

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the forty-first Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 15 February 2019 at 10.00 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

Present:

- Ms. Joanne Harmon (Chair)
- Dr. Padraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
- Dr. Barbara Brittingham
- Ms. Mary Danagher
- Mr. Oisín Hassan
- Mr. Blake Hodkinson
- Mr. Thomas McDermott
- Ms. Niamh O'Reilly
- Prof. Irene Sheridan
- Dr. Anne Walsh

Apologies: No apologies

In attendance:

- Ms. Caitríona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Liam Butler (Item 10)
- Mr. Eamonn Collins (Item 11)
- Ms. Marie Gould (Item 8)
- Ms. Celine Kelly (Item 11)
- Ms. Orla Lynch (Item 8)
- Ms. Gráinne Mooney (Item 16)

INTRODUCTION

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

1. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

A Board Member raised a potential conflict of interest. There was a brief discussion on the matter in relation to item no. 8, Reviews. The Executive confirmed that from time to time, outcomes of Cinnte

Reviews may require the Board to approve certain directions to the provider based on recommendations arising from the Report. As the Board is not making any decisions on the Reviews in question, the Executive saw no conflict of interest on this occasion and the Board Member would not be required to remove themselves from the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS

The Minutes of the following meetings were **confirmed and signed**:

Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting held on 7 December 2018,

Minutes of the Incorporal QQI Board Meeting held on 21 December 2018, and

Minutes of the Incorporal QQI Board Meeting held on 5-10 February 2019.

3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS

The Board **approved** the following notes for publication on the QQI website:

Note of the Meeting of 7 December 2018

Note of the Incorporal Meeting of 21 December 2018 and

Note of the Incorporal Meeting of 5-10 February 2019.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Board noted the **Action Tracker**.

4.1. Action Tracker

The Board noted the update on the Action Tracker. The Board requested the Executive to refine the Tracker based on its discussion. The Board noted that the suitability of the document would be reviewed in June 2019.

5. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA

The Board noted the **Draft April 2019 Board Agenda**.

5.1. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) Review 2019

The Board noted that the Executive expects the outcome of the ENQA Review to be known by late June.

5.2. Presentations to the Board

The Board suggested that it would be helpful to receive presentations similar to those given by the HEA and SOLAS under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) arrangements from other sectors throughout the year. This would also link in with the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Plan. A number of bodies and organisations/stakeholders were suggested that would be beneficial to invite to a future meeting, including the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

The Board also briefly referred to the higher education completion rates released by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in the days preceding the Board Meeting.

6. **CEO REPORT**

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

The Board noted the CEO's Report which provided an update on key developments since the December 2018 Board Meeting and which also included Current and Forthcoming Events (from 10 December 2018 to 8 February 2019).

7. **ITEMS FOR NOTING**

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

7.1. Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Board noted a short overview of the work of the Policies and Standards Committee presented by the PSC Chairperson and a Committee Member. The Board noted that the Committee would be considering new policies arising out of the revised QQI legislation once it is enacted. The Committee has already had sight of the project management programme for policy development arising out of the legislation and noted that this workplan is now likely to be impacted by further changes in the timeline for the enacting of the legislation.

The Board noted that the international members have proven to be very beneficial to the Committee. The Board noted that there is diversity in the work of the Committee and noted the intention of the Chief Executive to attend an upcoming PSC meeting as an observer.

One Board Member queried the possibility of developing a Policy on Non-Formal Learning in the future. The Board noted that the Executive is exploring this area and how best to proceed.

The Board **agreed** to include an overview of the Audit and Risk Committee on the Agenda for the April Board Meeting and similarly for the Approvals and Reviews Committee at its June Meeting.

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee held on 28 November 2018.

7.2. Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programme and Awards Oversight Committee held on 12 September 2018.

7.3. Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the Approvals and Reviews Committee held on 23 October 2018.

7.4. Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 20 December 2018.

7.5. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

The Board noted that a revised Memorandum of Understanding had been agreed between QQI and the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

7.6. Rolling Board Agendas 2018 and 2019

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agendas for 2019 and 2018.

8. REVIEWS

The Board noted the update on **CINNTE Cyclical Reviews**, discussion on which was deferred from the December 2018 Board Meeting.

The Executive briefed the Board on the rationale and process used in conducting the Cinnte Reviews of Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology, Sligo, the first two of the new Review cycle.

