

## Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the seventy sixth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Monday, 2 December 2024 at 10:30 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

**Present:** Prof. Irene Sheridan (Chair) (Items 1-14 and 16-19)  
Dr. Pdraig Walsh (Chief Executive)  
Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)  
Dr. Sean Duignan  
Dr. Sharon Feeney  
Mr. Blake Hodgkinson  
Ms. Anne Naughton (Items 1-14 and 16-19)  
Ms. Maria Ward

**Apologies:** Ms. Marianne Doyle  
Mr. Kevin McStravock  
Mr. Bryan O'Mahony

**In attendance:** Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)  
Mr. Liam Butler (Item 12)  
Mr. Eamonn Collins (Item 9)  
Dr. Mary-Liz Trant (Item 1)

### INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed Members to the meeting.

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

## 1. PRESENTATION BY DR. MARY-LIZ TRANT, NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP OFFICE (NAO)

Following an invitation from the Executive, Dr. Mary-Liz Trant, Director of the National Apprenticeship Office, delivered a presentation to the Board. Within her presentation, Dr. Trant included an overview of the current statistics for apprenticeship programmes with close to 30,000 apprentices in place at the end of October 2024, approximately 5,000 of which are consortia-based. It was noted that the NAO expects to have the largest number of registrations within a calendar year, by year end this year, in the region of 9,000.

The presentation was followed by a questions and answers session. Among the topics touched on during the discussion was the NAO's exploration of options to attract more employers to the process, the development of new programmes and working towards an integrated apprenticeship system. The aim of the NAO is to work towards a single integrated apprenticeship system and work is ongoing to integrate the craft-based apprenticeships into this system. The Board noted that the Action Plan for Apprenticeships 2021-2025 covered the period until the end of next year. The Board also noted that there are 23 new apprenticeship programmes in the development stage and it is expected that these will be validated during 2025 and early 2026. It was noted that the National Apprenticeship Office is currently on track to have 100 apprenticeship programmes in place by 2026.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, thanked Dr. Trant for her attendance and contributions to the meeting. Dr. Trant thanked QQI for all its assistance and cooperation to date.

The Board noted that there had been communication on a specific apprenticeship matter between SOLAS, the Department, and QQI where appropriate.

## 2. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board noted two conflicts of interest were raised in relation to the meeting agenda.

The Board agreed that the two members would abstain from Item 15, Reviews, where relevant.

## 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The **Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting** held on 27 September 2024 were **confirmed** and signed.

## 4. NOTE OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The Board **approved** the **Note of the Meeting of 27 September 2024** for publication on the QQI website.

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

The Board noted the **Action Tracker**.

### **5.1. Action Tracker**

The Board noted the updated Action Tracker. The Board noted that the Executive was continuing to liaise with DFHERIS on finalising the fees and charges for the Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) process.

## **6. CEO REPORT**

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

### **6.1. CEO Report**

In addition to the CEO Report circulated, the Chief Executive provided Members with a verbal update on a number of recent activities.

The Board noted that, as previously advised, applications for the Initial Access to Validation (IAV) process received prior to 1 September 2024 continue to be processed as normal. Applications received after 1 September 2024 will have to undergo the new Due Diligence process as part of the IAV process. The Board noted that the Executive is expecting to be in a position to reopen the IAV process to new applicants in early 2025.

The Board noted that a series of lightning talks on the Re-thinking Assessment projects had featured as part of the QQI Biennial Conference ‘Leading and Learning in a Changing Landscape’ which was held on 21 November. It was noted that the Executive and Board Members had received very positive feedback on the event. There had been a large volume of material presented, and system-wide learning demonstrated, and it had proved to be a valuable event. The Executive confirmed that hosting conferences of this scale on a biennial basis allows the time needed to work on the material and the developments presented. The Executive thanked the Chairperson for chairing the conference.

