

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the eighty-fourth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 5 December 2025 at 10:30 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

Present: Prof. Irene Sheridan (Chairperson)
Dr. Lynn Ramsey (Chief Executive)
Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
Dr. Sean Duignan
Dr. Sharon Feeney
Mr. Blake Hodkinson
Mr. Kevin McStravock
Ms. Emma Muldoon Ryan
Ms. Anne Naughton (Items 1-9)
Ms. Maria Ward

Abstention: Ms. Marianne Doyle

Apologies: None

In attendance: Ms. Caitríona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
Mr. Liam Butler (Item 7)
Dr. Anna Murphy (Item 13)
Dr. Jim Murray (Items 8-9)

INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson opened the meeting by welcoming two new members, Lynn Ramsey, the new QQI Chief Executive and Emma Muldoon Ryan, the new Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (AMLÉ) nominee on the Board.

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

1. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board noted that one member abstained from the meeting due to a potential conflict of interest related to an item on the agenda.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The **Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting** held on 26 September 2025 were **confirmed** and signed.

3. NOTE OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The Board **approved** the **Note of the Meeting of 26 September 2025** for publication on the QQI website.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Board noted the **Action Tracker**.

4.1. Action Tracker

The Board noted the updated Action Tracker.

The Board noted the intention of the Executive was to present a revised and updated Crisis Communications Plan at the February Board meeting, however, the Executive flagged that the matter may now be put on hold due to resourcing changes.

The Board also noted that following the completion of the External Review of the performance of the Board and its Committees, work would recommence with the ICT team on a new Board members' platform.

The Board discussed a number of the ongoing actions listed.

5. CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

5.1. CEO Report

The Board discussed the progression of a paper on the honours degree classification study and noted that as the next steps, the draft would be reviewed internally and by the Executive

Management Team (EMT) in the first instance. The Executive proposed that a presentation on the paper would feature at the February Board meeting.

The Board briefly discussed the topic of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) and the Board noted that work was progressing on an internal AI framework. The Executive confirmed that it expected to have the framework complete by year end and was recommending that it would be reviewed on a 12-monthly basis in recognition of the rate of change occurring in the AI landscape. The Board noted that the Executive was approaching its consideration of the use of AI from two directions, as a tool for use internally within the organisation for its own work and as a tool employed by providers and learners.

The Board noted that the consultation on the Green Paper on Micro-credentials had been extended into January 2026. The Board also noted that the Executive was conscious of the number of consultations currently underway and how best to target the correct audiences for each. The Board noted that in addition to discussions at an Executive level, the matter along with the timing of consultations, had also been discussed at a recent meeting of the Irish Quality and Qualifications Forum (IQQF). The sequencing of consultations also needs to be considered, noting that a number of consultation periods had been extended this year. The Board noted that SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) testing was also being carried out on a number of the organisation's processes.

6. STRATEGIC PLANNING

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

6.1. Corporate Plan 2025

The Board noted the interim progress report covering Quarter 4 of the Corporate Plan 2025. The Executive updated the Board on a number of areas where delivery has been delayed, outlining that several of the delayed areas were interdependent.

The Board noted that work on the Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines on Apprenticeships was paused and a delay to the publication of the White Paper on Qualifications at NFQ Levels 5 and 6 had impacted on delivery of a number of other actions. The Board also noted that the

Executive was working on taking a strategic approach to collating the organisation's research priorities.

The Executive confirmed that phase 1 of the revised intranet had launched for staff.

The Board noted the 2025 progress report.

6.2. Draft Corporate Plan 2026

The Board noted the initial draft Corporate Plan for 2026. The Board noted that, as normal, the draft plan would be reviewed by the Executive in early 2026 once confirmation of the State Grant allocation for next year has been received.

