Minutes of the 73rd SCQF Partnership Board held on Thursday 26th March 2026 at 10.00am online and at Level 3 meeting room, 177 West George Street, Glasgow G2 2LB

Members Present:	**Confirmed**
John Evans (JE)	Chair of SCQF Partnership
Nick Page (NP)	Qualifications Scotland
Rob Stroud (RS)	QAA
Claire McPherson (CMc)	Universities Scotland
Marie Hendry (MH)	College Development Network
Gillian Brydson (GB)	Co-opted Director & Chair of QC
Ross Short (RSH)	Co-opted Director
Martin Jones (MJ)	Co-opted Director
Mhairi Hay (MHA)	Co-opted Director

In Attendance:

Laura Wilding (LW) *for items 1.1 to 5.2*	SCQF Partnership
Marissa Lippiatt (ML) *for items 1.1 to 5.2*	SCQF Partnership
Donnie Wood (DW) *for items 1.1 to 5.2*	SCQF Partnership
Ghayoor Abbas (GA) *for items 1.1 to 5.2*	SCQF Partnership
Susan Lauder (SL) (Secretariat) *for items 1.1 to 5.2*	SCQF Partnership
Maureen Boyle (MB) *for items 1.1 to* 2.5	SCQF Partnership
Samantha Houten Feeley (SHF) *for items 1.1 to 2.5*	SCQF Partnership
Lynda Short (LS) *for items 1.1. to 2.5*	SCQF Partnership
William Quinn (WQ) Observer *for items 1.1 to 2.5*	Scottish Government

Apologies:

Naureen Ahmad (NA)	Scottish Government

Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and welcomed ML to her first Board meeting as interim CEO for SCQFP.

Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

1.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2026

The Board confirmed they were satisfied the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting.

The minutes and redactions were approved.

1.2 Matters arising & action list review

Matters arising from minutes dated 29 January 2026 ongoing/outstanding actions were highlighted:

JE advised a new risk register and risk assessment approach would be added to the October Board forward agenda for future consideration.

ACTION

ML would set up meetings with Board partners to discuss shared messaging, and the outcome would now be shared at the June Board meeting.

ACTION

JE advised a date for the postponed Board development day had still to be arranged.

ACTION

ML advised the new strategic plan was on track to be published on the SCQFP website before 1st April 2026.

ACTION

It was agreed that Board partner collaboration on key themes arising from SG publications and reforms would be carried forward.

ACTION

ML stated an update had been received from SG regarding requirement for SCQFP representation within the Strategic Leadership Group regarding the Workforce Development piece.

DW would provide an update on conversations within the Joint Articulation Group later in the agenda.

It was agreed the action regarding DW obtaining an update from SG on providing a link regarding employer engagement priority sectors in relation to work being undertaken for offshore wind would be carried forward.

ACTION

It was agreed the action regarding MH and RS to provide ML with information regarding streamlined reports produced for their respective Board meetings would be carried forward.

ACTION

Update on phase 1 of digital strategy would be provided under agenda item 2.2

Outcome of salary benchmarking exercise to be added to June agenda.

ACTION

GA confirmed work had begun on seeking legal advice regarding data sharing/data protection relating to current contracts for the SCQF Register and would provide an update on this when available.

ACTION

It was agreed that a summary of progress on SFC deliverables as set out in the grant letter would be given in Q3.

ACTION

DW would provide an update on the RPL project under agenda item 2.5.

ML stated the retainer agreement for the HR service provider was under review and confirmed the number of days, 1 per month, appeared sufficient at this point.

1.3 1-minute Director updates

JE introduced this item. Directors provided updates on current and future priorities for their sector/ organisations.

It was agreed to take items under section 3 next as GB required to leave the meeting at 11am.

3.1a (draft) Report from Quality Committee Chair
3.1b Minute of meeting from 12th March 2026

Both items were taken as read and noted.

3.2 Progress report on SFRS action plan

GA spoke to the paper and provided an update on progress.

