

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the forty-ninth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 19 June 2020 at 10:00 a.m. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, this meeting took place via Microsoft Teams (video conference facility).

Present:

- Ms. Joanne Harmon (Chair)
- Dr. Pádraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
- Dr. Barbara Brittingham (Items 1-13)
- Ms. Mary Danagher (Items 1-14)
- Mr. Blake Hodkinson
- Mr. Thomas McDermott
- Mr. Kevin McStravock
- Ms. Niamh O'Reilly (Items 1-14)
- Prof. Irene Sheridan
- Dr. Anne Walsh

Apologies: No apologies

In attendance:

- Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Andrew Brownlee, SOLAS (Item 1)
- Ms. Louise Kelly (ICT Manager, Item 1)

INTRODUCTION

The Board agreed that the agenda for the meeting was acceptable subject to moving item 21, 'Board Meets Without the Executive Present' to item 10 and adopted same.

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the meeting. The Board noted that due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions in place in Ireland, the Board was continuing to meet virtually through Microsoft Teams.

1. PRESENTATION BY SOLAS

Following a request by the Board, Mr. Andrew Brownlee, Chief Executive, delivered a presentation to the Board.

The presentation was followed by a questions and answers session.

The Board and Mr. Brownlee discussed a number of topics. The Board noted that there had been a significant amount of interaction between QQI and SOLAS and close collaboration between the CEOs and at management level of the two agencies, particularly in dealing with the initial phase of provider closures during the Covid-19 restrictions.

The Board noted that the Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024 was awaiting Ministerial approval.

The Board noted that the Chief Executive of QQI would make a presentation to the SOLAS Board in early July.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, thanked Mr. Brownlee for presenting to the Board.

2. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board noted that no conflicts of interest were declared.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The *Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting* held on 27 April 2020 were **confirmed** and would be signed at a later date when circumstances allow.

4. NOTE OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The Board **approved** the *Note of the Meeting of 27 April 2020* 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. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA

The Board noted the **Draft September 2020 Board Agenda**.

The Board noted the draft Agenda for the next Board Meeting. The Board noted that following discussion with the Chairperson, the Executive had invited Oisín Hassan, the Programme Manager of the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) to present at that meeting.

The Board noted that the Executive was awaiting confirmation of the date of the Quarter 2 PDA 2020 Review Meeting with the Department of Education and Skills.

7. COVID-19

The Board noted the update on matters effected by and resulting from **Covid-19**.

7.1. Covid-19 Update

The Board noted the update detailing the continued involvement of QQI in the national response to Covid-19 in the Tertiary Sector and progress in its own working arrangements. The Board noted that staff continue to adapt well to the move to e.working and the organisational measures taken to support the transition.

The Board noted there had been large attendances at wellbeing webinars organised by the HR Unit and at staff meetings.

8. CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

8.1. CEO Report

The Board noted the various updates contained in the CEO report covering the period since the April 2020 Board Meeting.

The Board noted that the document had included a report resulting from the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) International Partners' Forum held on 20 May which detailed some of the common challenges, impacts and effects of Covid-19 on international peer HE agencies.

The Board noted that a large amount of QQI's work is continuing as normal. The Chief Executive provided a verbal update following the closure of the June 2020 certification period. It was noted that in the region of 34,000 learners were certified (down from approx. 52,000 for the same period in 2019), although this is unlikely to be matched by a reduction in certification income as the majority of the decrease in numbers falls in the Levels 1-4 area which either have no associated fees or whereby many learners are exempted fees. The Board noted that, as briefed by the Executive at the April Board meeting, providers had been advised that QQI would also run an additional certification period in July. The Executive, therefore, will not have the full picture of the summer certification numbers until that certification period is complete. The Board noted that a small number of staff had used the QQI office under the new working conditions/social distancing measures to complete a certification print run for the April and June periods.

9. ITEMS FOR NOTING

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

9.1. Focus on HR and Organisation Committee

The Board noted the verbal overview of the work of the HR and Organisation Committee provided by the Chairperson of the Committee. The Board noted that the Committee was established on foot of the Clarion process to provide governance and oversight in relation to Human Resources, Industrial Relations and related matters.

