

## Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the eightieth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Monday, 28 April 2025 at 10:30 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

**Present:**

- Prof. Irene Sheridan (Chairperson)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary/Interim Chief Executive)
- Dr. Sean Duignan
- Dr. Sharon Feeney (attended via MS Teams, Items 1-8)
- Mr. Blake Hodgkinson
- Mr. Kevin McStravock
- Ms. Anne Naughton
- Mr. Bryan O'Mahony
- Ms. Maria Ward

**Apologies:**

- Ms. Marianne Doyle

**In attendance:**

- Ms. Caitríona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Liam Butler (Item 13)
- Dr. Peter Cullen (Item 1)
- Dr. Bryan Maguire (Item 14)
- Dr. Jim Murray (Item 8)

### INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed Members to the meeting.

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

## **1. PRESENTATION ON MICRO-CREDENTIALS BY DR. PETER CULLEN, HEAD OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION, QQI**

On foot of a request from the Board, a presentation on Micro-credentials was delivered by Dr. Peter Cullen, Head of Research and Innovation at QQI. In addition to the presentation, a working draft Green Paper on Micro-credentials had been circulated for information to Board Members in advance of the meeting. The Board noted that the Executive was finalising the draft green paper with the intention to seek the Policies and Standards Committee's (PSC) approval in June to publish the document for consultation.

During the course of the presentation, the Board noted an overview of the current environment and considerations in relation to micro-credentials in the tertiary education sector. The presentation was followed by a questions and answers session. Among the topics referred to during the discussion were areas under consideration within the Green Paper process. The Board welcomed the Green Paper and the move to provide guidance on Micro-credentials to the tertiary sector.

The Board noted that the Executive will update the Board later in the year following the conclusion of the consultation process. The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, thanked Dr. Cullen for his attendance and contributions to the meeting and Members looked forward to engaging with the next phase of the policy development process.

## **2. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The Board noted that one conflict of interest was declared in relation to the agenda.

The Board noted that the member undertook to abstain from Item 15, Reviews, where relevant.

## **3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS**

The **Minutes of the QQI Board Meetings** held on

- 10 February 2025,
- 3-5 March (Incorporeal) and
- 27-31 March (Incorporeal) were **confirmed** and signed.

#### 4. NOTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETINGS

The Board **approved** the **Notes of the Meetings of 10 February 2025, 3-5 March** (Incorporeal) and **27-31 March** (Incorporeal) 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.

##### 5.2. Craft Apprenticeships

The Board noted a verbal update provided by the Interim Chief Executive on a specific apprenticeship matter which the Board had previously been apprised of.

##### 5.3. Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL)

The Executive informed the Board that a qualitative narrative on the Protection of Enrolled Learners Fund had been requested by the Department to accompany the financial accounts. A draft report had been prepared for their consideration.

#### 6. INTERIM CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **Interim CEO Report**.

##### 6.1. Interim CEO Report

In addition to the report circulated, the Interim Chief Executive provided Members with a verbal update on a number of recent activities. The Board noted that the Executive was preparing to reopen the Initial Access to Validation (IAV) process which had been paused in September 2024 to facilitate the inclusion of the Due Diligence aspect of the process. It was noted that ahead of the process reopening the Executive had held a briefing session for 15 potential new providers.

The Board noted that in relation to the Due Diligence process for existing providers, the intention is to incorporate this element into the next phase of Cinnte reviews for smaller private/independent HE institutions (HEIs) and it would also be incorporated into the

Delegated Authority (DA) process for the four larger private/independent HEIs who have already undergone a Cinnte review once that process comes onstream.

The Board noted that the first programme validation under QQI's Policy on Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes based on the European approach had taken place and the panel report features later on this meeting's agenda.

The Board noted that the Executive had changed how it provides the interactive visualisation of certification data on the organisation's website with effect from April.

## **7. STRATEGIC PLANNING**

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

### **7.1. Corporate Plan 2025**

The Board noted the progress report covering Quarter 1 of the Corporate Plan 2025. The report also updated members on progress on actions which span the calendar year.

The Board noted that in the region of 1,000 responses had been received to each of the staff and learner Surveys on Artificial Intelligence in Further Education and Training (FET), HE and English Language Education (ELE) in 2024 and the Executive expects to be in a position to provide a verbal update or a brief overview at the next Board meeting scheduled for 13 June.

The Board noted that, in relation to Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), the Executive intended to discuss Skills to Advance at a meeting with SOLAS on 1 May and the timelines for the validation of same.

