

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) **Report to Parliament**

1 January 2015 – 31 December 2015

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 171 of the
Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009

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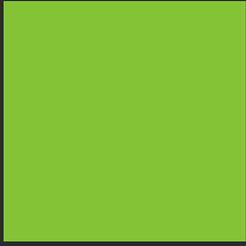
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“Our work during 2015 was directed by our Corporate Plan.”



Amanda Spielman
Chair, Ofqual

Foreword

Welcome to our Report to Parliament, which covers the calendar year 2015.

Our work during 2015 was directed by the goals and objectives set out in our Corporate Plan 2015-18. We achieved many of our aims and made much progress on others.

A great deal of our focus has been on reforming GCSEs, AS and A levels. The first new qualifications began to be taught in English schools in September 2015, and the subjects to be introduced in 2017 have been agreed. At the time of writing, at least one new qualification had been accredited in all GCSE and A level subjects for first teaching in September 2016.

Reform has also been a feature of our wider work. A key change in 2015 was the removal of the Qualifications and Credit Framework rules, which were not providing enough flexibility for awarding organisations to meet the needs of students and employers. We have also begun work with others to reform functional skills qualifications and advised the Government on assessment within reformed apprenticeships.

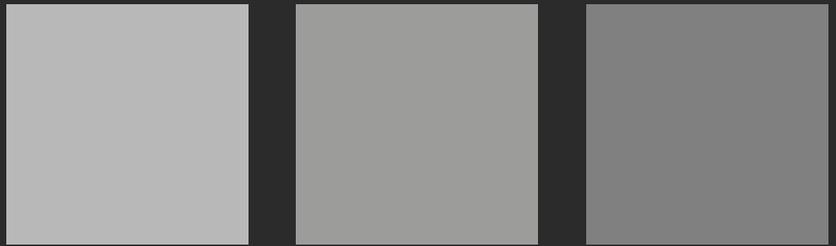
One of our statutory responsibilities is the maintenance of standards in GCSEs, AS and A levels in England. There were relatively few changes to these qualifications in summer 2015 and the results were stable.

Key to all these achievements was Dame Glenys Stacey, our former Chief Regulator, who provided wise direction and strong leadership during her five-year tenure. And the future is bright following the appointment of our new Chief Regulator, Sally Collier.

Amanda Spielman

Amanda Spielman, Chair





Our role

Ofqual is the independent qualifications regulator for England, and until late spring 2016, for vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland (see page 30).

We regulate GCSEs, AS and A levels, National Curriculum assessments, and vocational qualifications, many of which are used in publicly-funded apprenticeships and adult training. Many regulated qualifications support government policy objectives, but some are only studied privately.

Our statutory objectives and duties

We have five statutory objectives, which are set out in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. In brief, they are:

1. to secure qualification standards;
2. to promote National Assessment standards;
3. to promote public confidence in regulated qualifications and National Assessment arrangements;
4. to promote awareness of the range and benefits of regulated qualifications;
5. to secure that regulated qualifications are provided efficiently.

We have a wide range of other duties and publish separate documents addressing some of these, including those related to equality and diversity and regulatory burden.

Our mission

We regulate so that qualifications are sufficiently valid and trusted. We make clear and considered judgements for the benefit of those who study, and rely on, regulated qualifications.

Our governance

The Ofqual Board is the legal authority responsible for the regulation of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. It sets the goals and objectives contained in our Corporate Plan.

Board members (as at end-December 2015)

- Amanda Spielman, Chair
- Dame Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator*
- Professor Julius Weinberg, Deputy Chair, Vice Chancellor, Kingston University
- Anne Heal, Chair, Thames Water, Customer Challenge Group
- Barnaby Lenon, Chairman of the Independent Schools Council
- Dana Ross-Wawrzynski, Chief Executive of the Bright Futures Education Trust
- Maggie Galliers, Chair of the National Institute of Continuing Education Board and Chair of City College Coventry Corporation
- Mike Cresswell, former Chief Executive of the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance
- Neil Watts, consultant headteacher for Suffolk County Council, member of the Architects Registration Board and member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation Complaints Committee
- Philip Fletcher, former Chairman of Ofwat (the Water Services Regulation Authority and member of the Archbishops' Council for the Church of England
- Roger Taylor, National Professional Adviser on Intelligence at the Care Quality Commission
- Tim Balcon, Chief Executive, the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment
- Tom Taylor, Commercial Director, the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and Chair, Consumer Council for Water Wales
- Professor Terri Scott, Principal and CEO of Northern Regional College

Executive (as at end-December 2015)

- Dame Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator*
- Marc Baker, Chief Operating Officer
- Jeremy Benson, Executive Director, Vocational Qualifications
- Michelle Meadows, Executive Director, Strategy, Risk and Research
- Julie Swan, Acting Executive Director, General Qualifications

Ian Stockford, former Executive Director, General Qualifications, left Ofqual on 31 December 2015.



Julius Weinberg
Deputy Chair



Anne Heal



Barnaby Lenon



Terri Scott



Dana
Ross-Wawrzynski



Maggie Galliers



Mike Cresswell



Neil Watts



Philip Fletcher



Roger Taylor



Tim Balcon



Tom Taylor



Marc Baker
Chief Operating Officer



Jeremy Benson
Executive Director for
Vocational Qualifications



Michelle Meadows
Executive Director for
Strategy, Risk and Research



Julie Swan
Acting Executive Director for
General Qualifications



Our goals

Our work in 2015 was informed by the goals and objectives set out in our [Corporate Plan 2015-18¹](#)

Goal 1: Regulating and reforming general qualifications	See page 15
Objective 1: Regulate for the validity of general qualifications throughout their lifecycle	16
Objective 2: Oversee the introduction of reformed general qualifications	24
Objective 3: Regulate for the validity of National Assessments	27
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¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-corporate-plan-for-2015-to-2018>





Review of 2015

Goal 1: General qualifications

Context

Ofqual regulates GCSEs, AS and A levels in England within the context of government policy. A programme to reform and redevelop these qualifications has been under way since 2013. Exam boards are producing new subject specifications which we are reviewing to make sure they are of the right standard. The changes being made to GCSEs will mean they are more engaging and worthwhile to teach and to study, and that they compare well with similar qualifications internationally. And the changes at A level will ensure they remain a highly respected qualification both domestically and internationally.

We are also actively engaged in providing advice to Government on policy matters related to National Assessments, where there is significant change in the arrangements for testing.

Regulatory activity

GCSE, AS and A level results

Ofqual is responsible for maintaining standards in GCSE, AS and A levels in England over time. There were relatively few changes across these qualifications in summer 2015 (see examples in box) and we adopted the same approach to awarding as in summer 2014. We wrote to schools and colleges about awarding ahead of the summer exam season.

