

## SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

PC12/3 i

### PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 8 NOVEMBER 2021 For approval

Minutes of the eleventh meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday 23 August 2021 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 B Black (until PC11/7)
- \* Ms J Blair
- \* [REDACTED]
- \* Mr J Booth
- \* Mr S Borley
- \* Mr A Dickson
- \* Mr L Downie
- \* Mrs D Mahmoud
- \* Mr J McMorris
- \* Ms F Robertson
- \* Dr G Stewart

\* indicates present

#### In attendance

- [REDACTED], SQA (PC11/10 only)
- [REDACTED], SQA
- Ms N Crowley, SQA
- Mrs J Faulds, SQA (OC11/8 only)
- [REDACTED], SQA
- [REDACTED], SQA
- Mr M Ware, SQA (PC11/7 onwards)

#### Observer

- [REDACTED], Scottish Government

#### 11/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the eleventh meeting, particularly Ms Beth Black, Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards, and Mr John Booth, Director of Communications to their first meeting.

A welcome was also extended to [REDACTED] from the Sponsorship Team at the Scottish Government.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Baxter and Mr Middleton, SQA Chair.

It was highlighted that Mr Borley would be deputising in the absence of Mr Baxter and Ms Black would leave the meeting early, and Mr Martyn Ware, Head of Research, Policy, Standards and Statistics, would join to deputise.

## **11/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

## **11/3 PREVIOUS MEETING**

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

Subject to minor typographical corrections, the minutes of the tenth meeting held on 17 May 2021 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **ii Action Grid**

The Committee noted the contents and closure of the four actions recorded in the Action Grid.

### **iii Workplan**

The Committee were mindful of the impact of the Scottish Government announcement that SQA would be replaced, and a new specialist agency created. With already stretched resources, it was recognised that priorities for SQA had and would continue to change, and that the workplan may be reviewed accordingly.

The Committee noted the contents of the workplan.

## **11/4 MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

## **11/5 SQA ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2021-22**

In accordance with standard practice, an exercise was undertaken ahead of the 2021-22 financial year to agree year two deliverables for the Corporate Performance Framework and Business Plan, that was finalised in March. However, following the Scottish Government announcement, the Education Reform and the publication of the OECD report on Curriculum for Excellence a full review of the deliverables had been undertaken, including a reflection on the challenges and priorities that have emerged since March.

The Committee were mindful of the pressures on SQA staff, not just in response to the COVID-19 pandemic but the impact of the Scottish Government announcement. SQA was commended that despite the challenges, many of last year's deliverables had been progressed and some delivered. It was recognised that it would be a challenging

task to prioritise deliverables as the year progressed and suggested that the Business Plan be a live document that was regularly reviewed.

The Committee considered and discussed the Business Plan in detail, during which it was:

#### **Introduction by the Chief Executive section**

- Agreed that the narrative should reflect that SQA was entering a time of uncertainty and significant change and that the plan would help to prioritise and guide the organisation through this time, at the same time as SQA continued to deliver for all its customers.

#### **We are trusted, respected and valued by our customers, stakeholders and partners section**

- Agreed it would be pragmatic to remove the word maintained from the narrative around trust given that the results from the recent stakeholder engagement research.

It was acknowledged that it would be a challenge for SQA to shift stakeholder engagement research results back to the levels they were once at, given the ongoing challenges.

- Recommended that the narrative around engaging with learners include a reference to the engagement in 2018 with Young Scot.

#### **We are a thriving organisation, with quality jobs and a fair work environment for all our people section**

- Suggested that it could be of benefit to include some case studies.

In response, it was advised that although there were some case studies available these were too dated to be include in the 2021-22 Business Plan. It was noted that considering already stretched resources and pressures it was unlikely new ones could be created.

#### **Higher *National, vocational and international delivery to plan*' section**

- Suggested that the narrative around a secondee be reviewed to ensure clarity that it was a senior leader from a Scottish college on secondment at SQA.

The Committee acknowledged that any suggestions would be considered by the Executive Management Team (EMT), and if appropriate would be incorporated. Subject to any agreed amendments recorded above, the Committee approved the Annual Business Plan 2020-21.

