



Audit Report

FireQual

24 February 2022

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1 Background

This was the first audit of FireQual since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation on 10 February 2021.

FireQual is a specialist awarding body that works in collaboration with industry to develop qualifications that improve the knowledge, skills and competences required by individuals working within the fire safety and protection sector.

FireQual is based in Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire.

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 remote and scoped audit of FireQual, only specific regulatory requirements in respect of business continuity and planning, centre and qualification approval, online assessment and the examination system, as well as external quality assurance were included within the scope. 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 FireQual complies with SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements namely:

- ◆ *SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles (2021)*
- ◆ *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 FireQual'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

FireQual: audit date: 24 February 2022

Audit Report approved by
Accreditation Co-ordination Group on: 6 April 2022

Audit Report to be signed by FireQual: 23 May 2022

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 findings of this Audit Report and will be published on SQA Accreditation's website following signed agreement.

SQA Accreditation will 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 FireQual 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, no Issues have been recorded and five Recommendations have been noted.

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 2	Going forward, should situations arise that require the activation of a business continuity implementation plan, it is recommended that this should be formally reviewed at every Board meeting as a means of ensuring actions are met or remain fit-for-purpose.
2. Principle 4	FireQual may wish to consider the creation of a succession planning policy and process, formally documented to proactively identify suitable individuals for particular roles, which could mitigate potential gaps arising in key functions in the business in a more economical manner.
3. Principle 5	FireQual may wish to consider referencing its Appeals process, including a hyperlink, in letters notifying potential centres of partially or fully unsuccessful applications.
4. Principles 12 and 13	FireQual may wish to consider making reference to SQA Accreditation's guidance on <i>Assessor and Verifier Competence (July 2021)</i> , 01/07/2021, where appropriate, when determining the qualification requirements for assessment and quality assurance staff.
5. Principles 12 and 13	FireQual may wish to consider the introduction of a service level agreement with approved centres for the retention of recorded assessment and/or invigilation activity.

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 FireQual'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

No issues were raised as part of the audit.

2.2 Recommendations

Regulatory Principle 2. The awarding body must demonstrate clearly defined business planning processes which show evidence of management commitment and decision making and ongoing review.

FireQual representatives provided the audit team with an overview of the awarding body's business continuity planning activities in the light of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

This included the creation of a COVID-19 implementation plan in the form of the *COVID-19 Risk Assessment (FireQual Office) Summary/References*, which was updated on 16 July and again on 15 September 2021.

Both iterations of the implementation plan were available for review on SharePoint, and the Lead Auditor found them to be detailed and comprehensive.

It was noted that most of the identified actions were identified as 'ongoing' in respect of associated timescales, across both versions of the implementation plan. Consequently, the audit team sought clarification on how progress against each action was monitored by the awarding body.

The audit team were advised that contingency planning and actions around COVID-19 were subject to discussion at every FireQual Board meeting, something that the sample of available minutes of meetings would suggest was the case. However, it was also noted that a review of the actual COVID-19 implementation plan itself did not form part of the agenda, which may account for no formal updating of the plan since September 2021.

Therefore, going forward, should situations arise that require the activation of a business continuity implementation plan, it is recommended that this should be formally reviewed at every Board meeting as a means of ensuring actions are met or amended to remain fit-for-purpose.

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

Regulatory Principle 4. The awarding body must demonstrate an effective approach to the identification and management of risk.

A review of various iterations of FireQual's Risk Register identified several references to staff recruitment and resourcing. Currently, the awarding body has a small staffing complement, with individual staff members using previous employment experience and competence to undertake multiple roles, if required.

The role of Qualifications Manager, which was vacant at the time of the audit, was used as the basis for discussions around how and why the awarding body takes such a flexible approach to ensure key roles and functions are resourced.

In respect of this position, it was noted that both the current Director of Qualifications, as well as the Chair of the FireQual Board, have taken responsibility for the most essential functions of the Qualifications Manager role, at different times, to mitigate any operational impact on the business during a period in which it has been difficult to identify a suitable candidate to take up the post.

Clearly, this was a reaction to a particular set of circumstances affecting the recruitment process, such as the relatively remote location of the FireQual main office and a lack of suitably experienced individuals within the fire safety sector.

The audit team fully understands the approach taken by the awarding body, both generally and in this particular instance, as it seeks to increase staff resources in a proportionate manner. It was clear that such an approach, although reactive, did have an element of planning around it in respect of who took responsibility for what and when.

Therefore, with that in mind, FireQual may wish to consider the creation of a succession planning policy and process, formally documented to proactively identify suitable individuals for particular roles, which could mitigate potential gaps arising in key functions in the business in a more economical manner.

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

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.

During the audit, FireQual representatives outlined the awarding body's process for granting centre and qualification approval. The outcome of the process can be full approval, approval with actions, approval without qualification delivery rights, or referred centre status. The last constitutes a fully unsuccessful application.

The audit team found the policy, procedure and published guidance around centre and qualification approval to be clear and concise.

However, it was noted that whilst the Appeals policy made appropriate references to an applicant's right of appeal against an unsuccessful application, the relevant correspondence notifying applicants of the outcome did not.

Therefore, FireQual may wish to consider referencing its Appeals process, including a hyperlink, in letters notifying potential centres of partially or fully unsuccessful applications.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 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.

And

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.

A review of a sample of FireQual qualification specifications noted the inclusion of the following in respect of delivery staff requirements:

Those wishing to deliver, assess or quality assure the qualification should hold sufficient knowledge of the subject matters covered within the qualification and demonstrate that they have undertaken continuous professional development to ensure their knowledge is kept up to date.

Sufficient knowledge should be demonstrated by individuals having been serving officers or having worked as a fire risk assessor or related industry for a minimum of two years.

It is expected that those that wish to assess or quality assure the qualification hold or are working towards the relevant qualifications.

In respect of the above, FireQual may wish to consider making reference to SQA Accreditation's guidance on *Assessor and Verifier Competence (July 2021), 01/07/2021*, where appropriate, when determining the qualification requirements for assessment and quality assurance staff.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 4**.

In respect of recorded and/or remote assessment and invigilation activities, FireQual representatives outlined the process for remote quality assurance.

Currently, only one centre is actively delivering qualifications remotely and learner numbers are currently at a level that allows for short timescales in terms of awarding body sampling and quality assurance activity. On completion of any sampling activity, it was noted that the awarding body does not retain recordings to avoid any personal data concerns regarding learners.

During the discussions, the audit team highlighted the need for FireQual to give thought to an agreed retention period for recordings at providers, as a means of supporting both its own quality assurance activities and SQA Accreditation's provider monitoring activity where appropriate. Such an approach would ensure that providers manage online records in an effective and timely manner.

Therefore, FireQual may wish to consider the introduction of a service level agreement with approved centres for the retention of recorded assessment and/or invigilation activity.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 5**.

3 Acceptance of Audit Findings