

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

PC8/3 i

PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 23 NOVEMBER 2020 For approval

Minutes of the seventh meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday
24 August 2020 at 10.30 am by Microsoft Teams.

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 (until PC7/9)
- * Dr G Stewart

*indicates present

In attendance

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], Scottish Government

Mr S McLaren, SQA (PC7/10 – 7/11 only)

[REDACTED] SQA

Mr S Sharkey, SQA (PC7/8 only)

7/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the seventh meeting including [REDACTED] from Scottish Government who had recently joined the Sponsor Team and was in attendance as part of her induction to SQA.

Apologies were recorded for Mr Dickson and Mr David Middleton, SQA Chair.

The Convenor requested that the Committee be mindful that due to the lead in time for the meeting some of the papers had been prepared prior to the Deputy First Minister's Ministerial Direction to SQA on 11 August, relating to the 2020 Alternative Certification Model (ACM). The Committee would therefore focus on the performance measures

prior to 11 August. Furthermore, the SQA Board would meet later in the week and that would be the forum for discussing matters arising as a result of the Ministerial Direction.

7/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

7/3 PREVIOUS MEETING

i Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes of the sixth meeting held on 24 February 2020 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

ii Action Grid

The Committee noted the contents of the Action Grid.

iii Workplan

The Committee noted the contents of the workplan.

7/4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

7/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW - Q1 2020-21

Mr Borley explained the new format of the report was developed from the outcomes and deliverables from the Performance Framework. The start of the report contained a dashboard of the outcomes with symbols to indicate the status at the time of reporting, and he provided an overview of these. The report also contained high-level snapshots of the progress against each of the Performance Framework deliverables. He went on to provide a detailed overview of the report and the following areas were covered in the course of discussion:

The Committee suggested that it would be beneficial to include a key to explain the various symbols in future reports.

At the last meeting, there was discussion around why the Media Strategy was referred to as promotional. It was acknowledged that this had been agreed with the team following consultation, however, after review of the report the Committee agreed that it was inconsistent with the rest of the outcomes. Therefore, the Performance Framework and associated documentation would be updated.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic and priorities required elsewhere in the business, the Committee enquired if there would be a delay in initiating the Strategic Change Programme and the digital prioritisation overall.

In response, the Committee were reminded that the Scottish Government had addressed the residual gap to deliver a balanced position for the financial year 2020-21, that had included capital funding and a continuation of support for the

Change Programme. This had also included additional support for the Transformation Programme (as set out in SQA's Spending Review submission).

Recruitment would commence shortly for a new Head of Service who would work closely with the Executive Management Team (EMT) and the Senior Responsible Owner, to lead, manage and deliver a Strategic Change Programme that would align the vision, strategy and aims of SQA. This role would allow senior leaders to ensure business as usual work could continue to be met.

SQA were working towards September for a substantive budget review for the remainder of 2020-21 and a base budget for 2021-22, that included contingencies to address issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the general economic pressure on all public bodies, it was anticipated that there would be limited flexibility moving forward and SQA would need to deliver on its corporate goals within planned capacity and budget. A report would be presented to the SQA Board in due course.

Regarding delivering Contracts in-line with Service Level Agreements, the Committee noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some contracts were unable to be delivered. The Committee was reassured that SQA were working closely with the clients to continue the positive working relationships.

Overall staff absence levels were below the Public Sector Benchmark, apart from within Accreditation (due to this being a small team). The Committee were assured that there was no cause for concern.

The Committee was pleased to note that the Q1 absence rate was the lowest rate in the last twelve months. Although work related stress absence had slightly increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee was assured that EMT's priority continued to be the health and wellbeing of the staff.

Regarding staff turnover, the Committee was assured that exit interviews were routinely held and documented, and any issues raised were followed up appropriately.

The Committee suggested that it would be useful to include in future reports an analysis of results from exit interviews to identify any changes and themes.

In terms of appointees, the Committee noted that the NQ Certification Programme Group and the HN, Vocational and International Certification Programme Group provided assurance on progress against a number of critical success factors throughout the year to the SQA Board.

Ms Blair took the opportunity to advise that recruitment for external verifiers was underway for 2021, and this was on track.

Within the compliance with all legislative, statutory and regulatory requirements, it was explained that the one amber measure was as a result of the slight delay in publication of the Corporate Plan due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Plan had been published and the measure had moved to green.

The Committee suggested that it would be valuable to include a measure around equality and diversity within the report. It was advised that when the system transferred to Business World existing information could not be carried over. There was currently a campaign running to encourage colleagues to provide this data. It was anticipated that a measure would be included in the report in due course

Since the Deputy First Minister's Ministerial Direction to SQA there was a risk that confidence in SQA's qualifications may have been impacted. The Committee acknowledged that SQA was required to follow Ministerial Direction, however, suggested that it would be worthwhile to capture and monitor stakeholders' views on the credibility of SQA's qualifications. In response it was advised that SQA were looking to include external voices and views in future reporting.

