

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

SQA BOARD – 26 NOVEMBER 2025

B175/2.3

Minutes of the one hundred and seventy-fourth meeting of the SQA Board held on Wednesday 8 October 2025 at 10 am 2025 in Room 1.1, Lowden.

Members

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

SQA Officers

- * Ms J Blair (B174/6.1 only)
- * Mr J Booth (B174/2 onwards)
- Mr M Campbell
- Mrs D Mahmoud
- * Mr J McMorris (B174/5.3 onwards)
- Ms D Stewart
- * Mr M Ware (B174/2 – B174/4.3)
- * Mr D Walsh (B174/2 onwards)

In attendance from SQA

[REDACTED], [REDACTED]
Ms J Campbell, Head of Test Operation Services (B174/5.3 only)
[REDACTED], [REDACTED] (B174/2 – B174/6.1 only)
[REDACTED], [REDACTED] (Corporate Governance)
Ms C Kerr, Head of Standards, Malpractice and Complaints (B174/4.3 only)
[REDACTED], [REDACTED] (B174/4.1 and 4.2 only)
[REDACTED], [REDACTED] (B174/4.3 only)

1 EXECUTIVE SESSION (BOARD MEMBERS ONLY)

The Chair reminded the Board that, going forward, each meeting would commence with an Executive Session and today marked the first such session.

The Executive Session covered three primary areas: reflections and key observations from the Chief Executive's initial months; initial perspectives on people and leadership

matters going forward; and an overview of upcoming functional business reviews and expectations for the next phase.

2 CALL TO ORDER

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the one hundred and seventy-fourth meeting and the penultimate meeting of the SQA Board.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Hagney, Mr Campbell, Mrs Mahmoud and Ms Stewart.

The Chair noted that although the current agenda was substantial, the governance team would, following the transition to Qualification Scotland, ensure future agendas were balanced and focused on appropriate items for Board discussion.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

Approval of previous meeting minutes

- i 4 August 2025
- ii 13 August 2025
- iii 27 August 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 August 2025, 13 August 2025 and 27 August 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3 STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND LEADERSHIP UPDATES

3.1 Chair's Remarks

The Chair began by expressing her sincere appreciation to Mr Walsh, his team, and the HR team for their efforts in reaching a successful resolution of the pay award. She acknowledged that extensive negotiations had taken place with the Scottish Government and emphasised that the hard work and commitment shown throughout the process were recognised and greatly appreciated by the Board.

The Chair referred to the email sent yesterday regarding the recent General Questions in Parliament (GIQ) and subsequent correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary, noting that this had brought clarity on the transition timeline. She again thanked the Secretariat for their work in adjusting the Board meeting schedule accordingly.

As part of the Chief Executive's induction, the Chair noted that significant time had been dedicated to engagement with politicians across a broad spectrum, including independent representatives. She and the Chief Executive had met with members

from all political parties, with the exception of one party spokesperson, and reported that discussions had been constructive and largely positive. The Chair highlighted that there was clear commitment from political stakeholders to support Qualifications Scotland in establishing itself fully, and she reiterated the warm welcome that had been extended to the new Chief Executive by nearly all parties.

Providing an update on Board recruitment for Qualifications Scotland, the Chair informed members that interviews were scheduled to take place during the week commencing 20 October. She reported that the campaign had attracted close to 300 applications of a very high calibre across all categories, and that she had personally spent five days on the shortlisting process. It is anticipated that six appointable candidates would be identified, subject to approval by the Cabinet Secretary, and that they would be able to join the informal Board meeting planned for January 2026.

In closing, the Chair thanked those members who had attended recent all-colleague calls, noting that staff had valued the visible engagement of Board members. She confirmed that invitations to participate in these calls would continue to be extended following the organisation's transition to Qualifications Scotland.

