Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the twenty-second Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 12 February 2016 at 10.00 a.m. in the Boardroom, QQI Offices, 26/27 Denzille Lane, Dublin 2.

Present: Mr. Gordon Clark (Chair)

                        Dr. Padraig Walsh (Chief Executive)

                        Ms. Claire Byrne (Secretary)

                        Dr. Barbara Brittingham

                        Ms. Una Buckley

                        Dr. Ann Louise Gilligan

                        Ms. Joanne Harmon

                        Mr. Jack Leahy

                        Mr. Thomas McDermott

                        Mr. James Moore

Apologies: Ms. Mary Danagher

In attendance: Ms. Caitríona Lawless (Recording Secretary)

                        Mr. Tom Boland (Item 1)

                        Mr. Eamonn Collins (Item 8 - 9)

                        Mr. Ultan Tuite (Item 7)

1. **MEMORADUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY (HEA)**

    The Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority, Tom Boland made a presentation to the Board as part of the commitments in the Memorandum of Understanding between QQI and the HEA. The presentation covered the HEA's broad objectives around Higher Education reform and its relationship with QQI. Mr. Boland outlined the work undertaken by the HEA in recent years in developing performance compacts with the IoT and University sectors. The Board noted that the HEA's focus is now also on working on the development of regional clusters and the development of Technological Universities.

The Board noted that QQI and the HEA have a shared quality objective and the MoU has built upon a history of collaboration between the two agencies and strengthened its relationship. The Board noted that the QQI Executive was using the HEA/QQI MoU model as a base in its discussions with SOLAS during development of a similar agreement.

Mr. Boland's presentation was following by a Questions and Answers session, the discussions were mainly around the areas of benchmarking, funding and resourcing and the role learners can play in governance in the HE sector. The Board noted that the HEA, QQI and USI are currently working together to develop Principles for Student Engagement.

INTRODUCTION

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

2. **MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF 27 NOVEMBER 2015**

    The *Minutes of the QQI Board Meeting* held on 27 November 2015 were **confirmed and signed**.

3. **NOTE OF THE MEETING OF 27 NOVEMBER 2015**

    The Board **approved** the *Note of the Meeting of 27 November 2015*, for publication on the QQI website.

4. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

    All matters arising fell within agenda items and were discussed during the course of the meeting.

5. **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

    The Board noted the documents entitled **Governance Structure**.

    The Board noted that following the Judicial review in January 2015 and subsequent legal advice on the non-statutory functions of QQI, it was considered appropriate that the following non-statutory functions are removed from the Board's Schedule of Reserved Functions:

    - Withdrawal of ACELS recognition (non-statutory function);

- Withdrawal of recognition within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (non-statutory function)

The Board noted that QQI operates ACELS on an administrative basis as it is not on a statutory footing with QQI.

There is an absence of an express function in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 allowing QQI to recognise awards in the NFQ.

The Board noted that as it is likely to be some time before the legislative amendments required are in place, it is appropriate to remove the two functions from the Schedule. The Board **approved** the removal and the removal of references from the Terms of Reference of the Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) in relation to recognition within the NFQ. The Board noted that should there be legislative changes in the future, the Board will revisit its Schedule of Reserved Functions.

The Board noted, that on foot of the recent Review of the sub-Board Committee Structure and in order to ensure staggered turnover of experience and expertise of current members of committees, the Executive invited members to extend their terms of office by 1, 2 or 3 years. The Board noted the list of terms of office extensions. The Board also **approved** the nomination of Lucien Bollaert to the Policies and Standards Committee (PSC).

6. **RELATIONS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS (DES)**

The Board noted the documents entitled **Relations with the Department of Education and Skills**.

6.1. <u>MFA Review Meeting, 15 October 2015</u>

The Board noted the note of the Management Framework Agreement (MFA) 2015 Review Meeting held with the Department on 15 October 2015. The Board noted the Executive's updates on matters arising and developments since that Review meeting.

6.2. Draft MFA 2016

The Board noted that engagement had begun with DES on drafting an MFA for 2016 and an initial draft had been produced. The Board noted the Executive's approach to the drafting process had been to have the MFA reflect the key deliverables for the year against the approaches set out in the Strategy Statement 2016-2018 and mirror the high level objectives from the 2016 Corporate Plan. The Board noted that the Executive had met with Department officials and discussed its approach. The Board noted the intention that the draft MFA would follow similar models to other agreements that the Department has with agencies also under its remit. The Board noted that the drafting process was continuing and the Executive expected the MFA to be signed by the Chief Executive of QQI and the Deputy Secretary General of the Department at a meeting in March.

6.3. Discussions with DES

The Board noted that since its discussions at the November 2015 Board Meeting, the Executive had committed to providing DES with an additional opportunity to provide feedback during its policy consultation process.

The Board noted the update on discussions with the Department on workforce planning.

The Board discussed options for briefing a new Minister on any issues, developments etc. following the upcoming General Election. The Board **agreed** to discuss the matter further at its April 2016 meeting.