Board members raised concern that the draft Corporate Plan as set out for 2026 would be difficult to deliver upon within the current staff resources. Members suggested that the plan needs to be more realistic in its aims, cognisant of the number of activities carrying forward from 2025 and the interdependencies of some actions. The Board briefly discussed the impact of additional monitoring activity arising from new processes such as TrustEd Ireland. The Board was also conscious of the impact of Ireland's hosting of the EU Presidency in 2026 and the additional pressure that may place on time and resources. In addition to the regular review of actions prior to the presentation of the final version of the Corporate Plan in February, the Executive undertook to review the presentation of the plan and reflect on the prioritisation and the overlap and relationships between actions. The Executive undertook to discuss the plan further with Directors.

The Board deferred decision on the initial Corporate Plan 2026 pending the presentation of a revised draft at the February 2026 meeting. The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, expressed its appreciation for the work completed to date and looked forward to revisiting the matter next year.

7. BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

7.1. Management Accounts

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the ten-months to 31 October 2025. The Board noted the opinion of the Executive that it was likely that there would now be a surplus at year end. This follows a particularly strong certification period in October as well as additional work carried out by the Quality Assurance (QA) unit which operated on a cost recovery basis. The Board noted that while the organisation was currently in a positive financial position, it also further underlined the unpredictability of the organisation's funding model.

The Board noted an update on the supplementary funding process.

7.2. ICT Support Contract Tender

In addition to the details circulated prior to the meeting as part of the documentation, the Executive provided a verbal update on the tender process for the next ICT support contract. The Board noted that the deadline for tender applications had closed the previous evening and the Executive confirmed that a number of applications had been received. The Executive also confirmed that in preparing the draft budget for 2026, a significant increase in the allocation of spending in this area had been considered in view of inflation and other rising costs since the contract had last been awarded four years ago. The Board noted that a meeting to evaluate the applications would take place in mid-December.

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

- the procurement of contracts for ICT contract resources for six months (January-June 2026) as outlined in the proposal submitted, in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy and subject to contract.

7.3. Draft Budget 2026

The Board noted an initial draft Budget for 2026. The Board also noted, as outlined earlier in the item, that due to the current tender process underway, there would be increased expenditure in ICT costs and a continued shortfall under the pensions heading. The Board noted that, as normal, a final draft budget would be presented to the Board for consideration

at its February meeting, following confirmation from DFHERIS, of the State Grant allocation for 2026. The Board also noted that if further revisions are made to the Corporate Plan for 2026, it may be necessary to adjust the budget to align with same.

The Board **approved** the initial draft Budget for 2026.

7.4. Fees and Charges

The Board noted that QQI's schedule of fees and charges had been revised to include the fees and charges recently approved for the Listed Awarding Bodies (LABs) and the Cinnte Review process for private/independent higher education providers. The Board noted the Schedule of Fees and Charges.

7.5. Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024

The Executive apologised for the delay in presenting the audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024 following a pause to the audit work, the Executive had now received final queries from the C&AG and it was expected that the account would be finalised shortly.

The Board noted that no material changes had been identified to date and the activity in relation to the Professional Services Withholding Tax (PSWT) applied to Panel members which the Board was aware of and which had been resolved in 2024 had been noted in the original draft statements. The Board authorised the Chairperson and the Chief Executive to sign the audited Financial Statements once available and subject to there being no material changes.

The Board noted that with the exception of the early completion of the audit of the 2023 statements, the audit has generally concluded in November or December. The Board noted that the Executive had updated the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting of 14 November on the status of the audit. The Committee was satisfied with the Executive's recommendation to the Board as set out.

8. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

8.1. Amended Legislation Programme (ALP)

TrustEd Ireland

The Executive provided a verbal update on the TrustEd Ireland process. The Board noted an update on the decision of the Department of Justice (DoJ) to close the Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) earlier than planned.

The Board noted an update on the current status of applications received during window 1 of the TrustEd Ireland process. The Chairperson expressed the Board's appreciation of the work carried out by the organisation in the planning for this process.

The Board noted that the first application assessed for Listed Awarding Body (LABs) status, St. Patrick's Pontifical University, had been successful.

