

PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 16 MAY 2022

For approval

Minutes of the thirteenth meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday
7 February 2022 at 10 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 (PC13/5 onwards)
- * Dr G Stewart

In attendance

- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * Ms N Crowley, SQA
- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * [REDACTED], SQA (PC13/8 only)
- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * Mr D Middleton, SQA
- * Mr G Smith, SQA Board member (PC13/8 only)
- * indicates present

13/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the thirteenth meeting and took the opportunity to acknowledge that this was Ms Craig's last meeting of the Committee as her tenure to the SQA Board finished this month.

Apologies for absence were received from [REDACTED] from the Sponsorship Team at the Scottish Government.

13/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

13/3 PREVIOUS MEETING

i **Minutes from previous meeting**

Subject to a minor typographical correction, the minutes of the twelfth meeting held on 8 November 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

ii **Action Grid**

The Committee noted that there were no actions recorded.

iii **Workplan**

The Committee noted the contents of the workplan.

13/4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

The Chief Executive joined the meeting.

13/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW – Q3

██████████ provided a comprehensive overview of the report that covered the period October to December 2021. The following areas were covered in the course of discussion, and the Committee:

Perform

- Noted that out of the eight deliverables within the strand three had been assessed at green, and five at amber: a change from the previous quarter of six at green, and two at amber.
- Whilst the number of question papers sent to print was lower than the last diet prepared for (2020), revised turn-around times had been agreed and it was expected that all question papers would be printed by the end of February. This would continue to be closely monitored.
- Positive progress with appointee recruitment (for Principal Verifiers, Depute Principal Verifiers and Verifiers) and ad-hoc recruitment would be undertaken when required.
- Whilst the initial total number of Invigilators requested was less than for the 2019 diet (the last examination diet), further analysis had been undertaken at centre level and numbers were in a positive position.
- Whilst it was the responsibility of centres to identify the number of Invigilators required SQA continued to closely monitor this and contact centres if required.
- Clarification provided on the resources required to support the SAS Software.
- Discovery work was ongoing to assess inherent risk in legacy systems including SAS Software with the aim of creating longer term sustainable solutions.

- The Committee was assured that the current system was able to support the 2022 diet, with requirements continuing to be finalised.
- Enquired if there was an update received regarding SQA's compliance with the Ofqual malpractice audit. It was advised that a letter and draft case narrative from Ofqual had been received. Both documents were under review and where required advice would be sought to inform SQA's response.
- Noted the increase in staff turnover levels since the Scottish Government's announcement of SQA's replacement. It was acknowledged that the outcomes from Professor Muir and subsequently Professor Hayward's work could have further impact.
- Welcomed that analysis from the impact on staff recruitment continued to be monitored with results feeding into the service design activity for both recruitment and exit process.

Plan

- Noted that one deliverable within the strand had been assessed at amber, a change from green at the last quarter, nevertheless progress continued to be made.

Progress

- Noted that out of the nine deliverables within the stand, one had been completed, six had been assessed at green and two at amber: a change from the previous quarter of eight at green, and one at amber.

In closing, the Committee commended SQA for the positive development of the QPR over the past year, particularly around the level of detail now included.

13/6 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Mr Dickson provided a verbal update to the Committee highlighting that:

- Positive progress continued across all the workstreams within the Financial Improvements Programme.
- Defining SQA's present position against the Best Value Self-Assessment from Audit Scotland continued, and it was anticipated that this would be able to transfer to any new organisation set up as part of the replacement of SQA.
- Work had commenced to transfer the Cost Allocation Module data into Business World, SQA's financial system.

The Committee noted the update.

13/7 RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS STRATEGY

Ms Black provided a provided a detailed presentation to the Committee on the development a new Research and Analysis Strategy for SQA. During the ensuing discussion, the Committee:

- Welcomed that there was rigorous analysis undertaken to identify what opportunities existed for SQA, what the short, medium and long term challenges both internally and externally would be and the development of coherent actions.
- Were mindful that SQA would move into a transition period to new organisation(s), however, given that SQA was data rich in both evidence and research, encouraged management to showcase this.
- Agreed that it was essential for SQA to ensure that any data made available was communicated in a timely manner and to appropriate audiences. It was noted and welcomed by the Committee that this was an integral part of the Communications Strategy.
- Noted that it could be constructive to explore any opportunities around Scottish national data similar to the kinds of analyses and sharing agreements in place around the National Pupil Database in England.
- Endorsed that an effective Research and Analysis Strategy would set out for staff and wider stakeholders how SQA plan to continue to embed data and evidence in SQA's decision making, whilst also increasing transparency in a way that would enable the achievement of culture change that would be critical to SQA and the new organisation(s) future success.

The Committee thanked Ms Black for the informative and stimulating presentation.

13/8 SQA PEOPLE SURVEY 2021

[REDACTED], was welcomed to the meeting to present an update to the Committee on the high-level results from the SQA People Survey. A welcome was also extended to Mr Grahame Smith, SQA Board member.

In the course of discussion, the Committee:

- Noted that the survey was mainly aligned to the Civil Service People Survey, which was used by a wide range of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs).
- Observed that overall, the employee engagement score was 69%, whilst a drop from 80% in 2020, it remained a high score relative to other public bodies.
- Were mindful that the results reflected the extremely challenging context that included the unprecedented delivery demands, the announcement on SQA's replacement and, at the time that the survey was live, continued uncertainty on job security.

- Acknowledged that it remained a challenging time for SQA, particularly whilst awaiting the Scottish Government response to Professor Muir's report which would not be realised until March following the Parliamentary recess.
- Commented that the Executive Management Team (EMT) had reflected on the results, particularly as a team around leadership and managing change and that, for the first time, had developed a united six-point action plan, to support and guide staff through the challenging times ahead. This was in addition to any plans being developed at business area or directorate level.
- These included EMT setting out clear aims, objectives and priorities for SQA at a corporate level, including recognising that a holistic approach to resource planning across SQA in respect of change proposals to ensure greater visibility in 2022-23 and beyond.
- Highlighted the importance of creating psychological safety at work and welcomed that each Directorate leadership team would have sessions on this.
- Were assured that EMT's priority continued to be the health and wellbeing of the staff. EMT continued to encourage regular teams and one-to-one meetings, and fortnightly 'Ask EMT' sessions continued. Following feedback for smaller, informal get togethers a new platform 'Tea with EMT' had been introduced. 'Live events' were also undertaken when required.
- Welcomed the positivity of the highest scoring questions around individuals and teams. It was emphasised the importance of ensuring that working in SQA remained a positive experience for all its staff.
- It was highlighted that the recent pulse survey had also enabled staff to provide feedback on how they were feeling about working in SQA. The Committee was pleased to note that the average results continued to remain encouraging with high scores in relation to feeling supported to work effectively in SQA.
- Suggested that in the context of the change SQA would have to navigate the establishment of a People Committee could be beneficial. Functions of the Committee could also include the governance of people issues and overseeing the delivery of the People Strategy.
- Agreed that it was important for the SQA Board to consider options around how it could become more visible within the organisation.

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

Both [REDACTED] and Mr Smith left the meeting.

13/9 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING

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

13/10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In drawing the meeting to a close, the Convenor thanked Ms Craig for her years of service and contribution to SQA. During her tenure, she had been an active member of a number of Committees, providing strong advice and guidance. In response,

Ms Craig expressed her gratitude to SQA officers, particularly the Strategic Planning & Governance business area for their dedication and hard work to develop and refine the QPR.

13/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Tuesday 16 May 2022.

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

Later: It was confirmed that the meeting would be held by MS Teams.