QCA audit of The Edexcel Foundation's general qualifications operation

Final report February 2002

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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 outcome of an audit of Edexcel's general qualifications operations carried out between March and November 2001 by QCA staff with expertise in awarding body auditing. Visits in February and March resulted in an interim report to the awarding body.

The audit focused on three main areas within Edexcel:

1. The management and divisional structure.
2. Information and communication systems.
3. Quality assurance and quality control.

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

The QCA audit team found the majority of Edexcel staff to be hard working, open and conscientious. Large numbers of staff worked long hours in their efforts to deliver results on time. There were many examples of good working practices across the organisation. Despite this, too many of Edexcel's centres have received poor service in 2001. Most of this has been the major result of shortcomings in processing examination results and Edexcel's poor handling of the post-results services. QCA has high expectations of the unitary awarding bodies and Edexcel is at present failing to meet its responsibilities to centres.

Edexcel is clearly aware of the challenges presented by Curriculum 2000 and is taking steps to develop an organisation capable of meeting the tasks ahead. However, QCA has serious concerns that the organisation functions on the basis of the experience and knowledge held by individual members of staff rather than fluent working practices that are supported by an appropriate management structure, comprehensive documented procedures and regular internal monitoring to ensure that these are implemented.

To ensure the effective delivery of the examination in summer 2002 and beyond, QCA requires Edexcel to take immediately the following actions:

1. **Coordinate the many reviews of the summer 2001 examinations series and produce a register of the lessons learned by 28 February 2002.**

2. **Provide QCA with assurance that management structures, competence and procedures are appropriate to the delivery of results in summer 2002 and beyond by 28 February 2002.**

3. **Present to QCA a fully documented plan for the summer 2002 examination series, identifying key tasks, milestone dates and responsibilities as well as a risk analysis and contingency plans by the end of February 2002.**

4. **Update and amend the examinations programme folder in the light of the review of the 2001 examinations series, and publish to all staff by 27 March 2002.**

5. **Develop a procedure for the way in which pre-award intelligence and statistical information will be used at all awarding meetings by the end of April 2002.**

6. **Amend customer service practices and procedures to improve significantly its services to customers by the end of May 2002.**

7. **Improve the Enquires about Results service to provide a better service to customers and meet targets for response by the end of June 2002.**

8. **Review these key action points regularly and agree with QCA further points as necessary to ensure the effective delivery of the summer 2002 examinations series.**

QCA will continuously review Edexcel's performance against the above actions and report on its findings in the autumn.

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 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:

1. 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.

2. Ensure that individual awarding bodies are delivering particular qualifications according to the accreditation criteria, including the common and qualification-specific codes of practice.

3. Promote continuing improvement and public confidence in the quality of external qualifications.

4. Keep under review the effectiveness of the accreditation criteria, in particular the codes of practice.

5. 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 its summer 2001 awards met the requirements for quality, rigour, fairness and consistency.

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

QCA is grateful to Edexcel for the spirit of openness and co-operation shown in assisting 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 Edexcel was formed in 1996 by the merger of the Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC), a leading provider of vocational qualifications, and the University of London Examinations and Assessment Council (ULEAC), one of the major GCSE and GCE examining bodies.

1.2 The stated aim of the formation of BTEC and ULEAC was to anticipate the growing desire for mixing academic and vocational study, and the need for a more flexible system catering for a range of learners. Edexcel is a registered charity and is committed to providing qualifications and support across the national framework, to meet the needs of diverse learners. Edexcel's stated mission is to stimulate and recognise individual achievement throughout life, giving equal standing to academic and vocational success, and promoting employability and personal development.

1.3 Edexcel provides a wide range of qualifications including GCSEs, GCE AS and A levels, VCEs, GNVQs, BTEC First, National and Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, NVQs, Key Skills and Entry level qualifications, and specific programmes for employers. Edexcel qualifications can be taken in schools, colleges and universities or in the workplace. A network of UK and overseas offices supports the Edexcel qualifications portfolio. The QCA audit team interviewed staff based at the Edexcel headquarters' Stewart House in London and did not interview staff in the outreach offices.

1.4 In March 2001 Edexcel finalised a new management structure following an audit and report by Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdler (KPMG) on the examinations processing system. This had been initiated as a result of an appreciation of the Scottish Qualifications Authority auditors' report on the 2000 examination series and what had been described by Edexcel's then chief executive as 'a need for greater clarity and responsibility within the organisation'. It was clear to QCA that Edexcel had reflected on its structure with a particular focus on meeting the demands of Curriculum 2000. The use of an independent auditor to assist in this process is commended. Based on the interviews conducted by QCA, it was clear that members of staff were acutely aware of the challenges presented by the 2001 exam series and were working hard to meet them. Edexcel, however, still found it necessary to redistribute some significant management responsibilities very close to the summer 2001 examination series.

1.5 Further refinements were made to the organisational structure in late September. This was in the light of experiences from the summer examination series and the appointment of an acting chief executive following the resignation of the chief executive.

1.6 Given the number of changes to the organisational structure over the past year, Edexcel would benefit from reviewing and analysing the current structure to ensure that it reflects the organisation's core business purpose, and then ensuring a period of stability and consolidation.

