

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

B147/1.3

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 8 AUGUST 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 1pm on Wednesday 1 June 2022 by video conference.

Members

- * Mr D Middleton (Chair)
- * Ms F Robertson (Chief Executive)
- * Ms A Davis
- * Mr S Hagney
- * Mrs J Handley
- * Dr W Mayne
- * Mr H McKay (B146/3.1 onwards)
- * Mr G Smith
- * Prof K Thomson

Officers

- * Mr M Baxter
- * Ms J Blair
- * Mr J Booth
- * Mr L Downie
- * Mrs D Mahmoud (until B146/3.22)
- * Mr J McMorris
- * Dr G Stewart

In attendance

- * Mr S Borley, Head of Chief Executive's Office
- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * [REDACTED], SQA (until B146/3.22)
- * Mr I Morrison, Head of Humanities, Care & Services, SQA (B146/4.1 only)
- * Mr M Ware, Head of Research, Policy, Standards and Statistics, SQA (B146/4.1 only)

Observer

- * [REDACTED], Scottish Government (until B146/3.1)

- * Indicates present

1 OPENING REMARKS

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, noting that apologies had been received from Dr Wayne and [REDACTED].

He highlighted that item B146/4.2 Accreditation Member Co-option had been deferred as this would be considered by the Accreditation Committee in July and back to the Board for ratification thereafter.

1.2 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 Davis and Mr Hagney had children studying at Higher and Advanced Higher levels.

1.3 Minutes from previous meetings

i Minutes from 23 February 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2022 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

ii Minutes from 23 March 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2022 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

Postscript: Following the meeting it was identified that there was a minor omission within the minute from the Contract approvals section regarding the contract amounts and the escalation to the Scottish Government for final approval. The minutes were updated and circulated virtually to the Board for approval.

iii Minutes from 3 May 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2022 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

1.4 Matters Arising

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

2 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive highlighted that today marked the end of this year's National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams. A multitude of arrangements for the exam diet and significant contingency arrangements had been developed and established. She provided assurances to the Board that SQA continued to have robust contingency plans in place that would allow the management of any potential emerging vulnerabilities.

As part of her regular blog on the SQA's internal intranet she would be including a thank you to colleagues from across SQA for the hard work and dedication through-out this period. A video message to learners following the end of exams would also be issued. She reported that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills would also be

sending a video message of thanks to SQA colleagues and this would be published on SQA's internal intranet.

The Chief Executive went on to provide the Board with an update on the continued work across the organisation to deliver on SQA's vocational portfolio, critical contract delivery and accreditation functions.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair took the opportunity to thank all colleagues from across SQA for the commitment and support to ensure a smooth running of this year's diet. It was recognised that there continued to be significant work before the conclusion of the 2022 diet.

Mr McKay joined the meeting.

Risk escalation

Discussion took place around the five escalated risks, associated with the replacement of SQA, from the 2021-22 Q3 Corporate Risk Register. Following consideration, and endorsement, at the March Board meeting, the Chief Executive, as Accountable Officer for SQA, had written to Mr Griffin, as Accountable Officer in the Scottish Government for Education and Justice. The Board noted that Mr Griffin had responded to provide an update on the Scottish Government's process for handling the escalated risks, and the next steps, including that the five escalated risks continued to be the responsibility of SQA. It was noted that the Board and the Audit Committee would be kept updated on any progress.

The Board were in agreement that the risks could not be effectively and/or fully mitigated by SQA on its own but that SQA would continue to mitigate as much as possible. It was noted that there would be continued dialogue with the Scottish Government around how any further mitigation might be considered and managed through governance arrangements for education reform and Scottish Government Audit and Risk arrangements.

The Board noted that although the end of year figure for staff turnover was lower than the industry benchmark, some areas across the organisation were experiencing some concerns, and this would be closely monitored by management.

At this point the Chief Executive took the opportunity to advise that Mr Downie would be leaving after five years at SQA. Mr Downie would remain to oversee the technical side of the diet before departing in August. Interim arrangements would be established and the process to appoint his replacement would commence shortly. On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked Mr Downie for all he had contributed to the SQA. His presentations to the Board had always been clear and helpful. Although the Chair hoped there would be further opportunity to thank him for his work, he wanted to record the Board's best wishes for the future.

3 FOR DISCUSSION

3.1 Awarding 2022 Programme Update

Risk to Diet

Ms Blair advised that since the last meeting, where a number of risks were highlighted there had been some change in the profile of risks. She was pleased to advise that, as at today's date, the volume of exams exceptional circumstances was broadly comparable to previous years and to date, volumes were unlikely to breach our planned capacity. The service would close in ten days, taking cognisance of the additional two public holidays for the Queen's Jubilee.

SQA was continuing to monitor college strike action and though there was no longer a risk to the exam timetable, several strike days had been planned for June and this could potentially cause some disruption to quality assurance and results processes. The Incident Management Team (IMT) continued to monitor the situation, given the importance of receiving HNVQ results in time for UCAS transfer and articulation.

