Provider Monitoring Report

Smart Awards Ltd

6 April 2023 - 3 May 2023

Contents

1   Background

Two providers were monitored remotely on 6 April 2023 and 3 May 2023.

1.1   Scope

SQA Accreditation carries out quality assurance activity in line with its *Quality Assurance of Approved Awarding Bodies Policy.* This involves monitoring a sample of the awarding body's approved providers or assessment sites. Provider monitoring visits will be conducted in a consistent manner within and between providers.

The aim of monitoring is to:

♦ ensure the awarding body's compliance with SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements
♦ confirm that quality assurance arrangements are being conducted by the awarding body in accordance with its prescribed arrangements
♦ ensure that quality assurance arrangements are being conducted in a consistent manner, within and between providers
♦ ensure that providers are receiving the appropriate guidance, support and documentation from the awarding body in order to facilitate a high standard of qualification delivery
♦ inform future audit and monitoring activity for the awarding body

All Principles may be included within the scope of the provider monitoring activity.

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

SQA Accreditation provider monitoring reports are written by exception focusing only on those areas where corrective action is required or recommended.

1.2   Provider Monitoring Report Timescales

Smart Awards provider monitoring dates: 6 April 2023 - 3 May 2023

Provider Monitoring Report approved by
Accreditation Co-ordination Group on: 17 May 2023

Provider Monitoring Report to be signed by Smart Awards: 28 June 2023

Action Plan to be emailed
to regulation@sqa.org.uk by Smart Awards: 28 June 2023

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

♦ The awarding body will be sent a copy of the Provider Monitoring Report by email.

♦ The awarding body must sign the copy of the Provider Monitoring 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 Action Plan and return by email to SQA Accreditation.

The findings of this Provider Monitoring 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 Provider Monitoring 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 e-mailed to Smart Awards as a separate document to the Provider Monitoring Report and must be submitted to SQA Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified in 1.2. As a result of the provider monitoring activity, eight Issues have been recorded and two Recommendations have been noted.

Issue	Detail of Issue recorded	Risk rating
1. Principle 5	Staff at provider 2 highlighted that the SQA accredited qualifications are time-bound for three years and need refreshed on/before expiry. The Accreditation Auditor cannot find any information on this process in the awarding body documentation and the provider could not find any information either. In discussion with the Regulation Manager, it was confirmed that SQA Accreditation is not formally aware of the time bound nature of the SQA accredited provision and the use of a refresher qualification.	Medium
2. Principles 5 and 13	The updated *Centre Handbook Guidance For Centres,* 1 March 2023 details two annual external quality assurance (EQA) activities. However, there is an *EQA Handbook, October 2022* on SharePoint which details three annual activities. Hence there is inconsistency in information in this regard.	Low
3. Principles 7 and 8	The Accreditation Auditor found it very difficult to gain access to providers for the purpose of remote provider monitoring.	High
4. Principle 12	At the time of provider monitoring, provider 1 was using the awarding body's online system for theory tests. However, provider 2 has not been able to register learners for the SQA accredited qualifications since 31 March 2023, as Smart Awards informed the provider that they were waiting on the approval of an amendment to the assessment methodology for the online platform. The Accreditation Auditor is unsure why there is a disparity in the availability of qualifications and assessment methods between providers.	High

5. Principles 12 and 9	When discussing invigilation arrangements with staff at provider 1, it was highlighted that there was no updated invigilation guidance relevant to the online platform.	Medium
6. Principle 14	The awarding body needs to clarify the information contained within their *Reasonable and Adjustments and Special Considerations policy* in terms of externally assessed qualifications and ensure that providers are clear on requirements.	Medium
7. Principle 16	The complaints procedure at providers 1 and 2 had no reference to escalation of complaints to either Smart Awards or SQA Accreditation as the regulator.	Low
8. Principle 18	The malpractice policy at providers 1 and 2 did not state that all suspected or actual cases of malpractice or maladministration would be reported to the awarding body immediately.	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	Smart Awards may wish to consider having two different contact numbers for the awarding body and the Network Operative Passport Scheme (NOPS).
2. Principle 9	Both providers monitored had evidence of continuing professional development (CPD) for all relevant staff. However, provider 1 had some records that were not updated and some that were inconsistent in their recording. It is recommended that the awarding body give further guidance to providers on CPD and perhaps specify a minimum requirement to facilitate a base level of expectation.

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 provider monitoring will count towards Smart Awards'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   Good Practice, Issues and Recommendations

The following sections detail:

♦   good practice noted by providers
♦   Issues recorded and Recommendations noted against SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements

2.1   Good Practice

Both providers spoke highly of Smart Awards. In particular, the following areas of good practice were noted by providers:

Provider 1 highlighted the:

♦   e-certification process
♦   training opportunities
♦   quick resolution of queries and issues

Provider 2 highlighted the:

♦   good engagement with the awarding body
♦   accessibility of staff at all levels
♦   improved quality assurance
♦   professional nature of Smart Awards

2.2   Issues

Regulatory Principle 5. The awarding body and its providers must provide clear information on their procedures, products and services and ensure that they are accurate and appropriate to accredited qualifications.

Staff at provider 2 highlighted that the SQA accredited qualifications for Overhead Safety and Underground Safety are time-bound for three years and need refreshed on/before expiry. The Accreditation Auditor cannot find any information on this process in the awarding body documentation. The provider could not find any information either.

In discussion with the Regulation Manager, it was confirmed that SQA Accreditation is not formally aware of the time bound nature of the SQA accredited provision and the use of a refresher qualification.

