

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the sixty second Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 10 June 2022 at 10:00 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

Present:

- Ms. Joanne Harmon (Chair)
- Dr. Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
- Dr. Barbara Brittingham
- Ms. Mary Danagher (Items 1-15)
- Mr. Blake Hodkinson
- Mr. Thomas McDermott
- Ms. Megan O'Connor
- Dr. Niamh O'Reilly (Items 1-15)
- Prof. Irene Sheridan (Items 1-17)
- Dr. Anne Walsh (Items 1-11)

Apologies: None

In attendance:

- Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Liam Butler (Item 10)
- Mr. Eamonn Collins (Item 11)
- Ms. Barbara Kelly (Item 6)
- Dr. Bryan Maguire (Item 7)
- Dr. Anna Murphy (Item 15)
- Dr. Barry O'Connor, Chairperson, Expert Advisory Group (Item 7)

INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the meeting and acknowledged the Board's first opportunity since 2020 to meet in person in QQI Offices.

The Board agreed that the agenda for the meeting was acceptable and adopted same.

1. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board noted that there was one possible conflict of interest declared.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The **Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting** held on 8 April 2022 were **confirmed** and would be signed at a later date.

3. NOTE OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The Board **approved** the **Note of the Meeting of 8 April 2022** for publication on the QQI website.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Board noted the **Action Tracker**.

4.1. Action Tracker

The Board noted the updated Action Tracker. A Board Member requested an amendment to the deadline for the compilation of a Board Reflections document with the intention to present the draft document for consideration and discussion at the next Board Meeting scheduled for 23 September. There was a brief discussion on how best to capture the Board's reflections, such as each Member contributing five key learnings from their time as a Member as well as shaping the document to best assist the incoming Board. The Board noted that the Chairperson will do a handover session with the incoming Chairperson. There was also a suggestion that existing Board Members could meet with incoming Board Members for a handover session.

Engagement with the Recognised Trade Union

While conscious of ongoing engagements and contact, the Board expressed a desire to see a formal process for engagement with the recognised Trade Union in place before the term of the current Board ends. The Board noted that the HR and Organisation Committee have been discussing the matter and expect to advance a formal relationship architecture over the next few months. A Blended Working Policy is also expected to be in place by Quarter 4.

The Board noted that the Chairperson would discuss the Board Reflections document further with the Board Secretary.

5. CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

5.1. CEO Report

The Board noted the various updates contained in the CEO Report covering the period since the April 2022 Board Meeting.

Following some queries, the Executive elaborated on a number of the points contained in the report. The Board noted that a contractor had been appointed to carry out the Review of the Quality Assurance, Governance Arrangements and Processes for the existing Consortia-led Apprenticeship programmes with the resulting report expected by the end of September.

The Board requested that the Irish Quality and Qualification Forum (IQQF) briefing paper be circulated to Members once finalised. The Executive also undertook to circulate an OECD Skills Strategy presentation from a recent meeting of the National Skills Council.

The Board noted the recent developments in relation to the validation of programmes leading to micro-credential awards. It was also noted that topics relating to micro-credentials will be discussed and considered by the IQQF and suggested that consideration should be given to how micro-credentials could be part of the progression route through tertiary education and the feasibility of that route.

The Board noted that the Executive had found it difficult to recruit learners to the focus groups participating in the Rethinking Assessment: Stakeholder Views project.

The Board noted that Certification numbers have continued to increase.

The Board noted that the Chief Executive was a member of the Funding the Future Implementation and Review Group established by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to develop a sustainable funding model for higher education.

6. PRESENTATION – UPDATE ON APPRENTICESHIPS AND AWARDS DEVELOPMENT

The Chairperson welcomed Barbara Kelly, Director of Awards, to the meeting.

The Board noted the presentation on Apprenticeships and Awards Development provided by Ms. Kelly. An update on the new Awards Directorate and its current work including the re-engagement process with FET providers was also provided. The Board noted that the Executive intends to review its Validation Policy to accommodate initiatives/changes arising from the recommendations of the inaugural ETB review quality reviews. The Board noted that work on Quality Assurance Guidelines for Online Programmes is underway with a draft document for approval for consultation expected in September.

