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SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE – 25 OCTOBER 2023

Minutes of the one hundred and seventy-third meeting of the Accreditation Committee held on Wednesday 25 October 2023.

Members

*Mr G Smith (Convenor)
Ms V Mann
*Ms J Handley
*Ms A Newton
*Ms E Hutton
Mr A Clark
Ms F Robertson
*Ms K Summers
Mr I Wilson
*Mr R Reed

Observers

Mr D Middleton
* [REDACTED] (SG)
* [REDACTED] (SDS)
* [REDACTED] (SQA Accreditation)
* [REDACTED] (SQA Accreditation)
* [REDACTED] (SQA Accreditation)
* [REDACTED] (SQA Accreditation)

Officers

*Mr G Brown

* [REDACTED]
* [REDACTED]
* [REDACTED]
* [REDACTED]

* indicates present

173 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Convenor informed Members of the format of the meeting

The Convenor asked Members to declare whether they had any 'conflicts of interest' in relation to any matters covered in the papers.

No conflicts of interest were declared.

173 WELCOME

The Convenor welcomed Members to the meeting. The Convenor also welcomed members of the SQA Accreditation Team who were attending the meeting as observers in response to the Team's request for greater access to Committee Members. The Convenor advised the Committee that other members of the Team would also be present during the lunch break when there would be the opportunity for some informal discussion about the work of the Team and the role of the Committee.

173 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr D Middleton, Ms V Mann, Mr I Wilson, Mr A Clarke and Ms F Robertson.

173/01 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the one hundred and seventy-second meeting of the Accreditation Committee were approved as a correct record.

173/02 MATTERS ARISING

The Convenor informed Members that the following agenda items would be considered during the Strategy Session:

- Withdrawal of Qualifications
- Education Reform Programme

173/03 AWARDING BODY AUDIT REPORTS (CIH, AAT AND BIIAB)

██████████ introduced paper AC173/03 and provided an update on the above Audit Reports and Action Plans.

Members were informed that BIIAB had submitted evidence to close out their outstanding issues. This is being reviewed by the ██████████ who is in discussion with the awarding body.

The Convenor noted that Issues 1 and 2 for AAT were the same. This is a typing error and will be amended.

Action: ██████████ to check AAT Issues for 1 and 2 and make necessary changes.

Outcome: Members approved the Audit Report and Action Plans

173/04 PROVIDER MONITORING VISIT REPORTS (HIGHFIELD QUALIFICATIONS, CMI, REHIS AND RAD)

██████████ introduced paper AC173/04 and provided an update on the above Provider Monitoring Visit Reports.

Members were informed that Highfield Qualifications had one Issue rated as High. it was reported that the ██████████ is not concerned about this as. not all of its large provider base (95 providers) offers the qualification in question and once the relevant evidence is received it will be checked to ensure it is being disseminated to all providers.

Members asked for the number of providers visited to be included in the cover paper for future Accreditation Committee meetings.

Action: ██████████ to include in the cover paper the number of providers visited.

Outcome: Members approved the Provider Monitoring Visit Reports.

173/05 SQA ACCREDITATION ANNUAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING REPORT

Mr Brown introduced paper AC173/05 and provided Members with an overview of the SQA Accreditation Annual Complaints Handling Report.

Members were informed that Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) introduced a requirement for public service organisations to publish an Annual Complaints Handling Report.

Members noted that although no complaints were received about SQA Accreditation in financial year 2022- 2023an annual report required to be published by 31 October 2023. The Committee approved the Report as drafted.

Action: [REDACTED] will upload this to the SQA Accreditation website.

Outcome: Members approved the SQA Accreditation Annual Complaints Handling Report 2022 - 2023.

173/06 SQA ACCREDITATION'S RISK REGISTER

Mr Brown introduced paper AC173/06 and updated Members on the SQA Accreditation's Risk Register.

Mr Brown informed Members that, during an Internal Audit that covered the SQA's approach to recording risks, it had been identified that SQA Accreditation had been completing its risk register incorrectly, although the specifics of this were unclear. It was noted that the Head of Accreditation was in discussion with the Internal Auditors about this and it was hoped that this matter would be resolved by the next Accreditation Committee. The Convenor asked that Members to be given a brief explanation at the next meeting of the issues of concern to Internal Audit and how they should be resolved.

