

**SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

**PC6/4 i**

**PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 25 MAY 2020**

**For approval**

Minutes of the fifth meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday 24 February 2020 at 10.30 am in Inglis/Livingstone, Lowden.

**Members**

- \* Ms E Craig (Convenor)
- \* Ms A Davis
- \* Mr H McKay
- \* Mr R Stewart

**Officers**

- \* Mr M Baxter
- Ms J Blair
- \* [REDACTED]
- \* Mr S Borley
- Mr A Dickson
- Mr L Downie
- \* Mr J McMorris
- \* Ms F Robertson
- \* Dr G Stewart

\*indicates present

**In attendance**

[REDACTED]

Mr D Middleton, SQA Chair  
Ms D Monteith, SQA

[REDACTED]

**5/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the fifth meeting including Mr Mike Baxter, Director of Finance and Corporate Services, to his first meeting of the Committee.

A welcome was also extended to Mr David Middleton, SQA Chair, and

Ms Denise Monteith, Head of Higher National and Vocational Qualifications, Operations, who was deputising for Ms Blair.

Apologies were recorded for Ms Blair and Mr Downie.

The Convenor explained that a fellow SQA Board member, Mr Grahame Smith, had been due to attend, however, he had been called to another meeting and was no longer able to attend.

## **5/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

## **5/3 PREVIOUS MEETING**

### **i Minutes from previous meeting**

The minutes of the fourth meeting of the Committee held on 18 November 2019 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **ii Action Grid**

The Committee noted the contents of the Action Grid.

### **iii Workplan**

The Convenor advised that she had initial discussions with Mr Baxter regarding the workplan and that they would review this to ensure there was a balance of scrutinising key matters around performance, including how the organisation was delivering against resource challenges, and to ensure there was no duplications with the SQA Board or other Committees.

She highlighted that presentation of the SQA People Survey 2019 (PC5/6 refers) had been discussed with management, as the Action Plans from the survey result were still under development across Directorates. Taking into account that the next meeting of the Committee would be May, it was agreed appropriate to present the high-level results to this meeting.

Discussion led to the contents of the workplan, and the Committee:

- *Surveys*

Noted that any survey results presented would be followed up two meetings later with an update/review on progress.

For example, the SQA Customer Survey results that had been discussed by the Committee at the November 2019 meeting, a follow-up report on progress would be provided at the next meeting in May.

- *Change Programme*

Noted that primary updates would be provided to the SQA Board, however, to enable the Committee to scrutinise the ability to deliver, updates on the programme would be provided at every second meeting.

The Committee was reminded that any risks associated with technology was captured in the Corporate Risk Register that was reviewed at every meeting of the Audit Committee.

In addition, assurance had been provided from the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) who conduct an independent review and had provided formal assurance for the Change Programme.

- *International*

Requested an update on market assessment to enable an understanding around what markets SQA were operating within/pursuing and the assessment of the products and services.

- *Performance Framework*

Requested that on finalisation of the framework, the workplan was reviewed to ensure it was aligned'

- *Quarterly Performance Review (QPR)*

Noted that development remained ongoing and would be aligned to the Performance Framework.

As the QPR was critical for the Committee to review the performance of the organisation, it was welcomed that a gap analysis would be undertaken.

The Committee noted the contents of the workplan.

#### **5/4 MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

#### **5/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Mr Borley led on presenting the report, highlighting that performance was on track for all Strategic Goals, with the exception of Strategic Goal 8. The following areas were covered in the course of discussion:

##### **Strategic Goal 8**

Overall RAG status was assessed at amber and the Committee noted that this reflected the position at the end of December 2019 when confirmation had yet to be received on the level of funding from the Scottish Government.

Mr Baxter advised, that as reported to the SQA Board earlier in the month, the in-year position had stabilised, and funding levels were agreed with the Scottish Government to allow a break-even position.

He highlighted that the development of the 2020-21 budget would ensure clear and transparent expectations, therefore the matrix for reporting would be reviewed and aligned.

## **Strategic Goal 2**

The Committee requested further information regarding SQA's position with Ofqual. It was explained that Ofqual believed that SQA had breached their conditions of recognition in relation to how aspects of malpractice concerns were investigated and actions specifically in relation to the Health and Safety in a Construction Environment qualification in the English market. Ofqual had referred this to their Legal, Moderation and Enforcement Team for further investigation.

In response to the number of reported malpractice cases, SQA had withdrawn this qualification from the market in England. Provisions for Scotland had moved to a digital-only form of assessment that tightened conditions of assessment and introduced unannounced visits to quality assure these assessments.