1.7   The chart (Figure 1) details the structure of Edexcel as at October 2001.
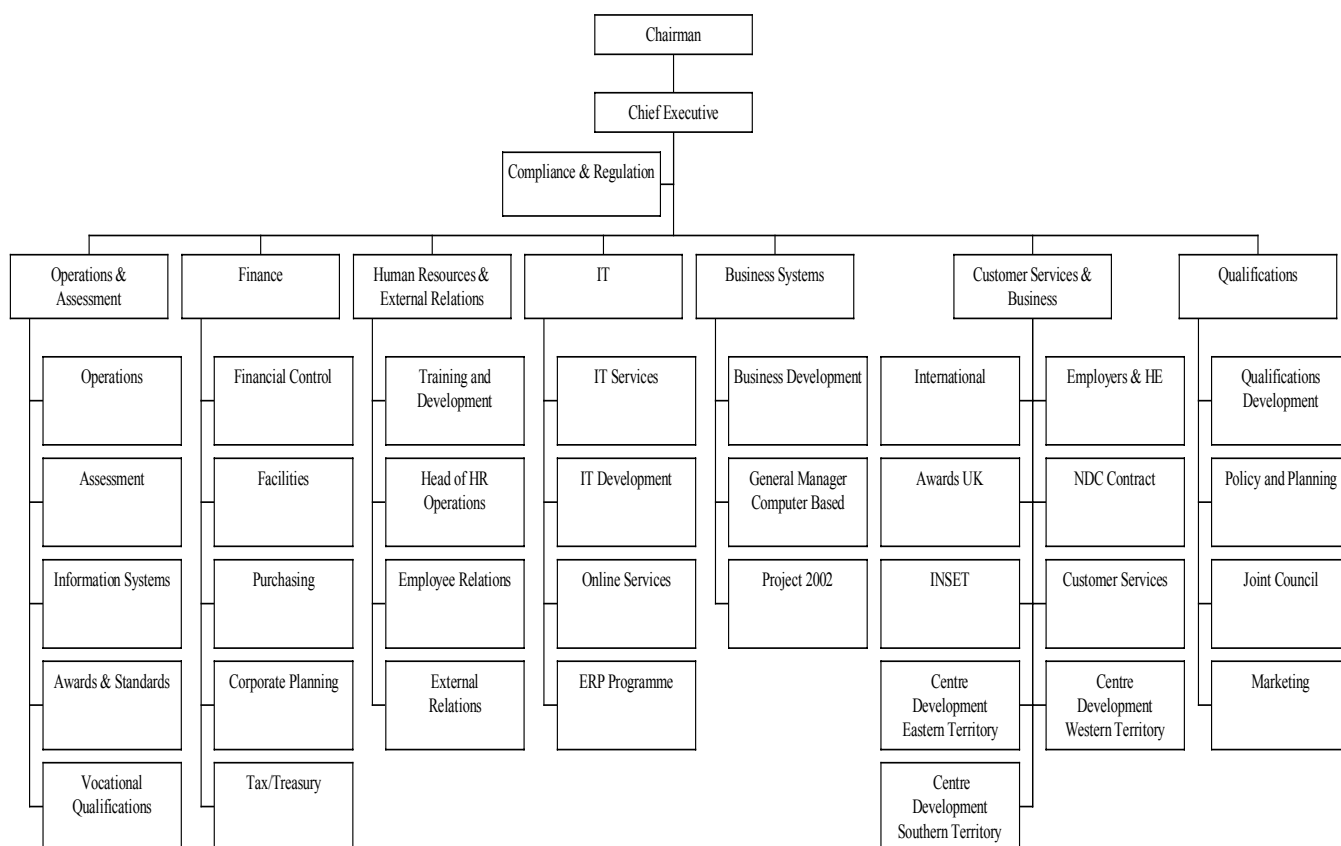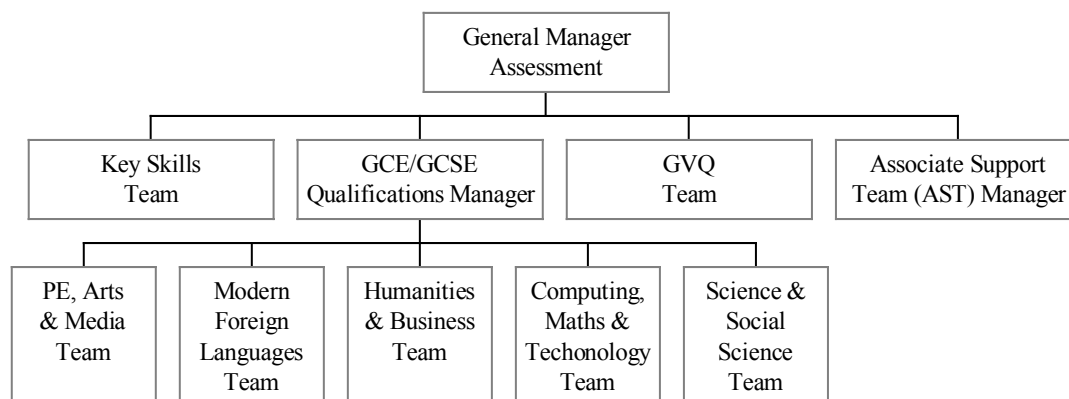

There are six directorates:

1.   The Operations and Assessment directorate is responsible for the management and delivery of the assessment instruments of Edexcel's qualification provision and the post-awarding processes. The director of Operations and Assessment is charged with responsibility for maintaining examination standards.

2.   The Finance Directorate is responsible for managing Edexcel's finance and accounting functions including purchasing, corporate planning and general facilities. Each of these functions, is the responsibility of a designated manager responsible to the section director.

3.   The Human Resources and External Relations directorate manages Edexcel's training and development function, human resources, employee relations and external relations.

4.   The Information Technology directorate is responsible for the formulation and delivery of Edexcel's information and communication strategy. Its key function is to integrate what is currently differing provision across Edexcel into one integrated environment.

5.   The Customer Services and Business Development directorate is responsible for Edexcel's marketing strategy across all qualifications offered by the awarding body. It also holds responsibility for developing a customer-focus ethos across Edexcel.

6.   The Qualifications Directorate is responsible for developing qualifications that are fit for purpose and for developing and disseminating Edexcel's education and training policy. During the period of the QCA audit, the Qualifications directorate serviced the office of the convenor to the Joint Council for General Qualifications.
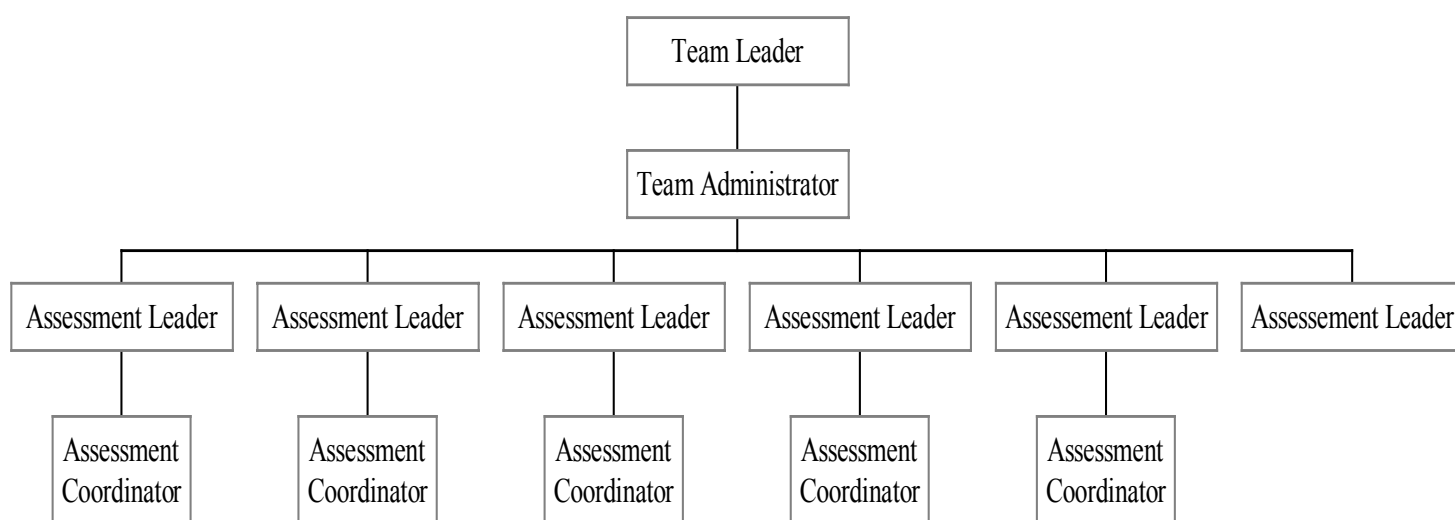
In addition, there is a Compliance and Regulation Unit which reports directly to the chief executive officer.

