

## Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the eighteenth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 12 June 2015 at 10.00 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

**Present:**

- Mr. Gordon Clark (Chair)
- Dr. Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Claire Byrne (Secretary)
- Dr. Barbara Brittingham
- Ms. Mary Danagher (attended via phone conferencing)
- Dr. Ann Louise Gilligan
- Ms. Joanne Harmon (attended via phone conferencing)
- Mr. James Moore

**Apologies:**

- Ms. Una Buckley
- Mr. Kevin Donoghue

**In attendance:**

- Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Andrew Bridgett (Item 5)
- Mr. Eamonn Collins (Items 6 and 7)

### INTRODUCTION

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

#### 1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 24 APRIL 2015

The *Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting* held on 24 April 2015, were **confirmed and signed**, subject to an amendment on page eight.

#### 2. NOTE OF THE MEETING OF 24 APRIL 2015

The Board **approved** the *Note of the Meeting of 24 April 2015* for publication on the QQI website.

### **3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

#### **3.1. Succession Planning**

The Board noted the Chairperson's update on the progress in relation to succession planning. The Board noted that the Department of Education and Skills (DES) was still awaiting formal agreement for the proposal but is aware of no difficulties. The Board noted that it may be necessary to schedule an ad hoc incorporeal meeting of the Board before the next scheduled meeting in September.

#### **3.2. Recognition of Professional Awards**

The Board noted that in relation to concerns surrounding possible gaps in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 arising from the High Court Case in January, the Executive was awaiting sight of the legal advice which the Department of Education and Skills had requested from the Attorney General's Office. The Board noted an update from the Executive on draft Bills etc. currently going through the legislative system.

### **4. BOARD MEMBERSHIP**

The Board noted the document entitled **Board Membership**.

#### **4.1. USI Nomination**

The Board noted that the term of office as a QQI Board Member of the USI representative, Kevin Donoghue was due to be completed on 30 June 2015 and his replacement is likely to be the incoming Vice President of Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance, Jack Leahy.

The Chairperson highlighted the important value the participation of USI plays in the work of the Board and its Committees and which provides USI with an opportunity to participate in QQI's strategic development.

The Board noted that the Chairperson and the Executive had been in contact with the Department in relation to the filling of the USI nominee Board appointment vacancy and the requirements and expectations of the position.

#### 4.2. Board Member Vacancy

The Board noted that there was no further progress on the filling of the Board Member vacancy and it was hoped that there would be developments prior to the next Board Meeting scheduled for 25 September.

The Board expressed its concern in relation to the continuing vacancy on the Audit Committee and the fact that the role of Chair is currently managed by a Board Member who also chairs a second QQI Committee. The Board hoped for a resolution shortly.

The Board noted that the Chairperson intended to meet informally the new Board Members prior to the usual induction sessions with the Executive in advance of the next Board Meeting scheduled for 25 September.

The Board noted that the issue of Board Membership will be raised with the Secretary General at the upcoming Management Framework Agreement (MFA) meeting.

### 5. **AUDIT AND RISK**

The Board noted the documents entitled **Audit and Risk**.

#### 5.1. Internal Audit Reports

The Board noted and discussed the following Internal Audit Report which was considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 22 May:

##### a) Payroll and Personnel Cycle

The Board noted the report of the internal audit on the Payroll and Personnel Cycle and noted in particular, the report's recommendations in relation to staff training programmes and the establishment of a Reserve Fund to mitigate the impact of future retirements on the QQI budget.

The Board **approved** the following Internal Audit Report as recommended by the

Audit Committee:

- ***Payroll and Personnel Cycle***

#### 5.2. Internal Audit Charter

The Board noted that the Executive had carried out a mid-term desk review of the QQI Internal Audit Charter and proposed several minor amendments as a result. The Board noted the approval of the revised Charter by the Audit Committee and its recommendation of same to the Board.

The Board **approved** the ***QQI Internal Audit Charter – May 2015***.

#### 5.3. Items for Noting

The Board noted the following items arising from the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 22 May 2015:

- The Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting of 27 March 2015
- Updates on Risk Management and the Draft QQI Financial Statements 2014
- The Letter of Engagement dated 9 April 2015 from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) in relation to the audit of the QQI Financial Statements 2014.
- The Management Letter dated 17 April 2015 from the Office of the C&AG regarding the QQI Financial Statements 2013 and the Management Response to same.
- Updates on the Aged Debtors listing and the Bad and Doubtful Debts Policy,
- A Progress Report on the Internal Audit Plan 2013-2016 and,
- A report on the Conference on the Effectiveness of Audit Committees hosted by the C&AG's Office.

#### 5.4. Risk Management

The Board noted the Executive's proposal to update the Board on the high level risks at future Board Meetings, with the owners of those risks in attendance at the

meetings. The Board **approved** the proposal in principle. The Board noted that the new organisational structure may prompt reassignment of some risks.