3.2 Chief Executive's Remarks

The Chief Executive informed the Board that a short-term business plan would be developed to cover the period to 31 March 2026, focusing on the key activities the organisation must complete by that date. Work on a three-year corporate plan would commence in January 2026, with the Chief Executive emphasising the importance of Board involvement from the outset. He noted that, while there may be some time pressures, the corporate plan would require formal ratification by the Board. Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders would also take place to inform the plan.

He reported that a five-year financial strategy was in preparation, with Mr Walsh to provide further detail later in the meeting.

Redacted paragraph - section 30 (b)(ii) the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation.

3.3 Board engagement

The Chair led the discussion on the proposal to strengthen engagement between the Board and the wider organisation, expressing her thanks to Mr Booth, and particularly to [REDACTED], [REDACTED], for their work in developing the proposal.

The Chair emphasised that the Board should be interactive and noted that the proposal was practical, well-balanced, and achievable. She outlined the three parts of the engagement strategy and highlighted its critical importance for the Board and the new organisation. The Chair stressed the importance of providing Board members with the space to build trust and transparency across the organisation. She highlighted that members serve as ambassadors for the Board and that their role should be meaningful and impactful. She further emphasised the need for a consistent message and a phased approach, ensuring that initiatives were practical, reasonable, and implemented in a managed manner.

The Board agreed that enhanced engagement had been needed for some time and that the present moment provided the right opportunity to implement it. With the different Board make-up in Qualifications Scotland, it was important to ensure all roles were appropriately supported. It was noted that the larger governance team would provide increased support to Committee Conveners. Mr Smith highlighted the challenges he had experienced in representing staff and emphasised the importance of providing adequate support to the new Board member undertaking this role.

Mr Hewitt suggested that a future Board meeting could be hosted within a member's own establishment and kindly offered his college as a potential venue. The Chair welcomed this as an excellent idea, noting that it may be more suitable for consideration in subsequent years of the new Board.

The Board agreed the importance of clearly distinguishing the role of the Board from that of the Executive Management Team while maintaining strong relationships with managers to avoid any blurring of responsibilities.

The Board welcomed the approach, noting that it provided coherence, supported engagement with staff, and was inspirational. Members highlighted the value of building understanding of the Board's role, demonstrating leadership through their ambassadorial responsibilities, and enhancing communication, participation, and alignment with strategic priorities. The Board agreed that the proposal represented a positive step in supporting leadership, accountability, and organisational culture.

4 GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE

4.1 SQA Annual Procurement Report 2024-25

The Chair welcomed [REDACTED], [REDACTED], to the meeting.

[REDACTED] presented the report outlining the work and contributions of the Procurement Department over the financial year, fulfilling SQA's obligations under Part 2, Section 18 of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. The report demonstrated how procurement activity supported SQA's Corporate Outcomes by ensuring the effective use of financial resources and upholding duties of compliance and best value in line with the Scottish Public Finance Manual.

The Board welcomed the assurance that the report had been considered by the Audit Committee, noting robust discussions and minor amendments made following Committee feedback. The Board further noted that the Audit Committee had commended the governance arrangements and ongoing commitment to securing best value for money and had endorsed the report for submission to the Board.

There was a question around why the number of suppliers who were accredited Living Wage employers and were awarded a regulated contract awarded during the period was only three whilst the number of regulated contracts during that period that included fair work criterion was nine. In response it was advised that the nine referred to contracts that were done by SQA, the three referred to ones embedded in the Scottish Government's framework.

Regarding Community Benefits, [REDACTED] advised that the scope had been limited, as the £4 million threshold meant few contracts triggered reporting requirements, explaining the limited statistics included in the report. The Board noted the challenges of applying Community Benefit measures to existing contracts.

The Board suggested that future reports include additional narrative on Fair Work, emphasising that consideration is not merely a statutory obligation but also an opportunity to demonstrate proactive engagement and best practice. The Board also suggested including further information on Community Benefits and, where relevant, the potential implications of artificial intelligence, to provide a more comprehensive overview of procurement considerations.

