

## Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the twenty-first Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 27 November 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. Una Buckley
- Ms. Mary Danagher
- Dr. Ann Louise Gilligan
- Mr. Thomas McDermott
- Mr. James Moore

**Apologies:**

- Ms. Joanne Harmon
- Mr. Jack Leahy

**In attendance:**

- Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Ms. Mary Sheridan (Item 6)
- Mr. Vincent Teo (Item 5)

### INTRODUCTION

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

#### 1. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF 25 SEPTEMBER 2015

The *Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting* held on 25 September 2015 were **confirmed and signed**.

#### 2. NOTE OF THE MEETING OF 25 SEPTEMBER 2015

The Board **approved** the *Note of the Meeting of 25 September 2015* for publication on the QQI website.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

#### 3.1. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between QQI and the HEA

The Board noted that Tom Boland, the Chief Executive of the HEA, had been unable to attend that day's meeting and his presentation to the Board (under the terms of the MoU) would be rescheduled for early next year.

#### 3.2. Financial Statements 2014

The Board noted that, following the suggestion of a Board Member at the September 2015 meeting, the Executive had discussed with the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) the possibility of inclusion in the 2014 Financial Statements of a pension liability accrued in 2014. Following the agreement of the C&AG, the Financial Statements had been amended to include same. As this addition amounted to a material change and required Board re-approval, the matter would be considered under Item 7, Budget and Finance.

The Board noted that consideration of multiannual budgets would be postponed until 2016.

### 4. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Board noted the documents entitled **Governance Structure**.

The Board noted the background to the Review and the resulting Review Report and its recommendations. The Board noted the changes recommended to the Terms of Reference for the four committees together with suggested changes to membership and terms of office.

The Board noted that this was the first time the sub-Board Committee structure had been reviewed and while there had been a small number of start-up issues, largely the structure had functioned very well and the Executive would continue to refine matters.

The Board **agreed** that to assist in furthering communication between the Board and its Committees, the Executive should implement the recommendation in relation to organising annual meetings of the four Committee Chairs with the Chairperson of the Board. The

Board suggested that Committees should be made aware of the outcomes of those meetings and a list of issues be maintained.

The Board **approved** the recommendations of the Review, the amendments to the Terms of Reference for the four Committees, Committee membership and terms of office and noted that the Executive had made initial contact with appropriate experts to fill a number of vacancies on the Policies and Standards Committee.

The Board noted the amendments to the current terms of office to ensure that membership is staggered and a high level of expertise is retained at all times. The Executive intended contacting current members inviting them to extend their terms of office. The Board noted that changes to membership, other than that of the Executive Membership on the Policies and Standards Committee, would be effective from the first meeting of each Committee in 2016.

#### **5. RELATIONS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS (DES)**

The Board noted the documents entitled **Relations with the Department of Education and Skills**.

The Board noted the update provided by the Executive following the MFA Review meeting held on 15 October 2015. The Board noted that among the matters discussed were a review of the 2015 Management Framework Agreement (MFA), development of a 2016 MFA and the QQI Workforce Plan. The Board noted the Executive would meet with the Department on 12 January 2016 to consider a draft MFA for 2016.

The Board noted the suggestion that the Executive invite a DES official to attend a meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee as an observer; this would aid in the flow of information around the area of policy development. The Board noted that the Executive remains concerned with the ongoing matter of QQI being listed in the policies of other bodies without prior knowledge and the implications of same.

The Board noted the Executive was continuing to work to ensure consistent and transparent relationship and communication with DES.

The Board noted the Executive's suggestion of establishing a 'feed' notifying subscribers of the publication of new meeting notes and publications on QQI website. The Board noted that notes of QQI Board and Committee meetings are published on the QQI website.

## 6. AUDIT AND RISK

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

The Board noted the report of the meeting of 13 November 2015 provided by the Chairperson of the Audit Committee.

### 6.1. Internal Audit Reports

The Board noted and discussed the following Internal Audit Reports which were considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 13 November:

#### a) Review of the System of Internal Financial Controls 2015

The Board noted and **approved** the review of the System of Internal Financial Controls for 2015 and the Board is **satisfied** that an effective System of Internal Financial Controls has been put in place.

#### b) Internal Audit Report – Revenue Cycle

The Board noted the report of the internal audit on the Revenue Cycle.

#### c) Audit Testing of High Level Risk Register Controls, Cross Organisation Risks 1 & 2

The Board noted the report on Audit Testing of High Level Risk Controls for Risks no. 1 & 2.

The Board **approved** the following Internal Audit Reports as recommended by the Audit Committee:

- Revenue Cycle
- Audit Testing of High Level Risk Register Controls, Risks 1 & 2

## 6.2. Risk Register Project Plan

The Board noted that following the recent restructuring and the establishment of a Risk Management Team within the Governance and ICT Directorate, the Executive felt it was necessary to review the current Risk Register. As a result of that review and the changes to risk owners, the Risk Management Team will overhaul the current Risk Register. The Board **approved** the Risk Register Project Plan and noted that the Executive expected work to be completed by the end of Quarter 1, 2016.