The Committee agreed that it would be valuable to consider perceptions of SQA's credibility given the impact of recent events at a future SQA Board meeting.

In closing, the Committee commended SQA, particularly Mr Borley and his team, for the amount of progress that was able to be made against the Performance Framework deliverables, given the impact and change of direction for copious activities across SQA during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7/6 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Mr Baxter provided an overview of the structure and the three key workstreams of the Best Value and Financial Improvement Programme. He reiterated that whilst the Finance and Corporate Services Directorate was leading on the work, it was organisation wide and would support the Best Value Programme. To succeed in meeting the objectives set out in the Best Value Framework and supporting action plans the workstreams would be appropriately resourced across the organisation. Such consideration would include spend to save proposals in order to ensure SQA could deliver within available financial and other resource constraints.

During discussion of the Specific Directorate Improvements, the Committee:

- Requested clarification around the support for SQA to become a modern digital awarding body. In response it was noted that this was around the development of capability and capacity to be able to handle digital evidence, which was essential for the future of SQA products. Further capability and capacity would be required to take this work forward and this would be discussed with EMT.
- Noted that the implementation of the new grading structure would be linked to the removal of some outdated terms and conditions. This would enable improved progression through grades at lower levels. Discussions were due to commence with Trade Unions, subject to further consideration by EMT.
- Agreed that overhead costs should be more transparent across the business and would welcome cost allocation going forward, particularly in the area of Contracts. Where, SQA would undertake full costing analysis, and would consider both marginal contribution and full cost absorption.

- Welcomed that there would be a spread of responsibilities to enable development opportunities across SQA, including assisting to create a culture of improvement.

The Committee noted the report that a delivery timetable was in development and would be presented in due course.

7/7 COMMITTEE STANDING ORDERS – SECTION 11

The Convenor reminded the Committee that at the February meeting it was 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 Committees remit was adequately aligned.

Given that SQA's Performance Framework had a deliverable for a Stakeholder Management Strategy, the Committee suggested and agreed it was pertinent to include stakeholders within the sub-bullet of 11.3.4 (Markets, customers and external relationships).

In the ensuing discussion the Committee considered whether:

- 11.3.4 should include a sub-bullet around the Committee reviewing and providing commentary to the SQA Board on aspects of SQA's activities.

It was agreed not pertinent because this was incorporated within 11.3.5.

- 11.3.3 provided adequate distinction between the Committee and other sub-Committees of the SQA Board, on its role to provide advice and guidance on SQA's key performance indicators.

In response the Committee was assured that each sub-Committee had distinct remits. With regards to the People Committee, it was noted that further discussions had to take place internally with regards to the remit, before SQA Board approval. On establishment, if required this Committees remit would be reviewed.

The Committee were reminded that at any point, if agreed appropriate, they could recommend that another sub-Committee scrutinise further any area(s) within the QPR.

The Committee endorsed the amendment and agreed that the Standing Orders would be presented to the SQA Board for formal approval at its October meeting.

7/8 SQA CHANGE PORTFOLIO AND PROGRAMMES

Mr Stephen Sharkey, Head of Planning, Governance and Compliance, was welcomed to the meeting.

To ensure that SQA remained relevant to 21st century skills and technology its learners, customers and staff, Mr Downie and Mr Sharkey delivered a presentation that summarised why the Change Portfolio and Programmes were created. They went on to explain the overall governance and H2 Strategic Change Programme in detail.

During the presentation the Committee:

- Noted that there was a multi-year Change Programme, based on two key fundamental drivers - one internal to the organisation the other external. Welcomed that SQA had invited the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to conduct independent reviews, with the outcomes shared with the Audit Committee.

Noted that the governance structure had been reviewed following an observation from the OCIO Assurance team and that the revised governance model had been streamlined in order to make more effective use of corporate resources.

- Welcomed that an Integrated Assurance and Approvals Plan (IAAP) would be produced for the Strategic Change Programme in conjunction with the OCIO and that Scott-Moncrieff, SQA's appointed internal auditors, would be conducting an audit on the Legislative, Statutory and Compliance and Continuous Improvement and Growth programmes as part of the 2021-22 Internal Audit Plan.
- The Committee suggested that as part of the SQA Board's delegated authority and duties it would be prudent to have them endorse the key portfolio governance principles and approval procedures.
- Acknowledged that there would be inherently higher risk with the H2 Strategic Change Programme as it would have a wider and deeper impact externally and internally.

The Committee thanked Mr Downie and Mr Sharkey for the informative and stimulating presentation.

Mr Sharkey left the meeting.

7/9 SQA PEOPLE SURVEY - REVIEW OF PROGRESS AGAINST ACTION PLANS

████████████████████, OD Manager, was welcomed to the meeting.

