

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 4 FEBRUARY 2021

Minutes of the one hundred and thirty third meeting of the Board of Management held at 10am on Wednesday 25 November, by video conference.

Members

- * Mr D Middleton (Chair)
- * Ms F Robertson (Chief Executive)*
- * Ms E Craig
- * Ms A Davis
- * Mr S Hagney
- * Mrs J Handley
- Dr W Mayne
- * Mr H McKay
- * Mr G Smith
- * Mr R Stewart
- * Dr K Thomson

Officers

- * Ms J Blair
- * Mrs D Mahmoud
- * Mr L Downie
- * Mr M Baxter
- * Mr J McMorris
- Ms J Ross
- * Dr G Stewart

Observers

- * Ms A Kerr, SQA

* indicates present

133/1 OPENING REMARKS**1.1 Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair extended a welcome to all members of the Board and noted apologies from Dr Mayne.

1.11 Declaration of Any Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

1.12 Minutes of meeting held on 5 November 2020

It was noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2020 would be circulated to members in due course.

1.13 Matters Arising

There were no other matters arising that would not be covered in the course of the agenda.

1.14 Action Grid

The contents of the action grid were noted.

1.15 Workplan 2020

The Board noted the contents of the workplan.

The Chair provided a brief update to members, noting that a reply had been received from the Deputy First Minister, acknowledging the points in the letter issued on 6 November on which the Board had been sighted. The Chair reported that he and the Chief Executive were scheduled to meet with Mr Swinney on 10 December.

133/2 PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

2.1 Strategic Reflections: Looking Forward and Looking Back

The Executive Management Team, led by the Chief Executive, delivered a presentation to the Board providing reflections on the previous 12 months and looking forward to 2021 and beyond in terms of strategy, delivery and capacity, including capacity for strategic change.

Ms Blair and Mr Downie provided an update on the scope, plan, projects and requirements being defined for the delivery of Awarding 2021, and the key risks, issues and dependencies for the three streams of work, most notably public health guidance.

Dr Stewart and Mr McMorris went on to look beyond 2021 to SQA's long-term deliverables, key themes for the future of assessment and how SQA can ensure learner success in a changing policy and technology landscape.

Finally, Ms Mahmoud and Mr Baxter provided an overview of financial and people resourcing plans to ensure SQA are able to continue to deliver best value and efficiency in 2021-22, highlighting the creation of a new post within the Executive Team for a Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards that recruitment would begin for in the new year.

The Board welcomed the presentations, commenting on the reassurance they provided on the organisation's capacity to address and manage any immediate and long-term challenges. Members were reassured by forward thinking and a broad view of what is required across the whole system. They supported the collaborative approach being taken forward.

The Board supported the Executive Management Team in the plans for delivery in the coming year, including the recruitment of a Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards.

2.2 2021 – 2022 Business Plan

Mr Baxter delivered a presentation to the Board, providing an overview of the work that had been undertaken in 2020 to establish the finalised set of deliverables in line with the organisation's values that had been incorporated into the SQA Performance Framework.

Mr Baxter led the Board through the work required for 2021/22 to arrive at a set of deliverables that will meet the organisation's needs and obligations and allow for the publication of a Business Plan, as per requirement.

Mr Baxter reported that work undertaken on the Performance Framework would set SQA in a good position in which to meet the obligation of a Business Plan, carrying deliverables forward with the additional focus of

Awarding 2021 and the Priestley Review informing the work being undertaken.

Through discussions with the Audit and Performance Committees, there had been broad agreement that it would be prudent to take a narrower focus into 2021/22, ensuring that SQA can deliver in these exceptional times, whilst not losing sight of what is crucial for the organisation in the medium- and long-term.

The Board welcomed the update, noting that the Business Plan would come back to the Board for discussion in early 2021.

2.3 P7 Financial Report

Mr Baxter went on to present the 2020-21 P7 Financial Position, noting that since the last financial update to the board for the Q2 forecast there had been no change to the forecast outturn.

Mr Baxter reported that, in light of recent announcements made by the Scottish Government in relation to next year's diet cancellation of National 5 exams and need for an Alternative Certification Model and contingencies for Higher/ Advanced Higher, should the planned exam diet not be possible, finance colleagues had been working with the business to establish what implications these scenarios would have in the current and next financial years. Engagement would continue with Scottish Government to ensure SQA and Scottish Government financial planning assumptions are aligned.

The Board noted the update and were content that the position was being actively managed.

133/3 PAPERS FOR APPROVAL

There were no papers for approval at this meeting.

133/4 PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

4.1 Qualifications Delivery

4.11 NQ Certification Programme

The Board noted the contents of the National Qualifications Certification Programme Group report.