The Board noted the developments outlined in the area of Apprenticeships, many of which were arising from the National Apprenticeship Action Plan e.g. the establishment of the National Apprenticeship Office, the National Apprenticeship Alliance which has met twice, the intention to establish an Apprenticeship Access Committee. The Board noted that the QQI-led Review of the Consortia-led Apprenticeships model is underway with the draft report expected by the end of September. It was also noted that planning to migrate craft apprenticeships to the new single model is underway. The Board noted that the Executive also expects developments within the CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) system. The presentation was followed by a Question and Answers session with the discussion touching on topics such as Early Learning and Care and the funding of apprenticeships.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, thanked Barbara for her presentation.

7. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

The Board noted an update on **Engagement with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS)**.

7.1. Amendment Legislation Programme (ALP)

The Board noted the verbal introduction to the update on the Amended Legislation Programme provided by the Board Secretary/Director of Corporate Services. The Board noted that an Expert Advisory Group had been established to support and advise the Executive in the

development of Due Diligence Guidelines and Criteria and noted the membership of the group. The Chairperson, Dr. Barry O'Connor, attended the meeting virtually to provide a verbal update to the Board on the Group's progress to date. The Board noted that the Group is reviewing draft Section 29 Criteria and Guidelines and has met with representative bodies in the ELE sector and HE providers. The Group plans to review the regulations for the Protection of Enrolled Learners as the next stage of its work.

The Board noted that Due Diligence will be in place as part of the IEM process and to ensure the good governance of providers and the sustainability of those businesses. The Chair of the Expert Group expressed his thanks to his colleagues for the work done to date and confirmed his belief that it was important to get appropriate guidelines in place as part of this process. The Board suggested that the Guidelines should include a statement or caveat that the listings/requirements contained within them are not exhaustive and are open ended.

The verbal update was followed by a brief Questions and Answers session.

The Chairperson thanked Dr. O'Connor and the Expert Group for all their work.

The Board also noted a verbal update on the ALP provided by Bryan Maguire, Director of Integration. The Board noted that the IEM Codes are being prepared and are expected to be considered by the Policies and Standards Committee at its next meeting (on 7 July). Draft Policy and Criteria for Listed Awarding Bodies are also expected to be presented to that Committee for consideration for approval to publish for consultation. The Board noted that the Executive is also planning for the implementation of associated fees from ALP functions.

The Board noted that Due Diligence is required to be in place prior to the initial stages of the IEM process being rolled out.

7.2. Meeting with the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

The Board noted that the meeting between the Minister and the Chairperson and Chief Executive of QQI scheduled for 7 June had been deferred to 12 July. The Board also noted that the Quarter 2 PDA Review Meeting was scheduled for 20 June.

7.3. Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA) 2022

The Board noted the PDA and Oversight Agreements for 2022 which had been signed by the Assistant Secretary of the Department and the Chief Executive of QQI.

7.4. Funding Model

The Board noted that the Executive had submitted an updated Funding Model submission to the Department, a copy of which had been provided to the Board in advance of this meeting. The Board noted that feedback was awaited from the Department. The Executive considered the submission to be more balanced and looks at funding from all perspectives and is more equitable.

8. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Board noted documents relating to **Strategic Planning**.

8.1. Corporate Plan 2022

The Board noted the Progress Report covering Quarters 1 and 2 of the 2022 Corporate Plan. The Board reminded the Executive of the importance of not overcommitting itself to too many priorities within a given time period.

8.2. Draft Annual Report 2021

The Board noted the design proof for the revised Annual Report for 2021. The draft report had been revised following the Board's opportunity to provide feedback on the report presented at the April Board Meeting.

The Board **approved** the Annual Report for 2021 and requested that it be submitted to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science by 30 June as required by the 2012 Act.