The Board noted the Cinnte Reviews of the final four Technological Universities had been completed and the reviews of the four largest private providers were reaching their final stages. It was noted that a thematic analysis of the 2024 Annual Quality Reports received from higher education providers was published in October.

The Board noted that there had been a delay in progressing a convention on the Titling of Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards. The draft which had been developed over the course of a year had been circulated to all designated awarding bodies for consideration. However, consensus had not been reached, and it could not be progressed in its current form as a result. For this reason, a recommendation rather than a determination on titling will issue from QQI in due course.

## **7. STRATEGIC PLANNING**

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

### **7.1. Corporate Plan 2024**

The Board noted the interim progress report covering Quarters 1-4 of the Corporate Plan for 2024. The Board noted that as the report had been prepared in mid-November, it was expected that a number of further deliverables would be completed by the end of the year. It was also expected that, due to external dependencies, work on a small number of deliverables may carry forward into 2025.

### **7.2. Corporate Plan 2025**

The Board noted that the draft Corporate Plan 2025 presented was the first corporate plan linked to the new three-year Statement of Strategy for 2025-2027 and among the key priorities and deliverables contained within it are the next phases of the TrustEd Ireland process, future proofing of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as well as other new functions contained within the Amended Legislation Programme (ALP). In the development of this Plan, the Executive undertook a horizon scanning exercise as well as an analysis of proposed deliverables in terms of required inputs such as human resources, ICT and finance as well as additional supports required from the Partnership Division, in terms of events, related publications, etc.

The Board noted that the Executive was also planning to further review the initial plan against human and financial resources available in 2025. The Board noted that the Executive Management Team (EMT) would meet with the Project Management Office (PMO) on 12 December to commence the review exercise.

The Executive confirmed that the Board would be presented with the final draft Corporate Plan for 2025 at its meeting scheduled for 10 February 2025. At that point, the Executive expects to have confirmation of its State Grant allocation for 2025 as well as a final tally of any deliverables which remained open at the end of 2024 and which would be incorporated into next year's plan. The Board acknowledged that the Corporate Plan is a useful vehicle to see where value is added in terms of the Statement of Strategy and its impacts.

The Board **approved** the initial Corporate Plan 2025 subject to the review of resource requirements and the plan being re-presented to the Board at its February 2025 meeting.

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

The Board noted documents relating to **Engagement with DFHERIS**.

### **8.1. Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA)**

The Board noted that the initial Corporate Plan for 2025 approved under the previous item would be appended to the draft PDA for 2025 which is currently with the Department for consideration and feedback.

The Board noted that the Quarter 2 PDA Review Meeting took place on 21 October. It was noted that the meeting had been attended by the Chairperson and the Chief Executive representing QQI and the Assistant Secretary - Higher Education Policy Division and members of the Higher Education – Governance and Quality Unit representing the Department. The Chairperson provided a verbal update on the meeting. The Chairperson confirmed that there had been discussions on the Amended Legislation Programme (ALP) and the TrustEd Ireland process. Among the other items discussed were the integrated tertiary education system and the QQI funding model.

The Board noted that the Chairperson had highlighted the funding challenges for QQI over the next 3-5 years, and in particular, the projected financial budget/outturn for 2025.

It was noted that the Department had been complimentary in relation to the new Statement of Strategy. It was noted that the Executive had again taken the opportunity to raise a Quality Assurance (QA) matter which it was monitoring. The Executive confirmed that it considered that the issues raised had been understood but was concerned about the timely implementation of a satisfactory solution.

The Board noted the letter of 11 November 2024 from the Principal Officer in the Higher Education – Governance and Quality Unit, DFHERIS, confirming supplementary funding.

The Board noted that the Executive was working with the Department to schedule a combined Quarter 4, 2024 and Quarter 1, 2025 PDA Review Meeting during February 2025. The Board noted that the Department had asked that the Quarter 4 meeting be deferred in light of the calling of a General Election in recent weeks.

#### 8.2. Funding Model

The Board noted a verbal update on the Funding Model.