The Board approved the Annual Procurement Report 2024–25, noting that it would be published on the SQA website in a transparent and proportionate manner, as required under the Act.

4.2 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement 2024-25

[REDACTED] presented SQA’s annual Modern Slavery Statement Procurement Report for 2024–25, noting that preparation of the statement was a legislative requirement for all public bodies in Scotland. He confirmed that there were no reported instances of modern slavery during the reporting period.

The Chief Executive, as Accountable Officer, confirmed to the Board that he was content with the report.

In discussion, the Board acknowledged that much of the statement reflected existing practices.

The Board suggested that future reporting could include information on the actual outcomes of these activities to provide greater assurance. It was noted that such details could be captured in the cover paper accompanying the report to the Board, rather than within the published statement itself.

The Board approved the Modern Slavery Statement 2024–25, which would be published on the SQA website.

[REDACTED] left the meeting.

4.3 SQA (Awarding) Annual Complaints Handling Report 2024-25

Ms Kerr, Head of Standards, Malpractice and Complaints, and [REDACTED], [REDACTED], were welcomed to the meeting.

[REDACTED] presented SQA’s Awarding Body Annual Complaints Handling Report, covering the period from April 2024 to March 2025, in line with the requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Act 2002. The report detailed the number of complaints received, performance against SPSO timescale indicators, average response times, and the outcomes of complaints at each stage.

The Board noted that 72 complaints had been received during the year, with the majority handled at Stage 1. Performance against timescale targets had been high. Complaint outcomes included those resolved, upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld. The Board also acknowledged that complaints had been used to inform improvements, with outcomes shared publicly on SQA's website. It was suggested that the report could also include complaints escalated to the SPSO, noting that the SPSO reviewed each case and determined that no further investigation was required.

The Board recognised that effective handling of complaints had contributed to SQA's strategic outcome of being trusted, respected, and valued by customers, stakeholders, and partners.

The Board approved the SQA (Awarding Body) Annual Complaints Handling Report 2024–25 for publication.

Mr Ware, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] left the meeting.

4.4 Standing Orders for Accreditation Committee and Accreditation Coordination Group

Mr Smith, Convener of the Accreditation Committee, presented the revised Standing Orders for the Accreditation Committee and the Accreditation Coordination Group. He provided background, noting that an appeal received approximately a year earlier had highlighted governance gaps and potential conflicts in the appeals process, prompting a thorough review. For the Accreditation Committee, Section 14 was revised to reflect the updated Appeals Process, and for the Accreditation Coordination Group, Section 10 was similarly amended. These revisions had been approved by the Accreditation Committee.

It was noted that further changes might be required once the organisation transitioned into Qualifications Scotland, however, with an Accreditation Committee meeting scheduled in October, it was considered appropriate for the governance arrangements to be formally approved at this stage.

The Board considered a number of minor amendments to the Standing Orders. For the Accreditation Committee Standing Orders, Section 11 should include narrative that the minutes would be published on the website following Committee approval, and Section 12.1 should include reference to international business. For the Accreditation Coordination Group Standing Orders, Section 8 should also include narrative that the minutes would be published on the website following Group approval.

The Board approved the amends presented and the additional ones suggested to the Standing Orders for both the Accreditation Committee and the Accreditation Coordination Group, subject to checking any possible implications with the Head of Accreditation

Post-Meeting Amendment: Following the meeting, Mr Brown, Head of Accreditation, advised that the reference to international business in the Accreditation Committee Standing Orders would not be appropriate as SQA Accreditation does not promote or monitor international activity, was not resourced for overseas provider monitoring, and awarding bodies may not use the SQA accreditation logo internationally. He also

advised that, for the Accreditation Coordination Group Standing Orders, only the decision list, rather than the full minutes, should be published, in line with current practice.