8.3. Appointment of Board Members

The Board had a brief discussion on the appointment of the next QQI Board. The Board noted that the Department had been in contact with the Chairperson in relation to the advertisement for the upcoming Board vacancies. The Board also noted the potential that the Executive may not have a quorum for a period of time following the end of the current Board's term on 5

November. The Board noted that the Executive is planning to cover some items with deadlines in Quarter 4 at the September Meeting e.g. ICT expenditure, draft Budget 2023, etc. The Board noted that the Executive may arrange a meeting prior to 5 November to cover any remaining items requiring attention. The Executive would issue a save the date notice following further discussion with the Chairperson.

9. BOARD MEETS WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Chairperson updated the Board on the CEO performance management process and the Board discussed the formalising of an industrial relations structure and reaffirmed the need for same to be put in place.

10. BUDGET AND FINANCE

The Board noted an update on **Budget and Finance**.

10.1 Management Accounts to 30 April 2022

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the four months to 30 April 2022. The Board noted the Executive's assurance that there was nothing arising in the accounts which gave cause for concern. It was noted that Certification income continues to perform strongly to date in 2022.

The Board noted that there had been a slight decrease in the number of prompt payments. The Executive clarified that this had been due to a temporary reduction in staff numbers in the Finance Unit which had since been filled and the situation is expected to return to normal within the next month or two.

The Executive is continuing its work with the Department to solidify its Reserves Policy. The Board noted that the Executive was also incurring further necessary spending in certain areas (e.g. ICT, equipment, premises upgrades) to prepare for the future blended working model.

10.2 ICT Contracts and Resources

The Board noted the proposal outlined and **approved**:

- the procurement of contracts for ICT contract resources for six months (July-December 2022), as outlined in the proposal submitted and, in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy and subject to contract and
- the purchase of services in MS Azure for the period July 2022-June 2023 as outlined in the proposal submitted and, in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy, subject to contract.

10.3 Draft Budget 2023

The Board noted the initial outline draft Budget for 2023. It was noted that the draft was compiled from the five-year plan developed by the Finance Manager in mid-2020 and updated with information based on recent income and expenditure trends. The Board noted that the draft is based upon recurring assumptions and no changes based upon the Funding Model submission have been included.

10.4 Aged Debtors and Forgone Fee Income

The Board noted this report (featured under Item 15, Audit and Risk) and agreed that it was helpful for the Department to be aware of the income QQI foregoes under the certification fee-waiver provided to certain categories of learners.

11. ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Board noted an update on **Organisation and Human Resources**.

11.1 Human Resources

The Board noted an update on Human Resources.

11.2 Organisation Resources

Denzille Lane

The Executive provided the Board with an update on the refit of the Denzille Lane premises, noting that advice had been received on a refit of the 1st and 2nd Floor Meeting Rooms and ventilation for same. The Board noted that members of the Executive had met with the Landlord in relation to renewal of the lease on the premises. It was noted that the current lease expires in November 2023 and the initial discussions had taken place. The Board noted

that with new blended working arrangements likely to be in place, it is likely that there will be a reduction in the organisation's accommodation requirements.

Mount Street

The Board noted the Executive's proposal to complete the licence periods for the Mount Street premises (also expiring in 2023). It was noted that the Mount Street premises had been largely used as meeting rooms and meeting spaces and is no longer suitable post-Covid without a significant upgrade and investment. The Board suggested that the Executive should consider exploring alternative accessible serviceable premises options in the area. The Executive undertook to explore options for alternatives. The Board noted that QQI's requirements may change over the coming years and the organisation needs to future proof its options.

The Board noted that the Executive would consider other options and also noted that it may be possible to carry out dilapidations work in this space during the current financial year.

11.3 HR Strategy 2022-2024

The Board noted that the draft HR Strategy had been developed to support the delivery of the Statement of Strategy 2022-2024. The HR Strategy confirms the importance of the health and wellbeing of staff to the organisation, the Executive and the Board. It was noted that QQI had worked to become an employer of choice and significant developments and initiatives had been put in place since its establishment in 2012. The Board noted that the Executive looks to further improve on its HR priorities over the next three years.

The Board discussed the draft and suggested a small number of minor amendments. The Board **approved** the HR Strategy subject to the minor amendments suggested.

12. REVIEWS

The Board noted the documents relating to **Reviews**.

12.1 Cinnte Cyclical Review

The Board noted the Report for the Review of Technological University Dublin (TUD).