As previously, exam boards used data from the entire cohort's performance in earlier exams or tests to predict how the group would perform in the summer series, and to check whether awards were in line with expectations. For AS and A level, exam boards used predictions based on students' prior achievement at GCSE. And for GCSEs, they used

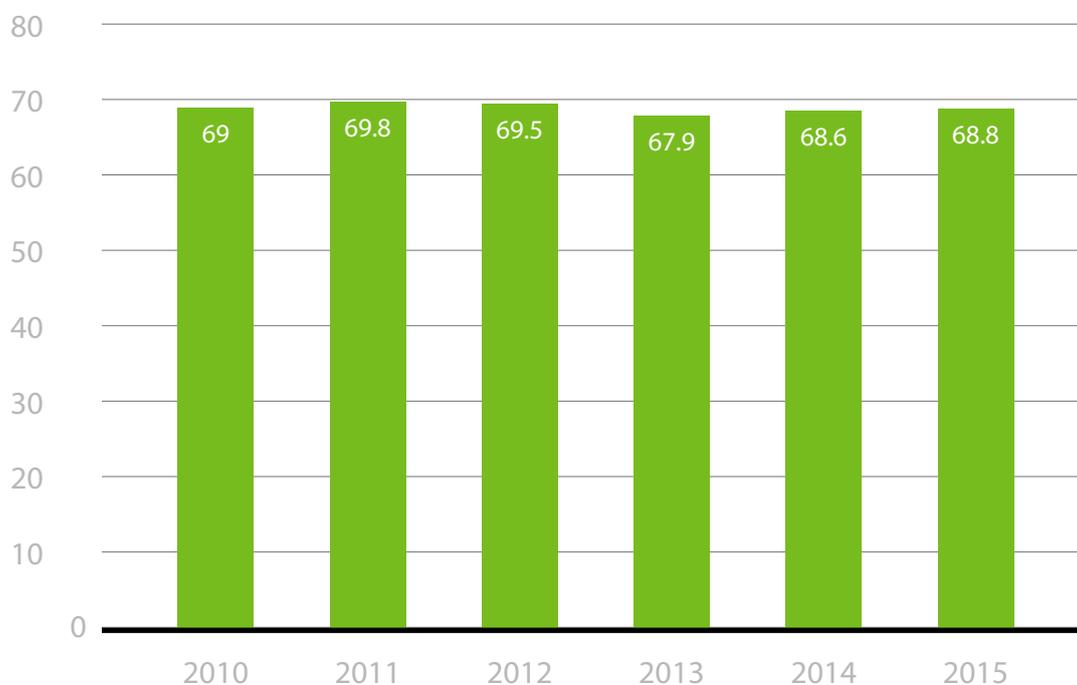
Strengthened GCSEs

We monitor the quality of GCSEs, AS and A levels over their entire lifecycle, not just when they are first introduced. In recent years we identified 'easy routes' through some GCSEs that meant some students were being taught a much narrower curriculum than intended. We asked exam boards to make changes to strengthen some of their papers and accredited new sample exam papers. We monitored the production of corresponding live papers to make sure that they matched the sample papers that had been accredited. New GCSEs in geography were awarded for the first time in summer 2014, and in English literature and history in summer 2015.

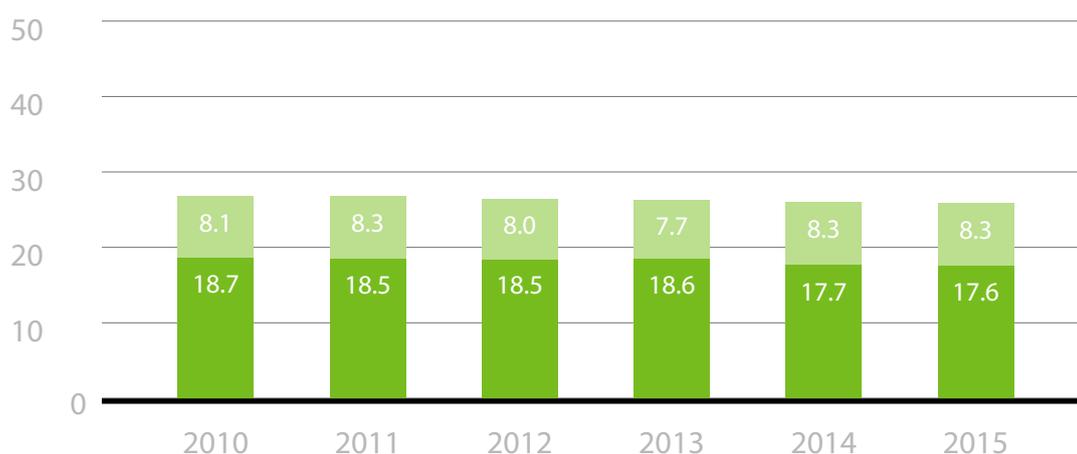
predictions based on students' achievement in Key Stage 2 tests taken in year 6. Key Stage 2 data was also used by exam boards awarding International GCSEs.

Overall entry patterns and results at GCSE, AS and A level in England were broadly stable (see charts on page 17). While the overall number of GCSE entries was also broadly stable year-on-year the number of entries from year 10 students continued to decline, falling 13% to 425,000. This suggests a continuation of the move by schools away from early entry following changes to performance tables. In contrast, entries from post-year 11 students continued to rise, up 18%, to just over 300,000. This change would appear to be driven by the Government's resit requirements relating to GCSE English and maths. Together, these changes were reflected in the overall results, which showed a small drop in the proportion of A* and A grades awarded.

Percentage of GCSE grades at A*-C by year, 2010-2015



Percentage of A level certifications at A or A* by year, 2010-15



Footnotes:

Provisional data published by the Joint Council for Qualifications.

Charts show the percentage of GCSE and A level certifications in England, by year 2010-15.

Full course, summer entry GCSEs.



There were more significant changes in the entry patterns in some GCSE subjects, and between GCSEs and other similar qualifications. In particular, the number of candidates entered for CIE's IGCSE® First Language English rose sharply. This may have reflected an expectation among some teachers that the qualification could give their students a better opportunity to achieve a particular grade. As it happened, some expectations were not met, prompting questions about CIE's marking and awarding processes.

CIE's IGCSE® First Language English specification has two syllabus codes, one approved by the Department for Education for use in maintained schools in England and the other taken mainly by students in independent schools and overseas centres. Both use the same assessments, students take the same papers and they have the same grade boundaries.

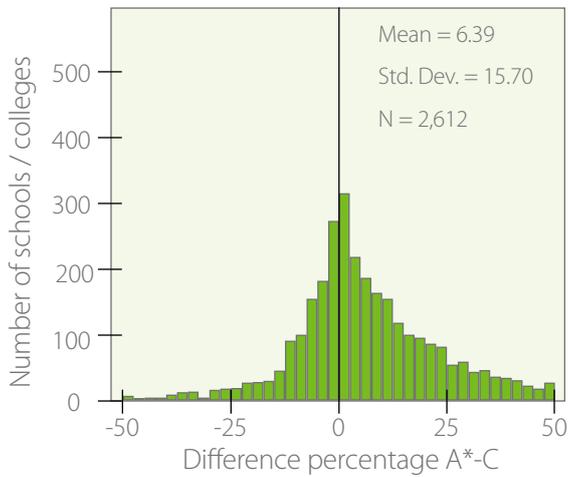
CIE sent us analysis in May 2015 that suggested that it had graded the syllabus offered to maintained schools in England slightly leniently in 2014, particularly at grade C, compared to GCSEs in English, and proposed to tighten grade standards for summer 2015. It is normal for exam boards to routinely review the outcomes of their grading processes and to make fine adjustments once they have analysed all of the data from the exam series.