As the Accreditation Committee was due to meet before the next Board meeting in November, the Chair, with the approval of Mr Smith, Convener of the Accreditation Committee, officially ratified the Standing Orders of the Accreditation Committee and the Accreditation Coordination Group on behalf of the Board in line with the advice from the Head of Accreditation.

5 STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

5.1 Finance Update Report

Mr Walsh reported that while the timescales were tight the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) remained on track for presentation to the Audit Committee on 17 November and subsequently to the Board for formal approval on 26 November. He noted a technical issue regarding appointee holiday pay, which pertained to its classification within "other costs" and "staff costs," but confirmed that this did not affect the substance of the accounts. Ms Wailes, as Convener of the Audit Committee, confirmed that, at present, there were no concerns regarding internal or external controls. She added that the ARA would be fully scrutinised by the Committee at its meeting.

Mr Walsh then provided an update on the 2025-26 budget, highlighting the challenging financial environment with the Scottish Government. Efforts had been made to shift the focus within ongoing discussions on current year funding pressures and AO Templates, and he had been working collaboratively with the sponsorship team to strengthen relationships and engagement. Mr Walsh informed the Board that SQA had been allocated a further £34.7 million in funding through the final Autumn Budget Revision, which was positive news; however, this still left a funding gap of £4.7 million. The Board noted that the Scottish Government was aware of the challenges and had been supportive.

He continued with an update on the spending review, setting the context for 2026-27, and reiterated that the financial environment remained challenging. Mr Walsh addressed sustainability, referring to the report included in the papers, and noted that, while the report was a few months old, there had been no significant changes. He confirmed that bottom-up budgets were on track, with templates issued across the organisation and returns expected that week. He also expressed a desire for a more flexible approach going forward.

Mr Walsh also noted that the Period 5 report was consistent and that the organisation had successfully absorbed the above 3% pay remit additions, which was viewed as a positive outcome. He reported progress in enhancing financial controls, with the planned establishment of a Financial Planning and Analysis team.

The Chair took the opportunity to commend Mr Walsh for his work, noting the positive results already achieved. She acknowledged the challenges of his role and expressed pride in his efforts. She highlighted the extensive work being undertaken, including strengthening the relationship with the Scottish Government, and recognised the

progress made by him and the team. She also noted the discipline and approach he was instilling across the organisation.

The discussion then turned to unused capital, and Mr Walsh clarified that unallocated capital was part of the budgeting approach for the change programme. He explained that ongoing activities, such as legacy systems, were considered business as usual, and while they were allocated, their reporting made them appear unallocated.

The discussion then moved to aged debt. Mr Walsh advised that this had been an ongoing issue for two to three years, and it was unclear why the debt had not yet been written off. He confirmed that this was an issue he was actively addressing. Additionally, in response to a question he noted the impact of exchange rate movement on the aged debt. The Board expressed concern, as this was not the assurance they had received in the past however Mr Walsh confirmed this to be correct, and the Board acknowledged that this would need to be factored into future financial planning and risk management.

The Board noted that the Q4 2025-26 budget was ambitious, with capacity and capability being significant factors in meeting the challenge. In response, Mr Walsh explained that the Financial Planning and Analysis team he was establishing would improve financial governance. He anticipated the team would be set up within the next six months, and monthly management accounts would be provided to the Executive Management Team (EMT), enabling more timely financial information. Mr Walsh emphasised that this approach would ensure financial performance was monitored and discussed regularly, at a more granular level. Business Partners would also support Directors and leads in financial management across the organisation.

The Chair reminded Mr Walsh that the financial risk ultimately rests with the Board and commended him for the excellent job he was doing. The discussion then moved to the broader perspective on risk management, with the need for contingency plans in the event that the funding gap in the budget was not addressed.

