

Minutes of the 52nd SCQF Partnership Board held on Thursday 10 December 2020 at 09.00 hours via video conference on behalf of SCQF Partnership, 201 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 2LW

Confirmed for website

Present:

Rob Wallen (RW)	Chair SCQF Partnership
Jim Metcalfe (JM)	College Development Network
Stuart McKenna (SMcK)	STF
Alastair Sim (AS)	Universities Scotland (Items 1-4 & 7 only)
Fiona Robertson (FR)	SQA (Items 1-4 & 7 only)
Alastair Delaney (AD)	QAA

In Attendance:

Aileen Ponton (AP)	SCQF Partnership
Sheila Dunn (SD)	SCQF Partnership
Julie Cavanagh (JC)	SCQF Partnership
Beverley Wallace (BW) (Secretariat)	SCQF Partnership

Welcome and introductions

RW welcomed all to the meeting and informed the Board of a change in agenda item order as some Directors had to leave the meeting early.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were noted from Malcom Foley.

Register of Interests

RW reminded Directors to submit their annual Register of Interests form by end of December 2020 if they had not already done so.

Noting of any conflict of interest

RW asked the Directors if they were aware of any issues presenting a conflict of interest with the planned agenda and none were noted. However, RW asked it to be noted that, in relation to Item 7a on the agenda, ASET was a wholly owned subsidiary of NESCOL and RW was formerly the principal of NESCOL therefore technically the owner of ASET. Although he no longer had any links with NESCOL or ASET he would abstain from taking part in the discussions or decision on this issue.

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2020

RW asked Directors if they were happy that the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting. The Directors confirmed they were satisfied.

RW then talked through the redacted minutes for the website. The Board agreed to redact the two paragraphs from Item 3 and in addition the second paragraph from Item 6 would also be redacted and BW would amend this.

2. Matters Arising

Additionally, AP told Directors that following the agreement with SDS around GAs, the Partnership had contacted SDS about the need to start looking at the inclusion of Foundation Apprenticeships below level 6 on the framework as these qualifications were reaching the end of the pilot period. The Board then noted the matters arising.

3. CEO Report

AP began by inviting SD to provide an update on the Micro credentials (MCs) project. The group had been expanded to include Dundee and Angus, Borders and West Lothian colleges, as well as STF and Glasgow Chambers of Commerce. Two surveys had been issued to employers to gauge their appetite for MCs and whether they would want some type of formal recognition. The first survey was sent initially by Edinburgh and CoG colleges to their local employers and a second amalgamated survey was sent to a wider group via the other colleges, STF and Glasgow Chambers of Commerce. Whilst the survey was still currently open a quick analysis of the feedback so far indicated that employers would be interested in MCs but only if they were significantly different from any of the current offerings. They were also largely positive about having some sort of formal recognition. The next steps would be the analysis of the survey and production of a scoping report before then looking at how MCs could be implemented. Whilst it was initially thought the project would need to be completed by end of December 2020, the EU (which had funded the project) had granted an extension into early 2021, with completion expected by end of February 2021. AP added that SFC had been updated on the project.

AP then invited JC to discuss the SDS RPL project, whose aim was to create a recognition process for apprentices not able to complete their apprenticeship. JC outlined how this would be achieved as detailed in the paper. The project had been completed ahead of schedule with all of the training and resources for training providers launched online at the beginning of December 2020 on SDS's platform. This would be followed by surgeries from December 2020 to February 2021 to allow providers to seek clarity and advice on the process.

RW invited Directors for comment and a discussion then followed around MCs. It became clear that a number of sectors were involved in the development of MCs independently of each other. Directors thought it was important to share findings and knowledge across the sectors and to have a more joined up approach, with SQA, Universities Scotland and QAA inviting SD to link up with colleagues involved in MCs. It was also acknowledged that there was enthusiasm across sectors to develop MCs; however it was questioned how great was the appetite of employers for MCs. The scoping exercise being undertaken by the Partnership would help gauge interest within the college sector and how the employer's position was presented in the scoping report would be critical in informing that debate.

Briefly discussing the SDS project, FR said the SQA had also been looking at the issue of non-completion of apprenticeships and a link up would be useful. AP agreed and re-assured FR that the involvement of awarding bodies and accreditation in the process had been fully taken into account by SDS throughout the development of the project.

Finally JC went on to update Directors on the RPL project for migrants and refugees. The Partnership was continuing to work with GCU to further develop and refine the resource, looking at

SCQF levels to help draw out skills migrants and refugees may have gathered in another country and to benchmark transferable skills to the SCQF as well as looking at other aspect of their skills and learning. A learning programme had been set up for facilitators to ensure they were able to utilise the resources and also a QA process had been established. Additionally, a record of achievement would be issued listing all of the qualifications and skills achieved. The first set of online training courses for facilitators had successfully run at the end of September 2020 and another one was currently in progress. The aim was to have that training programme credit rated on the framework, giving confidence to users and to employers and supporting the QA process. GCU was now looking at how to expand the programme, called Skills Recognition Scotland, and how to develop a central hub which would take on ownership of the whole process. AP added that that Skills Recognition Scotland was no longer a pilot and had now formed part of Scottish Government's programme of work with the steering group being chaired by Scottish Government.

