

# SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

B161/1.4

## BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 24 APRIL 2024

For approval

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 10am on Wednesday 20 March by video conference.

### Members

- \* Ms S Rogers (Chair)
- \* Ms F Robertson (Chief Executive)
- \* Ms A Davis
- \* Mr S Hagney
- \* Mrs J Handley
- \* Dr W Mayne
- \* Mr J Morton
- Mr G Smith
- \* Professor K Thomson
- \* Ms M Wailes

### Officers

- \* Mr M Baxter
- \* Ms J Blair
- \* Mr J Booth
- \* Mr M Campbell
- \* Mrs D Mahmoud
- \* Mr J McMorris
- \* Dr G Stewart
- \* Mr M Ware

- \* Indicates present

### In attendance

Ms J Gilruth, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (B160/4 only)  
Ms C Hicks, Director of Education Reform, Scottish Government (B160/4 only)  
Mr S Borley, Head of Chief Executive's Office, SQA  
[REDACTED], SQA  
[REDACTED], SQA  
[REDACTED], SQA

## 1 OPENING REMARKS

### 1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, noting that apologies had been received from Grahame Smith.

## 1.2 Declaration of any Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest raised in relation to the agenda.

Whilst not a conflict of interest, it was acknowledged that Mr Hagney held an interest through his position as a Head of Centre. Furthermore, it was noted that Ms Wailes, Ms Davis and Mr Hagney have children currently studying or who had recently completed SQA qualifications.

## 1.3 Minutes of the previous meeting from 24 January 2024

The Board agreed the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

The Chief Executive noted that Mr Smith had suggested a small change to minute of the meeting on 29 November which had been agreed and the minutes had been updated ahead of publication.

## 1.4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that would not be covered during the agenda items.

## 2 UPDATES

### 2.1 Chair's Update

The Chair provided a comprehensive update on her activities since the previous Board meeting held in February. This included the resolution of the pay dispute, where she expressed gratitude to the team, acknowledging the commendable work by colleagues leading to resolution, and ensuring the organisation continued to deliver effectively.

The Chair reported her attendance at various Board committee meetings, emphasising the valuable learning experiences gained. She noted that two Remuneration Committee meetings had taken place in February and March. She also highlighted the work with the Scottish Government around non-executive recruitment for additional Board membership. A recruitment programme to fill all outstanding positions was scheduled to commence over the summer.

Acknowledging that an update on the development of the Corporate Plan would be presented later in the meeting, with an opportunity for discussion with the Cabinet Secretary, she noted that the purpose of the presentation was to provide a longer-term perspective beyond the transition from SQA to the New Qualifications Body (NQB). The final version of the Corporate Plan would be brought for formal Board approval at the meeting in April.

A brief update was provided on plans for the Transition Board, with confirmation that transition-related matters would be included as a standing item on Board agendas going forward. Efforts were underway to ensure sufficient flexibility and clarity, allowing the SQA Board sovereignty and adaptability necessary for a smooth transition. The Transition Board would aim to facilitate organisational progress. Ongoing work was underway, including finalising arrangements and membership. Once established, regular updates would be provided to the Board.

The Board welcomed the adoption of a full system approach, recognising that the finer details of governance arrangements were yet to be finalised. It was emphasised that, while responsibility for existing statutory functions would remain with the substantive Board, the Transition Board would play a crucial role in facilitating the organisation's progress to a new qualifications body. The Board concluded with a commitment to stay informed and engaged in the ongoing transition process, with a focus on maintaining effective governance and ensuring continuity of organisational functions.

## 2.2 Chief Executive's Update

The Chief Executive provided an update on the activities undertaken by her and the Executive Team since the last Board meeting. Key areas of focus included engagement on the Corporate Plan, involving both internal and external stakeholders across the education and skills system. The response to the propositions outlined in the plan had been very encouraging, setting a positive context for engagement and positioning SQA and the new organisation for the future. She highlighted ongoing work s, including further internal engagement, to finalise ahead of the next Board meeting scheduled for the end of April.