The Chief Executive advised that SQA's international business would be one of the first areas to undergo a functional business review, given the importance of fully understanding the financial figures and identifying any potential financial risks. He raised key questions regarding the investment in this area, asking what had been invested and what the return had been, and whether the organisation had been the best entity to carry out this work. The Chief Executive highlighted the need for a clearer understanding of the financial implications and emphasised that ensuring Qualifications Scotland was fit for purpose was the priority, with a strong focus on long-term sustainability, which was considered critical.

The Board welcomed the excellent paper, noting that it effectively addressed short, medium, and long-term plans. It demonstrated strong thinking and sound judgment. The Board reiterated the importance of the ongoing relationship with the Scottish Government, which was critical to the organisation's success. The Board also recognised the establishment of the new Financial Planning and Analysis team as a positive step forward and commended the overall shift in how financials were being managed, praising it as a significant improvement. Further thanks were extended to Mr Walsh for his leadership in this area.

5.2 Short-Term Business Plan

Mr Booth presented the draft short-term Business Plan, which outlined the organisation's goals, outcomes, outputs and key tasks through to March 2026. The document, described as a "plan on a page," was designed to provide clarity to both the business and external stakeholders regarding priorities from 1 December 2025 to 31 March 2026. It was noted that the plan served as a transitional framework, preparing the organisation for the forthcoming Corporate Plan, while demonstrating immediate action on key organisational changes. The plan was underpinned by a resourcing strategy incorporating Scottish Government funding and savings identified from a recent efficiency review.

During the discussion, the Board provided feedback, including a need to do more to highlight the organisation's commitment to its people. The Chair agreed with this observation, referencing the ongoing work with the People Committee and the Fair Work Convention, and suggested that these should have been considered in the plan's development.

In relation to Outcome 1 (stronger engagement), the Board suggested that the focus should not be limited to schools alone, emphasising the need for the plan to be inclusive of all stakeholders. This would ensure that colleges, businesses and other relevant sectors could see themselves represented within the document.

It was also proposed that Outcome 4 (effective and efficient organisation) be amended by adding the word "system" to better reflect the interconnected nature of the organisation's work and the wider educational sector.

There was some concern regarding the phrasing "push ahead with qualifications reform," with some members feeling it sounded overly aggressive and potentially counterproductive, particularly in the context of educational reform and the need for positive external stakeholder engagement.

The Chief Executive provided an update on the initiative to recruit ten volunteers across the organisation to act as "change agents," with a focus on driving improvement over the next two to three years. The Board was invited to participate in this initiative, should they wish.

The Chair stressed the importance of action over rhetoric, encouraging the organisation to adopt a "less is more" approach. She emphasised the need for a focus on delivering tangible outcomes rather than making broad, unsubstantiated promises.

While the plan was generally seen as strategically sound, questions were raised about how it would be utilised once launched and how it linked to the ongoing functional business reviews. The Board looked forward to reviewing the final version of the plan, incorporating the above feedback, at the next meeting for formal approval.

5.3 Risk Management

2025–26 Quarter 1 Corporate Risk Register Report

Mr McMorris, Director of Corporate Strategy & Business Development, and Ms J Campbell, Head of Test Operations Services, were welcomed to the meeting.

Ms Campbell presented the 2025-26 Q1 Corporate Risk, Opportunity, and Issues Report, which outlined the ongoing management and governance of risks, opportunities, and issues within the organisation for the period from April 2025 to June 2025. She highlighted that the Audit Committee received quarterly updates on the full Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and referred to the appendices, which detailed both corporate risk analysis and transition risks related to the move from SQA to Qualifications Scotland. This report had been discussed and approved by the Audit Committee at its August meeting. Following feedback from the Audit Committee, Ms Campbell confirmed that improvements had been made to the format of the report, and the Committee had expressed satisfaction with these changes.

Ms Campbell reassured the Board that the overall process was functioning as intended. She confirmed that the Q1 CRR was fully aligned with SQA's Risk, Opportunity, and Issues (ROI) policy, and that the updated register had been thoroughly reviewed and approved by the relevant governance bodies, including the Risk and Opportunities Group, the Executive Management Team, and the Audit Committee.

