently cited by senior managers, Heads of Learning and Teaching units (or equivalent) and academic leads for HEA accredited programmes as of most value (and most visible for those in these roles) include:

- The UKPSF and contribution to CPD framework development within institutions, and accreditation of programmes.
- Change Academy and change programmes (where these can be seen to have emerged from, or linked to, institutional strategic aims around learning and teaching enhancement and where the HEA has been able to offer early and continuing support – one institutional consultee citing their Retention and Success 3-year programme in this regard).
- Grant funding – valued for its capacity to support development for early career academics, although some queried the attraction of small grants to some types of

institution (large research-intensives with multi-million research programmes, for example). We note that the HEA does offer both departmental and collaborative awards as part of its Teaching Development Grant scheme, in addition to individual awards within the same scheme.

Consultees were mixed in their views relating to consultancy days offered to institutions as part of subscription. Whilst many were positive and had taken advantage of these, a minority were concerned about the HEA's capacity to be able to support this should institutions take up the offer. Others were concerned at the potential loss of days with changes to the HEA's subscription model.

### **Observations from case studies**

Valued services provided by the HEA cited by the six case study institutions (and which had had a positive impact across the institutions and for individuals) included:

- For all six institutions, the HEA's support for professional accreditation and individual teaching career progression – including the value of the UKPSF and HEA's role in coordinating this on behalf of institutions.
- Access to, and facilitation of, key networks, including for example the PVC Network and National Teaching Fellows networks – mentioned by staff across four of the six institutions.
- Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from across the sector on shared areas of interest (and on collaborative projects).
- Two institutions, where staff had participated in change programmes, were positive on HEA's professional contribution to these projects and on the wider impact these had had on institutional practice.
- In particular, for the two smaller institutions visited, small grants for individual teaching staff at different stages of their careers were welcomed and seen as an important part of wider contribution to the professional development of staff.
- Longer-term projects – as a source of expertise to inform sector debate

A key theme from the consultation is the sometimes very marked difference in perceptions of the HEA's value between senior teams and those working directly with HEA funded projects or who have seen the impact of activity on local practice.

It also suggests that there is further work for the HEA to do in engaging with senior teams within institutions. Recommendations 7, 9 and 10 also relate to this point.

#### **5.2.5 Networks**

As noted above, the HEA's work in facilitating key networks, including the PVC Network, were generally valued highly by institutions and other consultees.

Views from some institutional consultees on where the HEA could strengthen its position were in relation to the development of key communities of practice across the sector, not necessarily represented through current HEA networks but of interest to institutional contacts (leads on 'student experience' directorates for example). It was felt that this would help to strengthen links between institutions and the HEA.

#### **Recommendation 11:**

The HEA should consider the scope for supporting networks of new communities of practice (such as institutional leads on the student experience) to reflect strategic interests across institutions, in addition to the existing networks (i.e. PVC; discipline networks).

#### 5.2.6 HE in FE

In its “UK Policy Overview for Funders and Owners” (December 2012), the HEA notes that “...a key concern for all four UK governments is ‘widening access and success’” and that amongst other features of sector reform, the increase in the number of FECs allocated HE student places for the first time in 2012/13 (in England) represents a “...significant shift in the overall make-up of the HE sector in England”. Related to this is the importance accorded to further education providers in the delivery of HE in Wales and in Northern Ireland and the structural changes in Scotland.

During 2012, the HEA started to offer institutional subscriptions to FECs and private institutions that undertake significant volumes of HE provision. As at July 2013, the HEA’s annual subscribers within the further education provider sector totalled about 40, representing approximately 10% of the UK-wide FEC market<sup>17</sup>.

For this review, we have engaged with 42 further education providers: 11 who responded to the survey, 3 providing written responses, 27 through a Mixed Economy Group (MEG) hosted focus group; and 10 institutions participating in separate focus groups held in Wales and Northern Ireland. Eight of these institutions contributed through more than one consultation route.

HE in FE is provision which is expanding and playing an increasingly important role in delivering quality provision locally. Much, but by no means all, provision delivered in FECs is vocationally based, and there are distinct models for delivery across the home nations.

We were given positive evidence of HEA activity in the further education sector, as outlined below.

#### ***From focus group participants and through written responses in England:***

- Services provided through the Health and Social Care discipline cluster were seen as very useful with good sub-group meetings and lots of excellent, useful research and activity taking place.
- Also mentioned positively were the discipline support for Engineering (supportive with good resources) and for Art and Design.
- Development, promotion and support for implementation for the UKPSF.
- HEA funding for research events.
- Dedicated, named contacts provided for institutions from HEA personnel (regular visits and assistance in publication of research papers).
- Bidding, funding and quality advice provided by the HEA.
- Range of student engagement initiatives (recently announced by the HEA).

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<sup>17</sup> Based on figures for UK-wide FE provision from <http://findfe.com/>

- The 'College-based HE' (formerly HE in FE) web pages were seen as particularly helpful: "*Staff have been inspired by the content they can access via the website and by the projects which have been supported over the years which have informed practice*" (English HE in FE provider and recent subscriber).

**From focus group participants in Wales:**

- Engagement with the Future Directions initiative has been positive and Welsh colleges feel they have had good representation in the work strands.
- One recent subscriber commented positively on their experience of attending the HEA's Annual Subscribers event which showed how much information they had not had whilst they were non-subscribers.

**From focus group participants in Northern Ireland:**

- For the FECs this is a recent arrangement – their subscriptions have been arranged through the overarching body for colleges, rather than individually. Colleges were, therefore, at the early stages of engagement with the HEA, although the general view was that there were positive signs to this relationship.

**From survey responses:**

- Focus provided by the HEA on teaching and learning, and on professional recognition: "*We need the HEA to engage with the sector and ensure our students get the same level of expertise from our tutors as they would get at a university*" (English HE in FE provider).
- Support to the professional development of staff.
- Contribution to growth in scholarly activity in the sector.
- Guiding institutional strategic thinking.

Given the different context of further education, arising from the vocational nature of the teaching and institutions which are not funded for research activity, discussion with the sector focused on issues that the sector perceived the HEA needed to address for HE in FE to achieve parity with HE. Key issues mentioned by institutions were:

- The perceived emphasis of the HEA on academic research over scholarly activity and action-based research. FECs felt that they engaged in the latter two activities but this received less recognition from the HEA.
- The HEA works too slowly for some. An example was given of further education action research that reportedly 'took months' to get through the HEA's academic review process. Institutions commenting noted that this did not sit well with the expectations from the further education sector on being able to be responsive and provide faster turnaround on recommendations and results.
- A query was raised on whether the HEA should recognise Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) professional standards and that some of the qualifying criteria for National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) application disadvantaged further education staff (an emphasis around research).

Although the relationship with the HEA for many was still in its early stages, institutions welcomed the opportunity to develop this further, in areas such as professional recognition for teaching excellence.

*“The HEA clearly appreciates that the HE sector is becoming more diverse and is therefore well positioned to respond.”* (English HE in FE provider)

We note, however, that many colleges do not have a direct relationship with HEA. In England only 20 members of the MEG are direct members of the HEA and in Wales, Colegau Cymru reported only one college with a direct relationship; others would typically engage via their franchising institutions (as would be expected as these are the only FECs with any large amount of directly funded HE provision). FECs cited two reasons for lack of direct membership – the small size of their provision and the cost of membership. A number feel somewhat disenfranchised by lack of subscription, although perceive their interests in other work streams of the HEA to have been fairly represented.

HE in FE institutional experience of the HEA is, therefore, variable and often entirely dependent upon how it is mediated and made accessible by their HE partner. FECs we spoke to gave examples of both good contacts with HEA being promoted by their HE partner and virtually no contact at all.

Differences in the levels of engagement with this sector in the various home nations (and indeed in the nature of provision across these) mean that there is as yet no overarching commonality of view on the HEA’s performance in this area to date.

HE in FE sector consultees recognise that there is value in partnering with the HEA because of its wider sector work and its links with key sector agencies, for example with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and its introduction of the new Higher Education Review methodology for quality review in the HE in FE sector in England from 2013/14.

*“HEA are in a strong position to support HEIs but need to work closely with QAA to do so.”* (English HE in FE provider)

Other consultees working across the HE in FE sector have observed that the HEA has yet to fully flex its approach to institutional support with regards to further education providers offering HE and that the views of non-subscribers within this sector should also be sought to better understand future needs. We understand that the HEA is now initiating activity for its ‘task and finish’ groups in this area.

