

Ofqual Board

Paper 88/14

Date:

28 January 2015

Title:

Chief Executive's Report

Report by:

Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive

Paper for discussion and information



Summary

1. This report updates the Board on strategy and progress in delivering the Corporate Plan published in August. It updates the Board on Government policy developments, and sets out known strategic risks.

Recommendations

2. The Board is asked to:
 - a. Note progress and issues related to policy and strategy.
 - b. Review the organisation's strategic risk register.
 - c. Consider and agree new arrangements for financial accountability and management.
 - d. Endorse for publication our Annual Report to Parliament on Standards.
 - e. Endorse our strategic approach to malpractice, and our prioritisation of actions.

Considerations

Policy developments

Annual Report to Parliament

3. Our second report to Parliament is now presented to the Board for review and endorsement. The report reviews how we have prioritised and interpreted our statutory objectives and the reform of GCSEs and A levels. Finally it outlines the development of our regulatory approach. The report covers the period April 2011 to December 2014.

IGCSEs

4. Government has now made and published its decision that IGCSEs will remain in performance tables only until reformed GCSEs in each subject are first examined and awarded.
5. Government's decision does not lead us to change our regulatory approach to IGCSEs, given that they are likely to remain a popular alternative to GCSEs in key subjects for the immediate future.

AS and A levels

6. Given differences of view between the Government and the opposition with regards to AS and A levels, we wrote to the Shadow Secretary of State to set out options and the timeframe for the implementation of any change in policy. The opposition accept our view that any change would take two years to implement, with first teaching from September 2017. Current government policy remains unchanged.
7. UCAS has published their survey 'Unpacking Qualifications Reform: Results of the UCAS survey on A level reform'¹. The survey considers the extent to which schools have established their approach to offering reformed qualifications, particularly standalone AS. 66% of respondents (500 schools) will offer standalone AS; 16% will not. 18% are undecided. The report received media coverage, emphasising anxiety in schools.

Apprenticeships

8. The Skills Minister, Nick Boles, gave evidence to the Education Select Committee on 14th January regarding Government's progress on plans for apprenticeship reform. Boles expressed to the Committee reservations about funding arrangements. We provided a written submission to the Committee (appendix seven). Government policy on apprenticeships remains as

¹ <http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-unpacking-qualification-reform-jan-15.pdf>

previously stated. We will be meeting with the Minister in early February to discuss matters of common interest including our role in apprenticeship qualifications and assessments. Board members are referred to the closed Vocational Qualifications update paper (90/14) for more detail.

Qualification Wales

9. Board members will recollect that when they last met, we were considering the draft legislation to establish a new Welsh Regulator. There are difficulties, tensions as between the provisions in the draft legislation and Ofqual's remit. We wish so far as possible to ease those tensions ahead of enactment, in the interests of learners in Wales and in England. Board members are referred to closed paper 90/14 (Vocational Qualifications Update) for the current position.

General Election

10. We anticipate purdah starting on 30th March, lasting for six weeks – until the election takes place. We await Cabinet Office guidance. We have taken these anticipated timelines into account in developing our timetable for publishing consultations, decisions and of course our corporate plan.
11. We maintain an active interest in the stated policy intentions of all parties and note that, to date, decoupling of AS and A level is the only known area of contention.

Strategy

12. The Board is asked to note progress in delivering our current Corporate Plan, set out in the closed appendix one. Matters of particular interest to the Board are set out below.

Corporate Plan 2015-2018

13. We will publish the next iteration of our Corporate Plan at the end of March. We will discuss the organisation's goals, objectives and proposed activities when we meet for the Board Strategy Day on the 27th February (draft agenda in appendix two). The proposals we will present to the Board for discussion reflect the views and input of colleagues from our directorates and are fully in line with the direction set by the Board in its current Corporate Plan.
14. We will publish, for the first time, a statement of our risk appetite specified for different aspects of our work – in line with good practice of other regulators. The Board will take an important role in setting our risk appetite, through discussion at the Board Strategy Day.

Malpractice and teacher ethics

15. Ahead of the Board Strategy Day, Board members are asked to consider (at this meeting) our developing strategy and plans in relation to malpractice. Building on earlier Board discussion, we propose clear strategic aims and prioritised actions to deliver them. Board members will receive a presentation at the meeting, to enable full discussion of our proposals.

