

Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Note of the fifty-sixth Meeting of the Authority (The Board) which took place on Friday, 23 April 2021 at 10:00 a.m. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, this meeting took place via Microsoft Teams (video conference facility).

Present:

- Ms. Joanne Harmon (Chair)
- Dr. Padraig Walsh (Chief Executive)
- Ms. Cliona Curley (Secretary)
- Dr. Barbara Brittingham
- Mr. Blake Hodkinson
- Mr. Thomas McDermott
- Mr. Kevin McStravock (Items 9-20)
- Ms. Niamh O'Reilly
- Prof. Irene Sheridan
- Dr. Anne Walsh

Apologies: Ms. Mary Danagher

In attendance:

- Ms. Caitriona Lawless (Recording Secretary)
- Ms. Tanya Kenny, Principal Officer, Higher Education – Quality and Governance Unit, DFHERIS (Item 1)
- Dr. Anna Murphy (Item 9)

INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the meeting. As there were ongoing restrictions in place in Ireland due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Board was continuing to meet virtually through Microsoft Teams.

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

1. PRESENTATION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

Following a request by the Board, Ms. Tanya Kenny, Principal Officer in the Higher Education – Quality and Governance Unit in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), delivered a verbal presentation to the Board. The presentation included an update on the recently published DFHERIS Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 and on the current work of her Unit. There was also an update on recent engagements on items such as the Amended Legislation Programme (ALP) and the Funding Model. The Board noted that there had been significant engagement and collaboration between the two organisations on their respective Statements of Strategy. The presentation was followed by a questions and answers session.

Ms. Kenny thanked the Board and the Executive for the role QQI had played in the Department's Covid-19 response which maintained confidence in the Sector.

The Board noted that the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science was happy to accept its invitation to attend part of the June 2021 Board Meeting. Ms. Kenny thanked the Board and the Executive for its invitation to present to it and for the ongoing support with the Department's work.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, thanked Ms. Kenny for presenting to the Board.

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 22 February 2021 were **confirmed** and would be signed at a later date when circumstances allow.

4. NOTE OF PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

The Board approved the **Note of the Meeting of 22 February 2021** 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 on foot of the discussion on the running order of the Agenda at the February Meeting, the agenda items had been reordered for this meeting.

6. COVID-19

The Board noted an update on matters effected by and resulting from **Covid-19**.

6.1. Covid-19 Update

The Board noted an update on the current impact of Covid-19. The Board noted that since the February Board Meeting, the Executive had held a series of engagements with CORU to discuss social care work placements impacted by Covid-19.

The Board noted that the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science had expressed an intention to reopen Third Level Campuses in September 2021. The Board and the Executive remain cognisant of the impact of the past year on many learners, particularly those that are disadvantaged.

The Board noted that QQI staff are continuing to work remotely and noted the Government announcement on 1 April launching the Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect. The Board noted that public consultation on the Right to Request Remote Working was underway and advised the Executive that consideration should be given to QQI's working requirements once restrictions lift.

7. CEO REPORT

The Board noted the **CEO Report**.

7.1. CEO Report

The Board noted the various updates contained in the CEO report covering the period since the February 2021 Board Meeting.

The Board noted that, since the beginning of 2020, 77 Further Education and Training (FET) providers are not seeking to re-engage with QQI. There was a short discussion on the categories of providers involved and the Executive undertook to provide a requested breakdown/profile of the providers involved. The Board noted that a large number of those not seeking to re-engage were providers who had not certified learners in the previous two years or had not revalidated programmes in that period. In addition to this, a number of providers are engaging with Education and Training Boards (ETBs). These are, in the main, providers based in areas outside of Dublin. Small FET providers may find linking with an ETB a more attractive option than re-engaging directly with QQI. Board Members queried if there are other alternative options to continue to provide programmes but not engage with QQI and if additional supports for these providers are required. The revised Legislation provides routes for non-QQI Awards to appear on the National Framework of Qualifications, however, that Section is not yet enacted.

The Board briefly discussed the consultation on the Green Paper on Qualifications and suggested that the Executive explore stakeholder categories outside of the norm during the consultation process.

The Board noted that the inaugural phase of the Cinnte Reviews of ETBs is progressing. Of the initial five reviews underway, the main review visits of two (Limerick-Clare ETB and Laois Offaly ETB) are completed and the planning visits for another two (Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB and Donegal ETB) had taken place in March.

There was a short discussion on this item and the Executive reported that the reviews carried out to date had had good panels and strong Chairs. There had been good industry representatives and learner representatives involved. The Board noted that there had been

strong interest in participating and being involved in these reviews. The Executive is gathering feedback on the process and making adjustments as needed. It was noted that the virtual element of the reviews has continued to prove successful.

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

The Board noted the updates relating to **Engagement with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**.

