



Audit Report

Equestrian Qualifications GB Limited

29 August 2018

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1 Background

This was the 14th audit of Equestrian Qualifications GB Limited (EQL) since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation in 1994.

EQL is an approved awarding body that works in partnership with a variety of organisations such as The British Horse Society and the British Equestrian Federation to develop and award Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) for the equestrian industry. EQL's headquarters are situated in Kenilworth, Warwickshire.

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 audit of EQL, 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 EQL complies with SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements namely:

- ◆ *SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles (2014)*
- ◆ all *Regulatory Principles Directives*
- ◆ the awarding body's Accreditation Licence

Awarding body documentation considered for review by the Audit Team includes all documents banked on EQL'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

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| EQL audit date: | 29 August 2018 |
| Audit Report approved by Accreditation Co-ordination Group on: | 19 September 2018 |
| Audit Report to be signed by EQL: | 9 November 2018 |
| Action Plan to be e-mailed to regulation@sqa.org.uk by EQL: | 9 November 2018 |

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

- ◆ The awarding body will be sent two signed copies of the Audit Report by post.
- ◆ The awarding body must sign both copies of the Audit Report and return one by post to SQA Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified above.
- ◆ The awarding body will also be e-mailed a copy of the Audit Report (for information only) and an electronic copy of the Action Plan.
- ◆ The awarding body must complete and return the Action Plan in accordance with the timescale specified above and e-mail 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 two signed copies of the approved Action Plan by post.
- ◆ The awarding body must sign both copies of the Action Plan and return one by post 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 e-mailed to EQL 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, two Issues have been recorded and two Recommendations have been noted.

| Issue | Detail of Issue recorded | Risk rating |
|-----------------|---|-------------|
| 1. Principle 3 | The awarding body could not demonstrate that it had a robust business planning process in place and have documented objectives and timescales. | High |
| 2. Principle 10 | The awarding is only permitted to use suitably qualified external verifiers to make equine-based decisions for portfolio evidence. It must satisfy SQA Accreditation that the Accountable Officer and educational specialists will not be involved in SVQ assessment decisions or any other function which could be construed as an external verifier's responsibility. | High |

A Recommendation has been noted where SQA Accreditation considers that there is potential for improvement. The awarding body is advised to address any Recommendations noted as good practice. 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 1 | EQL should ensure that it holds accurate and current conflict of interest declarations from its staff and associates. |
| 2. Principle 14 | The awarding body may wish to amend its maladministration and malpractice policy to state that it will inform SQA Accreditation of any suspected or actual cases at the earliest opportunity. |

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 EQL'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 3. The awarding body shall have clearly defined business planning processes which show evidence of management commitment, decision making and ongoing review.

During the previous audit in May 2017, the Audit Team recorded a number of Issues around EQL policies and processes which required change. Since then, EQL has worked closely with SQA Accreditation to make the necessary improvements and as a result, the Audit Team were satisfied that EQL policies met regulatory requirements. EQL has also outlined its direction of travel in the positional statement sent to SQA Accreditation in 2017.

Through discussion EQL was able to describe the business planning process that it uses, however, it was unable to produce a formal business plan for current or future year's objectives. Awarding body staff advised the Audit Team that there are governance talks taking place between EQL and its parent company, nevertheless, the absence of a structured approach to ongoing business planning raised concern. The Lead Auditor offered the awarding body regulatory support and hopes that EQL will engage with SQA Accreditation.

SQA Accreditation has been made aware that EQL's largest Scottish provider plans to put no new learners through SVQs in 2019. Given that this provider has been effective in attracting new learners, the awarding body should consider how numbers in Scotland can be maintained and the impact that this could have.

The awarding body could not demonstrate that it had a robust business planning process in place and have documented objectives and timescales. This has been recorded as **Issue 1**.

Regulatory Principle 10. The awarding body shall ensure that it has the necessary arrangements and resources for the effective delivery, assessment and quality assurance of SQA accredited qualifications.

The awarding body has employed educational specialists and carried out centre reviews with all Scottish providers to review policy content and fitness for purpose. This has led to a greater understanding by providers of why policies are required and how they should apply them. This was noted as excellent practice by the Audit Team.

