

SAI United Kingdom NAO, Comptroller and Auditor General Mr Gareth Davies

EUROSAI Governing Board Portfolio – Emerging Issues and Forward Thinking

UK NAO holds the portfolio Emerging Issues and Forward Thinking since being elected to the Governing Board at the XI EUROSAI Congress in April 2021.

Our objective is to promote excellence in audit by supporting EUROSAI members to identify and more importantly act upon emerging issues in a timely way. We will collect information from EUROSAI members and external organisations to help identify the most relevant and strategically important issues which require members' attention. Working collectively with SAIs in the region we will help audited institutes learn from good practice and auditors to take practical action to improve the efficiency and impact of their audit work.

Researching emerging issues is one of the key areas of the Portfolio's responsibility but equally important is identifying how to respond to these issues. We will continue to monitor the emerging issues of the audit profession and the operating environment of SAIs and relevant stakeholders. We will carry out a review of SAI strategic plans around the EUROSAI region. This will build on the survey work carried out by the previous portfolio holder, SAI Finland and also brainstorming sessions with other SAIs. Important to the success of the portfolio will be communicating the findings of our research and consulting with EUROSAI members on which emerging issues need attention. Project groups and other channels will be used to help engage in a timely way, moving beyond discussion to taking action. Identifying concrete actions SAIs can and should be taking for example investing in skills and capabilities or better use of data. We will work effectively with others across EUROSAI and make the strategic connections to facilitate successful work across portfolios.

The current Project Groups that remain extremely important in this portfolio are those covering COVID-19 and Future Risks and Climate Change. More widely, there are other key themes which will need to be considered over the period, including:

- **Technological developments and digital government** – big data, AI, data warehouse and ownership, and cyber security
- **Environment, climate and sustainability** – climate change and net zero. An important element of this is reporting against the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- **Demographic changes** – impact on public services on an ageing population
- **Citizen engagement** - more systematic approaches to obtain views of citizens (who have changing expectations of public audit)
- **Moving boundaries of public sector audit** – relationship with regional or local government

- **Government preparedness for future emergency responses** – heavily influenced by COVID-19
- **Engagement with stakeholders** - how audit engages with external bodies that help support the delivery of public services.

Through our work identifying future issues and risks we will support the strategic planning work of the Governing Board and development of their goals. We will help the Governing Board to focus on areas which add the most value to audit work and monitor the effectiveness of the outputs produced by the formal project groups. We will proactively collaborate and support other portfolio holders and the SAIs responsible for Strategic Goals 1 and 2.

Project Group on Auditing the Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

We have consulted EUROSAI members on the future direction of the Project Group and received positive feedback that it should continue. The Project Group will reform in November 2021 with a streamlined set of work programmes to reflect the new phase of the pandemic and the longer-term impact on public finances. The Project Group will continue to focus on facilitating the sharing of audit tools, approaches and knowledge. We will put our formal proposal on the EUROSAI Benchmarking and Information Exchange Portal (BIEP). The Group will likely focus on the economic recovery from the pandemic; pressures on public finances; importance of resilient public services provision (learning from the pandemic); and differential impact of the pandemic on the population (including health and education).

Project Group on Future Risks and Climate Change

The Future Risks and Climate Change Project Group is consulting on key themes. The Project Group were successful in their bid to present at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in November. Members of the Project Group presented on the issue of “translating climate ambition into delivery” giving examples where SAIs have been able to provide insight and report on government’s progress. There remains a high level of interest in this topic and the Project Group and the Group will set out their plans in late 2021. The Project Group will continue to help support members in identifying approaches and methods to audit climate issues.