8.1. Performance Delivery Agreement 2021 (PDA) and Oversight Agreement 2021-2023

The Board noted the verbal update on the Performance Delivery Agreement (PDA) Review Meeting which had taken place on 4 March 2021. The Board noted that similar to the discussion under Item 1 above, the Department had acknowledged the Executive's work on the various Covid-19 Working Groups.

The Board noted that the next PDA review meeting between the Secretary General and the Assistant Secretary of the Department and the Chairperson and Chief Executive of QQI had been scheduled for 22 June.

8.2. Funding Model and Workforce Plan

The Board noted the verbal update on developments in these areas. The Board noted that the Executive is working towards reprofiling Relationship Fees in light of the establishment of more Technological Universities (TUs) and inclusion of the ETB sector within that fees structure.

The Board noted that there is recognition in the Department that QQI needs a more predictable and sustainable funding model to maintain its processes and services.

8.3. Amendment Legislation Programme (ALP)

The Board noted that the first meeting of the QQI/DFHERIS ALP Liaison Group had taken place on 22 April. The Term of Reference and timeframe for the legislative programme had been agreed and the Group is scheduled to meet fortnightly. It was noted that the Group was cognisant of the reliance on sufficient staffing resources and an appropriate fee increase and

for the delivery and implementation of the legislative programme. The Board noted that there had been positive engagement to date.

The Board Secretary provided a broad timeline for the completion of establishment measures for two of the functions arising from the amended legislation.

9. STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Board noted an update on **Strategic Planning**.

9.1. Corporate Plan 2021

The Board noted the Quarter 1 Progress Report for the 2021 Corporate Plan.

9.2. Draft Annual Report 2020

The Board noted the draft Annual Report for 2020. The Board **approved** the draft Report subject to there being no material changes prior to publication. The Board was requested to submit any further feedback on the document to the Executive by 30 April and the final proof would be presented to the Board for noting at its June Meeting.

9.3. Development of Strategy Statement 2022-2024

The Board noted the draft Statement of Strategy, 2022-2024. Board Members provided feedback on the draft Statement and discussed areas that still require further consideration for inclusion in the current draft. It was noted that Members felt that the draft could be more ambitious and that the language could be strengthened in this regard.

The Board agreed that some of the key elements are contained within the draft and just need to be refined, repositioned and strengthened. It was suggested that some need greater prominence and an appropriate narrative to the document may help set the context.

The Executive welcomed the comprehensive feedback and acknowledged that there may be an element of cautiousness in the draft Strategy. It is conscious that to deliver some of its goals it has to work with partners and stakeholders which then leads to conciliatory language such as collaborate, support etc. The Board noted that QQI achieved a lot in 2020 by working with others and it wants to build on that, particularly in the current restricted period.

The Executive undertook to bring the draft Statement back to the EMT for revision. The Board acknowledged both the difficulty of strategy development in the current online environment and the significant amount of work and effort put into the document to date.

The Board **approved** the continuation of the strategy development process but requested that the Executive consider the feedback provided and revise the draft Statement accordingly.

The Executive outlined the next stages of the development process. The next stages now include revisions by the EMT, further consultation with staff and an external consultation stage (it is envisaged that this may last approximately three weeks). The Executive would revert with a revised draft Statement of Strategy.

The Board noted that the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science had accepted an invitation to meet with the Board at its June Meeting.

The Board noted that the Chairperson would discuss the timelines for the strategy process further with the Chief Executive and Board Secretary.

10. AUDIT AND RISK

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

10.1. Focus on the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted the verbal overview of the work of the Audit and Risk Committee provided by the Chairperson of that Committee. This focused primarily on the annual key governance matters under its remit which the Committee considered at its most recent meeting, held on 9 April.

10.2. Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Board noted a verbal update on the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting held on 9 April and a draft report of the meeting held on 16 February 2021.

10.3 Top Five Risks for 2020

The Board noted that the Executive had revisited the wording of two of the Top Five Risks for the year ended 31 December 2020, following consideration and discussion of the draft at its February 2021 Meeting. The Board **approved** the revised wording for the two risks in question and **approved** the Top Five Risks subject to a minor amendment to Risk 1.

10.4. Draft Unaudited Financial Statements 2020

The Board noted and discussed the draft unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2020 which had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting of 9 April and were referred to the Board for its approval.

The Board **approved** the Financial Statements for 2020 subject to audit by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and there being no material changes.

10.5. Internal Audit Report - Review of System of Internal Controls (SIC) 2020

The Board noted and **approved** the Review of the System of Internal Controls for the year ended 31 December 2020. The Board expected the Executive to report back on the progress on the review recommendations.

10.6. Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee 2020

The Board **approved** the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for 2020 and noted the Committee's priorities for 2021. It was noted that two external Members will be added to the Committee in 2021.

