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2011

## Annual Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly

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## **Ofqual Annual Report to the Northern Ireland Assembly**

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# Foreword by Sandra Burslem and Glenys Stacey



**Dame Sandra Burslem DBE, Deputy Chair**

**It has been a good year. With wise advice and assistance from colleagues in Northern Ireland, we have prepared the ground for our new approach to regulation. We will hold awarding organisations to greater account for the quality of their qualifications, including of course those qualifications (vocational qualifications) that we regulate in Northern Ireland. We have laid the ground, both in England and in Northern Ireland, and as the year ends we are rolling out our new approach to regulation.**

It has been a busy year, with developments and achievements specific to Northern Ireland. So, for example, we have established our Regulation of Vocational Qualifications in Northern Ireland Committee, and have great hopes for it.

Danny Kennedy, the former Employment and Learning Minister met our Board when it had its first meeting in Belfast in January. We were also called to a meeting with the Assembly's Education and Learning Committee at Stormont in February. We greatly welcomed these engagements and look forward to similar events in the coming year.

We hope you find this report informative, and we look forward to the year ahead and to continuing to work with our Northern Ireland colleagues, maintaining, quality standards and public confidence in the vocational qualifications that affect the life chances of so many people today.



**Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive**

# Foreword by Ray Coughlin

**Qualifications are important; they open doors for learners of all ages and can change lives. Securing standards, increasing public awareness of regulated qualifications, sustaining public confidence in them and protecting the learner are at the heart of everything Ofqual does.**

The establishment of Ofqual and its *Regulation of Vocational Qualifications in Northern Ireland Committee* represents a significant development in the regulation of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. As the Northern Ireland member of the Ofqual Board and Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee, I am committed to playing a key role in providing Ofqual with views and perspectives that reflect the interests of users in Northern Ireland, be they students, employers or the higher education sector. I work with our Committee members to provide strategic advice to Ofqual on the implementation and impact of the regulation of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland and to ensure that Ofqual gives proper consideration to the needs of Northern Ireland learners, employers and the wider public.

This is a significant challenge, but a fascinating and rewarding one and I am particularly pleased to have with me on the Committee members from across Northern Ireland who are strong, independently-minded and who represent a wide cross-section of interests and experience.



**Ray Coughlin, Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee**

# Section 1



## Who we are

**The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) is the regulator of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland and of qualifications (other than degrees), examinations and assessments in England. We were established under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the ASCL Act)<sup>1</sup> and came into being<sup>2</sup> in April 2010.**

We are a non-ministerial government department accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to Parliament. The Ofqual Board is the legal authority ultimately responsible for the regulation of qualifications. It provides leadership and direction, setting the strategic aims, values and standards of the organisation.

Our Board currently comprises 11 non-executive members and our chief executive. One of the Board is from Northern Ireland and has been appointed to represent the interests of Northern Ireland and to advise the Board on its aims and objectives for Northern Ireland. In June 2011 it was announced that Amanda Spielman will become our second Chair, subject to confirmation by Her Majesty at the Privy Council.

We have a team of six people based in Belfast and they are supported by teams based at our head office in Coventry.

2. Before 2008 the regulator of all qualifications in Northern Ireland, except National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) was carried out by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessments (CCEA). Regulation of NVQs was carried out by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Between 2008 and 2010, Ofqual existed in interim form as part of the QCA.

1. ASCL Act 2009: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/contents)

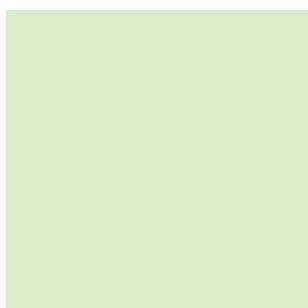
# What we do

**As a statutory body, our objectives, powers and duties are set down by Parliament. Our work is aimed at achieving our statutory objectives and meeting our duties, as set out in the Act. Our statutory objectives are detailed in Appendix 1.**

We aim to be a strategic and risk-based regulator, with a decision-making process that is proportionate, based on evidence and open

that they need and that employers want.

