

Regulatory Compliance and Quality Review Programme

Annual Report 2018

Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) is an independent company limited by guarantee incorporated by the Local Government Association in August 2014.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government delegated a number of statutory functions (from the Audit Commission Act 1998) to PSAA on a transitional basis by way of a letter of delegation issued under powers contained in the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

As a consequence of these delegations, for 2017/18 the company will continue to be responsible under transitional arrangements for appointing auditors to local government and police bodies, for setting audit fees and for making arrangements for certification of housing benefit subsidy claims.

Looking beyond 2017/18, the Secretary of State has specified PSAA as an appointing person for principal local government bodies from 2018/19, under the provisions of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Local Audit (Appointing Person) Regulations 2015.

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Introduction

1 Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) monitors the performance of all its audit firms. The results of our monitoring provide audited bodies and other stakeholders with assurance that high-quality audits are being delivered. We define audit quality as compliance with our regulatory requirements and with professional standards. Our objectives are to:

- provide assurance that the firms have put in place systems and processes to deliver audit work of good quality; and
- provide information to inform the audit appointments we make.

2 There are two strands to our monitoring:

- audit quality- applying our annual quality review programme (QRP) to the audit work undertaken on the 2016/17 financial statements; and
- regulatory compliance- reporting quarterly on audit firms' compliance with our regulatory requirements as set out in the Terms of Appointment.

3 The audit quality and regulatory compliance monitoring for 2017/18 incorporated a range of measurements and checks comprising:

- a review of each firm's latest published annual transparency reports;
- the results of reviewing a sample of each firm's audit quality monitoring reviews (QMRs) of its financial statements, Value for Money (VFM) conclusions and housing benefit (HB COUNT) work. Our review included assessing compliance with the HB COUNT guidance;
- an assessment as to whether we could rely on the results of each firm's systems for quality control and monitoring;
- a review of the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC) published report on the results of its inspection of firm audits in the private sector;
- the results of our inspection of each firm by the FRC's Audit Quality Review team (AQR) as part of our commissioned rolling inspection programme of financial statements and VFM work;
- the results of each firm's compliance with 15 key indicators relating to Terms of Appointment requirements;
- a review of each firms' systems to ensure they comply with our regulatory requirements; and
- a review of each firm's client satisfaction surveys for 2016/17 engagements.

4 In the limited assurance regime, the measurements and checks comprise:

- the results of firms' compliance with five key indicators relating to Terms of Appointment requirements;
- a review of firms' systems to ensure they comply with PSAA's regulatory requirements;

- the results of reviewing a sample of firms' own internal QMRs of annual return work;
- an assessment as to whether we could rely on the results of each firm's systems for quality control and monitoring; and
- a review of each firm's client satisfaction surveys for 2016/17 work.

5 This report summarises the results of the quality review process for 2018.

Overall performance

6 In our principal and limited assurance regimes, our monitoring of compliance with the Terms of Appointment uses a green, amber, and red scoring scheme.

7 We also use similar scoring in the principal audit regime to assess the overall quality of audit work for key aspects of the audit covering: financial statements audit work; VFM conclusion; and HB COUNT certification work.

8 The combined regulatory compliance and audit quality performance for each principal audit firm is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Combined regulatory compliance and audit quality performance scores (Principal Audits)

Firm	BDO	EY	GT	KPMG	Mazars
Combined firm score	A	A	A	A	G
Combined regime score	A				

9 In the limited assurance regime, we assessed whether the work performed by the firms met the required standard.

10 We were satisfied that:

- all firms produced work to an acceptable standard;
- all firms met PSAA's regulatory requirements; and
- the risks of failure in the regime were low.

11 The firms' individual annual audit quality and regulatory compliance reports, are available to view on the audit quality pages of our website.

Regulatory requirements- principal audits

12 Our monitoring of auditors' compliance with the Terms of Appointment focuses on 15 key indicators. These include the target dates for issuing audit opinions on the financial statements and VFM conclusions; reports on the whole of government accounts returns; producing annual audit letters; and sending us specified information and returns.

13 We are pleased to note that the majority of the indicators were scored as green, where the requirement was either fully met, or met within a specified tolerance.

14 Auditors met the majority of our target dates for issuing the audit opinion (99.6 per cent for NHS and 94.5 per cent for local government). Where they were not met, the delays were for reasons that were outside the auditor's control, such as delays at audited bodies in producing financial statements or requiring the resolution of complex objections.

15 The results of satisfaction surveys issued by firms for 2016/17 audit work showed that audited bodies were satisfied or very satisfied with their auditor.

QRP results- principal audits

Financial statements audit work

16 Auditors of listed companies have a statutory duty to produce an annual transparency report, giving information about the firm's governance and its arrangements for ensuring the quality of its work. All the firms in our principal audit regime are covered by this requirement and our review of the transparency reports did not highlight any significant issues of note.