This report focuses predominantly on the work of the Operations and Assessment directorate but also considers its inter-relationship with other divisions, especially Qualifications and IT.

Figure 2 below details the organisational structure of the Assessment section

```
                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │   General Manager    │
                        │     Assessment       │
                        └─────────────────────┘
      ┌──────────────┬──────────────┴──────────┬──────────────────┐
┌───────────┐ ┌─────────────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌────────────────────┐
│ Key Skills│ │    GCE/GCSE     │ │   GVQ    │ │ Associate Support  │
│   Team    │ │Qualifications Mgr│ │   Team   │ │Team (AST) Manager  │
└───────────┘ └─────────────────┘ └──────────┘ └────────────────────┘
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| PE, Arts & Media Team | Modern Foreign Languages Team | Humanities & Business Team | Computing, Maths & Techonology Team | Science & Social Science Team |

Each of the 7 assessment teams varies in size, but each has a structure similar to that indicated below in Figure 3.

```
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Team Leader  │
                    └──────────────┘
                           │
                    ┌──────────────────┐
                    │Team Administrator│
                    └──────────────────┘
```

| Assessment Leader | Assessment Leader | Assessment Leader | Assessment Leader | Assessement Leader | Assessement Leader |

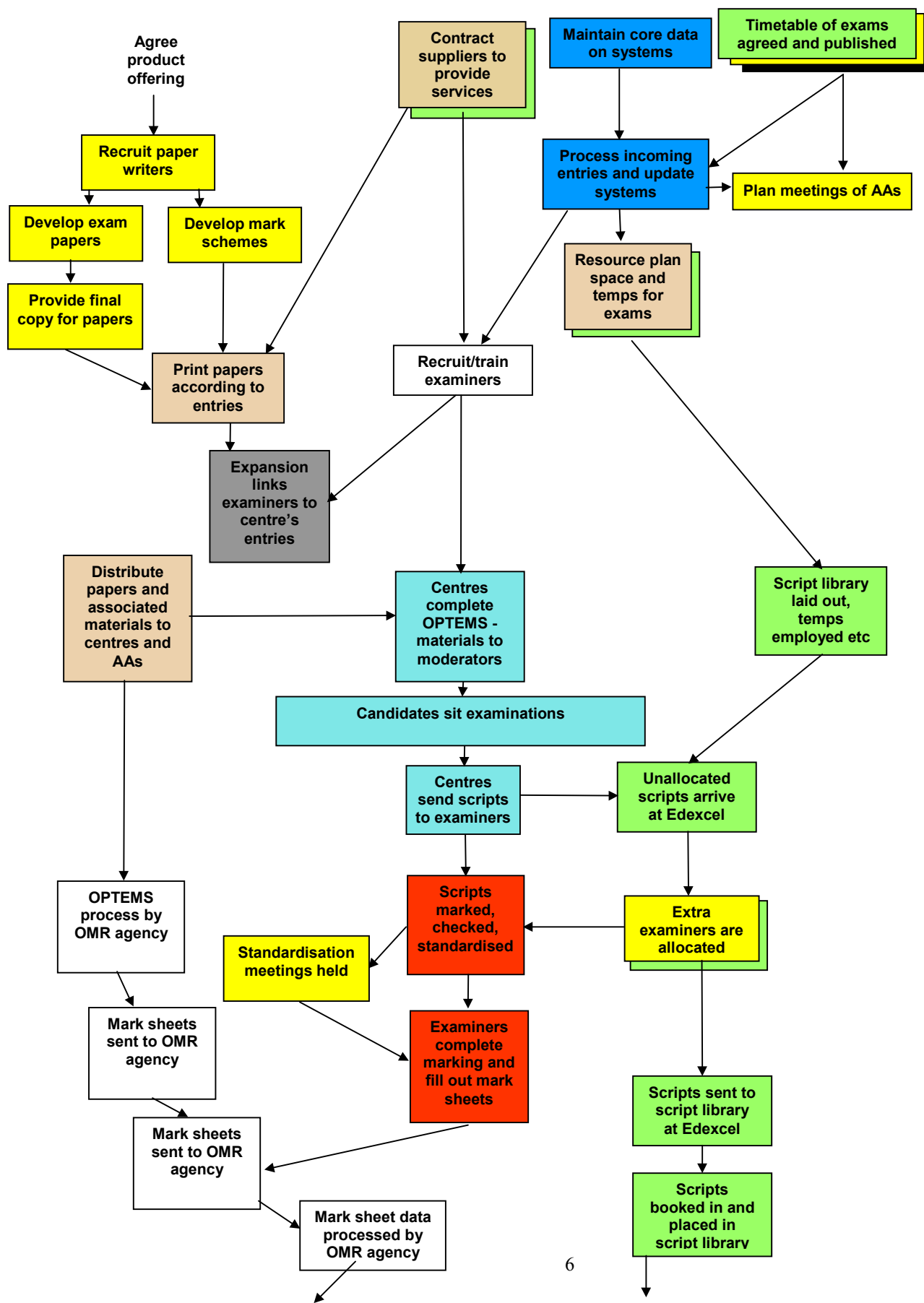| Assessment Coordinator | Assessment Coordinator | Assessment Coordinator | Assessment Coordinator | Assessment Coordinator | |

Assessment leaders are responsible for managing the entire assessment process across a specified range of subjects, ensuring that agreed deadlines are met and quality standards achieved.

Edexcel's examination process

1.8 The various elements of Edexcel's examination process are detailed in the flowchart given as Figure 4. The chart is based on the Edexcel process map submitted to the QCA audit team as at March 2001.

Figure 4