Qualifications are big business, with some 15.5 million achievements<sup>3</sup> being awarded in the last year for which figures are available in Northern Ireland, Wales and England. Having consulted extensively last year, we are changing the way qualifications are regulated. We expect awarding organisations to be accountable for the quality and standards of their qualifications and the



to scrutiny. We aim to be transparent in the way that we work – we consult both formally and informally on what we do, and we publish open Board papers and the results of our regulatory monitoring, whatever the findings may be.

To be trusted, vocational qualifications need to be valid – to measure what they are supposed to measure and provide learners with the skills they need and which employers require. Qualifications also need to be reliable and comparable, manageable and, as far as possible, to be free from bias. Those qualifications that meet these criteria are likely to be fit for their purpose and to have lasting value. We evaluate qualifications so that we know whether they are fit for purpose and we take action where they are not, and report on what we have done.

We have recognised more than 170 awarding organisations to award regulated qualifications. Of these, 120 operate in Northern Ireland to award vocational qualifications that are aimed at providing learners with the knowledge and skills

efficiency with which they operate, and we expect them to be open with us and to co-operate with us. In turn, we aim to work with awarding organisations in a fair and open manner, and to provide a stable and consistent framework for them to work within. We are committed to the Government's better regulation principles (transparent, targeted, consistent, accountable and proportionate) in how we develop and operate our regulatory arrangements.

At the centre of our regulatory arrangements for qualifications are our *Recognition Criteria* and *General Conditions of Recognition*.<sup>4</sup> Once awarding organisations are recognised against our published criteria, they are required to meet our general conditions, and we can take regulatory action only when they have not done so. We are finalising our policy on taking regulatory action. We will publish our fee-capping policy separately.

3. Ofqual Annual Qualifications Market Report (May 2011): [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-25-annual-qualifications-market-report.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-25-annual-qualifications-market-report.pdf)

4. Regulatory arrangements: [www.ofqual.gov.uk/for-awarding-organisations/96-articles/610-regulatory-requirements](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/for-awarding-organisations/96-articles/610-regulatory-requirements)

In order to meet our **qualifications standards objective**, we specify the requirements which qualifications must meet and check that they have been met. For some qualifications, we set very detailed requirements. We check that proposed qualifications meet those requirements ('accredit' them) before they can be added to The Register of Regulated Qualifications (The Register).<sup>5</sup> We require recognised organisations wishing to award regulated qualifications to meet our general conditions; over the next year we will stop checking all qualifications before they are added to The Register, putting the responsibility onto the awarding organisations themselves where they have proved that they can take responsibility for doing so.



Our Regulatory IT System (RITS) was launched in October 2010. It enables awarding organisations to provide information to us electronically. A RITS event for awarding organisations, providing training and information on the system, was held in Northern Ireland in February 2011.

A wide range of information regarding qualifications is included on our website with a section dedicated to vocational qualifications. All our reports and open letters are also available. As well as this, we have throughout this year engaged directly with people including employers, training providers, sector skills councils (SSCs), government, further education colleges and awarding organisations. We have ensured at all times that our stakeholders' views are taken



We also undertake monitoring activities to look at awarding organisations and qualifications in practice, including qualifications which have not been accredited.

In order to meet our **confidence and awareness objectives**, we seek to lead and be an active participant in public debate. We also make available a wide range of information about qualifications including on our website. In October 2010 we launched The Register online.

The Register replaced the National Database of Accredited Qualifications and contains details of recognised awarding organisations and regulated qualifications in Northern Ireland, Wales and England. The Register, which is supported by each of the qualification regulators in Northern Ireland, Wales and England, enables people to view the full range of regulated qualifications. This is accessible through our website, which also provides a section on frequently asked questions.

into consideration in relation to the regulation of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

As part of our approach to building confidence in the regulation of vocational qualifications we held five consultation events in Northern Ireland to encourage responses to our consultation on new criteria and conditions of regulation.