Plans for managing the volume of appeals continued to be developed with guidance issued to centres confirming arrangements for the service. There was a reminder of the importance of the agreed roles and responsibilities with staff in centres, including the expectation for centres to have conversations with learners ahead of appeals submissions. There are eligibility criteria for the service which includes the need for learners to have performed worse than their estimate and to have covered the course. Priority appeals remained challenging given that all evidence was required to be submitted digitally.

Appointee release continued to be closely monitored, particularly with some teams impacted by last minute call offs and where possible, Appointee Management had managed to top up teams ahead of training. Challenges remain and routine contingencies would be invoked if there were any issues arising from size of teams impacting on the speed of marking.

Some resource stretch continued to be experienced in running parallel processes for contingency and there would be papers going to the Awarding Programme Board seeking agreement to stand down some developments given approach to the point of go/no go and of time to be invoked. The Board were reminded why it was not possible to run a hybrid model and noted that work continued with the agreed exams model, or the alternative model would require to be invoked. The Communications Directorate continued to work on clear communication of why the hybrid model would not be possible.

Although, the NQ Certification Programme was at amber, on the whole progress was being made with marking and quality assurance and colleagues' conversations with teams would suggest that marking teams were pleased to be back helping with the diet.

Programme Update

went on to provide a detailed comprehensive update on the Awarding 2022 Programme, including key milestones and issues noting that although a number of deliverables were progressing towards closure, the overall programme status remained at amber.

left the meeting.

3.2 Education Reform

The Chief Executive reported that the Scottish Government continued to consider the governance of the Education Reform Programme.

SQA was consolidating comments and amends to the draft commissioning document that would be submitted back to the Scottish Government the following week.

3.21 Hayward Review – National Qualifications

The Board noted that Dr Thomson had been appointed to the Qualifications and Assessment Independent Review Group (IRG). It was anticipated that Professor Hayward would provide an initial report to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills by the end of December, with final recommendations by the end of March 2023.

The Chief Executive advised that she would be meeting Prof Hayward later that day for further discussions about SQA's role in her work. Dr Stewart had been invited to attend the IRG on an individual basis.

3.22 SQA Reform

Mr Baxter updated the Board on the continued engagement with the Scottish Government in attempts to identify a pathway forward with the programme of reform.

and Ms Mahmood left the meeting.

4 PAPERS FOR APPROVAL

4.1 Standards setting and maintaining in 2022

Mr Martyn Ware, Head of Research, Policy and Standards, and Mr Iain Morrison, Head of Humanities, Care & Services, were welcomed to the meeting.

Mr Ware and Mr Morrison provided a comprehensive overview of the approach to standards and awarding in 2022 and the 'Standards Setting and Maintaining in 2022' policy.

There was some discussion around a focus on the changing of SQA's approach to setting grade boundaries for 2022, which had been announced in February, and it was clarified that the intention was to allow normal processes to run as far

as possible. The Chief Executive provided assurance that the foundation of normal awarding processes remained.

It was clarified that the objective of awarding in 2022 was to award generously, and that this was likely to mean an intermediary position, somewhere between 2019 and 2021, overall for each level (National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher). This was intended to help achieve a transition between the outcomes from 2020 and 2021, when grades were determined by alternative means and not SQA's external assessments, and the return to awarding on the basis of these SQA assessments this year. These normal awarding processes and the assessments that underpin them were designed and are operated by SQA in a way that seeks to ensure fairness for all learners while maintaining standards. The Board noted that the approach and policy took into account the disruption of the pandemic, modifications to course assessment and revision support.

The Board approved the approach to standards setting for 2022 and the 'Standards Setting and Maintaining in 2022' policy.

Mr Morrison and Mr Ware left the meeting.

4.2 Accreditation member co-option

As advised at the start of the meeting (B146/1.1 refers) the item was deferred.

4.3 HN Next Generation Update

The Board noted the current status of the NextGen: HN project and SQA's current commitment to prototype qualification development and pilot delivery.

For planning, development and evaluation activity beyond the current commitment, the approach for the 2022-23 was to be determined. Due to time constraints, it was agreed that this would be circulated virtually to the Board for consideration and approval.

5 PAPERS FOR INFORMATION

5.1 Scheduled Statistics and Media publications and activities for Awarding 2022

The Board noted the summary of the schedule of all the publications and products that support Awarding 2022 Results Day.

5.2 SQA Updated Sanctions Assurance

The Board noted the updated review and acceptance of the actions taken to manage risk within the IT Products.

6 COMMITTEE REPORTS

6.1 Performance Committee – 7 February 2022

The minutes of the Performance Committee meeting held on 7 February 2022 were noted by the Board.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no further business raised.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board would take place on Monday 8 August 2022.