```
Agree product offering
        │
        ▼
Recruit paper writers
   │         │
   ▼         ▼
Develop exam papers   Develop mark schemes
   │                      │
   ▼                      │
Provide final copy for papers
        │                 │
        └──────┬──────────┘
               ▼
Contract suppliers to provide services
        │
        ▼
Print papers according to entries
        │
        ▼
Expansion links examiners to centre's entries
```

Maintain core data on systems → Process incoming entries and update systems

Timetable of exams agreed and published → Process incoming entries and update systems → Plan meetings of AAs

Process incoming entries and update systems → Resource plan space and temps for exams

Contract suppliers to provide services → Recruit/train examiners

Recruit/train examiners → Expansion links examiners to centre's entries

Distribute papers and associated materials to centres and AAs → Centres complete OPTEMS - materials to moderators

Resource plan space and temps for exams → Script library laid out, temps employed etc

Centres complete OPTEMS - materials to moderators → Candidates sit examinations

Candidates sit examinations → Centres send scripts to examiners

Centres send scripts to examiners → Unallocated scripts arrive at Edexcel

Script library laid out, temps employed etc → Unallocated scripts arrive at Edexcel

Centres send scripts to examiners → Scripts marked, checked, standardised

Distribute papers and associated materials to centres and AAs → OPTEMS process by OMR agency

OPTEMS process by OMR agency → Mark sheets sent to OMR agency

Unallocated scripts arrive at Edexcel → Extra examiners are allocated

Extra examiners are allocated → Scripts marked, checked, standardised

Standardisation meetings held → Examiners complete marking and fill out mark sheets

Scripts marked, checked, standardised → Examiners complete marking and fill out mark sheets

Mark sheets sent to OMR agency → Mark sheets sent to OMR agency

Examiners complete marking and fill out mark sheets → Mark sheets sent to OMR agency

Mark sheets sent to OMR agency → Mark sheet data processed by OMR agency

Extra examiners are allocated → Scripts sent to script library at Edexcel

Scripts sent to script library at Edexcel → Scripts booked in and placed in script library

6

Flowchart boxes:

- **Mark sheet and OPTEMS data sent to Edexcel systems**
- **Post standardising review**
- **Special considerations requested**
- **B checking**
- **Scripts called from library for awarding meetings**
- **Aegrotats carried out. Missing and incorrect results chased and resolved**
- **Statistical analysis carried out**
- **SML checking**
- **Awarding meetings**
- **Centres not returning OPTEMS, and AAs not returning mark sheets and moderator sheets are chased**
- **Grading requirements entered to system**
- **Review of awarding**
- **Incomplete grades resolved**
- **Final results and grades calculated for all entrants**
- **Mark schemes finalised and printed**
- **Results sent to UCAS via EDI**
- **Results & other printout printed and despatched**
- **Results sent to centres via EDI**
- **Customer queries answered within 48 hours**
- **Results reviewed and amended if necessary**
- **EAR and access to scripts service offered**
- **Certificates printed and despatched**
- **Appeals - internal and external**

Key

Colour	Description
Centres	Centres
Operations	Operations
Assessment Design & Standards	Assessment Design & Standards
Data Research Services (outside contractor)	Data Research Services (outside contractor)
Student Services	Student Services
Publications and Logistics Unit	Publications and Logistics Unit
Assessment Associates (AAs)	Assessment Associates (AAs)
Joint Council for General Qualifications	Joint Council for General Qualifications
Unattributed	Unattributed

1.9 Members of staff below middle management level were familiar with vertical lines of communication, which were felt to be transparent, effective and often noted as supportive. There was a lack of awareness among staff at lower levels about the function of other teams in the organisation and even within their own directorate. This may be due to the roles and responsibilities of teams changing or not being clearly defined, and staff not being brought up to date with revised organisational structures. Edexcel needs to support staff in their new roles and allow for the consolidation of the new structure. Some staff relatively new to Edexcel commented on how the organisation functions predominantly in a hierarchical manner with little regard to cross-directorate working practices. Edexcel's Intranet site provides a source of information for its staff on how the organisation is structured.

1.10 The examination process map illustrates the system designed to deliver Edexcel's core business of providing public examinations that are fit for purpose and in line with regulatory requirements. However, while the process map shows the activities contained within the process, the functional dependencies and boundaries of control are not explicit. Several activities in the process in summer 2001 were under the joint responsibility of two operational sections. To some degree this was reflected by the establishment of a centralised Control and Command Team (CCT), with a strategic planning function (see 2.10). Whilst the CCT was intended to coordinate the examination process, its establishment brought into question the extent to which the existing organisational structure reflected the core business process. The structure introduced in December 2000 was reviewed in autumn 2001 and further refinements were made to reflect Edexcel's realisation that not all functions had been clearly defined. Changes had also been made to management responsibilities early in the summer 2001 examination series. Edexcel needs to ensure that all staff are aware of the new management structure and that managers are supported in establishing their new roles and responsibilities.

1.11 The examination process is not at present fully underpinned by documented procedures that govern each activity showing key accountabilities and contingency planning. The development of an *Examinations Programme Folder 2001* as a strategic planning document and the publication of procedural documents on the intranet was intended to address this issue (see 2.11 and 3.18). These documented procedures need to be moulded into a coherent whole, their existence made known to all staff and their implementation monitored and reviewed.

1.12 Edexcel staff generally demonstrated a clear understanding of their individual roles and responsibilities within the organisation. Many assessment leaders in Operations and Assessment reported good working relations with their counterparts in Qualifications Development (QD) and vice versa. However, these relations clearly rely on informal contact between individuals. There appear to be no formal procedures in place to ensure that staff in Operations and Assessment and QD meet regularly and liaise effectively. There are examples of good practice emerging in the development of cross-directorate or cross-section communications. For example, during the summer 2001 examination series QCA observed some staff from QD working with colleagues in Operations and Assessment at standardisation and awarding meetings. Arrangements for using staff across directorates need to be formalised, with the expectations for QD staff built into their job descriptions. Further examples of good practice included regular meetings of senior staff in IT and Operations and Assessment and staff in QD working closely with product and business managers in customer services. It is imperative that such examples of good practice are supported through formal channels of communication.

2. Information and communication systems

2.1 Edexcel uses two IT systems for managing examinations: Oracle (for vocational qualifications) and AS 400 (for general qualifications). Each system has common base data. The systems were developed separately by Edexcel's predecessor bodies, BTEC (Oracle) and London Examinations (AS 400). VCE and GNVQ qualifications currently span both systems.

2.2 A strategic review of Edexcel's IT operations was conducted in 2000 by Arthur Andersen. The review recommended that all Edexcel's IT-based facilities should move to one centralised source, the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. The new system is being introduced in phases and needs to be tested and piloted to ensure that it does not jeopardise future examinations' series. A further review was undertaken by KPMG in June 2001 following the introduction of the first phase of ERP.