It was highlighted that given the scope of SQA's powers and remit that even the most robust quality assurance processes may not identify wider issues such as criminal activity. However, there were a number of additional precautions that could be taken so SQA had also reviewed the procedures for the rest of the UK and had introduced mandatory SQA approval, even if a centre was already approved by another Awarding Body. This would strengthen SQA's due diligence processes for new centres. Future operating models and quality assurance on all high risk, short and license to practice qualifications would also be reviewed.

It was noted that the Qualification Committee would be provided with a full report on the situation for discussion at its meeting on 26 February 2020.

The Committee were assured that an Action Plan had been developed to manage any findings/ recommendations of the report from Ofqual, and this would be closely monitored by the Executive Management Team (EMT).

The Committee queried if there was a risk on the Corporate Risk Register regarding the potential regularly action from Ofqual and it was noted that one would be added.

## **Strategic Goal 3**

The Committee enquired if there was any impact on international business from the Coronavirus outbreak, specifically China. It was advised that there was potential for medium term impact as it was currently candidate recruitment and would likely impact the 2021-22 budget.

The Committee were assured that there were business continuity plans evoked to monitoring the situation, in the event of a global pandemic.

## **Strategic Goal 6**

It was highlighted that the staff survey matrix had been amended to exclude leavers from the Voluntary Early Release (VER) scheme. Although some individuals might have naturally left, the exclusion provided a better reflection of the organisation's organic leavers.

The Committee was pleased to note that the turnover percentage was below the public sector benchmark.

It was highlighted that the staff turnover matrix in the QPR for 2020-21 onwards would include an analysis by Directorate.

### **Strategic Goal 9**

The Committee were reminded that, owing to the independence of the Accreditation function from the Awarding function, the reporting of this Strategic Goal was included within the QPR only for completeness. It would not therefore be reviewed by the Committee.

Mr Stewart, as Convenor of the Accreditation Committee, confirmed that the Accreditation Committee would continue to review performance against this Strategic Goal and report to the SQA Board as necessary.

### **RAG report ratings**

The Committee ratified EMT's overall RAG report ratings on the Strategic Goals; green for Goals 1-7 and amber for Goal 8.

## **5/6 SQA PEOPLE SURVEY 2019**

██████████ OD Manager, was welcomed to the meeting to present an update to the Committee on the high-level results from the SQA People Survey and next steps. As part of the detailed presentation, the Committee noted that:

- The survey was partially aligned to the Civil Service People Survey, which was used by a wide range of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs).
- Overall, the engagement score was 74%, whilst a drop from 80% in 2017, it remained a high score for an organisation of its size. It was highlighted that the Civil Service People Survey 2018 score was 62%.
- Some benchmark variances could be the result from minor amendments to the narrative of questions, however, it remained valid to compare the responses with the 2017 results. It was clarified that any amendments were highlighted in the explanatory notes of the results.
- For the first time each section of the survey had a free text box associated with it, to allow reporting across themes easier. It was highlighted that there was anonymisation of comments before the results were submitted to SQA.
- The lowest positive scoring questions had followed previous years trends.
- There was no demographic information requested in any of the survey.
- Action Plans resulting from Directorate and business area meetings were being supported by OD Business Partners, with the expectation that all plans, along with a robust method of tracking were established by end of February.

- Directorate Plans would also be reviewed by a working group of OD, HR and Trade Unions to see if any actions arising could be implemented corporately.

Following the presentation, the Committee engaged in discussion, during which the following was raised:

- Timing of the presentation to the Committee.

The timing was unfortunate, however, it was reiterated that this had been discussed and agreed that it was appropriate to present the high-level results to this meeting (PC5/3 iii refers), rather than the May meeting.

- How would the Committee monitor progress against Action Plans?

It was advised that the Action Plans were being developed using SMART objectives. Within the Directorates, teams were involved in the process and development of these to provide ownership and purpose. Progress of the Action Plans would be monitored through the Committee, with a review of progress at the meeting in August.

- Was there scope to undertake a 'temperature check' on employees' engagement or an employee pulse survey?

It was highlighted that a 'temperature check' was undertaken every two years, and this had changed to annually. There was potentially scope available to undertake an employee pulse survey.

In line with SQA's values, management were trying to encourage openness and transparency in its communication and decision making. EMT were aware that this was a wider cultural piece with regards to how to engage, provide communications and evolve as a business.

Initial work already undertaken included the introduction of a weekly EMT update (on the staff intranet) and a Values-Led Leadership Programme. The aim of the programme was to provide all leaders within SQA awareness of their own personal leadership style and how it informs how they lead others in SQA. Initial feedback on the training was positive, and once this had been rolled out across the business it would assist the development of a comprehensive Values-Led Culture Transformation Programme that would support SQA in achieving its Strategic Goals.

- Some survey questions produced classic concentric circles responses, and the Committee suggested that it could be useful to review the neutral (neither agree nor disagree) option in future.