The Board noted a Board Member's suggestion of linking risks to staff appraisals which would assist in embedding the risk register within the organisation's culture. The Board noted that the Executive is currently at the identification stage of the project and the matter together with the provision of appropriate training for risk owners will shortly be discussed by the CEO/Directors Group.

The Board noted that under new accounting procedures coming on stream, there will be a requirement on organisations to publish their top four risks together with their controls.

## 6.3. Aged Debtors Listing

In the course of discussions around the Aged Debtors Listing, the Board noted the suggestion to remove a number of the long standing debtors (legacy items over three years) from the actual list. The Board noted that work would continue on recovering the amounts involved.

## 6.4. Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2015

The Board noted that some additional work was being carried out on the draft Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2015. The final version will be presented to the Board at its meeting scheduled for 12 February 2016.

## 6.5. Items for Noting

The Board also noted the following items arising from the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 13 November 2015:

- The Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting of 28 August 2015;

- Schedule of Audit Committee Meetings 2016;
- Update on the QQI Financial Statements 2014;
- Update on the Effectiveness of Audit Committees questionnaire;
- Update on the implementation of FRS 102 Accounting Framework and compliance with Circular 13/2014 on Exchequer Grant Funding;
- Update on Implementation Status of Previous Internal Audit Report Recommendations.

## 7. BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

### 7.1. Annual Meeting with QQI's Accountant

The Board met with QQI's Accountant Mr. Vincent Teo of Crowley's DFK, without the Executive present, to assure itself of the Executive's performance in relation to financial matters.

### 7.2. Financial Statements 2014

The Board noted the amended Financial Statements 2014, which now include an accrued pension liability. The Board discussed other non-material revisions and **agreed** to the amendments suggested. The Board noted that the Audit Committee Chair would follow up on the amendments with the QQI Accountant and the Executive.

The Board **approved** the QQI Financial Statements for 2014, subject to the amendments outlined at the meeting and subject to there being no further material changes, for signature by the Chairperson and the Chief Executive.

### 7.3. Variance Accounts

The Board noted the update on QQI variance accounts to 30 September 2015 and noted that based on current spending, there is likely to be a surplus at the end of this year.

The Executive clarified any issues raised.

The Board noted a request of a Board Member that the variance analysis be in future presented on an accruals basis rather than the current cash basis which the Executive must use when reporting to the Department of Education and Skills. The Board noted that the Executive agreed that bilaterals on the matter would take place between the QQI Accountant, the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Executive. The Executive undertook to use both formats.

#### 7.4. ICT Expenditure

The Board noted that the Executive published a tender for the provision of application support services on the etenders website and in the Official Journal of the EU (OJEU). Following evaluation of the applications by the Tender Assessment Group, a tender applicant was recommended. Following consideration by the Board and in accordance with QQI's Purchasing and Procurement Policy and subject to contract, the Board **approved** the awarding of a three year contract to the successful tender applicant.

The Board noted the proposal for the extension of contracts for ICT Contract Resources for the six month period from the end of January 2016 for software and maintenance work in accordance with QQI's Purchasing and Procurement Policy, subject to contract. The Board **approved** the extension as outlined.

## 8. HUMAN RESOURCES

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

### 8.1. Legacy Superannuation Matter

Following on from the briefing on the legacy superannuation matter provided at its September meeting, the Board noted that the outstanding arrears had been paid and the pension itself is in payment.

### 8.2. Procedure for Notifying the Board of QQI Labour Relations Matters

The Board considered and **approved** the Procedure for Notifying the Board of QQI Labour Relations Matters.

### 8.3. Staffing

The Board noted that the Executive had attended on 25 November, a meeting in the Department of Education and Skills, where a number of bodies were updated on the latest developments in relation to delegated sanction and workforce planning. The Board noted that the Secretary General of DES would be corresponding with agency heads before year end, informing them of the new Delegated Sanction Agreements (DSA) which will replace the previous Employment Control Framework (ECF). The Board noted that this change means that the Executive can approach DES directly in relation to the filling of vacancies rather than making a case to both DES and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The Board noted that the new arrangement would be subject to certain conditions such as, any vacancies filled must be met within the current pay allocation, a workforce plan must be in place and it is applicable to grades up to Principal Officer standard level. The Board noted that the Executive had already submitted an informal request to the Department advising them of the need to fill a number of vacancies. The Board noted that the Executive hopes to have a decision in relation to this by year end.

The Board noted that the Executive has completed a significant amount of work in relation to workforce planning.