10.7. Rolling Internal Audit Plan 2021-2023

The Board **approved** the Internal Audit Plan for the period 2021-2023.

10.8. Corporate Procurement Plan 2021-2023

The Board noted that the Executive had reviewed and updated the Corporate Procurement Plan. The Board **approved** the Plan which covered the period 2021-2023.

10.9. Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 November 2020

The Board noted the minutes of 13 November 2020.

Following a Board Member's query, the Executive confirmed that it had received confirmation from the Department that the QQI Financial Statements for 2019 had been laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

11. BUDGET AND FINANCE

The Board noted an update on **Budget and Finance**.

11.1. Management Accounts to 28 February 2021

The Board noted the Management accounts for the two months to 28 February 2021. The Board noted that income and expenditure had remained steady for the first two months of the year.

12. ITEMS FOR NOTING

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

12.1. Programmes and Awards Executive Committee (PAEC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Programmes and Awards Executive Committee held on 4 February 2021.

12.2. Policies and Standards Committee (PSC)

The Board noted the report of the meeting of the Policies and Standards Committee held on 15 March 2021. The Board noted that the Level 6 Comparability Study is underway. The Board requested a briefing on Europass at a future point.

12.3. Rolling Board Agenda 2021

The Board noted an update on the Rolling Board Agenda for 2021.

13. ORGANISATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Board noted an update on **Organisation and Human Resources**.

13.1. Update on Human Resources

The Board noted an update on Human Resources in addition to an associated update from the Department provided earlier in the meeting. The Board noted that sanction of several posts had been confirmed. It was noted that a number of the sanctioned posts are replacing staff who have already or will have retired and do not relate to new positions.

The Board congratulated the staff of QQI on the organisation being named in the Top 100 in Wellbeing Company Index launched by Ibec in association with Business and Finance Media Group. The Board noted that QQI's next Keepwell Mark assessment is scheduled for 19 May and the Executive may be able to provide an update on the outcome at the June Board Meeting.

14. GOVERNANCE

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

14.1. Implementation Plan for External Board Evaluation 2020

The Board noted that an Implementation Plan for the actions arising from the External Board Effectiveness Review 2020 had been developed following the February Board Meeting and as a result of consultation with the Chairperson. The Board considered the Plan and discussed a number of suggestions:

- Board Members are already invited to QQI Events – it was suggested that the invitations should be expanded to include more sectoral events. The Board re-expressed its interest in hearing the views of stakeholders. The Board noted that the Executive had, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, been unable to hold a follow up Annual Conference/Enhancement Event, similar to that held in Croke Park in February 2020. That CPD Conference 'Exploring Models of Success: Professional Development of Staff in FET, HE and ELE' had attracted a wide target audience within the sector.
- Cover Papers – amendment of cover paper template to prompt the author to consider potential (strategic) impacts and elaborate. It was agreed that papers should provide

Board Members with an indication of where value is added and implications should be clear, concise and upfront.

- Training and development for Board Members and Committee Members – The Executive noted the appreciation of Board Members for the training and development opportunities provided to date. It was noted that many had found their attendance at Governance Forum sessions beneficial. A Board Member suggested that the organisation of a refresher training session for the Board as a group may be helpful. A number of other options were outlined.
- Links to key published documents should be circulated e.g. Action Plan for Apprenticeships.

The Board noted that the Implementation Plan can be amended and adjusted as the actions proceed and progress. The Executive acknowledged that it can be difficult, at times, to balance governance matters with devoting time to strategic reflection at meetings, the volume of routine governance matters is often significant.

14.2. Committee Members/Appointments

The Board **approved** the following appointments to QQI Committees:

- Mr. Mark Kane and Dr. Mary Meaney to the Programmes and Awards Oversight Committee and
- Mr. Walter Johnston to the Audit and Risk Committee.

The Board also noted the extension by two years of the membership term of Dr. John O'Connor on the Programme and Awards Executive Committee to 22 February 2023.

15. COMMUNICATIONS

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

15.1. Media Mentions

The Board noted the media mentions published since the February 2021 Board Meeting together with Social Media Statistics covering March 2021.

16. DRAFT BOARD AGENDA

The Board noted the **Draft April 2021 Board Agenda**.

The Board noted the draft Agenda for the next Board Meeting.

17. NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed in due course.

The Board noted that as Kevin McStravock's term as Deputy President/Vice-President for Academic Affairs at USI was coming to an end, the June Meeting would be his final one as a QQI Board Member. The Board noted that a nomination for his replacement will be issued by USI to the Minister for approval. It was also noted that the Executive would arrange induction sessions for the new Member and the Chairperson undertook to meet with the outgoing and incoming representatives.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and contributions.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.