Regulatory strategy implementation

16. Our Standards Advisory Group will consider our proposed definition of validity at their next meeting. Meanwhile, we are making steady progress in implementing the changes resulting from our regulatory strategy. A new internal operational board will commission audit work and technical evaluation of qualifications, using a variety of research and audit approaches. Commissioning will be informed by the application of our risk model. We refer the Board to the Vocational Qualifications Update paper (90/14) for updates on implementation of our strategy.
17. We are now poised to make the further changes to our regulatory framework, removing ineffective provisions (QCF) and making other provisions (Guided Learning Hours) more effective. Board members are referred to closed papers 91/14 and 92/14 respectively to consider the detail.
18. We intend to publish a statement of our regulatory strategy by the business year end – to coincide with the publication of the next iteration of our Corporate Plan. Like other regulators, we wish to state clearly our approach, making plain what those we regulate and other stakeholders can expect from us.

GQ reform

GCSE Maths

19. We have now accredited all four specifications for the reformed GCSE Maths to be taught from September 2015. Given expressed concerns at perceived differences in assessment style of those specifications, we are conducting research to see as clearly as possible how different approaches would likely work in practice. A summary of our research programme, to be completed by the end of April, is included in appendix three.
20. In order to prevent confusion that could arise for schools should exam boards be free to issue additional sample assessment materials and other exemplar material at this stage, we have imposed a prohibition (by special condition) on

such materials, pending the outcomes of our research. We expect to complete the research by early April.

21. We have written to key stakeholders in the mathematics community, and to head teachers and maths teachers to keep them abreast of developments and will continue to keep them updated. To date, the maths community in particular is supportive of our research and commitment to address the concerns. We will discuss with key stakeholders our research findings and their implications at the earliest opportunity.
22. Board members may be interested in the work done ahead of and during accreditation to ensure so far as is possible that the accredited specifications are of the right standard. This work is summarized in the closed appendix four.
23. There are clear challenges in stating and assessing the standard of qualification demand and difficulty – particularly where there is a stated aim to change that standard. Specifically now, we look ahead to A level Maths and GCSE sciences, where we expect similar challenges.

Pricing of General Qualifications

24. We have commissioned and will now publish two reports on the GCSE, and A level markets. The reports highlight the unusual characteristics of these markets, particularly the unimportance of price in purchasing decisions. Instead, decisions are made on the basis of quality – with relatively large changes in perceived quality required to trigger a switch of provider.
25. These peculiarities do create risks, particularly in the context of reform, when schools are making purchasing decisions that may impact on existing market share. For example, the lack of price sensitivity in the market could allow prices to rise as exam boards seek to recuperate their investments in new qualifications.
26. We are acting on these findings by discussing with exam boards their pricing strategies, including asking them to notify us of and explain any notable increase in fees.

Capacity and capability

27. On the 13th January we began, as planned, a period of consultation with our staff regarding the next stage of implementation of our new operating model. This will see staff move to new roles below the new leadership structure we implemented in September 2014. The Chief Operating Officer's Report provides a more detailed update on the consultation process.

28. We have strengthened our capacity and competence in strategic communications and stakeholder relationship management – noting the importance of these areas to the Board. The Board will be introduced at the meeting to the key individuals leading this area - Chris Shadforth, Associate Director Communications, Phil Beach Director of Strategic Relationships, General Qualifications and Naomi Nicholson, Director of Strategic Relationships, Vocational Qualifications.
29. As noted before, we have not secured a permanent Executive Director for General Qualifications. However, we are pleased to have appointed Ian Stockford as Acting Executive Director.

Financial Accountability and Management

30. We have reviewed our arrangements for financial accountability and management and ask the Board to consider and approve our proposal.
31. Previously, financial accountability was split across two roles, covering management accounts and financial accounts. We are proposing a new role to create a single point of accountability for all finance matters. This role, whilst reporting to the Chief Operating Officer, will have an additional accountability line to the Chief Executive Officer, and to the Board, in light of their statutory accountabilities for financial reporting.

