

Minutes of the thirty-eighth meeting of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council which took place on Monday, 3 December 2007 in HETAC Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, at 11:00 a.m.

PRESENT:

Chairperson:	Professor Séamus Smyth
Chief Executive:	Séamus Puirseil
Secretary:	Tadhg Ó hÉalaithe
Members:	Mr. Michael Carmody
	Ms. Marion Coy
	Dr. Finola Doyle-O'Neill
	Mr. Diarmuid Hegarty
	Mr. Hamid Khodabakhshi
	Ms. Mary McGlynn
	Mr. Stan McHugh
	Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan
	Ms. Marion Palmer
	Mr. Norman Sharp OBE

IN ATTENDANCE:

Dr. Bryan Maguire
Ms. Caitríona Lawless

APOLOGIES:

Dr. Barbara Brittingham
Ms. Margaret Duignan
Mr. Paddy Murray

1. Minutes of the Meeting of 17 September 2007

The Chairperson TABLED copies of a letter of 14 November 2007 received from Ms. Cara O'Neill, Assistant Branch Organiser, SIPTU, which he had received on 20 November 2007 which Council NOTED referred to the draft Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 17 September 2007 and circulated as C/M37.

Council AGREED that the draft Minutes as circulated were an accurate and factually correct account of the Meeting and as such, the Minutes of the Meeting of 17 September 2007 circulated as C/M37 were confirmed and signed.

2. Matters Arising from Minutes

Item 3.4. – C/M37

Council NOTED that a consultation meeting with Institutes of Technology and the Qualifications Authority, on the implementation of the recent Ministerial Regulations regarding Charters for Recognised Institutions had taken place on 2 October. Council FURTHER NOTED that representatives of 12 out of 13 Institutes of Technology were present at that meeting.

Item 4.2 – C/M37

Council NOTED that the HETAC Code of Business Conduct had been circulated to members of the Academic Committee at its meeting held on 15 October 2007.

Item 4.3. – C/M37

Council NOTED that the Academic Committee requested the Executive to clarify the differences between the terms of 'alignment' and 'equivalence' in relation to the recent evaluation of the application of the ACCA for the alignment of their Professional Qualification, ACCA with Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications, as per the Academic Committee Minutes listed as Item 6.1. of today's agenda.

Item 4.4. and 4.5. – C/M37

Council NOTED that correspondence conveying the Qualifications Authority's agreement for the extension of delegated authority to Athlone Institute of Technology and Letterkenny Institute of Technology would be dealt with under Items 3.2. and 3.3. of today's agenda.

Item 5 – C/M37

Council NOTED that the Executive had written to the Registrars of Universities and the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland, in order to consult further in the H.E. Sector on the Draft Standards for Complementary Therapies. Council NOTED that further correspondence on the matter had also been issued between HETAC and the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Health and Children. Council NOTED that progress on this stage of consultation would be brought to the Council's attention at a future meeting.

Item 6 – C/M37

Council NOTED the expression of public policy at recent meetings with representatives of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment regarding the need for expeditious accreditation of new providers, but STATED that while appreciating this need, the vigilance of HETAC is critical in safeguarding the reputation of Irish Higher Education. Council NOTED that a revised policy document would be put before Council at its Meeting on 4 February 2008.

Council NOTED that a revised Policy on Institutional Review of Providers of Higher Education would be dealt with under Item 6.3. of today's agenda. Council AGREED that the vigilance of both the Council and Executive of HETAC is critical in the safeguarding of the reputation of the H.E Sector in Ireland.

Item 7 – C/M37

Council NOTED that a meeting planned with the Qualifications Authority on the Report of the Implementation of the HETAC Action Plan which was drafted on foot of the recommendations of the Report of the Review of the Performance of HETAC under the European Standards for Quality Assurance and under Section 9 of the Qualifications Act, had not yet taken place due to work pressures relating to the recent

conferring season. Council NOTED that a rescheduled meeting would take place in the coming weeks.

Item 10 – C/M37

Council NOTED that Honorary Doctorates would be dealt with under Item 4 of today's agenda.

Council NOTED that the Minutes of the Tripartite Meeting held on 15 October 2007 would be dealt with under Item 5.3. of today's agenda.

The Chairperson raised the matter of the previously mentioned letter received from the Assistant Branch Organiser, SIPTU in relation to a section of the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 17 September 2007. Council EXPRESSED concern that a third party should be commenting on Council Minutes which until this meeting were still at a draft stage and subject to confidentiality until agreed and signed. Council NOTED that draft Minutes are circulated to senior staff within HETAC to enable decisions made at Council Meetings to be implemented. Council AGREED that the Minutes of the Meeting on 17 September 2007 were a factually accurate account of the meeting at the Labour Court on 13 September at which no recommendation had been made but where the official and staff sides agreed to avail of the services of the Labour Relations Commission. Council DECIDED it would be inappropriate to correspond with a third party in relation to its Minutes and AGREED to let the matter rest.