9. REVIEWS

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

9.1. Focused Review – Assessment processes for (legacy) Craft Apprenticeship programmes

The Board noted the report of the Review of the implementation and effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures for the assessment of phases 4 and 6 of the Advanced Certificate Craft-Electrical under section 34(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 at SOLAS.

The Board noted that the Oversight Group which had been recommended as part of the outcomes of the review, had been established and was scheduled to hold its first meeting on 12 December. The Board noted that the Oversight Group would be chaired by QQI's Director of Development and would focus initially on the implementation of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and would report within six months.

The Board further noted that the Executives of SOLAS, QQI and the HEA had met to discuss the migration of craft apprenticeships to the Technological Universities (TUs).

The Board noted that the Executive had been invited to appear at a sitting of the Joint Committee on Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on apprenticeships on 11 December.

The Board noted a verbal update on the recent business of the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) provided by the Committee Chair including the decision on the publication of the focused review.

The Chairperson expressed appreciation for the work of the committee and the organisation on this matter.

10. BOARD MEETS WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Board considered some of the current and future challenges and opportunities for the organisation.

11. ITEMS FOR NOTING

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

11.1. Focus on the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted a verbal update on the work of the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC) provided by the Committee Chair. The Board noted that the ARC had recently considered two focused reviews and a significant amount of its current business related to the consideration of the first tranche of TrustEd Ireland applications. The Board noted that the Committee was meeting up to seven times in 2025 to progress business arising from the new functions commenced in late 2024. The ARC Chair also acknowledged that it had been a particularly busy year for the Executive as a result. The Chair provided a brief overview of some of the categories of decisions taken within the past year including consideration for publication of two focused reviews, consideration of the first Listed Awarding Body application and TrustEd Ireland applications. The Chair acknowledged that the quality of documentation has helped the committee's deliberations significantly.

11.2. Policies and Standards Committee

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee held on 23 June 2025. The Board noted that the committee had since met in November and was expected to meet again in March 2026. It was noted that there was some significant policy work in development.

11.3. Approvals and Reviews Committee

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the Approvals and Reviews Committee held on 12 September, 6 October and 11 November 2025.

11.4. Programmes and Awards Executive Committee

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 17 July 2025. The Board noted that the Executive had raised with providers the issues that the quality of incoming documentation has been causing.

11.5. Rolling Board Agenda

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agendas for 2025 and 2026.

12. GOVERNANCE

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

12.1. Committee Members/Appointments

The Board **approved** the appointment of Joseph Ryan to the Approvals and Reviews Committee. The Board also **approved** the appointment of Emma Muldoon Ryan, the AMLÉ nominee to the Board, to the ARC, replacing her predecessor, Bryan O'Mahony.

The Board discussed a vacancy on the Audit and Risk Committee following the completion of the term of Blake Hodkinson. The Chairperson nominated Maria Ward as the second Board member on that committee and the Board **approved** the appointment. It was also noted that following her appointment as Chief Executive, Lynn Ramsey now assumed the role of Chair of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee.

13. 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 14 November 2025.

13.1. Internal Audit Reports

The Board noted the following Internal Audit Reports:

- Cybersecurity Audit
- Awards and Certification Cycle
- Qualifications Information and Learning Opportunities
- Review of Risk Register, High Risks Internal Controls.

Cybersecurity Audit

The Board noted that while there were a number of recommendations arising from this audit, the areas captured were all areas which the ICT unit had flagged as requiring attention in advance of the audit. The Board noted the confirmation of the former Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee that the committee had been extremely conscious of ICT security and the risks involved over the last number of years.

The Board also noted that the Executive was mindful of the increased security threat level in the months leading up to and including Ireland's term as host of the EU Presidency in 2026. The Board confirmed that it was comforted by the fact that the findings were not a surprise to the ICT team and were areas already identified for further attention. The Board noted that work was already underway on the recommendations.

Qualifications Information and Learning Opportunities

The Board noted the recommendation in relation to succession planning and that work had commenced on a project to update and develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for this area. The Board also suggested that if opportunities allow for it, shadowing may be beneficial.