Strategic risk

32. Board members are asked to review and comment on Ofqual's strategic risks and mitigations, as shown in the updated strategic risk register attached at appendix five. Broadly the direction of travel in our identified risks is positive.
33. We have identified a new risk related to the implementation of new regulatory compliance tools, in line with our regulatory strategy. However, we are confident in our mitigating actions at this time.
34. The Board is also asked to note the extension of our identified risk related to accreditation of new GCSEs and A levels to cover the second tranche of accreditation for subjects to be taught from 2016. This round of accreditation begins in April and has been further developed by on our evaluation of the first tranche.
35. Risks related to the National Reference Tests are addressed for the Board in the paper on this matter for discussion at the Board meeting.

Future Look

36. The forward planner for the Board is included at appendix six.
37. We will continue to deliver the plans and actions set out in the Corporate Plan. To note, our consultation on assessment of practical skills in GCSE Science ends 4th February. The Board will also be asked to make contractual decisions related to the National Reference Test.
38. In February we will meet for a Board Strategy Day. We intend to discuss with you progress on our new Corporate Plan, the development of our risk appetite and a review of the stakeholder landscape (draft agenda for the day in appendix two).

Impact Analysis

Internal stakeholders

39. We are now in a process of formal collective consultation with the union regarding our staffing changes. These now include regional representatives from the union. To date our dialogue is constructive.

External stakeholders

40. Broadly, relationships with external stakeholders remain positive. Our consultation on GCSE Science practical assessment has so far received a more muted response than we might have expected. Consultation remains open until 4th February.
41. We responded to ASCL's Blueprint consultation, noting our support for the vision of the future presented by ASCL, in areas of relevance to us.

Paper to be published	YES
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting

Appendices list:

- Appendix one: Corporate Plan Progress Report – closed
Appendix two: Board Strategy Day – draft agenda
Appendix three: GCSE Maths Research Programme Overview
Appendix four: GCSE Maths accreditation – closed

Appendix five: Strategic Risk Register

Appendix six: Board Forward Plan

Appendix seven: Written submission to Education Select Committee



Agenda

Board Away Day

Date:

27 February 2015, 09:00 – 16:00

Venue:

Offsite - tbc



1. Corporate Plan development
2. Single exam board scenarios
3. Stakeholder and perception
4. Risk appetite
5. Update on our Regulatory Strategy

GCSE Maths

Summary of Research Programme



Overview

Our GCSE mathematics programme of research has been designed to further explore features of the sample assessment materials that have been developed by exam boards as part of the current reforms. This current design of the research programme is made up of 3 strands that ask the following questions:

Strand 1: Based on the views of mathematicians, what is the relative mathematical demand of questions in sample assessment materials for the new mathematics GCSE?

Strand 2: Based on a sample of current year 11 students sitting the sample assessment materials, what is the relative difficulty of questions in the new mathematics GCSE?

Strand 3: Using students' descriptions of their approaches to tackling questions, are there different approaches to mathematical problem solving in the new mathematics GCSE sample assessment materials?

All three strands are scheduled to report at the end of April 2015.

Overview of research designs

Strand 1 – Comparison of item demand

Methodology

The methodology applied in this strand of the research uses a comparative judgement framework based on question demand. This means that mathematicians are presented with a series of pairs of maths questions and asked, for each pair, “Which question is the most mathematically difficult to answer fully?” The judges are asked to make this judgement many times for randomly paired questions. Based on these many judgements, a statistical model is fitted (the Rasch model) that places the questions on a scale from the least to most mathematically demanding.

The questions used for this strand of research are those from sample assessment materials for the new GCSE maths specifications, questions from the current GCSE mathematics papers and also questions from 12 international jurisdictions. This leads to an pool of over 2,000 questions. More than 40 judges will be asked to perform 1,000 judgements each.

Once these judgements have been made, the statistical model will allow an evaluation of:

- Which questions are perceived to be of greater and lesser mathematical demand
- How reliable the judgements were

Limitations

This strand of research provides an evaluation of perceived demand of questions and does not, necessarily, reflect the difficulty of questions as experienced by students of the appropriate age and experience. Mathematics experts, by their nature, tend to see beyond any context within which the mathematics is set and/or any complexity introduced due to the specific numbers that appear in a question. This, in addition to the judgement that that judges are being asked to make, will be helpful in isolating the perceived mathematical demand from any other features.