It was highlighted to Members that two risks, 19 ACC 23 R and 4 ACC 13 R, relating to Standards and Frameworks, had been increased. due to the late issue of tenders for the review of SVQs. The request for tenders was issued on 2 October with a closing date for submissions on 16 October. Following a period of evaluation, contracts will be issued on the week commencing 6 November. Given that the work is required to be completed before 31 March 2024, there is a possibility that there may be limited interest in bidding for the work.

Members were also informed that it was proposed that, at the next quarterly review of the risk register, consideration be given to creating a single risk relating to the Standards and Framework Programme. Members agreed to this proposal.

Members were informed that three risk scores have been decreased since the last review.

The Risk 16 ACC 23 R (SQA Accreditation is not involved in discussions around the medium to long term strategy for a 3 nation National Occupational Standards Programme) has reduced as a result of Scottish Government agreeing to a SDS/SQA Accreditation proposal to develop a process for the development of National Occupational Standards using the Technical Expert Group model.

Risk 19 ACC 24 R (The number of approved awarding bodies decreases) has decreased given that one new awarding body has recently been approved. It was noted, however, that there were no enquiries received in Q2 nor were any applications submitted.

Risk 19 ACC 25 R (The development of new Apprenticeship Standards by Technical Expert Groups without input (quality assurance/approval) from SQA Accreditation staff impacts negatively upon SVQs and our remit) has decreased again as a result of the Scottish Government agreeing to the proposal to review the process of NOS development.

It was noted that one Issue had been recorded in relation to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) Database. Following the transfer of the NOS Database to a new platform, the functionality of the search engine has not improved. This and other issues with the Database had been raised with Skills Development Scotland.

██████████, the SDS observer on the Committee, informed Members that the issues identified had been resolved. The Database is now being tested by SDS and ██████████ suggested that SQA Accreditation also test its functionality. The biggest issue relating to the NOS Database was lack of functionality within the primary search function. This is critical to supporting developers and updating the system. In its quarterly newsletter published recently, the NOS Governance Group have asked to be informed of any other issues and have advised that addressing them will be prioritised accordingly.

Action: Mr Brown to provide the next meeting of the Committee with a brief explanation of the issues of concern to Internal Audit in relation to the complete of the Risk Register and how they should be resolved.

Action: Risk 19 ACC 23 R and Risk 14 ACC 13 R to be merged into a single Risk covering Standards and Frameworks.

Outcome: Members discussed and noted the SQA Accreditation's Risk Register.

173/07 QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

Mr Brown introduced paper AC173/09 and provided Members with an update on the Quarterly Performance Report for the second quarter of 2023 - 24.

Members were informed that one new awarding body (EMPI Awards) had been approved.

Members noted that the SVQ Research Project was slightly behind schedule and this was showing as amber.

Outcome: Members discussed and noted the Quarterly Performance Report.

173/08 STANDARDS AND FRAMEWORKS COMMISSIONING

██████████ introduced paper AC173/08 and updated Members on the projects.

██████████ informed Members that six projects from 2022-23 have still to be approved but should be in the new few weeks.

With regards to projects for 2023 –24, a total of 40 NOS were commissioned.

It was highlighted to Members that, with the current target of contracts for SVQ projects being awarded w/c 6 November 2023, there is a concern that interest could

be limited if developers do not consider it feasible to complete the projects in under five months. ██████ advised that three tender bids were received for a total of 18 SVQ reviews and that he is confident, given the experience of the bidding Standard Setting Organisations, that they should be able to complete these projects this operational year.

Outcome: Members discussed and noted the Standards and Frameworks Commissioning paper and the risks identified.

173/09 UPDATE ON REFORM

it was noted that this would be considered during the Committee's Strategy Session.

173/10 ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2023 - 2024

██████ introduced paper AC173/10 and asked Members if they were content with the work plan for 2023 -24.

Mr Brown asked for the Annual Complaints Handling Report to be included in the work plan for October 2024.

Action: ██████ will update the work plan to include the Annual Complaints Handling Report, October 2024.

Outcome: Members discussed and approved the Accreditation Committee Work Plan 2023 -24.

