2002

QCA audit of AQA's general qualifications operation

February 2002

QCA
Guarding standards

Contents   Page

Executive summary

QCA has in place a programme of work focusing on the general qualifications operations of the unitary awarding bodies in England. This report describes the outcomes of an audit, carried out between February and November 2001 by QCA staff with expertise in awarding body auditing, on the general qualifications operation of the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA). Monitoring activities in February and March 2001 resulted in an interim report to the awarding body in May 2001.

The audit focused on three main areas:
1. the management and divisional structure;
2. information and communication systems;
3. quality assurance and quality control arrangements.

Monitoring activities carried out by QCA staff from early summer to November 2001 concentrated on following up the recommendations in the interim report and also focused on examination procedures and the experiences and outcomes of the summer 2001 examinations series.

During the audit period AQA was in the process of introducing a new management structure. Roles and responsibilities were changing within the organisation and the procedures established by AEB and NEAB, AQA's former constituent boards, were being reviewed and updated.

The QCA audit team identified several areas where strategic developments are necessary. These are:
1. the refinement of the business process model;
2. the evaluation of the organisation's restructuring;
3. the work of the Quality Audit Unit throughout AQA;
4. the evaluation of examination procedures;
5. the recruitment of examiners.

There were several areas of good practice for which AQA is commended:
1. the establishment of its committee structure which includes:
    - a high level of independence in its quality assurance committee
    - an education and training committee whose membership is largely drawn from serving teachers;
2. the establishment of the Quality Audit Unit;
3. the phased implementation of modifications to the ICT systems and recognition of the risks involved;
4. the commitment to risk management and self-assessment;
5. the active involvement and leadership from senior management especially in relation to awarding.

The QCA audit team found a committed senior management team supported by equally committed staff in all sections across the organisation. There was evidence of substantial good practice across the awarding body's provision although this was not always supported by a strategic approach to the issues listed above.

QCA has made a series of recommendations as a result of the audit (see pages 10, 12 and 16). AQA is required to respond to these recommendations with an action plan, including timescales, within six weeks of the publication of this report. QCA will agree the action plan with AQA and monitor closely the awarding body's performance in meeting it.

Introduction

QCA's remit and monitoring programme

England, Wales and Northern Ireland share a common system of external qualifications[1]. Statutory regulation of these qualifications is used to safeguard the public interest, ensure fairness for candidates and maintain public confidence.

Under the Education Act 1997 QCA is responsible for regulating external qualifications in England.

Further details about QCA's regulatory responsibilities are set out in *A guide to the arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland,* which is available on request. It also sets out the regulatory requirements in the form of accreditation criteria, including a common code of practice.

One key responsibility is 'to keep under review all aspects of such qualifications'. QCA, in conjunction with the regulatory authorities for Wales and Northern Ireland, has agreed a set of principles and procedures in order to fulfil this responsibility set out in *Arrangements for monitoring and reporting publicly on external qualifications,* which is also available on request.

QCA, along with the regulatory authorities for Wales and Northern Ireland, undertakes a range of awarding body monitoring activities.

The purposes of the regulatory authorities' monitoring activities are to:

a) ensure that the standards of achievement required for an award meet the regulatory requirements for quality, rigour, fairness and consistency within and across qualifications, across awarding bodies and over time;
b) ensure that individual awarding bodies are delivering particular qualifications according to the accreditation criteria, including the common and qualification-specific codes of practice;
c) promote continuing improvement and public confidence in the quality of external qualifications;
d) keep under review the effectiveness of the accreditation criteria, in particular the codes of practice;
e) provide relevant information on the national qualifications system to a wide audience.

QCA's monitoring of the unitary awarding bodies in England

Following on from the publication in December 2000 of a report on the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations Board (OCR), QCA has in place a programme of work focusing on the general qualifications operations of the other two unitary awarding bodies in England, AQA and Edexcel. The prime aim of this work was to assure that AQA's summer 2001 awards met the requirements for quality, rigour, fairness and consistency.

This report describes the outcomes of QCA monitoring activities, carried out from February to November 2001 by QCA staff with expertise in awarding body auditing, on the general qualifications operation of AQA.

QCA is grateful to AQA for the spirit of openness and cooperation shown in assisting in the production of this report.

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[1] For the purposes of statutory regulation, an external qualification is a qualification:
- that is academic or vocational in nature (including a National Vocational Qualification), but not an academic qualification at first degree level or any comparable or higher level; and
- that is authenticated or awarded by an outside body (that is, a body or person other than the institution or employer that provides the course of education or training leading to the qualification).

