

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 11 DECEMBER 2007

Minutes of the forty-fifth meeting of the Board of Management held at 10 am on Wednesday 26 September 2007 in the Boardroom, Dalkeith.

Members

- * Mr J McCormick (Chairman)
- * Dr J Brown
- * Mr A Cassidy
- * Mrs J Gillespie
- * Prof A MacLennan
- * Mrs L McKay
- * Mr J Mitchell
- * Mrs M Nicol
- * Mr G Rodgers
- * Prof J Simmons

Officers

- * Ms M Cahill
- * Ms K McCallum
- Mr J McDonald
- * Ms J Ross
- Mr R Sylvester
- * Mr J Young

In attendance

- Dr G Stewart
- Ms J Blair

Observers

- Ms C Carlin, Scottish Government

- * indicates present

45/1 **WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr McDonald and Mr Sylvester.

45/2 **PREVIOUS MEETING**

i **Minutes of meeting held on 8 August 2007**

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

ii **Action Grid**

The Board noted and agreed the action grid.

45/3 **MATTERS ARISING**

44/3 43/5 **Coincident Exams**

It was noted that in early 2008, the Board would receive the report on the analysis of the work being undertaken on timetabling.

44/3 43/9 **Trading Subsidiary**

Pending a decision from the Scottish Government on the submission of the business case for the Trading Subsidiary, preparatory work was underway for the operation of the proposed subsidiary.

44/8 **Current Performance and Future Plans**

The Board noted with satisfaction that the Staff Pay Award negotiations had been completed and the pay proposal approved by the Unions. Presentations on the detail had been presented to all staff, and the award, including backdated monies to 1 April 2007, would be paid to all existing staff on 26 October.

44/9 iv **Remuneration Committee**

The work on the Executive Team pay deal remained ongoing. It was noted that the NDPB forum would meet with the Scottish Government on 23 October for discussion around Director level remuneration.

45/4 **CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS**

The Chairman reported that he had attended:

- A meeting with the Cabinet Secretary, Fiona Hyslop [with Janet Brown], to discuss SQA's modernisation programme and role in the forthcoming Skills Strategy.
- A breakfast meeting, chaired by Mr Iain Bruce from The Herald, when the Minister met with representatives from the Education community. It had been a useful and valuable occasion, where the tone was set for involvement and participation in taking forward the agenda of the *Skills for Scotland* strategy.
- Dinner at Edinburgh University for the first meeting of the Scottish Confucius Institute. Set up as a forum to further Scottish engagement in China, it was intended that the Institute would act as a conduit for interaction across the whole of Scotland in developing and sustaining links with China.

The Chairman confirmed that a formal meeting of the Board would be held before the dinner on the evening of 15 November. Ms Ross would contact members to take forward arrangements.

45/5 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

Dr Brown presented an overview of the headline issues since the last meeting of the Board. In particular she highlighted:

Dalkeith Site

At a recent meeting with Fiona Hyslop, she and the Chairman had been advised that the business case for the future of the Dalkeith site would be considered soon. Ms Carlin added that the Accommodation Office had since commented on the business case that would now be presented to Ministers for consideration.

NDPB CEO Conference

The conference had centred on the Scottish Government's overall purpose to focus on increasing sustainable economic growth. The commitment for this would include a review of the educational landscape, to gain an understanding of how the different public agencies that supported skills and learning operated and how these could bring greater cohesion and support to the local delivery of skills development.

New independent regulator for the exam system in England

That morning, Mr Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, would announce that he planned to separate the functions of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority into an examination and curriculum administration body and an independent monitoring body for the English system, the latter being created as a new independent regulator of qualifications and tests in England.

45/6 REPORT FROM CERTIFICATION PLANNING GROUP

Following the removal of the derived grades procedure, SQA had recognised the potential for an increase in the number of candidates eligible for an appeal. Current figures were reported at 18,514 for Stage 1 Appeals and 41,587 for Stage 2 Appeals, both of which fell below the estimated figures.

