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Mr. Tom Boland
Chief Executive
Brooklawn House
Crampton Avenue
Shelbourne Road
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12th June 2008

Dear Tom

I am writing to you on behalf of the universities in relation to your letters to each concerning PRTL14. The universities take very seriously their obligations towards the implementation of programmes funded under PRTL14. Unfortunately we have all encountered difficulties in the initial ramp up of these national programmes given the delay between the actual award and approval of expenditure plans. The implementation of graduate based research programmes depends critically on the recruitment of international high calibre PhD students and researchers and these are closely tied to the academic year.

The initial awards under Cycle 4 were made in August 2007, however institutional recurrent expenditure plans were not approved until December - thus activity in earnest could only commence within the latter half of the first reporting cycle (Oct07-March 08). The timing of expenditure approval for the recurrent elements mitigated particularly against recruitment of PhD students. This is because, in the main, recruitment cycles of quality students nationally and internationally map to the academic year. We are wholly committed to addressing the PhD numbers through students identified and commencing in the academic year 08/09.



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The broader ramp up phase of Cycle 4 research related programmes was also affected by the timing of the approval of expenditure, again placing this element of activity into the first 3 months of the current calendar year as recruitment of associated personnel was progressed. These considerations contribute directly to the rates of expenditure reported in this first 6 month period. When normalised for the actual activity period (i.e. the period post December 2007 to March 2008) and the nature of international research recruitment, the ramp up phase of the programmes are largely on track. We expect all allocated resources under Cycle 4 to be wholly committed in accordance with our reprofiled expenditure plans during the second reporting period and through recruitment of PhD students into the academic year 08/09.

Our experience to date with large funding programmes indicates that it is largely during the initial phase that under-spending tends to occur. It is only after the ramp-up that money can be spent at a significant and consistent level. As noted earlier, particular challenges for project budgets and spending plans arise depending on the time of year, given the importance of the academic cycle. This has been recognized by the HEA in the past and is also recognised by other national funding agencies and the European Commission (through the Framework Programmes). The universities remain committed to the implementation of PRTL14 and will work with the HEA to that end.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Hugh Brady
President IUA 2008