1. Management and Divisional Structure

1.1 The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) was launched as a joint venture company in November 1997 and registered as a charity on 30 September 1998. It brought together the Associated Examining Board (AEB), the Northern Examinations and Assessment Board (NEAB) and the City and Guilds' GNVQ qualification, which AQA acquired in autumn 1998.

AQA announced in October 1999 that AEB and NEAB had agreed to merge. The merger took place on 1 April 2000. AEB and NEAB brought into AQA their established GCSE and GCE syllabuses, Entry level qualifications and other assessment schemes.

AQA provides for examinations in the three main general qualifications of GCSE, GCE, and GNVQ/VCE. Additional provision (not covered by the current audit) is made for Key Skills, Entry level, the Unit Award Scheme, basic tests, higher education access courses, overseas qualifications and National Curriculum key stage tests. All new GCSE, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and other qualifications are being developed by AQA as a whole and not by its constituent boards as was previously the case. Over three-quarters of a million students in a wide range of centres prepare for AQA specifications and syllabuses.

1.2 AQA is an independent company, limited by guarantee (registration number 3644723) and a charity (registration number 1073334). As members of the company, AEB and NEAB each nominated 12 individuals to serve as trustees on the governing council of AQA.

Initially trustees were drawn from City and Guilds, which, although not a member of AQA, played a role in its governance during the transitional period. All trustees were appointed for one, two or three years. From 1 April 2001, nominations were being drawn from the following categories of membership:
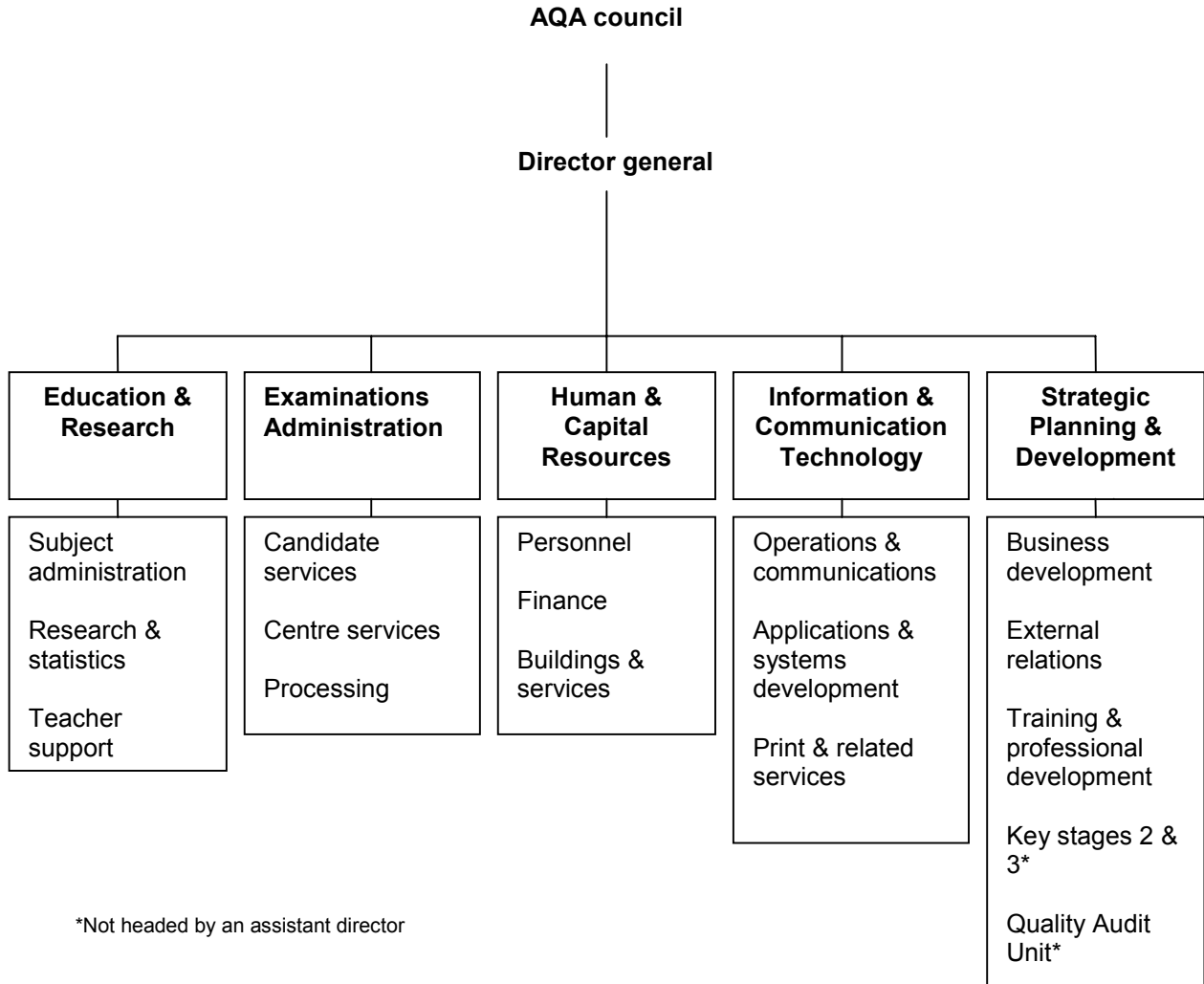- schools/colleges;
- higher education;
- Local Education Authorities;
- workplace/others.

