

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

PC9/3 i

PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 10 MARCH 2021

For approval

Minutes of the eighth meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday 23 November 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 (from PC9/5)
- Ms J Blair
- * [REDACTED]
- * Mr S Borley
- * Mr A Dickson
- * Mr L Downie
- * Mr J McMorris
- * Ms F Robertson
- * Dr G Stewart

*indicates present

In attendance

[REDACTED], SQA
Mr D Middleton, SQA Chair
Mr A Shaw, SQA (PC8/8 only)
Ms T Weir (PC8/8 only)

8/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the eighth meeting including Mr Middleton, SQA Chair.

Apologies were recorded for Ms Blair.

It was noted that due to technical difficulties Mr Baxter would join the meeting late.

8/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

8/3 PREVIOUS MEETING

i Minutes from previous meeting

Subject to minor typographical corrections, the minutes of the seventh meeting held on 27 July 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.

8/4 MATTERS ARISING

7/5 Quarterly Performance Review – Q1 2020-21

Mr Downie advised that recruitment for a new Head of Service to lead, manage and deliver the Strategic Change Programme had been unsuccessful. After consideration, it was agreed to pause the Programme until after the key delivery of the 2021 Awarding Programme. The Committee noted that this would impact on the delivery of the Programme.

8/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW – Q2 2020-21

Mr Borley explained that the report was now created using the data and analytics reporting tool Power BI, however, it remained a manual process to bring together all the data into the report presented. The report had some minor inconsistent reporting errors as a result of this and these were highlighted during the detailed overview of the report.

The following areas were covered in the course of discussion, and the Committee:

- Welcomed the inclusion of a key to explain the various symbols in the report.
- Noted that overall staff absence levels remained below the Public Sector Benchmark, apart from within Accreditation; due to this being a small team.
- Requested an update on the progress to include an analysis of results from exit interviews in the report.

In response, it was advised that since the start of the financial year there had been 33 individuals who had departed the organisation. Analysis had revealed that the lack of progression opportunities and pay as the main reasons for departure. It was highlighted that this did not include any individuals who left the organisation because of their fixed term contact concluding.

It was suggested that it would be sensible to review the results from exit interviews annually to enable better discussions and this was agreed by the Committee.

- Enquired if additional items, such as a keyboard, had been offered to staff to enable them to have a safe and effective workstation.

In response it was advised that the opportunity had been opened to staff and remained open for any changing circumstances. All staff had been provided with equipment requested from keyboards to office chairs, and all cases were reviewed individually. Additionally, the Facilities team were also working with colleagues with limited space to identify solutions.

- Requested an update on the investigation on the issue with e-Marking UAT testing with web service.

In response, it was noted that the issue had been technical compatibility because of legacy SQA systems and modern systems used by suppliers. All issues had been rectified and testing had resumed.

- Requested further information on the COVID related impact on deliverable for SQA continuing to develop and improve its portfolio of Qualifications.

In response it was highlighted that the priority had been the 2020 Alternative Certification Model (ACM) and then to work on support for centres for 2021, thereby meaning some delay to product development.

Over session 2020-21 centres would continue to require support with the constantly evolving environment, and this would continue to take priority.

It was highlighted that SQA's work with the regulators had also experienced similar delays with the evolving changes because of the pandemic.

- Enquired if any concerns had been identified around staff engagement, particularly with the lack of office networking and larger numbers meeting virtually.

Acknowledged that it was an important point, particularly as speaking in public was one of the most common fears for people. However, as time passed confidence with staff was increasing and hosting sessions with smaller groups had helped colleagues to continue to ask questions through Ask EMT sessions.

The focus at a recent Management Team meeting had been to reflect on the experience of 2020 and challenges for 2021. Several corporate-wide themes had emerged, including the importance to support the wellbeing of team and peers. The Management Team would continue to encourage regular teams and one-to-one meetings.

The Committee was assured that EMT's priority continued to be the health and wellbeing of the staff.

- ❖ Enquired about the status of the People Strategy.

The development of the strategy remained on track, and a visioning exercise

had been undertaken to establish strategic themes and aims for the future of the organisation. Key emerging themes included:

- ❖ Strengthening the foundations by keeping people at the heart of what SQA do. This would also include flexibility of employment, multiskilled workforce, collaboration, and work/life balance.
 - ❖ Building capacity by creating transformational change using infrastructure, recruitment, performance management and talent management.
 - ❖ Developing the organisation into a value led learning one, to deliver into 2021 and longer term.
- Enquired if the Stakeholder Management Strategy would require review given the recommendation on the development of a clear communications strategy, co-constructed with stakeholders from the Priestley Review: Rapid Review of National Qualifications experience 2020 report.