It was agreed that support should continue and a full report be presented to the June Board meeting.

ACTION

3.3 Update on Approved CRB applications

GA spoke to the paper and advised the reviewers' report for the NPC had been presented to the Quality Committee on 12th March

The Board approved the application with the conditions set out by the Quality Committee.

3.4a Review of SCQFP Credit Rating Body Approval & Fees Policy

GB spoke to the paper and advised a discussion had taken place at the Quality Committee. GB stated the consensus was that the fees policy should be for Board approval as it lay out with the Terms of Reference of the Quality Committee.

The Board approved the proposed increase in fees.

3.4b External Reviewers Fees Review

GA spoke to the paper which proposed an increase regarding the fees paid to external reviewers. GA indicated there would be a requirement for 3 external reviews within the next financial year.

The Board approved the proposed increase to fees paid to external reviewers.

1.4 CEO update

ML began the update by stating overall morale within the SCQFP team was good. ML indicated with year end approaching focus would be on ending the year in a strong position and work would begin on planning for 26/27.

ML stated ARC had identified a potential risk relating to the backfill of the Head of Operations role and this would be covered in more detail under item 4.4 of the agenda. ML advised she and the Chair were meeting on a regular basis meaning any identified risks could be actioned quickly to reduce any possible impact on delivery.

ML advised discussions had taken place with Scottish Government regarding the funding application for 26/27. ML stated the next step would be to submit further detail to SG but the timing for grant approval was understood. ML indicated currently there were no issues for SCQFP in terms of cash flow should there be any delay with the grant funding.

ML stated further information on key objectives including the National System for RPL, the SCQFPs Digital and Comms & Marketing strategies would be covered later in the agenda.

2.1 Progress report on delivery of operational objectives Q4

ML spoke to the paper which sought to update Directors on the progress of the organisation's operational objectives at the end of Q4.

ML stated good progress had been made across all operational objectives with all 6 high level objectives showing green. Of the 27 deliverables being tracked through SmartSuite 93% had been attributed a green status, 4% amber and 4% red.

ML advised the red/amber ratings had been due to capacity issues internally and by competing demands within external partner organisations.

The Board noted the progress on the delivery of objectives at the end of Q4.

2.2 Update on Phase 1 of Digital Strategy

MB spoke to the paper which updated the Board on delivery of year 1 of the Digital Strategy with a focus on achievements to date, strategic challenges and future opportunities.

MB provided a presentation to summarise the points outlined above.

MB stated the strategic challenges and opportunities included:

- Clarification on data sharing and ownership particularly in relation to the evolution of the Register.
- A broad project portfolio that required to be prioritised and aligned to impact and available resource.
- Data driven decision making would improve reporting and inform performance, impact and strategy.
- Exploring emerging technologies and collaborations would support learning, employability and wider system impact.

MB advised the main priority would be to ensure investment in new systems translated into measurable organisational and stakeholder benefit.

A short discussion took place regarding update of the register and timeline for completion.GA stated a timeline of approximately18 months had been given for completion of this work, dependent upon budget and capacity to complete the tasks.

The Board noted the progress of the first phase of the digital strategy and the priorities for the next phase of delivery.

2.3 Review of Comms & Marketing Strategy 2026 - 2027
2.4 25th Anniversary plans, milestones & budget re Conference 26

LS spoke to the paper and advised the timeline for the strategy had been brought into line with the financial year. LS stated the refreshed strategy had been built on activities and learning from July 2025 to March 2026 and the previous 12 months.

LS provided a presentation to summarise the key points of the strategy, its purpose, the key areas of focus for the coming year and its proposed performance targets.

LS advised the 2 overarching themes driving activity in 26/27 would be:

- All Learning Counts – to reinforce the Partnership's focus on Equity, Access and Mobility.
- 25 years of the SCQF – to celebrate the framework's anniversary as a cornerstone of Scotland's lifelong learning system.