The term of office for all trustees is three years and a second term may be served.

1.3 AQA's purpose, as set out in the strategic plan, is 'to provide users of its qualifications with high quality specifications, rigorous assessment regimes, excellent support systems and a responsive and efficient service to promote lifelong learning, set and maintain standards and provide opportunities for students following its specifications to qualify for success'.

1.4 In addition to the council AQA has a number of committees responsible for overseeing particular areas of operation:
- the Education and Training committee (most of the members are serving teachers);
- the Finance committee;
- the Quality Assurance Committee, five of whose seven members (including the chair) are independent of AQA;
- the research committee;
- twenty two subject advisory committees;
- six regional committees.

1.5 On 1 April 2000 the director-general, five directors and 16 assistant directors were in post. All further appointments date from 1 April 2001, with the new organisational structure being operational from October 2001. (Figure 1) details that structure.

Figure 1: The structure of AQA

AQA council

Director general

Education & Research	Examinations Administration	Human & Capital Resources	Information & Communication Technology	Strategic Planning & Development
Subject administration

Research & statistics

Teacher support | Candidate services

Centre services

Processing | Personnel

Finance

Buildings & services | Operations & communications

Applications & systems development

Print & related services | Business development

External relations

Training & professional development

Key stages 2 & 3*

Quality Audit Unit* |

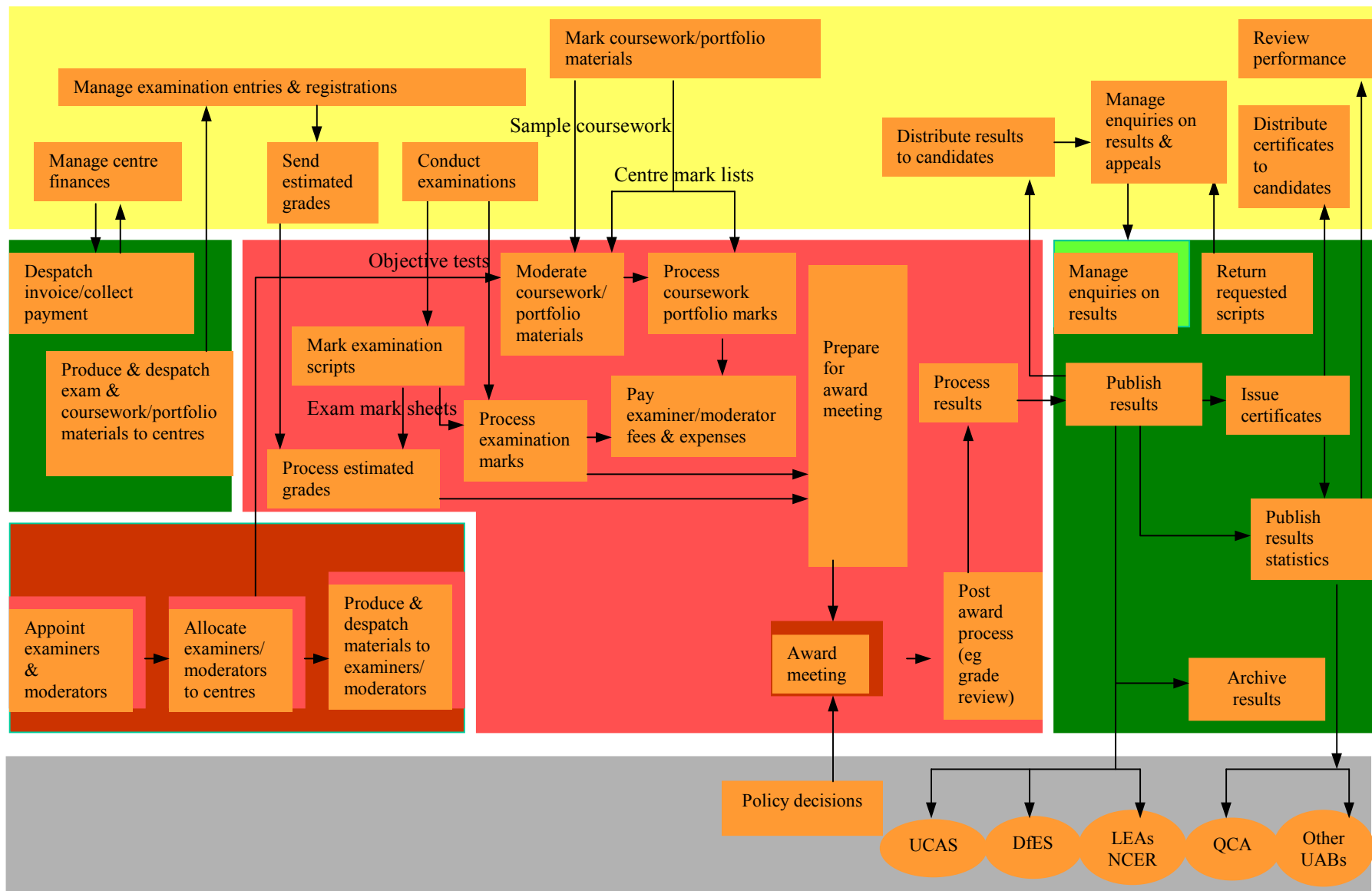*Not headed by an assistant director

- The Education & Research division is responsible for subject administration, research and statistics and teacher support. These three functions are the responsibility of four discrete sub-divisions (two of which are within the subject administration area); each headed by an assistant director.

- The Examinations Administration division is responsible for candidate services, centre services and examinations processing. These three functions are the responsibility of three discrete sub-divisions; each headed by an assistant director.

- The Human and Capital Resources division manages the personnel, finance and building services functions of the awarding body. These three functions are the responsibility of three discrete sub-divisions; each headed by an assistant director.

- The Information and Communications Technology division is responsible for AQA's operations and communications, applications and systems development and print and related services. These three functions are the responsibility of three discrete sub-divisions; each headed by an assistant director, working under the auspices of the Division.