The Executive answered any queries the Board raised in relation to the Cinnte Reviews and the process to date. The Board noted that part of the Cinnte Review Policy includes being open to and improving on and amending the process based on experiences and also noted that the Executive has already learned from the first two Reviews conducted and adapted the process as a result. The Board noted that the Executive had also adjusted the report template to capture all the material the Review Team views. The Executive also surveys both the Review Team and the Provider for feedback on their experiences.

Some of the discussion focused around learner participation on Review Teams and noted that the Executive is continuing to consider additional options in this regard. The Board noted that the Review Teams receive briefings from the HEA in relation to the data held on providers under their remit as part of their training.

The Board noted that reviewed providers are required to submit a one year follow up report as part of the review process.

The Board noted that institutions provide an Annual Institutional Quality Report (AIQR) to QQI which reports on internal quality assurance.

The Board congratulated the Executive on the completion of the first two reviews and noted that the discussion had been very helpful.

The Chairperson thanked the staff involved for their work.

9. ENQA REVIEW

The Board noted the document relating to the **ENQA Review**.

The Board noted that the Panel appeared to be satisfied with the Self-assessment Report and had requested very little follow up information.

The Board noted the briefing provided by the Chief Executive and any queries raised by Members were answered and areas of particular interest elaborated on.

The Board noted that the Review Panel will be meeting with DES officials as part of the site visit taking place on 4-6 March 2019.

The Board noted that the Executive would continue to update the Board on any developments between this meeting and the site visit. Board Members who will be meeting with the Panel as part of the site visit were also invited to email/contact the Chief Executive should they have any queries or need any further information in advance of the visit.

10. BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

Item omitted from this note.

10.1. Financial Report to 31 December 2018

The Board noted the financial report for the year ended 31 December 2018 and noted that there was a small surplus at year end.

A Board Member requested the Finance Manager to further breakdown some line items contained within the Financial Report where possible e.g. 'Meeting Expenses', 'Staff - Home Travel'. The Board noted that the Financial Manager is still adjusting the format but expects there to be a line item for every account item in the remaining 2019 reports.

10.2. Draft Financial Statements 2018

The Board noted that the draft audit file for 2018 was nearing completion. The Board noted an update in relation to a finance matter discussed at the December 2018 Board Meeting.

Board Members were reminded to submit any Travel and Subsistence Claims as soon as practicable following a Board Meeting.

10.3. Budget 2019

The Board noted the letter of 15 January 2019 from the Department of Education and Skills, confirming the Grant Allocation for 2019 for QQI as €4.579m, an increase of €75,000 on the 2018 allocation.

The Executive indicated that any potential shortfall in funding is likely to heavily impact on the implementation of the Strategic Plan arising from the Statement of Strategy 2019-2021.

The Board noted that the Executive had met with DES in January 2019 in relation to the matter.

The Board noted the Chief Executive had since had a separate meeting on another matter with the Assistant Secretary of the Department where the financial situation was also discussed.

The Assistant Secretary requested that proposals for a more sustainable funding model be submitted at a later date.

The Board noted that as the revised legislation is now likely to be further delayed, some work which may have otherwise fallen within the current year could be deferred. The Executive had built in time provisions in the Strategic and Corporate Plan of 'commencement of Legislation plus six months' which may now push out any new functions to a better-resourced period. The Executive stated that it may be better able to assess the situation by mid-year and revert to the Department at that point. The Board requested the Executive to draft the 2020 budget in time for the April Board Meeting and engage with DES on same. The impact of the cuts following the 2016 budget are now continuing to be felt and the Executive considers that it is already likely to impact on the 2020 budget and work.

The Board noted that the Executive is compiling a list of work that it is not likely to be in a position to complete in 2019 and a delay in the revised legislation may now be helpful.

Board Members noted that the potential number of retirements over the next few years may require additional funds and consequently support from DES in this regard.

The Board noted that the Chairperson and the Chief Executive had discussed the financial situation on a number of occasions over the previous few weeks. It was noted that QQI's

discretionary spend is quite a small amount. The Board noted that the Executive would continue to progress the matter with the Assistant Secretary and the Department.

10.4. ICT Purchase Proposal

The Board noted that the current ICT support services contract concludes at the end of Quarter 1, 2019. The Board noted that a number of submissions had been received to the recent Tender Request and the submissions would be assessed the week of 18 February. The Board noted that the Executive would organise an Incorporeal Board Meeting in the coming weeks to confirm the application chosen.

11. ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Board noted the document entitled **Organisation and Human Resources**.

Item omitted from this note.

11.1. Update on Human Resources

The Board noted an update on Human Resources and noted that the vacancy for ICT Manager (Assistant Principal Officer) had just been advertised. The Board noted that the role of Business Continuity Manager was assigned to the Director of Corporate Services. The Board noted that one of the items contained in a recent letter to the Department in relation to the Grant Allocation was a request for sanction to fill all current vacancies. The Board noted the appendix detailing new portfolio assignments at Heads and Managers level.

11.2. HR Strategy

The Board noted the draft Human Resource Strategy 2019-2021, the second QQI HR strategy. The Board noted the strategy had been drafted by the HR Unit and reviewed by the EMT and the Staff Engagement Forum.

The Board noted that there were a number of challenging actions contained within the Strategy.

The Board **approved** the HR Strategy subject to the minor amendments outlined.

The Board noted that a Work Force Planning exercise had commenced and a report is expected to be presented to the Board at its April 2019 Meeting.

The Board noted that the organisation's Keepwell application was well advanced and a site visit is expected mid-March with a portfolio of supporting evidence compiled. The Board also noted that the Executive was currently running a PMDS refresher course for staff and was also updating the job descriptions of the Heads and Managers as a result of portfolio adjustments.

The Board welcomed progress to date on the Organisational Review recommendations.

11.3. Organisational Review

The Board noted the Minutes of the final meeting of the Organisation Review Group held on 17 December 2018. The document also contained the final report of the Change Management Consultant.

11.4. HR & Organisation Committee

The Board noted that the HR and Organisation Committee had met on 14 February 2019 at which the Committee noted that significant progress had been made under the recommendations of the Organisational Review. It also noted that there were still further channels which needed to be progressed. The growth of the relationship with the Department was an important benefit, particularly in light of the financial situation.

The Board noted that the Executive would keep it updated and informed.

12. GOVERNANCE

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

12.1. Update on Legislation

The Board noted that the draft revised Legislation has completed the Committee Stage in the Seanad. The Board noted that a number of amendments have been proposed during that Stage. The most significant amendment relate to the Code of Practice for the Provision of Programmes to International Learners and the inclusion of requirements relating to 'quality standards for the recruitment, employment and cessation of employment of employees, and

with employment law generally; by relevant providers’ as well as ‘consulting with trade unions or staff associations that represent education and training staff or other employees of relevant providers’. The Board noted that the most recent amendments are likely to delay enactment of the revised legislation further.

12.2. Annual Review/Noting of Reserved Functions

The Board **approved** the inclusion of an amendment specifying that ‘expenditure with a greater value than the EU tender publication threshold’ (currently €221,000 to 31 December 2019) requires Board approval. The Board noted that this is already the practice followed but the Executive took the opportunity during the annual review of Reserved Functions to make it explicit.

12.3. Board Self-assessment Evaluation 2018

The Board briefly discussed the feedback received from its Self-assessment Evaluation for 2018. The Board noted it was the first occasion for the new Board to partake in the self-assessment process and it was a useful opportunity to reflect on where the Board’s progress in this area. The Board noted the feedback. Amongst the suggestions were, to ensure sufficient time for discussions, a reminder to members to read the material in advance of meetings, a request for more external presentations and a resolution to continue with the current agenda/time format for the moment. The Board noted that Members can contact the Chairperson directly if they feel they need to raise any matter.

The Board noted that the Agenda for this meeting had been adjusted based on feedback and discussion at the December 2018 meeting. The Board expressed a wish to focus more on business and strategic issues to ensure a better balance with governance items which can sometimes dominate the agenda.

12.4. Appointment of Chief Risk Officer (CRO)

Following the reprofiling of assignments of at Heads and Managers level, the Board noted that the position of Chief Risk Officer (CRO) had changed. Following a discussion on the matter, the Board **approved** the appointment of the CRO.

12.5. Terms of Reference for the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The Board noted that following the reprofiling outlined above, it was also necessary to change some Executive membership on QQI Committees. These changes resulted in the need to amend the Terms of Reference for the PAOC to remove the Executive Member from the Committee. The Board noted that the Committee would continue to be supported by a Key Executive. The Board **approved** the amendment.

