

## SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

B159/1.4

### BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 29 NOVEMBER 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 10.00am on Wednesday 29 November in Esk/Forth, Optima and 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 G Smith
- \* Professor K Thomson
- \* Ms M Wailes

#### Officers

- Mr M Baxter
- \* Ms J Blair
- \* Mr J Booth
- \* Mr M Campbell
- \* Mr M Ware
- \* Mrs D Mahmoud
- \* Mr J McMorris
- \* Dr G Stewart
  
- \* Indicates present

#### In attendance

[REDACTED], SQA (B158.4.5 only)  
Mr S Borley, Head of Chief Executive's Office, SQA  
Mr A Dickson, Head of Finance, SQA (B158.4.3 only)  
[REDACTED], SQA  
[REDACTED], SQA  
[REDACTED], SQA (B158.3.1 only)  
[REDACTED], SQA (B158.4.5 only)  
[REDACTED], SQA  
Ms L McGrath, Education Reform Programme Director, SQA (B158.4.2 only)  
[REDACTED], SQA (B158.4.1 only)

## 1 OPENING REMARKS

### 1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. He noted that Prof Thomson was joining the meeting virtually.

Apologies had been received from Dr Mayne and Mr Baxter, both of whom were preoccupied with family issues with which the Board sympathised.

## **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 from 4 October 2023**

The Board agreed the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting subject to some minor amendments.

## **1.4 Matters Arising**

There were no other matters arising that would not be covered during the agenda items.

## **2 UPDATES**

### **2.1 Chief Executive's Update**

The Chief Executive thanked Mr Middleton for carrying out the role of Chair of SQA over the last six years. The Scottish Government has appointed Shirley Rogers as the new Chair of SQA and she would commence her new role on 1 December 2023.

The Chief Executive provided an update on the ongoing pay dispute. Unite members have recently voted in favour of both strike action and 'Action Short of Strike'. SQA was working through the implications of this industrial action, and this would be discussed later in the meeting.

In relation to reform, the Cabinet Secretary would update Parliament on the Scottish Government's response to the Hayward Review in the New Year. The Chief Executive was meeting with the Minister of Further and Higher Education on 5 December to discuss the Withers Review, in advance of a Parliamentary Statement. The Scottish Funding Council, Skills Development Scotland and SAAS are also involved in discussions.

SQA had been informed by the Scottish Government that there would be no funding beyond October 2023 to take forward reform work and there would be changes to education reform governance.

The Board discussed proposed arrangements and noted some concerns in relation to capacity and resources to deliver and clarity of responsibility.

The Board agreed that the Chief Executive should write to the Scottish Government regarding these proposed governance arrangements.

The Board was also informed that Mr Booth was leading work on school and college engagement, and the Chief Executive had already visited a number of schools as part of this engagement programme, with more to follow.

SQA also met with Mr Graeme Dey MSP (Minister for Higher and Further Education) to discuss construction apprenticeships, with further meetings likely.

The Chief Executive invited Mr Booth to inform the Board about a recent accessibility audit, carried out by the UK Government's Digital Service on SQA's website and work underway. It was noted that further work would be required.

The Board noted this update.

## **2.2 Responsible Officer update**

Dr Stewart updated the Board on ongoing engagement with Ofqual. The Board noted this update.

## **3 PAPERS FOR APPROVAL**

### **3.1 Contract Approval: Catering Services**

[REDACTED]

**Redacted - section 33 Commercial Interests and the Economy**

### **3.2 Contract Approval: Next Generation: HN Digital Transformation**

[REDACTED]

**Redacted - section 33 Commercial Interests and the Economy**

### **3.3 SQA Corporate Parenting Plan**

The Board was joined by [REDACTED] who presented SQA's draft Corporate Parenting Plan and invited the Board to comment on it.

Mr Smith highlighted the excellent work going on and suggested that more could be done to raise awareness about SQA's role as a national Corporate Parent. [REDACTED] agreed to consider further.

The Board approved the draft Corporate Parenting Plan for publication.

## **4 PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Awarding 2023 Programme Update**

The Board was joined by [REDACTED] who presented the NQ Awarding 2023 Programme Dashboard and advised that the 2023 Programme is now closed.

Details of outcomes would be published on 5 December. Lessons learned would help delivery in 2024. An appeals evaluation comprising of three strands (technical delivery, operational delivery, and policy review) is scheduled to take place in January 2024.

Some discovery work was underway following a pilot exercise on 'Access to Scripts' and this may become a larger scale project.

The Board noted this update and thanked everyone involved in the successful delivery of the NQ Awarding 2023 Programme.

#### **4.2 Education Reform Update**

The Board was joined by Ms Liz McGrath (Education Reform Programme Director) who provided an update on Education Reform.

SQA will have a draft plan and first pass costings for activity related to the transition to the new organisation by the end of 2023.

The Reform team would provide guiding principles to help support the completion of the plan and its eventual implementation as SQA transitions to the new organisation post NQ Diet 2025.

The Scottish Government's short life working group considering the future scope of accreditation and regulation has made some progress.

The Board noted this update.

#### **4.3 Financial Performance Report**

The Board was joined by Alan Dickson (Head of Finance) who provided an update on the financial position as of 31 October 2023 (period seven).

Mr Dickson highlighted that reform expenditure has still to be approved by the Scottish Government. Mr Dickson also highlighted that capital expenditure needs to be closely monitored.

The Board thanked Mr Dickson for the update and fed back to him that they found the new reporting style very helpful.

#### **4.4 Contingency Planning**

Ms Blair provided an update on SQA's contingency planning following the Unite (trade union) membership ballot in support of both strike action and 'Action Short of Strike'.

Unite was holding a members' meeting on 6 December and would advise SQA of its plans. Unite needs to give SQA two weeks' notice of any industrial action.

Ms Blair updated the Board on SQA's contingency plan and would pivot to this plan in mid-December.

The Board remained hopeful that the dispute could be resolved. However, it endorsed SQA's approach to contingency planning, highlighted that care should be taken to closely monitor impacts and risks.

#### **4.5 Next Generation: HN - Contingency Planning**

The Board was joined by [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], who provided an update on contingency planning in relation to the continued delivery of

Next Generation: HN qualifications ahead of the new technology solution being introduced.

The Board noted progress being made with contingency plans.

#### **4.6 SQA People Survey – new approach**

The new approach to the SQA People Survey would be discussed through correspondence, but the Board noted it had been discussed already by the Performance Committee.

### **5 PAPERS FOR INFORMATION**

There were no papers for information.

### **6 COMMITTEE REPORTS**

#### **6.1 Advisory Council**

Mrs Handley presented the minutes of the Advisory Council meeting held on 12 October 2023.

The Board has been informed of the changes made to the Advisory Council and how it will operate going forward. The Board have also been advised of the key outputs from the workshop on reform.

#### **6.2 Qualifications Committee**

The Board noted the minutes of the Qualifications Committee meeting held on 27 September 2023.

#### **6.3 Performance Committee**

The Board noted the minutes of the Performance Committee meeting held on 16 August 2023.

#### **6.4 Audit Committee**

The Board noted the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 28 August 2023.

### **7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Board marked the occasion of the Chair's last meeting, with his tenure drawing to end on 30 November 2023. On behalf of the Board, Prof Thomson thanked Mr Middleton for his leadership and service.

Mr Middleton responded by thanking Board colleagues and SQA staff for their support and assistance during the term of his appointment.

### **8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Board will take place on Wednesday 24 January 2024 in Lowden.