- The Strategic Planning and Development division is organised into three sub-divisions, each headed by an assistant director and also has managerial responsibility for the Quality Audit Unit and Key Stages 2 and 3. The three sub-divisions are business development, external relations and training and professional development.

1.6 Staff interviewed by QCA were generally supportive of the restructuring process and felt that they had been consulted at appropriate key stages. The restructuring has seen many staff undertaking new roles within a different cultural environment. Not all staff interviewed were aware of AQA's intention to review the effectiveness of the new structure in 2003.

1.7 AQA has offices in Manchester, Guildford, Harrogate, Newcastle and Bristol. To support communication between the offices, AQA makes good use of video conferencing technology. This facility is used in addition to face to face meetings to facilitate regular and frequent meetings of the Management Executive team, divisional teams and as appropriate, joint divisional teams. Directors and assistant directors make regular working visits between the offices to ensure regular contact with staff. All staff need to be made aware of the rationale and schedule for these visits to fulfil AQA's corporate objectives.

AQA's examination process

1.8 The management and divisional structure supports the examination process as detailed in the flow chart given as Figure 2. This indicates the information flow from the initial setting of examination papers to the process of appeals.

Figure 2

Key:

AQA Council		Centre Services		Centres		Education & Research		Candidate Services	

Diagram contents:

Centre
- Identify examination requirements
- Issue timetable to candidates
- Request approval for entering examinations
- Manage examination entries & registration
- Notify estimate/intention to enter details
- Review entries/registrations

- Issue centre publications
- Produce despatch entry instructions
- Queries
- Amendments
- Send centre reports
- Approve AQA centres
- Maintain centres
- NCN registration
- Schedule product availability
- Coordinate teacher support
- Collect estimate/intention to enter details
- Follow up non-receipt of entry
- Administer request for special arrangements
- Despatch invoice & exam entries
- Produce/distribute basedata
- Receive/process entries
- Validate entries & generate centre reports

- Define AQA policy
- Define service and charging structure
- Define syllabus specifications, exemplars & coursework/portfolio materials
- Appoint senior examiners/moderators
- Produce question papers, objective tests & coursework/portfolio materials
- Allocate examiners/moderators to centres