LS explained within the strategy there were 4 focused sub strategies each with its own purpose, audiences and content plan aligned to the strategic pillars and themes. These included:

- SCQFP Board Marketing Strategy
- RPL Marketing Strategy
- SCQF: 25 in 2026 Marketing Strategy
- Public Affairs Plan

LS highlighted key work and achievements from 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026.

A short discussion took place regarding return of investment on paid campaigns. LS stated lessons learned from each campaign informs and shapes each subsequent campaign to ensure maximum impact is achieved.

LS outlined the Board marketing strategy which sought to show the people behind the strategic decisions at SCQFP to enhance reliability as well as highlight the expertise and diversity of experience with the Board and Committees.

LS then provided an overview of the RPL marketing strategy which sought to raise national awareness and understanding of RPL and increase uptake across learners, employers and providers.

It was agreed a schedule would be created regarding commitment required from the Board in relation to the marketing strategy to ensure this is able to be completed alongside their other work commitments.

ACTION

A short discussion took place about ensuring messaging isn't overwhelming for target audiences and whether, particularly in terms of public service reform, there would be a way to link and align approaches. LS indicated collaboration would be helpful and advised she attended a comms & marketing stakeholder group which included members from Education Scotland and Qualifications Scotland along with many others. LS agreed to raise this topic at a future meeting.

ACTION

SHF spoke to the SCQF at 25 marketing strategy which presented a significant opportunity to amplify messaging to all audiences. SHF indicated there would be 3 main events planned for the year including a study visit in partnership with the British Council taking place at the end of May, a headline conference event in September hosted at the Science Centre in Glasgow and then a parliamentary reception in early February 2027.

SHF advised plans were well under way for the British Council event with many countries already indicating notes of interest on attendance. SHF stated planning had also begun for the September conference and support/input from the Board would be welcomed to help shape the event.

It was agreed the Board with liaise with SHF regarding availability re attendance at the September conference and provide input/support where appropriate.

ACTION

Finally SHF spoke to the Public Affairs Plan which would concentrate on increasing SCQFP collaboration with policy makers, parliamentarians and employers.

All strategies outlined in the paper as well as plans for the SCQF 25th Anniversary celebrations were approved by the Board.

2.5 National System for RPL Project – Progress Update

DW spoke to the paper and provided a presentation to update the Board on the status of the National System for RPL project.

DW stated SCQFP had worked incredibly hard in collaboration with its consultants and the RPL steering group to ensure that all Scottish Government objectives were delivered and work around RPL had been maximised.

DW provided an overview of the project milestones and stated all outcomes were on track for completion with no risks identified. DW advised a full report would be presented to SG on Tuesday 31st March which would mark the end of the funded project.

A short discussion took place regarding whether the timeline given to the steering group regarding final comments on the report was too ambitious. DW advised draft copies of the reports had been sent to the steering group a week in advance and therefore the discussion focused on final tweaks to the report.

WQ provided positive feedback from SG regarding the range of resources produced within the time period and acknowledged that the project was on track for completion by the deadline agreed.

DW would circulate to the Board members when available.

ACTION

GB left the meeting at this point.

4.1 Management Accounts

LW spoke to the paper for the first 11 months of 25/26 and highlighted the forecast deficit for year-end would be lower compared to the budgeted deficit.

LW provided an overview of income throughout the year, direct cost breakdown as well as information on overhead spends.

LW stated the Senior Leadership Team had reviewed their expenditure, compared to budget for the Financial Year.

The Management Accounts were approved by the Board.

4.2 26/27 budget including pay proposal & update on salary benchmarking exercise

LW spoke to the paper and stated the draft budget had been approved by the ARC for presentation to the Board.

LW provided an overview of the draft budget for 26/27 and advised it had been based on current knowledge and estimates of the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council's strategic objectives for the Partnership for the new financial year.