12.2 Education and Training Boards (ETB) Review Cycle

The Board noted the reports for the reviews of the following ETBs (Phase 2 of the review cycle):

Cavan Monaghan ETB,
Waterford and Wexford ETB,
Kerry ETB and
Kilkenny and Carlow ETB.

This item also incorporated an update on the work of the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC). The Board noted the verbal report and update provided by the Chair of the Committee. The Chair acknowledged the support provided to the Committee by the Executive. The Board noted that there had been some turnover in the Committee's membership during the past year and its work had also changed as more sections of the revised Legislation are commenced.

A Board Member suggested that a context piece on Committees should be developed which may assist the incoming Board. The Chairperson would discuss the matter further with the Board Secretary.

The Board noted that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant number of reviews in the Cinnte Cycle had taken place over Microsoft Teams as had the entire cohort of the ETB Review Cycle. The Board noted that the Executive is planning to return to onsite Cinnte Reviews in 2023. There was a general consensus that, under the circumstances, the move to virtual reviews had gone well. The Board briefly discussed the matter of international panel members being as accessible once there is a full return to in person onsite visits.

The Board noted that Technological University Dublin is the first of the Technological Universities to undergo a Cinnte Review.

The Board noted that the ETB sector had made significant progress in the last number of years since their establishment and the evidence was to be seen throughout the review process. It was noted that the development of new programmes does appear to be the main issue and a universal recommendation arising from the review process. The Board noted that indications are that the ETB sector has seen the reviews as a good learning experience and have learned much from the self-evaluation process.

The Board noted that the Chief Executive is due to present to the Funding the Future Implementation and Review Group at its next meeting.

The Board noted that the Executive envisages the next round of the review cycles to vary from the current process.

13. ITEMS FOR NOTING

The Board noted the **Items for Noting**.

13.1 Focus on Approvals and Reviews Committee

This was handled under item 12 above.

13.2 Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee held on 17 December 2021.

13.3 Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Approvals and Reviews Committee held on 7 March 2022.

13.4 Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 7 April 2022.

13.5 Rolling Board Agenda 2022

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2022.

14. COMMUNICATIONS

The Board noted an update on **Communications**.

14.1. Media Mentions

The Board noted the media mentions for the period since the April 2022 Board Meeting.

14.2. Qualifax

The Board noted a verbal update on the Qualifax Website project. The Board noted that work on the branding had been completed and the successful tender applicant had begun preliminary work on the website redevelopment phase. The approximate cost of the project was noted and a detailed work schedule was being finalised. The Board noted that the initial preparatory work on the redevelopment project had been completed. The Executive expects that the new site will be ready for the 2023 academic intake.

15. **AUDIT AND RISK**

The Board noted documents relating to **Audit and Risk**.

15.1. Verbal Report of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting

The Board noted a verbal report on the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 20 May 2022.

The Board noted the information arising from the recent IA Review of ICT General Controls. It was noted that activity relating to Systems User Access for staff takes place on a monthly basis.

15.2 Internal Audit Reports

The Board noted a number of internal audit reports which had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting on 20 May.

The Board noted that there were two recommendations arising from the Payroll and Personnel Cycle Internal Audit Report. In relation to one recommendation - the obligation to provide Annual Benefits Statement for staff members, the Board noted that, to date, these statements have been provided on request or to those staff members nearing retirement. It was noted that the Executive is working to advance provision of this information to all staff and are working with ICT to develop a bespoke system to produce these statements.

The Board **approved** the following IA reports:

- Deloitte's Internal Audit of ICT General Controls,
- Payroll and Personnel Cycle.

A Board Member suggested that the Executive should explore if it is possible to standardise the levels and categories of assurances used during IA reviews to ensure consistency across all internal audit reports.

The Board noted that, following the Committee's request, the Terms of Reference for Internal Audits will be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee prior to the Audits commencing to ensure the correct focus and span of each contracted internal audit.

15.3 Status Updates on Planned Internal Audits

The Board noted an update on the status of planned Internal Audits for 2022. The schedule for 2022 had included a Review of the Top Five Risks, which is now deferred to 2023. This is due to changes in personnel and therefore, the assigned risks owners, and revisions to the Risk Register arising from the External Review of Risk Management.

