

## Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the sixty-sixth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Monday, 22 May 2023 at 2:00 p.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

**Present:**

- Prof. Irene Sheridan (Chair)
- Dr. Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
- Ms. Marianne Doyle
- Dr. Sean Duignan
- Dr. Sharon Feeney
- Mr. Blake Hodkinson (Items 1-11)
- Mr. Kevin McStravock
- Ms. Anne Naughton
- Ms. Maria Ward

**Apologies:** Ms. Clodagh McGivern

**In attendance:**

- Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Liam Butler (Item 11)
- Ms. Mary Grennan (Item 7)
- Ms. Gráinne Mooney (Item 13)
- Dr. Jim Murray (Item 7)

### INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the first meeting of the third Board of QQI.

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

## 1. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board noted that no conflicts of interest were declared.

## 2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS

The **Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting** held on 4 November 2022 were **confirmed** and signed.

## 3. NOTE OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS

The Board **approved** the **Note of the Meeting of 4 November 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.

### 4.2. Professional Accreditation Issue

The Board noted a verbal update provided by the Chief Executive on a focused review which had been instigated following a Protection for Enrolled Learners (PEL) event relating to the withdrawal by a provider of their submission to the professional accreditor of a QQI validated social care programme which arose in August 2022. The Chief Executive outlined the background which triggered the review. The Board noted that this matter had originally been outlined at the September 2022 Board Meeting, with a further update provided at the November meeting. The focused review process was completed on 12 May 2023 and the final report is awaited together with the provider response.

The Board noted that the Chief Executive, together with representatives of other agencies involved in the event, had been invited to attend a meeting of the Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on 30 May. The first session of the Oireachtas Committee meeting would hear addresses by QQI, CORU, the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) and the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA) while the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) would attend the second session. The

Board noted that QQI's opening statement had been drafted and submitted to the Department in advance of the meeting. It was noted that the meeting of the Oireachtas Committee would be televised and the submissions published. A link to the proceedings would be circulated to Board Members once available.

## 5. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Board noted an update on **Strategic Planning**.

### 5.1. Revised Corporate Plan 2023

The Board noted that the Corporate Plan is prepared at the end of each year for the following year and is informed by the organisation's Statement of Strategy. The Board noted that the initial plan for 2023 was prepared earlier than normal in time for the final meeting of the previous Board on 4 November 2022. The Plan was approved subject to any revisions or updates required in the interim and subsequent review and approval by the new Board following its appointment. The Board noted that the revised Corporate Plan had been updated to include four new actions following further consideration by the Executive in the intervening period since November 2022. The Executive answered queries raised by the Board on the revised Corporate Plan 2023.

The Board noted that the Statement of Strategy 2022-2024 was developed in 2021 and the work on the next Statement covering 2025-2027 will commence later this year/early next year.

The Board noted that one of the new actions in the revised Corporate Plan related to the next review by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) of QQI which is scheduled to take place in 2024 with the site visit expected to take place in February. An internal steering group to manage the review project had been established. It was noted that the Board would be involved in the review process. The Chief Executive outlined that on this occasion it would be a targeted review which would also examine an enhancement theme selected by QQI for evaluation. The Board noted that the Executive intends focusing on its programme of thematic analyses of the outputs of quality assurance processes in higher education as its enhancement theme.

The Board **approved** the Corporate Plan for 2023.

## 5.2. Draft Annual Report 2022

The Board noted the draft Annual Report 2022. The Board noted that on this occasion the introduction to the report would be from the Chief Executive only as there was no Chairperson in place at year end. The Board noted that the activities for the year are reported against the objectives of the Statement of Strategy. The Board **approved** the draft Report which would be finalised ahead of its submission to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science by 30 June.

The Board noted that QQI's Financial Statements are published separately as the audit of the accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) is usually not concluded by the end of Quarter 2 each year to allow for simultaneous publication.

## 6. **ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

The Board noted a verbal update on **Organisation and Human Resources** provided by the Executive.