External
- Government legislation
- Inter-board agreements
- Policy decisions
- JCGQ
- QCA
- Specification approval

8

Mark coursework/portfolio materials

Manage examination entries & registrations

Review performance

Sample coursework

Distribute results to candidates

Manage enquiries on results & appeals

Distribute certificates to candidates

Manage centre finances

Send estimated grades

Conduct examinations

Centre mark lists

Despatch invoice/collect payment

Objective tests

Moderate coursework/ portfolio materials

Process coursework portfolio marks

Manage enquiries on results

Return requested scripts

Produce & despatch exam & coursework/portfolio materials to centres

Mark examination scripts

Prepare for award meeting

Process results

Publish results

Issue certificates

Exam mark sheets

Process examination marks

Pay examiner/moderator fees & expenses

Process estimated grades

Publish results statistics

Appoint examiners & moderators

Allocate examiners/ moderators to centres

Produce & despatch materials to examiners/ moderators

Award meeting

Post award process (eg grade review)

Archive results

Policy decisions

UCAS

DfES

LEAs NCER

QCA

Other UABs

Key:

Education & Research		External sources		Centres		Centre Services		Processing		Joint responsibility	

1.8   AQA has developed a business process model comprising key procedures that underpin the examination process. AQA should develop a strategy for reviewing and amending the key procedures following each examination series. This strategy should make clear both where responsibility for the update lies and the timetable for this work. AQA should consider whether the title *'Business Process Model'* accurately reflects the nature of the documents.

1.9   AQA carried out a pilot study in risk management and self-assessment that led to a Quality Audit Unit being established. This unit was established to implement the risk assessment strategy and evaluate systems for countering the risks of process failure regarding the examinations process in and across all five AQA divisions. The remit also includes implementing an organisational framework for self-assessment and risk analysis and responsibility for liaising with the regulatory authority about its monitoring reports. QCA welcomes this significant development. However, given its position in the organisational structure, AQA should monitor and evaluate the unit's performance to ensure that it fulfils its remit and has sufficient status to be rigorous and independent in its activities.

Recommendations

1. AQA should provide a clear plan for reviewing the effectiveness of its organisational structure and communicate this to all staff (1.6).

2. All staff should be made aware of the rationale and schedule of senior management team visits between offices (1.7).

3. AQA should develop a strategy for reviewing and amending the business process model after each examination series, which includes a timeline and clear lines of responsibility (1.9).

4. AQA should monitor and evaluate the performance of the Quality Audit Unit to ensure that it fulfils its remit and has sufficient status to be rigorous and independent in its activities (1.10).

2. Information and communication systems

2.1 AQA inherited information and communications technology (ICT) systems and procedures from both AEB and NEAB. Decisions regarding which system to adopt across AQA were based on an analysis of the potential of each of the legacy systems to adapt and enhance delivery of the specifications first examined in 2001.

2.2 In 2002 AQA is building upon and modifying the current AEB and NEAB systems and where necessary developing new systems to cater for the new qualifications. Systems are being tested as they are developed and there is a full working plan in place to cover the transition period. Implementation is taking place in stages the aim being to avoid major shifts in working practice.

AQA was careful not to use untried systems during the key time of summer 2001 and is following a similar strategy for 2002. The fact that there are currently two ICT systems within the awarding body is viewed by AQA as a strength should there be a hardware failure.

2.3 AQA acknowledges that optimum testing of new or modified software is not always possible within the allowable timeline for development. In addition, it is not always possible to test systems using the same quantities of data that the live systems will be required to process. To compensate for this, development is broken down into a series of steps. At the end of each step, testing takes place at component or partial system level. AQA used a large database to test key processes, for example, aggregation of marks.

2.4 The January 2001 series of advanced qualifications was used as a test to evaluate modifications to the ICT system. However, AQA accepts that the number of transactions for the January series did not accurately reflect the volume to be experienced in summer 2001. Nevertheless, AQA was confident that the system, when operating at its peak, would have spare operating capacity. The system worked well over the peak summer examination series though the need to improve the audit trail was recognised.

2.5 Investment in hardware has been made to enhance volume capacity. There are also several layers of defence built into the system to cope with failures. These include:
- an automatic disaster recovery programme;
- back-up across AQA sites on a nightly basis;
- an automatic battery back-up system to cater for mains power failure.