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

Regulatory Principle 5. The awarding body and its providers must provide clear information on their procedures, products and services and ensure that they are accurate and appropriate to accredited qualifications.

Regulatory Principle 13. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have systems and processes which ensure the effective quality assurance of accredited qualifications.

Smart Awards has produced an updated *Centre Handbook Guidance For Centres,* 1 March 2023 which details two annual external quality assurance activities. However, there is an *EQA Handbook, October 2022* on SharePoint which details three annual activities. The information is inconsistent in this regard.

The EQA activity at providers 1 and 2 was consistent with the information in the *Centre Handbook.*

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 8. The awarding body must ensure that SQA Accreditation is granted access to all information relating to accredited qualifications.

The Accreditation Auditor found it very difficult to gain access to providers for the purpose of remote provider monitoring. Communication with provider 2 required multiple emails and phone calls before a reply was forthcoming; the Accreditation Auditor believes that the wrong contact name was listed on the provider list. Once contact was established, provider monitoring engagement was extremely positive at provider 2.

However, a third provider who had been selected for monitoring had still not responded to the Accreditation Auditor over a three week period, despite repeated attempts to contact using email, telephone, voicemail and by contacting the named individual as well as a regional base.

In discussion with the Regulation Manager, it was decided that a significant number of Issues had already been identified from monitoring the first two providers and that further attempts to gain access to the third provider would cause delays to the provider monitoring report, thereby preventing Issues being actioned in a timely manner. Hence it was decided to restrict the provider monitoring activity to the first two providers in this instance, the caveat being that the third provider would be included in the next round of provider monitoring.

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

Regulatory Principle 12. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have the necessary arrangements and resources required to manage and administer qualification delivery and assessment.

When Smart Awards was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation the assessment methodology for theory tests was paper-based. Smart Awards is currently in the process of seeking an amendment to this assessment methodology so that the testing platform can be online instead of paper-based.

However, provider 1 has been using the awarding body's online system for theory tests since February 2023 and prior to that date had used their own online system for administration of online theory tests. Conversely, provider 2 has not been able to register learners for the SQA accredited qualifications since 31 March 2023, as Smart Awards informed the provider that they were waiting on the approval of the amendment to the assessment methodology. Provider 2 has been delivering qualifications through a different regulator since then. The Accreditation Auditor is unsure why the provider could not continue with the delivery of the SQA accredited qualifications using the paper-based method. Moreover, the Accreditation Auditor is unsure why there is a disparity in the availability of qualifications and assessment methods between providers.

This has been recorded as **Issue 4**.

Regulatory Principle 12. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have the necessary arrangements and resources required to manage and administer qualification delivery and assessment.

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

When discussing invigilation arrangements with staff at provider 1, it was highlighted that there was no updated invigilation guidance relevant to the online platform. Staff commented that they were using the standard invigilation guidance from the awarding body's *Assessor Guides,* though they acknowledged that this guidance did not extend to online assessment.

This has been recorded as **Issue 5**.

Regulatory Principle 14. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that its qualifications and their delivery and assessment are fair, inclusive and accessible to learners.

The *Smart Awards Reasonable Adjustments policy*, 1 March 2023 states in section 17.1 that for externally-assessed qualifications, reasonable adjustments should be referred to the awarding body. However, section 17.2 then depicts a table and wording which suggests that the adjustments can be made by the provider, with advice only being sought from the awarding body where necessary.

17. EXTERNALLY ASSESSED QUALIFICATIONS

17.1. For qualifications/assessments which are externally assessed, Centre must apply to Smart Awards for approval no later than 10 days prior to the assessment date. The Smart Awards Reasonable Adjustment form on SAMS must be completed and submitted to apply for approval.

17.2. The table below outlines some of the areas that reasonable adjustments can be made. However, Centre have a duty to seek advice from Smart Awards in any case where they are in doubt if an adjustment is needed or how it should be applied.

Given that the theory tests for Overhead Safety and Underground Safety are externally assessed by the awarding body, these sections are relevant to the providers monitored. At provider 2, the Accreditation Auditor found that all reasonable adjustments were made by the provider, which would seem to contradict section 17.1 but accord with the information in section 17.2.

The awarding body needs to clarify the information contained within this policy and ensure that providers are clear on requirements.

This has been recorded as **Issue 6**.

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

The complaints procedure at providers 1 and 2 had no reference to escalation of complaints to either Smart Awards or SQA Accreditation as the regulator.

This has been recorded as **Issue 7**.

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

The malpractice policy at providers 1 and 2 did not state that all suspected or actual cases of malpractice or maladministration would be reported to the awarding body immediately. There had been no incidences in the provider, and provider staff did comment that they would in practice report everything immediately but understood that the policy needed to state the process accordingly.

This has been recorded as **Issue 8**.

2.3   Recommendations

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

Provider 2 staff explained that the same contact number is used for the awarding body and the Network Operative Passport Scheme. Staff suggested that it would be beneficial to have two different contact numbers for these purposes.

Smart Awards may wish to consider having two different contact numbers for the awarding body and the passport scheme.

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

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

The awarding body *Assessor Guides* state that assessors and verifiers, 'must demonstrate current evidence of continuing professional development in a relevant area of practice.'

Both providers monitored had evidence of CPD for all relevant staff. However, provider 1 had some records that were not updated for currency and some that were inconsistent in their ways of recording.

It is recommended that the awarding body give further guidance to providers on CPD, and perhaps specify a minimum requirement to facilitate a base level of expectation.

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

3   Acceptance of Provider Monitoring Findings