#### 8.3. Amended Legislation Programme

The Board noted an update on the TrustEd Ireland process. The Board was also provided with an update on the final number of confirmation of applications which were received by the deadline of the close of business on 27 September.

The Board noted that continuing support is being provided for applicants including weekly clinics and online resources.

The Board noted a briefing on the Executive's projected financial outlay for phase 1 of the TrustEd process, 2025.

The Board noted the continued importance of the provision of clear and correct information to the sector to avoid any misunderstandings or misinformation. The Board noted the

Department's intention to conduct an engagement exercise on the PEL charge, as indicated by the Minister at the TrustEd Ireland launch.

The Board noted that the Executive has commenced work on the draft Regulations for the expanded Delegated Authority (DA) process. The fees and charges for the Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) process are also required to be approved by the Department. The Executive has made the necessary submissions to the Department and is awaiting the decision.

## 9. ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Board noted documents relating to **Organisation and Human Resources**.

### 9.1 Human Resources

The Board noted an update on Human Resources. It was noted that two recruitment competitions were underway, Manager (Grade VII) and Senior Manager (Assistant Principal) Human Resources, Facilities and Sustainability.

### 9.2 Organisational Resources

The Board noted an update on the extension of the lease for 26-27 Denzille Lane.

The Board noted that the organisation's carbon emission levels were reducing year on year.

### 9.3 Human Resources Strategy 2025-2027

The Board noted the draft HR Strategy intends to build on the work completed under the current version, 2022-2024. The Board noted that one of the key priorities for the next three-year period is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). The draft document demonstrates how the new HR Strategy links into and is supportive of the Statement of Strategy 2025-2027.

The Board **approved** the HR Strategy 2025-2027 subject to a minor correction.

## 10. GOVERNANCE

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

### 10.1 Committee Members/Appointments

The Board **approved** the following appointment to Committees:

- Prof. Maria Hinfelaar to the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC).

#### 10.2 Succession Planning

The Chief Executive formally informed the Board of his intention to retire from his position with effect from 31 March 2025.

### 11 BOARD MEETS WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Board considered the Chief Executive's intention to retire and steps to be taken to support the recruitment process. The Corporate Plan 2025 and the implications of the Statement of Strategy as well as the current funding model for QQI were also considered briefly.

### 12 BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

#### 12.1 Management Accounts

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the nine-months to 30 September 2024. The Board noted an update on the current predicted year-end outcome. It was noted that certification income continued to be high, validation income was higher than expected and there was confirmation from the Department of supplementary funding as requested.

#### 12.2 ICT Contract Resources

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

- the procurement of contracts for ICT contract resources for six months (January - June 2025), in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy, subject to contract and as outlined in the proposal submitted.

#### 12.3 Budget 2025

The Board noted that, due to the current circumstances, the initial draft Budget 2025 had been a challenge for the Executive to present. The Board noted the projected out-turn for 2025. The Executive confirmed that the Department was aware of and continued to be updated on the situation.

The Board noted the initial draft Budget for 2025 and noted that a revised budget for 2025 would be present upon confirmation of the final position on the State Grant allocation by its next meeting scheduled for 10 February.

#### 12.4 Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023

The Board noted the draft Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023 had been approved in February 2024 for audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) subject to there being no material changes. The Board noted that two material changes had occurred during the course of the audit period and which the Board had been informed of and updated on.

Following an update on the changes, the Board **approved** the Annual Financial Statements 2023 for signing by the Chairperson and the Chief Executive.

### 13 **AUDIT AND RISK**

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

The Board noted that the fourth and final Audit and Risk Committee meeting of 2024 had taken place on 15 November. The Committee meeting's agenda had been reflective of the Audit and Risk items appearing on the agenda for this Board Meeting. The Board noted that an update on previous Internal Audit recommendations had been held over until the next Board meeting to appear together with the Review of the System of Internal Controls (SIC) and other year-end material.

