Audit Report

Qualifications for Industry (QFI)

2 December 2021

Contents

1 Background

This was the second audit of Qualifications for Industry (QFI) since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation on 22 June 2016.

QFI is an awarding body specialising in qualifications for those who work in or aspire to work in Construction, Engineering and Extractives.

QFI's headquarters are in Edinburgh and it has offices in Royal Leamington Spa, 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 remote and scoped audit of QFI, the areas of focus were: specific regulatory requirements relating to business continuity and planning, qualification portfolio management, database systems, as well as registration and certification. 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 QFI 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 QFI'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

QFI audit date: 2 December 2021

Audit Report approved by
Accreditation Co-ordination Group on: 19 January 2022

Audit Report to be signed by QFI: 2 March 2022

Action Plan to be emailed
to regulation@sqa.org.uk by QFI: 2 March 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 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 QFI 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, one Issue has been recorded and seven Recommendations have been noted.

Issue	Detail of Issue recorded	Risk rating
1. Principles 3 and 11	QFI must ensure that the management of SQA accredited provision is adequately resourced, is timely and is fully carried out in the line with the relevant guidance contained in SQA Accreditation's *Developing Qualifications for Accreditation, A Guide for Awarding Bodies, February 2018*.	Medium

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	QFI may wish to provide examples of the steps taken to support the implementation of its Business Continuity Plan in respect of the current COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Principles 3 and 11	At a point when the bespoke system replacing the current Quartz database is fully operational, QFI may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with a demonstration of its functionality.
3. Principle 4	QFI may wish to provide a current copy of the corresponding Risk Register to complement the Risk Management Policy which is currently available on SharePoint.
4. Principle 12	QFI may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with a copy of its schedule of Assessors which highlights the allocation of competence in the context of endorsements.
5. Principle 15	QFI may wish to provide a general report on unit registrations/certifications, linked to career skills requirements for Modern Apprenticeships, for relevant accredited qualifications.
6. Principle 15	QFI may wish to provide updated qualification and unit certificate exemplars. This should include an example of an SVQ certificate which incorporates endorsements.
7. Principle 15	QFI may wish to update SQA Accreditation on current 'active' learners for the *SVQ in Construction Site Management (Construction) at SCQF Level 9*, withdrawn on 24 June 2020.

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 QFI'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 must have the necessary resources to effectively carry out their operational functions to meet regulatory requirements.

and

Regulatory Principle 11. The awarding body must ensure that its qualifications portfolio is effectively managed, maintained and reviewed.

Prior to the audit, feedback from SQA Accreditation's Accreditation Managers highlighted several concerns regarding the management of QFI's portfolio of accredited qualifications.

There were noted concerns around the failure to submit formal requests for the withdrawal of qualifications, as well as a general failure to adhere to the timescales for submissions to ACG as specified in SQA Accreditation's *Developing Qualifications for Accreditation, A Guide for Awarding Bodies, February 2018*.

Through QFI's self-assessment submissions, SQA Accreditation was aware that the awarding body was finding it difficult to manage its portfolio of accredited qualifications using the Quartz database. In particular, the system was unable to highlight dates for qualification review and potential actions around future accreditation status.

Consequently, QFI has been forced to resort to managing qualifications using an Excel spreadsheet, the management of which is predominantly the responsibility of the Accountable Officer.

A copy of the *Qual plan & monitoring* spreadsheet was available to the audit team through SharePoint and a review of the document noted that all accredited provision, current or otherwise, was present therein. During the audit, the Accountable Officer explained how the spreadsheet was used as a tool for qualification review and management.

The audit team were content with the process as outlined but had concerns around the timescales for engaging with the spreadsheet, the failure to appreciate the need for a formal withdrawal of qualifications, as well as the inclusion of incorrect guidance to support the process.

There appeared to be no formal timescale for reviewing the spreadsheet. However, the Accountable Officer noted that it was generally reviewed monthly. The audit team considered this to be too infrequent, possibly resulting in the short notice late accreditation submissions for consideration by the relevant Accreditation Manager. It was also suggested that this timescale may partially account for the failure to submit formal withdrawal requests, although the Accountable Officer acknowledged that the need to make such submissions had not been fully appreciated by QFI.

Discussions extended to both potential short-term and more permanent solutions to the problems surrounding portfolio management. The Accountable Officer indicated that the awarding body will look at a revised and shortened timescale for monitoring the *Qual plan & monitoring* spreadsheet. Given that managing the qualification portfolio is only one of a number of key responsibilities allocated to the Accountable Officer, there was agreement that other staff resources may need to be allocated to support the activity. Again, this will be reviewed by QFI accordingly with any necessary adjustments made to the awarding body's *Governance RACI Chart* in respect of shared responsibilities for the function.

Longer term, QFI's External Verifier explained that the awarding body has spent a considerable amount of time over the last few years seeking suitable alternative 'off-the-shelf' systems to replace the Quartz database. However, it was found that possible alternatives were not flexible enough in terms of application or too costly. Consequently, the awarding body has invested time and resources in creating a bespoke database which will provide the necessary functionality. This will include system management of QFI's qualification portfolio and remove the need for the use of the *Qual plan & monitoring* spreadsheet.