5.5. QQI Financial Statements 2014

The Board noted that the field work aspect of the audit of the QQI Financial Statements 2014 by the C&AG's Office had been completed and the Executive was awaiting clearance of the statements by the C&AG. The Board noted that QQI is ensuring compliance with two new auditing requirements – FRS 102 (Accounting Framework) and the requirements of Circular 13/2014 (Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds).

5.6. Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies

The Board noted that a revised Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies was recently published for consultation and the new version is likely to place a greater emphasis on the role of the Audit Committee in State Body governance.

5.7. Aged Debtors

The Board noted the update on the Aged Debtors Listing and also noted that a draft *Bad and Doubtful Debts Policy* would be submitted to the Audit Committee for consideration at its August meeting.

5.8. Internal Audit Schedule 2013-2016

The Board noted the Executive's update on progress in relation to the *Internal Audit Schedule 2013-2016* following a mid-term review. The Board noted the Audit Committee recommendation that consideration be given to commencing later this year the preparation of the next three year Internal Audit plan, perhaps on an annual rolling basis.

5.9. Comptroller and Auditor General

The Board noted that the Audit Committee had invited the Auditor from the C&AG's Office with responsibility for the QQI audit to meet with the Committee at its August 2015 meeting.

The Board noted that the members of the Audit Committee attended the Conference on the Effectiveness of Audit Committees hosted on 18 May by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Board noted the C&AG's Special Report No. 87 'Effectiveness of Audit Committees in State Bodies' (copies of which were provided by the Executive) and the Board's attention was drawn to the four key areas identified by the C&AG where good practice is generally not being followed in State Bodies, namely,:

- The use of formal selection criteria and standard letters of appointment for new Audit Committee members,
- Identifying and recording conflicts of interest,
- Performance appraisal for Committee members, including the Chair, and
- Measuring the effectiveness of Audit Committees.

The Board noted that the Audit Committee will consider this report in greater detail at its next meeting. The Board noted the Audit Committee's intention to have a similar inhouse exercise carried out on its own effectiveness.

## **6. BUDGET AND FINANCE**

The Board noted the documents relating to **Budget and Finance** which included an update on variance accounts/budget analysis to 31 March 2015.

### **6.1. State Grant Allocation 2015**

The Board noted correspondence dated 30 March and 7 May between the QQI Chairperson and the Secretary General of the Department of Education and Skills regarding the State Grant allocation for 2015. The Board noted that the Executive had been asked to provide multi-annual budgets to the Department to assist in enabling DES to effectively manage its annual allocations. The Board noted the Executive's progress in restructuring Relationship Fees for 2015.

### **6.2. Purchase Proposal**

The Board noted the Executive wished to establish a framework agreement for the provision of financial and risk appraisal of applicant providers who will be seeking

approval of their Quality Assurance (QA) procedures prior to validating programmes leading to QQI awards or applying to use the International Education Mark (IEM).

The Board noted that a request for tender had been advertised in the Official Journal of the EU (OJEU). Following evaluation by the Tender Assessment Group, in accordance with the published RTF criteria, a tender applicant was recommended. In accordance with QQI's Purchasing and Procurement Policy and subject to contract, the Board **approved** the awarding of a four year contract whose value is anticipated to exceed €100,000 to the successful tender applicant.

### 6.3. ICT Contract Resources

The Board noted the proposal for the extension of contracts for ICT Contract Resources for the six months July to December 2015 for software and maintenance work, in accordance with QQI's Purchasing and Procurement Policy, subject to contract. The Board **approved** the extension as outlined.

As had been outlined at the April Board meeting, the Board noted that the Executive expects to make significant savings in expenditure in the area of ICT over the next number of years.

## 7. UPDATE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

The Board noted the **Update on Human Resources**.

### 7.1. IR Issues

The Board noted the update on progress in relation to the development of a new organisational structure. The Board noted that the Chief Executive and Directors had continued to work on developing a new structure based on agreed principles. The new structure will enable QQI to deliver on its strategy while being consistent with the recommendations contained in the LRC agreement. The Board noted coherence of structure is important and it should facilitate flexibility and fluidity.

The Board noted that the Executive was nearing completion of the roll out of assignments across the Head of Unit level and would then move on to the population of the next level of the structure which Directors were still working on.

The Board welcomed the progress to date and was cognisant of the impact on staff, both collectively and individually.

The Board noted that an all staff meeting had taken place on 10 June updating staff on the progress to date. The Board noted that the Executive was meeting again following this meeting to finalise role descriptions.

The Board looked forward to an update on the implementation at its September Meeting.

## **8. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Board noted the documents relating to **Strategic Development**.

