Strategy 2016/21
Project A1: Sector bodies (UHR)

1.   Purpose of paper

The ECC strategy for 2016/21 was agreed early in 2016, and a number of projects are underway.

This paper focuses on a specific element of project A1 'Rekindle / refocus and develop relations with sector bodies' where Board members may be able to provide guidance or direct support.

2.   The sector bodies project

This project is about securing ECC's position as positive, influential and relevant with key sector bodies.
The purpose is to raise our profile with members, ensure that the issues core to our consortium are aired with sector bodies, and secure opportunities for ECC to actively engage with the issues of the day.
In short, it's all about working towards our vision: "a sector that transforms people and organisational performance through developing, promoting and sharing learning and knowledge".

The project lead is Nicholas Johnston, and project sponsors are Julie Lloyd and Graham Curling. Several team members are also involved with regard to specific organisations and issues.

The overall strategy is to be very focused, using our limited resources to engage with a small, manageable number of organisations on specific topics.

The project plan sets out objectives and deliverables for the following organisations:

- UCEA
- UHR (see below)
- ECU
- Unions
- Scottish Funding Council
- Association of Scottish Colleges
- Staff Developers Forum
- Association Northern Ireland Colleges

Other opportunities are identified on ad hoc basis (eg. we have contacted Nesta regarding a substantial research project they are doing into future employment issues, and we are now discussing the possibility of ECC writing a thinkpiece about the implications of the findings for HE/FE).

This paper is concerned with the UHR regions and how best to tackle

3.   UHR and ECC

Current relations with UHR are neutral to absent. Nationally, UHR's position has been that getting to close to ECC might be seen as an endorsement of one role analysis scheme over another, plus although we arguably represent 75% of HEIs that leaves 25% of UHR members which have no relationship with ECC. This is in spite of our very clear position that we are not seeking endorsement nor favours for ECC members but collaboration for the wider sector.

For our part we have sponsored a business breakfast and afternoon tea workshop at the UHR conferences in 2013 and 2015, which were opportunities to raise our profile with members, non-members and UHR itself. As we are not an HEI we are ineligible for UHR membership, and in 2014 our application to be considered as an affiliated member was turned down. At that time UHR pointed us towards the regional groups. Other than a long-standing 'warmish' relationship with the UHR Scotland group, we have not attempted to engage with the regions.

The project plan for A1 sector bodies contains the following objectives for ECC / UHR:

- Reposition ECC as a positive asset for the sector and therefore for UHR whether individual HEIs are members or not

- Make contact with all regional Chairs. Use ECC Board to introduce to each region, plus identify which UHR regional chairs are members

- Attend at least two regional meetings, either for information only or for specific ECC-led item

- Publicise in ECC News You Can Use

- Explore whether we can get ECC coverage in UHR bulletin or newsletters

4. Items for Board discussion

4.1 What relationships do Board members have with the regions?

The current regions and Chairs are as follows:

- NE Chair: Andy Dodman, University of Sheffield
- South Chair: Gavin Wright, University of Brighton
- Midlands Chair: Jayne Billam, Nottingham Trent University
- SW Chair: Arlene Stone, Bath Spa University – ECC member (Sandra)
- Scotland Chair: Mairi Stewart, University of St Andrews – ECC members (Susanne)
- Wales Chair: Sue Midha, Cardiff University – ECC members (Sandra)
- NW Chair: Paul Boustead, Lancaster University – ECC members (Susanne)
- M25 Chair: Dean Morley, Kingston University

4.2 How best might we approach the regional groups?

Direct to the Chair? Can an ECC Board member make an introduction? Should we contact our members in these regions first?

4.3 What would we be saying to them?

This might vary from region to region depending on who the players are and what the regional issues are, but should we be seeking a fact-finding meeting or conversation just to see if there are issues of shared interest? Or should we offer to present an item not directly aligned to use of HERA eg. a briefing on our international pay event, or why we are setting up a digital skills network?

4.4   Big bang or one by one?

Should we contact every region (and let them know nationally perhaps?) almost as a courtesy so we are working in the open and aren't seen to favour one region over another? Or is it better to pick off one or two where we feel we might make progress, and use that to build on when we contact other regions?

5.   Next steps

The Board discussion will inform what we do next. Given the time of year it is likely that we would begin to contact UHR regional groups in the New Year with a view to making tangible progress during 2017. As well as liaison with UHR regionally, we will be looking to communicate with members in line with our values of collaboration and adding value.

15 November 2016

Nicholas Johnston
Chief Executive