

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

B163/1.4

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 5 AUGUST 2024

For approval

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 10am on Wednesday 29 May 2024 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
- * Mr J Morton


Officers

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

- * Indicates present

In attendance

Mr S Borley, Head of Chief Executive's Office, SQA

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1 OPENING REMARKS

1.1 Welcome and apologies

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

She particularly welcomed Mr John Morton to the meeting, noting that his short-term appointment to the Board had now been finalised, and Mr Dickson who would be leading on Finance issues in the interim while recruitment concludes for the Director of Finance role.

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 24 April 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.

1.5 **Action Grid**

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Mr McMorris updated that he had engaged with Mr Smith on his feedback around fair work and workforce planning to ensure these deliverables were reflected in plan and these comments had been picked up in the course of finalising the plan. The Board noted that a fuller update would be provided as part of B162/4.2.

2 **UPDATES**

2.1 **Chair's Update**

The Chair provided the Board with an update on her activities since the Board last met in April. She noted that the examination timetable was nearing its end and acknowledged the immense amount of work involved in its delivery. The Chair expressed her gratitude and recorded the Board's formal thanks to the organisation for their significant efforts.

She went on to update that all end-of-year reviews with the Board have now been completed and a meeting of the Remuneration Committee had been held on April 29.

The Chair informed the Board that conversations are ongoing regarding staff governance. There are discussions on whether the organisation can undertake initiatives in the transformation space to improve industrial relations through the principles of fair work and other related measures.

The Chair reported that she had met with representatives from the Scottish Government (SG) the previous afternoon to discuss non-executive appointments. The recruitment round was now set, and advertisements for these positions would go live in June. Pre-recruitment communications would be disseminated through various networks.

The Board noted the update.

2.2 **Chief Executive's Update**

The Chief Executive opened her update by extending a warm welcome to John Morton. She announced that Dr Stewart would retire from SQA in September after 35 years of service, highlighting the important role she had undertaken and value she had brought to the organisation throughout her years of service. Recruitment for Dr Stewart's interim replacement would commence in the early summer.

The Chief Executive also reported that arrangements for the appointment of the new Director of Finance were underway, expressing gratitude to Ms Wailes for her support thus far.

She mentioned that it is not yet confirmed if the election announcement will impact legislation for the New Qualifications Body (NQB).

The Chief Executive highlighted that it was an extremely busy time for SQA.

She noted that the exam diet would conclude that week, highlighting her thanks to staff across SQA. The upcoming programme of grade boundary meetings marked a significantly busy period for the organisation over the next two months.

There has been ongoing engagement with the government regarding SQA's financial position. Internal work to identify further savings continues, although it is challenging. The process of receiving drafts of the strategic guidance letter and framework document was also currently underway.

The next round of Covid inquiry submissions was concluding.

The Chief Executive provided an update to the Board around the ongoing industrial dispute in Colleges, noting that SQA were working closely with Colleges Scotland and the Scottish Government (SG). Efforts were being made to ensure that colleges communicate effectively with learners, and where possible, extend deadlines and provide support to learners.

Finally, and importantly, SQA colleagues continues to engage with Scottish Government officials on the timing of the introduction of the Bill to replace SQA, which was expected imminently, and the Scottish Government's response on the Hayward Review,

3 PAPERS FOR APPROVAL

3.1 Accreditation Committee: New Member Nomination

The Board were joined by Mr Brown, Head of SQA Accreditation, who was seeking Board approval for an additional member of the Accreditation Committee to bring the number of non-members (of SQA Board) back up to a level which would address recent issues around quorum.

The Board approved.

4 PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

4.1 Transition Update

The Chair provided an update on the first meeting of the Transition Board and planned agenda for the next meeting the following week. The Scottish Government is expected to set out their vision for the New Qualification Body and the draft Terms of Reference would be circulated to Transition Board members for feedback following the meeting, after which the final version would be shared with the SQA Board.

There would also be a presentation on digital awarding at the meeting on 4 June. The Chair emphasised the importance of recognising that this process would not be without cost and would need to be funded from available resources. The consideration of these associated costs was welcomed by the Board.

The Board discussed the representation of industry perspectives on the Transition Board and which institution could best represent the interests of all industries. It was noted that additional relevant representatives would be brought into conversations at the Transition Board when appropriate. The Board considered the importance of broader collaboration and engagement outside of formal meetings and recognised the risks associated with having an overly large group.

The Board noted the update, and noted that the Chair would bring similar, regular reports to the Board as the work of the Transition Board develops.

