



Audit Report

GQA Qualifications Limited

17 January 2024

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1 Background

This was the twelfth audit of GQA Qualifications Limited (GQA) since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation in 1993.

GQA is a nationally recognised awarding body providing specialist qualifications for the glass, construction, coating and print industries. GQA's headquarters are in Sheffield.

1.1 Scope

SQA Accreditation carries out quality assurance activity in line with its *Quality Assurance of Approved Awarding Bodies Policy*. This states the type and frequency of our quality assurance activities, describes our reporting procedures and indicates how the awarding body's Quality Enhancement Rating is calculated.

As this was a full remote audit of GQA, all regulatory requirements were included within the scope of the audit. Our quality assurance activities are conducted on a sampling basis and, consequently, not all aspects of the awarding body's systems, procedures and performance have been considered in this report to the same depth.

SQA Accreditation audit reports are written by exception focusing only on those areas where corrective action is required or recommended. Consequently, this approach to audit reporting does not detail areas where compliance or good practice was found.

The audit was designed to ensure GQA complies with SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements namely:

- ◆ *SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2021)*
- ◆ all *Regulatory Principle Directives*
- ◆ the awarding body's Accreditation Licence

Awarding body documentation considered for review by the Audit Team includes all documents banked on GQA's SharePoint site at the time of audit and information supplied to support audit activity. Restricted or commercially sensitive information gathered during SQA Accreditation's quality assurance activities is treated in the strictest confidence.

1.2 Audit Report and Action Plan Timescales

GQA audit date: 17 January 2024

Audit Report approved by
Accreditation Co-ordination Group on: 14 February 2024

Audit Report to be signed by GQA: 27 March 2024

Action Plan to be emailed
to regulation@sqa.org.uk by GQA: 27 March 2024

The process will apply in relation to the timescales specified above:

- ◆ The awarding body will be sent a signed copy of the Audit Report by email.
- ◆ The awarding body must sign the copy of the Audit Report and return by email to SQA Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified above.
- ◆ The awarding body will also be emailed a copy of the Action Plan.
- ◆ The awarding body must complete and return the Action Plan in accordance with the timescale specified above and email this in Microsoft Word format to regulation@sqa.org.uk.
- ◆ SQA Accreditation will confirm when the Action Plan is appropriate to address the Issues and present it to Accreditation Co-ordination Group (ACG) for approval.
- ◆ Following approval by ACG, the awarding body will be sent a signed copy of the approved Action Plan by email.
- ◆ The awarding body must sign the copy of the Action Plan and return by email to SQA Accreditation.

The findings of this Audit Report and the associated Action Plan will be published on SQA Accreditation's website following signed agreement.

SQA Accreditation will continually monitor progress towards completion of the proposed actions identified in the Action Plan and update the awarding body's Quality Enhancement Rating as appropriate.

1.3 Summary of Audit Issues and Recommendations

An Issue has been recorded where evidence shows that the awarding body is not compliant with SQA Accreditation’s regulatory requirements. The awarding body must address the Issues and specify corrective and preventative measures to address them through its Action Plan.

The Action Plan is emailed to GQA as a separate document to the Audit Report and must be submitted to SQA Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified in 1.2.

As a result of the audit and post-audit activities, three Issues have been recorded and three Recommendations have been noted.

Issue	Detail of Issue recorded	Risk rating
1. Principles 7 and 9	GQA is not following its own processes for document control, with some documents in SharePoint and on GQA’s website uncontrolled and/or past the review date. GQA’s SharePoint contains documents with incorrect or out-of-date information. The Document Amendment and Document Control Registers are not up to date. Principles in SharePoint do not have the correct documentation assigned to them and appear to be aligned to <i>SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2014)</i> rather than <i>SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2021)</i> .	Low
2. Principles 7, 9 and 17	A review of GQA’s Appeals and Enquiry About Results Policy - V9 (issue date 01/07/20) noted no appropriate reference that SQA Accreditation is unable to overturn assessment decisions or academic judgements.	Low
3. Principles 7, 9 and 18	A review of GQA’s Adverse Effects, Malpractice and Maladministration Policy – V14 (issue date 05/10/23) noted no appropriate reference that the awarding body must inform SQA Accreditation when any actual or suspected cases of malpractice and/or maladministration are identified.	Low

A Recommendation has been noted where SQA Accreditation considers there is potential for enhancement. The awarding body is advised to address any Recommendations in order to reinforce ongoing continuous improvement. However, measures to correct or prevent these are not mandatory and therefore do not form part of the Action Plan.

Recommendation	Detail of Recommendation noted
1. Principle 7	It is recommended that GQA amend an error on the search facility used for qualifications they deliver on their website.
2. Principle 7	It is recommended that GQA add information on how to become a learning provider to their website.
3. Principles 7 and 16	It is recommended that GQA add information on their GQA website about how to raise a complaint.

1.4 Risk Rating of Issues

SQA Accreditation assigns a rating to each Issue recorded, depending on the impact on or risk to the awarding body's operations, its SQA accredited qualifications and/or the learner. Issues recorded during the audit will count towards GQA's Quality Enhancement Rating which will, in turn, contribute towards future quality assurance activity. Further detail on how the Quality Enhancement Rating is calculated can be found on the [SQA Accreditation website](#).

2 Detail of Audit Issues and Recommendations

The following sections detail Issues recorded and Recommendations noted against SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements.

2.1 Issues

Regulatory Principle 7. The awarding body must have an effective approach for communicating with its staff, stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.

