

**National Qualifications Authority of Ireland**

**Meeting in Authority Offices**

**Thursday 3 February 2011**

**Present:**

Mr. Paul Haran (Chairperson)  
Prof. Anne Moran (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms. Inez Bailey  
Mr. Mogens Berg  
Mr. Eamon Devoy  
Mr. Pat O'Callaghan  
Mr. Donal O'Rourke  
Dr. Pat Phelan  
Mr. Gary Redmond  
Mr. Martin Shanahan  
Prof. Seamus Smyth  
Dr. Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)

**Apologies:**

Dr. Seán Conlan  
Mr. Tony Donohoe

**In attendance:**

Ms. Claire Byrne (Director of Corporate Affairs and Communications)  
Dr. Anna Murphy (Director of Research and Strategic Development)  
Ms. Trish O'Brien (Head of Framework Implementation and Qualifications Recognition)  
Mr. John O'Connor (Development Officer)  
Ms. Niamh Lenehan (Manager, Qualifications Recognition) (Item 7)

**Authority Members Terms of Office**

The Authority noted that the following members will have completed one term of office on 25 February 2011:

Paul Haran (Chairperson)  
Dr. Sean Conlan (Representative of community and voluntary organisations)  
Eamon Devoy (Nominated by ICTU)  
Dr. Pat Phelan (Nominated by Universities)  
Martin Shanahan (Nominated by Forfás)

Pat O'Callaghan (Nominated by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation)

Tony O'Donohue (Nominated by IBEC)

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 provides that members shall be eligible for reappointment but shall not serve more than two terms of office.

In addition, the Authority noted that the following members will have completed two terms of office on 25 February 2011 and are not eligible for reappointment:

Inez Bailey (Representative of community and voluntary organisations)

The Authority is seeking the Ministers assistance in appointing a person for each of the vacancies set out above for a five year period from 26 February 2011.

The Chairperson indicated that there were only a number of known outgoing members at this time but he wished to take this opportunity to thank all those members that will not be serving for another term for their steady and tireless contribution to the work of the Authority over the years. Each individual has committed freely of their time to the business of the organisation and this has culminated in a qualifications system that provides enhanced clarity for learners and a deepening of the implementation of lifelong learning provision in Ireland.

## **1. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2010 were agreed and signed.

## **Matters arising**

The Chairperson informed the meeting that the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills had conveyed her approval to the arrangement whereby the current Chief Executive of the Authority will also be appointed as Chief Executive of HETAC for the period to 30 September 2015 or the date of disbandment of HETAC on amalgamation. This approval is subject to HETAC and the Authority consenting to their Chief Executive also holding office in the other body. The Authority agreed to give its consent.

## **2. Budget, Finance and Risk**

The Authority noted the paper prepared and circulated by the executive.

The Authority noted that the Department had issued provisional figures on the level of funding for the three bodies in 2011. The executive will prepare proposals for the allocation of the funding when the final figure is known and this will be considered by the Authority at its meeting in April 2011. In the meantime, the Authority and Councils will revise budgets in accordance with the indicative figures.

The Authority noted the draft Risk Report 2010 and made recommendations for amendments. The Authority noted that the Internal Audit Committee will consider the final report at its next meeting. An updated risk profile will be put before the Internal Audit Committee and the Authority in June 2011.

### **3. Quality Assurance and the Dublin Institute of Technology**

The Authority noted the paper prepared and circulated by the executive.

The Authority noted the Institute's report, its findings and the progress made within the Institute in implementing its quality assurance procedures generally and in addressing the recommendations made by the Authority to the Institute following its consideration of the Institute's Annual Report for the period 2008-2009.

The Authority commended the Institute on the continued significant progress made in implementing its quality assurance procedures and made a number of further recommendations.

In addition, the Authority emphasised the continued importance of ownership of student feedback at the level of the module, and expressed its impatience at the Institute's lack of progress in this regard. The Authority considers the resolution of this matter to be critical to the Institute's fulfillment of its quality assurance responsibilities, and to the fulfillment of its own role as the statutory agency responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of the Institute's quality assurance/enhancement procedures. The Authority requested that the Institute be asked to address and resolve this matter without further delay and to provide the Authority with a progress report in this regard by 2 May 2011.

### **4. Revised Agreement for Alignment of VET Awards recognised by Ofqual**

The Authority noted the paper prepared and circulated by the executive.

The Authority noted the central aspects of a revised agreement for managing the continued alignment with the NFQ of vocational education and training (VET) awards, made by awarding organisations and recognised by Ofqual. The Authority supported the executive's work in this area and approved the revised agreement.

