

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the sixty fourth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 23 September 2022 at 10:00 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

Present:

- Ms. Joanne Harmon (Chair)
- Dr. Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
- Dr. Barbara Brittingham
- Ms. Mary Danagher (attended via video conferencing, Items 2-18)
- Mr. Blake Hodgkinson
- Mr. Thomas McDermott
- Ms. Clodagh McGivern
- Dr. Niamh O'Reilly
- Prof. Irene Sheridan
- Dr. Anne Walsh

Apologies: None

In attendance:

- Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Liam Butler (Item 10)
- Mr. Keith Moynes, Assistant Secretary, DFHERIS (Item 1)
- Ms. Tanya Kenny, Principal Officer, Higher Education – Quality and Governance Section, DFHERIS (Item 1)

INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the meeting.

The Board agreed that the agenda for the meeting was acceptable and adopted same.

1. PRESENTATION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE (DFHERIS)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. Keith Moynes, Assistant Secretary and Ms. Tanya Kenny, Principal Officer of the Higher Education Quality and Governance Section within the Department to the meeting.

The Board noted Mr. Moynes's presentation which focused on the current priorities of both the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and his Department.

Mr. Moynes took the opportunity in light of the Board's term of office ending on 5 November, to thank on behalf of the Minister and the Department, all Members for their leadership and stewardship of the organisation over their terms and expressed his appreciation for all that the Chairperson and the Board have done, particularly their engagement and collaboration and the significant progress on the Amended Legislation Programme (ALP).

The discussion was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Moynes and Ms. Kenny for attending and she paid tribute to her colleagues on the Board.

2. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board noted that no conflicts of interest were declared.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS

The **Minutes of the QQI Board Meetings** held on 10 June and 7-15 July (incorporeal meeting) 2022 were **confirmed** and signed.

4. NOTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS

The Board **approved** the **Notes of the Meetings of 10 June 2022 and 7-15 July 2022** for publication on the QQI website.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Board noted the **Action Tracker**.

5.1. Action Tracker

The Board noted the updated Action Tracker.

6. CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

6.1. CEO Report

The Board noted the various updates contained in the CEO Report covering the period since the June 2022 Board Meeting.

The Board noted that there had been a number of developments and significant progress in many work areas over the summer period.

The Board noted that the draft report for the review of the quality assurance, governance arrangements and processes for the existing consortium-led apprenticeship programmes was currently with several select groups (including the National Apprenticeship Office) for review. The report is likely to feed into the move to a single co-ordinated system of apprenticeships.

The Board requested that an update on the Rethinking Assessment project and the final Report on the apprenticeship review be presented to the Board at its November Meeting.

The Board noted the Research and Innovation Unit will be working in collaboration with the Partnerships Division on research on enterprise engagement.

The Board noted that the Executive had recently published its latest analysis of awards data, *QQI awards and related provision – looking back over the past 10 years*, which covered the period 2012-2022. The report includes five case studies depicting instances where trends or demands for programmes in specific areas/disciplines led to increased demands for certification.

7. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

The Board noted a number of verbal updates on QQI's **Engagement with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)**.

7.1. Meeting with the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

The Board noted that the Chairperson and Chief Executive met with Minister Simon Harris on 23 August. The Chairperson updated the Board on the discussions at the meeting and noted the Minister's enthusiasm and appreciation for the work completed by QQI to date.

The Board noted that the Minister will attend the 10-year anniversary conference on 18 October to launch the Global Academic Integrity Network.

The appointment of new Board Members was another of the items discussed at the meeting and the Board noted that the advertisement for the Public Appointments System (PAS) had been finalised and is due to be published in early October. The advertisement is for both ordinary Members and a Chairperson.

The Board noted that the Chief Executive had also attended a meeting on 22 September between the Department and the Chief Executives of the State Agencies under its aegis.

The Board noted that the rescheduled Quarter 2 PDA Review Meeting would now be taking place on 30 September.

7.2. Funding Model

The Board noted that the funding model submission was under consideration by the Department.

7.3. Amendment Legislation Programme (ALP)

The Board noted a verbal update from the Director of Development on recent progress on the establishment of the International Education Mark (IEM) process.

An outline was provided on the engagement and consultation with the ELE sector on the IEM and corresponding Codes of Practice to date and remaining consultation plans before year end.

