

SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

PC11/3 i

PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE — 23 AUGUST 2021

For approval

Minutes of the tenth meeting of the Performance Committee held on Monday 17 May 2021 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
- * Ms J Blair
- * [REDACTED]
- Mr S Borley
- * Mr A Dickson
- * Mr L Downie
- * Mrs D Mahmoud
- * Mr J McMorris
- * Ms F Robertson
- * Dr G Stewart

* indicates present

In attendance

- [REDACTED], SQA
- [REDACTED], SQA
- [REDACTED], SQA
- Ms C Matheson, SQA (PC10/9 only)
- Mr D Middleton, SQA Chair
- [REDACTED], SQA
- Mr A Shaw, SQA (PC10/9 only)

Observer

- [REDACTED], Scottish Government

10/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Convenor welcomed everyone to the tenth meeting including Mr Middleton, SQA Chair, [REDACTED] from the Corporate Office and [REDACTED].

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

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Borley.

10/2 DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There were no conflicts of interest declared on the agenda.

10/3 PREVIOUS MEETING

i Minutes from previous meeting

Subject to minor typographical corrections, the minutes of the ninth meeting held on 10 March 2021 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

ii Action Grid

9/7Country Human Rights Impact Assessments - Update

The Committee agreed that the paper, that included a Country Summary list should be circulated to the SQA Board for awareness of action and implication.

iii Workplan

The Committee enquired when the next update on stakeholder research and the annual customer survey would be presented. It was agreed that timings would be reviewed and, when appropriate, would be scheduled into the workplan.

The Committee noted the contents of the workplan.

10/4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

10/5 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REVIEW – Q4 2020-21

The Committee were reminded that due to the lead in time to produce the report some of the data may not be as current as desired. To enable the Committee to understand the status of each update, and to ensure more timely data to be reviewed, from the next quarter updates on the outcomes and deliverables would include what had occurred in the previous quarter and what was planned for the next quarter. The Committee welcomed the approach and commented that this would aid to focus discussion on any areas that were not assessed at Green.

[REDACTED] 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 seven deliverables within the strand three had been assessed at Green, and three at Amber; mainly due to priorities and change of direction for a number of activities across SQA during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Noted that the Q4 absence levels were low, apart from March and it was queried if there were any underlying commonalities or patterns. It was highlighted that within the Operations Directorate longer-term absences had been identified that could influence the Directorate figures and this could be the reason. Nevertheless, it was agreed that this would be investigated and reported back to the Committee in due course.
- Enquired around the higher number of overall entries than previous year for National 3, National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

In response it was explained a detailed analysis was undertaken, and there was no cause for concern identified.

- Were reminded that due to the lead in time to produce the report, data was a snapshot in time, and figures are reverting to predicted levels. The situation would continue to be closely monitored.
- Requested clarification on the further round of testing in the Provisional Results project to address some observations identified from recent engagement. It was explained that the additional testing was to ensure the system was fit for purpose and progress was being closely monitored, with mitigating actions put in place to assist slippage recovery.
- Noted that figures with the progress percentage by Quarter for the Dangerous Goods Driver Training was for April, whilst the volume of applications visual was for the previous month; the update would be reviewed for the next meeting.
- Were assured that the Executive Management Teams (EMT's) priority continued to be the health and wellbeing of the staff.

All colleagues had the opportunity to request additional equipment from keyboards to office chairs, and all cases were reviewed individually. The request service remained open for colleagues with any changing circumstances and the Facilities team continued to work with colleagues with limited space to identify solutions. Several intranet articles providing advice on ergonomic setup had also been provided. In addition, an allowance of up to £45 to cover the cost of a desk / table suitable for home working had been introduced to further support colleagues to create a suitable working environment.

Mental Health remained the front and centre for SQA, with several trained Scottish Mental Health First Aiders across the organisation. There was also a dedicated health, safety and wellbeing intranet page that included the existing range of health and wellbeing opportunities.

- Welcomed that the following the pass of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill on 16 March 2021, SQA's legal requirements would be finalised in due course and would be reported to the Committee as part of the legislative, statutory and regulatory requirements section.

Plan

- Noted that out of the ten deliverables within the strand four had been paused and six had been assessed at Green, with positive progress being made.
- Welcomed that the Environmental Impact Strategy had been approved and promotion and rollout of the strategy was on track for delivery across.

The Committee commented that SQA should be mindful to manage expectations going forward when travel returned to pre-pandemic levels.

- Requested clarification around the how Brand workshops were undertaken, particularly if SQA's Brand Strategy was about SQA's overall reputation management approach, not refreshing logos / designs.

In response it was advised that the work had been aligned with Awarding 2021 and adjusted programme schedule and timescales have been made to reflect SQA's audience's position and needs at this time.

Progress

- Noted that out of the nine deliverables within the stand one had been paused, one closed and seven had been assessed at Green, with positive progress being made.
- Commented the progress by SQA to strengthen relationships with key Scottish stakeholders and institutes to achieve more cross-organisational activity.

In closing, the Committee commended SQA for the continuing progress against the Performance Framework deliverables.

10/6 STRATEGIC BEST VALUE AND FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Mr Dickson advised that overall progress had slowed within the Programme in the last quarter, predominantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and competing demands of key individuals.

He went on to provide a detailed update on the Cost Allocation Project, including the benefits from a full costing approach. It was explained that the team had been focusing on defining the high-level project tasks and deliverables as well as making some early decisions on the core assumptions which would form the basis of the chosen methodology.