### **8.1. Draft QQI Annual Report 2014**

The Board noted the draft Annual Report for 2014 together with the 'Introduction by the Chief Executive and Chair' which was tabled at the meeting. Board Members **agreed** to forward any comments on the Introduction to the report to the Executive within the coming days. The Board noted that work would then begin on the design of the report in advance of its submission to the Minister for Education and Skills by the end of June in accordance with the requirements of the Quality and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012. The Board **approved** the QQI Annual Report for 2014.

### **8.2. Corporate Plan 2015**

The Board noted the progress report and the updated summary dashboard for the 2015 Corporate Plan.

The Board requested the Executive to further explore the detailed implementation of the Corporate Plan during its progress update at the Board meeting scheduled for 25



September. The Board also requested the Executive to carry through any 'At Risk' actions from the dashboard to the progress report.

### 8.3. Strategy Statement 2016-2018

The Board noted the background to the development and drafting of the Strategy Statement 2016-2018.

The Board noted the amendments made on foot of the feedback received through both the internal and external consultation process and the necessary amendments arising from the new structure. The Board noted that the foreword, mission etc. would be added to the document in advance of submission to DES. The Board requested the Executive to further develop the Statement to the point where it can be submitted to the Minister in accordance with the Act.

The Board noted the Executive's intention to provide more descriptive measureable outcomes in the linked Corporate Plans. The Board noted that copies of the National Employer's survey, one of the benchmark resources, would be forwarded to Board Members.

The Board **approved** the Strategy Statement 2016-2018 subject to the modifications proposed and, on this basis, the Executive would forward it to the Department for submission to the Minister.

The Board noted that QQI had hosted an International Seminar on Enhancing the Quality of Higher Education – 'Sharing Smart Approaches to Optimising Quality' – at Farmleigh House in the Phoenix Park which had been very successful and informative. The Board noted it was the first opportunity the Executive had to devote resources to organising a quality enhancement event and had managed to put together an excellent programme of speakers in a short space of time. The Board noted that following the success of the Higher Education event, the Executive was considering if a similar event would be of benefit to the Further Education sector.

## 9. COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

The Board noted the documents entitled **Approach to Communications Strategy**.

The Board noted and discussed the document – ‘A Strategic Approach to QQI’s Provision of Communications and Information, 2015-2017’ which was developed on foot of discussions on QQI’s draft Communications Strategy at the April Board Meeting. The Board noted that it was a three year plan linked to the QQI Strategic Statement 2016-2018 and also contained a number actions to be carried out in 2015. The Board noted some of the key actions which the Executive intends to develop and implement over the next number of years. The Board noted the strategy is a living document and will be modified over time following receipt of feedback and progress.

Board Members were requested to inform the Executive of any areas of communication they felt were not covered or were not receiving adequate attention within the strategy.

The Board noted the Executive intended to examine methods it considers essential to raise public awareness of QQI and its awards and would if necessary, seek external help to create it. The Board noted if Board Members had any suggestions to discuss same with the Board Secretary.

The Board welcomed the progress in this area and looked forward to seeing the Communications Strategy develop.

## 10. MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING

The Board noted the **Update on Memorandums of Understanding**.

### 10.1. Management Framework Agreement (MFA) with DES

The Board noted that the draft MFA with the Department of Education and Skills had been discussed at the Board Meeting held on 24 April 2015 and amendments arising from that discussion were forwarded to the Department for consideration. The Board noted following inclusion of those amendments together with several suggested by the DES, the draft MFA was nearing completion and would be signed in the coming weeks. The Board noted a Board Member’s suggestion that there was a

need to emphasise research and the funding of same in the course of discussions with the Department.

The Board noted that a date for a High Level Strategic meeting with the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of DES had yet to be finalised but it was expected to take place over the summer period.

## **11. COMPREHENSIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

The Board noted the document entitled **Comprehensive Policy Development Programme**.

### **11.1. Update on IEM/Regulatory Reform**

The Board noted the recent developments linked to the IEM/regulatory reform. The Board noted the announcement of 25 May 2015, by the Minister for Education and Skills and the Minister for Justice and Equality, of Government approval of reforms to the student immigration system for international education. The Board noted the Ministers' Press Statement announcing the reforms and the Government Policy Statement published by the relevant Departments.

The Board noted that responsibility for maintaining the Internationalisation Register (Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP)) had been transferred from QQI to the Department of Justice and Equality on 5 June. The Board noted the Executive was awaiting further criteria around the regulatory reforms which was expected to be published by the relevant Departments in the coming weeks.

The Board noted and welcomed the recent progress in this area.

The Board noted until such time as legislative changes, mentioned under item 3.2 above are clarified, the introduction of the IEM cannot be progressed.

## **12. DOCTORAL FRAMEWORK**

The Board noted the document relating to the **Doctoral Framework**.