15.4 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The Board noted a verbal update on GDPR which covered the periods of Quarter 4, 2021 and Quarter 1, 2022. The Board noted that there were no GDPR subject requests received during these periods and no breaches or incidents occurred. The Board noted that there had been no issues of concern arising.

The Board noted that the Data Protection Breaches Policy had been updated and approved by the Board at its April Meeting. A review of Data Protection compliance had been carried out by the outsourced internal auditors during Quarter 2 and a significant suite of documentation provided as requested. The Board noted that the Executive is awaiting the final review report but was aware of an initial recommendation arising relating to the consolidation of records of process activity (RoPA).

The Board noted that the Research Unit had completed significant work on Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) for one current project. It was noted that it had been a labour-intensive activity but the organisation had benefitted from the learning and experience gained through working through the process. The Board noted, following a query from a Board Member, that data sharing between agencies is in place, particularly under MoU arrangements.

The new HEA legislation will also strengthen data sharing relationships and data protection agreements. It was noted that data QQI shares is anonymised.

15.5 Aged Debtors and Foregone Fee Income

The Board noted a Report on Aged Debtors and Foregone Fee Income which had been discussed with the Finance Manager under Item 10 above, Budget and Finance.

15.6 Risk Management

Risk Register

The Board noted the Risk Register which was revised on foot of the External Review of Risk Management and was a live Corporate Risk Register containing fewer risks and supported by Divisional/Directorate sub-Registers. The Corporate Risk Register now consists of seven risks which were identified and analysed by the Executive Management Team (EMT).

The Board noted that the Executive had taken on board the recommendations arising from the External Review. It was noted that the process for the development of the new Register had included a number of workshops and discussion sessions with the EMT. The Board noted that the Executive had reviewed its risk universe and the EMT felt it had developed a better understanding of the risk environment after undergoing the process. The Board noted that divisional risks are now managed at Director/ate level.

The Board discussed the Register and requested that the text of draft Risk No. 4 be revisited/reworded. The Board also suggested that the Executive use the term 'Blended Working' rather than hybrid working. The Board reiterated that the Executive needs to be clear that blended working has to be applied for and the obligations under staffs' existing contracts remain. The risk should be reworded to make the blended working situation clear. The Board also requested a minor amendment to Risk No. 5.

The Board **approved** the Corporate Risk Register subject to the amendments outlined above. It was noted that revised Risk No. 4 would be circulated to Board Members for its consideration in the coming weeks.

Risk Management Policy

The Board noted that the Risk Management Policy had been amended on foot of the recommendations arising from the External Review of Risk Management and in support of the new Risk Register.

The Board noted that following their development, the divisional Risk Registers will be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee for consideration and external oversight.

The Board **approved** the revised Risk Management Policy.

15.7 Minutes of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 1 April 2022.

16. GOVERNANCE

The Board noted an update on **Governance**.

16.1 Committee Members/Appointments

The Board **approved** the following appointments to QQI Committees:

- Dr. Billy Bennett to the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee,
- Prof. Fiona Farr to the Approvals and Reviews Committee and
- Ms. Cassy Taylor to the Policies and Standards Committee.

17. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA

The Board noted the **Draft September 2022 Board Agenda**.

The Board noted and discussed the draft Agenda for the September Meeting.

The Board noted that the Assistant Secretary and Head of the Higher Education Policy Division in DFHERIS, Mr. Keith Moynes was scheduled to attend this meeting.

The Board requested that extra time be allocated to discuss the Board Reflections document.

The Board noted that a HR and Organisation Committee Meeting is expected to take place over the summer period and an update on progress on the Blended Working Policy is expected to be provided at the next Board Meeting.

18. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 23 September 2022**, beginning at **10:00 a.m.**

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Board noted that this was Megan O'Connor's final meeting as a QQI Board Member. On behalf of the Board, the Chairperson thanked Megan for her input and participation on the Board as well as her work with the Executive. The Board noted that her successor is expected to be appointed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in the coming weeks.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and contributions.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.