3. Correspondence

3.1. Council NOTED the letter of 23 October 2007 from Mr. Stan McHugh, Chief Executive of FETAC circulated as C/A38/3.1. regarding the implementation of the FETAC Integrated Awards and Standards Business System and his expression of gratitude for the co-operation of the Council of HETAC for their assistance in this matter.

3.2. Council NOTED the letter of 25 October 2007 from Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú, Chief Executive, NQAI circulated as C/A38/3.2. notifying the Council of the agreement of the Authority to the extension of delegated authority to Athlone Institute of Technology to make awards for research programmes at Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications in the areas of Life and Physical Science, Mechanical and Polymer Engineering and Social Care. Council ALSO NOTED the letter of 26 September 2007 from Mr. Seán Ó Foghlú, Chief Executive, NQAI, circulated as C/A38/3.3., notifying the Council of the agreement of the Authority to the extension of delegated authority to Letterkenny Institute of Technology to make awards for taught programmes at Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

4. Honorary Degrees

Council NOTED the report of the Meeting of the Honorary Degrees Select Committee which was held on 22 November 2007. Council APPROVED the following nominations for Honorary Degrees by the Select Committee:

Joe McGarry – Retiring Secretary General of the Institutes of Technology Ireland,

Catherine McGuinness – Former Judge of the Supreme Court, President of the Law Reform Commission, Chair of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB),

Joyce O'Connor – Former President of the National College of Ireland,

Nuala O'Loan – Former Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland,

Peter Williams – Chief Executive, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK,
President of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher
Education.

A number of Council Members declared an interest in so far as they had a present or former professional relationship with a candidate.

Council NOTED that the names of candidates are confidential pending the initial contact being made with each of them by the Secretary to the Council. Council NOTED that a date for the conferring ceremony had yet to be decided but it is expected to take place in April/May 2008.

Council AGREED that the Honorary Degrees Select Committee should review the current procedures for selection of candidates for Honorary Degrees, the frequency of the event etc. and should revert to Council with a revised procedure at the June 2008 Council Meeting.

5. Chief Executive's Report

5.1. Council NOTED the Chief Executive's Report which was tabled at the meeting as C/A38/5.1. Council NOTED that a significant amount of the Executive's time had been devoted to Conferings in the period since the last Council Meeting. Council NOTED that a market research project on the attitudes of employers and learners to the work of HETAC is currently being conducted by IPSOS Mori. Council NOTED that a Witness Seminar to mark the fortieth anniversary of the publication of the Report of the Steering Committee on Regional Technical Colleges was held on 30 November and that work on a publication arising from the event is underway.

5.2. Council APPROVED the Draft Schedule of Meeting Dates for 2008 which was circulated as C/A38/5.2. and NOTED that the Executives of HETAC, FETAC and the Qualifications Authority had attempted to schedule meetings to allow for fluidity between the business of the 3 bodies. Council NOTED that an invitation had been received from the Cork School of Music to host the June 2008 Council Meeting at their new building in Cork.

5.3. Council NOTED the Minutes of the Tripartite Meeting held on 15 October 2007, circulated as C/A38/5.3. Council NOTED that the next Tripartite Meeting is scheduled for 13 December 2007. Council NOTED that HETAC and the Qualifications Authority were jointly working on a proposal on fees which would be forwarded to the Department of Education and Science for consideration. Council NOTED that Terms of Reference for the Framework Implementation and Impact Study had been received by the HETAC Executive. Council also NOTED that the 3 bodies intend to meet shortly with the Chief of Staff and the Director of Training of the Defence Forces to discuss the accreditation of education and training initiatives in the Defence Forces.

6. Academic Committee of Council

6.1. Council NOTED the minutes of the second meeting of the Academic Committee held on 15 October 2007, circulated as C/A38/6.1.

6.2. Council NOTED the information note circulated as C/A38/6.2. detailing the following new provider which had its first programme validation approved by

the Academic Committee at the meeting of 15 October 2007:

- Sales Institute of Ireland

This provider has now completed the final stage of its Quality Assurance assessment and Council AGREED its quality assurance procedures.