The Board then noted the CEO report with RW adding that he was impressed by the way the Partnership had driven forward Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council priorities despite the complexities of the current environment.

4. OU degrees and the SCQF

SD began by providing a summary as detailed in the paper, stressing that the Partnership was keen to include OU degrees in the SCQF database. Following a discussion, the consensus was that it was important to have OU qualifications on the database as they were a major, nationally recognised Scottish funded provider with rigorous validation processes. However there needed to be a clear rationale for this to take place and it would be important that the integrity of the decision could be demonstrated.

5. Management Accounts 2020 – 2021 Quarter 2

The main message from the Q2 management accounts was that there was a more positive out turn than predicted, mostly due to cost savings such as savings on publications and travel but also due to additional income from projects such as the SDS apprenticeship and Micro credentials projects and the consultancy for Malta. AP also acknowledged the saving made through the Partnership's IT provider who (in recognition of the Partnership as a small business facing challenges brought about by the pandemic) had provided free support from April 2020 to December 2020. Notwithstanding potential budget challenges for 2021-22, ARC was very positive about the out turn for the current year and the resulting additional reserves.

In reference to the SCQF Week taking place in March 2021, SMcK highlighted that an Apprenticeship Week was taking place early March 2021 and AP said she would ensure the two events did not clash. The Board then approved the Q2 management accounts.

6. Report from the Audit and Risk Committee

AP began by summarising the review of the risk strategy, the internal review of the Audit Scotland report on cybercrime and the review of the Business Continuity Plan as covered in the paper.

In relation to the risk strategy, JM highlighted the potential major changes to the tertiary system as a result of the current SFC review and suggested that continued engagement with the SFC and other institutions to help understand the implication of any changes to the business should be factored into the risk strategy. AP would review where the risk sat and would add it to both the current and following year's risk strategy.

Discussing the longevity of staff working from home SMcK referenced some recent controls put in place by SDS to limit the length and frequency of online meetings and asked if the Partnership had similar controls in place. AP responded no, however proceeded to outline the steps that had been

undertaken to safeguard and protect staff, including undertaking a home working and return to work survey and ensuring staff had access to online health and well-being courses. Given that the office was unlikely to open again until April 2021 and then only part-time, AP would look at whether additional controls on meetings were required.

The Board then confirmed they were happy with the current risk strategy ratings and noted the completion of the annual review of the BCP, the internal review on cybercrime and the business of the ARC.

7. Report from the Quality Committee

SD drew Directors attention to the information on the paper regarding the two RPL projects and the Quality Committees agreement on the use of SCQFP's logo and levels on profile statements/records of achievement. Their use would continue as long as SCQFP's QA processes continued to be implemented and in the case of the GCU project, which was a longer term project, a MoU would be drawn up.

The Committee also agreed to extend a CRB's application approval deadline by six months, as the application had been delayed by the impact of the pandemic on the submitting organisation.

Finally SD highlighted the Committee's approval for OPITO to continue as a CRB following its annual monitoring report. The Board were then happy to note and endorse the business of the Quality Committee.

7a. Application for Approval from ASET

SD began by informing Directors that ASET were a wholly owned subsidiary of NESCOL with a strong track record of delivering qualifications in Scotland in areas such as oil & gas and engineering. It already had a number of programmes on the framework credit rated by NESCOL and City & Guilds and the plan was for ASET to take these over if its CRB status was approved. The Quality Committee had recommended approval subject to two conditions: ASET continued to work towards the completion of the indicated action plan; and revisited, refreshed and documented interim arrangements for credit rating given Covid-19 continued to impact on current working arrangements.

There were now two outstanding actions on the plan to allow them to commence credit rating, namely the transfer of the NESCOL and City and Guilds programmes. SD highlighted that normally a CRB would not be able to start credit rating until it had completed the conditions of its approval. Unusually in the case of ASET, in order to complete the first part of its action plan, it would need to start credit rating. The Board then approved ASET as a SCQFP CRB.

7b. SFRS-TED Periodic Review Report

SFRS-TED had undergone its first periodic review since it became a CRB. SD pointed out that the report was in the new style that was agreed as part of the review of the QA model. Not much progress had been made by the CRB since the previous annual monitoring activity due to the effects of the pandemic. As a result, the Quality Committee recommended approval to continue as a CRB but with provision that all actions from both the current action plan and the previous annual monitoring activity must be completed prior to the start of 2021 review activity. The Board then approved SFRS-TED's continuation as a SCQFP CRB.

8. Any other business

RW informed Directors that he planned to send a note to SCQFP staff to say that it had been noted that the team had carried out an impressive amount of work with minimum interruption to normal service under what had been extraordinary circumstances. Directors noted this.

9. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 16 March 2021 from 09.00 – 11.00.