A quarterly e-newsletter is sent out to stakeholders and awarding organisations which includes Northern Ireland specific news. Stakeholders in Northern Ireland are encouraged to sign up for this newsletter via our website.

To meet our **efficiency objective**, we are undertaking analyses of the qualifications market, and developing our understanding of the factors that impact on costs and efficiency. This will inform the development of our regulatory arrangements, including (amongst others) our use of our fee-capping power.

It is in the interests of learners, employers and universities that qualifications are comparable across different countries. So we work with qualifications regulators in other parts of the UK and, where appropriate, put in place regulatory arrangements that are consistent.

This is particularly important for our work in Northern Ireland; we work collaboratively with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), who regulate all non-vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

We have also worked with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and reached an agreement with them that provides for the alignment of vocational qualifications regulated



by Ofqual to the National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland.

We have a duty to provide on request information and advice about our work in Northern Ireland. Departmental policy often has an impact on, or relies upon, qualifications and we want to be a trusted, independent and evidence-based source of advice to ministers on qualifications policy issues. Where appropriate, we will seek to make sure that our regulatory arrangements complement and enable policy objectives. We maintain regular contact with officials in both the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE) and with the Education and Training Inspectorate. We keep them advised about our regulatory policies and actions in Northern Ireland and discuss with them the impact of these on their policies and programmes of work.



# Section 2



## The year in view

### 2010/11 – our first year of operation – was a busy and eventful year for Ofqual.

Alongside our work to establish ourselves and develop our approach to regulation, Ofqual as a whole has maintained its crucial day-to-day role regulating, alongside our fellow regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland, more than 15,000 qualifications in an industry that we estimate is worth over £900 million a year.<sup>6</sup>

However, Ofqual's role is still evolving as the Education Bill<sup>7</sup> currently before the Parliament proposes to strengthen our role and to

### HIGHLIGHTS

- New framework for regulation developed
- Focus on awarding organisations being accountable
- *Register of Regulated Qualifications* published
- *Conditions of Recognition and Criteria* published.

6. *Annual Qualifications Market Report* (May 2011): [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-25-annual-qualifications-market-report.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-25-annual-qualifications-market-report.pdf)

7. *Education Bill 2010-11*: <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/education.html>

change one of our statutory objectives. We have been developing our ways of working and strengthening our links to teams throughout the organisation who support our work in Northern Ireland.

We have worked closely with our fellow regulator, CCEA, to ensure stakeholders were informed about the changes in the regulatory arrangements and we have maintained, and will continue regular contact with them to share information and discuss policy matters in which we have a mutual interest.

Over the last year we have laid the foundations for our new role as a statutory regulator, accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Parliament. We have consulted on and shaped our regulatory philosophy and approach. We have made substantial progress in drawing up our new qualifications regulatory framework which will play a vital role in securing our objectives.

The new regulatory philosophy and approach will place the responsibility and accountability for the quality and standards of qualifications firmly with the awarding organisations we regulate. We have set out our plans for a risk-based approach; we will retain a close interest in high-volume, high-stakes vocational qualifications but we will not scrutinise each and every qualification. We will assure ourselves through the recognition process that each awarding organisation is capable of awarding high-quality qualifications. Then we will hold it to account for those qualifications and monitor their compliance with the *General Conditions of Recognition*.<sup>8</sup>

To support our new approach, RITS was developed and implemented this year, on schedule and well under budget. It has enabled electronic information sharing with awarding organisations and between teams in Ofqual, helping us to work more efficiently. Further enhancements to RITS will support our new approach to regulation.