For summer 2015, CIE proposed to tighten grade standards at grade C and, to a lesser extent, at grade A for the entry offered to maintained schools. During the grading period, CIE provided us with copies of the evidence it was using. We monitored its processes and concluded that CIE made appropriate grading decisions. We subsequently carried out additional analysis of the award in response to concerns expressed by some schools. We concluded that there was no case to re-open the award.

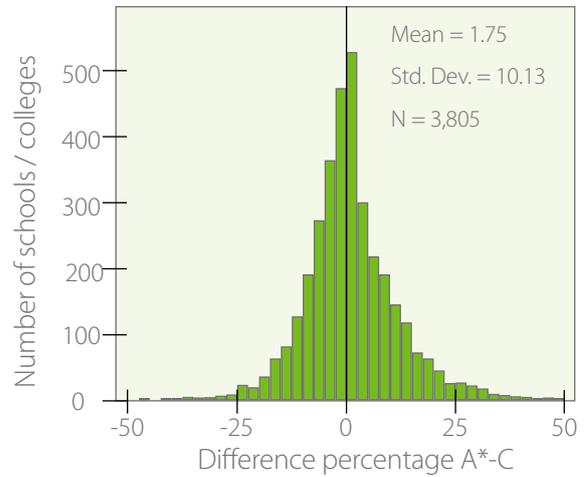
We routinely perform and publish analyses on the variation in school and college GCSE and A level outcomes. Examples for GCSE English and maths and A level English literature and maths are shown on page 19. The charts plot the variation seen in each of several hundred schools and colleges. Each bar represents the number of schools and colleges with a particular level of variation. The bars are higher in the middle of the charts, which means that

GCSE English and maths centre-level variability

English summer 2015 vs 2014 – all students

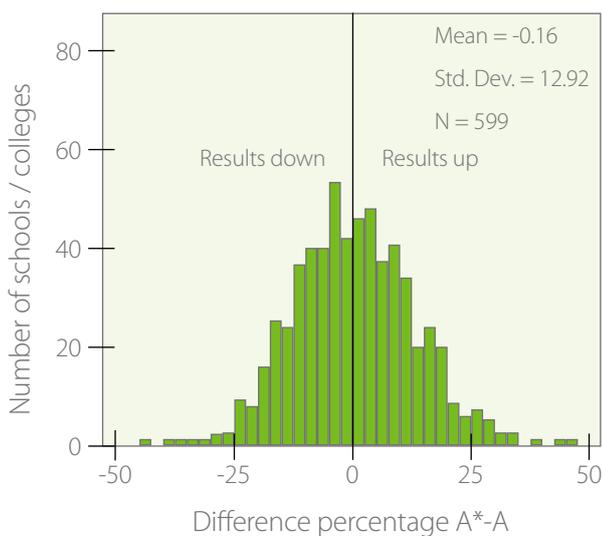


Maths summer 2015 vs 2014 – all students

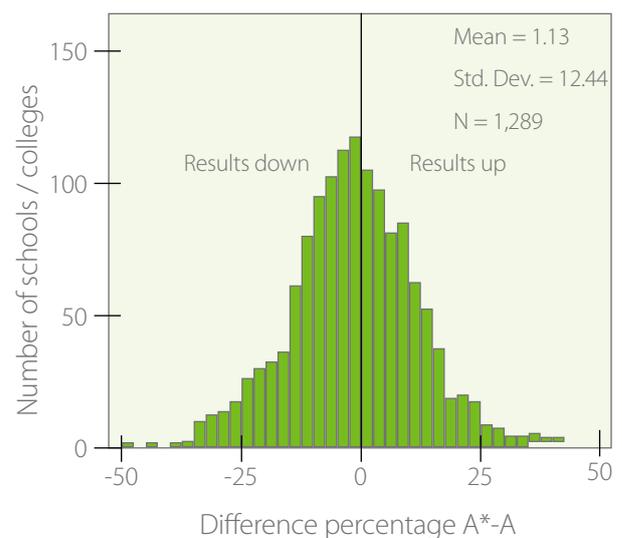


A level English literature and maths centre-level variability

English literature summer 2015 vs 2014 – all students



Maths summer 2015 vs 2014 – all students



Notes: Each bar represents the number of schools and colleges with a particular level of variation, measured in intervals of 2.5 percentage points. For example, the two bars either side of zero represent schools that had either a drop of up to 2.5 percentage points or an increase of up to 2.5 percentage points. The higher the peaks in the middle, the greater the stability from one year to the next.

“We monitor the quality of GCSEs, AS and A levels over their entire lifecycle.”

most schools see very little year-on-year variation. However, they also show that some schools encounter much greater variation (both increases and decreases in the proportion of students achieving particular grades), and 2015 was a year in which there was stability in assessment in these subjects. This variation could be because of many different factors, including differences in the mix of students entered for particular subjects, different teaching approaches, changes in staff or teaching time.

A small number of schools did express concerns to us about their students' results and we looked at these on a case-by-case basis. However, we did not see any unusual patterns in 2015; overall, the degree of centre-level variability was similar to previous years. We conducted similar analysis on CIE's IGCSE® First Language English in early 2016. The data showed slightly more year-on-year variation in the IGCSE® in 2015 than in GCSE subjects, but we concluded that it was difficult to draw meaningful conclusions given the small sample size of centres who took IGCSE® in both 2015 and 2014.

Quality of marking

The responsibility for marking GCSEs, AS and A levels lies with exam boards. Ofqual monitors their work and oversees awarding.

We subjected exam boards to additional regulatory scrutiny ahead of, and during, the summer marking season in light of issues identified at OCR in summer 2014 (see page 24). Exam boards completed their marking on time and without major incident in 2015.

In early 2014 we published the results of a year-long investigation into the quality of GCSE, AS and A level marking in England. We concluded that the exam boards' marking systems were well organised, tightly

controlled and ones in which the public should have confidence. However, we identified room for improvement in several areas. In late 2014 we asked exam boards to take a number of actions ahead of the summer 2015 series. These included developing action plans for the improvement of marking for any exam papers that typically received high numbers of significant grade changes on appeal, and to consider how live monitoring of marking quality could be improved to prevent large grade changes from occurring. In addition, we said that we would look to develop standardised quality of marking indicators for reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels from 2017, and pursue longer-term research into how the design of mark schemes could affect the quality of marking.