### 8.4. HR Strategy

The Board noted that a HR Strategy is being developed and part of the consultation process would include the appointment of an advisory group made up of staff members. The Board noted that the Executive expects to present the draft HR Strategy to the Board for its consideration at its meeting scheduled for 12 February 2016.

## 9. **BOARD PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

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

The Board noted and **approved** the draft Board Performance Evaluation form for 2015 subject to the inclusion of a question relating to the experience, skills and competencies



required on the Board. This will be helpful in filling any gaps that may arise in the coming year. The Board noted that the Executive would forward the survey to Board Members for completion in the coming weeks.

## **10. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT**

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

### **10.1. Corporate Plan 2015**

The Board noted the update on progress in relation to the 2015 Corporate Plan. The Board noted the current status of activities and noted that activities not completed by year end would be, where possible, incorporated into the 2016 Corporate Plan. The Board noted that these activities were deferred largely due to legislative issues and the organisational restructuring. The Board suggested, if possible, that the Executive should prioritise the development of procedures and guidelines for monitoring and the publishing of a protocol on information for learners.

### **10.2. Corporate Plan 2016**

The Board noted the initial draft approach to the Corporate Plan for 2016. The Board noted the Executive was on track with development of the 2016 Plan and the Executive hopes to build a flexible plan which will be able to adapt to resources and deliver as much as possible. The Board noted that the various Directorates would shortly be meeting with the Finance, HR and ICT sections to explore the resources each would be likely to require in the course of their planned work for the coming year.

## **11. COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION**

The Board noted the documents relating to **Communications and Information Strategy**.

The Board noted the QQI Award Brand campaign was launched at the beginning of November. Advertisements had appeared in print and radio media and a pack outlining the new brand had been sent to each provider offering programmes leading to QQI Awards. The Board noted feedback around the information package which was sent to providers. The Board noted that there is still a large amount of public reference to HETAC and FETAC

awards which needs to change. The Executive is conscious of expenditure in this area but it has to balance it against the priority of increasing public recognition of the new award brand.

The Board noted that, as part of the brand awareness campaign, a ceremony was held on 18 November in the Aviva Stadium at which learners representing achievements across all 10 Levels of the National Framework of Qualifications were present. The representative learners were presented with commemorative awards by the Minister for Education and Skills. The Executive had received positive feedback from stakeholders on the campaign and the event. The Board congratulated the Executive on the work to date and noted the Executive's intention to build on the campaign in the first quarter of next year.

The Board noted a Board Member's suggestion that the Executive focus on some of the sectors and areas the learners had represented at the launch ceremony – as this would provide good continuity.

The Board noted that the Executive feels that structured engagement with Government Departments is also key to promoting recognition of QQI awards and moving away from the continued focus on and reference to legacy awards.

## **12. LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS**

The Board noted the verbal update on **Legislative Amendments**.

The Board noted that the Executive will continue to operate the areas where it has clear competence in the current legislation.

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

The Board noted the verbal update on **Further Education and Training**.

The Board noted the verbal update on the Executive's engagement with the Community and Voluntary Sector (C&VS). The Board noted that the Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Sector Working Group had met six times to date. The Group had last met in October to consider various options available for collaboration between C&VS providers which were

presented to the Group by the Executive, together with the implications for each option. The Board noted that the Group itself met to review each of the options and their viability. The Board noted that the Group discussed the options presented both amongst the Group and with QQI members. The Board noted that the Group will discuss some possible piloting options for collaboration at its next meeting scheduled for 14 December 2015.

The Board noted that the Executive considered that there had been positive engagement and progress over the past year and looked forward to the future follow up.

#### **14. ITEMS FOR NOTING**

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

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

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the *Programme and Awards Executive Committee* held on 16 September 2015.

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

The Board noted the report of the meetings of the *Policies and Standards Committee* held on 28 and 29 September 2015.

The Board noted that the first session had included discussion with the Executive on the Review of the sub-Board Committee Structure and the second session looked at an overview of policy development, schedule of priorities and how the Committee engages with the Board's strategy. The Board noted that the Committee is cognisant of the Review of the National Framework of Qualifications which is due to take place in 2016 and the Committee's role and value in policy development.

The Board noted the Executive's intention to make a submission to the National Skills Strategy and the Executive is scheduled to make a presentation in early December to the Skills Steering Group.

14.3. Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the *Approvals and Reviews Committee* held on 9 September 2015.

14.4 Media Mentions, Key Developments, Current and Forthcoming Events

The Board noted the *Media Mentions, Key Developments, Current and Forthcoming Events* (from 25 September to 27 November 2015).

14.5 Draft Board Agenda (February 2016) and Rolling Board Agendas 2015 and 2016

The Board noted the draft Agenda for the Board Meeting scheduled for 12 February 2016 together with an update on the Rolling Board Agendas for 2015 and 2016.

**15. NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 12 February 2016** beginning at **10:00 a.m.**

**16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

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

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

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