### **5. Organisational Change in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Area in Higher and Further Education and Training**

The Authority noted paper on developments in relation to the implementation of the Employment Control Framework (ECF) in the Public Service and its impact on the Authority, the Councils and ultimately, the amalgamated body.

The Authority noted the communication from the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills setting out the likely requirement for reductions in staff across the three bodies for 2011 and the requirement by end of 2014. The Authority also noted the Chief Executive's letter of response to the Secretary General.

The Authority, while recognising the gravity of the country's economic situation, expressed grave concern at the proposed reductions in staffing of the Authority and the Awards Councils over the period 2011-2014.

The Authority noted the precarious position that would be created by such reductions, in particular of the service of the national information database, Qualifax, whereby the staff of that function will be reduced from 7 to 2, in the current year. The Authority further noted that it had been asked to take over the responsibility for the Internationalisation Register from the Department. In both cases, the functions were taken over in the legitimate expectation of being allocated the staffing necessary to provide the required services.

The Authority also expressed its concern that, if the proposed reductions in staffing are implemented as proposed, this carries the notable risk of the Authority's inability to implement the National Framework of Qualifications to the extent that it is a genuine reference tool for national standards.

The Authority further noted that the total staffing of the three statutory agencies (the Authority and the two Awards Councils) has already fallen by 25% from 2009 figures and that the proposed reduction under the ECF would represent a 40% cut from staffing levels in 2009. The Authority noted with concern that this reduction of 40% is 5 times higher than the average proposed reduction of 8% in the public service numbers envisaged over the period 2008-2014 as published in the Government's National Recovery Plan (2011-2014).

The Secretary was requested to write to the Secretary General to inform her of the Authority's serious concerns arising from the Departments ECF proposals.

## **6. Report on Authority's Work 2010**

The Authority noted the draft report, presented by the executive, on the work of the implementation of the Authority's Business Plan 2010-2011, in relation to the 2010 period.

The Authority considered the draft report and made recommendations to be incorporated into the final draft. The final report will be before the Authority for approval at the April meeting.

## **7. Report of the Qualifications Recognition Service in 2010**

The Authority noted the Annual Report of the recognition service 2010 as presented by the executive.

The Authority noted that organisational change and government policy on staffing had a significant impact on the recognition section in 2010. It was also noted that the recognition service saw an increase of 18% on the previous year in applications received. In addition, the Authority assumed responsibility for the management and maintenance of the Internationalisation Register from the Department of Education and Skills during that year. Notwithstanding the impact of these factors, the recognition service, through the development of its processing system, reduced the application turnaround time and completion rates rose to 87% of applications being completed within 1 to 2 weeks.

The Authority noted the plans for the recognition service in 2011 both nationally and internationally. Plans are in place for the ongoing development of the service to maintain and enhance relationships with relevant national stakeholders. On the European and international front, a priority for the executive is to build on the work conducted in linking the recognition of qualifications to developments in qualifications frameworks through the ENIC-NARIC network.

The Authority noted that in the current economic climate the number of immigrants coming to Ireland has fallen significantly while the number of emigrants has also increased. It is likely that the number of recognition applications in 2011 will be similar to those received in 2010, but other areas of work such as queries relating to Irish qualifications and the recognition service's role in the promotion of the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad, is likely to become increasingly important.

## **8. FETAC Common Awards System / Standards Development**

The Authority noted the update provided by the executive on the Authority's engagement with the FETAC Common Awards System (CAS) and the Framework implications of CAS.

The Authority noted the work that had been undertaken on comparing of approaches of FETAC and HETAC in the determination of awards standards. Work on the causes and effects of the differences in approaches will receive further attention.

## **9. National Strategy for Higher Education**

The executive briefed the Authority on the issues for the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland arising from the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (Hunt Report).

The Authority noted that the Strategy recommends a cabinet sub-committee on higher education and the HEA has commenced work to implement the Strategy.

### **10. Quality Assurance – Enhancement Activities**

The Authority noted the paper prepared and circulated by the executive.

The Authority noted the ongoing quality assurance arrangements for the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI). The RCSI will be reporting to the Authority at the end of 2011 on its progress in implementing its action which will address the recommendations arising from the 2010 review which took place to advise the Minister on the granting of degree-awarding powers to the College.

### **11. Framework Implementation**

The Authority noted the updates paper and the progress in relation to the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications and on matters arising in the course of this implementation.

### **12. Communications and Use of Framework**

The Authority noted the paper prepared and circulated by the executive.

### **9. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on the slightly earlier than scheduled date of Wednesday 13 April 2011 at 11.00am in the Authority's offices on Jervis Street.

The Authority noted that the date of the June meeting will also take place earlier than scheduled on Tuesday 21 June 2011.

The meeting concluded.

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