

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the eighty-fifth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 27 February 2026 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)
- Ms. Marianne Doyle
- Dr. Sharon Feeney
- Mr. Blake Hodkinson
- Ms. Emma Muldoon Ryan
- Ms. Anne Naughton
- Ms. Maria Ward

Apologies:

- Dr. Sean Duignan
- Mr. Kevin McStravock

In attendance:

- Ms. Caitríona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Mr. Liam Butler (Item 8)
- Dr. Peter Cullen (Item 1)
- Ms. Louise Kelly (Item 12)
- Dr. Anna Murphy (Item 11)
- Dr. Jim Murray (Item 9)

INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed Members to the meeting.

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

1. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION ON THE ANALYSIS OF DEGREE CLASSIFICATIONS TRENDS IN PUBLIC-SECTOR HIGHER EDUCATION 2011/12-2021/22 BY DR. PETER CULLEN, HEAD OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION, QQI

The Board noted the Report on the Analysis of Degree Classifications Trends in public sector higher education 2011/12-2021/22 and Annex 3 of the report (on Statistical Modelling) which had been circulated to the Board for information in advance of the meeting. The Executive held a question and answers session for members who discussed the analysis and noted that the draft documents would soon be circulated to providers for comment.

The Chair thanked the Executive and expressed the Board's appreciation for the work and the opportunity to engage with it.

2. POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board noted that no conflicts of interest were declared.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The **Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting** held on 5 December 2025 were **confirmed** and signed.

4. NOTE OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The Board **approved** the **Note of the Meeting of 5 December 2025** 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.

6. CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

6.1. CEO Report

The Chief Executive provided a verbal update on a number of key developments in addition to the circulated report.

Apprenticeships

The Board noted that there had been a significant amount of activity since the December Board meeting. Meetings of both the Oversight Group and of the Chief Executives of the three agencies (QQI, SOLAS and the HEA) had taken place. The Board noted a sub-group of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) had been established to oversee and monitor SOLAS's programme validation implementation plan. It was noted that discussions had been progressing on the high-level plans and the emerging structure to incorporate Technological Universities (TUs) and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) into the process.

Discussions had also taken place on the high level Group dealing with the migration/transition of apprenticeships.

A Board member raised the need for the Group dealing with the transition of apprenticeships to be realistic in their timelines. It was suggested that providers would need adequate time built into any activation dates for curriculum changes to give them opportunities to make the necessary changes to their training facilities to allow new programmes to roll out.

TrustEd Ireland

It was noted that the Board had seen recent press and media coverage on TrustEd Ireland. The Board noted and agreed that it is key that the communications surrounding the process are clear and consistent. The Board noted that the Executive was scoping scenarios internally in relation to the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) process and the PEL fund.

Tertiary Education Strategy

The Board noted that DFHERIS had shared its draft Tertiary Education Strategy for comments. The Board noted that the Executive had submitted observations on the draft Strategy.

7. STRATEGIC PLANNING

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

7.1. Corporate Plan 2025

The Board noted the progress report covering Quarter 4 of the Corporate Plan 2025. The Executive apologised for the late presentation of this paper which had been impacted by the work on revising the Corporate Plan for 2026.

The Board noted that the progress report closed out actions which were complete and reflected on actions which may not have been delivered upon in 2025, while also noted that work was still continuing and where actions were combined or consolidated.

The Board noted the Corporate Plan progress report for 2025.

7.2. Corporate Plan 2026

The Board noted that the Executive had worked with the senior team to present a revised Corporate Plan for 2026. The Executive summarised the process undertaken in revising the plan, noting that three meetings had taken place since its initial presentation at the December 2025 Board meeting. There had been two meetings with the Directors and a half day meeting with the Directors and Heads held. The Executive outlined the rationale for some of the changes.

The Executive confirmed that it had worked to ensure that the plan represented key strategic objectives for the organisation for the year ahead. The Board briefly discussed some of the actions listed. It was noted that a review of the Cinnte process would take place in 2026 as a new cycle was likely to commence in 2027. The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, noted that external dependencies continue to play a significant role in the organisation's plans, that the Board were aware of and sympathetic to them. The Board confirmed that it was satisfied that the Corporate Plan fits within the organisation's strategic plan.