Review of Risk Register, High Risks Internal Controls

The Board noted that the audit found that there were adequate controls in place.

The Board **approved** the Internal Audit reports as listed.

13.2. Internal Audit Plan 2026-2028

The Board noted that the rolling internal audit plan would continue to be reviewed on an annual basis. Key audits for 2026 to be undertaken by the external IA partner include Procurement and Control Management, Review of the System of Internal Controls, Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery and Governance and Risk Management Framework. The Board noted that the plan of inhouse internal audits included review of the Due Diligence and TrustEd Ireland processes which the Board had requested be deferred during 2025 as the processes had just commenced. The Board noted that these processes would now be audited in 2026.

The Board **approved** the internal audit plans for 2026 as outlined.

13.3. Risk Management

The Board noted an update on risk management and an additional verbal update on recent considerations provided by the Chief Risk Officer (CRO). The Risk Register had been presented to the Board at its June meeting. Following the Board's subsequent discussions at its September meeting, the CRO confirmed that the risk on the organisation's funding model had been amended on foot of the Board's deliberations and request.

The Board noted that, over the past months, the Executive had discussed the inclusion of a risk on craft apprenticeships on the Risk Register. The Board noted that measures were in place to address the current situation. It was also noted that the Executive was working with SOLAS and the HEA on the migration process. The Board noted that, following its deliberations, the Executive had concluded that the new risk would be added to the register before year end and the revised register would be presented to the Board in February.

13.4. Statutory and Compliance Obligations

The Board noted the updated list of Statutory and Compliance Obligations which now included the EU Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act 2024 as the latest addition to the list.

13.5. Data Protection

The Board noted a verbal update on Data Protection, covering Quarters 2 and 3. Among the updates provided, the Board noted that a tender process for Data Protection advisory support services closed on 5 December. The Board noted that general training on GDPR had been provided for staff as well as a briefing by the organisation's external support partner as part of this year's digital clean up month.

13.6. Minutes of Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 19 May 2025.

14. **ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES**

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

14.1. Human Resources

The Board noted an update on Human Resources.

The Board noted that following the recent retention of the Keepwell Mark, the organisation had again been listed in the Top 100 Companies for leading in Wellbeing Index.

Gender Pay Gap

The Board noted that the Executive had compiled a Gender Pay Gap report for the first time following a change to the categories of employers which the reporting requirement applied to. The Board noted that the analysis found that there was an initial differential of 8.7% in favour of male employees but the Executive expected that that would change next year. The Executive confirmed that the final report would be available at the February Board meeting.

14.2. Facilities

The Executive provided an update on facilities and the progress which had taken place over the previous months. It was noted that discussions were continuing with the Landlord on the upgrades to the heating system.

15. **COMMUNICATIONS**

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

15.1. Media Mentions

The Board noted media mentions covering the period 15 September – 20 November 2025. The Board also noted a report on QQI's Social Media statistics covering the period 16 September to 20 November 2025.

16. **DRAFT BOARD AGENDA**

The Board noted the **Draft February 2026 Board Agenda**.

The Board noted that the Gender Pay Gap report would be incorporated into the HR update for the February meeting.

The Board suggested that a discussion on the Committee structure should take place in 2026.

The Board, following the commencement of the new Chief Executive, reiterated its wish to have a Strategy day in Spring 2026, which would be the mid-point of its Board term. The Executive undertook to consider a suitable agenda for the event.

The Executive informed the Board that the Head of Research and Innovation would present on variance in honours Bachelors degree classifications at the February meeting.

The Board noted that, under the Memorandum of Understanding between QQI and the HEA, a presentation to the Board would be scheduled in the coming meetings as would an invitation to the Assistant Secretary of the Higher Education – Policy Division in DFHERIS.

17. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted the next scheduled meeting would take place on Friday, 27 February 2026.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

18.1. Partnership between Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT) and Queen's University, Belfast

The Board noted a brief verbal update on the announcement of 18 November on the partnership between DKIT and Queen's University, Belfast, whereby DKIT would become a University College of Queen's.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and contributions.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.