The Chief Executive reported that the organisation was currently deeply involved in procedural programme for the 2024 examination diet, which would start in a matter of weeks. She acknowledged the considerable activity required to ensure the successful delivery of the diet, noting that progress to date had been good. The recent resolution of the industrial dispute represented a positive development for both colleagues and the organisation.

The formal Scottish Government response to the Hayward Review was expected after the Easter recess, with the introduction of the Education Reform Bill in early May, Colleagues were engaging closely on both elements, as appropriate.

In closing, the Chief Executive highlighted that the recent industrial dispute has been very challenging, and discussions were underway with SQA's recognised Trade Unions to explore joint working going forward.

The Board acknowledged the Chief Executive's update and expressed support for the ongoing efforts of the Executive Team. The Board reiterated its commitment to providing necessary guidance and support as the organisation navigates through these various challenges and opportunities.

## 6 PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

### 6.1 Awarding 2024 Programme Update

The Board were joined by [REDACTED], who provided a comprehensive update on the 2024 Awarding Programme, offering an overview of its principles and current status.

[REDACTED], reported that the programme is currently designated as amber, clarifying that this status did not reflect any issues of concern but rather aligns with expectations for this phase of implementation.

██████████, highlighted the commencement of the Access to Scripts project, which followed the proof-of-concept project conducted last year, expending the initiative to all centers for a limited number of qualifications. This development is significant in terms of enhancing transparency in the organisation's activities and benefiting learners.

The Board welcomed the update and engaged in discussions regarding the reporting style and methodologies employed. Additionally, the Board commended the efforts invested in the return of scripts initiative.

### **3 PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Draft Budget 2024-25**

Mr Baxter presented a paper setting out the draft budget position for FY 24/25 following further analysis of projected costs and revenues for 2024-25 from that presented to the Board of Management on 24 January 2024.

He reported that discussions had commenced with the Scottish Government regarding the level of grant required for the fiscal year 2024-2025 and the Accountable Officer process for in-year funding. Emphasis was placed on the urgency of these discussions, with acknowledgment that last year's in-year grant was not confirmed until June 2023, making swift action necessary in this regard.

Mr Baxter outlined key points of savings, emphasising that these savings would need to be structural and recurrent in order to effectively address the organisation's cost base. Additionally, he emphasised the importance of demonstrating to the Scottish Government that all efforts were being made internally to reduce costs as part of the request for additional grant funding.

The Board welcomed the update and discussed the figures presented in the report. Specific attention was given to the savings identified through changes to the procedural programme and the potential impacts on income of funding cuts on the College sector. It was noted that there had been no movement on fees and charges to address the level of income for the organisation, and discussions with the Scottish Government had highlighted the need for a review in 2025 to balance out reductions in volume-based income.

Efforts to increase efficiency through initiatives such as e-marking and virtual meetings were highlighted. While recognising that not all materials lend themselves to e-marking, it was noted that such initiatives could lead to reductions in costs related to script carriage and stationery. The Board supported all the efforts being made to address the financial challenges facing the organisation and emphasised the importance of ongoing communication and collaboration with the Scottish Government.

#### **3.2 Financial Performance Report**

Mr Baxter presented an update on the financial position as at Month 10 to 31 January 2024, reporting that as at Month 10 the forecast was projecting that the organisation would remain within the Q0 budget for business-as-usual revenue expenditure. A positive result given the initial challenges set within the Q0 budget. He

highlighted the importance of recognising international business in achieving a balanced position.

The Board noted the update.

### 3.3 **SQA Corporate Plan 2024-27**

The Board received a presentation from Mr Baxter, Mr Ware and Mr Booth providing an update on the progress to date on developing SQA's 'prospectus for change' (the corporate plan) for the period 2024-2027, including feedback from engagement with stakeholders, users and staff. The Board were provided an opportunity to discuss the direction of travel in relation to the ambition the prospectus articulates, including the draft deliverables that would underpin the delivery of the three-year outcomes; and how these would be delivered in partnership with stakeholders and users.