*“The HEA have made great strides in reaching out to colleges in the HE in FE sector promising support in a range of areas. This effort needs to be maintained if colleges are to see real benefits from the existence and membership of the HEA in the future.”*  
(English FEC)

We have observed that there are specific topics of interest and concern to HE in FE providers and these should be reflected in the HEA’s established structures to engage with such topics.

### **Recommendation 12:**

The HEA should engage more fully with the representative forums to establish and address the HE in FE agenda including definitions and criteria for NTF membership and the role of scholarly activity and action research.

### 5.2.7 Working with the wider sector

In the period since 2010, the HEA has maintained its relationships with a broad range of sector agencies and specialist bodies, through regular contact, collaboration on projects and research and through its academic Associates Network.

Broadly, those agencies with a direct and established working relationship with the HEA have been positive about its performance during the period in maintaining links and mutual recognition for activities of joint strategic interest.

*“The HEA keeps the education conversation going.”*

*“We welcome the support that we get from HEA and think it makes us stronger.”*

In this review we have engaged with 30 sector bodies (including the four funding bodies and owners of the HEA), through survey, interview and written responses to consultation.

The majority of those consulted were generally positive about their perspective on the HEA, as also reflected in the survey analysis on the character of their relationship with the HEA, and the HEA’s management of this relationship.

*“We have found the HEA to be very responsive to our needs and requests.”*

*“Since the 2012 restructure this has improved considerably.”*

For many institutions, there is a clear recognition for the progress made by the HEA over this timeframe to seek to better define its strategic direction and its place in the wider sector landscape.

A number of consultees raised some concerns that factors such as perceived staff turnover and the workload of HEA staff across a wide remit had affected its ability to drive forward all major partnerships with intent. However, this needs to be put in context: the HEA had undergone substantive restructuring over the period (necessitating some staff turnover), and we note that many key stakeholder partners of the HEA have identified a positive trajectory for this relationship – with the HEA stabilising and refocusing attention on forward planning for areas of mutual interest.

That there appear to be continuing areas of overlap in the remit of the HEA and that of other bodies, notably QAA, the Leadership Foundation for HE and Jisc, is of less concern to consultees than the recognition that effective working and clarity of purpose for the HEA and its partners should go some way to improve its recognition and credibility with the sector.

Is the HEA building the right relationships? A number of stakeholders are interested in seeing the HEA develop its links further in specific areas which are seen to be relevant to its strategic mission and its intent to strengthen links with institutions. Those noted by consultees include:

- Technology-enhanced learning and how the HEA works in particular with Jisc and builds on its work to date around ‘flexible learning’ – although we note that the HEA has been working on some key initiatives in the period, for example its joint work with Jisc on the HEFCE-funded Open Educational Resources (OER) initiative from 2009 to 2013) and the Educational Learning Technologies (ELT) programme which promotes digital literacy across and within disciplines.

- HR functions within institutions – recognising their key role in supporting professional development.
- Institutional staff responsible for furthering the development of the holistic student experience, in addition to the HEA’s ‘traditional’ networks within learning and teaching and educational development.
- Promotion of VITAE (professional development of researchers) – due to the close links noted between training for research and training for teaching (“...*in terms of transparency, mode of engagement with research participants, ethics of enquiry, project management, transferable areas of knowledge*” (Sector body)).

### 5.3 Working across home nations

The HEA’s activities across the four home nations are directed through its annual grant agreements with its funders. These set out both UK-wide and nation-specific priorities and the HEA’s activities with, and provision of services to, institutions and partner organisations influenced by the grant agreements themselves and the specific activities supported through the HE and further education sectors in these nations. So, for example, the HEA’s Student-Led Teaching Awards scheme was initiated in Scotland in conjunction with the NUS (in 2009/10) and has now been rolled out to further institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as at 2012/13.

#### 5.3.1 England

The Higher Education White Paper for England ‘Students at the Heart of the System’ sets out the context for the HEA’s work in England, together with the English 2012/13 reforms. HEFCE’s 2013/14 grant letter to the HEA notes a range of England-specific priorities for the HEA to consider in developing its services to the HE sector in England in the light of these reforms, including:

- Student engagement, achievement and experience – given the “...*increasing focus on students as active participants in a learning community*”<sup>18</sup>.
- Postgraduate education (in the context of HEFCE’s cross-cutting theme for postgraduate policy).
- Maximising the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning.
- Employee learning and graduate employability.
- Widening participation,
- Ethnicity and degree attainment.
- National HE STEM programme.
- Strategically important and vulnerable subjects.
- Sustainable development.

Many of the organisations that work alongside the HEA in this context will also have a UK-wide remit and we have reflected elsewhere in this report the perceptions and perspectives of these bodies (i.e. in section 5.2 above).

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<sup>18</sup> HEFCE Grant letter to HEA for 2013-14

In comparison with the other three home nations, the HEA does not have a dedicated team for England-specific work. Their work with English HEIs, HE in FE providers and other bodies operating in England is spread across each of their teams. Much of the activity of these teams is targeted at 'UK-wide' priorities and is resourced accordingly (see section 4.6 above for further details).

A review of HEFCE's role in enhancement within the sector is currently in progress (due for publication in summer 2014). It is expected that this will cover aspects of the HEA's role in the wider enhancement landscape.

### 5.3.2 Wales

The policy context in Wales is framed by the Welsh Government's 'For Our Future: The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales', published in 2009, and more recently the Policy Statement on Higher Education (June 2013). The policy statement sets a new vision for HE in Wales and establishes a set of future priorities for the Welsh Government working in partnership with HE providers and with HEFCW to deliver an ambition for a world-class HE system.

'Future Directions' is the quality enhancement programme for the Welsh HE sector, co-ordinated by the HEA via the Future Directions Steering Group. The HEA has a satellite office in Cardiff which it shares with HE Wales.

Findings from consultation with sector representatives from Wales indicate that:

- There has been a 'dramatic improvement' over the past three to four years in the Welsh sector's relationship with the HEA. Prior to that point the view was that HEA needed to respond better to Welsh specific needs, and it had seemed to some that "*...there was no point continuing*" with the relationship.
- The relationship building has been done by the HEA, particularly by the current Welsh manager who is highly regarded across the Welsh sector in terms of personal effectiveness. The HEA is considered generally to be operating effectively and is highly valued by the Welsh sector.
- The HEA is considered by institutions and sector stakeholders alike to have been instrumental in leading, developing and supporting the Future Directions enhancement themes. Future Directions needed one organisation to lead and own it, and doing so has been the HEA's biggest contribution.
- The fact that HEA is more visible and there is more interaction with the sector makes a strategic role possible. As well as its role in Future Directions, the HEA has embedded the Sustainable Development Bill in Wales, and has been doing innovative work in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) and in the Welsh language.
- The UKPSF is another area where the 'additionality' of the HEA is clear to Welsh consultees and HEA is considered as the national champion for learning and teaching "*...leading the professionalisation of the academy*".
- There is, however, a difference in terms of perceptions of how far HEA is demonstrating that it is achieving value for money at an institutional level.
- In addition, there is some blurring of the boundaries between HEA and other sector bodies in Wales, in particular, a perceived overlap between the remits of the QAA and

HEA in terms of quality and enhancement. This has led to some tension in the past which has now been resolved.

There was some concern expressed by consultees about possible future risks for the HEA which included the following:

- In spite of the fact that HEA is perceived as being “...*comparatively underfunded*” it should not become “...*anglocentric*”. There has been cognisance of the respective requirements of the four individual home nations to date and consultees hope this will continue. There is also a perception that the overall structure of HEA is “...*very England-centric*”, with limited interaction beyond that of the two key members of HEA staff.
- Concerns from some consultees that the spread of available resources and perceived turnover in the HEA’s management team and staff may still be impacting on the organisation, for instance, in loss of corporate memory and sustainability. We note above (in section 5.2.7) that this needs to be placed in context of restructuring changes over the period but there is work here for the HEA to do to provide reassurance on these points as part of their relationship building with the sector. We also observe that the wider contact made across the HEA with the Welsh sector is not necessarily currently visible to some consultees.

### 5.3.3 Scotland

In Scotland, the recent policy focus has been on HE governance, widening participation, outcome agreements, employability, college regionalisation and the potential impact of the outcome of the forthcoming independence referendum. The Scottish Government’s ‘Putting learners at the centre’ emphasised equity of access and parity of experience for learners, including more flexible pathways from further education into HE.

QAA’s Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework drives the enhancement agenda in Scotland. It has five aspects: enhancement themes; enhancement-led institutional review; institution-led quality review; engagement of students in quality management, including through Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs); and institutional provision of an agreed set of public information.