The Board **approved** the Corporate Plan for 2026 and expressed its appreciation for the work carried out.

7.3 EU Presidency 2026

The Board noted a verbal update on the organisation's role in Ireland's hosting of the EU Presidency in the latter half of 2026.

The Board noted that the Executive was working on a draft conference programme with DFHERIS and the event which was expected to focus on transnational education was scheduled to take place in October.

8. **BUDGET AND FINANCE**

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

8.1. Management Accounts

The Board noted the Management Accounts for the twelve-months to 31 December 2025. The Board noted that there was a surplus at year end.

While the Board and the Executive welcomed the strong out-turn for the year, it was acknowledged that the on-going unpredictable nature of the current funding model needs to be rectified.

The Board briefly discussed other changes which are expected to impact on the organisation's income.

8.2 Financial Statements 2025 - QQI

It was noted that the unaudited draft Financial Statements for 2025 (QQI) were required to be submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) and DFHERIS by 28 February.

The Board **approved** the draft Financial Statements for 2025, subject to audit by the C&AG and there being no material changes. It was noted that the Financial Statements would be re-presented to the Board for approval following completion of the audit.

8.3 Financial Statements 2025 – Protection of Enrolled Learners Fund

The Board noted the draft Financial Statements for the Protection of Enrolled Learners Fund for the year ended 31 December 2025. It was noted that the fund had not operated in 2025. The Board **approved** the draft Financial Statement for 2025.

8.4 Budget 2026

The Board noted that confirmation of the State Grant allocation for 2026 had been received from the Department, noting an increase on the allocation received in 2025. The Board noted the resulting revised Budget for 2026.

8.5 ICT Support Contract Tender

The Executive updated the Board on the tender process and outcome. The Board **approved**:

- the award of a 3-year contract of Support Contract for ICT to the successful applicant, in accordance with the QQI Purchasing and Procurement Policy, subject to contract.

8.6 Financial Statements 2024

The Board noted the audited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2024 which were signed by the Chairperson and Chief Executive on 22 December 2025. The Board also noted that the statements had been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas on 12 February 2026. It was noted that the Executive had also received the related draft Management Letter.

8.7 Review of the System of Internal Controls (SIC) (featured under Audit and Risk, item 11)

This item was considered earlier in the meeting running order while the Senior Manager, Finance and Procurement was present. The Board **approved** the review of the System of Internal Controls. The Board noted that policies updated following the recommendation contained within the review would be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board for consideration in time.

8.8 Company Credit Card

Following the recent commencement of the new Chief Executive, the Board **approved** the Executive's request to proceed with an application for a company credit card for the Chief Executive.

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

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

9.1 Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA)

The Board noted a verbal update on the PDA Review meeting with the Department which took place on 18 December. The Executive outlined the range of topics discussed.

9.2 Amended Legislation Programme (ALP)

The Board noted a verbal update on the ALP and recent developments.

TrustEd Ireland

The Board noted that the first tranche of approved Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in receipt of TrustEd Ireland approval, totalling 28, were announced on 4 February.

The Board noted that the Executive was in the closing stages of the assessment of Window 1 ELE applications. The Executive confirmed that it expected successful Window 1 applicants to have completed the TrustEd and Due Diligence assessment stages by the end of March. The Board acknowledged that this milestone encompassed a significant amount of work on behalf of the organisation and the Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC).

The Executive confirmed that Window 2 for applications closes on 27 March and provided an update on the number of confirmation of applications which had been received to date. The Executive had continued to brief providers on a regular basis up to this point. The week of 2 March would see the final ELE webinar take place. The Executive confirmed that a lot had been learned from the first phase of the process.

Due Diligence

The Board noted that an in person Due Diligence workshop for ELE providers and those applying for Initial Access to Validation (IAV) had been held on 25 February. It was noted that there had been approximately 70 attendees. The Executive confirmed that the workshop would be followed by a number of one-to-one meetings and further individual meetings would be arranged with other providers, if requested/required.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, acknowledged the work and effort involved in these processes over the last number of years.

10. BOARD MEETS WITHOUT THE EXECUTIVE PRESENT

The Board considered some current matters including the upcoming Irish Presidency, resourcing demands on the agency, and the plan for a Board/Executive session to revisit strategy and mission.