4.2 Prospectus for Change (Corporate Plan) Approval by Scottish Government

Ms Raven, Head of Strategic Planning and Governance, joined the meeting to provide an update on the Corporate Plan (CP). Initial review feedback had been received from Scottish Government policy officers on the final draft version of the CP. The main feedback was the addition of performance measures and targets against each deliverable, a requirement from the Scottish Public Finance Manual. The Executive Management Team (EMT) would review this feedback, and the final version would be completed by the end of the week before submitting to the Cabinet Secretary, accompanied by a paper from the Chief Executive highlighting key points. The final version of the CP would be circulated to the Board virtually before submission to the Cabinet Secretary. Ms Raven would clarify the timeline for receiving feedback from the Cabinet Secretary.

Ms Raven noted that the plan would also be translated into Gaelic and potentially other non-English languages for dissemination.

Ms Raven thanked the Board, and all involved in the creation and development of the plan for their contributions.

4.3 Budget 2024-25

Mr Dickson, Head of Finance, provided an update on the financial position, noting the lack of significant change since the Board's last meeting in April. Efforts were ongoing to explore cost reduction options and increase Scottish Government confidence in the future program.

The Chief Executive emphasised the real concern around this year's budget position. Significant steps had already been taken to make savings, which materially linked to the discussions around the Corporate Plan and transition. The current financial constraints would affect the organisation's ability to implement changes and achieve ambitions, particularly in digital initiatives. The deficit is significant but less severe than it might have been due to a reduction in superannuation costs. The superannuation reduction will apply to this financial year and to FY 25/26 but these are expected to return to normal in FY 26/27.

The Board noted that the Executive Team were making every effort to reduce costs as much as possible and acknowledged the significant impact of the budget reduction on the organisation, considering the limited revenue streams available outside of fees and charges, which were fixed at outdated rates.

The Board discussed these challenges, recognising the difficulty of the position and noted the increased volumes and costs, with no increase in funding or opportunity to increase revenue.

Acknowledging that finance drives and is driven by the organisation's structures, the Board agreed that a discussion on the people strategy would be welcomed so that members understand the measures being taken to address these challenges in the short, medium, and long term as the organisation transitions.

The Board recognised the scale of the challenge and the limited resources available to resolve it. They acknowledged the fundamental nature of financial considerations in terms of organisational design and emphasised the importance of reflecting the depth and nature of the ongoing discussions.

5 PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

5.1 Awarding 2024 Programme Update

Mr Muir joined the meeting to provide an overview of the 2024 Awarding Programme. He reported that the overall status of the programme was at amber. He summarised that the position was as expected for this point in the year due to the rhythm of project delivery and there were no issues or concerns to report at this time. He highlighted that a good number of projects are either completed or nearing completion.

Mr Muir updated the Board on live projects, including the access to scripts project, which had been expanded in this awarding year to all centres for a limited number of subjects to gather further insights from the service.

The Board discussed planning for the 2025 timetable, noting the complications posed by the later Easter holidays in 2025. The Board noted that SQA colleagues would be meeting with SLS to model potential compressions of the timetable. Any changes would need to be carefully considered due to implications such as increased workload, coincident exams, and the pressure on centres to turn around assessment arrangements.

The Board noted that extensive consultative arrangements were in place for forming the timetable, with concerns primarily arising from the timing of Easter and decisions by Local Authorities on holiday schedules. The Executive Team would keep the Chair and Board closely informed on developments.

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

5.2 **Appointee Update**



Redacted - section 30 (b)(i)

6 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

6.1 **Accreditation Committee**

The Board noted the Accreditation Committee minutes from 9 February 2024. Mr Smith reported that the key focus areas of the Committee had been the new member appointment, contribution to education reform, and ongoing discussions around the NOS database.

6.2 **Qualifications Committee**

The Board noted the Qualifications Committee minutes from 6 March 2024. Professor Thomson reported that the level of analysis being reported into the Committee around N4 and N5 entries and the Work Based Learning strategy was of exemplary quality and stressed the importance that this detail is shared with other organisations as appropriate.

In addition, Professor Thomson noted that newly co-opted members Jen Davies and Yasmeen Hussain were both proving quality additions to the membership.

6.3 **Performance Committee**

Ms Davis provided a verbal update on the recent meeting of the Performance Committee noting that a workshop was planned in July to re-establish the QPR, linked to new Corporate Plan.

7 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business raised.

8 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Board will take place on Monday 5 August for a pre-results briefing.