

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

BEO32/1.12

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – 28 OCTOBER 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Management held at 10am on Wednesday 1 September 2021 by video conference.

Member

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

Officers

- * Ms J Blair
- * Mr M Baxter
- * Mr L Downie
- * Mr J McMorris
- ██████████
- * Dr G Stewart
- * Mrs D Mahmoud
- * Ms B Black
- * Mr J Booth

Observers

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Ms N Crowley, Head of Chief Executive's Office

* Indicates present on the call

1.1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, including members of the Qualifications Committee, who would be joining the Board for a joint session to discuss Awarding in 2021. In particular, the Chair welcomed newly co-opted members of the Qualifications Committee:

- Carol Turnbull; and
- Jon Reid.

The Chair noted that no apologies had been received.

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS, COURSES AND AWARDING IN 2021

The Executive Management Team delivered a presentation to members on National Qualifications, Courses and Awarding in 2021, in particular:

- An overview of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) for 2021 and the work that had been undertaken with the NQ2021 group and through the Quality Assurance exercise.
- Total entry figures from 2017-21 and the effects on grade distribution over National 5 – Advanced Higher and subject variability.
- Media, communications and stakeholder engagement covering a variety of channels over the period of results day, delivering emphasis on standards and credible results for learners.
- Appeals headlines for 2021, including the direct right of appeal to SQA for learners, new procedures, and priority and standard appeals figures.
- Approach to 2022 with the return to exams, including the range of contingencies in place to react to public health advice and further modifications put in place for 2022.

The Board and Qualifications Committee welcomed the presentation and expressed interest in further analysis.

Members discussed differences in conditions of assessment and outcomes throughout the pandemic, particularly with regard to periods of lost learning. It was agreed that further research into this would be valuable going forward.

Qualifications Committee members noted that there would be further opportunity to take these discussions forward at their next meeting on 15 September.

The Chair thanked members of the Qualifications Committee for their attendance and contribution to the discussion. The meeting took a short break while Qualifications Committee members left the meeting.

1.11 Declaration of Any Conflicts of Interest

Moving into the Board agenda proper, the Chair recorded that 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.

The Chair noted that members of the Board would never be put in a position directly to affect the outcomes relating to their centres or family members.

1.12 Minutes of previous meetings

i 27 May 2021

The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

ii 8 June 2021

The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

iii 16 June 2021

The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

iv 1 July 2021

The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

v 2 August 2021

The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

1.2 Chief Executive's Update

The Chief Executive provided the Board with an overview of the work ongoing around Awarding 2022 including contingencies and modifications, noting these would continue to be reliant on public health advice.

Providing an update around the review being led by Ken Muir, the Chief Executive had written to Mr Muir the previous week providing some requested information and highlighting some of the key risks. She reported that she had been invited to meet with the expert panel the following week. Mr Muir would attend an Executive Management Team meeting on 7 September, following which he would hold an all staff briefing session, where he will take questions from staff. Board members would be provided with a joining link to this event to allow them to attend if they wish. The Chief Executive confirmed that SQA had been offered places on the stakeholder advisory group, with a commitment to continue engagement.

The Chief Executive reported that she had received correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills the previous week that had provided some assurances around job security, however she noted that no firm commitment had been made beyond March 2022. The Board acknowledged that this was not the commitment that SQA had been seeking and that there was an understanding of that within the organisation and with the Unions.

The Chief Executive went on to provide an update on the Stobart Report that had been released the previous day, noting that the report presented options rather than formal recommendations. The Board discussed next steps and the Chief Executive highlighted her intention to write to the Cabinet Secretary.

2 PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

2.1 Awarding 2021 Programme Update

The Board welcomed [REDACTED], to the meeting to provide an overview of the Awarding 2021 Programme dashboard and key risks.

2.2 Awarding 2022

[REDACTED] then went on to provide an update on progress toward awarding in 2022, reporting that key target outcomes for awarding had been revisited based on what had been agreed for 2021. [REDACTED] provided an overview of the proposed approach and work breakdown structure including principles of scope and noted that next steps for would be programme mobilisation.

The Board welcomed the update, commenting on the assurance was provided from the reporting on work being undertaken around awarding and effective project management.

The Board went on to discuss staffing and recruitment, noting that it was crucial that the organisation remained able to retain and recruit key people.

3 PAPERS FOR APPROVAL

3.1 EHRC Section 23 Agreement

Mr Baxter provided an overview of the work that had been undertaken with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) since the last update to the Board in June to develop the terms of the legal agreement and SQA's supporting action plan. Mr Baxter reported that the agreement would last for a period of two years and be monitored at periods of six months.

The Board noted the update and were content to approve that, subject to agreement of the legal documentation and joint press statement, SQA enter into a Section 23 Agreement with EHRC for a period of 2 years.

The Board were joined by [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], from Audit Scotland to observe the presentation of the Annual Report and Accounts.

3.2 Report and Accounts 2020 – 2021

3.21 Public Services Reform Act 2010 - 2020-21 Report (PSRA)

Mr Baxter presented the PSRA report, noting that it had been presented to and approved by the Audit Committee previous month and would be published on the SQA website along with the Annual Report.

The Board approved the PSRA report.

3.22 Audit Scotland Annual Audit Report 2020-21

Mr Baxter led the Board through the report and provided key reflections. [REDACTED] then provided his observations, noting his thanks for the engagement from across all SQA in the work undertaken for year 2020-21.

The Board noted the report, acknowledging that it would reach final status when signed off by [REDACTED] and presented to the Auditor General.

3.23 SQA Audit Committee Annual Report 2020-21

Mr McKay, as convenor of the Audit Committee, presented the Committee's Annual Report for 2020-21. Mr McKay provided an overview of the report, concluding that the Committee were happy to recommend the signing of the accounts as presented.

The Board noted the report.

3.24 Letter of Representation

Mr Baxter presented the Letter of Representation, noting that an updated version had been circulated to the Board ahead of the meeting that morning.

The Board noted the letter of representation.

3.25 Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21

Mr Baxter presented the Annual Report and Accounts (ARA) 2020-21 noting that the Audit Committee had considered the ARA at its meeting in August and recommended approval to the Board.

The Board approved the ARA, noting that arrangements had been made for the electronic signatures of the Chief Executive, Chair and Audit Scotland to be added following the Board before they would go on to be submitted to Ministers and Parliament.

██████████ and ██████████ left the meeting.

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and input to the meeting, noting that the Board would meet again the following week to cover off standing business items and further reflect on current issues.