2.6 The ICT division has an annual processing plan that notes the timing of examinations in all subjects and alerts staff to large entry subjects which impact on system processing facilities. The Applications and Systems sub-division employs standard project management techniques including analysing risk for each project. The risk management and self-assessment study noted in paragraph 1.10 proved useful and was welcomed by AQA staff dealing with ICT systems. To avoid unnecessary risks to the examination process, it is standard practice to avoid making any major changes to systems or applications during key points in the examination cycle.

2.7 All ICT operations are carried out within a 12-hour daily cycle. The remaining 12 hours are considered to be a 'contingency' resource that can be employed in critical situations.

2.8 Formal ICT senior management meetings are scheduled every three months. However, prior to major changes to the structure and organisation of AQA and when the new qualifications were being introduced, senior managers met more frequently. The Assistant Director, Applications and Systems are based in Guildford but visits

AQA's Manchester site approximately twice a month and also meets regularly with counterparts in other awarding bodies. These meetings were described as 'open and productive', providing opportunities to discuss common issues.

2.9   AQA has used a 'validation group' to ensure that, for specific projects in development, the process is monitored so that outcomes meet the needs of users. In the new structure, responsibility for 'validation' has transferred to the assistant director, processing, in the Examinations Administration division, where safeguards for data validation have been built into systems (on-line validation). The examination process also routinely uses manual checks on data (off-line validation). However, for some aspects it relies on the experience of staff to identify anomalies in the 'look' of data.

2.10   A major asset of, but also risk to, the applications and systems department is the experience, knowledge and skills of staff. AQA is aware of the importance of passing on this expertise to new staff, and methodologies to achieve this include:
- staff induction;
- on–the-job training (new and experienced staff are paired);
- maintaining a comprehensive library of historical information on system and programme specifications/listings;
- developing comprehensive training packages.

2.11   AQA recognises that the new structure and relationship between the AS and full GCE requires increased points of data retrieval. An important issue is tracking of candidate entries and unit achievement across awarding bodies (candidates taking/re-sitting units with more than one awarding body). There is agreement between the unitary awarding bodies on how a unique candidate identifier is to be generated and this appears in all of AQA's documentation for centres on entering candidates.

2.12   The majority of examinations entry data is now collected electronically and AQA has clear documented processes for handling the data. However, many of the received data contain errors. Most errors are identified electronically and are minor and can be quickly rectified by AQA staff; others arise from the complexity of the entry requirements and changes to entries by centres. Further errors seemed to be caused by the various carriers used by centres. Staff reported gradual improvements in this area.

2.13   Up to and including summer 2000 examination results were issued separately by AQA offices. From 2001 new software was used to produce integrated reports on results and certification.

2.14   AQA is developing an IT system, AQA 14, to handle the new GCSEs in summer 2003.

2.15   Preliminary work is under way on developing a new single coherent IT system, AQA 15.

Recommendations

5. AQA should take steps to improve the audit trail of its examination processing procedures (2.4).

6. AQA should take steps to detect more speedily errors in the data sent from centres (2.12).

3.   Quality assurance and quality control arrangements

Responsibility and accountability

3.1   AQA's council is responsible for maintaining parity of standards in each subject and qualification from year to year, across different specifications and with other awarding bodies. This duty is actively discharged by the director general who carries out the role of accountable officer for AQA and whose responsibilities include ensuring compliance with the codes of practice.

3.2   In the January and summer 2001 examination series, chairs of examiners and the AQA senior officers servicing the awarding meetings reported the AS level grading recommendations to an 'on duty' director. The directors were charged with considering awarding committee recommendations before giving provisional approval. The results then went to the director general. The director general signed off results after considering written reports and, wherever necessary, having discussion with the appropriate director and chair of examiners. The director general approved the results in most cases but on occasions, in consultation with the chair of examiners, took action to amend the standards set in the light of all the available evidence.

Structure of the organisation

3.3   As part of AQA's restructuring programme, subjects were allocated to one of four of AQA's offices. The timing of the reallocation was designed so as not to affect adversely the summer 2001 examination series. For three subjects, teams are divided between two of the awarding body's offices:

• English GCSE in Manchester; English A/AS in Guildford;

• mathematics GCSE in Manchester; mathematics A/AS in Guildford;

• sciences GCSE in Guildford; sciences A/AS in Manchester.

AQA should monitor and evaluate the implications of these arrangements for the development of subject-specific materials across qualification levels.

Management of externally assessed components

3.4   Subject teams maintain and monitor tight schedules for question paper development, Question Paper Evaluation Committee review, question paper revision, checking and final authorisation for printing. If there is slippage in the timeline, then the development process can be curtailed by undertaking two parts of the process at the same time. Appropriate measures exist to ensure that the possibility of error is minimised.

