

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the sixty-seventh Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Monday, 19 June 2023 at 2:30 p.m. in the Rovos Meeting Room, The Alex Hotel, Fenian Street, Dublin 2.

Present:

- Prof. Irene Sheridan (Chair)
- Dr. Pádraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
- Ms. Marianne Doyle
- Dr. Sean Duignan
- Dr. Sharon Feeney
- Ms. Clodagh McGivern
- Mr. Kevin McStravock
- Ms. Anne Naughton
- Ms. Maria Ward (Items 1-10)

Apologies: Mr. Blake Hodkinson

In attendance: Ms. Caitríona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
Mr. Liam Butler (Item 5)

INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the meeting.

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. CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

2.1. CEO Report

The Board noted that on this occasion the CEO Report was covering a longer period than normal, from 24 September 2022 to 19 June 2023, and was a snapshot of the developments and work carried out since the Board Meeting held on 4 November 2022.

The Board noted the key points of information contained within the report including the increase in certification figures and current activity in validation, apprenticeships and re-engagement. The Board noted that four Quality Dialogue Meetings (QDMs) have taken place to date in June with another round taking place during the week commencing 19 June. This year, the QDMs are being held in-person with Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and Technological Universities.

The Board also noted that a masterclass is being hosted by the National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) on 20 June in addition to an update on recent developments with the Global Academic Integrity Network (GAIN).

The Board noted that an independent review of the QQI Annual Quality Reporting (AQR) model for higher education was published in June. The Executive had wished to evaluate the effectiveness of the process. It was noted that the focused evaluation had highlighted a number of areas which can be revisited and revised to improve the process.

The Executive clarified queries raised by the Board in relation to the report.

2.2. Professional Accreditation Issue

The Board noted that a Focused Review of a named provider, carried out under Section 34(1)(b), had concluded and the resulting report would be considered by the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) at its next meeting scheduled for 20 June. The Executive updated the Board on activities relating to the matter.

The Board noted that, as outlined at the Board Meeting held on 22 May 2023, the Chief Executive had made a presentation to the Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on 30 May during its session on Professional Accreditation of Higher Education (HE) courses with specific reference to Health and Social Care Professions. The Board noted that the Executive would forward the report of the focused review to the Board following its consideration by the ARC.

3. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE (DFHERIS)

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

The Board noted that the PDA Review Meetings for Quarter 4, 2022 and for Quarter 1, 2023 had taken place on 14 December 2022 and 27 April 2023 respectively and both had been useful meetings. Among the items discussed were the QQI Funding Model, the AQR Model evaluation, Board Member appointments and Human Resources.

The Board noted that, in addition to the three PDA Review Meetings per annum, the Chief Executive also meets on a regular basis with the Assistant Secretary with responsibility for Higher Education Policy.

The Board noted that, following a request from the Department, the Chairperson had met with the Assistant Secretary and the Principal Officer in the Higher Education – Governance and Quality Unit on 29 May. Among the items raised were pathways for learners and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). The Chairperson referred to the Department's ambition around integration of the tertiary education sector and QQI is seen as an important agency to contribute to that. It was noted that it was a short but positive meeting. The Board noted that an early warning notification system with the Department is in place.

The Board noted that the Chief Executive had also met with the Department recently and the key topics currently include the QQI funding model, the establishment of the next round of relationship fees and the International Education Mark (IEM) (and other amended legislative programme (ALP) areas).

The Board noted the Quarter 4, 2022 PDA Progress Report.

4. STRATEGIC PLANNING

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

The Board noted the progress reports covering Quarter 4, 2022 (circulated as the PDA Progress Report which featured under item 3 above) and Quarter 1, 2023. The Board noted that where any action was not completed by year end, it carried through to the next year. It was noted that the delay in appointing a new Board had impacted on some areas of work at the end of 2022 and into Quarter 1 of 2023.

The Board noted that the Policy on Authorisation to Use the International Education Mark has been deferred for consideration at the September 2023 Board Meeting while awaiting clarification on a small number of issues.

The Board noted that the draft Policy on Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) is currently being finalised for consideration at an upcoming Policies and Standards Committee (PSC) meeting. The Executive has been engaging with LABs on an ongoing basis including an informal consultation engagement in April ahead of the intended publication of the draft policies for public consultation during the summer months.

The Board noted that agreement of the related fees and charges and the establishment of the Learner Protection Fund are critical elements of the IEM establishment process.

5. BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

5.1 Management Accounts

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the four months to 30 April 2023. The Board noted that finances remain in a positive position with no items which give rise to concern at the present time. The Board noted an update on the number of retirements which are expected to take place during the latter half of the year and into 2024.

The Board noted that the latest QQI Funding Model submission continues to be under consideration with the Department.

5.2. Fixed Assets Disposal

The Board **approved** the list of fixed assets disposed of in 2022, noting that all items were capitalised and where possible/appropriate, recycled or donated. The majority of the disposals were as a result of the reconfiguration of the office premises to facilitate the return of staff to work onsite following the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.3. Funding Model Briefing

The Senior Manager, Finance and Procurement provided a presentation and briefing to the Board on QQI's Funding Model. It was noted that the Executive has been working closely with DFHERIS for the last number of years to try and develop a more stable and predictable funding model.

