Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

Meeting:	Advisory Board
Date:	13/03/2025
Time:	10:00:13:00
Details:	MS Teams/Optima

Minute

Members	In attendance
Gillian Hamilton (Chair)	[Redacted] (item 8)
Janie McManus	[Redacted] (item 10)
Ollie Bray	[Redacted] (observe)
Gill Ritchie	
Rob Strachan	
David Gemmell	**Governance**
Lyndsay McRoberts	[Redacted]
Aileen Ponton	[Redacted] (secretariat)
Apologies	
David Gregory	
Patricia Watson	

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to Advisory Board and extended a warm welcome to [Redacted] who was there to observe.

1.2 Apologies were noted from Dave Gregory and Patricia Watson.

1.3 The Chair informed the Board that John Fyffe and Kevin Kelman had stepped down from Advisory Board. It had been decided to merge the Advisory Board with the Audit and Risk Committee on an interim basis, in advance of new Governance approaches being stood up for the new organisations. The Director General had been formally notified to ensure all due processes had been followed.

1.4 It was noted that Aileen Ponton had agreed to Chair the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) and Lyndsay McRoberts would become a member.

2. Previous meeting

2.1 The Board agreed the minutes from the meeting of 30 January 2025.

2.2 The following action log updates were also noted:

AB 31	How best to utilise Strategic Discussion sessions going forward.	Overtaken by events – (interim merging of AB and ARC) – review at a later date. Action to remain open.
AB 35	MI, Q1 24-25 report – Explore the nature of enquiries.	Ongoing. Action open.
AB 37	Further Chief Executive updates issued via email.	Action closed.

AB 38	Curriculum Improvement Cycle slides shared with Board.	Action closed.

3. Declarations of interest

3.1 No declarations to report.

4. Update from the Chief Executive

4.1 The Chair advised that Joe Griffin had been appointed Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government and would take up the role in April 2025.

4.2 It was noted that Fiona Robertson had resigned as Chief Executive from SQA and John Booth had been appointed Interim Chief Executive, with Donna Stewart taking up the role of Chief Examining Officer.

4.4 The Chair provided an update on the Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC) and thanked Ollie Bray and his team for the significant external engagement work that had been carried out thus far. It was noted that the third paper for the CIC would be published in April 2025 and a regular update is provided to staff in the weekly e-bulletin.

4.6 The Chair also highlighted the significant amount of work that focused on improving attendance in schools. It was noted that the work taken forward by [Redacted] and team had influenced the changes on the SG data published fortnightly.

4.7 Improvements had been made with the new Oracle Cloud system but there are still some issues with HR and Finance. Specific concerns around finance and payroll reporting had been escalated to Scottish Government.

4.8 ES have continued to support internal professional learning for staff and recently held an ES Equalities Symposium. There were 12 sessions across five days with a mixture of facilitated sessions and self-directed learning opportunities for staff to attend.

5. Update from the Chief Inspector of Education

5.1 The Chief Inspector of Education, Janie McManus provided the following updates.

5.2 The National Thematic Inspection Report – Local Authority Approaches to School Improvement had published on 11 March 2025. A brief overview of the report was given and it was agreed that the inspection team would be invited to a future meeting to discuss the findings and next steps.

ACTION: National Thematic Inspection Report to be shared with Board members – [Redacted].

ACTION: Invite Inspectorate team along to a future Advisory Board to give a presentation on findings and next steps – Janie McManus/[Redacted].

5.3 The Inspectorate had taken a new approach in terms of methodology and quality assurance for National Thematic Inspections, with a new framework for the Inspection of Local Authorities being developed.

5.4 Members were also advised that a pilot to identify a link inspector for each local authority was being developed.

5.5 The Early Learning and Childcare Shared Inspection framework was going well, with pilots to test out the framework underway. The review of inspection frameworks was also reported to be underway with engagement from Associate Assessors, local authorities and children and young people.

5.6 The National Thematic Inspection of Literacy and English had also commenced to support the Curriculum Improvement Cycle, with Stakeholder forums supporting this work.

5.7 It was also noted that a report had been submitted to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and a special inspection of Fettes College was currently ongoing.

6. Education Reform – progress and next steps

6.1 The Chair provided an update on the work currently under way for Reform, including the OD Project, noting that structural level design options had been developed for corporate functions. These have been considered by the Leadership Team and shared with trade unions. It was noted that these had also been shared with the staff in scope. The aim was to have the final version agreed by 21 March.

6.2 There was some discussion around the proposed functions and the commitment to a shared digital services approach was highlighted. Board members provided some feedback for the Leadership Team to consider.

6.3 It was noted that colleagues across both HMIE and the wider Education Scotland have had opportunities (focus groups, team and individual questionnaires and workshops) to share their views on what's working well, what needs to change and what will be important for a new HMIE and a refocused ES.

6.4 The Board were informed that the Oversight Group had met at the end of February to review the ongoing work taking place to support transition and noted the focus on essential activity for day 1.