The enhancement themes have been progressing since 2003. The current theme is ‘Developing and Supporting the Curriculum from 2011 to 2014’, which is focussed on Curriculum for Excellence and its impact on HE, the flexible curriculum and staff: enhancing teaching. The work is planned and directed by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), on which the HEA has observer status. The HEA has an office in Scotland, co-located with Universities Scotland.

Findings from consultation with sector representatives from Scotland indicate that:

- Since 2010, the HEA has become much more credible in the Scottish HE sector; the discourse around it is much more positive, in particular:
  - The HEA is no longer internally focussed, it has developed a strategic vision and its value has become clearer in terms of raising standards and pushing the agenda.
  - In the past, operational delivery and contact with the sector was through such a devolved model that setting and delivering strategy was impossible.

- One consultee “...would describe the change in past three years as *transformational*” whereas “...three years ago would have said the sector could survive without the HEA”.
- In terms of the HEA’s Scottish focus:
  - The majority of consultees viewed the HEA to be responsive to its UK-wide remit and the potential impact of the policy divergence between home nations, however it was the view of some consultees that this could be better represented through specific and dedicated discussion (an example cited was discussion at HEA Board meetings on HEA in Scotland).
  - Nonetheless, consultees acknowledged the HEA’s activities in Scotland to be a variant of its UK-wide work, rather than anything fundamentally different. This is perceived by consultees to be more about matters of emphasis.
  - The HEA Scottish event in September 2013, setting out its plans and focus in Scotland, has been well received, as has HEA’s specific work around the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland.
  - Generally, the HEA is not considered to be as closely connected to government in Scotland as it is elsewhere, so there is a question as to how well it reflects policy priorities.
- In terms of HEA’s contribution to enhancement, consultees noted that:
  - There is a difficulty disaggregating the HEA’s role from the other contributors to quality enhancement (notably QAA Scotland which is considered to be driving the agenda in Scotland); “...*quality enhancement in learning and teaching is still contested territory*” and “...*SHEEC fulfils the enhancement role in Scotland – HEA very much a partner, but QAA Scotland runs the show*”.
  - HEA is able to provide details on what it has done in respect of its reach and input, but needs to do more to demonstrate its impact, particularly now it is at a more mature stage.
  - The HEA is strong in the area of individual practitioner support and in the professionalisation of teaching (e.g. work on the UKPSF and development standards); it is less clear how they support pedagogy at the discipline level.
- For institutional consultees:
  - A factor is the quality and motivation of staff within institutions to invest their time in what the HEA can offer and this varies across and within institutions.
  - There does not appear to be (from those institutions we have spoken to) a clear consensus on HEA’s role in rewarding teaching in Scotland, which does not take part in the NTFS.
  - There are increasing numbers of staff on teaching and learning contracts. Consultees’ perceptions of a growing parity of status between teaching and research contracts may show some evidence of HEA’s impact in promoting status and importance of teaching within HE.
  - QAA Scotland enables and facilitates the enhancement themes which drives the agenda in Scotland and leads to change.

Concern expressed by consultees in Scotland included observations on whether governance and the role of the funders in this regard needed to be reconsidered:

- The extent to which the interests of the four nations are represented in the HEA's governance structure and whether these are covered sufficiently with institutional representation.
- There might be a better way of setting out the funding agreement; priorities need to be agreed, but the detail should be at the level of outcomes the HEA is seeking to achieve – this is not easily defined, but the HEA should demonstrate its contribution, and its accountability for public funding.
- Whether the HEA may be 'over-governed'. A better approach might be to cut the bureaucracy and for funders to recognise the HEA's maturity and consider if they should continue to have observer status on the HEA board.

#### 5.3.4 Northern Ireland

The Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland (DELNI) in May 2012 published its HE strategy: 'Graduating to Success' (reflected in the HEA's 2013/14 grant agreement with DELNI). This, together with DELNI's widening participation strategy 'Access to Success' (also published in 2012), forms the basis for the HEA's work in Northern Ireland.

In its "UK Policy Overview for Funders and Owners" (December 2012), the HEA highlights:

- Its retention and success thematic work.
- Support (via workshops for Northern Ireland HE providers) to support accreditation of CPD frameworks.
- Postgraduate experience and curriculum enhancement.

Enhancing employability for graduates is also highlighted by DELNI and features as part of the Northern Ireland HE strategy and through its 'Success through Skills' agenda. A specific project (Project 6: 'Enhance the employability prospects of graduates') provides a focus for this, although it is not clear so far if the HEA will play a significant role in this initiative.

Findings from consultation with sector representatives from Northern Ireland indicate that:

- Institutions within Northern Ireland are in general positive about the HEA and what it is able to offer them, in particular around the professionalisation of teachers.
- Where institutions have actively sought support from the HEA their positive perception of the 'value-add' from the HEA is most marked.
- For larger institutions it can be harder to get a clearer sense of what the HEA is able to offer (albeit this may point to issues of communication within the institution).
- Further education providers are still at the early stages of relationship with the HEA, therefore, were less able to comment with authority on the experience of working in partnership.
- Both institutions and DELNI praised the efforts of the Northern Ireland nation lead within the HEA and valued the input of the former chief executive to develop strategic relationships with Northern Ireland.
- Less clear for consultees was how the HEA had sought to consolidate its work around 'employability', despite a range of individual events relating to this theme (including a keynote address by the HEA chief executive to the University of Ulster's Employability conference)

There is scope for the HEA to consider how it presents information back to its funding body on its work with institutions in Northern Ireland and on work of potential interest in other nations.

#### **5.4 HEA's structures, leadership and people**

Consultees commented favourably on the drive and focus taken by the former chief executive to stabilise the HEA through a period of major change and are encouraged by the appointment of the new chief executive in continuing to build relationships with the wider sector, in particular, with research-intensive institutions.

Also cited positively, by observers, was the effectiveness of the current Board and its committees – a positive trajectory with an improved balance between the responsibilities of senior executive team and those of the Board itself.

As shown in section 5.2.2 above, there was strong evidence from consultees that they perceive a positive trajectory for the HEA in the period since restructure.

The main challenges seen to remain for the HEA in respect of its organisation by consultees include:

- Complexity of the HEA's current structure and clarity around how some of the roles are linked, for example, between disciplines and cross-cutting themes.
- Managing a remote workforce.
- Harnessing talent and expertise across the organisation – seen still as too fragmented by some.
- Acknowledging the detrimental effect that the loss of organisational memory will have had following restructure.
- Persuading the sector of the outcomes being achieved now through the restructured subject networks.

#### **5.5 Summary**

Evidence shows that the HEA is seen by and large by stakeholders as an organisation that has undergone, and come through, a period of significant change for the better.

All areas of service that the HEA provides to the sector are encompassed across its three outward facing strategic priorities, namely:

- Recognising, rewarding and accrediting excellent teaching.
- Supporting effective practice (this includes discipline-based support).
- Influencing policy, future thinking, and change.

##### **5.5.1 Perceptions of HEA services – what it does**

The first of the services listed above, which includes the areas of professional accreditation and the support provided through the HEA's UKPSF, was identified by a majority of stakeholders across all consultation routes as central to their perceptions of the HEA's proven value to the HE sector. A majority of institutions of all types were positive about the HEA's role in furthering the professionalisation of individual teachers, in providing a

framework around accreditation of professional development and in supporting institutions to develop this within their own organisations.

Some consultees have observed there is scope for further development around fellowships, building on what has already been achieved and providing current and new fellows with the means for more structured ongoing support.

Stakeholder perceptions on the relevance and quality of the HEA's support to effective practice are influenced by the wide range of activities that fall within this area. These include its discipline-specific support, its support to professionals working alongside academic teaching staff, its work in commissioning and funding research within and across disciplines and its work around cross-cutting themes (such as employability, education for sustainable development, internationalisation, flexible learning).

Perceptions on this area are therefore necessarily limited by individual's knowledge of, and engagement with, the HEA's services. This area is the most complex of all of the HEA's lines of service.

Nevertheless there are some clear messages from sector consultation for this review:

- The perceived value of the HEA and its services is felt most strongly at the individual level – notwithstanding the substantial investment the HEA has made in the period to offer a variety of services at the level of academic departments.
- Strong historical links between individuals, institutions and the HEA in relation to subject areas (and this includes links with the former subject centres) still influence attitudes and behaviours.
- In a number of institutions (particularly noted in case study visits) there are notable differences between views of senior staff and those of academics who have been involved in HEA activity – the latter being more vocal in their positive opinion of the impact that the HEA had on their own practice and that of colleagues.
- The HEA will need to address concerns held by many that it is still too focussed around an established 'HEA community' that does not necessarily represent views of staff working more widely across academic disciplines. Institutions themselves have a role here too, and a number consulted acknowledged this: "*You get out (of the HEA) what you put in*".

