

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 30 JULY 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 2 pm on Thursday 9 July 2020 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
- * Mr M Baxter
- * Mr L Downie
- * Mr J McMorris
- * Ms J Ross
- * Dr G Stewart
- * Mrs D Mahmoud

Observers

- Ms A Kerr, Committee Manager
- Mr M Ware, Head of Transformational Change

* Indicates present on the call

1 OPENING REMARKS**1.1 Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting including Martyn Ware, Head of Transformational Change. He noted that apologies had been received from Dr Thomson.

1.11 Declaration of Any Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest raised in relation to the agenda.

Whilst not a conflict of interest, it was acknowledged that Mr Hagney and Dr Thomson held an interest through their positions as Heads of Centre. Furthermore, it was noted that Ms Craig, Ms Davis and Mr Hagney had children studying at National 5 and Higher levels. The Chair noted that members of the Board would never be put in a position directly to affect the outcomes relating to their centres or family members.

1.12 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Board meeting on 25 June 2020 were approved as an accurate record, subject to a textual addition. The Chair agreed that a revised version would be circulated.

1.13 Matters Arising

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

1.2 Chair's Update

The Chair referred to his recent email announcing the reappointments of Ms Craig, Mr Hagney, Mrs Handley, Dr Mayne and Mr McKay, and was pleased to see the stability this provided to the Board during these unusual times.

The Chair reported that he had been contacted by his counterpart from CCEA, the awarding body of Northern Ireland. The conversation had been one of value and interest, noting that the experiences of the two organisations had been widely comparable.

2 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive advised that her main update would be covered under the ACM agenda item. She reported that since the last meeting of the Board, work had focussed on concluding the moderation process, followed by National Awarding meetings with Principal Assessors and SQA qualifications staff, which had now successfully concluded. She noted her gratitude to SQA staff across all directorates who had been instrumental in the success of delivering this suite of meetings.

The Chief Executive reported that whilst delivery for 2020 remained crucial, there was increasing attention on qualifications and assessment in 2021. SQA was thinking through the issues very carefully and feeding into Scottish Government's C-19 Education Recovery Group around a central proposition. The Board understood the complexities of this live issue and agreed on the importance of considering contingencies for 2021.

3 FINANCE REPORT

Mr Baxter presented the Financial Position update, noting the change in circumstances relating to Covid-19 had impacted on SQA's operating model since the budget had been approved by the Board of Management on 16 March.

He reported that the position reflected current understanding of the position and would be reviewed on an ongoing basis, particularly in light of the requirements for Post Certification Review, preparations for the 2021 diet and emerging commercial considerations. Regular dialogue had been maintained with the Scottish Government over the position including medium-term capital expenditure, and a broader exercise to understand the impacts of Covid-19 across the public sector in Scotland was being undertaken.

The Board welcomed the new reporting format and noted that the paper presented a forecast outturn, which reflected any contracts and projects that had been subject to delay as well as cancellation. It was confirmed that a prudent and broad view had been taken on contingency to deal with any impact of the 2021 diet on resource capacity.

In response to the Board, it was clarified that the current pause on Modern Apprenticeship recruitment in response to COVID-19 had been considered from a number of perspectives, not least from SQA's duty of care for the health and wellbeing of young people, and was only a temporary measure that would be revisited as circumstances allowed.

Furthermore, the Board noted that Mr Baxter would be entering into dialogue with the Scottish Government to construct a more robust long-term financial plan in the Accreditation space.

4 DELIVERY ASSURANCE

Ms Blair provided a detailed overview of how work was progressing under the programme plan in place to support the 2020 awarding programme, including an end-to-end view across six key strands of activity.

The Board was pleased to note that progress was being monitored and reported effectively and noted the position and status of the key strands of the awarding programme. It found assurance that all key suppliers had confirmed individual contingency plans, which SQA had reviewed and was content with. In discussion, the Board acknowledged that communications colleagues were completely embedded in all awarding work strands. There was also dialogue around the Post Certification Review (PCR) period following certification, noting the projected eligibility figures.

The Board thanked Ms Blair for the comprehensive update and the assurance that the critical path was on track, with work towards 4 August continuing apace.

5 ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION MODEL UPDATE

The Chief Executive and Dr Stewart delivered a presentation to the Board providing a detailed update on SQA's Alternative Certification Model (ACM) for 2020; decision points that had passed; and further decision points where work was underway.

It was noted that a total of 16 optimisation runs had been completed over a period of three weeks. Technical advice had been taken from external partners SAS and AlphaPlus on defining and analysing outputs from each run, and support for the chosen run had been given as sound and based on SQA's stated assumptions and three core principles.

Dr Stewart reported on the final outcomes of moderation, explaining that the tolerances around the Starting Point Distributions (SPDs), and the approach to centre level moderation, had led to a moderately generous position overall.

As mentioned earlier in the meeting, National Awarding meetings had now been completed, and the Chief Executive was pleased to report that Principal Assessors had been universally content and supportive of the moderation approach taken and that the outcomes had achieved the expected SPDs.

The Chief Executive went on to assure the Board further that SQA continued to focus on its Equalities Impact Assessment of the full end-to end ACM process, and outlined the work specifically relating to Awarding activity.

The Board considered the presentation in detail and was very assured on the current position. There was discussion around communications and handling of Results Day, agreeing that support and clarity were essential. It would be important to provide the wider system with an insight into the processes undertaken in order to give assurances that SQA had delivered an ACM that ensured learners' work had been rightly and fairly recognised. The Board fully appreciated the challenge in informing audiences of the technical detail and methodology of the awarding model but approved the plans to do that.

The Board thanked officers for the update, commending the Executive for the extensive programme of work that had been undertaken so far.

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair thanked members for their time and contribution to the discussions, noting that the Board would meet again on Wednesday 22 July 2020.