



Audit Report

RSL Awards

5 June 2024

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1 Background

This was the sixth audit of RSL Awards since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation in 2011.

RSL Awards is a nationally recognised and international awarding body for creating qualifications in Music, Performing Arts and Creative Industries subjects. The awarding body has accredited its full suite of Performing Arts Awards (PAA) and also offers Highland Dance Qualifications in partnership with UKA Dance. RSL has the lead role within the partnership.

RSL Awards are located in Teddington, London.

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 RSL Awards, only specific regulatory requirements were included within the scope of the audit. The scope of the audit primarily focussed upon business development, uptake of SQA accredited qualifications, as well as current assessment and moderation activity in respect of the Performing Arts Awards (PAA) qualifications.

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 RSL Awards complies with SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements namely:

- ◆ *SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2021)*
- ◆ all *Regulatory Principle Directives*
- ◆ the awarding body's Accreditation Licence

Awarding body documentation considered for review by the Audit Team includes all documents banked on the RSL Awards 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

RSL Awards: audit date:	5 June 2024
Audit Report approved by Accreditation Co-ordination Group on:	17 July 2024
Audit Report to be signed by RSL Awards:	29 August 2024
Action Plan to be emailed to regulation@sqa.org.uk by RSL Awards:	29 August 2024

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 RSL Awards 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, three Issues have been recorded and four Recommendations have been noted.

Issue	Detail of Issue recorded	Risk rating
1. Principles 2 and 10	During the preparation for the audit, the Accreditation Auditor noted that the majority of RSL Awards accredited provision had no candidate uptake; in a number of cases of the PAA Awards, the lack of registrations had exceeded a two-year period.	High
2. Principles 9 and 12	A review of the RSL Awards <i>PAA Musical Theatre Syllabus Specification, Entry 2 to Grade 8 (SQA), Revised April 2024</i> , noted that amendments had been made to remove references to total qualification time (TQT) and guided learning hours (GLH), as they were not relevant. However, the unit specification for each grade with the syllabus had retained the above information, as well as specified credit values, and identifying Entry 2 and Entry 3 grades as 'Debut' and 'Premiere' levels.	Low
3. Principle 15	A review of SharePoint noted that RSL Awards had not updated its certificate exemplars to include its accredited PAA provision. At the time of checking, the only available exemplar was related to RSL Awards Rockschoo Graded Music Exams, which are no longer accredited.	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 9	RSL Awards may wish to review the currency of documentation retained on SharePoint to ensure that it fully reflects current policy and practice.
2. Principle 9	<p>RSL Awards may wish to review the relevant syllabi and supporting documentation for the SQA accredited PAA qualifications to ensure that the approach to grading of candidate results is consistent and transparent throughout.</p> <p>It may also wish to consider minor amendments to the wording in the Unit Specifications for the relevant SQA accredited PAA qualifications, to ensure that references to candidates repeating sections of their performance, as well as the number of candidates in both a 'Show Exam' or 'Group Exam' setting, accurately reflects current practice.</p>
3. Principle 12	RSL Awards may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with a copy of its Guidance for Examiners, Allocation of Marks Guidance, as well as evidence of recent training and standardisation events.
4. Principle 13	<p>RSL Awards may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with the outputs of the most recent Assessment Board as evidence of moderation of the most recent Musical Theatre examinations.</p> <p>It may also wish to provide a copy of documentation, either policy, terms of reference, work instructions or guidance, in support of the proposed revised approach to moderation using a Power BI Dashboard.</p>

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

And

Regulatory Principle 10. The awarding body must ensure that its systems and processes for the identification, design, development, implementation and review of qualifications and assessments are fit for purpose.

During the preparation for the audit, the Accreditation Auditor noted that the majority of RSL Awards accredited provision had no candidate uptake; in a number of cases of the PAA Awards, the lack of registrations had exceeded a two-year period. The *SQA Accreditation Accredited Qualification Zero Uptake Policy, Version 9 (September 2023)*, states that:

Awarding bodies with zero uptake qualifications will be contacted to ascertain their plans for these qualifications and given 20 working days to reply. Their response and plans will be presented to ACG either in the form of a Withdrawal submission or a request with supporting rationale to continue to offer the qualification/s. Requests to continue offering zero uptake qualifications will be considered by ACG with a decision made whether the qualifications are withdrawn or remain available for an agreed further period of time.

A rationale was submitted by RSL Awards and reviewed by ACG on 15 May 2024. However, although the rationale provided an overview of the awarding body's expansion of its business development resource, a greater focus on Performing Arts qualifications, as well as a greater emphasis on developing its customer base in Scotland, ACG members considered the rationale to be lacking in sufficient detail, regarding specific suites of qualifications, to allow a decision to be made around continued accreditation. They requested that this form part of the audit scope for discussion.

During the audit, the RSL Awards business development team spent time explaining the approach to promoting Performing Arts in Scotland, and the focus upon the qualifications as a whole with potential stakeholders, before subsequently pursuing specific suites where interest is shown. A number of examples of successful and potentially successful engagements with stakeholders were discussed, but there was no documented evidence available around what steps were taken to achieve the positive outcomes, or likely next steps.

