

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 23 APRIL 2020

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held by teleconference at 2pm on Thursday 2 April 2020.

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

WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed all members, noting apologies from Grahame Smith and Lee Downie, and thanked them for accommodating the call, intimating that the intention going forward would be to hold regular updates for the Board on a weekly basis. The Chair then passed over to the Chief Executive to provide an update on the position to date.

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.

MARKING AND DISTRIBUTION OF NATIONAL 5 COURSEWORK

The Chief Executive referred to an email that had been circulated to the Board on the evening of 31 March, incorporating paper B03/2 “Marking and distribution of National 5 coursework”. This paper had reflected the outputs of detailed considerations at the Code of Practice Governance Group (CoPGG) and had concluded – very regrettably - that SQA could not proceed with marking the National 5 Coursework materials received to date.

The Director of Operations confirmed that this conclusion had followed a very thorough investigation into granular operational and logistical dependencies. In light of growing concerns about the safety and security of materials, perceived unfairness and inequity in the assessment of incomplete coursework evidence, and the lack of a viable tool to conduct remote standardisation of marking to scale, it had become very

apparent that SQA could not proceed with marking of National 5 coursework in a safe and secure manner that maintained the integrity of national standards.

It was explained that despite the majority of coursework having been submitted by schools at the closing date, along with a good level of assurance from markers, it had become very apparent that it would not be possible to ensure absolutely that work could be posted out, tracked and received back safely and securely. Upon engaging with the courier service contracted to carry out the collection and distribution of coursework for marking, SQA had been informed that, while they would make every effort to prioritise the contract, they could not provide assurance that the contract could be delivered to the standard and security agreed, and after escalation of the matter to its Board, recommended cessation of the service.

Standardisation had become the very significant issue in early stages of the exploratory work. It was stressed to the Board that effective standardisation was essential to completing marking to the required quality; several alternative approaches had been explored, with the overriding challenge coming through around the inability for Appointees and SQA staff to safely and securely share the nature and volume of information required.

In addition, it was clear that not all meetings could be carried out remotely, for example moving from central marking to homebased would have exposed all the logistical risks associated with the courier service. Furthermore, following testing with smaller subjects, it had become clear that delivering a scalable, safe and robust standardisation process for the larger uptake subjects would not be in the realms of possibility.

The Board accepted that meetings were not able to be conducted effectively for the purposes of standardisation and that viability, scalability and security could not be delivered.

The Board discussed this issue and concluded all options had been investigated and exhausted, leaving this as the only course of action. It was acknowledged that a very difficult decision had been reached, with the overall objective to be as fair as possible to all National 5 learners, whilst responding to real risks to SQA operations, including the safe receipt and delivery of coursework materials and delivering remote standardisation.

The Board accepted the recommendation presented and that communications to this effect would be issued swiftly.

DRAFT GUIDANCE FOR CENTRES ON ESTIMATES

The Chief Executive updated the Board on the work to date on the alternative approach to certification for National Courses in the absence of actual candidate performance data, and referred Board members to paper B03/3 that had been sent out to the Board ahead of the conference call, and which clearly detailed the alternate approaches to determining grades for National Courses. It was recommended to proceed with Option 3, the combination of an extended estimate scale and a rank order by grade. Along with supporting estimates guidance to centres, this should provide SQA increased granularity for national awarding decisions in the absence of performance data. Collection of rank order data would also prove useful in the moderation of centre estimates and in the Post Result Services processes.

SQA would develop robust guidance to schools and colleges on how to determine and submit this refined estimate information. It was intended to provide this information by 20 April.

In closing her remarks, the Chief Executive highlighted that this approach would require whole system buy-in and co-operation so that collectively, SQA could do the very best for the young people of Scotland to enable them to move onto to their next steps in learning and work. The Chair invited the Chief Executive to comment on the position of the DFM. He had been party to two recent teleconferences when the Chief Executive had discussed her thinking with the DFM and senior Scottish Government officials. The Chief Executive confirmed that the DFM considered the proposed approach was sensible and measured in the circumstances.

Recognising that ultimately, any alternative approach to replace the normal diet of exams would have its challenges, the Board discussed and supported the proposed approach to estimation (option 3). It was agreed that the new draft guidance on estimations would come back to the Board for final approval before being issued to centres.

Some closing discussion took place around communications that were drafted for issue that afternoon, to provide an update in three key areas. Firstly, what evidence-based judgements teachers and lecturers needed to make about their learners' grades to help inform certification at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Secondly, the marking of National 5 coursework. And finally, details on our approach to the certification of National 2, National 3 and National 4 courses, National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Skills for Work courses, Awards, and free-standing units at SCQF levels 5, 6 and 7. The Board welcomed this messaging to centres and supported despatch that day, noting that a joint SQA-Colleges Scotland statement on alternative arrangements for SQA qualifications would be issued the following day.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for the update and the Board for their input and support; the weekly virtual meetings of the Board would be agreed and diarised in due course.