

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

PC13/3 i

PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 7 FEBRUARY 2022 For approval

Minutes of the twelfth meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday
8 November 2021 at 10.30 am by Microsoft Teams.

Members

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

Officers

- * Mr M Baxter
Ms B Black
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

In attendance

- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * Ms N Crowley, SQA
- * Mr A Dickson, SQA
- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * Mrs J Faulds, SQA (PC12/8 only)
- * Ms L McGrath, SQA
- * Mr D Middleton, SQA

Observer

- * [REDACTED], Scottish Government

* indicates present

12/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the twelfth meeting, including Mr David Middleton, SQA Chair and Ms Liz McGrath, Head of Qualifications Portfolio Management, who was deputising in the absence of Dr Stewart.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Davis, Ms Black, Ms Blair, Mr Borley, Mr Downie and Dr Stewart.

It was explained that due to the absence of Ms Davis the SQA Chair, as a non-executive member of the SQA Board, would stand-in as a member of the Committee to enable the necessary quorum for the meeting, as per the Standing Orders.

12/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

12/3 PREVIOUS MEETING

i Minutes from previous meeting

Subject to a minor typographical correction, the minutes of the eleventh meeting held on 23 August 2021 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

ii Action Grid

The Committee noted the contents and closure of the only action recorded in the Action Grid.

iii Workplan

The Committee noted the contents of the workplan.

12/4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

12/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW – 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 there was an update received regarding SQA's compliance with the Ofqual malpractice audit.
In response it was advised that the Ofqual had been in touch to advise that there had been delays due to the pandemic. The Committee was assured that this would be closely monitored by the Executive Management Team (EMT).
- Welcomed the level of detail that had been included within the Portfolio of qualifications deliverable, particularly the Next Generation: Higher Nationals Project.
- Enquired why the Streetworks Qualifications Register progress had been assessed as red.
In response it was advised that as the identity cards were produced in house and as a result of the pandemic, and the closure of the offices, the service-level

agreement (SLA) could not be met. This was recognised by the client, and it was anticipated that SQA would be back within SLA before the end of the year.

- Welcomed that following industry research a new public sector benchmarks had been established for absence to ensure that comparison remained accurate given the reduction in absences during the pandemic.
- Enquired around the absence levels that were above the benchmark.
In response, it was advised that although absence rate had been slowly increasing since Q3 of 2020-21, partly due to colleagues' experiencing side effects linked to the COVID-19 vaccination programme, following the Scottish Governments announcement there had been an increase in stress related absences.
- This was an area of concern for EMT, and priority continued to be the health and wellbeing of the staff. The Committee was assured that this would be closely monitored.
- Discussion led to staff returning to the office and it was noted that SQA was committed to following guidance set out by the Scottish Government. Only a small number of colleagues had returned to undertake activities that could not be done at home.
- Noted that the EHRC Section 23 Agreement had been added to the compliance deliverable and had been assessed at amber due to training and the SQA Review still in progress. Overall, the deliverable was on track and assessed at green.
- It was highlighted that it had been agreed that SQA would report quarterly on the EHRC Section 23 Agreement to the Sponsorship Team at Scottish Government.
- Noted that there were no movements to the Q1 forecast at P6 however, the Q2 reforecast was underway and any changes to the financial position would be reported to the SQA Board in due course. It was noted that it was anticipated that there would be significant movement at the Q2 forecast.
- Noted that within the Communications Strategy deliverable, the short-term action to refresh and improve referred to the current strategy. For 2022-23 onwards a new strategy would be developed and implemented.

Plan

- Noted that one deliverable within the strand had been assessed at green, with positive progress being made.

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.
- Welcomed that SQA's Environmental Impact Strategy had been successfully delivered and noted that future updates relating to the implementation would feature within the People Strategy update.

In closing, the Committee commended SQA for the continuing progress and development of the QPR, particularly with the unique circumstances facing SQA.

12/6 2022-23 PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK AND BUSINESS PLAN

The Committee were reminded that SQA published a corporate plan in 2020-21 covering the covering a three-year period to March 2023, with deliverables for the Corporate Performance Framework and business plan agreed annually. A full review of the deliverables, including a reflection on the challenges and priorities for SQA, in

the 2021-22 business plan had been undertaken, following the Scottish Government announcement, the Education Reform and the publication of the OECD report on Curriculum for Excellence that had emerged since March 2020.

In accordance with standard practice, development for the 2022-23 business plan had commenced and the Committee was assured that SQA would continue to operate and meet its statutory duties, and that the deliverables in the 'Perform' category of the Performance Framework would remain necessary for SQA to deliver. It was anticipated that any 'Plan' or 'Progress' deliverables not completed in 2021-22 would roll over into the 2022-23 plan.

The Committee were mindful that SQA would encounter a lot of performance challenges and capacity to absorb further 'Plan' or 'Progress' deliverables in 2022-23 would be limited, with the anticipation that capacity would be required to manage the implementation of the Muir Review recommendations with the highest priority.

12/7 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Committee welcomed that positive progress continued across all the workstreams with the Financial Improvements Programme.

Mindful that it was difficult for SQA to progress reviewing SQA position against a Best Value Self-Assessment from Audit Scotland during the pandemic, the Committee welcomed that work had resumed outlining SQA's present position. It was anticipated that work would be completed soon and would be able to transfer to any new organisation set up as part of the replacement of SQA.

Mr Dickson went on to provide a detailed update on the Cost Allocation Module, highlighting that version 1 had recently been completed. Cost allocation by product for 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 was available, including percentage of SQA expenditure allocated to products (NQ, HN, VQ, Customised, Contracts). The Committee noted that this work had assisted answering numerous information requests around fees and charges. The Committee commented that this information would be particularly important and helpful for the new organisation.

12/8 SMARTER WORKING UPDATE

Mrs Jacqui Faulds, Head of Appointee Management was welcomed to the meeting, who provided a comprehensive overview SQA's Smarter Working Programme. It was explained that with no date or expectation of a date for when all colleagues could return to work in the office, this had provided time for SQA to progress with an office redesign, making the working spaces more suitable to support face-to-face engagement, and the work styles and preferences chosen by colleagues. It was highlighted that the programme had commenced prior to the June announcement from the Scottish Government of the Muir Review and SQA's replacement.

Reiterating the earlier discussion (PC12/5 refers), the Committee was assured that EMT's priority continued to be the health and wellbeing of the staff. SQA continued to follow the public health guidance which was asking employers to make sure colleagues work from home where possible. When guidance changed, the programme would be rolled out appropriately. Management recognised that the programme was

likely to evolve and change following implementation, and to ensure it works in practice, assessing any impact on business delivery. Colleagues would be invited to provide feedback and suggest improvements to help move forward together.

Mrs Faulds left the meeting.

12/9 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING

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

12/10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no further business raised.

12/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 14 February 2022.

The location of the meeting would be confirmed nearer the time and would follow government advice and guidance.

Later: The date of the meeting was rescheduled to Monday 7 February 2022, at the earlier start time of 10am, and would be held by MS Teams.