

Minutes of the 61st SCQF Partnership Board held on Thursday 16 March 2023 at 13.00 via video conference and also at SCQF Partnership Conference Room, 201 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 2LW

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**Confirmed minutes for website**

**Members Present:**

Rob Wallen (RW)  
Jim Metcalfe (JM)  
Stuart McKenna (SMcK)  
Alastair Sim (AS)  
Fiona Robertson (FR)  
Malcolm Foley (MF)  
Alastair Delaney (AD)

Chair SCQF Partnership  
College Development Network  
STF  
Universities of Scotland  
SQA  
QC Chair  
QAA

**In Attendance:**

Pauline Radcliffe (PR)  
Sheila Dunn (SD) Items 1 - 6.4  
Laura Wilding Items 1 - 6.4  
Beverley Wallace (BW) (Secretariat) Items 1 - 6.4  
Stevie Boal (SB) Observer – Items 1 - 6.4

SCQF Partnership  
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Scottish Government

**Welcome and introductions**

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and recommended that, to allow SB to attend for Items 1 – 6.4 that Item 4. Skills Recognition Scotland Update be moved to follow Item 6.4 to which the Board agreed. SB joined the meeting at the point.

**Apologies for absence**

Apologies were given for Julie Cavanagh.

**Noting of any declaration of interest**

The Chair asked Directors if they wished to declare any conflict of interest relating to agenda items and none were noted.

**1. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2022**

The Chair asked Directors if they were happy that the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting. PR noted one inaccuracy in the second paragraph of Item 1, that stated a response from the Cabinet Secretary was expected early January 2023. This should have stated 'expected in Spring' 2023 and BW would amend this accordingly. The Board then accepted the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.

**ACTION**

Regarding the redacted minutes, the Board confirmed they were happy with the recommended redactions and the amendment to the SFC representative's name that was recorded incorrectly. This would also be amended in the complete version of the minutes.

**ACTION**

## **2. Matters Arising**

The Chair drew Directors attention to the paper on matters arising from the previous minutes and no additional matters were raised by PR. The Chair highlighted the positive outcome of the Partnership's Scottish Government funding bid – an increase of 10% in recognition of historic flat cash.

Regarding outstanding actions, PR informed Directors that the recording of hours spent on the shared lexicon project was still ongoing and updates would be provided in due course. It was noted that the action by JM to send some management account formats to LW had been completed. The Board then noted the actions carried forward and the progress on matters arising.

## **3. CEO update: First 90 days**

The Chair spoke to the report, highlighting the team's work in delivering business as usual through a period of change and extended staff absence.

Directors confirmed that they were content with the revised content, style and level of detail provided in the CEO update. They also noted the proposal that a narrative update would be developed for future reporting against the Operational Plan objectives on a quarterly basis to the Board.

## **4. Skills Recognition Scotland update (taken after item 6 on the agenda). Officers and the SG representative left the meeting for this item and the items that followed it)**

PR spoke to the paper and annexes, providing an update to Directors on developments following the additional Special Board meeting held on 13 February 2023.

A thorough discussion took place on the level of risk and benefits associated with each option.

Directors approved the option to agree to proceed as the nominated provider, subject to a number of conditions and instructed the Chair to write to the Minister.

**ACTION**

## **5.1 Management Accounts 2022 – 23 Quarter 3**

The Chair invited LW to provide an update on the management accounts. LW reported that the forecast deficit was still well within the additional spend agreed and that, having completed February 2023 Management Accounts, she could confirm that the deficit had been reduced further due to significant savings made on overheads. LW also highlighted a number of small accruals to next year's budget from projects nearing completion.

Referring to a request at the previous Board meeting to change the format of the Management Accounts, LW hoped to present a new KPI dashboard and a streamlined version of the accounts at the June 2023 Board meeting. The Board then approved the Q3 Management Accounts.

**ACTION**

## **5.2 Audit and Risk committee: draft minute**

The Chair spoke to the minutes of the February 2023 Audit and Risk Committee which were noted by the Board. The Chair finished by acknowledging the time and commitment provided by the Chair of Audit and Risk, the Depute Principal for Finance and Infrastructure at Forth Valley College.

### 5.3 Risk Register update

PR spoke to the update, noting that a request at the last Board meeting to add cyber-security and cyber-attacks to the risk register had been actioned and taken to Audit and Risk Committee for approval. Whilst the committee were happy with the mitigations already in place, PR noted that they also requested that staff training and awareness be included in mitigations. It was further noted that BW now planned to create a Cyber-attack Response Plan as an extension to the current Business Continuity Plan, in response to recent training.