### 6.1. Human Resources

The Board noted that it had been an extremely busy time for recruitment of staff over the last number of months and the Executive outlined any relevant HR developments which arose during the period.

The Executive outlined, for the new Board, that there is currently a blended working arrangement in place in the organisation, with staff attending the office a minimum of one day a week (or four days over a month). This arrangement was introduced as a six-month pilot from November 2022. The office building had been reconfigured to facilitate working in the post Covid-19 environment.

The Board noted that QQI had successfully applied for the IBEC Keepwell Mark in 2019 and had retained it since. QQI had also featured in IBEC's Top 100 Companies for Wellbeing for the last three years.

The Board noted that a Staff Engagement Forum is in place which is managed by the Human Resources (HR) Unit.

It was noted that succession planning is a focus of attention for the Executive and a lot of work has been progressed in the area to date.

## **7. COMPREHENSIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Board noted the documents relating to the **Comprehensive Policy Development Programme**.

### **7.1. International Education Mark (IEM)**

As part of its earlier Induction Session, the Board had received a briefing on the background to the development, and the upcoming introduction, of the International Education Mark. This together with a presentation on and overview of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies formed session one of the Board's induction. It was noted that the second part of the induction session would precede the next Board Meeting scheduled for 19 June.

The Board noted an outline of the background to the development of the IEM to date. The Board also noted that two draft Codes of Practice for Provision of Programmes, one for the Higher Education sector and one for the English Language Education sector, had been developed following extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders. It was noted that the introduction of a Code of Practice in this area for the ELE sector would be the first time a formal statutory Quality Assurance process for this sector was established.

The Board noted that discussions are continuing with the Department on the introduction/establishment of fees and charges for this function. Fees and charges are set by QQI with Ministerial approval. It was noted that a significant amount of feedback from the consultation process had referred to the setting of fees and charges and the concern of providers on how these would be calculated and if they would be equitable across the sector. It was noted that a draft fees schedule was prepared by the Executive and circulated to DFHERIS for review and consideration.

The Board noted that the Executive has continued to provide support and engagement with smaller groups and providers within the development process to date, to assist potential applicants in understanding their obligations under the new process. A number of briefings and interactive information sessions had been held for potential applicants.

The Board noted:

- Report on feedback from IEM White Paper consultation and
- Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for English Language Education Providers.

The Board **approved**:

- Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of English Language Education to International Learners and
- Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes of Higher Education to International Learners.

#### 7.2. Amended Legislation Programme (ALP)

The Board noted a verbal update on the progress of the Amended Legislation Programme.

### 8. **APPROVAL OF QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) PROCEDURES**

The Board noted the documents relating to **Approval of Quality Assurance Procedures**.

The Board noted that QQI had been working towards a re-engagement process with legacy providers since the establishment of the agency. The process involves approving Quality Assurance procedures and the capacity of providers who were previously under the umbrella of the legacy agencies, HETAC and FETAC. The Executive had allowed a period of transition for providers to upgrade their QA procedures to align with QQI procedures. The re-engagement process then commenced in 2018. The re-engagement process originally commenced with larger HE providers and progressed to smaller FET providers.

The Board noted that 140 FET provider applications had been received and 80 have been approved to date. 54 are currently in process or are within the six-month window to resubmit their submission. It is likely to be the end of the year before the entire process is complete.

In all cases, the Board noted the Panel Report, the Provider's Response, the Provider's Profile Report and the recommendation of the PAEC.

The Board confirmed that it was satisfied that it was provided with sufficient information to make the decisions and the Board **approved** the refusal to approve the Quality Assurance procedures of the named providers.

The Board noted that the providers involved would be informed of the decision. It was also noted that these providers have the opportunity to appeal the decision if they wish, or, in time, can apply as a new provider under the initial access to QQI awards process. It was noted that the Board's decision means that the validation of the providers' programmes now cease but the programmes will be taught out where there are learners enrolled on the programmes and no new recruitment of new learners is permitted.

## 9. GOVERNANCE

The Board noted a verbal update on **Governance**.