The HEA has clearly had a significant impact on a cross-disciplinary network of individuals, and despite the degree of variability of views that persist, and the reasons behind this, one key perspective is that suitable and targeted communications are essential in continuing to raise the HEA's profile in the area of discipline support.

Views on the HEA's work in the period to 'influence policy, future thinking and change' are more mixed across different types of institution and role within the sector. Consultees were less persuaded of the evidence for the HEA's influence and profile around sector-wide policy formation and change, although notable examples of the HEA's activities and services were cited positively by some, for example: the PVC Network; input into topics of sector-wide interest such as the HEA's facilitation on discussions around the use of a Grade Point Average system.

The HEA's work in building a robust evidence base of research for the sector is viewed by both institutional and sector body consultees as critical to the overall role of the HEA. That which is valued by the sector from the HEA's research work shares characteristics of:

- Well planned collaboration with key partners.
- Clear, practical applicability of findings.
- Shorter, contextualised research briefings.
- Effective dissemination through a wide range of routes.

Whilst many consultees were very supportive of the HEA's activities in the sourcing, commissioning and publication of research, several reported concerns that the HEA's research does not always provide a clear focus to help academics and senior leaders formulate practical solutions to address key issues. The 'What Works' student retention and success programme was cited positively by a number of consultees as evidence of where the HEA can work successfully in this respect.

### 5.5.2 How the HEA works with the sector

One message from this review is that *how* the HEA works with institutions, individuals and other groups is as critical as *what* it does, in influencing stakeholder perceptions of its value and contribution to the sector.

At their most successful, the HEA's partnerships with institutions and sector bodies are fully reciprocal and use sector intelligence to inform planning and to frame presentation of the HEA's services in a way that is tailored for specific audiences. This provides a basis for maturing of the relationship and for institutions and other organisations to gain additional value from ongoing partnership.

The majority of institutional consultees for the review were broadly positive in their perceptions of the character of their relationship with the HEA and the effectiveness of its management by the HEA. There are some variations within this, and Post-1992 institutions were in general more positive in their assessment than Pre-1992 and other types of institution.

There is scope for the HEA to consider other common areas of interest and institutional characteristics in reviewing its model of relationship management. For example: the particular interests and preoccupations around learning and teaching enhancement for research-led institutions; advice and guidance for newer institutions (including new subscribers) who are developing their approaches; and ongoing targeted support for those institutions who already have established their own strategy and approach to learning and teaching enhancement.

The HEA's investment in developing services for the HE in FE sector has clearly been welcomed by HE in FE providers, as relatively young entrants to the HE market. We have found evidence that where these services are made available they are greatly appreciated and have impact. However, there are some areas for the HEA to direct its attention in the next phase, such as better representation of further education-specific activity around research and scholarly activity.

### 5.5.3 Nation support

Consultees across all four nations have in the main noted an improvement in the relationship with the HEA in the past three years.

In England, much of the HEA's work is realised through UK-wide priorities although there are specific priorities for England that are reflected in the HEA's planned activities and in grant letters. England is the one home nation for which there is no separate named lead within the HEA; instead this work is spread across the HEA's operational teams. Findings from this review, in particular from the survey, reflect marginally more mixed perceptions of the HEA amongst England consultees in comparison with those of other home nations, although still broadly positive.

In Wales, the HEA is considered by institutions and sector stakeholders alike to have been instrumental in leading, developing and supporting the Future Directions enhancement themes. Future Directions needed one organisation to lead and own it, and the HEA doing so has made a significant contribution to the sector.

In Scotland, whilst the HEA's position with the sector is considered to have strengthened, it is still perceived as one of many and is yet to establish its unique position in the area of quality enhancement. The HEA's more recent efforts to consolidate and showcase what it is doing in Scotland is welcomed, such as in its recent Scottish event in September 2013 setting out its plans and focus for this nation. Similarly its work around the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland has also been well received.

For Northern Ireland, the HEA has been able to demonstrate that it is working in a number of the sector's areas of strategic interest and the HE strategy 'Graduating to Success' is reflected in HEA's current grant agreement with DELNI. The HEA would benefit from further clarifying for stakeholders in this home nation how it is working with the funding body and with institutions to further work around 'enhancing employability'.

The HEA still has some way to go for institutions across all home nations in demonstrating that it is achieving value for money at an institutional level.

## 6 CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECTOR

### 6.1 Introduction

This section considers the evidence available, from consultees, from the HEA and elsewhere, on the contribution that the HEA is making to the sector and the approaches that the HEA has taken since 2010 to evaluating and evidencing the impact of its work.

### 6.2 Evidencing impact

#### 6.2.1 HEA's changing approaches to evaluating impact

The HEA has changed its approach to the evaluation of impact of its activity in the period since 2010. In the 2009/10 reporting year it introduced a 'Value Impact Assessment' (VIA) (replacing an earlier Evaluation and Impact Assessment scheme considered overly bureaucratic). The VIA scheme was developed as a supplement to the existing planning and reporting systems and was evaluated in November 2010. The evaluation found that the scheme was too operational in focus and that the system for recording impact was unduly restrictive. As a result changes were introduced to try to address these concerns.

However, in light of the inconsistent use of the VIA by teams and the increased focus on value for money, the SMT decided in July 2012 to review its approach, focussing on developments that would provide a basis of evidence for external stakeholders and to enable staff 'buy-in' to the scheme. This resulted in the production of the current Impact Assessment Framework (IAF).

#### 6.2.2 Impact Assessment Framework

Design of the IAF has been shaped by findings from the HEA's own stakeholder survey (undertaken in October/November 2012) and developed with the intention of becoming a continuous process, with results monitored annually as part of annual planning. It has been designed (led by the HEA's current head of research) "*to provide a common system for defining, monitoring and assessing the impact of all major areas of work undertaken by the HEA in order to ensure consistency of approach*"<sup>19</sup>. It is intended as:

- A focus for the evaluation of outcomes of key activities ("Impact is about change"<sup>20</sup>) and not just outputs (activities and products).
- A means of directing limited resources to the evaluation of impact.
- A framework with clear responsibilities across HEA (for teams, for academic/discipline leads, Assistant Directors, and Deputy CEs).

The development of the IAF is in its early stages and the head of research is currently working with individual teams and heads of team to provide assistance in the implementation of the framework. The HEA's annual operational plans for 2013/14 are starting to show how intended outcomes are reflected against activities and KPIs. What is less clear is how the IAF will link into longer term strategic planning (although proposals have been made in this

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<sup>19</sup> HEA Impact Assessment Framework (G. Stoakes, June 2013)

<sup>20</sup> HEA Impact Assessment Framework (G. Stoakes, June 2013)

regard and are being put into place from 2013/14 (as noted in section 4.6.7). We suggest that the HEA works closely with its institutional clients to inform further development of areas for impact evaluation from institutional activity – given feedback received to date from consultees for this review on a wish to see clearer evidence of outcome as a result of engagement with the HEA (see section 5 above).

## 6.3 Impacts and benefits of the HEA

### 6.3.1 Survey results for this review – Impact

Survey respondents were asked: 'To what extent has the HEA helped your institution/organisation with the following':

- Raise awareness on the importance of learning and teaching?
- Increase levels of understanding or knowledge in respect of learning and teaching enhancement?
- Enable positive changes to practice or policy?

There were 97 responses to this question, showing a fairly even spread between the three areas of support, with the most popular rating being 'Moderately' in relation to all three (36%, 35% and 35% respectively). The majority of respondents indicated that there had been a moderate or stronger level of contribution from the HEA in each of the three areas. Comments relating to this question referred to:

- Valued evidence-base of many of the HEA's resources:  
*"The publications on leadership of research-led departments with high teaching quality (Gibbs et al), and Dimensions of Quality were singularly helpful in enabling us to define our own offer, and work effectively with academic heads of department."*
- UKPSF and CPD development support:  
*"Implementing CPD framework is a key activity for us in raising profile."*
- Growing awareness of the HEA's activities:  
*"We have not made much use of the opportunities offered by the HEA as an institution, and therefore the impact of the HEA has been moderate. That is now changing."*
- Recognition that the HEA's influence is only one of many in effecting change:  
*"HEA resources provide a useful adjunct to internal initiatives but do not drive them."*  
*"...such raising of awareness, understanding and influencing change occurs through a network of relationships – when the HEA has managed to get involved in such a network... it does well."*

Comments relating to a further survey question on the ways in which the HEA's discipline-related support had added value referred to:

- Fellowship guidance (although some consultees observed shortcomings in this area).