12.6. Appointment of new Committee Members

As a result of the reprofiling of assignments, the Executive recommended a number of changes to the Executive membership of QQI Committees. The Board **approved** the following appointments to the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee:

John O'Connor, Head of Framework Integrity (for a further two-year term),
Orla Lynch, Head of International and
Marie Gould, Head of HE Review (replacing Deirdre Stritch and Carmel Kelly).

The Board noted that Peter Cullen concluded his membership of the Programme and Awards Oversight Committee.

The Board also noted changes to some Key Executive support roles.

The Board also **agreed** that the Chief Executive could, in consultation with the Chairperson, approve the Executive Membership of QQI Committees. The Board noted that there can be instances between Board Meetings when changes are required to Executive membership, leaving unnecessary vacancies at times.

13. **AUDIT AND RISK**

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

13.1. Risk Register

The CRO presented the outcome of an exercise on mapping the Risk Appetite to the Risk Register and briefed the Board on an action plan which was requested by the Audit and Risk Committee. The Action Plan details how the Executive proposes to address those risks which

appear to be mismatched to tolerance levels in the Risk Appetite Statement. The Board also noted the Executive's intention to revisit a number of risks which following the mapping exercise are out of line with QQI's risk appetite statement. The Board noted work is underway to review controls in place, their effectiveness and any other potential controls. The Board noted that work over the coming weeks will include further articulation of some risks, revisiting the appetite statement, controls and the top risks.

The Board **approved** the approach outlined and requested the Executive to proceed.

13.2. Updates on previous Internal Audit (IA) Recommendations

The Board noted the Mazars follow-up Review Report on previous Internal Audit Recommendations 2015-2018 and the Status Update Review on previous Inhouse Recommendations Report 2015-2018.

13.3. Internal Audit Reports

The Board **approved** the following Internal Audit Reports as recommended by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting on 14 January 2019:

- Programme Validation Cycle
- Provider Approval (Initial Access) Cycle

The Board noted that the Executive expects to introduce a Fees Calculator for Providers on the QQI website later in the year.

13.4. Review of Internal Audit Plan, 2017-2019

The Board noted that the initial three-year Internal Audit (IA) Plan was approved by the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board in June 2016. The Plan was recently reconsidered by the Committee in light of the updated Risk Register and the Statement of Strategy 2019-2021. The main revisions were outlined. The Board noted that a Value for Money Audit will take place in Q1 2019. It was also noted that a number of audits had been deferred e.g. procurement - (deferred by one year) as there was little or no activity in the area at the time of the originally planned review, GDPR - as the regulations had only just come into effect and it was considered better to delay until the process had commenced. The ICT security review negated the need at

the time for ICT audit. The Board noted that the Executive had revised the Plan to take account of some of the changes. The Board **approved** the revised IA Plan.

13.5. Business Continuity and Resilience Policy

The Board noted that the development of a Business Continuity and Resilience Policy was a recommendation arising from the Review of the System of Internal Controls 2018. The Board noted that the Director of Corporate Services was managing the project and was the Business Continuity and Resilience Manager. The Board noted that detailed plans for each section are currently being developed. The Board **approved** the Business Continuity and Resilience Policy subject to some minor edits outlined at the meeting.

13.6. Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 22 October 2018.

14. STRATEGIC PLANNING

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

14.1. Corporate Plan 2018

The Board noted the Q4 Progress Report for the 2018 Corporate Plan and briefly discussed a number of the actions.

14.2. Accommodation Update

The Board noted that the Executive was deferring work on this matter.

15. RELATIONS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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

15.1. Update on PDA 2018 Review Meeting

The Board noted the Q4 Progress Report provided to the PDA 2018 Review Meeting with senior management of the Department held on 11 December 2018.

16. COMMUNICATIONS

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

16.1. Communications Strategy

The Board **approved** the revised Communications Strategy 2019-2021 which was revised to include feedback and requests from the Board following its consideration of the initial draft at its December 2018 meeting.

16.2. Media Mentions

The Board noted the media mentions for 2019 to date.

17. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 12 April 2019** beginning at **10:00 a.m.**

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Executive informed the Board that the current term of the Appeals Panel has concluded and a public advertisement to fill a number of vacancies will be published imminently. The Board noted that the members of the panel are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.