The Board noted that the International Education Unit has held bilateral meetings with individual HE providers and representative bodies, e.g. University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, University of Galway, NUI, University College Dublin and the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA). It was noted that some of the engagement has occurred through the providers' international officers. IEM updates and discussions also featured on the agendas of the Quality Dialogue meetings with the individual Universities which took place over the summer. A meeting with the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) is scheduled for the week of 28 September.

The Unit had also completed the second drafts of the Codes of Practice (Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education and Training to International Learners and Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Education and Training to International Learners: English Language Education) and the drafts were considered by the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) on 19 September for approval to go to public consultation. The consultation period is expected to run until the end of November with final draft documentation planned to be available before Christmas.

Another document, draft Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for the ELE sector (largely the Core Guidelines tailored specifically for the ELE sector) has also been developed. The Board noted that the Executive intends to complete four briefing sessions for the ELE sector by the New Year (a number of which have already taken place in September).

The Board noted that the IEM policy package will be undergoing formal public consultation but also noted that significant targeted consultation with stakeholders had already taken place.

The Board noted the Executive's intention that Due Diligence (Corporate Fitness) and the IEM process will run as one seamless process. There will ultimately be a whitelist of authorised institutions. Work is underway on the development and building of the ICT system to support the process.

The Board noted that branding for the IEM is being finalised and a workshop on the matter had been held on 20 September.

The Board noted that internal meetings and the fortnightly meetings with the Department on the ALP are continuing. Due Diligence and the IEM are the programme's current priorities, and these will have implications for the development of the Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) process which will follow thereafter. The Department had provided feedback on the draft Codes/draft IEM policies.

The Board noted that the scheduling of a meeting with DFHERIS and the Department of Justice (DoJ) in relation to the overlap of the IEM process with the immigration regime was being finalised. Currently, the Executive expects that the IEM process will be on target to open for applicants during the first Quarter of 2023.

A significant amount of work has progressed since the last substantial update received by the Board at its meeting in April. It was noted that the PSC had reviewed much of the documentation at its meetings in July and September. The Board commended the International Education Unit for all it has achieved, noting it was complex work but it has progressed far in a relatively short amount of time.

The Chief Executive thanked the Unit for the work completed to date. The Chairperson acknowledged the ambition and how much work had been progressed while noting that the process may yet run into delays due to external factors. The Board acknowledged that the process also needs to be fully resourced to ensure efficient roll out once established.

8. BOARD MEETS WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Chair updated the Board on the CEO PMDS process and said that it would be restated formally in the minutes at the next HR and Organisation sub-committee of the Board. The Board stressed the importance of progressing the formalisation of IR architecture within QQI and asked that the HR and Organisation Committee sought progress at the next HR and Organisation Committee. The Board also stressed the importance of putting the blended working policy in place and ensuring that the staff application process was put in place as soon as possible.

9. GOVERNANCE

The Board noted an update on **Governance**.

9.1 Committee Members/Appointments

The Board **approved** the appointment of Clodagh McGivern, Vice-President of Academic Affairs, USI to the ARC. Ms. McGivern replaces Megan O'Connor, the previous USI representative on the Board and the ARC.

The Board noted that the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) had discussed and recommended an interim Chairperson for the PSC as there is likely to be a gap between Board terms at this point. The current Chair of the PSC is an outgoing Board Member. The Board was satisfied that a Committee Member would take on the role of Chairperson in the interim period. It was noted this was a measure to facilitate the progression of the ALP at a particularly crucial and productive period. The Board noted that the Terms of Reference for the ARC, PAEC, PAOC and PSC all contain the stipulation that

'The Chairperson is appointed by the QQI Board and is normally a member of the Board. A Vice-Chairperson can be nominated by the Chairperson. Where the Chairperson is not available or not in a position to nominate a Vice-Chairperson, the other members of the Committee who are present may choose one of their number to be Chairperson of that meeting.'

9.2 Protocol for QQI Board Meetings

The Board noted the updated protocol for QQI Board Meetings and **approved** the document subject to the amendments suggested.

9.3 Board Member Appointments

The Board had been updated on the status of the Board appointments process under item 7 above.