Marking reviews and appeals

Exam boards are responsible for administering systems that allow schools and students to ask for GCSE, AS and A level results to be reviewed and, if necessary, provide a subsequent means of appeal. Ofqual sets the broad rules and monitors exam boards' application of their systems. Schools and students can, if still unsatisfied, ultimately make a further appeal to us.

The number of enquiries made by schools and students about marks and grades has risen sharply over recent years. The number of instances where results and grades have been changed has also increased. We know that some of these are marking errors that must be corrected, but others reflect the substitution of one legitimate mark for another. This can give a misleading impression about the actual quality of marking.

During 2015 we conducted research to inform proposals to revise the arrangements exam boards operate for schools and students to appeal their GCSE, AS or A level marks such that only marking

errors are corrected (see box). At the same time, we consulted on the removal of the Code of Practice that contains the current rules for reviewing marks and appeals as it has become convoluted and outdated. In its place we proposed to introduce new rules for the procedures exam boards should follow when setting grade boundaries for these qualifications in future. We are due to report our decisions in spring 2016.

Malpractice

It is the responsibility of exam boards and other awarding organisations to investigate allegations of malpractice against assessment centres (including schools), teachers or candidates. However, Ofqual provides opportunities for individuals to report concerns to us directly and we maintain a whistle-blowing policy.

During the summer 2015 exam series (across England, Wales, Northern Ireland, other UK regions and overseas), exam boards issued 2,460 penalties for malpractice to candidates, a 4% decrease from 2014, which represented 0.011% of total entries.

The penalties for candidate malpractice vary depending on the type of conduct. They include warnings, loss of marks and disqualification from units, components or qualifications. The penalties issued to candidates in summer 2015 comprised 840 warnings (5% lower than 2014), 1,100 loss of marks (10% higher) and 520 disqualifications (16% higher). The most common type of candidate malpractice reported was the introduction of unauthorised material into the exam room. In most cases (790 penalties), this was a mobile phone or other electronic communications device. This was 7% lower than in 2014, and 35% lower than in 2011.

There has been a steady increase in the number of penalties issued to school or college staff over

The effectiveness of marking review models

During 2015 we researched how the current model exam boards use to review GCSE, AS or A level marks compared with three alternatives: single-blind remarking, double-blind remarking, and an application of marking tolerance around the original mark.

We compared the marks given on review under each model in a controlled environment, but using current examiners and papers that had been the subject of a review request in 2014. We found that single-blind remarking was most likely to lead to a mark change, followed by double-blind remarking. The application of marking tolerance around the original mark was found least likely to lead to a mark change.

Our research also made it possible to estimate a 'true score' for each paper. We found that 74% of the original marks awarded were within 2 marks of the 'true score'. All the research models improved on the accuracy of the original mark in respect of the 'true score', with double-blind remarking giving the highest rates of proximity to the 'true score'.

We considered the likely costs of introducing double-blind remarking and estimated it would add between £4.7million and £10million to the review system. These costs would probably be reflected in the fees charged to schools seeking a review, which could be unfair to some students. The logistics of a model in which two reviewing markers would independently remark papers before conferring to agree a final mark (double-blind remarking) would also add to the time it would take to complete a marking review. We concluded instead that improvements to the existing review system should be introduced and launched a consultation in December 2015.



the past five years. In 2015, exam boards issued 262 penalties, up 120% from 2014. The most common penalty issued in 2015 was suspension from involvement in exams or assessments, which more than doubled from 2014 (91 cases compared to 41 cases). Twice as many penalties were also issued as a result of school or college staff giving inappropriate assistance to candidates in 2015 compared with 2014 (164 cases compared to 82 cases).

There are more than 6,000 schools, colleges and other centres in the UK delivering GCSEs and/or A levels. Where there is evidence that malpractice is the result of a serious management failure, an exam board may apply sanctions against the whole department or the school or college (rather than specific staff). Exam boards issued 288 penalties to schools or colleges in 2015, a 33% increase from 2014. There has been a steady increase in these sanctions since 2011, when 55 penalties were issued.

Exam boards may issue penalties to schools and colleges as a result of a breach of security, giving assistance to candidates, or 'other reasons'. Most penalties issued in 2015 were for 'other reasons', which include schools and colleges not adhering to the requirements of an exam, such as opening question papers early without authorisation,

allowing candidates to sit an exam at the wrong time, or a lack of appropriate invigilation during an exam.

It is impossible to know whether the recent increases relating to schools and staff reflect either an under-reporting of malpractice in the past that is now being addressed through greater awareness and publicity, or a recent change. In either case, the data are concerning and indicate that there are pressure points in the exam system that have the potential to influence behaviours. While our direct powers in this area are limited, we have sought to raise awareness and deter such instances. For example, in 2015 we reviewed how easy it was for the public to report allegations of malpractice to exam boards. We asked the boards to consider our findings and identify any improvements. We reviewed what progress had been made later in the year and tested their processes for investigating malpractice. We will report our findings later in 2016.

We have also sought to influence instances of malpractice through other stakeholders. For example, in March 2015 we brought teachers, academics and exam boards together for a joint symposium with Oxford University to discuss the pressures and ethical dilemmas facing teachers and schools. There was general agreement that the

teaching profession would benefit from a codified ethical framework. We believe any code should be developed and owned by the profession itself, and we stand ready to provide any assistance we can in this area.

Working with other regulators

A natural consequence of the devolution of education policy is that qualifications and regulation have developed and diverged between jurisdictions. The GCSE, AS and A level titles are used across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Some of the reforms that are being made to these qualifications in England are not being adopted by other countries.

There are no formal arrangements to monitor or require alignment of grade standards between countries, and this will be more challenging in future since the qualifications will not necessarily be alike. We recognise the difficulties this divergence presents to students and qualification users, such as employers and universities. We are working with other regulators to make sure that all students have access to a good range of qualifications even if they are not offered by a provider in their home country, and that there is information available to explain the different approaches. Ofqual signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Qualifications Wales in March 2016 as part of this work.

We continue to maintain a joint contingency plan with other regulators and stakeholders in the event of widespread disruption to the examination system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Inter-subject comparability

Ofqual makes sure that the level of expected difficulty of assessments in the same subject offered by different exam boards is very similar each year and over time. However, neither we, nor any of

our predecessors, have taken a policy position on whether the difficulty of different GCSE or A level subjects is, or should be, comparable. We asked stakeholders for their views in late December 2015, and expect to publish a policy position in autumn 2016.

Regulatory action

Ofqual conducts audits and other work to help achieve its statutory objectives. In early 2015 we conducted a 'mystery shopping' exercise to assess the appropriateness of information being provided by exam boards to attendees of their training events. We separately looked at the arrangements exam boards have with publishers. We will publish our findings in both cases in late spring 2016. We also reviewed exam boards' contract arrangements with third-party suppliers in 2015 and looked at their online training provision for markers. We intend to publish reports on these audits later in 2016.