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 13 February 2026. The Board noted that it had been Maria Ward's first meeting as a member of the committee.

11.1 System of Internal Controls (SIC)/Management Assurance Statements

The Board noted that the review of the SIC had been discussed and approved under item 8 above. The Board **approved** the Management Assurance Statements for 2025.

11.2 Risk Management

The Board noted an update on risk management provided by the Chief Risk Officer (CRO) and **approved** the top risks for 2025.

11.3 Internal Audit Reports

The Board noted the following Internal Audit Reports:

- Revenue and Debtor Collection
- Financial Reporting Cycle
- Value for Money Review – Facilities' expenditure.

The Board noted that aged debtors are monitored and appear regularly on the agenda of the Audit and Risk Committee.

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

11.4 ICT Security update

This item was discussed under item 12 below.

11.5 Minutes of Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 14 November 2025.

12. GOVERNANCE

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

12.1. Committee Members/Appointments

The Board **approved** the appointment of Alan McGrath to the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee. It was suggested that the Executive should seek nominations for committee vacancies from Board members.

12.2 Protected Disclosures

The Board noted and **approved** the

- Annual Report of Protected Disclosures Statistics, 2025 – Internal Reports made under Section 6 of the Act and
- Annual Report of Protected Disclosures Statistics, 2025 – External Reports made or transmitted under Sections 7, 7A, 10C and 10D of the Act

for submission to the Minister for Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation by 1 March.

12.3 ICT Security and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Board noted an update on ICT Security for Quarter 4, 2025 (originally listed under item 11 above) and also noted that the Executive would be reviewing its ICT policies over the coming months.

Artificial Intelligence

The Board noted that while the Executive had been developing its new Responsible AI Use policy, the rollout of MS Copilot to staff had been paused. The Board noted that an AI Steering Group had been previously established. The Board **approved** the Responsible AI Use policy and

noted that the organisation's emphasis would be on AI as a support, not as a replacement for human oversight and that the policy also dealt with the use of AI by third party suppliers.

Members queried if training on AI would also be provided to Board members which the Executive confirmed would be arranged in due course.

13. ITEMS FOR NOTING

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

13.1 Programmes and Awards Executive Committee

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 25 September 2025.

13.2 Approvals and Reviews Committee

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the Approvals and Reviews Committee held on 19 November and 2 December 2025.

13.3 Rolling Board Agenda

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2026.

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 the organisation was approaching the mid-point of the current HR Strategy and a progress report would be presented to the Board at a meeting later this year.

Gender Pay Gap

As indicated at the December 2025 meeting, the Executive had, for the first time due to a change in the national reporting requirements, compiled a Gender Pay Gap report. The Board noted the QQI Gender Pay Gap report for 2025.

14.2 Facilities

The Executive provided an update on facilities. The Board noted that the Executive was continuing to work with the Landlord on the reconfiguration of the heating system.

15. **REVIEWS**

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

15.1 Focused Review – Review of the implementation and effectiveness of Quality Assurance (QA) procedures for the Recognition of Prior Learning and Assessment (RPL)

The Board noted the report of the Review of the implementation and effectiveness of Quality Assurance Procedures for the Recognition of Prior Learning and assessment under section 34(1)(b) of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 at City College, Dublin (CCD) (formerly City Education Group).

16. **COMMUNICATIONS**

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

16.1 Media Mentions

The Board noted media mentions and social media statistics covering the period 21 November 2025 – 9 February 2026. The Board welcomed the Executive's decision to pause the organisation's X account. Following a brief discussion, the Executive undertook to refine the contents of future media mentions reports. The Board noted the Executive's expectation that a new Senior Manager, Communications would be in place in the coming months.

17. **DRAFT BOARD AGENDA**

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

The Board noted that Dr. Alan Wall, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority (HEA) would present at the April Board meeting. It was also noted that Keith Moynes, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education – Policy Division at DFHERIS would present at the June meeting.

A Board member requested, if possible, that documentation be circulated to members two weeks in advance of a meeting. The Executive confirmed, that in order to keep the information provided as

up to date as possible, this would not be feasible. However, as a compromise, the Executive undertook to try and circulate the documentation one-two days earlier than the current process (one calendar week in advance of the meeting).

18. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted the next scheduled meeting would take place on Friday, 24 April 2026.

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.