7. **AUDIT AND RISK**

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

The Board noted the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2015. The Board noted that a draft report was considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 13 November 2015 and which was recommended to the Board subject to a number of amendments. On foot of the inclusion of those amendments, the Board considered and **approved** the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2015.

8. BUDGET AND FINANCE

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

8.1. Variance Accounts

The Board noted the verbal update on the variance accounts to 31 December 2015.

8.2. Financial Planning

The Board noted that in future the accounts would be presented to the Board on an accruals basis each quarter. The Board requested the Executive to look to present a draft budget at the September/November Board Meeting each year and to endeavour to ensure it links closely to the Corporate Plan. As part of its Corporate Planning process, the Executive undertook to cost its high level priorities for 2016.

The Board noted the suggestion that the Executive consider the financial analysis aspect of QQI's business. The Board noted the current financial services tender concludes in September 2016 and the Executive would be exploring its options through the Financial Services Framework.

The Board requested that the Executive explore what aspects of business intentions can be outsourced. It is vital that a clear picture is developed of costings and resources required to meet the Corporate Plan's deliverables.

The Board requested the Executive consider outsourcing options and communicate its intentions for 2016 at the next Board meeting scheduled for 15 April where it would review the situation. The Board and Executive stated their commitment to utilising funding for 2016. The Executive welcomed the strong message from the Board and undertook to deliver it to the organisation as requested.

The Board noted and is cognisant of the Executive's dependence on the Department for sanction of human resources, a process which is often complex and challenging. The Board noted that the Executive was hopeful that there will be progress in this

area shortly. The Board noted that the Executive was implementing devolved budgeting and mechanisms to assist in prioritising key areas within the organisation.

The Board **agreed** that the matter would be considered further at its next meeting scheduled for 15 April.

9.   **HUMAN RESOURCES**

The Board noted the **Update on Human Resources**.

Items omitted from this note.

9.1.   Delegated Sanction Agreement - DES

The Board noted the correspondence of 17 December 2015 from the Secretary General of the Department outlining the operation of the Delegated Sanction Agreement (DSA) in the Education and Skills sector. The Board noted that the Executive had met with Department officials to clarify information around the specified pay ceiling. The Board noted that QQI's earlier submission requesting sanction to begin filling vacancies has to be re-submitted with further information which is now required under the new DSA.

9.2.   HR Strategy

The Board noted that the Executive had intended to present its HR Strategy to the Board at its February meeting. The Board noted that while the collaboration with a staff advisory group and internal consultation had been very useful and productive, it had also led to an extension of the timeline for the delivery of the document. The strategy document is now likely to be presented to the Board at its April meeting. The Board noted the Executive was examining staff engagement initiatives to assist in providing channels of communication for non-unionised staff.

10. COMPREHENSIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Board noted the document entitled **Comprehensive Policy Development Programme**.

10.1. Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

The Board noted the draft Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions together with the Feedback Report following the Consultation Process on the Review of HEIs. The Board noted that a significant amount of consultation with the sector had taken place and feedback received had been incorporated into the Policy document.

The Board noted that all public HEIs had undergone at least one review in the past by one of the legacy agencies (HETAC, NQAI or IUQB).

The Board discussed key elements they considered important within the review process e.g. use of experienced Review Panel Chairs, international members, appropriate training for learner representatives and other panel members. The Board noted that the legacy agencies had in the past, used a large number of international panel members during their processes and the Executive's intention was to continue that practice where appropriate. The Board also noted that as part of the implementation of the HEA Student Engagement Principles project, QQI and the HEA are co-funding a student engagement project in collaboration with USI. The project will involve assistance from the Scottish student agency, sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland). QQI is leading this project which will develop a National Student Engagement programme. This programme has two parallel tracks. The first is the development of a student training programme to help develop student capabilities in quality assurance internally and externally and the second part will focus on building institutional capacity to further embrace and improve on student engagement. A significant amount of work and resources had been devoted to the project. The Board noted that the depth of the learner representative reviewers pool was low in Ireland and it is hoped that this project will assist in building capacity in this area, attract learner reviewers earlier in their educational career and provide them with training in quality matters.

The Board noted the Executive was also considering, as a learning exercise, undertaking joint reviews or exchanging a review with a peer agency in another country.

The Board **adopted** the Policy for Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions and recognised that further discussions will be taking place with providers on developing mechanisms to support the review process and finalising a schedule of reviews.

11. **NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS**

The Board noted the document outlining a review of the **National Framework of Qualifications**.

The Board noted the proposed approach to the high-level Review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) to be carried out in two phases over 2016 and 2017 and noted that the Chair had had an opportunity to consider the paper in advance and to offer views which were included in the document.

The Board identified and discussed a risk that could emerge as a result of this project. The risk being the potential to unsettle interests within the qualifications system and to challenge assumptions about the reliability of the NFQ. The project needs to be mindful of this risk.

The Board **approved** the Executive's approach to the Review of the National Framework of Qualifications and noted that it would be kept informed of progress.

12. **WITHDRAWAL OF VALIDATION**

The Board noted the document entitled **Withdrawal of Validation**.

