

Minutes of the 57th SCQF Partnership Board held on Thursday 17 March 2022 at 09.00 via video conference and also at SCQF Partnership Conference Room, 201 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 2LW

Confirmed

Present:

Rob Wallen (RW)	Chair SCQF Partnership
Jim Metcalfe (JM)	College Development Network
Stuart McKenna (SMcK)	STF
Alastair Sim (AS)	Universities of Scotland
Fiona Robertson (FR)	SQA
Malcolm Foley (MF)	QC Chair
Alastair Delaney (AD)	QAA
Pauline Radcliffe (PR) Observer	Scottish Government

In Attendance:

Aileen Ponton (AP)	SCQF Partnership
Julie Cavanagh (JC)	SCQF Partnership
Sheila Dunn (SD)	SCQF Partnership
Jim Godfrey (JG) Items 1-7	SCQF Partnership Consultant
Beverley Wallace (BW) (Secretariat)	SCQF Partnership

Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and reminded Directors that JG was attending in his temporary role within the Partnership overseeing the Management Accounts.

Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence however it was noted PR was delayed.

Register of Interests

The Chair 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

The Chair 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 08 December 2021

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

The Chair then talked through the redacted minutes and the Directors agreed to the redactions in Item 4 and Item 6 and agreed that Item 9 could be left un-redacted.

Referring to Item 5b which had been fully redacted, the Chair suggested leaving in a few sentences to indicate that the item had been discussed. Directors agreed and following a brief discussion it was noted that it was important to have continuity in the minutes regarding the naming of CRBs.

2. Matters Arising

The Chair highlighted the matters arising from the previous minutes and no additional matters were raised by AP.

Referring to Item 5b, the Chair asked if a response had been received from CGLI regarding the letter that had been sent on behalf of the Board. AP explained a response had been received, albeit not a formal one and as a result meetings had taken place and this would be discussed in more detail in Item 7. PR joined the meeting at this point.

SMcK asked in relation to Item 4, how discussions had gone with SFC regarding the carry forward of funds. AP responded, saying having followed the Boards guidance in terms of the approach to take the matter had been resolved smoothly. The Board then noted the matters arising.

3. Management Accounts 2021 – 22 Quarter 3

The Chair invited JG to provide an update on the management accounts. In addition to the areas highlighted in the paper, JG informed Directors that there was a small forecasted surplus showing in the Q3 accounts. The confirmed SFC carry forward figure had now been reflected in the budget and the forecast outturn for 2021-22 and therefore moved the budget into a forecast deficit for Q4. However, as the year end approached a break even position was looking more likely, with the budget on track to meet expectations. AP added that the carry forward was ring-fenced for specific projects and therefore would be carried forward as restricted funds.

Regarding the decision not to charge delegates to attend the 2022 SCQF Partnership conference, AP explained that the decision was based purely on the fact that the conference had moved online and did not form part of any new policy. Charging would be re-introduced should the conference move back to being in-person. The Board then approved the Q3 management accounts.

4. Strategic Plan 2022-25

AP provided a brief background to the development of the 2022-25 strategic plan as detailed in the paper, adding that PR had contributed to the text relating to the Ken Muir report. Directors indicated they were satisfied with the paragraph relating to the Ken Muir report and approved the plan for publication.

5. Operational Plan and Budget 2022 – 23

AP began by highlighting to Directors that the Operational Plan had been aligned with the strategic plan and then provided Directors with an update as detailed in the paper.

JG then gave a brief overview of the 2022-23 budget. Asked what the projected reserves position would be at the end of 2022-23, JG explained it remained unchanged from the start of the financial year, equating to around 4-5 months of running costs. JG also clarified that the reason forecast figures were missing from 2 of the insurance lines was due to all 3 insurance lines being merged into one.

Asked if inflation had been taken into account when producing the budget, especially in relation to energy costs, JG confirmed this had been factored in. AP added that heating was included in the landlord's service charge and there was a possibility that the service charge would increase during the financial year but this was currently an unknown, but that the budget line had nevertheless been increased in expectation that this would be the case.

Moving on to the operational plan, AP provided an explanation around how success was specifically measured, as it was observed that some of the measurements of success detailed in the plan were at a very high level. She explained that a set of performance indicators were used and these would normally be brought to the March Board however a decision to delay them for 2021-22 had been made to ensure they reflected a full 12-month period. They would then be brought to the June Board. The Board then approved both the Operational Plan and Budget for 2022-23.

6. Report from the Audit and Risk Committee

The Chair talked through the highlights of the ARC as detailed in the paper. In relation to the audit plan, this would again take place virtually as it had worked well in the previous years.

The Chair then brought Directors' attention to the flexible working policy trial that was underway. AP provided a recap of the policy and how the trial was progressing. A discussion then followed around the importance of flexibility, as some aspects of the business worked better online whilst others lent themselves more to face-to-face interactions. This flexibility was also important for individual team members who had differing needs and preferred ways of working.

Asked about maintaining the duty of care, AP explained that health and wellbeing had been at the forefront of the business last year and the policy had been developed to reflect this, allowing staff to work in a way that suited them whilst continuing to function as a business effectively. JC and SD commented positively about the support that had been, and continued to be, provided, saying the policy had been well received by the team. The Chair concurred, saying staff had given him a clear message that they felt well supported during a recent meeting.