In the ensuing discussion the Committee:

- Were reassured that although the Finance team was leading on the work on the Cost Allocation project, it was organisation wide and would support the overall Programme.
- Welcomed that engagement would take place with staff and the Scottish Government as the project progressed.

- Noted that it would be March 2022 at the earliest to build enough information to allow an effective analysis of product and market costs.

The Committee noted the update provided.

10/7 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2020–21: DRAFT PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

██████████ highlighted that in response to the continuing pressures faced by departments and other government entities due to the impact of the pandemic, and to ease the burden on preparers of government Annual Reports and Accounts HM Treasury reviewed the financial reporting requirements for 2020-21. Therefore, any non-audited performance information that had already been published, would include a reference to the relevant publication rather than producing the information in the Section A (Performance Report) of the Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21.

It was highlighted to the Committee that only the draft performance analysis section had been included for review, and that there were several areas in the report that were still to be finalised, however the SQA Board would approval the final version at its meeting in September. It was also noted that Section B (Accountability Report) and Section C (the unaudited Annual Accounts 2020–21) would be presented to the Audit Committee for review at its meeting in June.

During discussion the Committee:

- Noted that the report would be given a professional proofread to make it publication ready by SQA's Editorial team.
- Enquired if SQA had ever been accredited by Investors in People.

In response it was advised that although several years ago SQA had, it had been agreed that the number of other areas and awards that SQA had recognition was adequate. SQA was committed to the Fair Work Framework, with all dimensions mapped to ensure that everything was considered in all its people initiatives and policies.

- Suggested that within the Credibility section, it would be beneficial to include figures for Advanced Higher.
- Welcomed that a digital assessment development service to help centres produce high quality digital assessment for local and remote delivery had been introduced.
- Suggested that it would be proactive to include narrative that articulated how SQA had progressed against its outcomes given the impact of COVID-19.
- Suggested that the narrative around colleagues working 'at home' and not 'from home' should be reviewed to clearly explain the distinction between the two.
- Suggested the inclusion of narrative around SQA working with others in the education sector to support the planning and delivery of the 2020 Alternative Certification Model.

In closing, the Committee agreed that the completed Section A, including tracked changes, of the Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21 would be presented to the next meeting for comment.

10/8 SQA PEOPLE STRATEGY

Mrs Mahmoud provided a detailed presentation to the Committee on the development and progress of SQA's People Strategy, and the Committee noted that:

- A key deliverable of SQA's Performance Framework was to 'Deliver a People Strategy' and the final draft would be presented to the SQA Board in June.
- The first iteration of the strategy was developed through a series of workshops within the People Directorate's Extended Leadership Team to ensure the specialisms and expertise of each of the Directorate's areas were incorporated into the strategy.
- An organisation-wide plan of colleague engagement with the draft strategy was undertaken, including engagement with SQA's Trade Unions and colleague networks.
- A capability needs analysis, and an SQA-wide Workforce Plan was conducted, in-line with public sector guidelines to ensure clear capabilities for the present, in future and how they would be developed.
- The strategy was designed for supporting SQA over the next three to five years and would be based on four aspects:
 - Development SQA's design and culture.
 - Improvement of performance.
 - Improvement of health, wellbeing and environment; and
 - To become a responsible business.

During the ensuing discussion, the Committee:

- Welcomed that management planned to embed a culture of positive challenge, based on an understanding that the aim was to do our best for SQA and its customers.
- Were reminded that Appointees were not employees of SQA, they were teaching professionals and specialists contracted to support SQA activities; and therefore, not considered during the development of the strategy.
- Noted that there although there were many long-term staff within SQA, options to build and progress all staff had been considered, including potential options for secondment and procurement, particularly in specialist roles within Business Systems.

- Endorsed that an effective People Strategy would set out for staff and wider stakeholders how SQA plan to address each area of the strategy in a way that enable the achievement of culture change that would be critical to SQA's future success.

In closing, the Committee recognised the encouraging progress in the development of People Strategy.

10/9 INTERNATIONAL UPDATE - FOLLOW-UP REPORT

Mr Alistair Shaw, Head of International, and Ms Cheryl Matheson, Head of Opportunity Appraisal & Bid Management, were welcomed to the meeting.

Following a previous update to the Committee, a comprehensive update was provided regarding SQA's Human Rights Policy and Country Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIA) and SQA's International Sales Strategy.

In the course of discussion, the Committee:

- Welcomed the publication of SQA's Human Rights Policy and guidance.
- Noted that HRIAs had been undertaken for all countries that SQA operated, and as a result there were a number of countries that SQA would withdraw from following the completion of any current students undertaking qualifications.
- Endorsed the implementation of a human rights alert service to inform SQA of any emerging issues.
- Acknowledged the challenge for SQA to pursue new business during the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- Suggested some potential new markets for new business development for SQA.

The Committee looked forward to future updates from the international arena.

Mr Shaw and Ms Matheson left the meeting.

10/10 FOCUS FOR NEXT MEETING

Following on from the earlier discussion (PC10/7 refers), the completed Section A of the Annual Report and Accounts 2020-21 would be presented to the next meeting. The Committee noted that the rest of the agenda would be established from the workplan.

Postscript: After a review of timescales, presentation of Section A to the next meeting would impact on the whole Annual Report and Accounts going to the Audit Committee on 16 August for final approval before going to the Board in September. Therefore, it was agreed that the report would be circulated virtually for comment, when available.

10/11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no further business raised.

10/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 23 August 2021 at 10.30 am, via MS Teams.