He was pleased to advise that all Directorate plans had been developed by the deadline and were available on the SQA's intranet. 25% of actions had already been completed, and the plans would be updated and available throughout the year, with regular communications on progress from Directors. There were some key topics that emerged from the survey results, and he went on to advise of the progress that had been made. During discussion, the Committee:

- Welcomed that Ask EMT sessions and Daily/Weekly "chats" had been introduced, along with regular Directorate wide meetings.
- Concurred that the positive results from the June Pulse Survey had validated that communication had been enhanced within Directorates.
- Were reassured that communication channels would continue to be reviewed to make sure the needs of staff were met.

- Welcomed that the Performance Framework would provide the structure that would help everyone focus on how they contribute to delivering SQA's strategy.
- Discussion progressed to the active Pulse Survey and it was advised that in addition to measuring any progress from the June survey, staff had been asked about longer term working arrangements, future ways of working and workplace preferences. Preliminary findings indicated that the results around communications would be broadly similar. Overall, there were no areas for concern emerging and EMT would review the results in due course.

In closing, the Committee recognised the encouraging progress that had been made in terms of staff engagement and communications.

██████████ left the meeting.

The Chief Executive left the meeting.

7/10 **STAKEHOLDERS**

Mr Stuart McLaren, Head of Marketing and Communications, and ██████████, Senior Research Manager, were welcomed to the meeting.

i Stakeholder Management Strategy

Mr McLaren advised that a review of strategic stakeholder engagement had been undertaken to look at best practice approaches and models for strategic engagement, to understand how SQA engaged with key stakeholder groups and to provide options for how SQA could improve in this area. A robust stakeholder engagement model was vital for SQA to be able to understand and respond to legitimate customer and stakeholder concerns. Mr McLaren delivered a comprehensive presentation, during which the Committee welcomed:

- That SQA was proactive to implement a clear strategy for managing the wide range of stakeholders, and that this was linked to a deliverable within the Performance Framework.
- That SQA would include the view of young people as stakeholders, in the same basis as other groups. This was particularly important given the recent media coverage around the 2020 ACM.
- The complex customer stakeholder journey map that enabled a visual representation of the multiple interaction points across the organisation.
- The development of an overarching stakeholder map that would identify what stakeholders SQA need to engage with, the perceptions and views SQA need to listen to.
- That the IAP2 and Scottish Community Engagement standards would be used to assist with the development of standards and as a reference point for best practice.

During the ensuing discussion, the Committee agreed that the success of stakeholder engagement was interdependent, relying very much on feedback coming in from the education arena to facilitate SQA's opportunity to respond and take action. Moreover, SQA should focus on ensuring its responsibility within the Scottish Education system was understood.

It was agreed that the presentation that supported the paper would be shared with the Committee.

Note: The following two items (PC7/10 ii and PC7/11) were presented simultaneously, supported with a presentation.

ii SQA Stakeholder Tracking Research Results 2019

████████ provided a comprehensive overview of the 2019 results of SQA's stakeholder tracking research programme, including the results from ad hoc questions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic from the 2020 research programme.

Discussion led to the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Committee were pleased to note that overall, 71% of school, colleges and training providers felt that SQA had handled the situation well. Broadly similar were the views from training providers and schools, however there was a difference in the feedback from colleges. In response, Ms Blair advised that this was perhaps due to a number of learners having to pause completion of regulated qualifications due to government advice and precautions that had been implemented by the Scottish Government. Similarly, some schools were struggling to deliver certain units in some foundation apprenticeships, for example completion of units in a workplace environment. SQA were working closely with Colleges Scotland, SDS and regulators to secure more flexible pathways for learners in 2021 where this is possible. EMT would be closely monitoring the situation.

In closing, the Committee suggested that there could be merit to include universities in future surveys.

7/11 SQA CUSTOMER SURVEY 2020

████████ presented the results of the 2020 Customer Survey and the recommendations of the Short Life Working Group (SLWG) which was set up to scrutinise the survey results.

Discussion led to the results regarding SQA's website and the Committee was reassured that research carried out indicate that most users were able to find the information that they are looking for, and that they had a relatively user-friendly experience when doing so. SQA was investigating to ascertain if the issues were around accessing specific content and services across SQA's digital estate rather than the website.

It was agreed that the presentation that supported the paper would be shared with the Committee.

Mr McLaren and [REDACTED] left the meeting.

7/12 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the agenda for the next meeting would be established from the workplan.

7/13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sharepoint

It was suggested that SQA's SharePoint platform could be used to allow the Committee early sight of individual papers when available, to enable review in advance of receiving a final pack.

7/14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 23 November 2020 at 10.30 am.

The location of the meeting was scheduled for Lowden, however, this would be reviewed nearer the time, and would follow government advice and guidance.

Later: Meeting would be held by Microsoft Teams.

Paper for noting

PFN 1 Appointee Survey Feedback

The Committee noted the findings of the 2019 Appointee Survey.