

## EAIR Strategy 2006 – 2009

The following Plan emerged from extensive discussions in the Executive Committee. An open discussion ranged from the retention of the current name of the Society to the added value of the website and the future of the journal.

### 1. Status of EAIR

EAIR has established itself since its inception in 1979 as an association of experts and professionals interested in the relationship between research, policy and practice in higher education. EAIR has developed from its roots as a European version of AIR, widening its sphere of interest from institutional research to policy at all levels, institutional, national and international.

Although the initials refer to institutional research, EAIR formally added ‘The European Higher Education Society’ to its logo and then appended the strap-line ‘Linking Research, Policy and Practice’. This reflects the direction that EAIR has taken and its emphasis on crossing boundaries between types of activities and seeking a mix of researchers, teachers, administrators, managers and policy makers. Despite the potential confusion of the EAIR name, the Executive Committee thought it inappropriate to change it at this juncture because EAIR is well known and we have introduced the strap-line for clarification.

### Mission and policy statement for the current period

The mission and policy for the coming remains as it was:

‘The *mission* of EAIR — ‘The European Higher Education Society’ — is to be a European society with an international membership and outlook.’

The objectives are:

- To encourage research in the field of Higher Education in Europe;
- To support the interaction between Higher Education research, policy and practice;
- To promote the development of institutional management, planning and policy implementation;
- To disseminate information on good practices in Higher Education;
- To cooperate and exchange information with related organisations.

These objectives are the same as in the previous strategy.

The ways EAIR intends to achieve its objectives are as follows:

1. Organising an annual Forum bringing together students, researchers, policy makers, leaders, administrators, practitioners and other interested parties of the Association;
2. Dissemination, by electronic media, the Forum papers to delegates and making them available to members.
3. Publicising a peer-reviewed journal four times a year, containing articles of interest to the membership, including significant contributions from the Forum;
4. Organising seminars to cater for the special interests and networking of individual groups of experts and professionals among the membership and other interested parties;
5. Providing a variety of opportunities for networking and professional development of members and other interested parties in the various fields of higher education;
6. Promoting comparative research on issues in higher education;
7. Offering other services (e.g. online-databases and membership directory).

## **Membership**

EAIR has widespread membership and people come from all over the world to the Forum. Membership numbers have been fairly stable with a marginal upward trend in recent years. However EAIR has always been an organisation with disproportionate membership from North-West Europe and Scandinavia. This is partly historical, this is the region in which the organisation developed and it is reinforced by English being the language in which EAIR operates (also reflected in overseas membership, which is heavily from North America, Australasia and South Africa).

The intention for the upcoming period is to continue to seek to make membership of EAIR more diverse, while accepting that a mono-language Forum will act as a restraint. The aim is to continuing to be welcoming to interested parties from all over the world and to further encourage involvement from:

- policy-makers from national ministries;
- younger researchers and administrators (at junior levels);
- people from Southern and Eastern Europe.

The Society has a core of members who attend each Forum. It has another group that attend periodically and a further group who link their membership just to infrequent or single Forum attendance. Clearly, the Forum is the Society's major event and the principal reason for membership for most of our members. EAIR monitors membership and follows up those whose membership lapses.

EAIR is relatively unique in offering the opportunity for networking across countries, disciplines, areas of interest and job roles, which is an aspect that has made EAIR successful and that we will continue to emphasise.

## **The Forum**

EAIR's key activity has been, and continues to be, its Annual Forum, which has attracted between 350 and 550 participants in recent years. Participation in the Forum has grown from the low point at Warwick in 1997.

In the 2003–6 Strategy Plan it was noted that although the Forum 'had found its basic form' there was scope for enhancement. Recent changes have included:

1. Making newcomers feel welcome.
2. Experiments with smaller roundtable discussions, through the use of longer sessions that emphasise audience participation and interaction.
3. Changes to the length of parallel papers (to 30 from 40 minutes)
4. Introduction of pre-conference meetings of special-interest groups.
5. Provision of a CD-ROM containing the Forum presentations, which not only makes the presentations easily available to participants but has improved the quality of presentations.
6. Careful selection of keynotes.
7. Encouraging all presenters to use visual aids to make it easier for non-first language English participants to follow sessions.
8. Adjusting the format of the social functions and coffee breaks to maximise the potential for interaction and networking.