Meantime, QFI must ensure that the management of SQA accredited provision is adequately resourced, is timely and is fully carried out in line with the relevant guidance contained in SQA Accreditation's *Developing Qualifications for Accreditation, A Guide for Awarding Bodies, February 2018*.

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

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.

QFI's Business Continuity Plan was discussed at length as part of the audit. The Auditors considered it to be a clear, concise, and well thought-out document in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Awarding body representatives were able to describe the steps taken in respect of each of the specified actions to support business continuity during lockdown.

Therefore, to complement the Business Continuity Plan on SharePoint, QFI may wish to provide examples of the steps taken to support the implementation of its Business Continuity Plan in respect of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Regulatory Principle 3. The awarding body must have the necessary resources to effectively carry out their operational functions to meet regulatory requirements.

and

Regulatory Principle 11. The awarding body must ensure that its qualifications portfolio is effectively managed, maintained and reviewed.

QFI is currently developing a bespoke system to replace the current Quartz database. The intention is that it will carry out all existing functions of the Quartz database and, more importantly, will have the capability of assisting the management of the awarding body's portfolio of accredited qualifications by alerting staff to key dates for review.

At a point when the system is fully operational, QFI may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with a demonstration of its functionality.

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

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

The audit team were able to review the awarding body's Risk Management Policy as part of the audit. However, a copy of the corresponding Risk Register was not available. Therefore, QFI may wish to provide a current copy of its Risk Register to complement the policy which is currently available on SharePoint.

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.

Given the difficulties surrounding the Quartz database's ability to assist in the management of QFI's portfolio of accredited qualifications, the audit team sought clarification around the application of endorsements for certain SVQs where applicable.

QFI's External Verifier explained the process for including relevant endorsement information and options for relevant units to the Quartz database, alongside the relevant qualification structure, following accreditation. Thereafter, a candidate's likely range of endorsements are identified alongside unit choices at the point of registration and checked for accuracy prior to certification. The audit team were able to see evidence of the Quartz database automatically producing a qualification certificate which included endorsement details.

As part of the explanation, the External Verifier also noted that the awarding body holds a schedule of Assessors which identifies areas of competence for assessment purposes, but also takes into account the context of specific endorsements. Thus, allowing for appropriate allocation of Assessors based upon the requirements of any endorsement.

Therefore, QFI may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with a copy of its schedule of Assessors which highlights the allocation of competence in the context of endorsements.

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

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

As part of the broader discussions around QFI's portfolio management, qualification accreditations submitted with the intention to offer specific units, included in the Career Skills list for Technical and Professional Apprenticeships, were touched upon in respect of SQA Accreditation's Zero Uptake Policy. This policy was previously referenced in Recommendation 5 from the 2018 QFI audit where it was suggested that the associated timescales should be considered as part of the qualification review process.

In September of this year, QFI had to provide a rationale for the retention of a number of zero uptake qualifications and it was noted that qualifications such as the *SVQ in Customer Service at SCQF Level 8, GP2E 48*, the *SVQ in Management at SCQF Level 9, GP29 49*, and the *SVQ in Management at SCQF Level 11, GP2A 51*, could still fall foul of the Zero Uptake Policy, despite having uptake on individual units.

The *SVQ Team Leading at SCQF Level 6, GN7K 46*, was also contained in the above list of zero uptake qualifications. Just prior to the audit, QFI submitted a further extension request for the qualification, in which the rationale for the extension also included a reference to the use of units for the purposes of supporting Technical and Professional Apprenticeships. The audit team noted that the Accreditation Manager had sought clarification around any unit uptake to date, as a means of further justifying the extension.

Given the above, as well as responding to the Accreditation Manager's request in respect of the specific SVQ, QFI may wish to expand upon this and provide a general report on unit

registrations/certifications linked to career skills requirements for Modern Apprenticeships for other accredited qualifications.

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

SQA Accreditation was able to review the awarding body's guidance and procedures for claiming both replacement and duplicate certificates. However, apart from Workplace Core Skills, we are currently unable to review current qualification and unit certificate exemplars.

Therefore, QFI may wish to upload unit and certificate exemplars to SharePoint. This should include an example of an SVQ certificate which incorporates endorsements.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 6**.

In addition, a pre-audit check of QFI's qualification portfolio noted that the *SVQ in Construction Site Management (Construction) at SCQF Level 9, GN99 49*, was present on the awarding body website despite being withdrawn on 24 June 2020, backdated to 31 January 2020.

The original certification end date of 31 January 2024 remained in place following the withdrawal, suggesting that there may still have been registered candidates at the time. However, as no submission was provided by QFI to support the withdrawal, it being part of a collective submission covering several other awarding body withdrawals brought to ACG by the Accreditation Officer, there appeared to be no evidence to support this supposition.

A pre-audit review of QFI data submissions at the time indicated that there may have been two candidate registrations.

Therefore, QFI may wish to update SQA Accreditation on current 'active' learners for the *SVQ in Construction Site Management (Construction) at SCQF Level 9*, allowing for a further amendment to the certification end date should there be no activity.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 7**.