It was highlighted that neutral responses were measured but did not form part of the presentation to the Committee on this occasion.

- Questioned if Appointees had been invited to participate in the survey?

The Committee was reminded that Appointee were not employees of SQA, they were teaching professionals and specialists contracted to support SQA activities. A separate Appointee Survey had been undertaken and it was suggested that feedback from this could be presented to a future meeting, and the Committee agreed.

The Committee thanked [REDACTED] for the comprehensive and thorough presentation.

[REDACTED] left the meeting.

## **5/7 PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK DRAFT DELIVERABLES AND MEASURES**

Mr Borley explained that timeframe had changed due to the extraordinary meeting of SQA Board convened for 16 March to approve the Corporate Plan. He led on a presentation on the latest position on the Performance Framework, in particular the deliverables and associated measures.

During the ensuing discussion the Committee:

- Acknowledged that some deliverables would be mapped to more than one outcome, and that not all deliverables would be new, with some considered as 'carried forward' from existing work.
- Was reassured that there was not a separate deliverable on the digital agenda, as this was embedded across several deliverables, in addition to forming part of the Enabling Consumers Programme (Change Programme).
- Noted the measures of the deliverables were intended as the key set of measures to indicate to the Committee that SQA was moving towards delivering the deliverables.
- Was assured that there would be a gap analysis undertaken to identify and ensure that all relevant priorities were covered.
- Recognised that the Performance Framework was developed to endure, and that not all deliverables would be completed in the first year.
- Agreed that part of its remit was to look for assurance that the Performance Framework was appropriate and fully supported with robust deliverables.
- Noted that there was a parallel piece of work with SQA Accreditation, in order to identify their specific priorities.
- Agreed to be mindful to remain strategic focussed and not delve into detail that was the responsibility of SQA management.

- Would welcome mapping against the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework.
- Acknowledged that due to the uncertainty around the Budget there was a similar measure of uncertainty as to which deliverables it would be possible to take forward as SQA's capacity to deliver was closely bound to the resources it had to do so.
- Were confident that as the year progressed, the Performance Framework would be developed to the extent where it would lead the discussions of the Committees.

In closing, the Committee welcomed the update and noted that the final proposals and sample report of the Performance Framework would be presented to the next meeting.

## **5/8 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME**

Mr Baxter advised, that under his new leadership, the programme was being reassessed to refocus activity for 2020-21 and that the proposed approach and the forward review programme proposals would be presented to the next meeting. The development of the 2020-21 budget would ensure clear and transparent expectations and a robust start point for the financial year.

The progress on the overall programme had been impacted by changes in key personnel and the requirement to focus on management of the 2019-20 financial position. However, he emphasised the amount of work that had gone into generating the amount of savings to date. The Committee commended the work of colleagues to achieve the levels of savings.

## **5/9 STANDING ORDERS**

The Convenor reminded the Committee it had agreed to review the Standing Orders after a year, to check that the remit accurately reflected the role and purpose of the Committee.

The Committee reviewed and endorsed the proposed changes detailed within the Standing Orders.

During the ensuing discussion the Committee suggested and agreed the following additional amendments would be made to the Standing Orders:

### **Section 1 - Membership and Appointments**

- 1.4 - Narrative regarding the period of time a co-opted member could be appointed would be amended from one year to be reviewed annually. This would allow co-opted members to build up knowledge and understanding of SQA in order to be an effective contributor at meetings.
- 1.7 - Narrative would be revised to clarify that the powers for the Committee to sit privately without any non-members for all or part of a meeting, was regards to



sessions such as the review of the Committees performance, and not in a decision-making capacity.

- 1.10 - The job title for the lead Director would be changed to reflect the renaming of the Directorate following the move of some teams.

In closing, the Committee agreed that once the Performance Framework was finalised, Section 11 (Delegated Authority and Duties of the Performance Committee) would be reviewed to ensure that the Committee's remit was adequately aligned to the framework. Following this, the Standing Orders would be presented to the SQA Board for formal approval.

#### **5/10 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING**

The Convenor opened discussion for the focus for the next meeting, including items scheduled on the workplan that had been discussed earlier in the meeting (PC5/3 iii refers) and the Committee agreed:

- QPR - Q4 2019-20.
- Strategic Best Value and Efficiency Programme - Proposed approach and forward review programme proposals (As advised at PC5/8).
- Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20 - Section A - Performance Report.
- Performance Framework - Final proposals and sample report.
- Customer Survey Results - Follow-up report.
- Change Programme.
- Stakeholders.

#### **5/11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business raised for the consideration by the Committee.

#### **5/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 25 May 2020 in Optima.

#### **ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS**

Following the meeting, members of the Committee met separately (in the absence of SQA Officers) to undertake the annual review of its own effectiveness.