3.5   The administration for appointments and the allocation of examiners to centres is handled by the Processing sub-division, advised and supported by subject teams. The Processing sub-division also provides guidance material for AQA staff and examiners and one-day training sessions for new staff (half-day for more experienced staff) on examination procedures and using the administration forms. Both the Processing sub-division and subject teams scrutinise recommended adjustments to examiners' marking, with the assistant director; processing having the final say when there is disagreement.

Management of internally assessed components

3.6   QCA external assessor and scrutiny reports in 1999 and 2000 highlighted shortcomings in the provision of guidance and training for centres regarding setting and assessing coursework. AQA has now appointed coursework subject advisers, each of them responsible for a group of centres. In the case of new specifications, AQA expects centres to attend regional standardisation meetings.

Special arrangements and enquiries about results

3.7   Centres are increasingly making late applications for special arrangements or modified papers. This has been recognised by AQA and to some extent addressed through increased staffing of candidate services. The AQA document 'Administrative Procedures – New Qualifications' (published September 2000) provides guidance to centres on making requests for special examination arrangements. However, the document is vague about the timeline for such requests. AQA should monitor the impact of such flexibility on the delivery of its qualifications.

3.8   Several systems have been implemented that aim to minimise risk in the processes for special arrangements and enquiries about results and appeals, for example:

- integrating a number of monitoring and checking points into processing systems;
- maintaining an audit trail for each results enquiry and appeal;
- bringing forward future papers in any case of gross malpractice that has implications for examination paper security.

3.9   AQA's performance in meeting targets for enquiries on results and appeals in 2000 was satisfactory:

- for priority service 2, which covers a majority of the enquiries received, AQA completed 97% of cases within target for GCE A level, and 98% for GCSE. 3,680 candidates (0.99% of the total A level candidature) were involved in an A level priority service 2 enquiry. For GCSE the equivalent figure was 982 candidates (0.03% of the candidature);
- for non-priority services, AQA met the target for GCE A level service 1 (214 candidates), was within 5% for services 2 (6,687 candidates) and 3 (39 candidates) and within 20% for service 5 (98 candidates);
- 11,168 candidates were involved in GCSE non-priority service 2 enquiries. 98% of these requests were completed within the specified target. A total of 1,953 candidates were involved in GCSE services 1, 3, 4 and 5. Success rates varied from 82% to 95%.

3.10   AQA's performance for summer 2001 is currently being evaluated by QCA. AQA should seek to improve its performance in all services, especially where it falls more than 5% below the targets.

Distribution arrangements

3.11   When examination materials such as answer booklets or pre-release materials arrive at AQA's offices, there is a random check of the contents of 20% of the boxes. If discrepancies are found, all boxes are checked and the assistant director of Centre Services informed.

3.12   Lists of required materials are sent through from the processing department, items are checked again by two people and are then packaged in the main area of the warehouse for despatch. Most packers/dispatchers are experienced temporary staff and agencies are used only as a last resort. Despatches to centres are carefully targeted and labelled and, wherever possible, they are staggered to avoid overload. Paper-based records of checks are kept.

Secure storage

3.13 The storage facility is divided into a secure store and a non-confidential store. Certificates are kept in the secure store. A booking-out system and signing-for system is in place. The secure store is normally either staffed or locked with entry controlled by issuing passes. During a QCA monitoring visit to the secure store, a member of AQA staff without authorisation gained entry. Although the person was challenged, this unauthorised entry is a matter of concern. AQA must ensure that full security procedures for the secure store are in place at all times.

Managing the 2001 examination series

3.14 AQA staff identified the scale of the summer 2001 examination series as a significant risk factor. The risks included:

- introducing new examinations alongside the continuation of legacy syllabuses;
- using multiple ICT systems (new and legacy);
- the complexity of the procedures required.

3.15 Twice as many grade boundary decisions were made in summer 2001, there were many more awarding meetings, and more examiners were involved. To control the increased risk, the management of the process relied largely upon applying tried and tested procedures. Despite these arrangements to reduce the risk errors occurred in the merger of files carrying GCE grades. As a result special arrangements had to be put in place to deliver approximately 13,000 results to about 870 A level centres. AQA contacted all affected centres in advance of their results being issued and alerted them to these special arrangements.

3.16 The revised specifications for advanced qualifications also meant that there was an overall increase in the number of meetings to be scheduled and serviced. To support the 2001 examination series, 100 extra staff were taken on across AQA. This was partly achieved by retiring staff continuing to work into early autumn and also by appointing staff on temporary contracts. The longer-term implications of the increased workload for the peak examination period must be subject to careful monitoring and evaluation.