4.12 HN, Vocational and International Certification Programme

The Board noted the contents of the HN, Vocational and International Certification Programme Group report.

4.2 **Cash Position**

The Board noted the position for the year based on the accruals forecast, accepting it as an assurance on the current position.

4.3 **SQA Health and Safety Update 2020**

Jacqui Faulds, Head of Appointee Management joined the meeting to present the SQA Health and Safety Update 2020, which had been brought before the Board for noting and to provide an overview of the health and safety activities during financial year 2019-2020 and planned activities for 2020-2021.

The Board noted the report and discussed the scope of the report, with consideration of mental health and health and safety when working from home, given the considerable change in the working arrangements of the organisation due to Covid-19. Ms Faulds highlighted that the update presented covered the period 2019-20, ahead of the impact of Covid-19 on SQA working arrangements.

Ms Faulds reassured the Board that these factors were being taken under consideration under the monitoring of Health and Safety in period 2020-21 and gave a brief overview of the steps that had been taken by the organisation to support staff in working from home in a safe and healthy manner, including the provision of office equipment for use in home environments and one-to-one meetings with the SQA Health and Safety Officer to perform further assessment and support when requested. Ms Faulds reported that the New Ways of Working project would also take these issues into consideration in assessing the new approach going forward.

The Board thanked Ms Faulds for the update, noting the extensive work being undertaken in this space to support staff.

4.4 **SQA Sustainability Report 2019/20**

Ms Faulds went on to present the SQA Sustainability report for the period 2019-20, providing a summary of the full report on SQA's environmental performance for 2019-20 which would be submitted to the Scottish Government on 30 November 2020, in compliance with the organisation's climate change duties.

The Board welcomed the report and discussed the planned approach in working toward the wider goal of achieving zero emissions by 2030. Members noted their support of continued review of internal processes and organisation wide practices in achieving progress in this space. The Board expressed interest in sight of a comparator with organisations of a similar size to ascertain performance and draw on good practice. The Board noted the report with thanks to Ms Faulds.

4.5 **Revised Complaints Handling Procedure**

Mr Baxter referred the Board to the Revised Complaints Handling Procedure that had been brought for information. This had been developed following the notification on 31 January 2020 from Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

(SPSO) to SQA and other public service organisations of the publication of their revised mandatory model complaints handling procedures (CHP) to be adopted by April 2021.

Mr Baxter highlighted that this procedure would apply to SQA Awarding Body and good practice from the development of revised procedures had been shared with SQA's accreditation function to inform development of the revised SQA Accreditation CHP.

In addition to this, Mr Baxter reported that the opportunity had been taken to review SQA's Unacceptable Actions Policy which links to the Complaints Handling Procedure, considering some of the revisions and good practice guidance issued by SPSO and outlining support available to employees where they are faced with unacceptable behaviour in the course of their interactions with customers. Following confirmation from SPSO that Equality Impact Assessments should be completed individually by organisations covered by the revised mandatory national model, SQA has documented all Equality Impact Assessments undertaken in relation to the SQA Awarding Body Complaints Handling Procedure and corporate Expected Behaviours Policy.

The Board duly noted the revised procedures, thanking Mr Baxter and his team for the extensive work that had been undertaken in developing them.

4.6 Committee Reports

4.61 Audit Committee - 27 July 2020

Mr McKay updated the Board on the business covered at the meeting, highlighting the Committee had discussed and approved the Annual Assurance Report, summarising the main activities of the Committee, and providing an assurance to the SQA Board that SQA's governance, risk management and control environment had been satisfactory in 2019-20.

4.62 Accreditation Committee – 11 August 2020

Mr Stewart updated the Board on the business covered at the meeting, highlighting discussions around the requirement to understand and support the Scottish Government economic recovery plan, noting resource implications parallel to SQA Awarding.

4.63 Qualifications Committee – 4 September 2020

Dr Thomson updated the Board on the business covered at the meetings on 4 and 16 September, noting his support and gratitude to Dr Stewart and the Chief Executive for taking forward the strengthening of the Committee's membership with the onboarding of valuable additional representatives.

4.64 Advisory Council – 7 September 2020

Ms Handley updated the Board on the business covered at the meeting noting that the Council had been working under the format of

workshops which had proved valuable for levels of discussion and engagement.

4.65 **Qualifications Committee – 16 September 2020**

Covered above.

133/5 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no other matters raised under any other business.

133/6 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Board would take place on 10 December 2020* at 10am by video conference.

**Following developments, the date of the next meeting of the Board was brought forward to Monday 7 December 2020.*