As Convener of the Audit Committee, Ms Wales expressed her gratitude to Ms Campbell for the significant work completed in this area. She confirmed that the CRR presented to the Board had already been reviewed and approved by the Audit Committee during its August meeting. Ms Wales clarified that the "temperature visuals" had not yet been presented to the Audit Committee. She noted that the CRR provided ongoing assurances that the systems were functioning as intended. While the risk scores had been rigorously challenged by the Audit Committee, Ms Wales emphasised that the Board also had the opportunity to review and challenge these scores. She further stressed the importance of ensuring that the CRR was thoroughly scrutinised and accurate, particularly as the transition to Qualifications Scotland progresses.

The Chair advised that Ms Wales and Mr Erskine would assist in shaping the risk appetite for the Qualifications Scotland Board and extended her thanks to them for taking on this responsibility.

Mr McMorris clarified to the Board that mitigating actions were in place for all risks identified. He noted that the paper presented today was a streamlined version for the Board's consideration. Ms Wales confirmed that the Audit Committee had fully scrutinised all aspects of the CRR.

The discussion then turned to the possibility of reporting certain risks to different subcommittees. The Chair confirmed that this was something she had already begun to explore.

It was also noted during the discussion that while there was significant focus on financial risks at the Board level, this was not necessarily the greatest risk facing the organisation.

There was further comment on the use of heat maps in the risk reporting, with some members indicating a need for additional clarity. It was suggested that a future session could focus on risk management techniques to ensure that all Board members fully understand the methodology and its application.

Annual Risk Workshop

Ms Campbell led the Annual Risk Workshop and outlined SQA's approach to managing corporate risks during 2024-25, highlighting improved reporting, cybersecurity threats, and a reassessment of the organisation's risk appetite. She emphasised the importance of horizon scanning to anticipate emerging risks and opportunities and explained how the risk framework aligned with SQA's strategic objectives.

Ms Campbell advised the Board on the 2024 BCI Horizon Scan, noting the significant rise in cyber security attacks, particularly ransomware targeting the education sector, which increased by 75% in 2024. The Board recognised this as a major risk area and highlighted the need for robust data recovery plans and scenario planning, particularly in relation to legacy systems. The Chief Executive confirmed that the organisation faced over 100 cyber attacks per day. The Chair noted her experience of undertaking annual cyber and data protection training on another Board and advised that she would consider implementing a similar programme for Qualifications Scotland Board members.

The Board reviewed SQA's current risk appetite and noted earlier comments that Ms Wailes and Mr Erskine would assist in shaping the risk appetite for Qualifications Scotland. The Board discussed the implications of adopting a more cautious approach, recognising that while it may constrain growth, it offered enhanced security, reduced exposure to financial loss, and strengthened stakeholder confidence.

Discussion then focused on identifying any strategic risks that may be missing, recurring risk themes, and the alignment of the current risk appetite with organisational objectives. The Board emphasised that people-related risks should be treated with equal importance to operational and business risks. Building on the earlier discussion, the Board considered the potential benefits of reporting specific risks to relevant sub-committees, ensuring that mitigation actions were reviewed by individuals with appropriate expertise, while the Audit Committee continued to oversee the overall CRR and provide the assurance to the Board. The Board agreed that careful consideration was required to determine which risks should be reviewed by which committees.

Additional risks highlighted included Artificial Intelligence, political and reputational risks, ongoing people and culture risks, and financial risks. It was also observed that with the increase in Qualifications Scotland Board membership, there may be potential risks to the effectiveness of governance and decision-making.

The Board noted the importance of embedding robust risk oversight across all governance levels and ensuring both operational and emerging strategic risks—including cybersecurity, people, political, reputational, and technology-related risks—were considered in future planning.