A Board Member requested an update on the uptake of Annual Leave during the pandemic. The Board noted that Annual Leave is monitored through an electronic system and noted that the Executive recorded a significant number of leave cancellations in the early stages of the lockdown. However, as the weeks have passed, leave uptake levels have normalised somewhat. HR is continuing to monitor the situation.

9.2. Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 8 April 2020.

9.3. Rolling Board Agenda 2020

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2020.

10. BOARD MET WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Chairperson updated the Board on the recruitment process for the CEO post.

11. RELATIONS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Board noted the documents relating to **Relations with the Department of Education and Skills**.

11.1. Workforce Planning

The Board noted the verbal update on Workforce Planning. It was noted that discussion on additional staff resources had been suspended pending exploration of a viable funding model. The next priority would then be progressing/reassessing the staffing resources required by QQI, particularly in relation to the International Education Mark (IEM) thereafter.

11.2. Revised Legislation

The Board noted that while there had been a significant amount of work done up to early February (in relation to Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) and Corporate Fitness), progress had been paused as a result of the need to respond to the Covid-19 situation which was emerging at the time.

A Board Member queried the likely risks arising from the delay in commencing the remaining sections of the revised Legislation. The Board noted that there is a range of PEL arrangements currently in place, but the Executive would prefer to also have the Corporate Fitness checks in operation. The Board noted that under the current process, the HE providers have cover and the academic year is already complete and if issues were to arise in multi-year programmes in the next academic year, certain measures are in place under the current PEL system, which have been implemented over recent years.

11.3. Funding Model Review 2020

The Board noted the update on the Funding Model which had been issued to Board Members a number of days in advance of the Board Meeting – this was in order to provide the most up to date version possible. The Board noted that meetings with the Department had resumed with one held the afternoon prior to the Board Meeting.

The Board noted a verbal update from the Executive and also noted that some of the details in the paper provided had been overtaken by the discussions at the meeting with the Department the previous day. The membership of the Funding Model subgroup and its Terms of Reference were noted. It is a subgroup of the Implementation of the QQA Act 2019 Working Group established to review the current framework, examine current fees and existing and potential income streams.

The Board discussed the Funding Model update and options. The Board commented on the options outlined and suggested a need to broaden the boundaries and identify additional options and possibilities. It was noted that some options would have implications for different stakeholders which should be set out. The Board noted that Covid-19 period is likely to impact on finances across the education and training sector and consequently, the need to agree a stable and robust funding model with the Department. The Board noted that during the process of the drafting of the revised Legislation, the Department intended that the new functions would be self-funding.

Board Members considered the options presented and expressed a preference for fully costed models with implications across the different stakeholder groups.

The Board noted that the Department are asking for a range of options. The Board expressed concern regarding the progress made to date on a new model. The Board also reiterated the need to explore how comparable European agencies are funded.

The Executive was requested to consider other funding possibilities and present them to the Board fully costed and clearly laid out. The Executive would continue to keep the Board informed, noting that there may be a need to raise the discussions at a higher level. The Board reiterated that in light of the organisation's significant role across the tertiary sector during the pandemic, the Department recognises the value QQI provides.

The Board confirmed that it wished to see the matter progressed.

12. BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

12.1. Management Accounts to 30 April 2020

The Board noted the Management accounts to end of April 2020.

12.2. ICT Contract Resources

The Board noted the proposal outlined and **approved**:

- the procurement of contracts for ICT contract resources and/or services for three months (August-October 2020), as outlined in the proposal submitted and in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy and subject to contract and
- the purchase of services in MS Azure for the period July 2020-June 2021, as outlined in the proposal submitted and in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy, subject to contract.

The Board noted that the current QQI Internal IT Contractor Framework expires in November and the Executive was shortly commencing a procurement process to establish a new framework.

12.3. Draft Financial Statements 2019

The Board noted the draft Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2019 which had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meetings of 1 April and 15 May and were referred to the Board for its approval.

The Board **approved** the Financial Statements for 2019 subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and there being no material changes.