In response it was advised that the deliverable for 2020-21 was to develop a framework for stakeholder management based on best practice.

It was also highlighted that there was also a separate strategic review of communications across SQA underway and the outcome would be presented to the SQA Board in February 2021. Following discussion at the SQA Board meeting, if appropriate an item would be added to the next meeting of the Committee.

- Suggested that it could be beneficial to assign overall RAG statuses to each of the outcomes as this could identify any critical areas more easily.

The Committee noted the report.

8/6 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Mr Dickson presented the report that provided an update on the Financial Improvements Programme and Best Value Programme, advising that progress continued to meet the objectives set out in the Best Value Framework and supporting action plans. Within the Financial Improvements Programme four workstreams (governance, people, processes and reporting) had been identified, and would be driven by a Finance Business Partner.

During discussion, the Committee:

- Acknowledged that progress on Best Value part of Programme was slower than had been hoped for due to competing demands of key individuals.
- Welcomed that there continued to be a spread of responsibilities to enable development opportunities across SQA, including assisting to create a culture of improvement.
- Noted that currency fluctuations were considered, however SQA did not money market hedge.

- Welcomed that financial resource and people would be aligned, particularly given the importance of embedding Best Value across SQA.

The Committee noted the report.

8/7 2021-22 PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK AND BUSINESS PLAN

Mr Borley reminded the Committee that the Performance Framework provided the basis for delivering an Annual Business Plan, and that the 'Perform' deliverables were specifically to capture what SQA must deliver every year, no matter the context.

The outcomes covered a three-year period from 2020 to 2023 and the deliverables that meet SQA's needs and obligations for 2021-22 were still to be finalised. This included the potential for SQA to develop three assessment systems and supporting post certification / appeals processes concurrently (ACM for National 5, Exam diet of modified Higher and Advanced Higher courses and contingency plans ready to be invoked should Higher and Advanced Higher exams be cancelled), following the announcement by the Deputy First Minister to Parliament on 7 October 2020. In addition, SQA would be required to progress the recommendations agreed within the Priestley Review, some of which would be embedded in work already planned for some deliverables, (e.g. SQA's work with stakeholders). As a result, there was not as much capacity for new discretionary activity, with some deliverables which required to be paused, to be picked up again in future.

During the ensuing discussion, the Committee:

- Agreed that it was prudent for SQA to take a narrower focus and concentrate on the critical activities SQA was required to deliver in 2021-22.
- Concurred that 'Perform' deliverables should be carried forward.
- Welcomed that mechanisms would be established to learn from 2021-22 to inform and improve next year's framework and future practice.
- Endorsed that some in-year deliverables may be required to be deferred if resources were required elsewhere.
- Agreed that it was difficult to measure credibility of SQA as it was defined by a number of factors, however, suggested that it could be valuable to include something in this area, perhaps within stakeholders.
- Noted that although SQA had to ensure it delivered in 2021-22, management should be mindful not to lose sight of what was crucial for the organisation in the medium and long term.

Discussion led to 2021 awarding and it was acknowledged by the Committee that the SQA Board would be the forum for discussing such matters.

In closing the Committee suggested that the workplan should be reviewed against the Performance Framework deliverables to assess coverage and / or gaps.

8/8 INTERNATIONAL UPDATE

From the Business Development Directorate, Mr Alistair Shaw, Head of International, and Ms Tracy Weir, Head of Opportunity Appraisal & Bid Management, were welcomed to the meeting. They provided a detailed overview of SQA's International Activities including the governance processes that supports the 2020-25 International Sales Strategy and the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the International Sales Strategy.

During the ensuing discussion, various aspects of SQA's future planning for new business development and contract opportunities was covered.

The Committee thanked Mr Shaw and Ms Weir for the informative update.

Mr Shaw and Ms Weir left the meeting.

8/9 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING

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

8/10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business raised for the consideration by the Committee.

8/11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 10 March 2021 at 10.30 am.

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

Later: The next meeting of the Committee would take place via MSTeams.

PAPERS FOR NOTING

PFN 1 Meeting Dates 2021

The Committee noted the dates presented.

PNF 2 SQA Health and Safety Update 2020

The Committee noted the report and that it would be presented to the next SQA Board meeting.