This is, however, only part of the picture giving rise to the need for strand 2 (outlined below) that will access the actual difficulty of items.

Strand 2 – Pilot testing to evaluate question difficulty

Methodology

Whereas strand 1 is considering the perceived demand of questions, this strand will evaluate the actual difficulty of questions as experienced by students.

To evaluate the actual difficulty of questions, current year 11 students will be asked to sit one of the question papers from the sample assessment materials as a mock exam. As an incentive to participate, the scripts will be marked and teachers provided with student and item level analyses following the study. Once schools have been recruited to participate and have nominated their candidates as higher or foundation tier, question papers from the different exam boards from the appropriate tier will be randomly distributed between the students. One non-calculator paper from each exam board will be included in this strand and will be sat under exam conditions.

A minimum of 500 students will be required to sit each question paper at each tier from each exam board. This number is necessary to achieve a level of randomness that will provide meaningful comparisons between the groups sitting the different papers. Following marking of students' scripts, analysis of the data will provide details of:

- The relative difficulty of questions as experienced by candidates
- Further evidence regarding the technical functioning of the assessments.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this strand of the research programme is that the students taking part in the pilot will not have followed the course of study relevant to the newly reformed specifications.

The potential effects are that students are not suitably prepared, leading to very low performance and/or disengagement with the exam. This could lead to floor effects with a large number of students achieving very low (or no) marks on a large number of items limiting the usefulness of the analysis. This may also affect different questions in different ways as some material will be new to the content.

While these risks are not insignificant, this cohort of students is the most representative group available and this potential risk will be borne in mind during the analysis phase.

The sampling of schools/students will not be nationally representative. Given the relative, rather than absolute, nature of the analysis, this feature does not compromise the analysis. Attention will be paid to whether the profile of recruited schools may lead to wholesale floor or ceiling effects.

Strand 3 – Approaches to problem solving

Methodology

This strand of the research programme will explore how students go about solving questions. To elicit the thought process students go through, potential higher tier year 10 students will be asked to articulate how they would explain to a fellow student how to go about answering a particular question. These explanations will then be used in a comparative judgement design (similar to strand 1) with judges deciding which explanation demonstrates the best problem solving ability as encapsulated by the definition of A03. These judgements will then be used to place all students on a scale from those with the lowest to highest problem solving ability. Students will then be asked to respond to these questions in a normal manner and their responses will be marked. Analysis of the relationship between the judges' views of students problem solving ability with the marks students actually achieve on these questions will provide information on the extent to which items are measuring problem solving ability. Comparisons between exam boards' approaches to problem solving can then be made.

Limitations

This is a challenging research design and it is difficult to know if all students will be able to perform the explanatory task outlined above. To test this, we will be running a pilot phase to assess viability of the approach and will adjust the design accordingly.

Forward Planner - Ofqual Board

Subject	3 Dec 14	28 Jan 15	25 Mar 15	20 May 15	Jun-15	7 July 15	23 Sept 15	18 Nov 15	20 Jan 16	23 Mar 16	Note
Reporting/Governance											
hgf	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
COO Report	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Corporate Plan			x							x	
Business and Financial Plan			x							x	
Annual review of Governance Framework	x							x			
Review of Standards Advisory Group Membership			x							x	
Review of the Vocational Advisory Group Membership			x							x	
Report on the work of Board Committees	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
2014/15 Annual Report and Accounts					x						teleconference
Dates for Board & Committee meetings in 2015/16	x							x			
Regulatory Business											
General Qualifications Directorate Update	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Vocational Qualifications Directorate Update	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
National reference test	x	x									
QCF - Technical Consultation		x									
QCF - post consultation decision				x							
Subject content and assessment arrangements for first teaching 2016 - p art 2		x									
Guided Learning Hours - post consultation decision		x									
Enquiries after results - decision to consult				x							

Apprenticeships and Traineeships for 16 to 19 year olds

Education Select Committee Inquiry – Ofqual submission



Executive summary

1. Ofqual is interested in apprenticeships because it regulates qualifications taken by apprentices. Existing apprenticeship frameworks are defined mostly by reference to qualifications to be passed. We are changing how we regulate vocational qualifications, including those used in apprenticeships.
2. Current apprenticeship reforms in England emphasise that they should meet the expectations of employers and the competencies apprentices should have after an apprenticeship, rather than passing qualifications. It is welcome that new apprenticeships will be less focused on qualifications: there will always be important skills and experience that cannot be easily or validly assessed. However, all apprenticeship tests still need to be valid. At the request of Government, we will consider how to regulate new apprenticeship tests so as to assure their quality.

