

Minutes of the 53rd SCQF Partnership Board held on Tuesday 16 March 2021 at 09.00 via video conference on behalf of SCQF Partnership Conference Room, 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) Items 1-8	Universities of Scotland
Fiona Robertson (FR)	SQA
Malcolm Foley (MF)	QC Chair
Linda Pooley (LP) Observer	SFC

In Attendance:

Aileen Ponton (AP)	SCQF Partnership
Julie Cavanagh (JC)	SCQF Partnership
Sheila Dunn (SD)	SCQF Partnership
Laura Wilding (LW) Items 1-5	SCQF Partnership
Beverley Wallace (BW) (Secretariat)	SCQF Partnership

Welcome and introductions

RW welcomed all to the meeting.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were noted from Alastair Delaney, QAA. It was noted that AD had reviewed the papers and sent his comment to RW who would refer to these where appropriate throughout the meeting. AS indicated that he had to leave the meeting early but had provided comments to RW/AP on all matters requiring approval.

Register of Interests

RW reminded Directors of the Register of Interests form. Should any Directors interests have changed, that would have implications on work with the Board, the form should be completed and submitted to BW to record.

Noting of any conflict of interest

RW asked the Directors if they were aware of any issues presenting a conflict of interest and none were noted.

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 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. Referring to Item 4 which had been fully redacted, RW asked the Directors if they thought it was appropriate to un-redact the first paragraph to which the Board agreed and BW would amend this.

2. Matters Arising

RW began by asking AP is there was anything additional she wanted to raise regarding matters arising. Referring to the SDS report on managing online meetings and working from home that SMcK had recommended at the previous Board meeting, AP confirmed the report had been circulated to the Team, noting that it contained a number of useful tips, many of which the Team were already implementing. The Board were then happy to note the matters arising.

3. Management Accounts 2020 – 21 Quarter 3

AP provided Directors with an update on the Q3 Accounts as detailed in the paper. Referring to the Partnership's bank accounts, SMcK asked if moving the 100k into the savings account would restrict access to the money to which AP responded no, saying there were no access restrictions on the account. AS then asked how many months of expenditure the business would be holding as reserves at end of the current financial year, adding that normally there should be no more than 6 months' worth. AP said she was not in a position to formally confirm this yet but expected it to be around 6 months' worth, adding that the additional spend planned for 2021-22 would ensure the reserves did not increase any further. The Board, with agreement from AD, approved moving 100k into the savings account and also approved the Q3 management accounts.

4. Operational Plan and Budget 2021 – 22

AP began by highlighting to Directors that the Operational Plan and Budget were developed later than normal due to the delays in funding confirmation before then providing an overview of the Operational Plan as detailed in the paper. In addition, she drew Directors attention to the movement of the employer engagement activity, from being a standalone activity to forming part of Activity 6, as many employers currently did not see workforce development as a top priority. It was felt that it would be more productive to focus on supporting Scottish Government and SFC on employer focused initiatives such as addressing skills gaps. LP commented that it was good to see the Operational Plan aligning with ministerial priorities; however, the plan may need to be altered due to potential changes in government priorities as a result of the upcoming election and AP agreed to make reference to this in the plan.

Moving on to discuss the 2021-22 budget AP highlighted the key areas as detailed in the paper. In addition, AP informed Directors that the reduction in overheads was based on an estimated return to the office in June 21 although it was acknowledged that this date may change. As a result of the current year's positive outturn an overspend for 2021-22 was planned that would help the business provide greater support for institutions whilst ensuring the Partnership's reserves were kept within the required limits. Referring back to Item 3 on the agenda LW confirmed that the expected year end reserves would be around 500k. The Board with agreement from AD approved both the Operational Plan and Budget for 2021-22.

5. Report from the Audit and Risk Committee

RW invited AP to comment on any changes to the Risk Management Strategy and matrix. AP began by telling Directors that following a request at the previous Board meeting, a control was added to Risk 5 in the strategy to ensure SCQFP took stock of the SFC's review of tertiary provision and any implications for the sector, organisations and provision. As a result of this a number of meetings with SFC had since taken place, resulting in the Partnership producing a paper for SFC on RPL and another meeting was scheduled for w/c 22 March.

Risk 1 relating to the pandemic had come down although it was still red for the current year and amber for 21/22; however this could change over the next few months depending on wider developments relating to the pandemic. Finally, there had been a reduction on other risks as funding had been confirmed and the process of recruiting a Development Officer had begun.

AP then drew Directors' attention to the addition of staff health and wellbeing to the list of potential risks on the strategy, adding that it had also been included as a priority in the Operational Plan. A range of support had been provided to staff and a return to work survey would also be conducted over the next few months to help understand any issues and concerns and also to look at the practicalities of a home/office work balance and the impact this had on job roles.

LP then highlighted to the Board that the SFC review was behind schedule and any progress on the phase one and two reports was unlikely to happen until after the election with a final report not expected until near the end of the year which AP duly noted, saying she would follow developments closely.

A general discussion then followed on how the business managed its priorities and the importance of finding a balance between income generation and maintaining the business's core function. The Board then agreed the changes to the risk management strategy, approved the timescales for the audit and noted the business of ARC. LW then left the meeting.