### 9.1 Appointment of Committee Members

The Executive reiterated the requirement of Board Members to populate seats on QQI Committees. The Board noted that all committees are currently active, with the Audit and Risk Committee scheduled to meet on 30 May, the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) on 20 June and the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) on 26 June.

The Board noted that in the period between the May Board Meeting and the next meeting scheduled for 19 June, the Chairperson and the Chief Executive would discuss options for adding the new Board Members to the respective committees.

## 10. AUDIT AND RISK

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

### 10.1. Verbal Report of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting

The Board noted background information on the Committee together with a verbal report on the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 28 April 2023. The Board noted that the Committee had considered the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for 2022 which will be presented to the Board for its consideration at its next meeting scheduled for 19 June.

## 10.2. System of Internal Controls (SIC) 2022

The Board noted that the previous Board had, at its meeting on 4 November, delegated consideration of the review of the System of Internal Controls for 2022 to the Audit and Risk Committee in the event that a new Board would not be appointed in time to consider the matter prior to the reviews compliance deadline of 28 February. The review was carried out by QQI's Internal Audit partner and approved by the Committee at its meeting of 24 February 2023. The Board noted that the audit of the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022 by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) would be outsourced this year. It was also noted that a representative on behalf of the C&AG had attended the last Audit and Risk Committee Meeting on 28 April and following the commencement of the audit, had confirmed that no causes for concern had been identified at that point.

The Board noted the Review of the System of Internal Controls 2022 and the Management Assurance Statements.

## 10.3. Risk Management

### Top Five Risks 2022

The Board noted that the Executive had devoted a lot of time and attention to the area of risk management over the last two-three years. The Board briefly discussed the risks presented as the Top Five Risks for 2022, raising queries in relation to the level of ongoing focus which a number of them should receive.

The Board **approved** the Top Five Risks as at 31 December 2022.

### Corporate Risk Register

The Board noted the current Corporate Risk Register. The Board noted that the Executive was continuing to develop divisional risk registers which will feed into the Corporate Register.

The Board **approved** the Corporate Risk Register as at 31 March 2023.

#### 10.4. Terms of Reference (ToR)

The Board noted that the Executive had recently reviewed both the ToR of the Committee and the Internal Audit Charter. The Board **approved** the revised Terms of Reference for the Audit and Risk Committee.

#### 10.5. Internal Audit Charter

The Board noted that, following the review exercise referred to above, no significant amendments were recommended to the IA Charter. The Board **approved** the revised Internal Audit Charter.

#### 10.6. Minutes of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meetings held on 21 October 2022 and 24 February 2023.

### 11. **BUDGET AND FINANCE**

The Board noted the documents relating to **Budget and Finance**.

#### 11.1. Management Accounts

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the 12 months to 31 December 2022. The Management Accounts for the three months to 31 March 2023 were also noted. The Executive outlined the current financial situation/model and the continued engagement with DFHERIS on the development of a new Funding Model for QQI. The Board noted the details of the current cash reserves to hand in QQI. The Executive confirmed that the organisation is currently in a healthy financial position. However, it continues to be difficult to predict QQI's income, in particular, the income generated through certification fees.

#### 11.2. Unaudited Financial Statements

The Board noted the draft Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022 which are currently undergoing audit by the C&AG. This consideration was retrospective as the Board was not in place in time for their consideration in February as would normally have been the case. The Board noted that there will be some minor adjustments to the Statements to cover pensions/FRS17 adjustments before the accounts are finalised. The Board **approved** the Financial Statements for 2022 subject to the inclusion of the minor adjustments outlined, audit

by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) and there being no material changes. It was noted that the Financial Statements will be re-presented to the Board for approval following completion of the audit.

#### 11.3. Budget 2023

The Board noted that an initial budget for 2023 was approved by the previous Board at its meeting on 4 November 2022. It was noted that the Budget had now been revised following confirmation by DFHERIS of the State Grant allocation for 2023 and the appointment of the new Board. The Executive clarified queries on the budget which were raised by Members.