Regulatory Principle 9. The awarding body and its providers must maintain accurate documents, records and data.

Prior to the audit, SQA Accreditation Auditors reviewed documentation uploaded to GQA's SharePoint site. It was noted that GQA is not following its own processes for document control. SQA Accreditation Auditors found various issues with documentation uploaded to SharePoint and to GQA's website.

Multiple documents within SharePoint have passed the set review date, such as:

- ◆ GQA 292 Conflict of Interest Declaration - V3 (issue date 01/10/19) — review due October 2021
- ◆ GQA 412 Appeals and Enquiry about Results Policy - V9 (issue date 01/07/20) — review due September 2022
- ◆ GQA 31 Incident Management and Adverse Effects Policy -V1 (issue date 16/07/19) — review due 10 July 2020

GQA's website also contains qualification specifications that are no longer live and documents such as GQA 24 Recognition of Prior Learning – V1 (issue date 01/08/16) have passed their review date. The Privacy Policy on GQA's website, dated July 2018, contains no version control.

GQA 19 Organisation Chart - V11 requires an update. The title on the Organisational Chart is V11 but the document body is V10. The content should also be updated to reflect recent changes to board members.

There is an incorrect link in GQA 439 Development and Accreditation Procedure - V10 (issue date 07/04/22), which takes you to SQA Awarding Body's website and not SQA Accreditation's website.

GQA 1 Quality Manual - V3.1 (issued February 2020) within SharePoint references ISO 9001:2008 instead of the current ISO 9001:2015. Further discussion revealed GQA are no longer ISO certified, so this document needs to be updated to reflect this. Details in the footer of the Quality Manual appendix do not correlate with the correct date and version number of the document.

The Quality Risk Assessment held within SharePoint is dated 2019–2020. It is also aligned to *SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2014)*

GQA 102 Document Amendment Register - V3 and GQA 101 Document Control Register - V4 in SharePoint have incorrect version control; they are both very out of date and in some cases, the information held does not correlate with each other, for example:

- ◆ GQA 19 Organisation Chart is V11 in SharePoint but recorded as V8 in the Document Control Register.
- ◆ GQA 246 Adverse Effect Notification Form is V3 in SharePoint but recorded as V1 in the Document Amendment Register.
- ◆ GQA 415 Adverse Effects, Malpractice and Maladministration Policy is V14 (issue date 05/10/23) in SharePoint but recorded as V12 in the Document Control Register.
- ◆ GQA 432 Centre Archiving Procedure is V6 in SharePoint but recorded as V5 in the Document Control Register.

In SharePoint, some Principles have no documentation assigned to them and some documentation is assigned to incorrect Principles — the documentation is aligned in accordance with *SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2014)* rather than *SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2021)*.

GQA must review all documentation to ensure it is current and valid, and Principles must have the correct policies and processes associated to them.

This has been recorded as **Issue 1**.

Regulatory Principle 7. The awarding body must have an effective approach for communicating with its staff, stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.

Regulatory Principle 9. The awarding body and its providers must maintain accurate documents, records and data.

Regulatory Principle 17. The awarding body and its providers must have clear, fair and equitable systems, policies and procedures to manage appeals.

SQA Accreditation Auditors reviewed documentation uploaded to GQA's SharePoint site. On review of GQA 412 Appeals and Enquiry about Results Policy - V9 (issue date 01/07/20), it was established that the policy has omitted the fact that SQA Accreditation is unable to overturn assessment decisions or academic judgements.

GQA must update the Appeals and Enquiry about Results Policy to reflect this.

This has been recorded as **Issue 2**.

Regulatory Principle 7. The awarding body must have an effective approach for communicating with its staff, stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.

Regulatory Principle 9. The awarding body and its providers must maintain accurate documents, records and data.

Regulatory Principle 18. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that it has safeguards to prevent and manage cases of malpractice and maladministration.

While reviewing GQA's SharePoint, it was noted that GQA 415 Adverse Effects, Malpractice and Maladministration Policy - V14 (issue date 05/10/23) does not have appropriate reference that the awarding body must inform SQA Accreditation when any actual or suspected cases of malpractice and/or maladministration are identified.

GQA must update the Adverse Effects, Malpractice and Maladministration Policy to reflect this.

This has been recorded as **Issue 3**.

2.2 Recommendations

Regulatory Principle 7. The awarding body must have an effective approach for communicating with its staff, stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.

Prior to the audit, SQA Accreditation Auditors reviewed GQA's website. While searching for qualifications available in Scotland, GQA's website appeared to have an error and one qualification showed up over sixty times in the search. This made it difficult to find relevant courses as they were lost within the large list. It is recommended this is fixed to ensure potential learners can access qualification information easily.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 1**.

Regulatory Principle 7. The awarding body must have an effective approach for communicating with its staff, stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.

When SQA Accreditation Auditors reviewed GQA's website, they were unable to find information on how to become a provider. It is recommended this is added to GQA's website so that potential providers have easy access to this information.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 2**.

Regulatory Principle 7. The awarding body must have an effective approach for communicating with its staff, stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.

Regulatory Principle 16. The awarding body and its providers must have open and transparent systems, policies and procedures to manage complaints.

When reviewing GQA's website, and through further discussion with GQA, it was noted that there is no information on how to submit a complaint to the awarding body. While GQA has adequate policies in place to guide complainants through the complaint process, it would be beneficial if information on how to raise a complaint was included on GQA's website. This has been noted as **Recommendation 3**.

3 Acceptance of Audit Findings