

Some items relating to personnel and financial matters have been withheld for operational/sensitive reasons.

**C/M51**

Minutes of the fifty-first meeting of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council which took place on Monday, 26 April 2010 at HETAC Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, at 10:30 a.m.

**PRESENT:**

Chairperson:	Professor Séamus Smyth
Chief Executive:	Gearóid Ó Conluain
Secretary:	Tadhg Ó hÉalaithe
Members:	Dr. Barbara Brittingham Mr. Michael Carmody Ms. Marion Coy Mr. Diarmuid Hegarty Mr. Stan McHugh Mr. Paddy Murray Dr. Íde Ní Fhaoláin Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan Dr. Marion Palmer Mr. Norman Sharp OBE Mr. Hugh Sullivan

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Dr. Bryan Maguire
Ms. Caitríona Lawless
Mr. Joe Cox (Item 6.1.)
Dr. Peter Cullen (Item 6.1.)
Ms. Mary Sheridan (Item 6.1.)

**APOLOGIES:**

Dr. Finola Doyle-O'Neill
Ms. Mary McGlynn

**1. Minutes of the Meeting of 15 February 2010**

The Minutes of the Meeting of 15 February 2010 circulated as C/M50 were confirmed and signed.

**2. Matters Arising from Minutes**

Item 2 – C/M50

Council NOTED that a training seminar for an initial group of newly recruited Panel Members had been held in the Griffith College Conference Centre on 26 and 27 March 2010.

Item 2 – C/M50

Council NOTED that the draft Awards Standards in Social Care would be dealt with under Item 6.2. of today's Agenda.

Item 3.2. – C/M50

Council NOTED that the report of the outcome of the Programme Validation Appeal lodged with the NQAI by [REDACTED] had been received by the Executive and would be dealt with under Item 5.2. of today's Agenda.

Item 3.3. – C/M50

Council NOTED that [REDACTED] had replied to the Chief Executive with a satisfactory response to HETAC's queries in relation to the difficulties arising from the results of an Economics Examination held in Semester 1 2008/2009.

Item 4.1. – C/M50

Council NOTED that correspondence received from the Kings Inns in relation to the accreditation of the LLB Degree at Dublin Business School would be dealt with under Item 3 of today's Agenda.

### **3. Correspondence**

3.1. Council NOTED the letter of 2 February 2010 from Bryan Maguire to Ms. Marcella Higgins, Registrar, Kings Inns and her reply of 10 March 2010, circulated as C/A51/3.1. and 3.2. Council NOTED that the Director of Academic Affairs had written to the Kings Inns on foot of external public concerns and developments arising during a quinquennial review of the LLB Degree programme delivered by DBS and jointly awarded by HETAC and the University of Wales. Council NOTED that the Kings Inns do not normally issue reports on programmes they accredit. Council NOTED that the first stage of the quinquennial review was held in February and the second stage is scheduled to commence in May 2010. Council NOTED that the Institutional Review of DBS planned for 19 and 20 April had to be postponed due to air travel restrictions throughout Europe during that week which prevented panel members from convening and also NOTED that the Executive had rescheduled the review for the earliest possible date available – early October 2010.

3.2. Council NOTED the letter of 11 March 2010 from Gearóid Ó Conluain to Mr. Michael Scanlan, Secretary General, Department of Health and Children regarding the recent Programme Validation Appeal to the NQAI and his reply of 1 April 2010, circulated as C/A51/3.3. and 3.4. and AGREED that this correspondence would be discussed under Item 5.2. of today's Agenda.

3.3. Council NOTED the letter of 16 March 2010 from Gearóid Ó Conluain to all HETAC Providers regarding 'Grade Inflation' and AGREED that this correspondence would be discussed under Item 4.1.

