

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

PC21/3 i

PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 5 FEBRUARY 2024

For approval

Minutes of the twentieth meeting of the Performance Committee held on Tuesday
7 November 2023 at 10am by Microsoft Teams.

Members

- * Ms A Davis (Convenor)
- * Mrs J Handley
- * Ms M Wailes

Officers

- * Mr M Baxter
- * Ms J Blair
- * [REDACTED]
- * Mr J Booth
- * Mr M Campbell
- * Mr A Dickson
- Mrs D Mahmoud
- * Mr J McMorris
- * Ms Y Raven
- Ms F Robertson
- * Dr G Stewart
- * Mr M Ware

In attendance

- * [REDACTED], SQA (PC20/10 only)
- * Ms S Coyle, SQA
- * [REDACTED], SQA
- * Ms G Hepburn, SQA (PC 20/8 only)
- * [REDACTED], SQA (PC20/1 – PC20/8 only)
- * [REDACTED], SQA (PC 20/9 only)
- * Mr R Pidgeon, SQA (PC 20/10 only)
- * Mr G Smith, SQA Board member (PC20/9 only)

* indicates present

20/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the twentieth meeting, including Ms Sharon Coyle, Head of HR, who was deputising for Mrs Mahmoud. Apologies for absence were received from the Chief Executive, [REDACTED] and Mrs Mahmoud.

20/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

20/3 PREVIOUS MEETING

i Minutes from previous meeting

Subject to a minor amend, the Committee approved the minutes of the nineteenth meeting held on 16 August 2023 as an accurate record.

ii Action Grid

The Committee noted the closure of the only open action.

iii Workplan

The Committee noted the contents of the workplan.

20/4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

20/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW – Q2

Ms Raven provided an overview of the Quarterly Performance Review (QPR) that covered the period July to September 2023, reporting that the Corporate Outcomes remain unchanged from the previous quarter update; three assessed at green and two at amber. She went on to highlight the deliverables that had changed in RAG status and context about what had changed was provided.

During the discussion, the Committee:

- Commended SQA for the significant amount of work undertaken by colleagues to successfully close out all the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Section 23 Agreement conditions enabling the deliverable to change RAG status from amber to green.
- Noted that the financial deliverables RAG status had changed from green to amber as a result of the ongoing delay in the confirmation of reform related funding from the Scottish Government.

The Education Reform programme was a Scottish Government led programme and the Committee agreed that the absence of resources could put the delivery of this as at risk. There had been discussions at the Audit Committee, the SQA Board and the Chief Executive had written to Mr Rennick, Director-General Education & Justice.

The Committee agreed that SQA was in an unreasonable position being expected to operate without confirmed funding and BAU resources would have to be prioritised over reform resources.

- Welcomed the introduction of the forecast for the next quarter within the dashboard for delivering contracts.

The Committee suggested that this could be incorporated into other dashboards within the report to help understand the anticipate change within the RAG statuses.

- Appreciated the update on SQA’s cyber maturity and resilience that provided an awareness and an understanding of the results that would be included in future report, including new scorecards.
- Were pleased to note that schools, colleges and training providers had received the 2023 National Qualification appeal outcomes.
- Enquired around the specific monitoring and enforcement activity progressed by Ofqual in relation to Malpractice investigations of centres delivering the Level 1 Health and Safety in a Construction Environment qualification. It was noted that a further update would be issued to the SQA Board but that H&S in construction wouldn’t be delivered again.
- Were assured that work continued to review all policies and the programme remained on track.
- Enquired around the numbers regarding the Estate Occupancy. It was noted that the information had been taken from the desk booking system and could be misrepresenting true figures as some colleagues did not always ‘check in’. Other options to measure this were under investigation and management continued to encourage the use of office space.

20/6 2024-27 CORPORATE PLAN UPDATE

Ms Raven advised that a workshop had been held in September with the Senior Leadership Team and discussion had mirrored that of the SQA Board around aligning to a fifth National Outcome: Human Rights; the creation of a new deliverable dedicated to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Work continued to ensure that the focus remained on mainstreaming EDI at SQA in all business areas, considering how we work, not just what we do.

The Committee were mindful that SQA were using existing governance measures, however, required a clear steer by the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that SQA’s corporate plan was aligned and met the expectations of the Scottish Government. The Committee was assured that SQA would continue to operate and prioritise activity to meet its statutory duties. An update on progress would be provided at the next meeting.