6.5 It was noted the initial business case ask for specialist resource in digital and HR had been approved by the Director General and processes to bring in additional capacity were now underway.

6.6 The Chair advised the second phase of the business case had been submitted the previous week but SG Education Reform team had since confirmed that there was no further additional budget to support the governance work or any other outstanding elements of the transition plan.

6.7 Some Board members expressed their concern on the volume of change that needs to be done to achieve Reform, especially with the SG budgetary challenges. They provided some options and suggestions for the Leadership Team to consider.

7. People Survey results 2024

7.1 Rob Strachan gave a brief summary of the key results from the survey. A range of actions had been taken forward at both Corporate and Directorate team level.

7.2 Executive members noted the disappointing results around leadership and managing change and around bullying and harassment. Non-executive members reflected that bullying and harassment in particular appeared to be an ongoing issue, featuring year on year in the results. Other areas of concern were workload and working away from home.

7.3 Board members provided some constructive feedback and provided suggestions for the Leadership Team to consider.

8. Finance

8.1 [Redacted] joined the meeting to provide an update on the financial monitoring report as at 31 January 2025. She advised that the Agency was at a position of underspend based on the most up to date information and she now expected the Agency to come under budget by the end of the financial year. It was noted that this underspend is not against base budget but includes the funded budget pressure. [Redacted] also reported some positive news - that the issues with payroll reporting had been resolved with ORACLE data now matching the ledger.

8.2 The Chair outlined conversations that had taken place around the next year's budget and noted that we don't yet have an understood budget for 2025/26, given the forthcoming separation of the organisation. She also highlighted the need to continue to manage budget pressures, noting the work around digital costs and the need to take a pragmatic approach to ensure the transition work runs as smoothly as possible.

8.3 [Redacted] left the meeting.

9. Audit and Risk Committee

9.1 Aileen Ponton referred to the minute from the last ARC meeting on 21 February 2025 and advised the meeting wasn't quorate but as no decisions needed to be made, the meeting went ahead.

9.2 It was important to note that there would still be an ARC function even though it would be a shared process with Advisory Board (AB) in the interim. The Board were also informed that the internal audit work was on track and the issues around Oracle had been noted.

10. ES Organisational Performance

10.1 Rob Strachan provided some context around ES Organisational Performance reporting and advised there had been some improvements since Quarter 2.

10.2 [Redacted] joined the meeting and provided an overview of the Quarter 3 report. She advised the Organisational Design work had picked up pace, in particular for Corporate Services, Governance and Digital Services. The introduction of Oracle, the challenging work around the SCAI and Covid Inquiries plus the pressures around GLOW and SWAN were also noted.

10.3 It was reported that the Management Information data had been added to the Quarter 3 report although there had been issues accessing some of the required data due to Oracle. As previously noted, there had been an increase in enquiries and it would appear some of the figures may have been reported incorrectly.

10.4 Board members provided some feedback on the report and there were discussions around Attainment and GLOW. It was agreed that Glow and the Agency's Digital Strategy should be added to the agenda of a future meeting and Attainment should feature as a substantive discussion at the next strategic session.

ACTION: GLOW and Digital Strategy to be added as an agenda item at a future meeting – Ollie Bray/[Redacted].

ACTION: A strategic discussion on Attainment to be added to the agenda for the next strategic session – [Redacted].

10.7 The Chair thanked [Redacted] for the comprehensive update and she left the meeting.

11. Annual Action Plan

11.1 Rob Strachan provided an update on the Annual Action Plan (AAP). He advised for 2025/26 the corporate planning cycle would be extended by a further year and a pragmatic approach would be taken on priorities around national policy expectations. Rob highlighted the four re-focus through reform areas – Curriculum Improvement Cycle, Attainment Challenge, Professional Learning and Leadership and Inspection.

11.2 Information on the next steps was shared, including alignment for the transition plan.

11.3 There was some discussion about the need to be clear on priorities and ensure positive outcomes for learners. It was also noted that the feedback from the local authority thematic review and Quad feedback brought some really good self-evaluation. It was recognised that there was a need to ensure that the key actions were identified as these would drive the work of the teams.

12. Education Scotland Risk Register

12.1 [Redacted] advised that while the risk register is reviewed at every ARC meeting, the Advisory Board needed to be assured that the key risks facing the Agency were being managed appropriately. It was noted that there would be a session to look at Power BI with the Non-executive Board members.

12.2 Members discussed the risks and confirmed they were content.

13. Support and Improvement and Inspectorate Boards

13.1 The latest minutes from both the Inspectorate and the Support and Improvement Boards were noted.

14. AOB

14.1 It was noted that John Fyffe should be recognised for his service over the years and the guidance and support he has provided, has been extremely invaluable. The Chair advised they had already planned to contact John and invite him to lunch to mark his service to Education Scotland.

15. Date of next meeting

15.1 It was confirmed that the next strategic session of the Advisory Board planned for 29 May 2025 would need to be rescheduled as this clashed with the ADES Directors' Forum, which a number of the Leadership Team would be attending.

Name [Redacted]
Date 24/03/2025