

QCA Financial Reporting Expert Group Terms of Reference

- **The QCA Financial Reporting Expert Group is committed to working with boards, investors, regulators and standard-setters to promoting high quality corporate reporting by quoted companies, especially small and mid-size quoted companies.**

We will encourage the boards of quoted companies to be aware of the importance of high quality reporting in order that the market can have confidence in their businesses and in the information provided by companies generally. In order to undertake our work effectively, we will work with investors to better understand their information needs. We will also encourage standard-setters, regulators and others to set standards and other requirements that meet the genuine needs of investors in a practical way.

- **We seek to foster a culture of continuous improvement in corporate reporting.**

We will encourage companies to keep their corporate reporting under regular review and to seek ways of responding to changing market needs. Information provided should be understandable, avoid unnecessary complexity, be presented in a timely fashion and in a format that makes use of modern technology where appropriate. We will similarly encourage regulators and standard-setters to remain responsive to marketplace changes and to provide information to preparers on good practice and on reporting issues which companies generally need to address. Standard-setters should also take a strategic rather than a piecemeal approach to their work and should periodically seek to eliminate requirements which have not been found to provide useful information.

- **We believe the concept of stewardship lies at the heart of good corporate reporting.**

Directors are responsible to the shareholders for the long-term success of their businesses and this will have a bearing both on what they are expected to report on and the most suitable method of measurement in financial statements. It is likely to have implications, for example, for the circumstances in which fair values are used and for what is considered to be the most appropriate means of measuring fair value in particular situations.

- **Corporate reporting requirements should be subject to robust cost-benefit tests.**

Standard-setters need to carefully assess the costs compared to the benefits of introducing requirements and to avoid unintended consequences wherever possible. To do this, they need to be conscious of the risks of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach since quoted companies encompass both global companies with a market valuation of tens of billions of pounds and small and mid-size quoted companies with one of a relatively few million pounds. Moreover, there should be a clear and public consensus between boards, investors, standard-setters, regulators and auditors on how materiality is to be applied in practice by companies when preparing their financial statements. A proportionate approach to corporate reporting that focuses on significant disclosures and avoids clutter in the financial statements with immaterial disclosures will both improve the quality of corporate reporting and reduce the costs of providing relevant information.

➤ **We press for accounting standards which properly reflect economic reality when implemented.**

Standards when applied, as well as when written, should focus on principles and not rules, enabling appropriate judgement to be exercised, and in their drafting should take account of practical concerns raised when they are being prepared. In measurement terms, a theoretically optimum solution may turn out to be sub-optimal if, for example, the assumptions of active markets are not met in practice. A mission to reflect economic reality also calls for post-implementation reviews of issues arising. Furthermore, investors may well wish to distinguish between those profits that have been realised in cash and those that have not. Moreover, how best to reflect economic reality may be impacted by the time horizon over which performance is being measured. Further work on what is meant by, and how best to capture, economic reality in financial statements would be helpful. There should be a pre-eminent emphasis on economic reality when standard-setters agree on convergence programmes.

➤ **Standard-setters should be in close touch with their marketplace.**

In a fast-changing modern market economy, if standards are to reflect economic reality and to be practical, the standard-setters need to be fully in touch with their marketplace. Standard-setters as a team should have substantial current or recent practical experience of operating in the marketplace as a user, preparer or adviser. They should also be drawn from a broad range of backgrounds, including those related to small and mid-size quoted companies as well as to global corporations.

➤ **We emphasise the importance of good narrative reporting as an integral part of corporate reporting.**

Work has been undertaken regarding the Strategic Report to make it a more effective tool for companies to communicate with stakeholders in a fair and balanced manner. To enable the development of a business to be seen in its proper context, it is essential that high quality information be provided on its strategy, as well as the key risks and how they are being managed, the key performance indicators (KPIs) used to manage the business, current performance and future prospects, and its corporate governance.

➤ **We expect members of the Expert Group to actively participate in the group's activities.**

This primarily involves preparing for, attending and participating in debate and discussions during meetings, but also includes volunteering to draft consultation responses and commenting on various outputs from the Expert Group. Members who are unable to attend each meeting are expected to contribute to the wider activities of the group. Members may be asked to report on consultations and/or draft consultation responses or other briefing notes, based on their particular individual expertise.