6. Report from Quality Committee

RW invited MF to highlight any key areas from Quality Committee report. MF began by acknowledging the hard work put in by the officers involved in the annual monitoring reviews to ensure that CRBs clearly understood what was required of them when the process moved online.

The College Review Phase 2 pilot had now reported and SFC had confirmed the proposed model from 2021. In terms of the SFC's Phase 1 Review report lengthy discussions had taken place around the report and this feedback had been collated by AP and forwarded to SFC. The QC felt that the SCQF was under-represented in the report given that many of the proposals and initiatives were within SCQFP's remit. Subsequently SFC had agreed to join one of the upcoming QC meetings to discuss how the SCQF could be embedded further to add value. JM then highlighted that SFC had already begun discussions with agencies around what partnerships might be formed in stage two and beyond and suggested early April would be a good time for the Partnership to try to secure further meetings with SFC to look how the Partnership could be better represented in the stage 2 reporting. AP agreed and added that some discussions had already taken place with SFC around partnership formations and another meeting had been arranged. The Board then noted the recommendations and business conducted by the Quality Committee.

6a. Approval and Fees

The Board along with agreement from AD approved that no change was needed to fee structure as detailed in the paper.

7. OU degrees and the SCQF

AP spoke to the paper, providing Directors with some further details around QAA and OU Scotland's involvement in the paper before highlighting the key points which were:

- the OU was approved as a CRB along with the other universities therefore had a level of autonomy that other SCQFP approved CRBs did not;
- it used the SCQF level descriptors to credit rate its modules and qualifications;
- it had developed a framework that aligned to all UK frameworks and had specifically developed levels 2a and 2b on its own framework to map with SCQF Levels 8 & 9;
- QAA recognised OU's degrees in term of quality assurance;
- it was part of the education landscape in Scotland and was set up differently from SCQF approved CRBs.

The proposal was that OU programmes would be incorporated on to the database and the Partnership would work with OU and QAA to develop a way of adding a footnote or link that would explain the difference in credit value.

A discussion then followed and the Board along with confirmation from AD agreed that the unique position of OU and its provision provided sufficient evidence and assurance to recognise that provision on the database without allowing any compromise to the integrity of the framework.

8. Succession planning for Chair and CEO

RW introduced the paper and talked through the proposals as detailed before opening the discussion up to the Board. An additional option of the Chair extending his tenure by one year was suggested and the Directors then each discussed their preferred option.. AS left the meeting at this point. The Board then recommended that RW remained as Chair for an additional one year. RW agreed to this, taking his tenure to December 2023, however stressed that he did not wish to undertake a further three years. AP added that there would be no issues in terms of compliance with the Memorandum of Articles as RW was currently in his second term and it allowed three successive terms of three years..

9. Performance appraisal and remuneration

BW, SD and JC left the meeting and a discussion then followed around performance appraisal and remuneration. AP then left the meeting to allow further discussion and the Board than approved the paper, agreeing that the Scottish Government guidance should be followed (as well as any revision that might be issued in the near future) as proposed. In the absence of the Chair it was also agreed that the daily rate for the Chair should increase in line with Scottish Government guidance.

10. Reflections on 2020 - 21

AP, SD, JC and BW re-joined the meeting. JC and SD then gave presentations on the highlights of 2020-21 along with some of the challenges. Highlights included the Skills Recognition and Apprentices Transition Projects; the School Ambassador Programme; SCQF Week 2021; the CRB Quality Assurance Process and support and development for colleges, universities and CRBs. Challenges included capacity issues due to the delayed recruitment of the DO post and maintaining an accurate SCQF database.

RW then invited comments from the Board. SMcK asked if the Apprentices Transition Project was complete, noting that the uptake from apprentices was very low. JC confirmed it was, adding that a greater uptake was expected once furlough had ended and also SDS had only very recently contacted apprentices who had been made redundant since April 2021.

SMcK then noted that the Partnership had successfully continued with its operational plan despite the challenges of the past year. JC concurred however stressed that there were instances when the business had to adapt and divert away from the plan, for example to move workshops online or to take advantage of new opportunities that had arisen that would add value to the business. The Board then noted the update with RW paying credit to the Partnership team for ensuring the business had continued to operate with minimum disruption.

11. CEO Report

RW asked AP if there were any items in the paper that she would like to highlight. Discussing the planned formation of a 'hub' for the refugees and asylum seekers project AP elaborated that the skills and expertise to run the hub did not sit with any one organisation and the Partnership was currently in discussions with Scottish Government and GCU to look at the options available.

12. Impact measurement indicators 2020-21

RW introduced the paper, noting that it was not the best year to make comparisons given the impact of the pandemic therefore it was best not to draw too many conclusions from the PI's provided. AP agreed adding that the strategic plan currently covered the period up to 2022 therefore she proposed that a review of the plan took place at the December 2021 Board Meeting to cover the period 2022-25 and would include a review of the current PI's to which the Board agreed.

13. Board self-evaluation

RW began by stating that he had received three evaluations back from Members so far. The general theme was that the governance worked effectively, the Board was well supported through the papers it received and the meetings worked well with good contributions being made. There was one suggestion that the framework for getting Board evaluations back from Board members was tied back to a governance code and AP would look to put this in place.

14. Update from the SCQF Forum

The Board noted the update from the Forum.

15. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 9 June 2021 from 09.00 – 11.00.