### **4. Chief Executive's Report**

4.1. Council NOTED the Chief Executive's Report circulated as C/A51/4.1. and his briefing on HETAC's response to several articles recently published in the media regarding so called 'Grade Inflation'. Council NOTED that the Irish Times had not contacted HETAC at any stage prior to the publication of these articles nor had HETAC been allowed the opportunity to reply to the articles published. Council NOTED that the Executive had prepared a comprehensive brief on the matter for the Minister for Education and Science, had contact with the Education Correspondent of the Irish Independent and had a response article published in InGovernment magazine, a public sector-wide publication (a copy of this article was circulated at the meeting). Council NOTED that research had been carried out in this area by HETAC a number of years ago and had formed part of the brief given to the Minister; a current research project on higher education learning outcomes is coming to a conclusion with results due in June and Council REQUESTED the Executive to explore sector wide

options (e.g. HEA, Universities, Heads of Industry) of extending its remit of research projects in this area, both nationally and internationally and SUGGESTED particular emphasis needs to be placed on exploring methods for continuous updating of technical information in the area of Information Technology. Council NOTED the Executive's intention to brief Council on the results of the Learning Outcomes research project at a future Council Meeting.

- 4.2. Council NOTED the Recognition Agreement between HETAC and SIPTU circulated as C/A51/4.2. and COMMENDED the Executive on establishing a basic set of rules of engagement with the Union.
- 4.3. Council NOTED the Minutes of the Tripartite Meeting (Chief Executives and Directors of NQAI, FETAC and HETAC) held on 4 February and 9 March (Draft) 2010, circulated as C/A51/4.3. and 4.4. Council NOTED that the issue of marketing and advertising campaigns had been discussed at these Tripartite Meetings and also NOTED that the issue needs to be taken beyond the current context and discussed with the Interim Board of the amalgamated agency as decisions on the continuation of the various 'brands' will need to be resolved.

Council NOTED that the NQAI and the HEA are to carry out a review of the Royal College of Surgeons on foot of a request from the Minister for Education and Science following the proposals that the functions of the NUI be transferred to the new qualifications body and the possible approval of bye-laws commencing the RCSP's statutory awarding powers. Council NOTED that Tara Ryan is the HETAC representative on this review and AGREED that the Executive should prepare a formal submission.

Council NOTED the Tripartite updates on the staffing moratorium and the likely effect it is going to have on HETAC in the coming months. Council NOTED that the Head of Function dealing with Programme Validations is due to retire in August and that the Executive is currently working on detailed succession plans. Council NOTED that the two year contract of HETAC's Research Officer was coming to an end in June 2010 and should efforts to extend the contract prove unsuccessful, this would have a serious impact on the ability of the Executive to continue with its research remit. Council AGREED that the current moratorium is in no way helpful to strategic planning for the organisations involved in the amalgamation. Council NOTED that the CEOs of the three bodies had recently met with officials of the Department of Education and Science and it appeared that staffing guarantees for the new body are likely to be applicable only to staff currently holding permanent posts.

Council NOTED that problems which had arisen with the Higher Certificate [Fáilte Ireland] Award were due to the withdrawal of Fáilte Ireland from the programme.

## **5. Academic Committee of Council**

- 5.1. Council NOTED the draft minutes of the fourteenth meeting of the Academic Committee held on 29 March 2010, circulated as C/A51/5.1. Council NOTED that the Academic Committee had adopted the Report of the Expert Panel on the Institutional Review of Tipperary Institute and NOTED this report would be published on the HETAC website.

Council NOTED that the Committee had requested clarification on the response of a registered provider to the outcome of their recent programmatic review and as a result, had delayed re-validation of the programme(s) until this had been received.

- 5.2. Council NOTED the Explanatory Memorandum and the Report of the Validation Appeals Committee established by the NQAI, circulated as C/A51/5.2.1. and 5.2.2. Council NOTED that this item had been deferred from the previous Council Meeting as the report had not been received from the Authority in time. Council NOTED that the NQAI had upheld the decision taken by HETAC not to validate the programme, [REDACTED], on the grounds that a single federated body for professional self-regulation had not been established. Council NOTED the recommendations of the Authority arising from this case – urging HETAC to consult with the Department of Health and Children with a view to defining more clearly what is acceptable as professional self-regulation (See C/A51/3.3. and 3.4.) and the clarification of HETAC’s internal processes regarding formal notification/communications with applicants. Problems in this instance largely arose due to a protracted standards setting process. Council NOTED the progress made on these recommendations to date. Council NOTED that in order to preserve parity of esteem, any other applicants applying to have programmes validated in this area will be subject to the same condition relating to the establishment of a federated professional body prior to the validation of a programme. Council NOTED that the evidence base underpinning these standards has changed significantly since their approval. Council REQUESTED the Executive to keep it informed on developments arising from its discussions with the Department of Health and Children.