The Board noted that the Executive had received confirmation that the audit of the 2019 financial year will commence in early September.

13. ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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

13.1. Update on Human Resources

The Board noted an update on Human Resources.

14. AUDIT AND RISK

The Board noted the documents relating to **Audit and Risk**.

14.1. Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the verbal update on the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 15 May 2020.

14.2. Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy

The Board noted that iterations of the draft Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee. The Board discussed elements of the Policy and were satisfied that other internal procedures were in place to deal with associated issues that could arise.

The Board **approved** the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy.

14.3. Internal Audit Reports

The Board **approved** the Review of the System of Internal Controls 2019.

The Board **approved** the Internal Audit Review of the Procurement Cycle.

14.4. Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement

The Board noted the draft Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement, following its consideration by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting of 15 May 2020. The Board noted the inclusion of a section on Risk Culture.

The Board **approved** the Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement.

14.5. Update on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The Board noted the verbal update on GDPR.

14.6. Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 1 April 2020.

15. **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

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

15.1. Corporate Plan 2020

The Board noted the Quarter 1 and interim Q2 Progress Reports for the 2020 Corporate Plan.

The Board noted a number of activities were delayed due to the disruption caused by Covid-19 and some activities which had been paused in order to progress the organisation's initial response to the pandemic were now being reactivated.

The Board noted that the Cinnte Review of IT Carlow which had been scheduled to take place in late March had now commenced as a pilot virtual review. The Chief Executive commented on the willingness of the Institute to engage with the new version of the process.

15.2. Draft Annual Report 2019

The Board noted the draft Annual Report for 2019 and the Chairperson thanked Members for the feedback the Executive had received on an earlier version. The Board **approved** the Annual Report for 2019 and noted that it would be forwarded to the Minister for Education and Skills by 30 June.

16. GOVERNANCE

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

16.1 Terms of Reference

The Board **approved** various amendments to the Terms of Reference of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) and the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) which were recommended by the Executive. The amendments were required on foot of the recent commencement of additional sections of the revised Legislation.

16.2. Appointment of new Committee Members

The Board **approved** the appointment of Dr. Achim Hopbach to the Policies and Standards Committee. Dr. Hopbach replaces Lucien Bollaert whose membership term on the Committee finished with effect from 28 February 2020.

The Board **approved** the appointment of Ms. Siobhan Kinsella to the Approvals and Reviews Committee. Ms. Kinsella replaces Dr. Martin Lyes whose membership term on the Committee finished with effect from 31 December 2019.

17. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Board noted the document relating to **Stakeholder Engagement**.

17.1 Consultative Forum

The Board noted that a review of the QQI Consultative Forum had been conducted. The Board discussed and noted that attendance levels at and the purpose of the Forum had changed in the period since its establishment. The Board noted that some of the other stakeholder engagement measures which have been put in place have also changed how the organisation interacts and communicates with its stakeholders. It was noted that the Consultative Forum

had provided an important opportunity for Board Members to network and connect with providers and stakeholders.

An alternative suggestion put forward to replace the Consultative Forum was the holding of a QQI national conference with breakout sessions for the different categories of providers etc. The Board suggested that it would be important to hold such a conference every 12-18 months and maintain a communications avenue for Board Members and stakeholders.

18. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The Board noted the document entitled **Thematic Analysis**.

The Board noted and briefly discussed the draft Report of the Thematic Analysis of the Reengagement Process.

19. COMMUNICATIONS

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

19.1. Media Mentions

The Board noted the media mentions published since the April 2020 Board Meeting.

20. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 25 September 2020** beginning at **10:00 a.m.**

The Board noted that the meeting will mostly likely be held via Microsoft Teams again and the Executive would be in contact with Members closer to the date to confirm the arrangements. The Board noted that there may also be a need for an additional meeting over the summer months.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Executive undertook to circulate two documents to the Board which had been mentioned during the course of the Meeting:

- Tertiary System Priorities from the draft Programme for Government (as prepared by DES)
- QQI's Cinnte Pilot Virtual Institutional Review Visit.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.