The Board took assurance from the workshop that SQA's risk management processes were functioning effectively and support ongoing strategic decision-making.

Ms Campbell left the meeting.

6 OPERATIONAL UPDATES AND KEY INITIATIVES

6.1 Appeals Update

Ms Blair, Chief Operations Officer, was welcomed to the meeting. She provided an update on the progress of appeals for National Qualification courses certificated in August 2025 and requested that the information shared be treated confidentially, noting that official statistics would be published in December 2025.

Ms Blair reported that the number of appeals had increased compared to the previous year, identifying this as an ongoing trend over previous years. It was noted that Grade A Band requests (from Band 2) were rising, largely due to admission requirements from universities in England. She explained that a Grade A was a Grade A and that SQA only accommodates appeals for candidates with conditional university offers requiring an A Band 1. This was to ensure we take steps to avoid undermining our grading system in Scotland, but we had no wish to disadvantage learners in these circumstances where an A Band 1 was a requirement.

She noted that the appeals service was costly and currently operates without formal eligibility criteria for standard appeals. We relied on appointees to undertake the service after returning to schools. Ms Blair highlighted that SQA was the only awarding body in the UK to offer a priority appeals service which allows for appeals beyond entry to HE only - college, employment and training were also eligible. She emphasised that it was the correct approach in supporting learners but stressed that support from centres was essential for its sustainability. In discussion, the Board asked about the benefits of offering this service. Ms Blair responded that it ensures learners had a voice, in line with the Education (Children's) Act. The Chair suggested that this could be considered further by the Learner Interest Committee once established, to obtain their perspective on the timing and appropriateness of appeals.

Regarding component-level data, Ms Blair advised that there was inconsistency across centres, with some providing the data and others not. Provision of this data was one of a number of centre responsibilities under the appeals service.

The Board took assurance from the update and noted the ongoing considerations regarding the management, sustainability, and strategic oversight of the appeals service.

Ms Blair left the meeting.

6.2 Transition

Transition Board Update

The Chair advised that the August Transition Board meeting went well, with updates provided on progress in the transition, key achievements, the risk register, communications and engagement plans, governance arrangements following the Education (Scotland) Bill, and ongoing work on commencement provisions and the Section 104 Order to support the establishment of Qualifications Scotland.

Update on Cabinet Secretary's Commission

The Chair reminded the Board that the Cabinet Secretary's Commission had comprised three parts. The first part related to Accreditation, which had been confirmed to remain within Qualifications Scotland, with a review scheduled in two years. Interim leadership had been in place, and recruitment for a Chief Accreditation Officer was underway.

The second part concerned the Schools Unit, where substantial progress had been made. The Chair commended the significant efforts and achievements in this area, particularly highlighting the contributions of Ms Brown, the seconded headteacher. The Board would be updated on developments in the Schools Unit in due course.

The third part related to leadership plans, and the Chair advised that she had been committed to confirming these plans with the Cabinet Secretary by the end of the year.

It was noted that the final update on this item would be provided at the November meeting and that it would not be carried forward into Qualifications Scotland.

Transition to Qualifications Scotland

Mr Booth updated the Board on the transition to Qualifications Scotland, noting that operations would begin on 1 December 2025 with a phased approach to full operation by 1 February 2026. He outlined the phased transition, governance arrangements, and associated opportunities.

The Board welcomed the clarification provided and took assurance that the transition was on track, noting the growing momentum and excitement. On behalf of the Board, the Chair took the opportunity to thank Mr Booth for his work in providing this assurance.

7 COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

7.1 Advisory Council

22 May 2025

The Board noted the minutes of the Advisory Council, which had been approved by the Council.

4 September 2025

Mr Morton, Convener of the Advisory Council, provided an update on the annual virtual open meeting, noting that there had been two interactive sessions. The first enabled Advisory Council members to help translate Qualifications Scotland's brand framework into meaningful practice, sharing and discussing the framework elements. The second session allowed members to reflect on the Council's role to date, capture lessons learned and consider how these insights could inform the establishment of the new Strategic Advisory Council under the Education (Scotland) Act 2025.