We regulate to secure that qualifications are valid, reliable and comparable and are provided

efficiently. Different versions of the same qualification provided by different awarding organisations must be comparable in particular so that there is no incentive for centres and learners to choose qualifications they believe are easier or provide higher grades. Colleges, universities and employers need to be able to trust that qualifications provide a fair and accurate indication and record of a learner's knowledge, skills, understanding and level of achievement at the point of assessment.



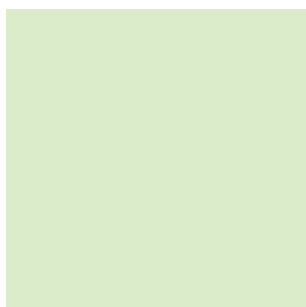
8. *General Conditions of Recognition* (May 2011): [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-16-general-conditions-of-recognition.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-16-general-conditions-of-recognition.pdf)

# Making sure vocational qualifications are fit for purpose in Northern Ireland

**There are 120 recognised awarding organisations that offer regulated qualifications in Northern Ireland; three are indigenous to Northern Ireland and one is based in the Republic of Ireland. Organisations wishing to become recognised as awarding organisations are required to go through a thorough checking and vetting process. Both the Open College Network Northern Ireland, based in Belfast, and the Accounting Technicians Ireland, based in Dublin, went through these rigorous processes to achieve recognition as new awarding organisations this year.**

ensure ILM was quality assuring centres in line with our regulatory requirements. Additional monitoring activities of other awarding organisations operating in Northern Ireland included IMI Awards Ltd, an awarding organisation for the retail motor industry, BCS which is the Chartered Institute for IT, and FDQ, an organisation providing qualifications for the food and drink manufacturing industry. We looked at these organisations because they offer specialised vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

As a result of this monitoring of awarding organisations, they developed action plans setting out the corrective actions we required. Reports on



Over the past year we have carried out systematic checks on a number of awarding organisations providing vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland to make sure they were meeting our regulatory requirements. Our initial focus has been on the larger awarding organisations because of the high volume of vocational qualifications they offer in Northern Ireland. We have monitored Edexcel, OCR and City & Guilds. As part of the City & Guilds monitoring activity we visited the Northern Ireland regional office to check that quality assurance responsibilities devolved to them were conducted appropriately.

We have also monitored the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM), a management awarding organisation, and conducted two centre visits in Northern Ireland to

all our awarding organisation monitoring activities are made public on our website.<sup>9</sup>

We monitored individual qualifications taken by learners in Northern Ireland, including vocational qualifications in applied science and manufacturing engineering, offered across 19 centres in Northern Ireland. In relation to the engineering monitoring we found that internal assessment was inconsistent across colleges and training providers, and that assessment methods did not provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate their abilities to meet the full range of requirements. We subsequently required the awarding organisations concerned to put actions in place to address these inconsistencies.

We also reported on the findings from the monitoring of vocational qualifications in information and communication technology (ICT) offered in Northern Ireland, where we found inconsistencies in guided learning hours, assessment criteria and comparability of demand across units impacting on standards. This monitoring concerned only one awarding organisation with whom we agreed an action plan to address the issues concerned.

We carried out some preliminary explorations into vocational qualifications in other sectors, including construction, electrical and plumbing and hairdressing. We will determine whether to apply further scrutiny to these based on these preliminary findings. We have also made recommendations for the improvement of vocational qualifications where they do not provide a sufficient progression route for learners, for example in the Early Years sector where we found that the Diploma for the Children and

One of the enquiries we handled locally was an investigation into whether the potential use of Northern Ireland colloquialisms in a British Sign Language qualification may have affected the external assessment of candidates. We were satisfied that candidates would not be disadvantaged if colloquialisms were used, as the assessment process excluded the use of colloquialisms.