The Board **approved** Budget 2023.

#### 11.4. ICT Resources

##### ICT Contract Resource Procurement

The Board noted that a tender for QQI's ICT Contract Resources framework which was undertaken three years ago was now entering its final year and a new procurement exercise will need to commence. The tender which covers a three-year period has an associated budget and covers the expertise and contracts which service and support the provision, development and maintenance of QQI's ICT system used by both staff and stakeholders.

As the six-monthly budget instalments for ICT expenditure are over the internal approvals threshold, the Board's consideration and approval is required. The Board **approved** the Executive to proceed with the preparation and publishing of the eTenders competition for the ICT Contract Resources framework 2024-2026, covering support, maintenance, cybersecurity and development roles.

##### ICT Resources

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

- the procurement of contracts for ICT contract resources for six months (July-December 2023), inclusive of additional resources required to support development of new systems, as outlined in the proposals 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 2023-June 2024 in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy, subject to contract and as outlined in the proposal submitted.

The Board noted that all compliance and procurement procedures are and were adhered to.

## 12. REVIEWS

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

### 12.1 Education and Training Boards (ETB) Review Cycle

The Board noted the final set of reports arising from the reviews of the 16 ETBs which had taken place over the previous 18 months:

- Longford and Westmeath ETB (LWETB),
- Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB (DDLETB) and
- City of Dublin ETB (CDET).

### 12.2 Sectoral Report on Inaugural Review of Quality Assurance in ETBs

Following completion of all three phases of the ETB review cycle, the Executive established a sectoral report team to identify system-level findings arising from the inaugural review process. The review was completed in early 2023 and the resulting report has been published on the QQI website. The Board noted the report and its findings.

## 13. COMMUNICATIONS

### 13.1 QQI Visual Identity Refresh

The Board noted an update on the progress in relation to the refresh of QQI's visual identity. The Board noted the rationale and background for the review and refresh project. The Executive had consulted with staff and key external stakeholders and was presenting the outcome of its review. The Board noted the presentation.

The refresh reflects changes to QQI in the 10 years since its establishment and the changing tertiary environment. The Executive outlined the next steps. Now that a refreshed visual identity has been developed, the Executive will look at introducing it on a phased basis across select areas to begin with, initially the website and certification being among the first areas of

roll out. It was noted that it was likely that the website would be updated over the summer period with a roll out to certification expected to take place in early 2024.

Following queries from Board Members, the Executive confirmed that it plans to increase its learner centric (focused) messages and communications over the next year in order to assist in the dissemination of the visual identity refresh.

#### **14. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA**

The Board noted the **Draft June 2023 Board Agenda**.

The Board noted the draft Agenda for its next meeting scheduled for 19 June. That meeting would follow a similar format as the May meeting, the second Board Induction Session in the morning followed by the June Board Meeting in the afternoon. It was noted that the Executive expects that the majority of the backlog of matters remaining for the Board's consideration which have accumulated in the period while awaiting the appointment of a new Board will be considered at that meeting.

The Board noted that the previous Board had requested presentations from some of QQI's key external stakeholders at its meetings during its term and the Executive confirmed that it can make similar arrangements should this Board wish it. The Memorandums of Understanding with both the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and SOLAS already require that the respective Chief Executives present to the Boards of the other agencies annually.

The Board noted that there is a requirement under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies for the Board to meet without the Executive present on two occasions annually and provisions would be made in the agendas for the remaining meetings this year to accommodate this requirement.

The Board noted the draft June 2023 Board Agenda and would discuss upcoming draft agendas as they arose.

**15. NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted the **Proposed Schedule of QQI Board Meetings 2023**.

The Board noted the next meeting would take place on Monday, 19 June.

The Board **approved** the schedule of meetings for the remainder of 2023:

Monday, 19 June

Friday, 22 September

Monday, 4 December.

It was noted that it had not been previously possible to schedule meeting dates for the year in the absence of a full Board cohort.

**16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and contributions.

**THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.**