In summer 2015 we published our final investigation report and associated decisions regarding concerns with OCR's marker capacity and ability to deliver timely GCSE and A level results in summer 2014. As it transpired, all results were delivered on time and we decided to take no further regulatory action.

We also imposed Special Conditions (see page 32 for more detail) on all four exam boards in respect of our ongoing research into GCSE maths (see page 25), which required them to delay publication of revised sample exam papers.

Qualification reform

A programme to reform and redevelop GCSEs, AS and A levels in England has been under way since 2013. The new qualifications are being phased

in over a number of years. The first new subjects began to be taught in September 2015 (see box on page 25). Ofqual's work is focused on ensuring assessment standards and validity of the new qualifications; the Department for Education is responsible for determining new subject content.

Some of the changes we are introducing are common to all new qualifications, such as the move to linear assessment (exams taken at the end of the course of study). In other cases we have adopted a default position, such as removing tiering in GCSEs, but allowed exceptions where it would otherwise not be possible to provide valid assessment and reliable results for candidates of all abilities; for example, in GCSE maths. Beyond these, the assessment objectives have been determined on a subject-by-subject basis. In forming our proposals we are considering carefully the assessment and awarding arrangements most likely to support the best educational experience and outcomes for students. This includes considering how assessment options might make a qualification more or less accessible for students who share particular protected characteristics. Our proposals are then subject to public consultation. A list of consultations undertaken during 2015 can be found later in this report. The key features of reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels are summarised in the box.

Some of our decisions have drawn public comment, such as the new assessment arrangements for practical skills in GCSE science. While many in the school system strongly supported the removal of controlled assessment, others in the science community perceived it to be about the removal of practical science from the classroom, which was not the case. We learned a great deal from this experience. In particular, we recognised the need to ensure that subject expert, teacher and assessment expertise are brought together early in any discussions as they are essential in forming

Key features of reformed GCSEs

- More demanding
- Designed for a two-year period of study
- Linear, so students will take all of their exams at the end of the course
- Non-exam assessment removed or reduced in the majority of GCSEs
- New grading scale from 1-9

Key features of reformed AS and A levels

- Greater input from universities
- Linear, with AS assessments typically taking place after one year of study and A levels after two years of study
- Keep the A*-E grading scale (A-E for AS level)
- AS results will no longer count towards an A level
- Degree of non-exam assessment will reflect balance and nature of new subject content
- Performance standards stay the same

qualifications that make good education possible. It is also important to broaden our stakeholder engagement. In the case of GCSE science, we sought to develop understanding by holding a number of events with the Royal Society and sending information directly to schools and colleges.

More generally, Ofqual representatives, including the Chief Regulator, Chair and executive directors, spoke at more than 40 public events and met with dozens of representatives from schools and colleges in England and other stakeholders during 2015. We also developed a range of innovative communication outputs, including a pack of 'postcards' that succinctly described aspects of the reforms, along with infographics, videos and blogs.

The accreditation process

We use a formal process to ensure reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels fully reflect new subject content and can provide reliable assessment and certification for students. Each exam board proposal includes a specification, assessment strategy and sample exam papers. These are independently reviewed by subject experts and their findings considered at panels chaired and supported by Ofqual staff. This process is focused on our published accreditation criteria and on making sure exam boards can deliver qualifications of the highest quality. Where accreditation is not successful, feedback is provided to the exam board.

Subjects accredited for first teaching from September 2015

GCSEs	Number of specifications
English language	4
English literature	4
Maths	4

Total 12

AS and A levels

Art & design	4 AS, 4 A
Biology	6 AS, 6 A
Business	4 AS, 4 A
Chemistry	5 AS, 5 A
Computer science	3 AS, 3 A
Economics	5 AS, 5 A
English language	4 AS, 4 A
English language and literature	4 AS, 4 A
English literature	5 AS, 5 A
History	3 AS, 3 A
Psychology	4 AS, 4 A
Physics	5 AS, 5 A
Sociology	3 AS, 3 A

Total 110

Accreditation

Four exam boards currently offer GCSEs, AS and A levels in England. Ofqual is responsible for ensuring that their qualifications meet the required standard, and continue to do so over time.

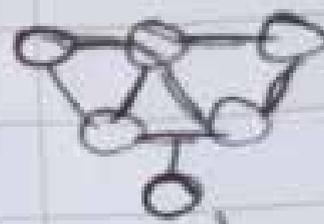
We accredited 122 reformed qualifications across 3 GCSE and 13 AS and A level subjects in 2014/15 (see box). In April 2015 we began the process to accredit specifications for first teaching in September 2016. In total 156 specifications were submitted for accreditation across 20 GCSE and 11 AS and A level subjects (see box on page 26). None of the specifications were accredited on first submission. In all, 34 specifications had been accredited by end-December 2015. That figure had risen to 113 by 19 April 2016.

Progress during 2015 was certainly not at the pace we had hoped, and as a result schools have had much less time to choose their preferred exam board and associated resource materials, and prepare for the new school year. There have been particular challenges with religious studies specifications, for which the content has changed substantially. It is also a subject where agreement amongst stakeholders has historically proved more challenging. More generally, we must ensure that all GCSEs see an uplift in the level of demand. A levels languages and geography must also reflect the advice of the A-level Content Advisory Board. We are reviewing the general themes for rejection that might inform the accreditation process for subjects to be taught from 2017.

Perceived differences in the expected difficulty of reformed GCSE maths qualifications were a key focus for commentators in early 2015. We accredited qualifications developed by three exam boards in late 2014, and the last specification in early 2015. A significant amount of pre-accreditation work was undertaken to help reduce the potential variability

Accreditation progress for first teaching in September 2016

GCSEs	31 Dec 2015	19 April 2016	A levels	31 Dec 2015	19 April 2016
Art and design	4 of 4	4 of 4	Classical Greek	0 of 1 AS 1 of 1 A	1 of 1 AS 1 of 1 A
Biology	0 of 5	4 of 5	Dance	0 of 1 AS	1 of 1 AS
Chemistry	0 of 5	4 of 5	Drama and theatre	0 of 4 AS 0 of 4 A	4 of 4 AS 4 of 4 A
Citizenship	1 of 3	3 of 3	French	0 of 4 AS 0 of 4 A	2 of 4 AS 2 of 4 A
Classical Greek	1 of 1	1 of 1	Geography	0 of 4 AS 0 of 4 A	2 of 4 AS 2 of 4 A
Combined science	0 of 6	3 of 6	German	0 of 4 AS 0 of 4 A	2 of 4 AS 2 of 4 A
Computer science	1 of 4	4 of 4	Latin	0 of 1 AS 1 of 1 A	1 of 1 AS 1 of 1 A
Dance	0 of 1	1 of 1	Music	3 of 4 AS 3 of 4 A	4 of 4 AS 4 of 4 A
Drama	0 of 4	3 of 4	Physical education	0 of 4 AS 0 of 4 A	3 of 4 AS 3 of 4 A
Food preparation & nutrition	1 of 3	3 of 3	Religious studies	0 of 4 AS 0 of 4 A	1 of 4 AS 1 of 4 A
French	1 of 4	2 of 4	Spanish	0 of 4 AS 0 of 4 A	2 of 4 AS 2 of 4 A
Geography	5 of 7	7 of 7			
German	1 of 4	2 of 4			
History	4 of 5	5 of 5			
Latin	2 of 2	2 of 2			
Music	3 of 4	4 of 4			
Physical education	1 of 4	4 of 4			
Physics	0 of 5	4 of 5			
Religious studies	0 of 11	5 of 11			
Spanish	1 of 4	2 of 4			
Total	26 of 86	67 of 86	Total	3 of 35 AS 5 of 35 A	23 of 35 AS 23 of 35 A



