Progress update on Bell Review recommendation on new higher education sector agency

Statement from Universities UK, GuildHE, the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) on the implementation of the recommendations of the Bell Review

Plans to create a new higher education sector agency are progressing well under the leadership of a transition group established in February 2017. Both Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE welcome the creation of a new agency that will develop services and relationships with the sector that are innovative, strategically important and flexible. The new sector agency will be better able to meet the rapidly changing needs of a diverse set of higher education providers. The transition group, led by Nigel Carrington (Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Arts London), is grateful to the boards and officers of the three agencies (ECU, HEA, LFHE) for the work they have put into the process thus far.

The group, comprising board members from the agencies and UUK/GuildHE representatives, is making good progress on key issues concerning the proposed merger. This includes looking at the development of a sustainable business model, the corporate form of the agency, and the process for appointing its senior leadership team.

The transition group has received legal and financial due diligence on each of the three agencies. Regarding the business model of the new agency – considered as part of financial due diligence – the transition group wishes to make clear that the merger is not predicated on a move to a single geographical site.

Meetings with stakeholders and the other sector agencies across the UK have been arranged to ensure that the focus and priorities for the merged agency meet the requirements of future subscribers, funders and clients. As the Bell Review affirms, the core functions of the existing three agencies (concerning the promotion of excellence in learning,
teaching and professional standards, leadership, management and governance, equality and diversity) will be at the heart of the mission of the new organisation.

Following agreement in principle to progress the Bell Review recommendations earlier this year, agency boards will be invited to authorise formally the merger in the summer by agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding. Each Board will receive papers outlining the potential vision for the new agency, financial due diligence on each of the agencies and an initial business model. Following agreement from each Board a Shadow Board comprising board members of the three agencies, led by Nigel Carrington as Chair, will take over the planning of the new agency. The Shadow Board’s main objectives will be to address:

- the mission, vision and purpose of the new agency
- the appointment of a Chief Executive-designate
- the business and operating models of the agency
- discussions with and involvement of staff and those directly associated with the agencies
- the branding of the new agency, including its name

The Boards of the agencies will continue to operate during this period, working closely with the Shadow Board.

A staff engagement and communications plan will be put in place as a priority to ensure proper consultation with colleagues in the three agencies during this crucial period.

Notes

A copy of the full report of the Bell Review (January 2017) can be found on the Universities UK website here:

http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/report-of-the-review-group-on-uk-higher-education-sector-agencies.aspx