The Chair ran through the risks for which the scores had changed since last quarter and the Board approved the Risk Register. Directors agreed that future quarterly reporting to the Board should focus solely on the Risk Register itself, but that the CEO would report annually on proposed amendments to the full Risk process and strategy. It was also agreed that Risk 3 should be removed altogether, following a satisfactory outcome of the review of the flexible working model in June 2023.

### ACTION

### 5.4 Budget

PR informed Directors that a balanced budget had been proposed and highlighted the following:

- although not formally confirmed funding from SFC was expected to be flat cash;
- the 5.5% increase in direct costs reflected the Partnership's strategic priorities and proposed operational goals for 23/24;
- the small increase in the Digital marketing line was to help drive traffic to the website through promotional videos and social media presence.

A Research & Evaluation budget of £20,000, to fund externally commissioned evaluation activity was something that only occasionally took place however given the current changes to the educational landscape it was deemed a pertinent time to undertake such an activity.

The Chair then asked Directors to note the final bullet point in Annex 1 of the budget paper, saying that the budget had been drafted on the assumption that the higher proposed cost of living increase to salaries as detailed in Item 7.2 would be approved. The Board then approved the budget for 2023/24.

### 5.1 Operational Objectives 2023-24

PR began by talking Directors through a proposed new way of streamlining reporting against the Operational Plan as detailed in the paper. A higher-level quarterly report would be provided to both Audit and Risk Committee and the Board, which would report on operational objective delivery and key milestones achieved.

Directors commented on the plan presented (Annex 1) with the consensus being that the level of detail was appropriate, provided that the CEO paper was utilised to report any disconnect between the detailed work plan and the higher level plan brought to the Board. The Board then approved the Operational Objectives subject to the full revised reporting format being presented to June Board 2023.

The Chair then highlighted strategic priority 5 in the Operational Objectives that related to supporting the delivery of policies and initiatives which supported and promoted the recognition of skills and a diverse range of learner pathways. Directors were asked to bear this commitment in mind when discussing Item 4.

## **6.1 Report from Quality Committee**

There were no particular areas to highlight from the Quality Committee report out with the items covered in 6.2 and 6.3. The Board noted the general business conducted by the Quality Committee.

## **6.2 EduQual as approved CRB**

MF informed Directors that following a detailed discussion the Quality Committee had recommended that EduQual be approved as a new CRB. SD then provided Directors with some background information regarding EduQual and drew attention to the set of conditions imposed, as detailed in the paper, stressing that EduQual would not be able to start credit rating until they had met those conditions satisfactorily. The Board then approved Quality Committee's recommendation that EduQual be approved as a SCQFP Approved Credit Rating Body. Arrangements for lifting the conditions to allow credit rating to commence would be delegated to the Chair of the Quality Committee and Management Team.

## **6.3 Revised Approved CRB fees policy**

A review of the CRB fees had taken place that showed income received from CRB fees fell short of the costs of carrying out assessment and monitoring of CRBs. Following an in-depth discussion at the Quality Committee three options were considered as detailed in the paper, with option 3 (a subscription based model) being recommended to the Board. A discussion then took place around the impact of implementing option 3. The Board then ratified the Quality Committee's recommendation that the fee structure should change, subject to an impact assessment being carried out before implementation.

**ACTION**

## **6.1 SCQFP Qualifications publications: new and revised**

SD updated Directors on the background and progress of both the 'Naming Qualifications and Learning Programmes for the SCQF' and the 'SCQFP Guide to Qualifications of Ukraine' documents as detailed in the paper.

Referring to the naming qualifications paper, SD informed Directors that clarification had now been received from SQA regarding an outstanding issue around the use of titles of award, certificate and diploma. As a result, the paragraph relating to this would be removed.

Regarding the Ukrainian qualifications document, SD was still trying to source a contact who had experience in the Ukrainian education system/qualifications who could check the document for accuracy. Directors commended this work and confirmed that there would be a good deal of interest in the publication. AD indicated that QAA had good contacts within the Ukrainian HE quality agency should SD need further help. The Board then noted the two publications.

## **7.1 People Update**

PR provided an oral update on people and human resource matters since taking up the post of Chief Executive in mid-December. RW further updated Directors on his meeting with staff prior to the Board meeting. Directors noted the updates.

## **7.2 Salary and Benefits Benchmarking Review, including cost of living consideration**

PR spoke to the paper which summarised the results of a salary and benefits benchmarking review and proposed a number of salary increases based on the analysis provided to bring salaries into

line with the market. Directors approved these increases, noting that all staff had successfully completed their performance management reviews.

