

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 9 APRIL 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 2.30 pm on Thursday 26 March 2020 by conference call.

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
- Ms D Mahmoud

Observers

- Ms A Kerr, SQA

* Indicates present on the call

The Chair welcomed all members and thanked them for accommodating the call at short notice. The Chair then passed over to the Chief Executive to provide an update on the position to date.

The Chief Executive reported that, as mentioned at the last Board, the Scottish Government had invoked the national Qualifications Contingency Group. It had convened on 17 March to consider the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on the 2020 examination timetable, and wider qualifications certification. Subsequently, the Scottish Government and SQA had issued a joint statement outlining the Group's preference for SQA to proceed with the examination diet - cognisant of the matters in hand.

On 18 March, SQA had received written Ministerial advice that, based on the First Minister's statement regarding imminent school closures for an extended period, SQA should work on the assumption that it would no longer be possible to deliver an examination diet in 2020. SQA was commissioned by the DFM to develop an alternative model of certification to ensure that, in the absence of the exam diet, young people in schools and colleges who, through no fault of their own were unable to sit exams, would not be disadvantaged. The Chief Executive had acknowledged that request by letter on 19 March. These two pieces of correspondence had been duly shared with the Board. The Chair had been present at the meeting with the DFM on 11 March and on a call on 18 March, which set out the emerging and final position. The Chair's note of 18 March provided further information to the Board. With this decision, the DFM announced on 19 March that schools and colleges should continue to work with learners to ensure that any units and coursework were completed, and that estimated grades were provided to SQA.

SQA had immediately started work on finding practical solutions to develop a credible certification model, however this work was then impacted by the further official Government guidance on 22 March, where due to public health advice, it had been advised that no young person with SQA coursework to complete should attend school to do so. As a result, SQA had had to make some exceptionally difficult decisions about coursework and had

concluded, that schools and colleges were not required to submit learner coursework for marking, in Higher and Advanced Higher courses. This was discussed with the Chair and communicated on Tuesday 24 March.

Acutely aware that the credibility of any new model relied heavily on acceptability across the system, the Chief Executive assured the Board that she had been engaging with the sector as much as possible, reporting that all parties had recognised the significant challenge being faced by the organisation and were supportive of the current position. In addition, engagement had been undertaken with the College sector, in particular Colleges Scotland and other senior members of the College and University sectors. Exploratory work had also been initiated around the opportunity to peer review any approach taken to internal assessment.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that there had been some challenges in relation to resourcing within the organisation and that additional resource could be drawn upon if necessary. She continued to assure the Board that despite the speed and fluidity of the situation, and demands for clarity from across the system, SQA's priority was to ensure that proper and equitable decisions were being made at the right time and for the right reasons.

In concluding her opening remarks, the Chief Executive noted in particular:

- 1 Her close consultation with the Chair, acting on behalf of the Board, over the preceding days;
- 2 The importance of drawing on the skills and expertise of the Board, its Committees and the Advisory Council, in settling any new the model of certification; and
- 3 The propensity for challenge and contention that would come with any certification model based on estimation – and the need to take legal advice.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked the Chief Executive for the comprehensive update, noting the strains and pressure the organisation was under to publish a detailed plan for Certification.

The Chair then opened the discussion to Board members in turn, during which the following points were raised:

- To ease the tension for clarity from the system, there was consensus for an interim “holding” communication to all centres before Easter, reiterating SQA's current position and highlighting the requirement for time in order that a detailed and robust framework for delivery could be produced.
- There was full support for looking at the role of the Committees.
- The risk to challenge around certification and Post Results Services was critical, and there was unanimous backing for clarity on SQA's legal position.
- It was agreed that having a solid evidence base around the certification approach would be essential to ensuring the credibility of the end product.
- SQA needed the full support of the system to deliver any new model.
- It was suggested that consideration could perhaps be given to an extension to the deadline for submission of estimates by Centres.
- It was agreed on the need to add clarity on National 4 and completion of Units.
- Any new model must also be cognisant of the impact on those learners moving into Further Education and university.
- It was noted that SQA had been in communication with UCAS around the possibility of running a slightly different approach this year. SQA would be working toward the standing certification date of 4 August but would look to the potential of an earlier date to

maximise time for Post Results Services processes to be concluded before UCAS deadlines. It was highlighted again, that an aligned approach across the system was essential.

- SQA Accreditation had released a credible communication, but this would require further consideration and guidance around what flexibilities SQA Accreditation would be prepared to provide.

In conclusion, the Board noted its full support of the work by SQA thus far, which had been transparent and in a manner that recognised the pace of change. It was absolutely understood that the success for delivery was entirely dependent on the ability of the education system to come together across all sectors in the system.

The Board also recorded its thanks to SQA staff on all the work being undertaken in this unprecedented time.

The Chief Executive thanked the Board for its input and gave an assurance that SQA was working to deliver a robust certification model that would use the best evidence to deliver fairness for students, and ultimately allow an acknowledgement of their achievements. A proposed model for certification would be brought before the Board for consideration as soon as practicable.

The Chair thanked members for their input to a full and valuable discussion and noted that the Corporate Office would be in touch with a date to reconvene.