3.17 In summer 2001, the recruitment of a sufficient number of examiners for some subjects was problematic. AQA addressed this problem by targeting its recruitment advertising to specific institutions or groups of potential examiners and by encouraging examiners to accept larger than usual allocations. Contingency plans were in place to invite the most reliable markers to AQA's offices to undertake additional marking after they had completed their own allocation. Such heavy reliance on the goodwill of experienced examining staff helped to control the risk for summer 2001. However this approach is not sustainable and a long-term strategy in line with national policy is needed to deal with the issue.

Review and evaluation

3.18 At the end of each examination cycle, process reviews are undertaken, with separate meetings taking place at Guildford, Manchester, Harrogate and Newcastle. In 2001, the review meetings were held in the autumn. From interviews with staff it appeared that there were differences in the way in which these review meetings were structured and approached in Guildford and Manchester. For example, one meeting appeared to have a structure and agenda whilst the other was more informal, with no apparent agenda. These process reviews should be formalised and the structure of the meetings made clear to all staff.

3.19 One of the subject managers interviewed reported holding a review with senior examiners. This is good practice and should be considered for adoption across AQA.

3.20   The need for amendments to specifications is often identified through the examination process. Comments on specifications and how they perform are passed to AQA's subject advisory committee for consideration. The assistant directors for subject Administration have responsibility for negotiating minor changes to specifications with QCA.

3.21   There are general procedural documents for internal staff and examiners for GCE, VCE, GCSE GNVQ and Certificate of Achievement examinations. In addition the awarding body has produced a guidance document on the use of statistical data for awarding GCE AS and VCE units taken for the first time in 2001. These documents have been constructed by adapting existing AEB and NEAB models to meet AQA's needs and comply with the relevant Joint Council for General Qualifications agreements and the GCSE, GCE, VCE and GNVQ Code of Practice.

3.22   The documentation is being redrafted into the new AQA house-style. Responsibility for developing different sections of the documentation is given to a number of staff groups; staff are expected to raise issues or suggest improvements on the operation of the examination process. Documentation is supported by staff briefings and an annual training programme supervised by assistant directors. In addition, principal subject managers mentor new subject officers.

3.23   The Education and Research division jointly with the Examinations Administration division has responsibility for developing and evaluating the methodology and processes used for examiner and moderator standardisation. The business process model also identifies points within specific elements of the examination process when quality control checks take place and/or where there are opportunities to collect evidence for evaluation purposes, for example, the production of reports by chief examiners and subject officers and office reviews of marking. The Research department is responsible for checking all awarding calculations and identifying possible errors before results are issued.

3.24   However, there is no clear methodology within the business process model for reviewing and modifying the process. In particular, there is no strategic approach to monitoring procedures and no clear evidence on:

- how methodologies and the examination process as a whole are formally monitored;

- how or what evidence is collected and how it is used to evaluate process;
- how the outcome of evaluation is fed back into the system to strengthen the examination process.

3.25   The Quality Audit Unit should oversee the evaluation of the entire examinations process. The unit should also ensure that an on-going programme of internal audit is undertaken on a systematic basis and with clear lines of communication and responsibilities between itself and the divisions. QCA needs to be assured that adequate resources are available to enable the Quality Audit Unit to operate effectively.

Recommendations

7. AQA should develop a methodology to monitor and evaluate the implications of splitting subject teams in three subjects between two sites for developing subject-specific materials across qualification levels (3.3).

8. AQA should monitor the impact that lack of a clear timetable for requests for special arrangements has on the delivery of its qualifications (3.7).

9. AQA should seek to improve its performance for enquiries about results, especially where it falls more than 5% below agreed targets (3.10).

10. AQA should ensure that full security procedures for secure storage are in place at all times (3.13).

11. AQA should carefully monitor and evaluate the longer term implications of the increased workload for the peak examination period (3.16).

12. AQA should establish as a priority a long-term strategy for examiner recruitment (3.17).

13. AQA should formalise its examinations process reviews and communicate the structure to all staff (3.18).

14. AQA should consider the practice of including examiners in the review process across the whole organisation (3.19).

15. AQA should ensure that the Quality Audit Unit:
    (a) oversees the evaluation of the entire examinations process;
    (b) ensures that an on-going programme of internal audit is undertaken on a systematic basis and with clear lines of communication and responsibilities between itself and the divisions (3.25).