Current apprenticeship arrangements

3. Current apprenticeships are defined mostly by reference to qualifications that framework designers, such as Sector Skills Councils, believe will ensure that apprentices have the knowledge and skills to continue in that occupation. Apprentices must also pass functional skills or other qualifications in English and maths, unless they have already have grade C GCSEs.
4. Ofqual does not regulate apprenticeships themselves: it does not assess the standards or validity of apprenticeship frameworks as a whole. However, we regulate the component qualifications, many of which are developed principally to meet apprenticeship requirements, so we have a close interest in apprenticeships, and in the extent to which component qualifications meet employer expectations.

Changes to the regulation of vocational qualifications

5. The Ofqual corporate plan for 2014-17 which can be found here: <http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/corporate-plan/>, describes our new approach to regulation, based on the validity of qualifications – that is, whether the results achieved by learners can be used by those that rely on them in a meaningful and appropriate way. This is as important for apprenticeship qualifications as for any other: employers need to be confident that qualifications test the right knowledge and

skills, and that qualification holders have met the requirements. Qualification validity cannot be judged at any single point in time; all stages from design and development through assessment and awarding can affect validity. We expect awarding organisations to assure validity over the life of each qualification.

6. We are removing regulations that do not support qualification validity, and indeed may damage it. In particular, we are consulting on removing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) requirements: while there are good qualifications in the QCF, which will not be affected by the proposed reforms, the QCF rules do not prioritise validity or standards.

7. We are also auditing awarding organisations' systems and capacity to develop valid qualifications and to make sure they meet user (eg employer) needs. In the coming months we will extend this audit programme and introduce audit strategies and other ways of checking validity. The audit schedule will be risk-based but with an element of randomness, so no awarding organisation can assume it will not be audited soon.

8. Where awarding organisations cannot show that their qualifications have clear purposes and that these are met, we will take action. In particular, we are reviewing functional skills qualifications, and will publish our findings later in the autumn.

Government apprenticeship reforms

9. Since the decision to make reforms based on the 2012 Richard Review of apprenticeships, we have been discussing with Government issues relating to testing (assessments) in new apprenticeships. We have advised Government on trailblazer proposals for apprenticeship standards and tests.

10. One strength of the new model is that it does not conceive of apprenticeships as collections of qualifications. It will always be hard for formal tests to measure the wider skills and experience that employers consistently say they want from new employees.

11. In defining new apprenticeship standards, many trailblazers have identified generic skills (such as teamwork) as well as the knowledge and skills that qualifications more typically test. There are various ways of confirming that apprentices have these wider skills, which we will discuss with Government and trailblazers.

12. Some trailblazers propose to include existing qualifications in apprenticeships, as well as new tests to be taken at the end of the apprenticeship (and sometimes at earlier points too). It will be as important as ever to employers that these tests are valid and that standards are secure. Given this, we have been asked by Government to put in place regulation for apprenticeship tests. However, trailblazers will be able to propose alternative quality assurance models if they believe they will be superior or better suited to their sector.

13. We will work with Government, UKCES, trailblazers and awarding organisations in coming months to consider regulation that will support valid testing of the new apprenticeships, without imposing undue burden or restricting innovation.

14. Many qualifications are used mainly in apprenticeships, so we will monitor the effect of apprenticeship reforms on the whole qualifications system. We will also consider what can be learned from the apprenticeship work (including the experiences of any trailblazers that adopt alternative quality assurance models) for the regulation of other vocational qualifications.

15. We would be happy to discuss these matters with the Committee.

Jeremy Benson

Executive Director for Vocational Qualifications

30 September 2014