- Teaching recognition (awards) and the ability to promote these more widely within the institution.
- Linkages to sector-wide developments.

What evidence is there for any variation in view across nations, types of institution or type of role?

Analysis of survey responses indicated a slightly higher average score for respondents from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, compared to those from England across all three aspects.

Institutions by type showed a slightly lower average for Pre-1992 institutions compared with other respondents. This is also consistent with findings noted in section 5 above as observed from survey findings and to some degree with qualitative input through case studies and interviews.

Responses from sector bodies were more positive in comparison with those in institutional roles and this could be considered in the light of other feedback received (and outlined in section 5) from some institutional consultees who wish to get a clearer sense of the outcomes from engaging with HEA activity.

### 6.3.2 Survey results for this review – ‘Additionality’ of the HEA

Of a total of 93 survey responses to the question ‘To what extent do you agree that the HEA’s services are unique, i.e. the same outcome could not have been achieved without HEA’s support?’ a majority (61%), either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’. A further 23% gave a neutral response (‘neither agree nor disagree’).

Of institutional types, 69% (16 of 23) of Post-1992 institutions showed a more positive response to this question (‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’) compared to 55% (22 of 40) of Pre-1992 institutions. Numbers of responses from HE in FE providers, private sector, small and specialist institutions and sector representative bodies were much smaller although on balance these were also predominantly positive.

England-based respondents showed on average a slightly lower score than those from the other home nations.

In line with the survey question above on the extent of the HEA’s contribution, responses from individuals from sector agencies were on average higher than those from institutional senior management, professional support and academic roles within institutions. Within institutions, senior management respondents were the most positive on average compared with other academic members of staff and professional support roles.

For those that responded positively, observations were made on:

- The ‘uniqueness’ of accreditation compared with other areas of HEA support: “*This is the case for accreditation and recognition, less so for other services.*”
- The absence of equivalent bodies with the same scale of remit: “*If the HEA didn’t exist someone would want to create a body to support teaching and learning at a national level.*”

Those that were not as persuaded of its uniqueness commented on:

- Lack of clarity on “*visible outcomes*” on which to base a judgement.
- Overlap with other bodies, whether nationally-based (“*QAA Scotland*”), institutions themselves, sources of resources and good practice advice and information (albeit none with precisely the same remit).

These findings are generally consistent with other consultee views provided, although we have found for some institutions, the reverse is true of the respective views of senior managers and staff working within the institution who have been engaged in HEA activity (i.e. elsewhere senior staff have been less positive than their academic and professional support colleagues).

#### 6.4 Findings from institutional case study visits

As noted in section 5, all six institutions cited the HEA’s support for professional accreditation and individual teaching career progression as a positive influence.

For institutional senior teams and those involved in HEA activity, the other areas of HEA support and activity most frequently cited as of benefit and value to their institutions included:

- Access to, and facilitation of, key networks, including for example the PVC Network, National Teaching Fellows networks (mentioned by staff across four of the six institutions).
- Opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from across the sector on shared areas of interest (and on collaborative projects). A programme lead at one institution for example cited work around transforming assessment in arts and design for which they have, through HEA funding, been running a project with another school of art.
- Two institutions where staff had participated in change programmes were positive on HEA’s professional contribution to these projects, and in the wider impact these had had on institutional practice. For example, HEA’s investment and input into supporting one institution’s change programme on assessment and feedback (building on the TESTA project model<sup>21</sup>) enabled the project to be wide-reaching, provided a structure for activities and is a good fit with the institution’s strategic priorities in providing parity of the student experience across disciplines.
- Creation and promotion of Fellowships – and access to various HEA networks, including liaison with sector experts through HEA-hosted events.
- In particular for the two smaller institutions visited, small grants for individual teaching staff at different stages of their careers were welcomed by those in receipt of grant funding and also seen as an important part of wider contribution to the professional development of staff.
- Longer-term projects – as a source of expertise to inform sector debate.

Findings from the visits indicate that whilst many of the activities supported and funded through the HEA are having a positive effect on individual practitioners, on selected departments and faculties, and in some cases cross-institutionally. It is less clear how the HEA intends to follow up on the longer term outcomes from these initiatives. For many consultees, this is a critical component of the ongoing case to be made for continued

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.testa.ac.uk/>

investment in learning and teaching enhancement activity, by institutions themselves and by the wider sector.

### Recommendation 13:

In its communications with the sector the HEA should leverage and consolidate the evidence being collected on the outcomes of key activity led, supported and funded by the HEA including providing feedback on those current and past projects where there is an opportunity to follow up subsequent actions taken by those involved.

#### 6.5 Evidence from the HEA

The HEA's Strategic Plan for 2012-16 sets out a number of targets against each of its strategic priorities and these have been translated into a series of KPIs as at the start of 2013. Two of these relate to 'Impact':

- % of respondents surveyed who report that they have changed their practice or policies as a result of the HEA's partnership work.
- % of institutional leaders and policy-makers surveyed who agree that they have gained valuable support from the work, knowledge, evidence-gathering activities and interventions of the HEA.

In addition, for 2013/14, the executive team have agreed three overarching priorities:

- For 25% of academic staff to undertake CPD aligned to the UKPSF.
- All of the HEA's research into HE learning and teaching to have an impact on policy or practice.
- Engagement with institutions in teaching and learning development activity to account for at least 90% of students studying for a UK HE qualification.

Alongside this, and for the 2010/11 and 2011/12 reporting years, the HEA has sought to consolidate quantitative and qualitative data across a range of sources, including events, change programmes and stakeholder engagement activity<sup>22</sup>. Within this, quantitative data is based on the scale of HEA activities per area (volumes of individuals and institutions engaged), satisfaction ratings by participants and levels of impact relating to percentages of respondents reporting a change in their own practice or that of colleagues or to perceptions of wider sector practice and policy. This is supplemented with qualitative evidence of examples of reported changes and benefits supported through the HEA's work.

Sources of evidence of the HEA's impact include: its own events impact surveys undertaken in March, July and December 2012 (based on 179 responses across a total of 1,263 individuals surveyed); its own stakeholder survey (undertaken in October/November 2012 and based on 114 responses of a total of 268 individuals surveyed); and its evaluation survey of its change programmes (based on 74 responses of a total of 1,163 individuals surveyed who had participated in every HEA change programme run between 2004 and 2012).

The HEA's own analysis acknowledges that *"...impact reported by respondents is only ever indicative of the total impact the HEA may have supported through its activities. Nevertheless*

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<sup>22</sup> HEA Summary 2011-12 Impact Report (March 2013)

*it provides a reliable and practical method of capturing both the scale and type of changes and benefits the HEA's work supports".*

This analysis indicates that:

- Events activity represents one of the largest in terms of volume and reach by the HEA. Feedback shows that the HEA's events have greatest impact on those individuals who have attended the event, in terms of changes to or influence over practice. Comparatively, change programmes have a greater impact on the colleagues of those individuals. Overall, the HEA's key stakeholders report high levels of perceived changes in policy and practice from individuals, organisations and the sector as a result of the support across HEA activity. This is subject to the caveats, as noted by the HEA, on volumes of respondents to event impact consultations.
- Events have a greater impact on individual's understanding and awareness, compared with changes in practice, although qualitative supporting evidence suggests that participants have been able to identify some longer-term outcomes as a result of attendance at HEA events.
- Reported stakeholder satisfaction levels with the HEA's services and perceptions of the degree of positive influence on changes to practice or policy as a result are on a par with the findings from this review (for example: 76% of survey respondents for this review confirmed a moderate or greater influence on positive changes to practice or policy; the HEA's own stakeholder survey reported that 64% respondents confirmed that the HEA's support had led to positive changes in their own practice). Positive results for the participants in change programmes run by the HEA are more pronounced – 74% reported a change in practice or policy of colleagues as a result of the initiative.

Other evaluation activity that has been carried out by the HEA since 2011 includes:

- Various institutional case studies (including outcomes from institutional programme accreditation in line with the UKPSF; participation in change programmes, participation in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)).
- Various discipline-based case studies – examples of HEA support for discipline-related learning and teaching enhancement.
- A review of the Student-led Teaching Award scheme in Scotland.
- Evaluation of the Teaching Development Grants.
- Evaluation of the New to Teaching workshops.
- Evaluation of departmental visits by discipline leads (STEM)
- Feedback monitoring with recipients of HEA bespoke consultancy services (from February 2013).
- Research synthesis on impact of teaching development programmes.