in the assessment standard between the respective boards' specifications. However, we decided that further research was warranted to assure us that they were each of the highest quality and would deliver a level playing field for all students. We initiated an innovative approach to testing the comparability of the different boards' sample exam papers, based around comparative judgement. Our work involved dozens of maths experts and mathematicians as well as trialling questions on nearly 4,000 students. In light of the substantial body of evidence produced, we asked each exam board to take specific actions with respect to some of their sample exam papers; they completed this by end-June 2015. The benefit of conducting additional research informed subsequent work that supplemented the accreditation of GCSE science specifications.

Most remaining subjects identified for reform will be introduced in 2017; the Government announced in June 2015 that a number of other languages would additionally require reform and we committed to review these for potential first teaching in 2018.

GCSE and A level awarding in future

New GCSEs are intended to be more demanding than those currently taken. In 2014 Ofqual announced that a new, numerical grading scale would be introduced to allow greater discrimination between the very best students.

We recognise that it will take time for teachers to adapt their teaching to new GCSEs, AS and A levels and this could impact student performance in the years immediately after their introduction. During 2015 we confirmed our intention to accommodate this potential through statistically-driven awarding and in spring 2016 we published detailed proposals for how awarding of new GCSEs will be undertaken. In summary, in the first year after the introduction of reformed subjects, students will be awarded the

grades they would have been expected to receive had they taken the current syllabuses. In other words, roughly the same proportion of students will receive a grade 7 in the new qualification as received a grade A on the old syllabus. And we will do the same at the equivalent of the current grades C and G. We intend to revert to the pre-reform approach to awarding in subsequent years, which is based on a mixture of statistics and examiner judgement.

It is anticipated that GCSE awarding will in future also be supplemented with the results of a new National Reference Test. It is planned that tests in English and maths will be taken by a sample of year 11 students from 2017. Each year, around 300 schools will take part in the tests. As the test questions will remain largely the same over time, the overall performance of each school-year cohort can be compared to others that have sat the tests previously. The results will be available to exam boards to inform their awarding decisions, and subsequently published towards the end of August each year. During 2015 we completed initial field trials of the test, and a full-cohort trial was conducted in March 2016.

Unlike GCSEs, performance standards for new AS and A levels are to remain the same and the current grading systems are being retained. However, the removal of the link between AS and A2 will change the way that some grade boundaries will be calculated.

Existing A level grade boundaries are set in different ways. Grades E and A are key grade boundaries. They are set by exam boards based on senior examiner judgement of student work, statistical predictions and other evidence. Grades B, C and D are arithmetic grade boundaries. They are set by dividing the difference in marks between grades A and E equally. Students who achieve an A grade overall and 90% of the UMS marks on their A2 units receive an A*.

In the first year of new A level awards in any subject, awarding will be based primarily on statistical predictions from the cohort's prior attainment at GCSE. Grades E and A will continue to be key grade boundaries and set in a way similar to existing key grade boundaries, but awarders will be asked to review scripts around the grade A and E boundaries to make sure they consider them acceptable. The grade A* will be set using statistical predictions only, while other grade boundaries will be set arithmetically, as now, but reviewed against statistical predictions.

Market impact

Many of the changes being introduced as part of GCSE, AS and A level reform, such as greater emphasis on assessment by written examination, will impact the size and distribution of the marker workforce. Other pressures on delivery come from the inclusion of a wider variety of script items, new content, and potential shifts in market share between exam boards. We have encouraged exam boards to consider marker capacity such that they can assure us that appropriate numbers of examiners are identified, recruited and retained. In particular, we have asked that they consider afresh their employment arrangements and how they can contribute to achieving positive outcomes.

National Assessments

Ofqual has an objective to promote reliable and consistent National Assessments, and we reconsidered our approach to regulating them during 2015. We previously concentrated on delivery, but concluded that this adds little value, risks blurring accountability and diverts resources from our main focus.

In future we will concentrate on meeting our standards and public confidence objectives by

keeping a system-wide view and reviewing the validity and reliability of National Assessment outcomes. We discussed the implications of this change in approach with the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) and we will make amendments to our regulatory framework during 2016.

2015 test series

Ofqual monitored STA's delivery of the 2015 test series, which was the first in which all test papers were marked on screen. We had no concerns about the delivery of the test, marking or standard setting and results were reported to schools on time in July.



Goal 2: Vocational and other qualifications

Context

Ofqual regulated around 160 awarding organisations providing about 13,000 live qualifications at end-December 2015. Most of these were vocational qualifications or qualifications other than GCSEs, AS and A levels. We will cease regulating most vocational qualifications offered in Northern Ireland in spring 2016, reflecting a decision of the Department for Employment and Learning; the responsibility will pass to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

The market for qualifications is changing as Government policy develops and as skills funding decisions are increasingly devolved to regions and employer-led bodies. Ofqual is providing advice on the role and effective use of assessment and qualifications to support good education and training outcomes as the Government reforms apprenticeships and develops its approach to technical and professional education, particularly for 16-19 year-olds.

We continue to take a flexible risk-based approach, targeting the issues of greatest concern to the sustained provision of high-quality qualifications as the operational and financial risks faced by firms alter.

Regulatory activity

Withdrawal of QCF and introduction of RQF

Many of the awarding organisations Ofqual regulates offer qualifications developed under the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) rules. In December 2014 we announced that we intended to remove the QCF rules because they did not allow enough flexibility for awarding organisations to innovate in their design of qualifications to meet users' needs. The rules were removed on 30 September 2015.

As we removed the QCF rules we revised our General Conditions of Recognition and introduced a new descriptive framework for regulated qualifications (RQF). Under the new approach, which came into effect on 1 October 2015, all qualifications regulated by us sit within a single framework with their level and size determined by the awarding organisation. We retained levels commonly understood within the education sector and, following consultation, adopted Total Qualification Time as the measure of size.



Functional skills

Over a million functional skills qualifications are taken annually by adults, apprentices and by young people who have not secured a grade C or above at GCSE.

During 2015 we worked with Government and the Education and Training Foundation on plans to reform functional skills qualifications to improve their content, relevance and recognition by employers. The intention is for new qualifications to be available from 2018.