2.3 Members of staff in Operations and Assessment and Qualifications Development divisions have access to parts of AS 400. Access is controlled by a security officer in the IT department and requests for increased levels of access must be approved by the line manager of the member of staff concerned. Members of staff use AS 400 to access information about centres, candidate entries and examiner allocations. Assessment leaders in Operations and Assessment are able to enter and amend data on coursework. Assessment leaders use the interactive awarding programme during awarding meetings and find the facility to pre-test awarding outcomes prior to the meeting helpful in alerting them to potential issues.

2.4 Training in the use of IT systems including AS 400 is provided for new, permanent and temporary staff. Members of staff reported favourably on the quality of the training received.

2.5 The capacity of AS 400 has been increased to accommodate the new AS qualification. This has involved an extension of the existing system rather than major changes.

2.6 A review of examinations 2000 resulted in an upgrade to the Oracle system, to ensure that there was sufficient capacity to cope with the expected increase in demand for disk space in summer 2001. A similar review of AS 400 took place. Increased capacity meant that a process, which took six hours in 2000, took 57 minutes in 2001.

2.7 Members of staff widely acknowledged that a system failure during the awarding season could compromise Edexcel's ability to publish examination results on time. Following three system failures in 2000, contingency plans were put in place. An external supplier was contracted to supply a 24-hour recovery system if the IT systems failed. All Edexcel buildings are linked to the external supplier. The external supplier was also commissioned to carry out a 'component failure impact analysis' (CFIA) for Edexcel in time for June 2001

2.8 During peaks in examination processing, a moratorium on annual leave is imposed on staff in several operational teams.

2.9 In the IT department, arrangements are in place so that extra staff can be recruited at short notice through agencies who are able to supply programmers for AS 400 and Oracle, should members of staff be unavoidably absent during peak periods. No major modifications are made to IT systems between June and August each year.

2.10 Edexcel's internal review of examinations 2000 led to the formation of the central Command and Control Team (CCT), established at a strategic level to review progress in delivering both the winter series of GCE, VCE and GNVQs, and the summer series of GCE, GCSE, VCE, GNVQ and Key Skills. It was also designed to progress chase, review and report back to senior management on progress against plans, and identify potential bottlenecks and shortfalls, taking or requesting appropriate actions. The CCT was managed by the General Manager, Operations and involved staff from across the organisation, in particular Operations and Assessment, examinations processing, IT and Compliance and Regulation. This is a welcome initiative. The IT team see their function as very much a supporting role, and a member of staff from IT has been seconded to the Command and Control Team. Whilst senior members of staff were keen to stress the value of the CCT as an example of horizontal working across the organisation, staff at lower levels had patchy awareness of the review of examinations 2000 and of the role and purpose of the CCT. While the function of the CCT was intended to be strategic, it was often more concerned with day-to-day

trouble shooting. Inconsistent membership, and the attendance of managers without the authority to take decisions, also hindered its success.

2.11 The development of an *Examinations Programme Folder 2001*, was intended to support the strategic decisions made by the CCT. The existence and purpose of the examinations folder was not communicated to all staff.

2.12 Senior members of staff in IT and Operations and Assessment meet regularly to discuss the implications of forthcoming work for IT systems. This is reported back to the management board on a fortnightly basis for time-critical projects and monthly for other projects; this is good practice.

2.12 Enquiries about Results (EAR) and access to scripts use a separate IT system called Staffware. Staffware was developed for Edexcel specifically for these services. However, problems linked to the system were encountered with the Enquiries about Results service in 2000. In summer 2001 an employee of the system supplier was contracted full time by Edexcel to provide ongoing technical support during the crucial EAR period.

3. Quality assurance and quality control arrangements

3.1 When QCA visited in March 2001 it was unclear where overall responsibility lay for the quality assurance and quality control of Edexcel's general qualifications, and for ensuring compliance with the regulatory authorities' codes of practice. This has been the responsibility of the Compliance and Regulation Unit since September 2001. The Compliance and Regulation Unit also has responsibility for internal audits across all aspects of the organisation.

3.2 A management restructuring early in 2001 placed the Compliance and Regulation Unit outside of the directorate structure, reporting directly to the chief executive. This formed the basis of a monitoring arm for the organisation, to support staff development and improve the operation of the organisation. The compliance team is responsible for monitoring quality and its implementation across the organisation.

3.3 Several Edexcel teams involved with general qualifications have achieved ISO 9001 accreditation. However, there is not a coordinated approach between Edexcel's work for ISO 9001 approval and the internal quality monitoring and auditing activities undertaken by the Compliance and Regulation unit. In order to achieve and maintain certification procedures must be clearly documented. Members of staff across Edexcel were able to refer to quality manuals detailing procedures in their area of work. However, not all assessment leaders interviewed by QCA appeared to be aware of the details of the quality manuals. While extensive documentation of procedures is commendable, its contribution to improved working practices is limited by the extent to which staff use the documentation. Although the move towards ISO accreditation across the organisation is a positive step, a programme to evaluate the effectiveness of accredited procedures on practice is necessary.

3.4 Staff not directly involved in these elements of Edexcel's work were unable to explain the relationships and appeared further confused by additional audit activities conducted by external agencies. There was some hostility to the introduction of ISO 9001.This may have been due to possible misunderstandings of the system, resulting from a failure to communicate its purpose and value clearly to staff. There is benefit to be gained by a coordinated strategy for establishing the ISO 9001 and the complementary monitoring and auditing programmes undertaken by the Compliance unit.

3.5 Monitoring of the quality systems in practice is shared between the Compliance and Regulation Unit and the ISO 9001 team. However, the lines of demarcation and responsibility are not clearly defined. It is noted that ISO 9001 has much to offer Edexcel as a business organisation. The advantages of the quality management system are not clear to staff, with some staff members expressing concern that such a system focuses on procedures rather than on the actual quality of products brought about by the system. Edexcel should ensure that all staff understands the demarcation of responsibility and the purpose of ISO 9001.

3.6 Reports from the regulatory authorities on general qualifications were circulated to relevant members of staff in Operations and Assessment and to the Compliance and Regulation Unit. However, it was unclear who was responsible for ensuring that the recommendations of these reports were coordinated and acted upon. A designated member of the senior management team has now been given that responsibility.

3.7 Senior members of staff are responsible for producing management reports on progress in their areas of work at regular intervals. An organisation-wide 'quality assurance tracking procedure' was introduced in March 2001 and thereafter developed into a monthly monitoring report. It is an important and welcome step.

3.8 Awarding meetings are the responsibility of assessment leaders. Team leaders are responsible for monitoring the awarding meetings but, given the number of meetings, there are occasions when team leaders actually manage awarding meetings. Assessment leaders were unanimous in their view that team leaders were always available to offer support. This facility is clearly valued. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that systematic checks of the awarding process are not undertaken. Reference was also made to the equally supportive role of the officers responsible for Assessment Design and Standards and technical support. However, it was noted that systematic visits to awarding meetings made by the assistant director for Standards and the manager of Assessment Design and Standards evident in 1999, were not carried out in 2000 or 2001.