### **11/6 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW – Q1 2021-22**

The Committee noted that the report reflected the changes proposed in the Annual Business Plan 2021-22 and that any deliverables that had paused had been removed. Work continued to further develop the report and it was anticipated that changes previously requested by the Committee would be addressed in Q2.

██████████ provided a comprehensive overview of the report. The following areas were covered in the course of discussion, and the Committee:

### **Perform**

- Noted that out of the eight deliverables within the strand six had been assessed at Green, and two at Amber.
- Enquired if the outcome regarding SQA's compliance with the Ofqual malpractice audit had been received. In response it was advised that it was anticipated that a report should be received late autumn.

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

- Noted that 2020-21 continued to be a recovery year for centres and SQA would continue to provide support and prioritise key developments according to customer needs.
- Welcomed that the benchmark for absence was under review to ensure that comparison remained accurate given the reduction in absences during the pandemic.
- Enquired if there had been an increase in turnover levels since the Scottish Governments announcement. In response it was advised, although it was a relatively short period of time since the announcement, level had increased compared to trends. The Committee was assured that this would be closely monitored.

Discussion led to recruitment and retention, and it was advised that a risk had been added to the Corporate Risk Register around the inability this could cause to retain and recruit key talent following the Scottish Governments announcement.

Conscious of the impact of the announcement on staff, the Committee was assured that a primary focus of EMT had been one of support to staff and the organisation, with a number of communication channels being set up including a new intranet site and yammer group to share all available information.

The Committee agreed that staff must be kept informed of all stages of the Education Reform and staff security must be addressed, ensuring that Fair Work principles were adhered to.

### **Plan**

- Noted that one deliverable within the strand had been assessed at Green, with positive progress being made.
- Welcomed that there was a research project to better understand public perceptions of standards and related issues of trust and confidence was underway.

## **Progress**

- Noted that out of the nine deliverables within the stand, eight had been assessed at Green and one at Amber, with positive progress being made.
- Were reassured that SQA would continue to meet its statutory remit and governance arrangements.

Ms Black left the meeting and Mr Ware joined the meeting.

### **11/7 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**

Mr Dickson provided an update on the positive progress in the last quarter, in both the Financial Improvements Programme and the Cost Allocation Module, which was noted by the Committee.

### **11/8 SQA HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE 2021**

Mrs Jacqui Faulds, Head of Appointee Management was welcomed to the meeting, who provided a comprehensive overview of the health and safety activities during financial year 2020-2021 and the planned activities for 2021-2022.

She was pleased to advise that SQA had just been notified that they had achieved their seventh consecutive Gold Awards in the internationally renowned Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Health and Safety Awards and this was commended by the Committee.

Mrs Faulds left the meeting.

### **11/9 COMMITTEE STANDING ORDERS**

Mr Borley presented the Standing Orders and reminded the Committee that this was part of the annual review to check that the remit accurately embraced the governance and role of the Committee.

The Standing Orders had been reviewed to ensure future proofing with pronouns, and as per the recommendation of the Azets Corporate Governance internal audit report, the date of the last review and approval date had been incorporated.

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

### **11/10 SQA STAKEHOLDER TRACKING RESEARCH AND CUSTOMER SURVEY RESULTS**

██████████, Senior Research Manager, was welcomed to the meeting.

██████████ provided a comprehensive overview of the key results from the 2020 Scottish Stakeholder Tracking and the 2020-21 Customer Survey. The Committee had also been provided with a detailed paper, which had highlighted the key points and

explained the next steps in SQA's stakeholder research programme and what actions the organisation intended to take in response to these findings.

The Committee discussed the results in depth, particularly the reduced results on communication with stakeholders and customers, SQA values, satisfaction and credibility of the organisation. Acknowledging the challenge SQA faced, the Committee emphasised the importance for SQA to improve how it communicated, engaged, and built trust with stakeholders and customers.

██████████ left the meeting.

#### **11/11 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING**

The Committee noted that the rest of the agenda would be established from the workplan.

#### **11/12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

In drawing the meeting to a close, the Convenor took the opportunity to acknowledge that this was Mr Stewart's last meeting of the Committee and thanked him for his eight years of service and contribution to SQA. During his tenure, he had sat on a number of Committees, providing strong advice and guidance.

#### **11/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 8 November 2021 at 10.30 am by Microsoft Teams.