### **7.2. Annual Report 2024**

The Board noted an initial draft Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 2024. The Board noted that the draft was the final report to feature under the previous Statement of Strategy covering the period 2022-2024. Board Members were requested to forward any further feedback on the report to the Executive by 2 May.

The Board **approved** the draft report to progress to the next stage of the drafting and editing process ahead of the presentation of a final version to the Board for consideration at its June meeting.

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

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

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

The Board noted that the PDA for 2025 and a revised Oversight Agreement (2024-2026) had been agreed with the Department and signed by the Chief Executive of QQI and the Assistance Secretary of the Higher Education – Policy Division in DFHERIS in March. The Board noted that there was an increased emphasis on the commitment to the Climate Action Mandate in the PDA and the Oversight Agreement had been updated to take account of the commencement of Amended Legislation Programme (ALP) functions in late 2024.

### **8.2. Funding Model**

The update on the Funding Model was moved to Item 13.2 below.

### **8.3. Amended Legislation Programme**

#### **TrustEd Ireland**

The Board noted an update on progress on ALP functions since their commencement in September 2024 including an update on Window 1 of the TrustEd Ireland application process. The Board noted that Window 1 closed on 28 March. The Board noted that Window 2 would open later this year and will continue into 2026.

#### **Learner Protection Fund (LPF)**

The Board noted a verbal update on the Learner Protection Fund. The Board also noted a brief verbal update in relation to the stakeholder engagement process undertaken by the Department. The Executive hoped that the matter would be concluded before the next TrustEd Ireland application window.

The Board thanked the Executive for the update.

## 9. COMPREHENSIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Board noted documents related to the **Comprehensive Policy Development Programme**.

### 9.1. Interim Guidelines

The Board noted draft Guidelines which had undergone an interim review process pending a full review to better align the existing guidelines with current FET practices and QQI policies on validation and standards determination.

The Board **approved**:

- Quality Assuring Assessment: Interim Guidelines for Providers 2025
- Quality Assuring Assessment: Interim Guidelines for External Authenticators 2025.

## 10. BOARD MEETS WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Board considered current priorities and challenges for the organisation as well as key relationships externally. An update on the CEO recruitment process was provided to the Board.

## 11. AUDIT AND RISK

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

The Board noted a verbal update on the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee which took place on 28 March 2025. The Board noted the provision of the Annual Report for the Audit and Risk Committee for 2024.

It was noted that a representative of the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) had, on 28 March, met with the Audit and Risk Committee as required under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, 2016. It was also noted that work on the development of a tracker system for recommendations arising from internal audits was underway and the final version could be made available to the Board if it so wishes.

### 11.1 Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board **approved** the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for 2024 subject to a minor amendment.

### 11.2 Internal Audit Reports

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

- Compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (Corporate Governance Review)
- Partnerships Division.

#### Corporate Governance Review

The Board noted that the Committee had discussed the recommendations arising from the internal audit of Corporate Governance. It was noted that one of the recommendations had already been completed as part of the annual review of the Schedule of Reserved Functions (item 12 on this meeting's agenda) and the Executive confirmed that it would complete a more substantial review exercise to incorporate any related recommendations arising from the External Review of the performance of the Board and its Committees currently underway together with the other recommendations arising from this audit.

#### Partnerships Division

The Board noted that there were no recommendations arising from the internal audit of the Partnerships Division.

### 11.3 Internal Audit Plan

The Board noted and discussed the draft Rolling Internal Audit Plan 2025-2027. The Board suggested that it may be more beneficial if one proposed audit were to take place at a later date once the process in question was advanced. An alternative audit suggested was that of the Strategic Development process. The Board noted that there were opportunities to add other audits to the schedule if they wished. The Board expressed its satisfaction with the audit universe document included in the plan.

The Board **approved** the Rolling Internal Audit Plan 2025-2027 subject to the replacement of the named audit with an audit of the recent Strategic Development Planning process (under which the Statement of Strategy 2025-2027 was developed).

#### 11.4 Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 27 January 2025.

### 12. GOVERNANCE

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

#### 12.1. Schedule of Reserved Functions

The Board noted the Schedule of Reserved Functions which incorporated an initial change on foot of a recommendation arising from the Internal Audit of Compliance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (Corporate Governance). The Board noted that the Executive was proposing to complete a more comprehensive review and update of the Reserved Functions based on recommendations from the Corporate Governance audit and any recommendations which may arise through the External Review of the performance of the Board and its Committees which was currently underway. The Board **approved** the revised Schedule of Reserved Functions.

