



Audit Report

GQA Qualifications Limited

8 June 2017

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1 Background

This was the tenth 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 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'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 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:	8 June 2017
Audit Report approved by Accreditation Co-ordination Group on:	28 June 2017
Audit Report to be signed by GQA:	10 August 2017
Action Plan to be e-mailed to regulation@sqa.org.uk by GQA:	10 August 2017

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 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, four Issues have been recorded and five Recommendations have been noted.

Issue	Detail of Issue recorded	Risk rating
1. Principle 1	GQA does not have a robust system for recording and updating conflicts of interest. The current process relies on staff or associates disclosing information and is not led by the awarding body, leaving it exposed to risk.	Medium
2. Principles 4 and 6	The information on SharePoint is not accurate or up to date. It refers to job roles in GQA that no longer exist and documents refer to SQA instead of SQA Accreditation. In addition, many procedures and processes for key functions date as far back as 2012 and there is no evidence of these having been reviewed.	Medium
3. Principle 6 and RPDIR – 2	The quarterly returns submitted by the awarding body continually omit qualifications from the listings and in addition there are inaccuracies with several of the accredited titles and their SCQF levels.	Low
4. Principle 10	GQA must monitor the progress of actions recorded during External Quality Assurance (EQA) visits and must work with providers to ensure that these are closed out by the date identified.	Medium

A Recommendation has been noted where SQA Accreditation considers 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 5	It is recommended that GQA reviews its application of the current tariff system used in the delivery of qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation.
2. Principle 10	It is recommended that GQA formalises a timescale for the review of EQA accompanied visits where performance is observed.
3. Principle 10	It is recommended that GQA retains a copy of all qualification certificates held by EQAs so that it can demonstrate full compliance with assessment strategy requirements.
4. Principle 10	It is recommended that GQA record the assessment location details when carrying out observation visits.
5. Principle 15 and RPDIR – 3	It is recommended that GQA changes the credit rating body on SVQ certificates to SQA Accreditation.

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

The Audit Team reviewed GQA's *Monitoring Conflict of Interest* policy and discussed the process surrounding it. The Lead Auditor was concerned that GQA was largely reliant on its own employees or associates disclosing and updating any conflicts of interest and does not proactively request this information.

The Lead Auditor stressed that it increases the awarding body's exposure to risk and leaves it vulnerable if employees or associates fail to disclose or deliberately withhold a known conflict of interest.

The Audit Team requested all current conflict of interest declarations from External Quality Assurers (EQAs), which are required annually. The awarding body was unable to provide up-to-date records for two EQAs, which demonstrates a weakness in the process.

The Audit Team and GQA staff agreed the process could be strengthened if the awarding body took a lead in requesting information from all staff at the beginning of employment, and then on a regular or annual basis. This approach would significantly reduce any accusation of negligence on GQA's part if a conflict of interest was subsequently discovered.

GQA does not have a robust system for recording and updating conflicts of interest. The current process is reliant on staff or associates disclosing information and is not led by the awarding body, leaving it exposed to risk. This has been recorded as **Issue 1**.

Regulatory Principle 4. The awarding body shall continually review the effectiveness of its business services, systems, policies and processes.

And

Regulatory Principle 6. The awarding body and its providers shall maintain accurate documents, records and data.

Prior to the visit, the Audit Team reviewed the content of the information banked on SharePoint. GQA staff had previously identified that there were issues with access to SharePoint. However, the issues were resolved during the audit.

The information on SharePoint is not accurate or up to date. It refers to job roles in GQA that no longer exist and documents refer to SQA instead of SQA Accreditation. In addition, many procedures and processes for key functions date as far back as 2012 and there is no evidence of these having been reviewed. This has been recorded as **Issue 2**.

GQA staff assured the audit team that the content of all procedures and processes are reviewed annually, but it is not clear from the revision numbers when that review last took place. Because of the way the information is recorded, some documents appear not to have been reviewed for a number of years.

Regulatory Principle 6. The awarding body and its providers shall maintain accurate documents, records and data.

And

Regulatory Principles Directive RPDIR – 2 Data Submissions

It had also been identified that GQA's quarterly returns were inaccurate over several quarters, an Issue which had been picked up in the audit of GQA in 2014. It appears that this has still not been resolved by the awarding body.

The quarterly returns submitted by the awarding body continually omit qualifications from the listings and in addition there are inaccuracies with several of the accredited titles and their SCQF levels. This has been recorded as **Issue 3**.

A report produced by the SQA Accreditation's Information Officer, was shared with GQA as it is detailed and will enable them to correct the Issue more effectively, with a breakdown of all the errors across quarters.

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 Audit Team reviewed External Quality Assurance (EQA) reports for centres delivering accredited qualifications and found that actions which had been identified during visits had been allowed to slip past the 'action by' dates identified.

GQA staff explained that these actions would, under normal circumstances, be addressed during the next EQA visit. However, if it is going to assign dates, it should ensure that there are closed off by the agreed date — otherwise it is not meeting its own targets.

GQA must monitor the progress of actions recorded during EQA visits, and must work with providers to ensure that these are closed out by the date identified. This has been recorded as **Issue 4**.

2.2 Recommendations

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

The awarding body uses another regulator's tariff system to apply to its qualifications, and specifically uses the name associated with this system. Although it is acceptable to use the level of sanctions themselves, it is not appropriate for GQA to state that another regulator's tariff of sanctions system applies to qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation.

It is recommended that the awarding body reviews its application of the current tariff system used in the delivery of qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation. This has been noted as **Recommendation 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.

GQA's main procedures and processes are described in the *Operations Manual, May 2016*. The Audit Team reviewed the content of the manual prior to audit and noted that the GQA Technical Manager or Chief Executive Officer observe EQAs during provider visits. During discussion it became clear that this process happens on an annual basis.

Unlike other GQA procedures, there was no timescale specified for this review. It is recommended that the awarding body formalise a timescale for the review of EQA accompanied visits where performance is observed. This has been noted as **Recommendation 2**.

The Audit Team asked to see copies of the qualification certificates for all EQAs involved in delivery of qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation. The awarding body was only able to provide evidence for some of its EQAs. It is recommended that the awarding body retains a copy of all qualification certificates held by EQAs so that it can demonstrate full compliance with assessment strategy requirements. This has been noted as **Recommendation 3**.

EQA reports were examined by the Audit Team to ensure that GQA was carrying out the number of visits stated in its own policy. The Audit Team noted that where GQA carried out observation visits to assessment sites which were not the main assessment location, this was not clearly recorded on the report. It is recommended that GQA record the assessment location details when carrying out observation visits. This has been noted as **Recommendation 4**.

Regulatory Principle 15. The awarding body and its providers shall have effective, reliable and secure systems for the registration and certification of learners.

And

Regulatory Principles Directive RPDIR - 3 Logos and certificate requirements for SQA accredited qualifications

In October 2016 SQA Accreditation updated the requirements of Regulatory Principles Directive RPDIR - 3 Logos and certificate requirements for SQA accredited qualifications. The certificate was found to be compliant with the Directive. However, the correct title of the credit rating body should be 'SQA Accreditation' and not 'SQA'. It is recommended that the awarding body changes the credit rating body on SVQ certificates to 'SQA Accreditation'. This has been noted as **Recommendation 5**.

3 Acceptance of Audit Findings

For and on behalf of GQA Qualifications:

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

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