

## REPORT ON NQMS SCHEME AUDIT 2024

### Introduction

This second audit of the NQMS Scheme was carried out in January and February 2024. As intended, it was confined to the process whereby an SQP implements the requirements of the NQMS, ie the documentary evidence specifically relating to that process. It did not look at any other aspects of projects or sites.



As previously agreed by the NQMS Steering Group, 5% of submitted declarations since the issue of the revised Appendix 1 template were audited which resulted in six declarations being selected. Three members of the SiLC PTP volunteered to carry out the audits and therefore each auditor carried out two audits. The agreed procedure was that the auditors communicated with the respective SQPs to obtain the necessary information and therefore were aware of the SQP identity and the project/site name. Apart from the auditor for a specific audit and the audit co-ordinator, the identity of the SQP and the project/site which relates to each one of the audit results sheets remains confidential. All six of the SQPs relating to the selected declarations are currently active.

The declarations to be audited were selected by randomly selecting SQPs rather than the declarations. This was to implement one of the recommendations of the report on the first Scheme Audit in order to avoid bias towards choosing SQPs who have submitted more declarations than others.

When requested, four of the SQPs responded within the required time frame but the other two did not quite meet this requirement. In general, there were no real difficulties in obtaining the required information and overall, the SQPs responded well.

### Results

The audited declarations covered, interpretative report (1), risk assessment (2), remedial options (1), remediation strategy (1) and foundation risk assessment (1). The five aspects that the auditors addressed are discussed below;

- Project team assessment: this was marked as 'Conformant - good' for two of the declarations and 'Conformant – improvement possible' for all the others. The reason for this was the absence of any form of competency matrix or similar. In some cases, the SQP stated that competency was an internal system, and the details could not be issued outside the organisation. Following further requests, the SQPs generally provided brief statements on qualifications, years of experience and types of projects with no reference to the NBSF. Documentary evidence that the SQPs had checked competencies was generally missing.
- Checking and signing-off of key aspects: this was marked as 'Conformant - good' for five of the declarations. The other declaration was marked as 'Conformant - improvement possible' because Appendix 1 had not been fully completed.
- Understanding of regime and objectives: this was marked as 'Conformant – good' for all six declarations.
- Documented response to Appendix 1: this was marked as 'Conformant – good' for two of the declarations. Three were marked as 'Conformant - improvement possible, in one case because only the last page was signed and dated, in another because all report types had been ticked as not applicable and the auditor raised the question as to whether the report comes under the scope of the NQMS (this is the Foundation Works Risk Assessment), and in the third

because Appendix 1 requirements have been incorporated into the in-house technical review tool which was provided but not signed. The auditor recommended that Appendix 1 should be completed in addition to the in-house system. The remaining declaration was marked as 'Non-conformant - minor' because Appendix 1 was not fully completed.

- Compliance of conclusions or recommendations with NQMS requirements: marked as 'Conformant - good' for four of the declarations. Two of the declarations were marked as 'Non-conformant - minor', in one case because although the SQP stated that uncertainties had been set out in the report, this was not obvious to the auditor. The other case was the foundation risk assessment where it was again not obvious to the auditor where uncertainties or limitations had been set out in the report.

Two of the declarations were marked overall as 'Conformant - good', three were marked as 'Conformant - improvement possible' (including the foundation risk assessment) and one was marked overall as 'Non-conformant - minor'.

### **Recommendations**

1. As stated above, documentary evidence that the SQPs had checked competencies was generally missing. In most cases a further request had to be made in this respect and the responses ranged from brief statements on qualifications, years of experience and types of projects with no reference to the NBSF, to statements that competency is an internal system and copies cannot be provided.

A further section should be added at the beginning of Appendix 1 to enable the SQP to confirm that they have checked the competencies (with reference to the NBSF) of the personnel involved in the report preparation and the acquiring of the data on which the report is based, e.g. site investigation supervision, laboratory accreditation, data analysis, risk assessment, etc. This new section should allow for comment on limitations where data originates from a separate organisation, although such limitations should also be in the report.

2. There still seem to be some minor issues in respect of Appendix 1. Although generally it appears to be being properly implemented, there is still a need to further emphasise that Appendix 1 must be completed in full at the time of the report preparation and all pages signed and dated. If Appendix 1 has been incorporated into an organisation's internal system, then there must be scope for signing and dating and for copies to be made available in the event of audit or alternatively, if this is not possible, Appendix 1 must be completed in addition.
3. As noted above, one of the declarations audited relates to a Foundation Works Risk Assessment (FWRA) which had been carried out in accordance with the EA guidance. The requirement for a FWRA can be a planning condition so probably should come under the scope of the NQMS. However, most of the questions in the risk assessment section of Appendix 1 would not apply. Consideration needs to be given to what suitable modifications could be made to Appendix 1 to make it more applicable to reports such as a FWRA.
4. Further emphasis is needed in the NQMS Documentation concerning the need for uncertainties and limitations regarding conclusions and recommendations to be included in the report.

5. Two of the declarations audited were for the same site but it was noted by the auditor that the 'linked declarations' information had not 'fed' through to the final versions of the declarations. This is considered not to be a significant issue, but it is recommended that the on-line system is reviewed to determine whether adjustments can easily be made so that the final version of the declaration shows this.