Although the purpose of these visits was viewed by assessment leaders as purely supportive, they did allow the facility for some monitoring of procedures. The apparent withdrawal of this facility needs to be reviewed. The Compliance and Regulation Unit monitored the summer 2001 series of meetings for GCE and was due to report to the Audit Committee (Sub-Committee of Council) in December.

3.9   Preparation for awarding meetings involves the appropriate assessment leader and team leader, who model and consider possible outcomes of awards through a pre-awarding meeting. This initial process involves considering statistical information and examiner estimates. The information is used to inform assessment leaders of the possible consequences resulting from key decisions made during awarding meetings. This process clearly holds some benefit to the awarding process but at this stage does not involve the chairs of examiners or chief examiners as agreed collectively by the awarding body chief executives through the Joint Council for General Qualifications. QCA's monitoring activities show that the information generated through the pre-award was used inconsistently across awarding meetings. Edexcel should have a clear procedure for the way pre-award intelligence and statistical information is used in awarding meetings.

3.10   It was of concern to QCA when it visited in March that although the manager of Assessment Design and Standards was held in high regard, the responsibility carried by the postholder far exceeded the relative position of the post in Edexcel's management structure. When the manager of Assessment Design and Standards retired in April 2001 however, Edexcel took the opportunity of separating the responsibility between two managers. Despite this, it is regrettable that there was no formal handover period. Furthermore, other than what now appears to be informal recourse to the assistant director for Standards, access to experience and expertise in the pivotal exercise of validating awarding decisions is not available beyond middle management grade. This lack of detailed knowledge and understanding among senior staff of the technicalities contained within the examinations process is a major concern.

3.11   In the January 2001 series of examinations, on completion of an awarding meeting, assessment leaders discussed the outcomes with team leaders before submitting a range of forms to the then manager of Assessment Design and Standards. The information included key grade boundaries, related statistical information and notes of any issues relevant to the awarding committee's recommendations. This information was supported by the chair of examiner's report. At this point the Manager of Assessment Design and Standards decided whether to accept the awarding committee's recommendations, or ask for further information and justification of decisions made. If necessary, the manager would have required the awarding committee to reconvene. The results of this process were taken to the Review of Awards committee. Any awards identified by the manager of Assessment Design and Standards as too lenient or too severe were brought to the attention of the committee. Awards not identified as problematic were largely carried on the manager's recommendation.

3.12   The Review of Awards committee, chaired by the director of Operations and Assessment, convened for one day in January and 4 days in June 2001. It was unclear how this committee fitted into Edexcel's committee structure, what its terms of reference were, or on what grounds it was constituted. In practice, the chair of the Review of Awards committee and the Manager of Assessment Design and Standards shared the responsibility for all awarding decisions. One of the principal accountabilities of the Director of Operations and Assessment is 'to ensure the standards of qualification that bear Edexcel's name are maintained.' Edexcel's part A submission to the regulator for accreditation to the National Qualifications Framework states that the chief executive is the awarding body's accountable officer. From the evidence gathered by QCA, it appeared that this role was not discharged in strict accordance with the regulatory requirements.

3.13   It is also of concern to QCA that there is heavy reliance on the expertise of one or possibly two officers to validate the awarding process. If a key member of staff is absent during the height of the awarding timetable, it is unclear what contingencies exist to overcome such a situation.

3.14   A new chief executive was appointed to Edexcel in October 2001 and the awarding body has taken the opportunity to review the role of the accountable officer and awarding committee. Edexcel has developed terms of reference for the Review of Awards group and has defined the role of the accountable officer. It is clear from these that the chief executive intends to discharge the role of accountable officer in accordance with regulatory requirements. This will be closely monitored by QCA.

3.15 It was widely acknowledged that Edexcel staff would be under particular pressure in summer 2001. With the restructuring, extra layers of management had been recruited, for example two deputy general managers in Operations and Assessment. There was a flexible approach to deploying qualifications leaders and other suitable staff to run standardisation meetings aimed at alleviating pressure on assessment leaders. Staff from regional offices also helped with examinations processing during the crucial summer 2001 period. This level of flexibility is to be commended. Training was provided to support staff from other departments. It is noted that similar provision was made in 2000 but evidence shows, that some QD staff 'didn't have time in the end to offer support'. However, it is acknowledged that Edexcel had given top priority to deploying staff in this manner. Some staff were not helping at all while others reported that they were covering up to five days of meetings. Some staff interviewed were unclear of the underlying strategy for selecting and deploying staff in this exercise remains unclear.

3.16 QCA found a working tension between the roles of assessment leaders and QD qualifications managers in some subject areas. While some officers reported strong though unofficial links with officers in different directorates, in some cases staff were unhappy with the way in which the 'old' subject officer role had been split between QD and Operations and Assessment. Some assessment leaders believed that their current role did not call for subject expertise, and some reported dissatisfaction with their role in terms of variety and intellectual challenge. However it must be stressed that no dissatisfaction was expressed regarding individual colleagues. Some QD staff described contact with assessment leaders as 'intermittent' and the level of contact and degree to which the two teams work together seems to be reliant on the nature of the individuals concerned, rather than any formal requirement. However, the roles of qualifications leader and assessment leader that cover GCE/GCSE and VCE/GNVQ does provide the facility for supporting one of Edexcel's goals, which is ensuring comparability across general qualifications in terms of demand and status.

3.17 Although the wide range of subjects covered by qualifications leaders has some advantages, it does place significant pressure on them in assuring the quality of specifications submitted to QCA. While the Qualifications Development procedure refers to specifications being subject to 'scrutiny by a panel of Edexcel managers' there is little evidence that this procedure has been put into operation or that staff involved with this process would possess sufficient subject expertise.

3.18 Senior members of staff in Operations and Assessment are clearly engaged in improving the quality of work through reviews of current practice and the development of action plans. The *Examinations Programme Folder 2001* is an example of an attempt to improve strategic planning.