These represent the views of individuals, institutions and sector bodies who are already users of the HEA's services. One of the key challenges for the HEA in its next stages will be to develop a fuller understanding of non-engagement with its services by parts of the sector.

## **6.6 Evidence from other sources**

We have considered results from two additional reviews commissioned in the period since 2010 by the HEA, on the NTFS and the UKPSF respectively.

### 6.6.1 Measuring the impact of the UKPSF<sup>23</sup>

The evaluation, which reported in June 2013, provided an evidence base for the awareness and use of the UKPSF at institutional level and for the impact the framework had made on attitudes and practices of teaching staff. Key findings from the review were that where institutions and staff had engaged with the framework, its impact had been significant in shaping accredited courses, influencing institutional CPD frameworks, supporting reward and recognition and influencing institutional strategy and policy. Levels of awareness amongst teaching staff responding to the survey were more modest, with just over half (57%) being aware of the framework, a third having engaged with it and a significant number (43%) being unaware of the UKPSF prior to the survey, including staff already holding Fellowships.

Influence of the UKPSF was reported as more marked amongst University Alliance institutions, less so amongst Russell Group, GuildHE and HE in FE institutions responding to the review.

The evaluation made a series of recommendations to the HEA, including:

- Mapping the UKPSF to other key professional frameworks – to support increased use of the framework where engagement is lower.
- Increasing effort to support greater engagement in HE in FE.
- Work to raise the profile of the UKPSF including clarification of the relationship with Fellowship status.
- Revisiting the exemplars and other signifiers provided for certain disciplines to better explain the ‘fit’ between these disciplines and the UKPSF.
- More advice to be given on evidencing of Descriptors 3 and 4 (respectively, Senior Fellows and Principal Fellows)

The findings from this evaluation on perceived levels of impact of the UKPSF appear to be consistent with those from this review.

### 6.6.2 NTFS Review 2012<sup>24</sup>

The review of the NTFS was commissioned by the HEA to demonstrate what impact the scheme was having on the sector, to review its shape and operation and to ensure it could deliver maximum benefit to the sector in recognising and rewarding teaching excellence.

The review drew on comparative data from other national and international award schemes, historical HEA data over the 13 years of the scheme and current survey analysis. Findings indicated that the NTFS’s value to the sector was well-recognised and its main strengths were around: status of award, its focus on teaching, availability of funding as a result of the scheme and enabling personal and professional development.

Five key recommendations were made:

- Clarification on the scheme’s purposes and key responsibilities of the NTF role, as well as clarification on its relationship with the UKPSF.

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<sup>23</sup> Measuring the impact of the UKPSF for teaching and supporting learning (SEDA), June 2013

<sup>24</sup> NTFS Review: report on findings (M. Rickinson, R. Spencer, C. Stainton), December 2012

- Strategic responses to be developed to specific concerns raised: around feedback practice, on the nomination and assessment process, and on support for peer reviewers.
- Improvement of the profile of the scheme.
- Dissemination of findings from the review.
- Establishment of processes to make more effective use of skills and expertise of NTFS.

The HEA has published its responses to these recommendations and has confirmed that it will be implementing changes to the scheme in two phases, in 2013 and 2014.

## 6.7 Summary

The HEA has yet to establish a clear approach to demonstrating value for money and the impact of its work. This is despite the fact that evidence is starting to be collated by the HEA itself in a more systematic fashion than hitherto and there is a wealth of supporting data from across individual projects, institutions and consultees as to its positive impact.

A majority of institutions and sector bodies consulted for this review indicated that there had been a moderate or stronger level of contribution from the HEA to their organisations in terms of:

- Raising awareness on the importance of learning and teaching.
- Increasing levels of understanding or knowledge in respect of learning and teaching enhancement.
- Enabling positive changes to practice or policy.

Similarly, a majority have confirmed the uniqueness of the HEA's services (that the same outcome could not have been achieved without the HEA's support), although we would note that this is more pronounced amongst Post-1992 institutions in comparison with others.

It is not clear that this evidence is being systematically used by the HEA to inform its conversations with subscribing institutions and the wider sector.

Institutions have told us that, whilst efforts to refine the presentation of information around engagement with the HEA have been appreciated and improvements in this area can be seen, there is more that the HEA could be doing to use the information that it has to inform dialogue and productive planning for its work with institutions.

For stakeholders, contribution through the HEA's work is most evident where there is a clear focus for recognisable HEA activity with clearly defined outcomes, be it support to the creation of CPD frameworks, through change programmes within institutions, or individual recognition and reward.

Follow-through on post-project activity (and therefore the longer-term outcomes and changes from initial investment) is not always clearly set out, either in agreements between the HEA and its clients, or within the HEA's operational plans.

Consultees for this review have indicated an appetite for more evidence of outcome, both from the HEA's own work and the work which it supports. Stakeholders wish to see the HEA better evidencing its own contribution and also that of others, in shaping sector thinking

around the effects of investing in furthering excellence in learning and teaching across the sector.

*“Its message about the importance of professional recognition is strong, but less clear is how the HEA sees HE teaching as being different once more academics have achieved this.”*

The HEA could benefit from:

- Re-visiting its underpinning key performance indicators and drawing out more emphasis around the systematic tracking and measurement of short and long-term, direct and indirect outcomes from its work.
- Consolidating and simplifying the types of outcome that are emerging and can be evidenced and tailoring this information for its different ‘audiences’.

## 7 FUTURE DIRECTION AND FOCUS

This section provides an analysis of stakeholder views on the HEA's future direction and focus and observations on the HEA's work to date in considering ongoing sustainability.

### 7.1 Stakeholder perceptions

#### 7.1.1 Survey results

Respondents were asked two questions relating to their own and the sector's needs, and the position of the HEA in being able to deliver to these:

'What are your views on the type of support that your institution/organisation will need in developing learning and teaching strategy in the next 5+ years, and why?'

'How well do you see the HEA positioned to respond to future sector needs?'

Responses were received from 82 consultees to the two questions.

On future support required by the sector, notable common themes across the different types of consultee included:

- For sector agencies and professional bodies (six responses to this question), support needed related to collaborative working and resources to develop teaching practice and curriculum provision. Also recognised as important was an emphasis on efficiency, both in helping organisations to achieve greater efficiency and in getting value from projects that they undertake.
- For HE in FE institutions (five responses), continued support around the development of the HE in FE agenda including QAA review and alignment of practice with the UK Quality Code, student engagement, support for tutors delivering college-based HE "*...in the shadow of OFSTED*".
- For small and specialist institutions (six responses), the continuing need for a sector-wide voice on good practice in learning and teaching and quality enhancement, a "*coherent discourse*" which could be drawn upon by smaller institutions in developing their own strategies, and in support of more specialist institutions, CPD frameworks that reflect adequately the specialist nature of teaching. Also cited were the continuing need for "*...the leverage of accreditation*" and a "*critical friend*" role.
- For Pre-1992 institutions (34 responses to this question), common areas cited included providing and drawing on robust evidence bases for HE development; staff incentives and promotion criteria to improve teaching, ("*...supporting excellent teaching in an era of declining resources*"; "*The primary driver of research-active academic staff in my subject is incentives*") support to research training; in developing and using new technologies ("*...imaginative and appropriate application of technology*"); advance intelligence of sector developments (UK and globally – "*The international input and peer comparison of strategy would be hugely helpful, not least on innovative practices*").
- For Post-1992 institutions (23 responses to this question), similar areas as cited for Pre-1992 institutions, plus: support in relation to student retention and engagement and employability success rates; in managing staff working on a range of contracts and with variable delivery models ("*...the trick will be to manage these and still maintain the expectation of excellent practice*"); continued investment in HE research which impacts on student success ("*Focus on pedagogic research is valued*"); continued emphasis on

teaching quality (“...*what do we mean by ‘Good Standing’? What are we doing about it?*”); support in shifts in academic culture and perceptions to raise teaching on a par with research.