9.4 Board Reflections

The Board noted that as discussed at its June Meeting, the Executive had circulated a survey to all members to provide them with an opportunity to share their reflections and thoughts on their time on the Board. The Executive would compile the responses into a document for the

Board's consideration at its final meeting on 4 November. The document will also support the new Board on its appointment.

10. BUDGET AND FINANCE

The Board noted an update on **Budget and Finance**.

10.1 Management Accounts to 31 July 2022

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the seven months to 31 July 2022. The Board noted that certification income continues to be strong, and the Executive is awaiting the figures for the October period to see if the trend continues.

The Board noted the Senior Manager, Finance's opinion that there are sufficient funds to finance the organisation for the remainder of the year. The Executive will request the final drawdown of the State Grant allocation for the year in the coming weeks.

10.2 Annual Financial Statements 2021

The Board noted that the audit of the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2021 had been completed and no material changes had been made.

As there were no material changes, the Board **approved** the Annual Financial Statements 2021 for signing by the Chairperson and the Chief Executive.

10.3 Draft Budget 2023

The Board noted the draft Budget for 2023. The Board noted that the Executive is still keen to agree a Reserves Policy with the Department and is awaiting their feedback in this regard.

The Board **approved** the draft Budget for 2023.

10.4 Energy Costs

Following a query from a Board Member, the Board noted a verbal update provided by the Chief Executive on new initiatives to be implemented by DFHERIS and the agencies under its aegis as part of the Government's Public Sector Climate Action Mandate. The Board noted that the Chief Executive had attended a DFHERIS (Management Board and Agency CEOs) meeting

on 22 September at which one of the key items had been a briefing/update on the initiatives recommended by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

DFHERIS has issued communications to each agency outlining the measures which should be considered and implemented. It was noted that among the recommendations featured are the nomination of a Climate and Sustainability Champion from the senior leadership team, the development of a Climate Action Roadmap by the end of the year and reduction in overseas travel and introduction of carbon budgets. The Board noted these initiatives are due to be discussed at the EMT meeting scheduled for 3 October. The Executive expects that there may be further directives on areas such as temperature checks and energy usage.

The Board noted that the upgrade of the air condition system in the Denzille Lane building was progressing with the landlord. The Board noted that completing the Mount Street leases in June 2023 will probably amount to QQI's largest energy saving.

The Board noted that IEM ICT projects are progressing and an outline of associated costs of additional ICT resources was provided.

11. ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Board noted an update on **Organisation and Human Resources**.

11.1 Human Resources

The Board noted the update on Human Resources. The Board noted that the development of a draft Blended Working Policy was progressing. The draft policy, following consideration by the EMT, was forwarded to the recognised trade union for consideration by the end of September and was also presented to staff at a recent all staff meeting.

The Board noted that, under the requirements of the draft Policy, all staff will have to apply for a blended working arrangement, should they wish to avail of it. The Board noted that the Microsoft Teams application had been upgraded to include a meeting room and desk booking facility.

The Board noted that the Executive was also exploring ways of formalising the IR architecture in place and normalising the structure. The Board noted that a meeting of the HR and Organisation Committee will be scheduled for October and is expected to consider the detail of the plan.

12. COMMUNICATIONS

The Board noted an update on **Communications**.

12.1. Media Mentions

The Board noted the media mentions for the period since the June 2022 Board Meeting.

12.2. Professional Accreditation Issue

The Board noted a verbal update provided by the Chief Executive on an issue which had recently arisen in relation to the professional accreditation of a social care programme. Following an approved cessation of the programme by the provider, the Board noted that the Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) process has been initiated and the transfer of learners who wish to complete the programme is underway, where possible.

The Board noted that the Executive had been working on the issue for the last number of weeks. The coincidence of the issue with the start of the academic year was also challenging.

The Executive indicated that it is likely from QQI's perspective that a focused review will take place and clarified queries raised by Board Members in relation to this case.

12.3. Qualifax Website Project

The Board noted an update on the Qualifax Website project and suggested that the Executive should look at the site through the lens of all learners, not just those coming through the CAO system in order to be a true reflection of the span of further and higher education and lifelong learning.

The Board noted the new site will be online in time for the 2023/2024 academic year.