The Board noted that among the recommendations arising from the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (the Hunt Report, published January 2011), was the development of a 'consistent quality framework for Irish PhD education, based on critical mass'. The Report of the Strategy Group stated that a "demanding framework that meets or exceeds international standards for PhD education should be applied consistently across all higher education institutions, as an essential underpinning of the Irish PhD brand. This should lead to greater consolidation and collaboration among providers, with stronger offerings for students."

The Board noted that on foot of this recommendation, a Doctoral Framework 'operations group' [consisting of QQI, the HEA, Institutes of Technology, Ireland (IOTI), the Irish Universities Association (IUA), Dublin City University (DCU), University College Dublin (UCD), National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) and Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT)] was established and has been working on developing a Doctoral Framework for the last two years. The Board noted the resultant draft National Framework for Doctoral Education.

Board Members expressed concern around levels of resources devoted to Doctoral Education at times. The Board noted that QQI Policy on Delegated Authority for Doctoral Awards seeks to avoid broad research fields which often lead to inadequate resourcing.

The Board noted the establishment of the National Framework for Doctoral Education which is due to be launched by the Minister of State with Responsibility for Skills, Research and Innovation on 24 June 2015.

## **13. FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

The Board noted the verbal update on recent engagement with the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS). The Board noted that the Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group had met on 25 May 2015 and the Group was continuing to examine areas such as the Group's Terms of Reference, re-engagement and re-classification/self-declaration of status upon registration with the legacy agency.

The Board noted the next meeting of the Working Group is scheduled for 30 June. The Working Group is also on the same date, co-hosting with QQI, a seminar on '*QQI Draft Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines and Criteria for Voluntary Providers of Further Education and Training*' which is aimed at the Community and Voluntary Sector.

The Board noted that these draft QA Guidelines had been published in April for public consultation which was due to close on 7 July.

The Board noted that the Executive undertook to provide more detail on developments in this area at the next Board meeting.

The Board noted a query in relation to the identification of community and voluntary education on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and that the definition of this sector is being considered by the Working Group.

#### **14. BOARD PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

The Board noted the documents entitled **Board Performance and Evaluation**.

The Board noted the update on progress on recommendations arising from the Board Performance Evaluation for 2014. The Executive proposed that the Board would consider and discuss methods to obtain feedback under the 'Reviewing and Monitoring' heading at its September Board Meeting.

The Board noted that on foot of the Board's reiteration of its support for the use of plain English in its communications and publications, the Executive had arranged for the remaining 40% of staff to attend a plain English seminar and the Executive was continuing to aim for consistency in its use of language.

The Secretary of the Board undertook to examine the Special Report No. 87 produced by the C&AG's Office together with the accompanying survey to see if any elements could inform the Board in its actions around performance evaluation.

## 15. ITEMS FOR NOTING

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

### 15.1. Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the *Policies and Standards Committee* held on 16 April 2015 together with a verbal update on the Committee meeting held on 11 June. The Board noted that the Chairperson of the Committee had brought feedback following discussion on the Recognition of Professional Awards at the April Board Meeting to the attention of the Committee.

The Board noted that the Committee had considered a number of White Papers at its meeting on 11 June, one of which, the White Paper on Review of Higher Education Institutions, would be published for public consultation in the coming weeks. The second, White Paper on Policy and Criteria for Programme Validation, was referred back to the Executive for further work/drafting. This paper would be considered by the PSC again at its meeting scheduled for 29 September. The Board also noted that part of its September meeting would be devoted to a review of activities to date and a look forward at future developments.

### 15.2. Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the *Approvals and Reviews Committee* held on 27 April 2015.

The Board noted that a second applicant had successfully completed stage 1 (Approval of Draft QA Procedures) of the Provider Access to Initial Validation of Programmes leading to QQI Awards process.

### 15.3. Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the verbal update of the meeting of the *Programme and Awards Executive Committee* held on 10 June 2015.

The Board noted that an incorporeal meeting of the *Programme and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)* was likely to take place over the summer months.

15.4. Media Mentions, Key Developments, Current and Forthcoming Events

The Board noted the *Media Mentions, Key Developments, Current and Forthcoming Events* (from 18 April to 10 June 2015).

15.5. Draft Board Agenda (September 2015) and Rolling Board Agenda 2015

The Board noted the draft Agenda for the Board Meeting scheduled for 25 September 2015 together with an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2015.

**16. NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 25 September 2015** beginning at **10:00 a.m.**

**17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Board noted that the Executive was considering engaging with other agencies in order to instigate an informal all-island network opportunity for Further Education relationships.

The Board noted that following the successful completion of its ENQA Review in 2014, QQI had applied for listing on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). The Board noted that QQI had, on 12 June, received notification of its acceptance on to the Register.

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

**Chairperson:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_