Views on the capacity and capability of the HEA to respond to the sector in future were mixed, on balance positive but with a number of constructive areas for attention. Specific comments from consultees included:

- For sector agencies and professional bodies, views were mixed, citing that the HEA may need to be mindful of workloads and breadth of coverage; how well it can demonstrate that it can provide services of value to institutions “...*to the extent that they are willing to pay for them*” and being sufficiently flexible to “...*adapt its practice to suit the needs of different kinds of users*”.
- For institutions, positive views (34 responses to this question were positive from a total of 80 overall responses) on the HEA related to:
  - Positive on the direction of travel being taken (“*Mostly encouraging provided that the Scottish dimension remains focussed*”; “*Much better than it was 3 years ago*”).
  - Its role in sponsoring key research and in supporting cross-institution networking (“*The HEA drives initiatives forward... working with as wide a range of institutions as possible would further enhance the HEA’s ability to respond to sector needs*”).
  - Its position as an external partner to support individual recognition for teaching excellence and career development.
  - Where building on strategic partnerships, for example with the QAA (“*With the research investment, the PVC network, the UKPSF and national collaboration with QAA and others, the HEA should be well positioned*”; “*HEA are in a strong position to support HEIs but need to work closely with QAA to do so*”).
  - Its work to support organisational development, especially where seen to be supported through a strong relationship with the institution.
- Institutions with mixed (14 responses) or more critical views (10 responses) identified that to improve its future position the HEA would need to:
  - Increase its profile amongst sector strategists (including government and heads of institutions) “...*in order to retain credibility with its subscribing institutions and individual members*”.
  - Demonstrate to the sector that it can respond to different types of need across institutions (based on strategic priorities around learning and teaching) (“*I do not believe that the HEA can respond to sector needs as a whole – the research-intensive and the teaching-focussed institutions require different support*”).
  - Resist perceptions on an overly ‘management’ agenda around teaching and learning and do more to build links with disciplines.
  - Raise its profile across the sector and potentially outside the sector (“*I think it could do more to be proactive in leading debate involving the best thinkers from overseas and the UK, rather than just ‘servicing’ HEIs – important as this is*”).
  - Provide more opportunities for cross-institution collaboration.
  - Consider strengthening its independence from its funding bodies and government.

Analysis of survey responses indicates – as with responses to other survey questions – a more positive response overall from respondents from home nations other than England, and from Post-1992 institutions in comparison with those from Pre-1992s and other types of institution. Responses from sector bodies were on average more mixed in their views.

### 7.1.2 Other stakeholder perspectives

A majority of senior stakeholders across sector agencies and institutions felt that the HEA had a continued role to play for the sector. What many were keen to see the HEA do was to continue to ‘refresh itself’ and to ensure that its work was recognised and articulated more widely.

Messages across the four home nations were in the main consistent, although notable were a divergence of views across some Scottish consultees, for whom the HEA has not yet fully proven its respective position in the landscape of sector agencies.

Some stakeholders, including funder representatives, shared concerns that its interest in exploring international markets did not represent too much of a ‘mission drift’ and dilute its ability to provide a core offering to the UK sector. They felt that to justify further business development this would need to reflect a genuine market opportunity, supported by internal capacity to deliver to a very different potential client base (however, we note that the HEA’s grant letter specifically charges it with pursuing alternative sources of income).

A minority of senior managers within institutions commented on the HEA’s position in relation to growth internationally; this was to observe for example that many HEIs themselves are entering into more complex partnership arrangements internationally and with private providers. The HEA has an opportunity here to develop its consultancy support, although in the view of some institutions this may necessitate external expertise ‘bought in’.

Not only HE in FE providers see potential for this area for the HEA – a small but vocal number of HEIs also confirmed this as a priority area, for example in supporting HEIs with FE college partners.

Other observations made by consultees for this review in relation to the challenges faced by the HEA in developing its services in the next period included:

- Being able to provide effective services to a changing landscape of HEIs, some stronger and some weaker, in being able to adapt their approaches in a harsher economic climate.
- Drawing on a wider resource pool (including associates) to deliver work, including quality assurance of the HEA ‘brand’.
- Adapting its business and operational models from a predominantly government-funded organisation to a more commercial organisation responding to individual client requirements – “...*delivering paid for services is not the same as providing academic advisory expertise*”.

## 7.2 HEA’s work on sustainability

The Executive has already begun to look at options around the HEA’s business development and has produced a Business Development Plan (as at February 2013) which has been updated in consultation with its Board.

The HEA’s business development (BD) core team is now established, reporting (at the time of writing) to its Head of International Strategy and lead for Recognition and Reward and the HEA is working to build BD capability internally through training across its wider staff base (by means of a culture/training change initiative led by the BD team).

**7.2.1 Business Development Plan**

In this section we consider the HEA’s Business Development Plan for growing non-core income and the rationale upon which it is based. We consider the targets in the light of reported 2012/13 growth and make observations and concluding recommendations.

The plan is informed by the HEA’s Strategic Plan 2012-16 and in particular its objectives to grow income from non-core funding to £8m per annum by 2016; around expansion of reach (‘at least 90% of students studying for a UK HE qualification to be taught in an HEA-subscribing institution’) and in its interest in growing an international reputation and outlook.

The HEA’s Business Development Plan sets a target of growing non-core income<sup>25</sup> from £5.38m to £8.4m in the five year period 2012/13 to 2015/16.<sup>26</sup> This is an increase of 36% with the more substantive growth occurring in 2014/15 and 2015/16.

**Figure 16: Total forecast growth in non-core income 2012/13 to 2015/16**

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
	£'000			
Total income excluding core grant, comprising:	5,375	5,351	6,867	8,398
▪ Subscription income				
▪ Consultancy income				
▪ Event income				
▪ Recognition income (individual professional recognition)				
▪ Other income (research fees; sponsorship)				
▪ Ring-fenced project funding				

Figure 16 above shows the total forecast non-core income in the period 2012/13 to 2015/16. A high level analysis of the planned increase in income shows that this growth is to be achieved by both changing the balance of income from different streams – proportionately increasing income from consulting activity to 12% of total non-core income from 2% at present (Figure 17) and by increasing income from each income stream (Figure 18).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Non-core income’ includes: subscription income (from UK and international organisations); consultancy income (UK and international); event income (conferences and workshops; change programmes); recognition income (individual professional recognition); other income (research fees and sponsorship); and ringfenced project funding. It excludes core grant funding.

<sup>26</sup> Figures from HEA Business Development Plan

**Figure 17: Comparison of income stream contributions to overall non-core income 2012/13 to 2015/16**

Non-Core Income Streams	2012/13	2015/16
Consulting as % of total income	2%	12%
Subscription as % of total income	43%	40%
Events as % of income	6%	5%
Recognition as % of total income	3%	4%
Other as % of total income	1%	1%
Ring-fenced project funding as % of total income	46%	39%

**Figure 18: Growth increases in income 2012/13 to 2015/16 by type of income**

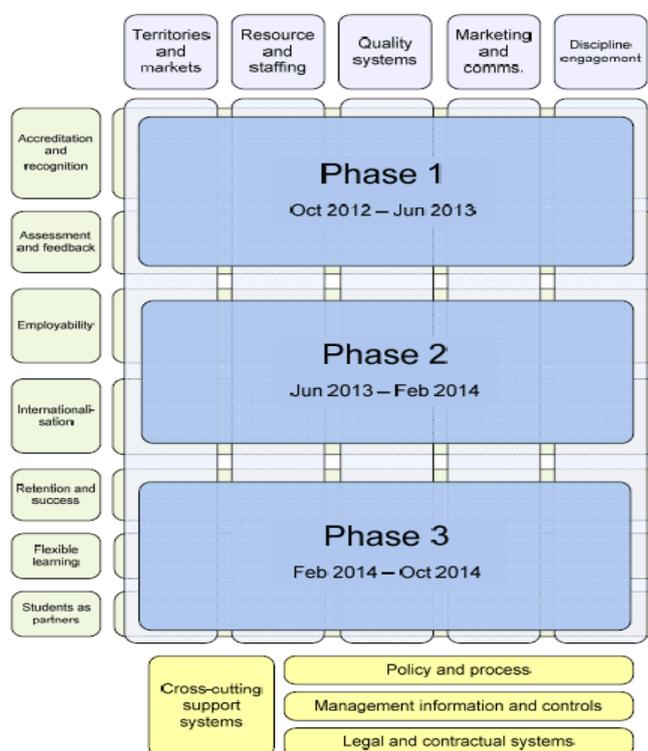
Type of non-core income	% growth targets from 2012/13 to 2015/16
Subscription income	Total subscription income increase – 47% (£1,066K) of which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UK subscriptions – £385K (17% increase)</li> <li>- International subscriptions - £681K (1548% increase)</li> </ul>
Consultancy income:	Total consultancy income increase – 750% (£884K) of which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UK consultancy – £186K (310% increase)</li> <li>- International consultancy – £699K (1204% increase)</li> </ul>
Event income	Total event income increase – 39% (£125K)
Recognition income:	Total recognition income increase – 111% (£158K)
Other income:	Total other income increase – 20% (£8.5K)
Ring-fenced project funding:	Total ring-fenced project income increase – 32% (£781K)

These are very challenging targets recognised as such by the Board. At the HEA Board meeting on 23 April 2013 the minutes record that “...while the targets were acknowledged to be steep and stretching to 2016, the Board was content and supportive of this ambitious approach...”.