3.19 Procedures for question paper setting, standardisation and awarding meetings for all general qualifications are in place to assure the quality of work undertaken. These are documented in a series of booklets and also on the Intranet. They are revised on a regular basis. Members of staff are generally aware of procedures and of the documents available to them, though it must be stated that they frequently reported that such documentation was not to hand, though it could be found if required. As previously stated, some staff referred to the series of quality manuals, though it is not clear that the relationship between the manuals and other procedural documents is understood. A series of booklets with instructions for examiners are also updated regularly by a designated team leader. These booklets are well presented and form a crucial support system.

3.20 Question paper production is an area of serious concern to QCA. The 1999 and 2000 QCA GCE and GCSE scrutiny and external assessor reports identified that Question Paper Evaluation Committee (QPEC) procedures varied across subjects and did not follow code of practice requirements in the majority of cases observed. Further, QCA monitoring of GNVQ and VCE qualifications revealed a similar pattern. Major adjustments were made to question papers at the QPEC stage, mark schemes were not always written at the same time as question papers and were often not presented either in part or in full at the QPEC meeting. Many subjects did not have specification grids to accompany question papers. In some of the meetings observed graphics and icons were not included on draft question papers at the QPEC stage, as they were outsourced and produced by an external publishing company. This often led to errors or inappropriate graphics that have not been subject to checks at the QPEC meetings. The process for the production of papers relies on knowledge and skills developed on the job by assessment leaders. Whilst the assessment leaders can point to some custom and practice in the development of GCE and GCSE question papers, the lack of guidance material and the lack of experience is of particular concern for the development of VCE and GNVQ question papers produced to meet the new assessment regime.

3.21 Training is provided as part of their induction programme for new staff in Operations and Assessment on procedures for standardisation and awarding. A large part of the training of new assessment leaders appears to be on an informal mentoring basis, often performed by the team leader. All members of staff in Operations and Assessment are offered training on changes to the code of practice and the implications for their work. Refresher courses on standardisation and awarding are offered at the beginning of each examination series by senior staff in Operations and Assessment. These training meetings are clearly valued by staff. It is of concern to QCA, however, that there is not a coordinated approach to staff development. Apart from a centralised induction programme, the quality and content of staff development activities appears to be, in the main, dependent on individual line managers.

3.22 The recruitment and retention of sufficient examiners to support the summer 2001 examination series was a particular concern to Edexcel. Procedures were in place to recruit additional examiners, and a designated member of staff monitored progress against targets. Recent figures suggest that Edexcel underestimated total entries for AS qualifications in summer 2001 and therefore underestimated the number of examiners required. Training was provided for new examiners and the quality of examiners' work was monitored throughout the marking period. A revised training package for new examiners was being developed. The Edexcel action plan for 2001 refers to procedures for dealing with examiners whose performance is unsatisfactory.

3.23 The late recruitment of examiners in some subjects and a large number of late entries from centres meant that a significant number of scripts had not been allocated to examiners by the time candidates sat examinations in summer 2001. Unallocated scripts were sent to Edexcel's processing centre for allocation to an examiner. This introduced a significant element of delay into the system and had consequences for the remainder of the examination process. QCA observers at standardisation meetings reported instances where examiners did not receive scripts sufficiently in advance of meetings to enable them to provisionally mark a sample.

3.24 QCA observers at awarding meetings in summer 2001 reported several instances where awarding meetings took place with a low percentage of marks entered onto the computer system. This meant that statistical information used to inform awarding committees' grading recommendations was less reliable and necessitated time-consuming additional checking of all provisional grade boundary recommendations.

3.25 QCA observers also reported frequent delays with retrieving scripts for the awarding meetings.

3.26 This was confirmed by Edexcel staff when QCA visited in September. Assessment leaders had experienced delays in receiving scripts and did not always receive the particular scripts, that they had requested. This meant that awarding committees had to review scripts that were not ideal for the purposes of awarding. For example, some scripts used at awarding meetings had been marked by examiners whose marking had been adjusted. This is a matter of concern.

3.27 Members of staff at Edexcel were clearly aware that centres were dealing with new A level examinations in summer 2001 and were anxious to support centres and make allowances for delays and errors due to lack of familiarity with the system. This desire to be flexible and accommodating did generate additional problems with processing examinations, such as dealing with late entries and ensuring that all GNVQ and VCE portfolio marks were entered onto the system. Members of staff felt that the clarity of advice and instructions supplied to centres could be improved. They also expressed the view that Edexcel should adopt a more rigid approach to deadlines next year in order to be fair to all centres.

3.28 Edexcel's review of examinations in 2000 identified delays in getting marks from OMR mark sheets on to AS 400. The company contracted by Edexcel to undertake this operation was to be more closely monitored by senior managers in 2001 and planning included placing an Edexcel member of staff on their premises. Monitoring meetings were to be held frequently where progress was measured against the agreed work schedule. When QCA visited in September, it was unclear whether a member of Edexcel staff had been placed on the company's premises during the processing peak in summer 2001 although it was later confirmed that this happened. Members of staff reported problems with processing OMR mark sheets, which had caused significant delays in getting marks onto the computer system in time for awarding meetings. Approximately 10-15% of mark sheets had to be inputted manually onto the system by the processing team.

3.29   When QCA visited in March, the examinations processing team was well organised with clear leadership and procedures. Responsibility for processing 'changed hands' at a key time before the summer 2001 series.

3.30   The lack of space for storing scripts, accommodation for staff and meetings was widely acknowledged as a problem by staff at all levels in the organisation. It was recognised that this would be a particular issue during summer 2001. To alleviate pressure on space in Stewart House (Edexcel's headquarters), part of the Operations and Assessment directorate relocated to a new building in Blundell Street. The new building houses the script library for GCSEs as well as providing space for the clerical checking of scripts. The move took place in April and released space for meetings in Stewart House. The move was identified as 'high risk' given its proximity to the summer 2001 examination series. As a result, a professional project management company was contracted to manage the process, and contingency plans were in place should the move have failed. Some assessment leaders were concerned that retrieving scripts for awarding meetings would take longer, particularly for those additional scripts requested at short notice during an awarding meeting.

Edexcel staff reported processing difficulties in summer 2001 related to an increase in the volume of scripts and to the move to Blundell Street shortly before the summer 2001 examination series. While initial communication problems between Blundell Street and Stewart House were resolved, staff had a relatively short space of time in which to establish systems in the new building before examination scripts were received. Staff reported that original plans for the layout of the script library were not followed. This meant that the script library was difficult to work in and there were a higher than usual number of mislocated scripts. The GCE script library was moved back to Stewart House as an interim measure to alleviate pressure on Blundell Street and to facilitate script retrieval for awarding and grade review meetings. Staff attributed the problems experienced at Blundell Street to poor management of processing staff. Several members of staff expressed the view that problems were dealt with by increasing the number of temporary staff, rather than improving management control of the actual process and how it was carried out. Staff felt that too many individuals were working on specific parts of the process in isolation rather than working as a coherent team. This meant that assumptions were made that staff were completing processes, such as chasing moderator mark sheets, when this was not the case.