The Board noted the steps taken by the Executive in the process to recommend withdrawal of validation from specific providers who have ceased operation of QQI validated programmes and noted the request of the Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC) that the Board withdraw validation of those programmes. The Board **approved** the withdrawal of validation from the providers specified under Section 47 of the 2012 Act.

13.   BOARD PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The Board noted the documents relating to the **Board Performance Evaluation**.

The Board **agreed** to defer discussion and consideration of the Board Performance Evaluation to the April Board Meeting due to time constraints. The additional time also gives Board Members an opportunity to reflect on the material provided.

14.   STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

The Board noted the documents entitled **Strategic Development**.

The Board noted the Report on the Summation of Progress against the QQI Strategy Statement 2013-2016, the Closing Report on the 2015 Corporate Plan and the draft Corporate Plan 2016 (deliverables).

14.1   Draft Corporate Plan 2016

The Board noted that the Executive had learned a significant amount from its planning process over the last three years and had used this experience to enhance the development of its draft Corporate Plan for 2016. The Board noted the deliverables in the 2016 Plan were linked to the approaches in the current Strategy Statement.

The Board noted that once the Corporate Plan was finalised, the Executive would present the Board with quarterly progress reports.

The Board requested the Executive to refrain from being overly ambitious with its intentions and to continue to be realistic in its planning process.

The Board **agreed** that it would consider and discuss progress at its next meeting and stated that the Executive should be cognisant that if there are changes to available resources, there should be an intention to revisit the planning outcomes.

15. COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

The Board noted the documents relating to **Communications and Information Strategy**.

The Board noted the update on Phase I of the Award Brand campaign and noted Phase II had begun in January 2016. The Board noted that this phase would concentrate primarily on the learner and included additional targeted regional and local advertising.

16. LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS

The Board noted the document entitled **Legislative Amendments**.

The Board noted a synopsis of the Technological Universities Bill which had recently reached Report Stage of the Legislative drafting process but did not progress beyond that point. The Board noted that the Bill is likely to be re-introduced in some form following the General Election. The Board noted some of the implications arising for QQI from the original Bill.

The Board noted that there had been reference to revisions to the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act 2012 during the course of the debate on this Bill. The Executive agreed to provide an update to the Board at its next meeting.

17. FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Board noted the document related to **Further Education and Training**.

The Board noted the Joint QQI/Community and Voluntary Working Group had held its final meeting on 15 December 2015 and that the members were reasonably satisfied that the objectives of the Group had been met. The Board noted that the Executive would be meeting with the Chief Executive of AONTAS to explore methods of communicating with providers which that organisation routinely engages with.

The Board noted that consultation on Quality Assurance Guidelines was ongoing and the re-engagement process can begin once the QA Guidelines have been agreed and published.

The Board noted that the Executive would shortly be scheduling dates for the two 2016 sessions of the Consultative Forum.

18. **ITEMS FOR NOTING**

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

18.1. Programme and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the *Programme and Awards Executive Committee* held on 2 December 2015. The Board noted that the decision to refuse validation of a number of programmes had been referred to the Programme and Awards Oversight Committee for confirmation or referral back to the PAEC.

18.2. Approvals and Reviews Committee (ARC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the *Approvals and Reviews Committee* held on 9 December 2015.

18.3. Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Board noted the reports of the meetings of the *Policies and Standards Committee* held on 11 December 2015 and 18 January 2016.

18.4 Programme and Awards Oversight Committee (PAOC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the *Programme and Awards Oversight Committee* held on 22 December 2015.

The Board noted that there had been a number of changes to Key Executive and administrative support to the committees as a result of the Review of the sub-Board Governance Structure and the restructuring and the Board expressed its thanks to those who had assisted the committees to date for all their work.

18.5 QQI Nomination to the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

The Board noted the re-nomination of Karena Maguire, Head of Quality Projects as the QQI representative on the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

18.6 Submission by QQI on the Development of a new National Skills Strategy

The Board noted QQI's submission on the Development of a new National Skills Strategy and noted the publication by DES of Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 on 27 January 2016. The Board noted the references to QQI within the Strategy document.

18.7 Submission from QQI to DES Management Advisory Committee (MAC) Cross Divisional Group on Quality, Evaluation and Assessment

The Board noted QQI's submission on Quality, Evaluation and Assessment to the Department's MAC Cross Divisional Group.

18.8 Media Mentions, Key Developments, Current and Forthcoming Events

The Board noted the *Media Mentions, Key Developments, Current and Forthcoming Events* (from 30 November 2015 to 13 February 2016).

18.9 Draft Board Agenda (April 2016) and Rolling Board Agendas 2015 and 2016

The Board noted the draft Agenda for the Board Meeting scheduled for 15 April 2016 - the final version would take account of discussions during the course of this meeting. The Board also noted an update on the Rolling Board Agendas for 2015 and 2016.

19. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 15 April 2016** beginning at 9:45 a.m.

20. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Board noted that a Memorandum of Understanding between QQI and SOLAS was under development and a meeting of the High Level Group of the two agencies was scheduled for 24 February 2016.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Chairperson: _____

Date: _____