17 The FRC's public reports provide an objective reality check on the self-assessments included in the firms' transparency reports. The FRC reports published on 19 June 2018 showed that in 2017/18 72% of audits required no more than limited improvements compared with 78% in 2016/17. Of the 120 audits reviewed six (5%) required significant improvement compared with eight from 106 reviews in the previous year (8%).

18 The FRC has identified key issues which firms need to address in order to improve audit quality. These were the:

- challenge and scepticism of management in key areas involving judgment, such as impairment reviews, asset valuations and provisions;
- group audit team's oversight and challenge of component auditors;
- audit of company pension scheme assets and liabilities; and
- arrangements for ensuring compliance with the Ethical Standard and independence requirements.

19 The results of the FRC reviews on a sample of 10 PSAA financial statement engagements for 2016/17 concluded that whilst there was scope for improvement, overall the audits had been performed to an acceptable standard.

20 We also asked the FRC to review the actions taken by firms at a sample of audits which had been identified as requiring significant improvement last year. They reported that not all actions planned had been implemented.

21 We reviewed a sample of all firms' quality monitoring reviews (QMRs) of financial statements audits. While these identified scope for improvement, there were no systematic concerns about the overall quality of work and the weaknesses identified were consistent with the FRC's profession wide findings.

22 The main areas identified for individual auditors to improve on are:

- the valuation of property and other fixed assets, and challenge of related assumptions;
- procedures in respect of defined benefit pension schemes;
- procedures where the local auditor is required to act as a group auditor where 'commercial' subsidiaries or joint venture arrangements have been set up; and
- documentation and timeliness of review procedures.

Value for money arrangements conclusions

23 Auditors are required to give a value for money (VFM) arrangements conclusion as to whether the audited body has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. For each firm we reviewed a sample of the quality monitoring reviews of auditors' VFM arrangements conclusions. In addition we asked the AQRT to review a sample of five VFM arrangements conclusions (one for each firm).

24 We were satisfied from the results of these reviews that the evidence on audit files was sufficient to support auditors' VFM arrangements conclusions. We noted, albeit on a small sample, that work on all VFM arrangements conclusions was rated as either good or only limited improvements required.

Certification of HB COUNT work

25 Certification work is not an audit, but a type of assurance engagement. PSAA auditors certify local authorities' claims to provide assurance to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that housing benefit subsidy claims comply with terms and conditions.

26 Auditors are required to undertake this work using specific guidance and tools which are agreed annually with the DWP. HB COUNT sets out the approach and work needed to certify the subsidy claim form and includes a requirement to test a sample of cases to check that benefits have been awarded in accordance with benefit regulations and that subsidy has been properly claimed

27 For each firm we reviewed a sample of the quality monitoring reviews of certification work to assess whether the auditor had followed our prescribed tests. We found that suppliers complied with our requirements but in a small number of cases there was scope for improving compliance with the certification instructions in some areas.

Regulatory requirements- limited assurance work

28 The limited assurance approach for smaller bodies comprises three key elements:

- a compliance check against the requirements of an annual return;
- a high level analytical review of financial and other information requested by the auditor; and
- a review of the bodies annual governance statement.

29 This work leads to the issue of a limited assurance opinion on the annual return and a certificate of closure.

30 We undertook our own reviews of a sample of limited assurance work at each firm, in addition to relying on firms' internal arrangements.

31 In the limited assurance regime, our monitoring of auditors' compliance regulatory requirements focuses on five key indicators. These include the target dates for issuing opinions on the annual return; and sending us accurate information and returns.

32 We are pleased to note that 100 per cent of the indicators were scored as green, where the requirement was either fully met, or met within a specified tolerance. Auditors met the target date (30 September 2017) for issuing the limited assurance opinion in the majority of cases (97 per cent overall) which was consistent with the previous year. This remains higher than in earlier years as a result of continued confusion at some small bodies about their responsibility to set the date for the exercise of public rights.

33 In addition the results of satisfaction surveys issued by firms for 2016/17 audit work showed that audited bodies were satisfied with their auditor.

QRP results- limited assurance work

Limited assurance work

34 Our reperformance of a sample of the internal reviews did not highlight any weaknesses in any of the firms' internal QRMs and we were able to rely on this work.

35 Some minor improvement points were raised across all firms as part of the internal QMRs.

36 There were no systematic concerns about the overall quality of limited assurance audit work.

Responses to QRP findings and next year's QRP

37 All the audit firms have made arrangements to report the QRP findings to a suitable management group. Action plans are in place to address both organisation-wide and audit team issues. We will follow up significant recommendations as part of next year's QRP.

38 We intend to continue with our regulatory compliance reports for all suppliers. Where required, we will make visits to firms.

39 Our programme for next year will continue to include reviews of audit work by the FRC; and reliance on the results of firms' QMRs.

40 Our aim is to work with firms to ensure that our regulatory requirements continue to be met and that the risks of audit failure remain low.

41 Quality assurance arrangements for limited assurance work for 2017/18 engagements are the responsibility of Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments Ltd (SAAA).