12.4. QQI Logo

The Board noted that the Executive was reviewing the presentation of the QQI logo with a view to exploring if it requires reconfiguration. It was noted that the QQI logo itself can get lost at times when featured with multiple logos during sponsorship, for example. The Board noted the Executive's verbal update on the matter and cautioned on implementing substantial changes. The new logo should be presented to the Board for its views in advance of launching.

13. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Board noted an update on **Strategic Planning**.

13.1. Corporate Plan 2022

The Board noted the Progress Report covering Quarters 1-3 of the 2022 Corporate Plan. The Chairperson requested that an update on the outcomes of the eight learner focus groups contributing to the Rethinking Assessment project be added to the agenda for the November Board Meeting.

13.2. 10-Year Anniversary

The Board noted that a significant amount of work had been completed to date on the 10th Anniversary Conference and noted the finalised conference programme. Registration for the conference on 18 and 19 October closed in mid-September as the event was fully subscribed.

The Board noted that the Executive will be signposting the IEM branding at the conference and the results of the Student Survey will also be released.

The Board requested that a list of common acronyms be provided at the conference, particularly for international delegates. The Board acknowledged the amount of work carried out to date.

14. REVIEWS

The Board noted the documents relating to **Reviews**.

14.1 Education and Training Boards (ETB) Review Cycle

The Board noted the reports for the reviews of the following ETBs (Phase 3 of the review cycle):

- Tipperary ETB,
- Galway and Roscommon ETB,
- Louth and Meath ETB and
- Kildare and Wicklow ETB.

The Board noted that similar issues/trends in relation to capacity for programme development had arisen in the reviews listed above as had also appeared in the previous phases of the review cycle. The Board noted that the self-evaluation process had proved beneficial for the ETB sector.

The Board noted that all 16 reviews were now complete and the last three reports were at the final stages of preparation prior to consideration for publication by the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) at its next meeting in November.

The Board noted that work on a sectoral review had commenced with the review team selected. The team is inclusive of international and learner representation and will present at the upcoming conference. The review report is expected to be available early next year.

The Board noted that investment in FET quality assurance had been discussed at the DFHERIS meeting on 22 September (mentioned under earlier items).

15. ITEMS FOR NOTING

The Board noted the **Items for Noting**.

15.1 Focus on Policies and Standards Committee

The Board noted the verbal update provided by the Chairperson of the Policies and Standards Committee. The Board noted that the Committee had recently considered the draft documentation relating to the IEM process for both the HE and the ELE sectors. The Committee had made some suggestions relating to the structure of the documents and it was noted that this feedback had been taken on board by the Executive. The documentation, with the minor modifications proposed, was approved for public consultation.

The Board noted that the documentation was drafted to reflect the uniqueness of the ELE sector.

It was noted that the next PSC meeting is scheduled for 23 November.

The Board noted during the Annual Meeting of Board and Committee Chairpersons in April that the subject of the composition of Committee membership was discussed. This was also discussed at the PSC meeting (in September) where there was a suggestion that more learner representation would be beneficial. It was noted that the labour market was already included and that the international member had recently been replaced following completion of their membership term. The Board also noted the Committee's decision to go paperless.

15.2 Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Approvals and Reviews Committee held on 26 May 2022.

15.3 Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 9 June and 14 July 2022.

15.4 Rolling Board Agenda 2022

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2022.

16. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA

The Board noted the **Draft November 2022 Board Agenda**.

The Board noted and discussed the draft Agenda for the November Meeting.

The Board suggested that the discussions on the Board Reflections document should be allocated a significant portion of the meeting and the Executive should remove any items which aren't necessary to maximise the time available on the day.

The Chairperson suggested that updates on the Green Paper on Qualifications and the Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF) should be added to the agenda. The Board noted that the Executive is currently finalising the nominations to the Forum and is meeting with the different sectors individually in the first instance. A meeting with FET Directors took place on 26 August and a meeting with Designated Awarding Bodies (DABs) is scheduled for 5 October. The Executive believes that the Forum can bring a lot of value to the system but is also conscious that it has to set out expectations in the first instance.

The Board noted that the agenda for the November Board Meeting may include an item on the Evaluation of QA arising from the re-engagement process.

17. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 4 November 2022**, beginning at **10:00 a.m.** This will be the final meeting of the second Board of QQI.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and contributions.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.