We reported on our own review of level 2 functional skills qualifications in English and maths in January 2015. As a result, awarding organisations offering these qualifications committed to improve the quality of their assessment materials, reduce the risk of malpractice and maladministration, strengthen their standard setting procedures and evaluate better how far the qualifications are meeting user needs. These improvements are designed to make the qualifications more reliable, and allow students to demonstrate better their breadth and depth of skills. We expected the majority of the improvements to be in place by summer 2015. We initiated an audit in autumn 2015, finishing in spring 2016, and will report our findings later in 2016.

Apprenticeships

The Government has committed to increase both the quantity and quality of apprenticeships over the current Parliament, with a target for three million starts by 2020. It has also encouraged greater private-sector involvement and investment by establishing so-called 'trailblazer' groups, consisting mainly of employers. Their responsibility is to develop new apprenticeship standards, including proposals on how they should be assessed. Ofqual has not been given a specific role in these developments, but we have advised the Government on the need for appropriate quality assurance mechanisms for such assessments, alongside good governance and regulation.

Employers are not obliged to include qualifications in their apprenticeships and their chosen assessment organisation does not need to be an awarding organisation regulated by us. However, some trailblazers have included regulated qualifications as part of their proposed standards and they can choose Ofqual regulation as the mechanism for providing 'external quality assurance' of their end-point assessments. We are considering our regulatory approach to such assessments.



“Over a million functional skills entries annually.”



Regulatory strategy

Ofqual's regulatory strategy is focused on identifying risks to the provision of valid qualifications and targeting effectively our regulatory compliance activity. Typically, awarding organisations with higher risk profiles are subject to greater scrutiny. We also base our decisions on the number of qualifications certified and the potential impact of any issues on the wider education and training sector.

All awarding organisations must meet certain rules regardless of the qualifications they offer. Most of these are set out in our General Conditions of Recognition. We require awarding organisations to provide an annual statement describing their levels of compliance with these Conditions.

We took the opportunity presented by our removal of the QCF rules (see page 30) to encourage awarding organisations to review and clarify the extent of our recognition of their activities. A

majority (95 of 163 overseen at the time) responded, of which 59 asked us to reduce the extent of our recognition, two requested to increase the extent of our recognition, and the rest confirmed their existing position.

Regulatory action

Ofqual has a range of regulatory powers available should an awarding organisation fail to comply, or notify us that it may fail to comply, with our Conditions. These powers include issuing directions, undertakings of corrective action, subjecting qualifications to an accreditation requirement, applying a Special Condition of Recognition, withdrawing recognition or imposing a fine.

During 2015 we accepted one undertaking, from City & Guilds, which recognised that it had failed to comply with our Conditions in respect of its arrangements for the endorsement of course materials. We imposed Special Conditions on eight occasions. Four of these were in respect of our ongoing research into GCSE maths (see page 25), and two were issued to awarding organisations to ensure they retained documents in advance of a potential investigation. The other two were issued to awarding organisations to provide quarterly statements of compliance, following their annual statement of compliance returns. While we did issue a number of Special Conditions in 2015, we took the view that their publication would be neither necessary nor proportionate. We did not issue any fines during 2015.

The delivery of qualifications in the security industry during 2015 was an area of particular focus for us, journalists and other stakeholders. Through audits and other supervisory actions we identified concerns about the quality of some assessments, and in particular a lack of control over their delivery by some centres. Where we looked into these issues we, in many cases, found other problems,

such as poor management of incidents and weak procedures for handling malpractice. We have already directed one organisation to take particular actions, and received undertakings from another. Other organisations have been required to carry out checks on their processes, and provide assurance about controls. We will report more fully in summer 2016.

We continued to look closely at qualifications offered to non-EU citizens seeking to obtain a Tier 4 visa to study in England. We published a report in early 2014 setting out serious concerns relating to the subject content being taught and assessment standards in some cases. Where issues were identified we either supported remedial actions by awarding organisations or prevented certificates being issued. We continued to monitor the market during 2015 and we will publish a follow-up report



later in 2016.

We conducted a range of other audit work during 2015, including looking into external quality assurance processes for the delivery of vocational qualifications in schools and colleges in England. We intend to publish a report on our findings in this area in autumn 2016.

Qualifications market

Qualifications register

Ofqual has a responsibility to maintain a register of all regulated qualifications. We launched a new prototype register in June 2015 that provides more information about the data we hold and reflects the introduction of our new descriptive framework for qualifications (see page 30). The new register will go live in spring 2016, and awarding organisations will have until December 2017 to provide the additional information on the size of each qualification they offer.

Informing our regulatory approach

Ofqual seeks feedback from stakeholders on an ongoing basis to inform and develop our regulatory approach. During 2015 we worked with the RNIB and National Autistic Society to assess how exam papers could be made more accessible to blind, partially sighted or autistic students. We also continued to chair the Access Consultation Forum, which brings stakeholders together to support our understanding of matters that affect the assessment of disabled students. In particular, the Forum discussed proposals from the UK Association of Accessible Formats to develop and introduce new minimum standards for the accessibility of electronic exam papers.





Goal 3: Organisational development

Context

The 2016–21 Comprehensive Spending Review will see Ofqual's core administration and programme funding reduce over the remainder of this Parliament. We recognise the importance of improving our efficiency and maintaining management controls to reduce our expenditure.

Capability and capacity

Organisational structure

Ofqual employed 181 staff at end-December 2015, following a significant organisational restructure. The new model better supports our regulatory strategy (see page 32) and provides clear accountability for decision-making and regulatory focus in every area of the business. The new structure has four directorates:

1. Strategy, Risk and Research: responsible for our strategic planning, research and analysis that underpins our regulatory approach, decision-making and overall strategy;
2. General Qualifications: responsible for regulating GCSEs, AS and A levels and other similar qualifications;
3. Vocational Qualifications: responsible for regulating vocational and other qualifications, and also houses a number of cross-cutting regulatory functions;
4. Regulatory and Corporate Services: responsible for auditing awarding organisations' compliance with our regulatory requirements, managing regulatory processes - such as recognition and accreditation - and also contains HR, IT, Finance, Communication and Customer Service teams.





Alongside our restructure we have brought additional skills into the business as well as making a significant investment in existing staff. We made 30 external appointments during 2015, recruited two apprentices and brought in a teacher on secondment to provide challenge to our thinking. A number of our recruits have been research professionals of standing from awarding organisations and universities.