Other issues raised in Northern Ireland and which led to investigations being conducted across England and Northern Ireland concerned a Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Diploma in Construction and an NVQ Diploma in Electrical Engineering. In the case of the Construction Diploma the concern was around additional guided learning hours and the perceived burden this may place on centres. This case is currently being reviewed. In relation to the NVQ Diploma, concern was raised by further education colleges in Northern Ireland about the



Young People's Workforce qualification did not adequately support learner progression to higher education. As this scrutiny focused initially on learners in England we had discussions with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council who confirmed that the equivalent Northern Ireland qualification did not have learner progression concerns as these had been addressed in the development stage of this vocational qualification.

We have established protocols to follow up on queries and investigations raised in Northern Ireland either to address concerns locally or raise them with colleagues at our head office in Coventry as they may have an impact beyond Northern Ireland.

amount of direct workplace evidence now required for this new QCF qualification. We identified that the level of direct workplace evidence was appropriate and concluded that this vocational qualification was fit for purpose.

Also, over the last year some further education colleges in Northern Ireland told us of their concern about changes to the internal verification systems of an awarding organisation. Following enquiries locally the case was passed to our vocational qualifications standards team in Coventry to follow this up centrally as the awarding organisation concerned had learners in both England and Northern Ireland. We are now seeking assurances from the governing body concerned that their proposed approach will not impact negatively on colleges or their learners.

# Public confidence and awareness

**Good progress is being made on raising the awareness of independent regulation and of our new role in Northern Ireland. We carried out a comprehensive programme of briefings to key stakeholders in the early part of the year to set out the changes to our role. We briefed senior management within each of the six Northern Ireland regional colleges of further education, met with training providers representing the private sector and set out our new role to the SSCs. We maintained regular contact with each of the main awarding organisations operating in Northern Ireland and we met quarterly with the Northern Ireland Awarding Body Forum.**

We worked with a number of initiatives established to support vocational qualification users in Northern Ireland, including VQ Day, the

VQ Reform Conference and the Northern Ireland Apprentice of the Year Awards.

We had visits by our then Chief Executive Isabel Nisbet to Translink in October 2010 and in November 2010 to Southern Regional College, where we were delighted to be joined by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning.

The visit to Translink focused on the new state-of-the-art Rail Operations Training Academy (ROTA), which designs and delivers bespoke training programmes tailored to meet the needs of all Translink operational staff.



**Left to right:**

Isabel Nisbet, former Ofqual Chief Executive; Barry Love, Translink trainer and assessor; Richard Wheater, Northern Ireland Skills Director, GoSkills Sector Skills Council.



**Left to right:**

Joan Gormley, Ofqual; Dolores Kelly, former Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning; Brian Doran, Director, Southern Regional College.

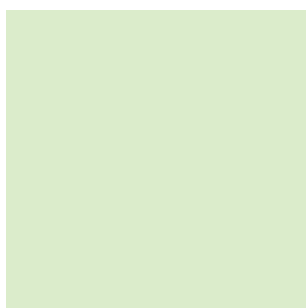
# Economic regulation

**The number of achievements in regulated qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has increased year on year for the last five years, from 13.2 million in 2005/6 to 15.5 million in 2009/10. Just 141 qualifications accounted for over half of these achievements.**

The qualifications that we regulate are generally provided through a market. This is a common model for the provision of large-scale public

provision of qualifications and value for money for Northern Ireland learners.

In January to March 2011, 61 awarding organisations recorded qualification achievements in Northern Ireland. We know this is not the whole picture as we have identified 120 awarding organisations that offer vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland, but it does give us a baseline upon which to build our data on awarding



services, but is unusual in this particular sector. In many of our economic competitors, public examinations in particular are controlled by the Government.

Healthy competitive markets drive innovation, efficiency and consumer choice. Healthy markets include incentives, if necessary backed up by regulation, to drive desirable behaviours and to discourage moves against the public interest. The qualifications market(s) can only be described as healthy if standards and public confidence are maintained. As we seek to secure efficiency and value for money, we will make sure that we take into account the need for the market to secure standards and public confidence.

