

**SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**  
**PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 16 AUGUST 2022**

**PC15/3 i**  
**For approval**

Minutes of the fourteenth meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday  
16 May 2022 at 10.30 am by Microsoft Teams.

**Members**

- \* Ms A Davis (Convenor)
- \* Mr H McKay
- \* Mrs J Handley

**Officers**

- Mr M Baxter
- \* 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 (PC14/8 only)
- \* [REDACTED], SQA
- \* Mr D Middleton, SQA
- \* Mr S Sharkey, SQA
- \* Mr J Wallace, SQA

\* indicates present

**14/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the fourteenth meeting including Ms Jane Handley to her first meeting of the Committee.

A welcome was also extended to Mr David Middleton, SQA Chair, Mr Stephen Sharkey, Head of Service Delivery, who was deputising for Mr Downie and Mr John Wallace, Head of Contract Operations, who was deputising for Mr McMorris.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Baxter, Mr Borley, Mr Downie and Mr McMorris.

**14/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

#### 14/3 PREVIOUS MEETING

i **Minutes from previous meeting**

The minutes of the thirteenth meeting held on 7 February 2022 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.

#### 14/4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

#### 14/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW – Q4

The requirement of the Committee was queried because the consideration section at the top of the cover paper was different to the section at the bottom. In response it was explained that the section at the bottom was to demonstrate governance structures and pathways of items through the organisation. In term of this item, it was clarified that the Committee was to discuss and review the QPR, as per the Standing Orders.

█ went on to provide a comprehensive overview of the report that covered the period January to March 2022. 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: no change from the previous quarter.
- Were highlighted to an acronym error within the National Qualifications Delivery to Plan section. The PDA acronym used in the narrative for Exam Exceptional Circumstances was pre-Diet Assurance and not Professional Development Awards.
- **Redacted text - Exempt under section 30 Prejudice to the Effective Conduct of Public Affairs**
- Were pleased to note that the end of year figure for turnover was lower than the industry benchmark.
- Enquired if there was cause for concern with the increase in leavers within the Business Systems Directorate.

In response it was advised that this business area had seen the biggest increase in turnover since pre-pandemic. An analysis had been undertaken to enhance understanding of the reasoning provided by leavers. The Committee agreed that it would be helpful to have further information surrounding this for the next meeting.

It was acknowledged that SQA had limits and constraints on what could be offered to attract potential employees in the current buoyant market, not just within Business Systems but also across the organisation, particularly at junior and mid-management levels. The forthcoming replacement of SQA was an additional barrier to attracting talent, as well as retaining talent. SQA had identified this as a corporate risk and along with other risks associated with the replacement of SQA had been escalated by the Audit Committee to the SQA Board, who had in turn escalated to the Scottish Government.

The Committee was assured that this would be closely monitored.

- Noted that although there had been upward trend of sickness absences, particularly around stress, this month had seen a slight reduction.

The Committee were assured that the Executive Management Team's (EMT's) priority continued to be the health and wellbeing of the staff, and this would be closely monitored.

- Were encouraged by the number of actions completed with the Communications Strategy plan.

### **Plan**

- Welcomed that one deliverable within the strand around the development of a Research and Analysis Strategy had been assessed at green, a change from amber at the last quarter.

It was noted that although the primary action plan had been agreed there would be constraints until a new Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards had been appointed to take forward this work and recruitment was underway.

### **Progress**

- Noted that out of the nine deliverables within the strand, one had been completed, six had been assessed at green and two at amber.

Although no overall change to the numbers from the previous quarter the deliverable around ISO9001 certification phase 1 had changed from green to amber and the deliverable around the evaluation of the 2021 Awarding Programme had changed from amber to green.

## **14/6 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**

Mr Dickson provided an update on the ongoing programme of work and advised that SQA had been unable to engage sufficient resource to progress the actions agreed to improve SQA Best Value against the five categories on Audit Scotland Best Value Toolkit. Although initially this was a result of the pandemic, work in relation to the replacement of SQA and delivery of the 2022 diet including parallel contingency activities had taken precedence.

Following the publication of the report by Professor Kenneth Muir it was recognised that there was an opportunity to develop services and processes where Best Value

was embedded in the operating models for replacement organisations. A short project would be undertaken to assist SQA to move on the self-assessment model in a positive direction while the reform was ongoing, and this was welcomed by the Committee.