## 6. Academic Matters

- 6.1. Council NOTED the Explanatory Memorandum and the draft Policy and Guideline documents circulated as
- Explanatory Memorandum – C/A51/6.1.1.
  - Core Validation Policy and Criteria – C/A51/6.1.2.
  - Monitoring Policy – C/A51/6.1.3.
  - Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria – C/A51/6.1.4.
  - General Programme Validation Manual – C/A51/6.1.5.
  - Good Practice in the Quality Assurance of Arts Research Degree Programmes by Practice – C/A51/6.1.6.

Council NOTED that not all of these documents were new policies but in some cases, were a consolidation and updating of existing policy. This was largely done in light of the commencement of a more formal practice of provider monitoring, the establishment of the Framework, the adoption of European standards and guidelines and the need to update the suite of policies as HETAC heads towards amalgamation.

Following lengthy discussion, Council AGREED the following:

- Core Validation Policy and Criteria – C/A51/6.1.2. and Monitoring Policy – C/A51/6.1.3. – Council REQUESTED the Executive to amend these policies to incorporate comments and suggestions made by Council Members;
- Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria – C/A51/6.1.4. – Council NOTED that this new policy proposes to relax the criteria for delegation of authority to award research degrees at Masters level and that this proposal would be subject to confirmation with the NQAI. Council also NOTED that the policy proposes that all Master’s degrees by research would in future be Master of Philosophy degrees, emphasising/signalling the difference between taught and research Master degrees. Council ADOPTED the substance of the Policy document and

REQUESTED the Executive to revert to the Institute of Technology sector for further discussion on the title of Master of Philosophy for Research Degrees.

- General Programme Validation Manual – C/A51/6.1.5. – Council NOTED that this Manual was an aid for providers to be used in conjunction with the Core Validation Policy and Criteria (see above) and ENDORSED this document subject to any changes being made to the Core Validation Policy, on foot of Council's suggestions, would be reflected in the text of the Manual.
- Good Practice in the Quality Assurance of Arts Research Degree Programmes by Practice – C/A51/6.1.6. – Council NOTED that these guidelines had been drafted by a Working Group on Practice-based Research in the Arts established by HETAC in consultation with the IUQB and the NQAI and is a companion document to be used in conjunction with the Research Degree Programme Policy and Criteria. Council ADOPTED the Guidelines and NOTED the remainder of this document (i.e. pages 3 to 12).

6.2. Council AGREED to defer the draft Awards Standards in Social Care Work 2010, circulated as C/A51/6.2.1-6.2.3., for consideration at its next meeting scheduled for 14 June 2010.

## 7. HETAC Corporate Services Policies

Council NOTED the Explanatory Memorandum and the Policy on Business-Related Foreign Travel by HETAC Officials 2010, circulated as C/A51/7.1.1. and 7.1.2. Council ADOPTED the Policy document.

## 8. Financial Matters

8.1. Council NOTED the Financial Out-turn for the 3 month period to 31 March 2010, circulated as C/A51/8.1.

8.2. Council NOTED and APPROVED the Provisional Draft HETAC Budget 2010, circulated as C/A51/8.2.

8.3. Council NOTED the draft Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting, 22 February 2010, circulated as C/A51/8.3. and NOTED that the Audit Committee had adopted/approved an amended Internal Audit Charter.

8.4. Council NOTED the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for the year ended 31 December 2009, circulated as C/A51/8.4. The Council also NOTED that the Audit Committee was satisfied that HETAC has in place a satisfactory System of Internal Financial Controls and that a Review of the System had been carried out for the year to 31 December 2009. The Chairperson THANKED the members of the Audit Committee for all their work to date.

## 9. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson BRIEFED Council on the recent progress in relation to the forthcoming amalgamation of Education QA Agencies. The Interim Board had approved the job description for the CEO of the amalgamated agency and this had been forwarded to the Department of Finance for consideration of the Interim Board's recommendation regarding the duration of the contract. Council NOTED that the Interim Board members received the news at the end of the previous week, that the job description had received the appropriate clearance from the Department of Finance and is now being prepared for advertisement by the Public Appointments Service.

**10. Any Other Business**

No business.

The next meeting of Council will take place on Sunday and Monday, 13 and 14 June 2010 – arrangements to be confirmed.

**THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.**

**Chairperson:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_