Although data capture had been challenging, figures were promising, and the meeting was reported as successful.

7.2 Audit Committee

10 March 2025 and 16 June 2025

The Board noted the minutes of the Audit Committee, which had been approved by the Committee.

25 August 2025

Ms Wailes, Convener of the Audit Committee, advised that the meeting covered a range of governance and assurance matters. She reported that external audit activities were proceeding as planned and that, in relation to internal audit, the new internal audit plan had been approved, and a tender exercise would be undertaken for a new internal audit contract.

7.3 Performance Committee

21 May 2025

The Board noted the minutes of the Performance Committee, which had been approved by the Committee.

18 August 2025

Ms Davis, Convener of the Performance Committee, advised that the meeting covered SQA's quarterly performance review, progress on strategic best value and financial improvement initiatives, the draft Part A performance report of the 2024-25 ARA, an analysis of exit data, and the results of the SQA People Survey.

Mr Smith, the Board member representing staff, expressed concern that he had not seen the results of the staff survey. He noted that he would usually attend Performance Committee discussions when the survey was considered and that the survey had historically been discussed at Board. He emphasised the importance of implementing the Fair Work Framework in a meaningful way, ensuring that actions and the staff survey were aligned going forward. The Chair advised that responsibility for the staff survey would sit with the newly established People Committee once it had been formally constituted, with the Board receiving a summary of outcomes and planned actions to maintain oversight and ensure good governance.

The Chief Executive advised that a procurement retender for the next staff survey contract was underway, which would ensure alignment with the Fair Work Framework. He highlighted feedback indicating a perception across the organisation that 'nothing changes' and noted that the most recent round of 'Colleague Cafes' would focus on follow-up actions and invite staff to identify the two main priorities for the next survey.

7.4 Qualifications Committee

7 May 2025

The Board noted the minutes of the Qualifications Committee, which had been approved by the Committee.

24 September 2025

Prof Thompson, Convener of the Qualifications Committee, advised that the meeting had considered the approval of several policies relating to assessment, awarding, and the management of exceptional circumstances in qualifications delivery. A Research and Analysis Strategy was also presented, and it was suggested that it would be of

interest to the Board. It was subsequently confirmed that the strategy is scheduled for discussion at the next Board meeting.

7.5 Accreditation Committee

5 February 2025 and 8 May 2025

The Board noted the minutes of the Accreditation Committee, which had been approved by the Committee.

30 July 2025

Mr Smith, Convener of the Accreditation Committee, advised that the Committee discussed audit and monitoring reports, SQA Accreditation's annual review and risk register, progress on Standards and Frameworks projects and Generative AI, and considered the transition of SQA Accreditation to Qualifications Scotland, including governance, branding, and stakeholder engagement.

He further advised that Mr Brown, Head of Accreditation, had decided to retire after over 30 years' service and acknowledged his significant contribution and dedication. Mr Smith also noted that convenorship of the Accreditation Committee had now passed to Professor Thompson, whose first meeting would take place later in the month, and wished him success in his new role.

The Chair thanked Mr Smith for his dedicated service as Convenor of the Accreditation Committee, acknowledging his leadership, guidance, and commitment, which had been instrumental in ensuring the effective operation of the Committee and supporting the work of SQA Accreditation.

8 CLOSING REMARKS

8.1 Other business and closing remarks

There was no further business raised.

In closing, the Chair highlighted that this marked an exciting stage in the transition to Qualifications Scotland and expressed her sincere thanks to all Board members and EMT for their contributions.

8.2 Date of next meeting

The next meeting, which would also be the final meeting of the Board as SQA, would take place at 10am on Wednesday 26 November 2025 and would be held on MS Teams.