During discussion, the Committee:

- Acknowledged that underpinning a successful Best Value Framework would allow for a strong organisational culture and positive attitude towards Best Value and improvement.
- Noted that the duty of Best Value applied to all public bodies in Scotland, and that accountable officers had specific responsibilities to ensure that arrangements had been made to secure Best Value. Audit Scotland, as part of the Annual Audit Plan, would undertake a review to confirm that such arrangements were in place within SQA.
- Suggested, based on experience in other organisations that it could be of benefit to enable budget holders to take ownership of any efficiency savings and re-use within own business areas.

In response it was advised not appropriate for 2022-23 due to the financial approach of an overcommitment that was held centrally by Finance and Corporate Services. Although the position would be kept under constant review to ensure anticipated slippage emerges through the year there could be a requirement to look at in year efficiencies to bring the budget back into balance.

- Enquired around the status of Phase 3 of the Corporate Business Systems project.

In response it was advised that this phase was the cost allocation part of Business World, specifically time recording, and this had been fully implemented.

The Committee supported the direction of travel in this programme of work and looked forward to future outputs.

#### **14/7 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2021-22: DRAFT PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

Linking back to a previous discussion around the requirements of the Committee from the cover paper (PC14/4 refers) it was agreed that this would be reviewed to ensure a consistent and accurate approach going forward.

██████████ highlighted to the Committee that there were several areas in the report that were still to be finalised and a final draft would be circulated to the Committee. It was also highlighted that Section B (Accountability Report) and Section C (the unaudited Annual Accounts 2021-22) would be presented to the Audit Committee for review at its meeting in June, and the SQA Board would approval the final version at its meeting in September.

During discussion the Committee:

- Noted that the report would be given a professional proof-read to make it publication ready by SQA's Editorial team.
- Suggested that within the 'Environmental performance' section it would be sensible to explain further the 2022 exam diet reasoning (e.g. visiting verification and appointee events) for increase in CO2 emissions. Inclusion of historic figures pre-pandemic would be beneficial for comparison.
- Suggested the inclusion of further narrative to clarify that the appeals on the grounds of discrimination still under consideration within the 'appeals' section refer to discrimination by centres.
- Suggested that it would be proactive to explain the status of the outstanding ten National Occupational Standards projects within the 'Accreditation delivery' section.
- Suggested that the narrative on human rights with the 'Outcome 1: We provide a credible qualifications system' section be reviewed to ensure that it was aligned with the Scottish Government.

In closing it was noted that a copy of the draft performance analysis of the Annual Report and Accounts 2021-22 would be sent to Audit Scotland later this week and the Committee was requested to send any further suggested amendments directly to [REDACTED].

#### 14/8 **SQA STAKEHOLDER TRACKING RESEARCH AND CUSTOMER SURVEY RESULTS**

[REDACTED], Senior Research Manager, was welcomed to the meeting who provided a comprehensive overview of the key results from the 2021 Scottish Stakeholder Tracking and the 2021-22 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. In the course of discussion, the Committee:

- Observed that overall satisfaction with SQA had slightly recovered, when compared to the previous year.
- Suggested that by sharing the results with staff, particularly with the positive improvement, could provide an opportunity to boost staff moral
- Acknowledged the challenge SQA faced and emphasised the importance for SQA to continue to improve how it communicates and engages with stakeholders and customers.

- Welcomed that SQA would remain focussed to ensure the credibility of the product remained high during the reform.
- Noted the continued rise in perceptions that SQA was bureaucratic. It was welcomed that SQA had planned operational excellence work and a deeper stakeholder engagement to lead to improvements in SQA's key processes and contacts with customers. This included recognising that more detailed research was needed to understand the difference in perception between audience groups.

It was enquired if staff had been asked about the perceptions that SQA was bureaucratic and although this was not something that had been done, it was agreed that this could be helpful to explore in the future to assist understanding.

It was highlighted that the limited digital capacity within SQA could impact bureaucracy perceptions.

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

[REDACTED] left the meeting.

#### 14/9 **FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING**

The Committee considered the items for the next meeting and agreed the agenda would be established from the workplan.

It was suggested that it would be beneficial to have an item around the role of the existing governance during the transition of SQA. It was agreed that this would be considered and that this would be discussion for the SQA Board.

#### 14/10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no further business raised.

#### 14/11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Tuesday 16 August and would be held by MS Teams.