Therefore, despite the positive nature of the discussions, and given ACG's concerns around zero uptake, RSL Awards must provide SQA Accreditation with a copy of its business development strategy, as well as updated versions of the zero uptake rationale submitted to ACG, the 'SQA x RSL Awards' document presented during the audit, the relevant section of the 2023 self-assessment report regarding business development, and the original AC2

submission, all outlining types of engagement, associated KPIs, subsequent progress reviews and the subsequent likelihood of future uptake.

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

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

And

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.

A review of the RSL Awards *PAA Musical Theatre Syllabus Specification, Entry 2 to Grade 8 (SQA), Revised April 2024*, noted that amendments had been made to remove references to total qualification time (TQT) and guided learning hours (GLH), as they were not relevant.

However, the unit specification for each grade with the syllabus had retained the above information, as well as specified credit values, and identifying Entry 2 and Entry 3 grades as 'Debut' and 'Premiere' levels.

Therefore, RSL Awards must review the full range of PAA syllabi relevant to SQA accredited provision, to ensure that there are no similar inappropriate references to guided learning hours, total qualification time, specific credit values, or 'Debut' and 'Premiere' levels.

This has been recorded as **Issue 2**.

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

A review of SharePoint noted that RSL Awards had not updated its certificate exemplars to include its accredited PAA provision. At the time of checking, the only available exemplar was related to RSL Awards RockschooL Graded Music Exams, which are no longer accredited.

Therefore, RSL Awards must provide SQA Accreditation with a certificate exemplar for the accredited PAA provision, removing or archiving on SharePoint all exemplars that are no longer current.

Also, in respect of Issue 2 above, given the erroneous inclusion of information on guided learning hours, total qualification time, and credit values identified in a sample of PAA syllabi for SQA accredited provision, the awarding body must review all PAA certificates issued since the point of accreditation to ensure that they do not include references to credit.

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

2.2 Recommendations

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

RSL Awards may wish to review the currency of documentation retained on SharePoint to ensure that it fully reflects current policy and practice.

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

A review of the RSL Awards *PAA Musical Theatre Syllabus Specification, Entry 2 to Grade 8 (SQA), Revised April 2024*, identified four bands of attainment, being Distinction, Merit, Pass and Unclassified, for the qualification as a whole. These bands of attainment are used across all accredited PAA qualifications.

However, in reviewing support materials for the Musical Theatre qualification, the audit team noted that the *Musical Theatre Marksheet Example*, available on the awarding body's website, indicated that there might be a more nuanced approach to the bands of attainment, including bands such as 'Low D' and 'High M'.

Therefore, RSL Awards may wish to review the relevant syllabi and supporting documentation for the SQA accredited PAA qualifications to ensure that the approach to grading of candidate results is consistent and transparent throughout.

The *Musical Theatre Syllabus* also contains information on the two performance options available to candidates. These are 'Group Exam' and 'Show Exam'. The audit team sought clarification on the differences between the two options from the perspective of actual assessment, the need for repeat performance, and examiner allocation. Particularly, as there is possibility of candidates being examined at different grades in both exam types, and as both options appeared to take a different approach regarding candidate numbers, both stating a minimum of two candidate entries, but potentially without a maximum number of candidates.

The RSL Awards Partnership Organisation Quality Manager took time to explain the assessment process, the fact that both exam types can have candidates being examined at different grades, that repeat performances are not a standard approach used to re-assess candidates but simply to ensure that elements have not been missed by the examiner. Also, that the candidate numbers in any exam are capped by the availability of examiners, who operate at a ratio of 1:8 in terms of candidates. Lastly, that an individual examiner will only assess candidates at one grade in either a 'Group Exam' or 'Show Exam'.

The audit team were content with this explanation but felt that the description of both exam types would benefit from additional wording clarifying the process for stakeholders.

Therefore, RSL Awards may wish to consider minor amendments to the wording in the Unit Specifications for the relevant SQA accredited PAA qualifications, to ensure that references to candidates repeating sections of their performance, as well the number of candidates in both a 'Show Exam' or 'Group Exam' setting, accurately reflects current practice.

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

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 discussions that took place in respect of Recommendation 2, RSL Awards may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with a copy of its Guidance for Examiners, Allocation of Marks Guidance, as well as evidence of recent training and standardisation events.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 3**.

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.

The RSL Awards Accountable Officer outlined the standard approach to moderation, which currently involves a monthly meeting of the Assessment Board. The meeting involves reviewing assessment results per examination, grade, and examiner.

With this in mind, RSL Awards may wish to provide SQA Accreditation with the outputs of the relevant Assessment Board as evidence of moderation of the most recent Musical Theatre examinations.

The Accountable Officer noted that there is a pending change in the awarding body's approach using Microsoft Power BI. Expected to be up and running between September and December 2024, the approach involves the creation of a dashboard, which will produce immediate and insightful outputs from moderation. This can support examiner training and standardisation, as well as highlight any deviations in results over time.

The RSL Awards Head of Operations (Graded Exams) gave a demonstration of the dashboard, albeit that PAA qualification data has yet to be fully incorporated, explaining that work is ongoing to determine the appropriate information and set of variables that will best support the dashboard. There is also ongoing work to produce a policy, terms of reference, guidance document, or work instructions to underpin regular use.

Therefore, RSL Awards may wish to provide a copy of supporting documentation, either policy, terms of reference, work instructions or guidance, in support of the proposed revised approach to moderation using a Power BI Dashboard.

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

3 Acceptance of Audit Findings