

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

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BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 26 APRIL 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 10am on Wednesday 25 January 2023 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
- * Mr G Smith
- Professor K Thomson
- * Ms M Wailes

Officers

- * Mr M Baxter
- * Ms J Blair
- * Mr J Booth
- * Mr M Campbell
- * Ms M Farragher
- * Mrs D Mahmoud
- * Mr J McMorris
- * Dr G Stewart

- * Indicates present

In attendance

Mr S Borley, Head of Chief Executive's Office, SQA

[REDACTED], SQA

Ms L McGrath, Reform Programme Director, SQA

[REDACTED], SQA

Mr M Ware, Incoming Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards, SQA

Mr R Quinn, Head of English, Languages and Business, SQA

1 OPENING REMARKS

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Apologies were noted from Professor Thomson.

1.2 Declaration of any conflicts of interest

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

1.3 Minutes from previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2022 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

1.4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

2 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive updated the Board on the programme of work that had been undertaken since the start of the year, with a particular focus on specific aspects of awarding in 2023. The approach to modifications in 2023-24 had been taken through Advisory Council and the Qualifications Committee and further work was being undertaken to finalise a position for further consideration by the Board.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the industrial action by teachers could impact on the exam diet. SQA is working closely with the Scottish Government to closely monitor these issues. Currently, appointee release is as expected at this point in the year.

Reform and review work continues and is taking up an increasing amount of time and space in the organisation. Some real opportunities are emerging, but SQA must remain mindful of capacity issues going forward and the need to endure ongoing continuity of delivery.

3 FOR DISCUSSION

3.1 Awarding 2023 Programme Update

The Board welcomed to [REDACTED], newly appointed Programme Manager for the Awarding 2023 Programme. [REDACTED], provided an update on the Programme, including key dates, issues and risks noting that the overall programme status remained at amber.

The Board thanked [REDACTED], for the clear and comprehensive picture of the current position.

3.2 Education Reform

3.21 Review of Skills Delivery Landscape

Mr Ware reported that colleagues had met with James Withers, who is leading the review in November to provide an overview of SQA headline perspectives on the review of the Skills Delivery Landscape. Internal engagement within the organisation had given SQA staff the opportunity to feed into the response. Clear alignment and consistency in the messages between all review work and SQA responses to both the Withers and Hayward Reviews was critical.

Mr Ware agreed to reflect on feedback from Board members in framing the response.

3.22 Hayward Response

Ms Farragher presented the SQA response to the phase two consultation on the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessments (Hayward Review) and provided an overview of the headline emerging themes.

The response included input based on internal consultation from across the organisation.

The Board noted that the corporate response had been discussed by the Qualifications Committee in December 2022 and welcomed the response.

3.23 New Qualifications Body Update

Ms McGrath presented the highlight report from last Programme Board meeting, providing an overview of the status of the programme and dependencies including Accreditation scope and function and the other review work underway.

Ms McGrath highlighted that the revision to the timelines of the Hayward review presented significant risk, on which Mr Baxter (in his capacity as Chair of the New Qualifications Body Delivery Board) had written to the Scottish Government's Director of Education Reform. A delivery plan must be established that is real, achievable and recognises all various dependencies to enable the establishment of the New Qualifications Body (NQB). The draft legislation was expected to be introduced before the Parliamentary Recess in May; clarity was needed on a number of key issues before then.

In terms of timelines, Ms McGrath reported that the Interim Hayward report was anticipated to become available in February, with the final report to be delivered in May - a delay of two months on the original timeline - and a Scottish Government response to the recommendations is expected by September. In the interim, SQA would move forward on elements of the Target Operating Model not relating to products.

The Board discussed the various reviews being undertaken and the interplay and implications of these. They agreed that care was needed to ensure that risk was managed carefully. Continuity of ongoing delivery was key.

3.3 Approach to securing appropriate assurance of the development of a replacement qualifications body and other strands of Education Reform

Mr Baxter outlined the proposed strategy, based on the well-understood 'three lines of defence' approach, to secure appropriate assurance over SQA's approach to the establishment of a replacement qualifications body and other aspects of the Education Reform Programme within SQA.

Mr Baxter highlighted that the approach seeks to deal with issues from an SQA perspective, reflecting the responsibilities and accountabilities of the organisation and its Board of Management.

This is complementary to arrangements put in place by the Scottish Government as part of their governance arrangements for the Education Reform Programme.

Mr Baxter provided an overview of the proposed approach for each of the three lines of defence, noting that this approach to assurance seeks to balance internal and independent sources of assurance, involving stakeholders and expertise to underpin the decision making and delivery of the work associated with the Education Reform Programme.

The Board discussed the paper, agreeing that they were comfortable with the principles of the approach subject to clarification of the role of the Board in relation to the ongoing reform process which Mr Baxter agreed to follow up with the Scottish Government.

3.4 Financial Performance Report

Mr Baxter presented the report, reporting a good, controlled position in the approach to the end of the financial year. He noted that movements experienced throughout 2022-23 would feed into a detailed Q0 analysis exercise to inform the budget for 2023-24.

The Scottish Government are updated regularly on all changes to the forecast and are informed through the Budget Monitoring Return which is provided monthly.

The Board welcomed the update and noted the position.

4 FOR APPROVAL

4.1 Appeals/Post Results Service 2023

Ms Farragher delivered a presentation to the Board to support discussion and agreement on the proposed arrangements for the appeals service in 2023. Feedback from the 2022 evaluation had fed into discussions with the SQA Learner Panel, Advisory Council, NQ Working Group and were discussed with the NQ Strategic Group and Qualifications Committee on 20 January to inform the SQA Board's consideration of the approach in 2023.

Ms Farragher highlighted that a decision on the system for 2023 was required at this time to facilitate planning and communication to centres and to confirm the full set of arrangements in place for 2023. The full 2022 evaluation would be concluded and published in the spring.

The Board welcomed the presentation and agreed that a results service would be introduced based on a review of their marked exam papers. They agreed it would be free and available direct to learners. The Board discussed

the need for clear communications on the approach, in particular to learners to ensure they are aware what this means for them.

It was agreed that the focus of the decision must be the most appropriate process for current assessment system, acknowledging that there was a separate discussion to be had regarding assessment systems of the future and the best processes to support that.

The Board welcomed the evidence-based approach to developing the proposals presented and noted that the broader feedback gathered would also be fed into the Independent Review Group work of the Hayward Review.

Mr Booth reported that SQA were working with the NQ communications group to ensure messages were delivered out to every part of the system, from warm up messages to stakeholders and carrying through past results day.

Mr Booth highlighted key messages that would be carried through communications, including that it would be a free and direct service for learners.

The Board noted that SQA would be using measures through the Performance Committee and Performance Framework to monitor the effectiveness of communications activity.

5 FOR INFORMATION

5.1 Cash Position

The Board noted the cash position as it was presented.

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair expressed his thanks and best wishes to Ms Farragher at her last meeting of the Board before leaving the organisation to take up the Chief Executive position at the Joint Council of Qualifications.

The Chair also expressed thanks on behalf of himself and the Board to Mr McKay whose tenure as Board member and Chair of the Audit Committee was concluding. His dedication and insight in the non-executive roles he had undertaken for SQA had been outstanding.

7 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board would take place on Wednesday 22 March 2023.

Update: Two exceptional meetings of the Board were called on 13 February and 8 March to discuss priority issues.