The Board noted that very positive feedback had been received overall, prompting discussion on the scale of engagement activity, which was comprehensive. The Board supported the strategy. but discussed concerns in centres regarding disparities in the implementation of project learning experiences across schools, noting that historically, it had not been possible to achieve a consistent standard across all centres, highlighting issues of fairness. The Board noted the need to await the government's response to the Hayward Review to determine how this this aspect will be considered.

It was noted that the organisation had engaged extensively with stakeholders, with progress made in the past couple of years to enhance openness, transparency, and accessibility for all stakeholders. Teaching unions had also been involved in these conversations. The Board discussed the importance of the impact of COVID being reflected, emphasising the importance of considering student wellbeing, mental health, and resilience. The Board noted that various presentation formats, including video and testimonials, are being considered to make the information more relatable and accessible.

There was unanimous support for the organisation's direction of travel, with the final stages of refining language and presentation underway. Members commended the boldness of setting out a clear vision for the organisation's future and collectively endorsed the ambition outlined in the presentation.

## 4 **VISIT OF CABINET SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS TO SQA BOARD**

The Chair welcomed Ms. Gilruth, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and Clare Hicks, Director of Education Reform, from the Scottish Government to the meeting.

The Chief Executive introduced the session, highlighting the collaborative effort between SQA and the wider education and skills system in building for the future.

Executive Team colleagues delivered a presentation on the prospectus for change, highlighting the work undertaken with the Scottish Government, partners, stakeholders, users, and staff in its development and delivery. The presentation

emphasised leveraging technology, resetting relationships, and delivering qualifications that align with societal and economic changes.

Mr Booth provided an overview of the engagement program conducted by the organisation, emphasising ongoing consultation and involvement with stakeholders. The importance of engagement methods and the "you said, we did" approach was underscored, whilst acknowledging the statutory role of the national qualifications body and challenges of achieving consensus on certain issues.

Moving on to transition arrangements, the Chair presented a diagram illustrating the proposed Transition Board's role, which would be joint chaired by herself and Ms Hicks. The plan was strongly endorsed by the Cabinet Secretary, commending the Chair for the position reached thus far and welcoming the clear route forward. She noted that a programme plan would be developed to report regularly to both the SQA Board and the Cabinet Secretary as transition work progressed.

The Chief Executive provided an update on this years' experience with the return to full course assessment, emphasising that its impact on learners would be carefully considered during grading meetings and a comprehensive examination of all evidence will inform decisions on the way forward.

The Cabinet Secretary thanked the Chair, Board members and the Executive Team for their time and input before leaving the call with Ms Hicks.

## **5 PAPERS FOR APPROVAL**

### **5.1 Awarding 2024 Policy**

The Chair welcomed Margot McKerrell to the meeting to seek endorsement of the draft policy for awarding graded National Courses in 2024.

Ms McKerrell provided an overview of the proposed policy for awarding in 2024, noting that it has taken as its starting point the policy agreed by the Board on 24 January. She noted that the policy had been developed in collaboration with key internal and external stakeholders and the SQA Qualifications Committee.

The Board welcomed and endorsed the approach proposed. It was noted that, similar to previous years, the details of awarding in 2024 would be made publicly available when results are published in August 2024.

### **5.2 Contract Award for Database Licenses**

[REDACTED]

**Redacted - section 30 (b)(i)**

### **5.3 SQA Appointees**

[REDACTED]

**Redacted - section 30 (b)(i)**

## **7 COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **7.1 Accreditation Committee**

In Mr Smith's absence, the Board noted the Accreditation Committee minutes from the meeting of 25 October 2023.

### **7.2 Performance Committee**

The Board noted the Performance Committee minutes from the meeting of 7 November 2023.

### **7.3 Audit Committee**

The Board noted the Audit Committee minutes from the meeting of 20 November 2023. Ms Wailes reported that all assurances returning from the audit environment were positive and the Committee had had some good conversations around the corporate risk register.

### **7.4 Qualifications Committee**

The Board noted the Qualifications Committee minutes from the meeting of 1 November 2023.

## **8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business raised.

## **9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Board will take place on Wednesday 24 April 2024.