3.31   Edexcel has undertaken several reviews of the summer 2001 examination series, conducted by different groupings of senior managers. Edexcel has accumulated a wealth of information on how the summer 2001 systems and processes performed. It is vital that Edexcel uses this information to improve its performance in 2002. While there is evidence of a considerable amount of risk analysis and planning, it is not clear how this is being coordinated centrally, or how it will translate into action that will remedy the problems experienced in summer 2001.

Following the issue of results in August, QCA received complaints from several centres that they had not received results on time. Centres were concerned that the problems reported were not rectified quickly enough, causing considerable distress to candidates affected.

3.32   Edexcel's performance in handling enquiries on results and appeals is an area of serious concern. This has already been acknowledged by an internal audit report produced by the Compliance and Regulation Unit. There is a lack of documented procedures across the organisation to support this area of Edexcel's provision. Although in 2000 the awarding body was within 5% of meeting priority service 2 targets for GCE A level and 10% for GCSE, no targets were completely met for the non-priority services at GCE A level. Services 3, 4 and 5 were below 50% completion within the target dates; the performance for GCSE shows a similar pattern. Much reliance is put on the experience and expertise of a few staff members whose knowledge has been described as 'indispensable' by colleagues. Such reliance on personally held knowledge and expertise constitutes a high risk. Low staffing levels and a heavy reliance on temporary staff to meet an increasing workload, together with poorly documented procedures across the organisation, would appear to be at the heart of the problem.

3.33   The enquiries and appeals system is reliant on ready access to examiners who check initial marking and are capable of working to tight timelines post-awarding. Staff reported this as being inherently difficult. The internal audit report *Enquiries about Results (EAR)* raised some doubt regarding the accuracy of completion figures supplied to the regulatory authority in 2000 due to underperformance of the Staffware system.   QCA has received much correspondence

expressing concern over Edexcel's handling of the enquiries about results from the summer 2001 series. Centres report significant delays in receiving the results of re-marks and difficulties receiving an adequate and timely response from the EAR team about their enquiry. Edexcel has not met the targets for delivering the outcome of enquiries about results as stipulated in the *GCSE, GCE, VCE and GNVQ code of practice*. Particular frustration has been expressed about Edexcel's failure to meet deadlines for processing priority 2 re-marks for A level candidates whose higher education place was dependent upon the outcome of the re-mark. Centres have complained that delays in receiving the outcomes of enquiries have left candidates unsure whether to prepare for re-sits in the January 2002 examination series. The effect of this has been to increase the burden on students and teachers. This issue must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

3.34 Awarding bodies were required to provide QCA with data about the outcomes of their Enquiries about Results services for the summer 2001 examination series by the end of November. Edexcel has been unable to supply QCA with the data.

3.35 Another area of particular concern is the quality of customer service received by centres, especially in relation to enquiries about results and appeals. Centres have complained to QCA about difficulties in contacting Edexcel by telephone, staff being unable to deal with their queries, being put on hold for considerable periods, being passed from department to department and receiving conflicting advice from different members of staff over the telephone, and a lack of written communication other than by standard letter. Centres complained that calls were not returned when promised. Centres were often prompted to call Edexcel when they received no response to faxes or letters, or the level of written response received was unsatisfactory. This poor level of customer service appears to be symptomatic of the lack of documented procedures, inappropriate reliance on temporary staff and problems with the IT systems.

3.36 Edexcel receives a large volume of phone calls, letters and emails each day. The Customer Response Centre (CRC) filters these, more or less effectively. There is a perception among staff in Operations and Assessment that the CRC is improving and that calls, which go through the CRC, are dealt with more efficiently than those are that come via the switchboard. Nevertheless, assessment leaders report that they still receive a significant number of misdirected calls that should have been transferred to colleagues in Qualifications. Individuals will by-pass the system in order to avoid transferring calls (eg assessment leaders will deal with queries about syllabus support material). While the management of calls is improving, further progress is needed, particularly given the pressures that staff in operations and assessment will be under during summer 2002.

3.37 Nevertheless, members of staff across Edexcel's organisation were keen to stress the importance of delivering a high quality of customer service in their work. This customer service ethos is cultivated by a customer satisfaction survey, which is commissioned by the External Relations team each year. The results of this survey are used to produce a list of 'priorities for improvement' for each directorate. These are treated as mini-projects, with timescales for action required as well as reviews. Problems highlighted include the efficiency of general administration and, in particular, the recently overhauled telephone system. Edexcel has recently appointed a general manager for customer services and a customer services plan is being developed. It is expected that these problems will be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Key Action Points

Following the recommendations of the interim report, in May 2001, Edexcel responded with an action plan but, by November 2001, has failed to make significant progress in achieving it.

To ensure the effective delivery of the examination process in summer 2002 and beyond, QCA requires Edexcel to take the following actions:

1. Coordinate the many reviews of the summer 2001 examinations series, produce by 28 February 2002 a register of the lessons learned and use these to strengthen the examination process for summer 2002 (para 3.31).

2. Provide QCA with assurance that management structures, competence and procedures are appropriate to the delivery of results in summer 2002 and beyond by 28 February 2002 (para 1.6, 3.9 - 3.14, 3.19, 3.20, 3.22, 3.23, 3.30).

3. Present to QCA a fully documented plan for the summer 2002 examination series, identifying key tasks, milestone dates and responsibilities as well as a risk analysis and contingency plans by the end of February 2002 (para 1.11).

4. Update and amend the examinations programme folder in the light of the review of the 2001 examinations series and publish to all staff by 27 March 2002.

5. Develop a procedure for the way in which pre-award intelligence and statistical information will be used at all awarding meetings by the end of April 2002 (para 3.9, 3.24).

6. Amend customer service practices and procedures in order to improve significantly its services to customers by the end of May 2002 (para 3.35 - 3.37).

7. Improve the Enquires about Results service to provide a better service to customers and meet targets for response by the end of June 2002 (para 3.32 - 3.34).

8. Review these key action points regularly and to agree further points with QCA as necessary to ensure the effective delivery of the summer 2002 examinations series by late autumn 2002.

QCA will continuously review Edexcel's performance against the above actions and report on its findings in the autumn.