## The rationale for growing non-core income

The HEA Business Development Plan contains a phased service delivery plan which sets out the services it has identified are needed, where the HEA strengths lie and the markets to which they apply – addressing and targeting these through a three-phase roll-out over the five year period of the plan (illustrated below in Figure 19):

**Figure 19: Phased service delivery plan**



The seven service areas were determined by:

- Aligning sector priorities and needs based on market analysis
- Analysis of sector trends in UK and overseas
- Alignment with HEA strategic priorities
- The ability of HEA to deliver in the short, medium and long term

The UK analysis informing prioritisation (and phasing) was based on 50 institutional engagements carried out in a three month period (March to May 2012); the annual report of the Partnership Management Team and an analysis of the number of consultancy enquiries received in 2012 compared to 2011 plus consideration of published sector-specific reports (two in particular were cited).

International focus was prioritised against a range of criteria including an analysis of political and economic environments and the maturity and characteristics of the HE sectors and resulted in a focus on:

- South East Asia: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia

- Middle East: Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE

The HEA's overseas work in 2012 was used to identify that the future focus should be on: increasing international institutional subscriptions; delivering consultancy services; supporting accreditation for UKPSF; and developing national policy and support frameworks.

Development of international presence to deliver the growth is focussed around:

- Co-ordinating attendance at and input into international conferences
- Ensuring that marketing and communications materials (including online and printed) are designed with an international audience in mind
- Working with key agencies in the UK and overseas (such as UK Trade & Investment, British Council, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UUK International Unit) to gain market intelligence, make links and develop opportunities
- Making appropriate use of the knowledge, contacts and experience of in-house staff and associates

### **Assessment of Progress**

The 2012/13 accounts show that, whilst some areas of non-core income are increasing (for example, subscription income has increased by 4% with 34 new subscribers during the year), there is a slight shortfall against the business plan<sup>27</sup>, in particular in respect of ring-fenced grant funding which is reported as due to a range of grant funding sources ending in 2012/13.

It was reported to us by the BD team in August 2013 that, in relation to consultancy income, UK income was £20k ahead of target but international consultancy was at £15k compared to the target of £58k – leaving consultancy income some £23k short of target. We understand from the HEA that forecasts have been more recently adjusted to reflect the slower pace of growth in international markets than initially envisaged.

The BD team themselves have started to identify the challenges they face and acknowledge the developmental nature of 2012/13. Key challenges and risks identified by the HEA include:

- Having to plan ahead with 'unknowns' (e.g. international markets)
- Their dependency on associates
- The need to build internal capabilities amongst staff; not just on commercial awareness on BD but also areas such as intellectual property (IP) rights.
- Organisational memory – the risk of over-reliance on key individuals
- The need for HEA to develop and build partnerships to really expand
- Institutional perceptions of HEA

With regard to realising income from international consultancy the HEA's International strategy itself recognises that:

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<sup>27</sup> HEA Report and Financial Statements for year ended 31 July 2013 report an actual outturn of £5,265K against their strategic key performance target of £6,000K for 'Income generated from restricted grant funding, subscriptions, other income but excluding core grant funding'.

*“There is a process in place to ensure an organised approach to delivering consultancy, however, developing a team to deliver high quality learning experiences in an international context remains a clear need.” (section 4.1.3)*

The 2013/14 priorities include two key actions to be undertaken in relation to this:

- Identify appropriate associates and provide high quality training in order to ensure successful international consultancy activity.
- Increase the number of international subscribers and embed their partnership management of international subscribers into the current system.

### **Observations**

Consideration of the approach outlined (albeit at a high level) would lead us to make the following observations:

- There is evidence that the HEA has created a starting basis for an operational model for developing its business areas outside core grant funding, through the creation of a dedicated BD team, development of a BD plan and internationalisation strategy. Plans to invest in internal capability to support the core BD team also appear sound.
- The BD plan targets are stretching, particularly those relating to international subscriptions and consultancy, and yet to be proven if fully achievable (the HEA's progress over the next two years will test their viability).
- The derivation of service areas is logical and the phased approach seems sensible. However, in our view the underpinning statistical base on which the BD plan is based could be viewed as limited. It may benefit from being updated this year and comparisons and impact assessment made.
- Lessons are being learned by the HEA around the need to further develop an understanding of overseas markets and how long it takes to develop partners and communicate service offering and establish trust and confidence.
- The HEA would benefit from ensuring it has a clear value proposition or set of propositions to present itself to its different markets.

We would also observe that very similar challenges face the HEA in expanding its market overseas and to new providers as for delivering its core services to the existing UK HE sector, namely:

- A flexible staff and associates base that offers the types of skills and expertise that the HEA's customers are willing to pay for.
- Clarity and consistency of knowledge across HEA staff and associates on what services it can offer and how these are being marketed to the sector.
- Core skill-sets across the HEA's teams around income generation and working in a commercial environment, e.g.: developing a forward 'pipeline' of opportunities at the same time as delivering on current projects; working with contracts and intellectual property constraints, etc.

## Recommendation 14:

The HEA should continue to prioritise investment in developing capacity and capability in non-core income generation, particularly consultancy. Alongside this we would also endorse the HEA's investment in realising its internationalisation strategy, and in building capacity to meet its business plan ambitions for overseas income generation.

## 7.3 Summary

### 7.3.1 Future direction of support

Consultees to this review have told us that in future they anticipate seeking a range of support from the HEA including:

- Providing and drawing on robust evidence bases for HE development; staff incentives and promotion criteria to improve teaching and support to research training; in developing and using new technologies and advance intelligence of sector developments (UK and globally – “The international input and peer comparison of strategy would be hugely helpful, not least on innovative practices”).
- Continued support around the development of the HE in FE agenda including QAA review and alignment of practice with the UK Quality Code, student engagement, support for tutors delivering college-based HE.
- Support for collaborative working and resources to develop teaching practice and curriculum provision.
- The continuing need for a sector-wide voice on good practice in learning and teaching and quality enhancement, with the continuing need for “the leverage of accreditation” and something of a “critical friend” role.

### 7.3.2 Perceived capacity to deliver

Consultees are broadly confident in the ability of the HEA to respond to the sector's future needs. Generally positive perceptions encompass the HEA's overall direction of travel, its role in sponsoring key research and in supporting cross-institution networking, its role as an external partner to support individual recognition for teaching excellence and career development and in its building effective strategic partnerships, for example with the QAA.

Where there are areas of concern these have encompassed:

- The importance of being able to demonstrate that it can provide services of value to institutions “...to the extent that they are willing to pay for them” and being sufficiently flexible to “...adapt its practice to suit the needs of different kinds of users”.
- A view that it should increase its profile amongst sector strategists (including government and heads of institutions) “...in order to retain credibility with its subscribing institutions and individual members” and “...do more to do more to be proactive in leading debate involving the best thinkers from overseas and the UK, rather than just ‘servicing’ HEIs – important as this is”.
- Its ability to be responsive to different types of need across institutions (based on strategic priorities around learning and teaching).

- Seeking reassurance that developing its work overseas will not inadvertently lead to 'mission drift' and should be informed by a genuine market opportunity (a point specifically raised by funder representatives).
- The ability of the HEA to adapt from a predominantly government-funded organisation to a more commercial enterprise responding to individual client requirements.

### 7.3.3 Sustainability

The HEA has established a very stretching target for increasing income in its current Business Development (BD) plan and while income has increased through increased numbers of subscribers and domestic and overseas consultancy it has not done so at the rate required to meet the 2012/13 plan.

The question of securing a sustainable financial future for the HEA is important given current public funding constraints.

The key challenge is for the HEA to build the capability and capacity (or otherwise buy it in) to drive growth in alternative sources of income from both domestic and overseas sources. This is recognised in the HEA's own plans for sourcing associates and increasing overseas subscriptions.

The HEA requires highly effective leadership and skills to grow its business (not least in the International arena). While we note the very recent appointment of a new senior member of staff charged with reviewing the HEA's business development and international strategy we believe there remains further need to enhance the HEA's core business development capabilities and clearly express its value proposition for different markets. Current plans appear pragmatic and well-founded and should give funders confidence that the HEA will be able to build its wider capabilities around business development.