Resource capability had been built into the planning cycle and it was intended to source funding through the Q2 forecast that was currently underway. In light of this, it was reported that the impact of the removal of derived grades in Diet 2007 would be manageable.

The Board undertook a wider discussion on the appeals system, and it was noted that the outcomes of the Appeals wash-up would be reported to the Board in December.

Commenting on the amber graded performance measures, Ms McCallum reported that:

SSA Slippage had occurred as a result of a higher than expected uptake, along with a complexity in the data capture/coding. The matter was being closely managed by CPG and revised completion dates had been agreed with SEED. CPG was confident that the matter would be concluded satisfactorily.

Appointees The number of shortages in Principal Assessors, Senior Examiners, Setters and Veters for the setting of 2009 Question Papers was being monitored very closely. Being one of the Continuous Improvement Programme strands, constructive work was underway in the area of recruitment and management of Appointees.

Internal reviews of the Results Online service had highlighted the need for SQA to focus on the user perspective. An external review of usability would be conducted, as well as a review of core systems that would go to inform future developments, ensuring that robust and capable processes were in place. Ms McCallum was commended for the remedial action that was being taken.

45/7 SKILLS FOR SCOTLAND: A LIFELONG SKILLS STRATEGY

Dr Brown opened the discussion with a brief presentation on the strategy's vision and the potential implications and opportunities for SQA. As a framework that showed how organisations and individuals involved in education, learning and training could contribute to improving Scotland's skills base, SQA's contribution and participation was pivotal to its successful delivery. She invited the Board to explore how SQA could assist in all aspects of the strategy's development.

A wide ranging debate was undertaken by the Board, where a variety of perspectives and expertise was offered. Recognising that SQA would have a variety of roles to play in the implementation of the strategy, the main highlights of the discussion were:

- Increased engagement. It was clear to the Board that if SQA was going to deliver on the skills agenda then innovative and effective partnerships were needed across all the stakeholders – universities, colleges, employers, SSCs et al.
- The importance of adult literacy and numeracy skills and efforts to improve employability.
- The importance of credit for learning and workplace learning. Encouraging the use of SCQF to support learning, and to reward individuals with the credit for the learning they have already achieved, thus enabling smooth transition through learning environments.
- Social inclusion. The strategy called for the need to tackle underemployment and structural disadvantage that face sections of the community.
- To assist those most disadvantaged and with limited choice and to concentrate efforts so that those not in education or training were offered an avenue back into work or education.
- Currency of SQA qualifications - links to the Scottish Standard and Curriculum for Excellence and what it means for the qualifications system.
- To use this as a time to reflect on current practice and consider what WAS offered, and to shape and deliver our products to ensure they WERE successful, flexible and rewarding. This should take consideration of early years in education and employment.
- To think about the functional size of our SQA qualifications - consider short and targeted qualifications/courses for those with HE qualifications.
- Opportunities beyond the school environment.
- Welcomed the optimism for promoting Science qualifications and those in the related area of Engineering and Technological Studies.
- To remember that early intervention should be extended beyond pre-school age.
- Vocational skills; considering their delivery, accessibility beyond secondary school age, and uptake. Achieving a parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning.
- Funding. The strategy failed to make any commitment to increased investment in further or higher education.
- Increased employability skills and to ensure that mechanisms were in place to develop and sustain greater employer engagement
- Promotion and visibility of learning opportunities – around showcasing what SQA actually does offer - in the qualifications and employment environments.
- To balance the dialogue around the qualifications framework in Scotland, ensuring that contributors have an equal voice and level of involvement.
- SQA's aspirations to contribute further to this work could inform the agendas for other committees, and that it was essential to open discussion and give the opportunity for wider participation.

It was noted that a cross functional group was in place in SQA to review the strategy and identify areas where SQA is already active and where new actions could be delivered.

The Board urged that SQA should explicitly state the technical expertise in place for the delivery of qualifications and assessment, drawing on the success of previous deliverables.