It appears, from feedback, that these changes have been welcomed by the majority of delegates. EAIR will continue to review the Forum to ensure continuous improvement of the event.

The innovations and improved quality in recent years have been due to:

- tightening of the organisation of the Forum over the last six years, with increased commitment on behalf of the hosts. This has been made possible by considerable hard work by the EAIR office staff.
- the enhanced role of the track chairs has provided a degree of cohesion and ownership as well as including more people with responsibility for the running of the event.
- the tighter requirements to provide not only outlines but papers in advance; the advent of the CD-Rom has appeared to improve the content.

Future strategy will be to:

- ensure that we rigorously maintain our processes for organising the Forum;
- encourage other special interest groups to emerge;
- review the role of the longer special slots (which to date have been patchy in the extent to which they offer extensive discussion opportunities);
- assess the commercial opportunities that EAIR might exploit as part of the Forum.

## **Publications**

### *The journal*

After considerable and protracted discussion about the journal and its future, EAIR has taken the positive step of changing publisher from Springer to Routledge. The new arrangement will cost the Society less money and means that the journal will be owned by the Society and not by the publisher. At the time of writing, there is some uncertainty as to whether the title of the journal will remain the same or will be changed. In any event, the new journal will clearly be the journal of EAIR and will focus on research that reflects the EAIR strap-line; linking research, policy and practice in higher education.

The intention for the journal is to expand its scope; from just publishing Forum material to inviting contributions from a wider constituency. In so doing, it is hoped to expand readership beyond EAIR membership.

### *Monograph series*

In the 2003–6 Strategy Plan, it was decided to launch a monograph series. This continues to be the intention and key issues are about implementation rather than strategy. There are plans to produce one or two monographs based on Tracks at the Rome Forum.

The aim of the monographs is to provide up-to-date reviews or evaluations of research or policy areas that will be of value to members and the wider higher education community.

The strategy is now to:

- firm up the editorial arrangements for monographs;
- identify publication options, both paper and electronic;
- identify topics that are timely;
- identify topics that can draw on the expertise of EAIR members.

To broaden the readership and distribution of the new monograph series, EAIR has invited CHER (The Consortium of Higher Education Researchers) to join EAIR launching the new series. Hopefully, cooperation with CHER will increase both the distribution and knowledge about the new series, and increase the quality of the content provided.

## **Website**

Websites are important aspects of organisations. The EAIR website has changed in various ways over the last three years, especially concerning the user friendliness for Forum registration purposes and information. Further improvements can be undertaken.

The strategy is to:

- enhance the non-Forum sections of the website;
- make the website a more useful resource for members;
- explore the value of the EAIR website as a portal to other higher education resources;
- explore the possibility of the website as a discussion forum or a place to post requests for help or information;
- seek views from the membership about the utility and organisation of the current website;
- seek views as to what members would like to have on the website;
- review the cost implications of enhancing the website.

## **Activities and services**

In the 2003–6 Strategy Plan a range of activities were mooted as possible developments for EAIR. One of these was the holding of joint seminars with sister organisations. EAIR organised three such events, two jointly with AIR (in Amsterdam and in Florida), which were very successful for those who attended although numbers who travelled across the Atlantic were small. A third event, in Valencia, was cancelled due to lack of registrations. The joint seminar with EAIE was also successful but attracted few members from EAIR.

A second plan was to ‘increase mutual knowledge among members about their experiences, positions and work, thus increasing the opportunities for members to search for and receive information that might be helpful in their own work. Internet, e-mail services and increased search possibilities are of importance in this process and the current “Directory” would make up the basis for such services but the information gathered and distributed will be expanded.

On the registration form for the Rome Forum, participants were asked to choose from keywords representing their field(s) of expertise and knowledge. In the meantime, this feature has also been added to the membership application form on the website. After the Forum in Rome, members who were not present at the Forum, will be asked to give their keywords as well. In the course of 2006 this ‘find the expert’ feature should be available to all paid-up members.

Future strategy that remains is:

- to take part in joint-badged additional events on an ad hoc basis when opportunities arise;
- to explore the possibility of holding special interest group meetings between Forums.
- to look into the possibility of implementing an electronic ‘EAIR News Alert’ six times a year, instead of the paper version of the Newsletter as published now. Adding more items of interest to the membership.
- to search for members or a group of members who want to help launching a web-based book reviews service with the possibility of exchanging opinions of members.