It was noted that some awarding body practices have caused concern at provider level. Two providers raised concerns with SQA Accreditation regarding the educational specialist's and Accountable Officer's roles in external verification activities. When the awarding body submitted the *EQL Positional Statement* in May 2017, it stated that '*a small team of specialists have been appointed to carry out independent external verification and centre review on site at EQL approved centres*'.

SQA Accreditation's understanding of this statement and discussion with the previous Accountable Officer was that the specialists were being employed to enhance external verification activities and not to replace the duties performed by existing External Verifiers.

The Accountable Officer stated that their EVs had also undergone policy training as some weaknesses had been highlighted and a development requirement had been identified. As a result, EVs underwent standardisation exercises to enhance their understanding of EQL policies, why they are required, and how to apply them. The Audit Team were concerned as to why a large number of long time serving EVs would not be familiar with the awarding body's policies and how they should be used, and asked for further clarification on the nature of the education specialists' involvement.

The reason for the scrutiny of the educational specialists and Accountable Officer's involvement originated from provider concerns that they were making external verification decisions on portfolio evidence during visits without the appropriate equine industry knowledge, experience and understanding. The requirements for EVs are defined in the *Lantra Assessment Strategy for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in the Land-based and Environmental Sector*.

The Audit Team reviewed the Curriculum Vitae for one specialist known to have visited a Scottish provider and although there was no question over their educational background, there was no evidence of any external verification qualifications or equine experience. This was noted by the Audit Team with EQL staff. It was also noted that the Accountable Officer did not have relevant equine industry experience.

The Audit Team were concerned that some of Accountable Officer's decisions have been construed by providers as external verification decisions and therefore require relevant equine industry knowledge, experience and understanding. It should be noted that the Audit Team found no evidence to support claims of this nature when reviewing information recorded in reports but through open and frank discussion it was clear that some examples of decisions could be construed as questionable.

However, the Audit Team did find evidence which shows that the Accountable Officer has signed off candidate records of achievement in the box which clearly states 'External Verifier's signature'. The box also states beside it that the learner has achieved the required level of competence. The Accountable Officer is not suitably qualified to make that decision. On-site external verification reports and EQL desk based review forms also showed evidence of where both the Accountable Officer and educational specialist had added their signatures in boxes where the EV should sign.

The Accountable Officer is a qualified external verifier but does not have appropriate or demonstrable knowledge, experience or understanding of the equine industry. There is also a risk that acting as an EV and Accountable Officer could potentially create a conflict of interest in future awarding body functions. It was stated that on some occasions, the Accountable Officer had made evidence based decisions but these were validated by another member of EQL staff who had equine experience. The Audit Team did not accept that this was an acceptable assessment approach as the member of staff is not a qualified EV.

An e-mail was shown to the Audit Team as evidence that Lantra SSC was happy with the arrangements that EQL had put in place. On inspection, the only area where the Audit Team could see where approval was being sought was for signing off the *Candidate Record of Achievement* form.

The awarding is only permitted to use suitably qualified external verifiers to make equine-based decisions for portfolio evidence. It must satisfy SQA Accreditation that the Accountable Officer and educational specialists will not be involved in SVQ assessment decisions or any other function which could be construed as an external verifier's responsibility. This has been recorded as **Issue 2**.

2.2 Recommendations

Regulatory Principle 1. The awarding body shall have clearly defined and effective governance arrangements.

One of the Issues raised at the 2017 audit centred on changes to the ways in which EQL maintains annual conflict of interest data. When the Audit Team asked to review conflict of interest logs, EQL staff stated that this exercise had not been undertaken yet but that it was still within the limits of the one year cycle that it was working to. EQL should ensure that it holds accurate and current conflict of interest declarations from its staff and associates. This will avoid a future audit Issue. This has been noted as **Recommendation 1**.

Regulatory Principle 14. The awarding body and its providers shall ensure that it has safeguards to prevent and manage cases of malpractice and maladministration.

The awarding body may wish to amend its *Maladministration and Malpractice Policy* to state that it will inform SQA Accreditation of any suspected or actual cases at the earliest opportunity. This has been noted as **Recommendation 2**.

3 Acceptance of Audit Findings

For and on behalf of EQL:

For and on behalf of SQA Accreditation:

Print name

Print name

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Signature

Signature

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Designation

Designation

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Date

Date

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