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SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY B174/2.3 ii

SQA BOARD – 8 OCTOBER 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the Board meeting held at 10am on Wednesday 13 August 2025 in rooms 1.20 & 1.21, Lowden.

Members

* Ms S Rogers (Chair)
Mr N Page (Chief Executive)
Ms A Davis
* Mr S Hagney
* Mr G Smith
* Prof K Thomson
* Mr J Morton
* Ms C McFarlane
* Mr S Hewitt
* Mr R Erskine
* Ms M Wailes

Officers

* Ms J Blair
* Mr J Booth
* Mr M Campbell
* Mrs D Mahmoud
* Mr J McMorris
* Ms D Stewart
Mr M Ware
* Mr D Walsh

* Indicates present at the meeting.

In attendance

Mr S Borley, Head of Chief Executive's Office, SQA
[redacted], [redacted], SQA
Mr Stuart McLaren, Head of Marketing, SQA (3.2 only)

1 OPENING REMARKS

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Board members to the meeting, noting that apologies had been received from Mr Page, Ms Davis and Mr Ware.

1.2 Declaration of Any Conflicts of Interest

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

1.3 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 28 May 2025 were approved by the Board.

1.4 Matters Arising

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

2 UPDATES

2.1 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair opened by formally recording the Board's thanks to John Booth for his interim stewardship of the organisation prior to Mr Page taking up post. A formal welcome was extended to Mr Page on his appointment as Chief Executive.

The Board was informed that permission has been granted to retain Mr Hagney and Prof Thomson as Board members for Qualifications Scotland. It was further noted that Prof Thomson would assume the role of Accreditation Committee Convenor, succeeding Mr Smith at the conclusion of his term with the closure of the SQA. The Board expressed its gratitude to Mr Smith for his leadership and contribution throughout his tenure.

The Cabinet Secretary had accepted the recommendation that John Morton be appointed as Co-Chair of the Strategic Advisory Council.
The Board recorded its appreciation to all colleagues within the organisation for the successful delivery of Results Day 2025. It was acknowledged that this represented an exemplary operational performance.

The Chair noted that SQA had received early information on the Scottish Government's financial ambitions and that the organisation was working to understand the implications for SQA and Qualifications Scotland. It was agreed that the Board should convene a further finance-focused strategy session to explore these matters in greater detail in due course.

An update was provided on the transition programme. It was reported that the transition plan remained at amber, moving towards green, which is considered to be in line with expectations at this stage. The improved resolution of the accreditation position had significantly reduced programme risk.

The Board received an update on board member recruitment. It was noted that there has been significant interest, with the Chair having met a number of potential applicants informally prior to application. Applications are due to close next week. The Corporate Governance team is undertaking substantial work to design an induction programme and to support team-building for what will largely be a new and younger Board.

The Board noted the Chair's update. There was some discussion around the organisation's capacity to address the work required on financial sustainability. It was recognised that appropriate arrangements must be put in place to ensure progress at a sustainable pace in partnership with the Scottish Government. The

Board agreed that further development of organisational data is required to strengthen planning and modelling capability.

2.2 CHIEF EXECUTIVES UPDATE

The Board noted that, in his absence, Mr Page had provided a written report that was included in the Board papers for information.

2.3 PAY AWARD UPDATE

Ms Mahmoud provided a concluding update on appointee status, confirming that the change in status for all appointees, including holiday payments, had been successfully processed.

An update was also provided on the staff pay award. It was noted that discussions with the Scottish Government on affordability were ongoing and that the organisation had now entered the dispute resolution process with Unite. All risks associated with not being able to implement a pay award prior to transfer to Qualifications Scotland have been articulated. The Board will be kept informed as the situation develops.

3 FOR APPROVAL

3.1 PRINT PRODUCTION CONTRACT APPROVAL

Ms Mahmoud presented a recommendation report concerning the retender of SQA's Print Equipment contracts, seeking Board approval. Mr Walsh noted that this had followed the regular procurement process and that the proposed approach would deliver cost savings. Given the contract value, Board approval was required.

The Board confirmed its approval of the recommendation. It was further noted that organisational costs for production print are trending downwards, and the Board agreed that further opportunities for cost savings should continue to be explored as part of the wider financial sustainability work.

3.2 QUALIFICATIONS SCOTLAND BRAND FRAMEWORK AND MISSION, VISION AND PURPOSE

The Board welcomed Mr McLaren, Head of Marketing.

Mr McLaren presented the draft brand framework for Qualifications Scotland, noting that Board members' input and approval were sought on key elements of the work now ready for review. The outputs included draft purpose, vision and mission statements, together with a set of brand values designed to articulate externally who the organisation is and what it stands for.

It was noted that development of the framework had been iterative, involving several rounds of engagement with colleagues, partners and stakeholders, as well as creative input from the agency commissioned by the Scottish Government. The agency had worked closely with internal experts to refine the essence and wording to produce a coherent and impactful identity for Qualifications Scotland.

The framework is intended to guide how Qualifications Scotland presents itself to learners, educators, parents and stakeholders during and beyond the transition from SQA. It was highlighted that the outputs directly support statutory obligations under the Education (Scotland) Act by emphasising the delivery of fair, transparent and learner-centred qualifications.

The Board welcomed the work and noted positively its alignment with the Education (Scotland) Act, describing the framework as simple, clear and concise. Members discussed the importance of ensuring the framework is embedded throughout the organisation, cascading through the corporate plan, business plans, directorate plans, management plans and ultimately into personal objectives. The Board agreed that a set of actions and a practical plan should be developed to demonstrate how the framework will be lived in practice, including alignment with the Fair Work Framework.

It was noted that the core values had been generated collaboratively by colleagues across the organisation, and consideration was being given to linking the demonstration of these values to a recognition scheme.

The Board discussed the articulation of ‘brave’ and ‘forward thinking’ as values, noting the need to ensure clarity about what these terms mean and how they may be perceived externally. Members also explored potential metrics to measure the effectiveness and impact of the framework.

The ambitions within the draft vision statement need to be expanded and explained with an importance placed on a system to allow the measurement of progress.

The Board welcomed the positive staff engagement in the development process, noting enthusiastic participation and the motivational impact. It was further noted that some external stakeholder testing had already been undertaken. The Board agreed that the framework should be brought to the next meeting of the Advisory Council for further engagement with its stakeholder members.

3.3 QUALIFICATIONS SCOTLAND: GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Board received a presentation from Mr Borley, supporting a paper on the governance arrangements set out in the Education (Scotland) Act. It was noted that the Act introduces significant changes to governance, which will result in a markedly different model for Qualifications Scotland compared to the current arrangements in SQA. The presentation summarised the new structure, highlighted associated risks and issues, and outlined the proposed approach to implementation.

The Board recognised that the new framework presents an opportunity to strengthen governance. It was agreed that expectations will need to be carefully managed among participants in the new groups to ensure clarity around their respective functions and responsibilities.

In discussion, members considered whether some of the work previously undertaken by the disbanded Performance Committee might more appropriately be routed through the Qualifications Committee rather than the Audit Committee. The Board also explored whether the Learner and Practitioner groups could be linked with the Innovation Committee, functioning in a similar way to focus groups, as exemplified by the approach taken by Sparqs.

The Chair noted that the non-executive Board members would give further consideration to these matters in their closed session in the afternoon.

4 FOR DISCUSSION

There were no items for discussion at this meeting.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business raised.

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair noted that the Board would next meet on Wednesday 27 August 2025, by MS Teams. This would be the annual joint meeting with the SQA Qualifications Committee.

The non-executive Board members then held a closed session.