#### 13.1 Internal Audit Reports

The Board noted the three Internal Audit reports presented.

##### Compliance with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012, 2019

The Board noted that there were three recommendations arising from this review report, one medium and two lower level. The Board noted that one recommendation had been resolved in September and the remaining two would be addressed in 2025.

The Board noted that there was a review of the Access, Transfer and Progression (ATP) planned for 2025, ATP hadn't been formally reviewed as yet in comparison with some other areas under QQI's remit.

#### Payroll and Personnel Cycle

The Board noted that there were two recommendations arising from this review.

#### Document and Record Management Cycle

The Board noted that that the Document and Record Management Policy had been recently updated and the Record Disposal Schedule was due to be reviewed and updated. A significant programme of work was already underway under the remit of the Internal Quality Governance Group.

The Board considered and **approved** the following Internal Audit Reports:

- Compliance with the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act, 2012, 2019,
- Payroll and Personnel Cycle, and
- Document and Record Management Cycle.

### 13.2 Risk Management

The Board noted an update on Risk Management. It was noted that the Audit and Risk Committee had received specific updates on cybersecurity and on the issues relating to Budget 2025 at its November meeting. The Board noted that divisional risk registers had been developed. The Executive confirmed that a review of the Risk Register will take place at year end and the Top Five Risks for 2024 would be presented to the Board in February.

### 13.3 ICT Security Update

The Board noted an ICT Security update for Quarter 4, 2024.

### 13.4 Key Statutory Obligations

The Board noted the formal List of Key Statutory Obligations 2024 and noted that the list remains unchanged.

13.5 Compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, 2016

The Board noted that the Audit and Risk Committee notes the organisation's compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies on an annual basis. The Board confirmed they were satisfied that oversight of this item remain with the Audit and Risk Committee.

13.6 Data Protection

The Board noted a verbal update on Data Protection covering the period 1 January – 2 December 2024.

13.7 Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 24 May 2024.

**14 ITEMS FOR NOTING**

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

14.1 Focus on the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The Board noted the verbal update provided by the Chair of the Committee. The Board noted that the PAOC reviews negative decisions of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) and either confirms or refers the decision back to the PAEC for further consideration. The PAOC adds oversight to the validation process.

14.2 Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee held on 5 December 2023.

14.3 Approvals and Reviews Committee

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Approvals and Reviews Committee held on 28 March 2024.

14.4 Programmes and Awards Executive Committee

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 24 September 2024.

#### 14.5 Rolling Board Agendas 2024 and 2025

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2024 together with a draft Rolling Agenda for 2025.

### 15 **REVIEWS**

*Two Members withdrew from consideration of this item.*

The Board noted documents relating to **Reviews**.

The Board noted the following Cinnte Review Reports:

- Munster Technological University (MTU), and
- Technological University of the Shannon (TUS).

The Board noted that the site visits for three out of the four largest private HE providers being reviewed under the next round of Cinnte reviews were complete, with the final one scheduled to take place in December. Attention would then move on to reviews of smaller private providers before ending with tailoring the review process to accommodate providers of 1-2 programmes.

### 16 **COMMUNICATIONS**

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

#### 16.1. Media Mentions

The Board noted media mentions covering the period 11 September to 10 November 2024.

The Board also noted a report on QQI's Social Media statistics covering the period 5 September to 7 November 2024.

### 17 **DRAFT BOARD AGENDA**

The Board noted the **Draft February 2025 Board Agenda**.

The Board noted that the Executive was in the process of arranging a presentation by SOLAS, if available, at the February Board meeting.

The Board briefly discussed some options for future presentation slots and among those suggested were: Micro-credentials, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and from internal QQI units, e.g. Research and Innovation Unit on the research programme, etc. It was noted that Board Members could forward further suggestions to the Secretariat.

**18 NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted the next scheduled meeting would take place on Monday, 10 February 2025.

**19 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and contributions.

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