In conclusion, the challenge for SQA was to continue to develop qualifications that were accessible, credible and purposeful - qualifications that learners want to use – with the overarching aim to deliver qualifications that answered the needs of Scotland's people and businesses.

45/8 FINANCE AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

The Chairman welcomed Ms Blair to the meeting.

i **Draft Corporate & Business Plan 2008-11**

Ms Blair reported that the outputs of the series of workshops and discussions with the Board and SQA management team had been fed into the Business Plan objectives. In line with Performance Management Study recommendations, the objectives had adopted a more strategic and outcome-focussed angle. The impact of this could be seen in a less detailed commentary under corporate objectives one and two, with the detail being reported at operational level.

It was proposed that for the first year, there would be a separate objective to reflect the work of SQA's regulatory function, Accreditation. This had been supported by the Accreditation Committee, and likewise was met with Board approval, seen as an important move towards placing the corporate plan in a strategic context.

The Board approved the draft business plan objectives as presented, with the suggestion that there should also be reference to the Skills for Scotland strategy. It was noted that a further iteration of the plan would be received in December.

ii **Review of Committee Remits**

Ms Blair presented the objectives and scope of work for the review of committee arrangements that was being undertaken as part of the PFMR, an element of which would be to assess SQA's administration and governance arrangements. The outcomes of this work would support developments for the Board to place more emphasis on strategic rather than operational matters

The Board approved the terms of reference for the review.

iii **Equality Mainstreaming Policy**

The implementation of SQA's Disability, Gender and Race Equality Schemes brought the development of an equality mainstreaming policy that was before the Board for approval. In line with SQA's commitment to ensure compliance and develop good practice in all areas of our operations, it was noted that progress against action plans in the schemes and actions arising from impact assessments, were monitored at monthly management team meetings.

There was broad endorsement of the work undertaken and the Board approved the policy for integration across SQA.

45/9 COMMITTEE REPORTS

i **Accreditation Committee held on 6 September 2007**

Professor Simmons referred to the minutes of the meeting and highlighted the work that was ongoing around the strategic review of SQA's Accreditation function. Officers were in the process of taking forward discussions with the Scottish Government, and it was hoped that an update could be provided at the next meeting of the Board.

The agenda for the next meeting of the Accreditation Committee in December would include a presentation on SCQF and discussion around the implications of the Skill Strategy. An invitation to attend was extended to members of the Board.

The Board noted the contents of the minutes.

ii **Advisory Council held on 3 September 2007**

Ms McKay drew attention to the Advisory Council's contribution to the planned development of SQA's Strategy for Science qualifications. There had also been useful discussion around 'Standards for Success' that subsequently was fed into the Qualifications Committee meeting later that month.

The Board noted the contents of the minutes.

iii **Qualifications Committee held on 21 September 2007**

Mrs McKay advised that the Committee had received an update on the 'Core Skills for the Future', which was undergoing a light refresh pending further developments with regard to Curriculum for Excellence and the Skills Strategy. Recognising the need to move this forward, the Committee had welcomed the smaller number of components in Communication and Numeracy. It was expected that the revised Core Skill framework standards would be welcomed by practitioners.

The Committee had also considered the proposal to extend the current endorsement service for learning/training programmes and qualifications in the UK to an international endorsement service for overseas centres. Whilst recognising the benefits of SQA offering international endorsement work, the proposal had not received the collective support of the Committee and it had been agreed to undertake further exploratory work, with a further iteration of the work to be presented to the next Qualifications Committee meeting in November.

A full discussion had taken place around the next steps for the Scottish Standard, and taking the views of the Advisory Council into consideration, it had been agreed to retain the term 'Scottish Standard' that was seen to be resonant to the purpose and focus of the strategy.

45/10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no matters raised for discussion.

PAPERS FOR NOTING

The Board noted the contents of the Financial Report to 31 August 2007.

45/11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Board of Management would be held in the Boardroom, Dalkeith on Tuesday 11 December 2007.