173/11 AWARDING BODY REGULATORY ACTIVITY UPDATE

██████ introduced paper AC173/11 and advised Members that consideration was being given to SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Strategy with regard to a hybrid approach that combined physical and remote audits and provider monitoring.

██████ informed Members that the current risk process was being utilised to identify audits which should be carried out in person. Decisions on in person visits would be based on risk ratings of high/very high, formed from Issues of significant concern from either the previous audit, extra-ordinary issues or any concerns from recent provider monitoring activity.

It was noted that visits being carried out via a hybrid model would help ensure SQA Accreditations limited resources would be deployed both effectively and efficiently.

Members noted the schedule of awarding body audits for 2023-24 and that, based on current risk concerns, NEBOSH and Alcohol Focus Scotland, will be audited in person at their premises.

Members noted the schedule of provider monitoring activity for 2023-24 and that there have been no significant risk concerns highlighted across providers of the various awarding bodies to date. It was intended, therefore, for activity to be conducted remotely for this cycle, with the right being reserved to make ad-hoc

decision to carry out physical visits, if information is received that would deem it to be reasonable and prudent to do so.

Members enquired about the number of provider visits for each Awarding Body. It was noted that, due to resource constraints, it is only possible to conduct between five and seven visits for the larger awarding bodies. Although this is a small percentage of their total providers these visits produce good information that helps feed into the awarding body audit.

Members agreed that provider monitoring is an important part of the audit process and protects the interests of learners and that it is important that the Scottish Government understands this and the resources SQA Accreditation requires in this regard. It was agreed that the on-going reform discussions offer an opportunity for the role and approach of SQA Accreditation, and the resources it requires to be effective on behalf of learners, to be better understood by the Scottish Government.

Outcome: Members discussed the Awarding Body Regulatory Activity Update.

173/12 ACCREDITATION DECISION LIST REPORT

██████████ introduced paper AC173/12, drawing Member's attention to those qualifications that had been accredited from 1 July 2023 until 30 September 2023.

The paper provided a summary of decisions made by the Accreditation Coordination Group (ACG) between these dates.

Outcome: Members noted the contents of the paper.

173/13 PROPOSED ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DATES 2024

██████████ introduced paper AC173/13, advising members of the scheduled Accreditation Committee meeting dates for 2024.

Outcome: Members noted the Accreditation Committee Dates 2024.

Action: ██████████ to circulate the final dates out to members.

173/14 AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE BOARD

The Committee identified the following issues to be drawn to the attention of the SQA Board:

- SQA Accreditation's contribution to the on-going programme of Education Reform.

173/15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Convenor invited colleagues from the SQA Accreditation Team attending the meeting as observers to offer their thoughts on the conduct and content of the meeting.

██████████, ██████████, advised that she found the meeting very useful and welcomed the opportunity to get to know Members and build a relationship between the wider Team and the Committee. She also advised that she welcomed the Committee's concerns over the challenges faced by the Team in delivering a high-quality service on behalf of learners and encouraged the Committee to be more assertive with the Scottish Government over the resources required to ensure the effective regulation and accreditation of qualifications. It was generally agreed by members of the Team that attending the Committee had been valuable and that the opportunity to do so in future should be available.

The Convenor advised that he would discuss with Mr Brown the best way for the Team to continue to engage with the Accreditation Committee after Mr Brown had had the opportunity to discuss this with the Team

Members of the Committee took the opportunity to thank the Team for the high standard and quality of the work it was undertaking as reflected in the papers submitted to the Committee.

The Convenor informed Members that Mr David Middleton's term of office as Chair of the Board of the SQA conclude at the end of November 2023. Members agreed to convey their gratitude to him for his leadership of the SQA and for his support for the work of SQA Accreditation and the Accreditation Team and Committee during his period of office.

It was noted that a number of announcements by Ministers in relation to the education reform programme were expected in the period ahead. It was agreed that if anything of significance in relation to the function of SQA Accreditation is announced before the Committee's next meeting, a special meeting would be arranged.

Action: Mr Brown will raise with SQA Accreditation Team its future engagement with the Committee and will, thereafter, discuss this with the Convenor.

173/16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next Accreditation Committee meeting: Friday 9 February 2023 at 1000 hours via MS Teams.