Information management

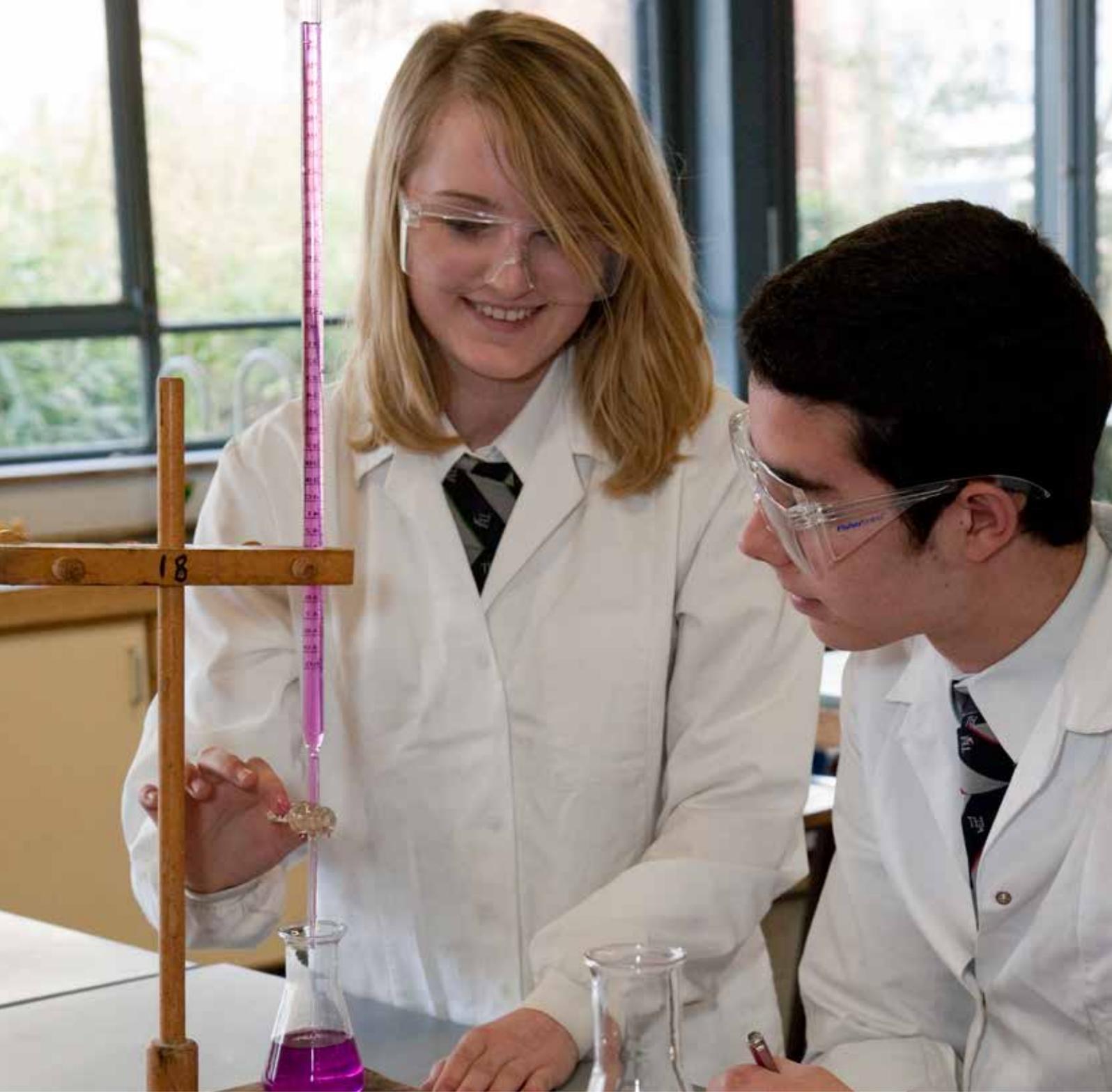
Regulatory IT system

We initiated a project to replace our regulatory IT system during 2015. The new platform will reduce our annual service costs from around £650,000 to about £18,000. It will also make the submission of information by awarding organisations easier, reduce regulatory burden and improve our subsequent management and use of content.

Use of resources

The resource budget for Ofqual for the financial year 2014/15 was £21.0million. The 2016-21 Comprehensive Spending Review set our core administration and programme funding at £19.5million in 2016/17, reducing to £17.2million by 2019/20. We instigated a range of cost-saving measures during 2015, including reducing our dependency on short-term and interim contractors. We continue to review how we can deliver our work most efficiently.





Consultations conducted during 2015

Consultations conducted during 2015

A level reform: regulations for biology, chemistry and physics

After the QCF: a new qualifications framework

AS and A level reform: regulations for ancient languages

AS and A level reform: regulations for geography

AS and A level reform: regulations for maths and further maths

AS and A level reform: regulations for modern foreign languages

AS and A level reform: regulations for music technology

AS and A level reform: regulations for philosophy

Assessing practical work in GCSE science

Completing GCSE, AS and A level reform

Consultation on new statutory guidance

Developing GCSEs in design and technology for first teaching in 2017

GCSE English language: assessment of spoken language skills

GCSE reform: regulations for ancient languages

GCSE reform: regulations for art and design

GCSE reform: regulations for astronomy

GCSE reform: regulations for business and economics

GCSE reform: regulations for citizenship studies

GCSE reform: regulations for computer science

GCSE reform: regulations for English language

GCSE reform: regulations for food preparation and nutrition

GCSE reform: regulations for geography

GCSE reform: regulations for history

GCSE reform: regulations for mathematics

GCSE reform: regulations for modern foreign languages

GCSE reform: regulations for science

GCSE, AS and A level reform: regulations for dance

GCSE, AS and A level reform: regulations for drama/drama and theatre

GCSE, AS and A level reform: regulations for music

GCSE, AS and A level reform: regulations for physical education

GCSE, AS and A level reform: regulations for religious studies

GCSEs, AS and A levels: new subjects to be taught in 2016

GCSEs, AS and A levels: reform of subjects for September 2016

Guided learning hours

Marking reviews, appeals, grade boundaries and Code of Practice

National reference test: implementation arrangements

Regulating use of calculators in new GCSEs, AS and A levels

Religious studies GCSEs, AS and A levels: new qualifications for 2016

Resits for legacy GCSE, AS and A levels

Corporate Plan 2016-19

We published an updated Corporate Plan on 1 April 2016.² Our new goals and objectives are:

Goal 1: Regulating and reforming general qualifications

Objective 1: Regulate for the validity of general qualifications throughout their lifecycle

Objective 2: Oversee the introduction of reformed general qualifications

Objective 3: Evaluate the validity of National Assessments

Goal 2: Regulating vocational and other qualifications

Objective 4: Regulate for the validity of vocational and other qualifications throughout their lifecycle

Objective 5: Promote public confidence in regulated qualifications

Goal 3: Develop our people, resources and systems

Objective 6: Build our capability and develop our people

Objective 7: Use our resources efficiently and effectively

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-corporate-plan-for-2016-to-2019>





Appendix

Subjects being reformed for first teaching in 2017

GCSE

Ancient history
Astronomy
Business
Classical civilisation
Design and technology
Economics
Electronics
Engineering
Film studies
Geology
Media studies
Psychology
Sociology
Statistics

AS and A level

Accounting
Ancient history
Archaeology
Classical civilisation
Design and technology
Electronics
Environmental studies
Film studies
Further mathematics
Geology
Government and politics
History of art
Law
Mathematics
Media studies
Music technology
Philosophy
Statistics



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