20/7 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Mr Dickson provided a comprehensive overview of the progress made within the different workstreams within the Best Value Programme.

He highlighted that as part of the recent annual audit exercise by SQA’s external auditors, Audit Scotland, they had raised an issue that SQA were using an old Best Value Framework. SQA were now self-assessing against the updated Best Value Framework and would develop consistent reporting moving forward.

20/8 INTERNATIONAL UPDATE

Ms Gillian Hepburn, Head of International, was welcomed to the meeting.

Ms Hepburn provided an overview of SQA's international engagement activities, explaining that in 2023 travel had resumed and the team focus shifted to business pursuit which had contributed to a healthy early pipeline of opportunities and allowed re-engagement face to face with many long-standing customers. The team would continue to grow existing markets and new opportunities were being identified. Several new prospects were in the pipeline and key consultancy companies were interested in working with SQA again. A priority for SQA was to grow new markets to continue to spread the reputation of both the organisation and Scotland as a study and work destination. In due course, this may require additional resource if growth continues. Transition to a new brand would need to be managed carefully to ensure no loss of customers and revenue.

The Committee expressed their support and acknowledged the work and dedication of International Team in establishing SQA's reputation as a leading, global awarding body, committed to supporting the Scottish Government's International agenda.

Ms Hepburn left the meeting.

20/9 SQA PEOPLE SURVEY – PROPOSED NEW APPROACH

Mr Grahame Smith, SQA Board member, and [REDACTED], were welcomed to the meeting.

[REDACTED] delivered presentation explaining the drivers for change to replace SQA's current annual People Survey with streamlined, quarterly Engagement Surveys. During the ensuing discussion, the Committee:

- Commended management for adjusting to quarterly surveys that enable them to be more responsive to what the organisation needs, including timely informed decisions and action planning.
- Welcomed that the question set would be pared back to enable more robust data analysis of responses, including a louder employee voice during the period of significant change as SQA transitions to the New Qualifications Body.
- Considered the timings, particularly the shorter timeframes and potential challenges to demonstrate progressing action plans.
- Recognised that there was a culture shift required and this would complement SQA's vision and core values.
- Welcomed that further advice was being explored around wider colleague engagement, both in terms of capturing employee voice and how management continue to engage on an ongoing basis.
- Noted that although still under discussion, emphasised the importance for incorporating verbatim comments.
- Concurred that colleague engagement was a strategic priority and it was essential for adequate resources to ensure that the overall process was properly managed.

- Noted that the next steps for this work would entail the analysis of the qualitative data and action planning from 2022 survey to produce themes and points of focus and engagement to determine content and format for pilot survey in Q4 of 2023-24.

In closing, the Committee welcomed the changes and move to a more modern and frequent approach to gathering the views of colleagues across SQA. An update on the progress would be provided to the next meeting.

Mr Smith and [REDACTED] left the meeting.

20/10 2022-23 KEY AUDIENCE RESEARCH RESULTS

[REDACTED], and Mr Richard Pidgeon, Head of Communications and Engagement were welcomed to the meeting. They provided a comprehensive overview of the results from the 2022-23 Key Audience Research which replaced the Scottish Stakeholder Tracking research programme, highlighting that since this was the first year that the Key Audience Research had been carried out, previous years could not be compared with this year's results to previous years. The Committee had also been provided with full reports by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd.

The Committee discussed the results in depth, noting that the findings from employers and training providers and parents / carers were largely positive, while findings from colleges and schools were more mixed. It was welcomed that the research would allow SQA to better understand its audiences and provided evidence of where things were working well, and areas of improvement, which would support SQA's decision making for the year ahead.

Discussion led to SQA's engagement activities and the opportunity for SQA to strengthen its messaging around how it was consulting and delivering new methods of engagement showcasing the evidence-based approach to its work. It was highlighted that the programme of centre visits which took a "listen and learn" approach to engagement with educators and learners had been well received and that SQA staff would continue to actively engage with schools and colleges throughout Scotland. The Committee welcomed the creation of Educator and Learner Charters to enable working collaboratively and enabling voices of these groups into SQA.

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

[REDACTED] and Mr Pidgeon left the meeting.

20/11 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING

The Committee considered the items for the next meeting and agreed that in addition to the items on the workplan there would be further updates on SQA's Corporate Plan 2024-27 and SQA's People Survey.

20/12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no further business raised.

20/13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 5 February 2024 and would be held by MS Teams.