The Board noted that the Relationship Fee for the ETB sector is currently awaiting final approval by the Department/Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The Board noted that some progress in general has been made over the last two years and the Executive is hoping that the funding model would be progressed by January 2024. The Board noted that QQI have been recipients of very strong Certification income over the last three years which is distorting the issue in the short term and presenting QQI's fees income in a more favourable light.

6. GOVERNANCE

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

6.1. Annual Review of Reserved Functions

The Board noted the Reserved Functions of the Board. The Board also noted that no changes were warranted on foot of progress with the Amended Legislation Programme (ALP) as yet but it is likely that amendments will be required later this year or early in 2024.

6.2. Protected Disclosures 2022

The Board noted the Protected Disclosures Report for the year ended 31 December 2022.

6.3. Appointment of Committee Members

The Board noted that the Chairperson would discuss the various vacancies arising on QQI Committees with the new Board Members individually and an incorporeal meeting would be arranged to consider the resulting nominations.

7. APPROVAL OF QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) PROCEDURES

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

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 decision and the Board **approved** the refusal to approve the Quality Assurance procedures of the named provider.

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

8. BOARD MEETS WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Board discussed their roles, responsibilities and the relationship between the Board and the Executive.

9. ITEMS FOR NOTING

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

9.1. Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the Policies and Standards Committee held on 21 March, 7 July and 19 September 2022.

9.2. Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the Approvals and Reviews Committee held on 9 August and 10 November 2022.

9.3. Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 1 December 2022, 9 February and 25 April 2023.

9.4. Rolling Board Agenda 2023

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2023.

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 a verbal report on the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 30 May 2023.

The Board noted that the Committee had received an update on the audit of the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022. The audit had been completed by the outsourced auditors and the file had been submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for completion/sign off.

The Board noted that following the recommendation by the Committee, the Executive would present a suite of revised policies relating to Data Protection for consideration by the Board at its next meeting scheduled for 22 September. The Board also noted that a second tranche of

revised policies would be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee at its next meeting in November.

The Board noted that the Director of Development delivered a presentation to the Committee on the IEM following a query from the Committee on the current potential risk status of the process. Following a query from the Board, the Executive confirmed that the organisation's internal audit plan is flexible and can be responsive should a need arise. It was also noted that QQI's Internal Audit partner contract finishes at the end of this year and a review of prior Internal Audit recommendations issued under the contract will take place before the end of the contract.

10.2. Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board **approved** the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for 2022.

10.3. Internal Audit Reports

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

- Workforce Planning, Recruitment and Succession Planning,
- Value for Money Review (Property Portfolio),
- Records and Document Management (Quality Information) and
- Review of Risk Management in QQI.

The Board noted that the Executive had in the last year, moved from an organisational Risk Register to a refined Corporate Risk Register and devolved Divisional Registers. The Board noted that a number of the Divisional Registers are already complete and the remainder are expected to be finalised before year end.

10.4. ICT Security

The Board noted an update on ICT developments and cybersecurity measures.

10.5. Data Protection

The Board noted a verbal update on Data Protection.

GDPR Policies and Procedures

The Board noted that a review/revision exercise on GDPR policies and procedures was recently carried out. The first tranche of revised policies arising from the review would be presented to the Board for its consideration at its next meeting on 22 September. It was noted that the Record of Process Activity (RoPA) was completed in Quarter 4, 2022 and will be reviewed annually which will capture new data processes, for example, arising from the enactment of the Protection of Enrolled Learners function.

10.6. Minutes of Audit and Risk Committee Meeting

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 28 April 2023. It was noted that a representative of the outsourced Auditor, carrying out the audit of the Financial Statements 2022 on behalf of the C&AG, had attended the meeting to present the audit plan to the Committee.

11. ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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

11.1. Human Resources

The Board noted that it had been an intensive period for recruitment and that a number of vacant positions had been filled. It was expected that the summer period would be quiet in terms of recruitment but activity will increase again in the final Quarter of the year.

12. REVIEWS

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

12.1 Cinnte Review – Trinity College, Dublin (TCD)

The Board noted the Cinnte Review Report for Trinity College, Dublin.

13. COMMUNICATIONS

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

13.1. Qualifax Website

The Board noted an update on the progress on the redevelopment of the Qualifax website which is expected to be completed by the beginning of the next academic year (September 2023). The Executive confirmed that a plan for launching the new site is under consideration.

13.2. Media Mentions

The Board noted the media mentions published since the Board Meeting held on 4 November 2022.

14. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA

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

The Board noted the draft Agenda for its next meeting scheduled for 22 September. The Chairperson and the Executive outlined to Members that this item provides an opportunity for Members to contribute to and suggest items for the next or future agendas.

15. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted the next meeting would take place on Friday, 22 September.

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.