#### 12.2. Committee Members/Appointments

The Board **approved** an extension to 31 December 2025 to the membership of the following ARC member:

- Carol Hanney.

#### 12.3. External Review of the Performance of the Board and its Committee

The Board noted a verbal update from the Executive on the External Review of the Performance of the Board and its Committee. It was noted that a survey had been issued to all Board and Committee members.

### 13. BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

#### 13.1. Management Accounts

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the three-months to 31 March 2025. The Board noted that there were currently no issues giving rise for concern.



### 13.2. Funding Model

The Board noted that the Executive had met with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on 24 April and Department officials confirmed that correspondence would issue in respect of the current Funding Model.

### 13.3. Bank Mandate

The Board noted that on foot of the commencement of the new Senior Manager, Human Resources, Facilities and Sustainability on 28 April 2025, the Executive requested the Board's approval to make necessary changes to the organisation's bank mandate. The Board **approved** the request and delegated authority to the Chairperson to proceed on the Board's behalf.

## 14. **REVIEWS**

*A member withdrew from consideration for part of this item.*

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

### 14.1. Cinnté Reviews

The Board noted the following Cinnte Review Reports covering the final two reviews of the Technological University (TU) sector:

- South East Technological University (SETU)
- Atlantic Technological University (ATU).

The Board also noted the following Cinnte Review Reports covering the three remaining providers in phase one of the review of the private/independent HEIs:

- Hibernia College
- Griffith College and
- National College of Ireland (NCI).

The Board noted the brief outline of each of the reviews provided verbally by the Director of Integration.

The Board noted that the Executive is working on compiling a thematic analysis of the five Technological University reviews and a similar exercise will be carried out on the four reviews of the private/independent HEIs.

The Board noted that a draft Statutory Instrument for the Delegated Authority (DA) process was with the Department and feedback was awaited. The Board noted that none of the aforementioned HEIs reviewed under phase one had undergone the new Due Diligence process yet. The Executive outlined that it would form part of the DA evaluation process for this group. The rest of the private/independent HE sector will undergo the Due Diligence assessment as part of their Cinnte Review process.

#### 14.2. Quality Assurance (QA) of Joint Programmes based on the European approach

The Board noted that the first programme to be assessed under QQI's Policy on Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes based on the European approach had been approved. The programme was Pathfinder – Joint International BA in Film with the lead institution of the Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire together with partner providers, Lusófona University, Lisbon, LUCA School of Arts, Brussels and the National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts, Sofia. The Board noted that the validation panel had been chaired by an international expert with experience of the joint European approach. The Executive provided a brief verbal outline of the process and the site visit. The Board noted the positive report and feedback from the panel and noted that the various partner providers will now submit the report to their respective QA agencies or ministries for accreditation. The Board welcomed the commencement of the process.

### 15. ITEMS FOR NOTING

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

#### 15.1. Focus on the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Board noted the verbal update provided by the Chairperson of the Committee. It was noted that the outcomes of a number of recent public consultations and the resulting policies and guidelines would be considered at Board Meetings throughout 2025. The next meeting of the PSC was scheduled to take place in person at the end of June at an ETB campus.

#### 15.2 Policies and Standards Committee

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee held on 25 November 2025.

#### 15.3. Programmes and Awards Executive Committee

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 13 February and 24 March 2025.

#### 15.4 Rolling Board Agenda

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2025.

### 16. **ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

The Board noted a verbal update on **Organisation and Human Resources**.

#### 16.1 Organisational Resources

The Board noted that the Executive had received the agreed Lease for 26/27 Denzille Lane on 25 April and the Board authorised the signing of same.

#### 16.2 Human Resources

The Board noted a verbal update on Human Resources.

### 17. **COMMUNICATIONS**

The Board noted documents related to **Communications**.

#### 17.1. Media Mentions

The Board noted media mentions covering the period 21 January to 2 April 2025. The Board also noted a report on QQI's Social Media statistics covering the period 21 January to 6 April 2025 together with the overview document requested by the Board at its February meeting. The Board noted the analysis which showed that recently the Executive was seeing decreases in engagement on the organisation's X and Facebook accounts but increased engagement on LinkedIn. The Board welcomed the analysis and suggested that a similar document may be beneficial to accompany specific or significant media articles.

#### **18. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA**

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

The Board suggested that a presentation on Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs), would be useful particularly in terms of where the process is at currently and its implications for QQI. The Board proposed that it could be as part of, or in addition to, a bigger picture presentation on the review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

#### **19. NEXT MEETING**

The Board noted the next scheduled meeting would take place on Friday, 13 June 2025.

#### **20. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and contributions.

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