Directors also considered the proposal to award all staff (excepting the Chief Executive) with a 4% cost of living increase and approved the increase to take effect from 1 April 2023. Directors further noted that the benefits benchmarking exercise demonstrated that staff benefited from a relatively strong benefits package when compared to other third sector organisations.

### **7.3 Remuneration Policy**

PR introduced the paper which proposed that the Partnership agreed a Remuneration Policy for all staff to enhance transparency on the processes applied to decision making on pay, including performance. Directors asked PR to further consider the approach to performance-related pay which should be brought to the June 2023 Board for further scrutiny. Directors further agreed that PR should consult with FR to agree a simplified Remuneration Policy for circulation to staff.

**ACTION**

### **7.4 IIP recommendations: quick wins**

PR reminded Directors of the Partnership's recent award of IIP Gold enhanced status and outlined that a sub-group of staff were further considering recommendations made within the report, with an initial focus on staff benefits and remuneration. PR also proposed, based on staff feedback, that a long service award of an additional days' service be added for that year only to individual staff members' annual leave entitlement. Discussion took place on the limitations of such a rewards approach and Directors agreed that an additional day's leave be added to annual leave entitlement for the year when the staff member reaches 10 years' service, but invited the CEO to consider more meaningful ways of rewarding team members.

### **7.5 Board self-evaluation and development actions**

The paper detailed the responses of an annual board self-evaluation survey to which 5 out of 6 directors had responded, whilst also reflecting some of the points made in 1:1 Introductory conversations with the new CEO. Areas identified for strengthening Board performance were: for the executive to take a more strategic focus on items brought before the Board for discussion to enable greater strategic leadership; and to support improvements to Directors' understanding of the Partnership's full range of services and their responsibilities as charity trustees.

Directors noted that the agenda had been re-structured to emphasise strategic items with an emphasis on items for approval rather than for information. Directors further agreed that a Board development day should be held annually to enable in-depth discussion of key strategic priorities, which would be followed by a social/dinner for those attending. Directors asked that where an Alternate Director was also appointed (see 7.6) they should also attend. It was agreed that the first half day development day would take place on 13 September, on the same date at the scheduled Board meeting.

**ACTION**

### **7.6 Appointment of alternate directors**

Two directors had raised their concerns that the current practice of Chief Executives of the organisations representing the Partnership having to serve on the Board did not necessarily lend itself to the most appropriate oversight of SCQFP business, where knowledge and skills of the postholders did not necessarily align with the subject matter under consideration. PR spoke to a paper which outlined the provisions of the current Articles of Association, which whilst necessitating the appointment of Chief Executives of the Partner organisations to the Board, also allowed for the appointment of Alternate Directors where they were unable to attend.

Directors therefore approved the appointment of Kirsty Conlon as the Alternate Director for Universities Scotland and noted that Gill Stewart acted as the Alternate Director for Scottish Qualifications Authority, whilst the new Chief Executive of CDN would consider whether to appoint, as appropriate.

#### **7.7 Board forward agenda plan 2023-24**

PR spoke to a brief paper providing a forward plan of business for Directors' consideration over the next financial reporting year. It was agreed that Directors should be free to suggest appropriate future agenda items and that the agenda would change, as priorities emerged. The forward plan and the proposal to bring it, with any proposed revision, to each Board meeting, was approved.

#### **7.8 Timeline and process for recruitment of new Chair**

Directors noted that the current Chair RW would retire in December 2023, having extended his appointment for 1 year to enable the smooth transition of the new CEO. PR proposed that a short-life Nominations Committee be established, supported by the CEO and administrative team, comprising 2 members of the Board, one being an Appointed Director, to recruit the incoming independent Chair. SMcK offered to act on the short-life Committee as a co-opted Director. Directors approved the Terms of Reference for the committee and a draft timeline for recruitment concluding in Summer 2023, with the preferred candidate attending the 13 September 2023 Board meeting and development day as an observer. The Nominations committee would aim to hold its inaugural meeting in April 2023.

#### **ACTION**

#### **8. AOB**

RW noted that this was the last meeting for JM as Director, who was shortly to leave his post as Chief Executive of College Development Network and commence the role of Principal and Chief Executive of Fife College. RW, PR and all colleagues thanked JM for his service on the Board and wished him well in his new role.

#### **9. Date of next meeting**

15 June 2023 from 09.00 – 11.00