Directors were then provided with an update on the risk register as detailed in the paper. Currently all of 2022-23 risks were sitting at amber; however a clearer picture would emerge once the risk strategy had been updated for May's ARC and this would be brought to the Board in June. The Board then: approved the risk management strategy; noted the progress on the workplan; noted the audit plan; and noted the progress on the Flexible Working Policy.

7. Report from Quality Committee

The Chair invited MF to highlight any key areas from Quality Committee report. MF provided a brief update, highlighting the approval of the annual monitoring reports from SFRS and ASET. He acknowledged the difficult circumstances under which SPSC had been working due to the pandemic and highlighted to the Board that its continuation as a CRB had been approved but with conditions and this would be picked up in item 7a.

In relation to the fees policy, the main reason for not increasing the fees was the decision to continue using a blended approach when conducting reviews rather than reverting back to physical visits, with MF adding that he was confident the reviews would remain as effective using this approach. The Board was happy to approve no changes to the fees and noted the general business conducted by the Quality Committee.

SD then provided an update on CGLI's decision to relinquish its SCQFP CRB status. A set of key actions had been agreed following a meeting between SCQFP and CGLI and these were detailed in the QC minutes. Following a discussion, the Board asked AP and SD to convey to CGLI that they wished to retain the joint statement drafted by the Partnership; however it was happy for CGLI to publish its own separate marketing messages should they wish to do so. JG then left the meeting.

7a. SPSC Periodic Review Report

SD provided Directors with a summary of the review findings, risk ratings, recommendations and conditions.

The recommendation was that SPSC could continue as a SCQFP Credit Rating Body subject to a set of conditions and a strengthening of the first condition (as detailed in the textual amendment to the conditions on page 1 of the report). Addressing concerns around the amber risk rating that had been given in the report, SD explained that the amber risk rating was mostly related to SPSC's capacity to take on any more credit rating. MF said that SPSC had been very open and transparent throughout the review process and felt reassured that improvements could be made as long as SPSC acted on the conditions and recommendations laid out in the report.

The Board then approved the Quality Committee's recommendation that SPSC continued as an SCQFP Credit Rating Body and agreed to the strengthening of the first conditions detailed on page 1 of the report.

12. Update on Conference for 2022

JC provided a brief update on the conference, informing Directors that plans were progressing well. 286 delegates had registered to date with registrations closing on Friday 18 March. JC then talked through the agenda, highlighting that there would be a slight amendment to timings for the Cabinet Secretary who would now deliver a pre-recorded message due to factors relating to timing and security. The Board then noted the progress in organising the conference.

9. CEO Report

The Chair asked AP if there were any items in the paper that she would like to highlight. As mentioned in Item 5, a set of Performance Indicators for 2021-22 were due to be brought to the March Board; however a decision had been made to delay the paper until June 2022 to allow for a full analysis of the year, including an analysis of the conference.

AP then invited SD and JC to provide updates on: the inclusion of SCQF Level 6 programmes in the UCAS Tariff Tables; feedback on the new quality assurance review model and hybrid approach; the Learning for Sustainability project; and the new 'Know Your Level' tool in the SCQF Interactive Framework.

In addition to the information provided in the paper, some further detail was provided as follows:

- a joint communication was in development regarding the inclusion of SCQF Level 6 programmes in the UCAS Tariff Tables;
- the requirement to provide Scottish registration details as evidence as part of the CRB review process would be reviewed;
- excellent practice boxes were no longer being included in Annual Monitoring reports;
- initial feedback to the 'Know Your Level' tool had been very positive.

FR commented that SQA was also involved with the Learning for Sustainability project and felt that it would be beneficial for the Partnership and SQA to meet to discuss the project going forward. AP confirmed that at this point the piece of work for Scottish Government was looking at non SQA awards but the final report with recommendations would highlight the potential for discussing linkages with SQA provision and inclusion of SQA provision marked in the SCQF database.

PR highlighted that SDS was keen to engage more with the Partnership, especially around work-based learning projects such as the Inclusive Recruiter campaign and 'Know Your Level' tool and would put JC in touch with the relevant members of staff at SDS. The Board then noted the CEO report.

11. Board self-evaluation

The Chair reported that the evaluations received had all indicated that the Board was working effectively in relation to: the quality of Board papers; the management of and contributions to meetings; the level of scrutiny provided by the Board; and the extent to which the Board was compliant with the Code of Good Governance. It was noted that therefore the evaluation process indicated no change was needed in the way the Board and Board meetings operated.

In relation to the evaluation process itself, it was suggested that in future years the process of collecting the evaluations could be anonymised, and it was agreed that that would be appropriate.

8. Performance appraisal and remuneration

Following a discussion it was agreed to adopt the salary increases proposed in the paper. It was also agreed to adopt the new daily rate for the Chair.

10. Considerations for CEO recruitment 2022

The Board agreed their preferred approach in terms of:

- recruitment consultancy;
- establishing a remuneration package for the post, based on benchmarking;
- job description and person specification;
- the type of selection process;
- the involvement of Board members and staff in the process.

The Chair was asked to finalise the decision regarding the recruitment consultancy.

It was noted that preferably the selection process should include the involvement of a range of Board members and staff.

13. Any other business

There was no other business discussed.

14. Date of next meeting

Thursday 9 June 2021 from 09.00 – 11.00.