LW highlighted work was underway in collaboration with the ARC on development of a 3 year plan to achieve a balance budget position to be presented to the Board at their June meeting.

ACTION

A discussion took place regarding the draft budget having a forecasted deficit for a second year however noted LW's comment regarding the work being undertaken with ARC regarding the proposed balancing of the budget.

A discussion took place regarding the presentation of the budget in relation to SFC funding which made it difficult for some Board members to fully evaluate the figures provided in the budget. LW advised SFC funding worked on the academic year as opposed to the financial year.

LW would draft a table to better explain the position regarding SFC funding and disseminate this to the Board.

ACTION

It was agreed for the Board to convene by Teams after the Easter holidays to discuss the budget and submit their approval by email.

ACTION

4.3a Audit & Risk Committee: draft minutes from meeting 2nd March 2026

MJ spoke to the paper and indicated there had been nothing from the ARC business which warranted Board discussion with exception of the updated Terms of Reference which would be covered under the next agenda item.

The minutes were taken as read.

4.3b Updated ToR for ARC

MJ spoke to the paper and indicated the changes had been highlighted in red.

MJ drew particular attention to the section regarding membership and the Chair of ARC and stated the committee agreed it would be essential for the person recruited to that position have a proper financial background. MJ indicated further discussion would be required as to where the ARC Chair sat in terms of their position on the Board.

ACTION

The updated Terms of Reference for the ARC committee were approved.

4.4 Risk Register update

MJ spoke to the paper and provided an overview of the changes that had been made namely:

- Removal of a long standing low risk item – MJ stated a footnote had been added to the register which addressed the removal.
- Addition of a new risk regarding the workload of the interim CEO as well as impact on delivery of objectives if the position of Head of Operations was not backfilled.

ML provided an update on the new risk and advised a temporary internal post would be promoted to address this. ML indicated this would result in a temporary re-structure which would make things more streamlined. ML stated this would be monitored to ensure risk impact was minimalised.

The Risk Register was approved by the Board.

4.5 Review of Cyber Security Incident Response Plan

SL spoke to the paper and provided an overview of the changes which had been implemented following previous Board discussion regarding recommendations made by the Cyber & Fraud Centre Scotland.

SL advised all recommendations had been implemented within the timescale indicated. Furthermore SL stated cyber-attach tests had been reintroduced with the first being carried out in December 2025. SL indicated a full annual security review report would be produced by the Partnership's IT service provided and would be presented to the Board at the June meeting.

ACTION

The updated Cyber Security Incident Response Plan was approved.

4.6 Updated Flexible Working Policy

ML spoke to the paper and provided an overview of the changes which had been made. ML drew particular attention to the section regarding number of days to be worked in the office and that core hours were now stipulated in the Policy.

MH stated the policy had been sent to the SCQFP staff team with a few comments regarding potential impact on contract changes as a result of the amendments which had been addressed in collaboration with the Partnership's HR service provider.

The Board approved the updated Flexible Working Policy.

5.1 Forward agenda

JE spoke to the paper which provided information on the agenda for the June Board meeting.

It was agreed that a discussion regarding the grant letter from Scottish Government would be added in to the June agenda in the context of SCQFP objective setting.

ACTION

The Forward Agenda was agreed.

5.2 AOB

Recruitment of ARC Chair

JE provided an update and advised the decision had been made to engage with a recruitment agenda who specialised in recruitment of Board members and trustees in order to expedite conclusion of this matter.

It was agreed JE would provide an update on the associated costs for this and make a decision on whether to proceed or whether a tender process required to be undertaken.

ACTION

The SCQFP staff left the meeting at this point.

6.1 Governance Review/Board Development Day

It was agreed that JE would draft and circulate Terms of Reference for a Governance Review..
ACTION

6.2 Ratification of appointment of interim CEO

The appointment of Head of Operations as Interim CEO was ratified unanimously**.**

Date of next meeting

Tuesday 30th June 2026 177 West George Street, Glasgow/hybrid