- 6.3. Council NOTED the Report on the Consultation process for the Institutional Review Policy, circulated as C/A38/6.3.1. and the Revised Policy on Institutional Review of Providers of Higher Education and Training, circulated as C/A38/6.3.2. Council ADOPTED the Revised Policy document subject to the inclusion of suggestions made by Council Members at the meeting. Council NOTED that the Executive would move to provide seminars and workshops to brief Providers on the roll out of the process as well as drafting a schedule of reviews for the first 5 year cycle. Council FURTHER NOTED that the first Institutional Reviews are expected to begin in the next academic year.
 - 6.4. Council NOTED the update on the Consultation Process towards a new HETAC Policy on Learner Assessment Issues, circulated as C/A38/6.4. and NOTED that a Forum on Learner Assessment would be held on 4 December 2007. The Chairperson REQUESTED Council Members to forward any thoughts on the document to the Director of Academic Affairs. Council REQUESTED the Executive to proceed with this matter with care and ASKED that extra consideration be given in relation to 'threshold standards' and 'fitness for purpose'.
 - 6.5. Council NOTED the Report on the Alignment of the Awards made by the Open University with the National Framework of Qualifications, circulated as C/A38/6.5. and REQUESTED the Executive to forward the report, subject to the amendments outlined at the Meeting, to the Qualifications Authority for its consideration.
7. **Quality Assurance**
- 7.1. Council NOTED the Explanatory Memorandum, circulated as C/A38/7.1.1 and ADOPTED the IHEQN Draft Principles for reviewing the effectiveness of Quality Assurance procedures in Irish Higher Education and Training, circulated as C/A38/7.1.2.
 - 7.2. Council NOTED the Information Note and the IHEQN Draft Code of Practice and Guidelines for Irish Higher Education Institutions for the Provision of Education to International Students circulated as C/A38/7.2.1. and C/A38/7.2.2. respectively and REQUESTED the Executive to consult with stakeholders on the Draft Code of Practice and Guidelines. Council NOTED that following the consultation process, a revised document would be presented to Council for adoption.
8. **Decentralisation Update**
- Council NOTED that there had been no major developments in the Decentralisation process since its last meeting. Council NOTED that a meeting on this matter has been scheduled between the Department of Education and Science and representatives of HETAC, FETAC and the Qualifications Authority for 11 December 2007. Council NOTED that Members would be kept informed of any developments at future Council Meetings.

9. Financial Matters

Council NOTED the Financial out-turn for the 10 month period to 31 October 2007, circulated as C/A38/9.1. Council ALSO NOTED that if HETAC's expenditure continues in the current vein, it is likely that there will be a surplus equating approximately to the opening balance at 1 January 2007, at year end.

Council NOTED the oral report of the Chairperson of the Audit Committee on the meeting which took place on 22 November 2007. Council NOTED that the Committee examined the Computer Controls Report prepared by the Internal Auditor and FURTHER NOTED that the Audit Committee will re-examine this area and the progress made at the next Audit Committee meeting scheduled for February 2008 with a report to be presented to Council at its meeting in June 2008. Council was assured that matters in this area are being looked at with great urgency and weekly meetings of the ICT team are taking place. Council NOTED that HETAC is also examining methods relating to a voting register of graduates being compiled in light of recent developments in relation to Seanad Elections. Council NOTED that the 2006 Accounts had been signed by the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office and that a management letter would not be issued arising from the 2006 Audit. The Chairperson THANKED the Audit Committee for their work over the past year.

Council NOTED that the Internal Auditor will undertake the review of Financial Controls for 2007 in January 2008.

Council APPROVED the HETAC Budget for 2008, circulated as C/A38/9.3. and NOTED the projected expenditure of €4.4 million for that year. Council NOTED that the issue of Award Fees etc. requires resolution.

10. Staffing

Council NOTED that the following vacancies had recently been advertised: Temporary Head of Function (Development Officer), 1 permanent Grade III position and a 1 year contract at Grade V. Council NOTED that a second Head of Function post will open up shortly following the retirement of a member of Senior Staff on health grounds and to whom a lump sum and pension are due to be paid. Council NOTED that a contract for a Research Assistant/Officer would also be advertised shortly.

11. Chairperson's Business

Council NOTED the contents of a letter dated 3 December 2007 from the Chief Executive to the Chairperson, requesting the agreement of the Council to his retirement from the post of Chief Executive with effect from 31 August 2008. Due to the intention of the Chief Executive to take annual leave in July and August, he would vacate his position during the latter part of June 2008. Council AGREED to this request. The Chairperson on behalf of Council THANKED Mr. Puirseil for his pioneering contribution to the work of HETAC and WISHED him every success and happiness for his retirement. Council AGREED to convene a special meeting on Monday, 7 January 2008 to discuss the recruitment process for the Chief Executive post and NOTED the intention to advertise the post in mid to late January with a view to having a new Chief Executive in place in time for the new academic year. Council AGREED that arrangements would also be put in place for an acting Chief Executive should any gap in office arise. Council AGREED that a suitable recognition of the contribution made by Mr. Puirseil to the work of HETAC would be made at a later date.

12. Any Other Business

Hamid Khodabakhshi INFORMED the Council that he had recently been elected to the position of President of the Union of Students in Ireland and as a result would be resigning as Education Officer with USI and HETAC Council Member in the coming

weeks. Council NOTED that a new Education Officer will probably be elected at a meeting of the USI Congress in the next few days. The Chairperson on behalf of the Council THANKED Mr. Khodabakhshi for his input as a Council Member and wished him every success in his future endeavours. Council NOTED the comments of Mr. Khodabakhshi thanking the Executive for the high level of involvement of student representatives in recent seminars and consultation processes.

The Chairperson extended best wishes to Council Members and Staff for the festive season.

The next meeting of Council will take place in the Boardroom of HETAC Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2 on Monday, 7 January 2008 at 11:00 a.m. (10:30 a.m.)

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Chairperson: _____

Date: _____