

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

B162/1.4

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 29 MAY 2024

For approval

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 10am on Wednesday 24 April 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 G Smith
- * Professor K Thomson
- * Ms M Wailes

Officers

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

- * Indicates present

In attendance

Mr S Borley, Head of Chief Executive's Office, SQA
[REDACTED], SQA
[REDACTED], SQA
[REDACTED], SQA (B162/4.2 only)

Observer

Mr J Morton, Observer

1 OPENING REMARKS

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, noting that no apologies had been received. Mr Hagney joined the meeting at 11.15am.

A warm welcome was extended to Mr John Morton to the meeting, noting that his short-term appointment to the Board was in the final stages of formalisation and he would be attending this meeting as an observer.

1.2 **Declaration of any Conflicts of Interest**

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

1.3 **Minutes of the previous meeting from 28 February and 20 March 2024**

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

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 an update on activities undertaken since the last Board meeting in March. She noted that the exam diet had commenced at the start of the week and expressed gratitude towards the Executive Team for their diligent efforts in ensuring its successful implementation. She acknowledged the significant workload involved and extended appreciation to all colleagues for their contributions.

The Chair reported on the considerable programme of engagement both internally and externally around the development of SQA's Corporate Plan and prospectus for future change. Alongside this engagement, she continued to meet with members of SQA staff, highlighting a productive 'Meet Shirley' all-staff session, and noting the enthusiasm of staff to actively engage.

The Chair reported ongoing discussions focusing on transition, change management, and organisational culture, including meeting with colleagues from Organisational Development and Change.

The Board noted the update.

2.2 **Chief Executive's Update**

The Chief Executive provided an update on activities across SQA since the last Board meeting. As outlined by the Chair, the examinations diet had commenced, following months of preparatory work. This is subject to ongoing delivery and communications monitoring and there were no reported issues to date. Awarding meetings would be relocated to the Glasgow offices, which was anticipated to generate financial savings to SQA over the summer period.

In the period since the last meeting of the Board, the Executive Team's focus had continued on the development of the Corporate Plan, with significant external and internal engagement ongoing. This had included conversations with opposition spokespeople. The Chief Executive noted very positive feedback thus far.

Anticipated legislation for the National Qualifications Body (NQB) was expected to be introduced in early May, with communications planned. The

Chief Executive was also hopeful that a Scottish Government response to the Hayward Review would be announced before the summer recess, after some delay.

In closing, the Chief Executive added her welcome to Mr Morton. She also noted that this was Mr Baxter's last meeting as Director of Finance and Corporate Services, as he would be leaving SQA. The Chief Executive extended her immense gratitude to Mr Baxter, for his substantial contribution to SQA over the last 4 years.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for her update and extended her own thanks and best wishes to Mr Baxter.

3 PAPERS FOR APPROVAL

3.1 Corporate Plan: A Prospectus for Change

Mr Baxter introduced the near final version of the SQA Corporate Plan to the Board, highlighting that it reflected both internal and external engagement. He emphasised that, where possible, the plan aligned with the review landscape, striking a balance between ongoing delivery and the need for change and transformation. Mr Baxter reported that the plan had been universally positively received, both in substance and in tone. Members commended the extensive work put into its development.

The Board discussed the organisation's role and commitment as an employer. It was agreed to add a reference in Annex 2 to the implementation of the careers service review. There was also discussion on the need to add strength to our commitment to employee relations, including the relationship with SQA's Trade Unions (TUs) and adherence to Fair Work principles.

Sustainability had been incorporated into operational planning and there was discussion about whether more emphasis could be placed on wider strategic drivers of change, for example the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education. The Board noted that agility would be required in moving forward to ensure activities aligned with broader policy announcements which were outstanding.

The Board welcomed the plan as comprehensive overall, with detailed operational plans to follow. Mr Baxter noted that an updated plan reflecting the comments of Board members would be submitted to the Scottish Government for approval which would allow the organisation to progress with operational planning.

A further update would be provided at the Board's meeting in May.

3.2 Appointees

The Chief Executive introduced the item noting that points raised by the Board at the previous meeting had been duly considered and incorporated into the addendum provided to the Board today. She highlighted the importance of legal compliance, whilst also being mindful of the financial

implications, wider issues in relation to appointee recruitment and retention, and the broader reform agenda.

Following a detailed discussion, the Board agreed to proceed with new contract arrangements, as quickly as possible from July, aligned with normal contracting timelines. This was subject to a more detailed assessment of deliverability.

The Chief Executive highlighted that she would need to engage further with the Portfolio Accountable Officer of the Scottish Government, around the financial implications.

The Board agreed to be updated on the progress of discussions as quickly as possible, with a further update at its next meeting.

3.3 Qualifications Committee Co-options

Dr Stewart put forward the proposal seeking to co-opt two new members to the Qualifications Committee.

The Board noted that both recommended individuals had been approached and were keen to take up appointment, which the Convenor of the Qualifications Committee had also approved.

The Board approved the two co-options.

4 PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

4.1 Draft Budget 2024-25

Mr Baxter set out the draft budget position for 2024/25 following further analysis of projected costs and revenues for 2024-25 from that presented to the Board on 20 March 2024. He provided the Board with an overview of the current funding position and projected additional requirement from the Scottish Government.

Mr Baxter noted that the additional Grant in Aid requirement and any funding in respect of Education Reform was subject to Accountable Officer approval in Scottish Government. Information to support this request was submitted to the Scottish Government on 28 March and the matter was being pursued with Scottish Government officials.

Further actions taken to reduce costs and seek to increase direct income were being considered on a recurrent basis, meaning that they would be sustainable and embedded within the operating model going forward.

The Board noted the challenges on funding, including steps being taken to deliver a balanced position.

4.2 **Awarding Programme Update**

██████████ joined the meeting to provide an overview of the 2024 Awarding Programme, including an update on the access to scripts pilot.

The Board noted the update with thanks and commended the work undertaken by the team to deliver.

██████████ left the meeting.

4.3 **Transition Update**

The Chair provided the Board with an update on the newly established Transition Board, co-chaired with the Scottish Government, reporting that the first meeting had been well attended and primarily focused on scene setting. An overview of workstreams was presented, detailing the various areas of focus and activities.

The draft Terms of Reference had been discussed, and the Board noted that, once finalised, they would be brought to the Board for information. It was noted that the relationship between the Transition Board and the Board was important.

The Board noted that the Chair would provide regular updates to ensure transparency and alignment with organisational objectives.

5 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

5.1 **Advisory Council**

Ms Handley reported that the Advisory Council had undertaken successful delivery of a live public access meeting in November with workshops on Key Audience Research and SQA & Sustainability. This would now become an annual event.

5.2 **Performance Committee**

The Board noted the Performance Committee minutes from the meeting of 5 February 2024. Ms Davis noted the continual development of the Quarterly Performance Review (QPR) to ensure it is robust going forward. Ms Davis reported that a new colleague engagement survey would soon commence, and this would allow a mechanism for effective staff engagement tracking going forward.

The Board noted that the new Corporate Plan would lay the groundwork to reformulate the QPR.

6 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Board again expressed their collective thanks and good wishes to Mr Baxter as he leaves SQA to take up a new role. He expressed his thanks in return for their support over his tenure.

There was no other business raised.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

pThe next meeting of the Board will take place on Wednesday 29 May 2024.