The market in England where we regulate all qualifications is different from the market in Northern Ireland where we regulate only vocational qualifications. There are differences in legislation, in policy and in funding systems. We have to understand the specific market in Northern Ireland to be able to secure the efficient

organisations and the vocational qualifications they offer in Northern Ireland. We have asked all awarding organisations offering vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland to provide us with data in 2011/12. In next year's report we will be able to detail the Northern Ireland market in full.

We are in the process of scoping a research project to allow us to understand better the drivers of a healthy market for qualifications to see if any additional regulatory measures are required.

Regulation must protect against commercial behaviours driving down standards while promoting efficiency. Building on these principles and on three studies that we published on aspects of our role as an economic regulator,<sup>10</sup> we carried out a major consultation on our plans for economic regulation and fee-capping powers. A summary of the responses was published in March 2011.<sup>11</sup> Four of these responses were received from organisations in Northern Ireland.

10. Developing a framework for economic regulation: [www.ofqual.gov.uk/how-we-regulate/138-economic-regulation/325-developing-a-framework-for-economic-regulation](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/how-we-regulate/138-economic-regulation/325-developing-a-framework-for-economic-regulation)

11. Analysis of consultation responses (February 2011): [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-04-08-Analysis-of-consultation-responses-for-Ofqual.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-04-08-Analysis-of-consultation-responses-for-Ofqual.pdf)

We will be publishing our response to this feedback in July 2011.

As part of our overall approach to securing efficiency, we imposed new requirements on awarding organisations to provide information that will encourage schools and colleges and other purchasers of qualifications to make more effective purchasing decisions. These were part of the recognition conditions we published on 16th May 2011. They also include new measures to increase price transparency and the clarity of information provided to learners, purchasers and other users of qualifications about the qualifications and associated products and services offered by awarding organisations. The conditions also require awarding organisations to manage any conflict of interest arising from their wider business activities or as a result of other work undertaken by their employees. Awarding organisations must also have a clear rationale for where qualifications are sold together with other products and services.



## The Ofqual team

### Leadership role

**Our first year as a statutory body has been marked by significant leadership changes and the recruitment of fresh talent. A new Board was appointed at the start of the year. As required by the legislation, a member for Northern Ireland, Ray Coughlin, was appointed through the public appointment process.**

One of the first actions the Board took was to establish a Regulation of Vocational Qualifications in Northern Ireland Committee and to appoint the Northern Ireland Board member, Ray Coughlin, as the Chair of this Committee. Two other Board members, Dame Sandra Burslem, Ofqual's Deputy Chair, and Maggie Galliers, Principal of Leicester College in England, were also appointed to the Northern Ireland Committee. A further six independent members from Northern Ireland were recruited through public advertising. The Northern Ireland members bring to the Committee a breadth of experience and knowledge of the local education, training and skills landscape, coming from further and higher education, private training, public sector training and the learning and development sectors.

Kathleen Tattersall, the first Chair and Chief Regulator, stepped down in July 2010. At the end of February 2011 Isabel Nisbet, Ofqual's first Chief Executive, left for a new position.

On 1st March 2011 Glenys Stacey, previously the Chief Executive of Standards for England, joined as our new Chief Executive. Dame Sandra Burslem, the Deputy Chair, has stepped in to provide continuity whilst a new Chair is appointed. The Government has meanwhile indicated its intention to combine the roles of Chief Executive and Chief Regulator, which has the agreement of DEL and DE, and provisions to achieve this are included in the current Education Bill.

## Capability and capacity

During our first year we have invested significantly in establishing and building our regulatory skills and competence to reflect the wider role we now have as the regulator of all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Those members of staff working directly on regulation received intensive training and support. All staff had the opportunity and were encouraged to learn more about regulation, and to learn from other regulators and from our own growing experience of regulation in practice. We will continue to invest in training and development. We are also building contacts and networks with regulators in other sectors.

## The team in Northern Ireland

Our team in Northern Ireland has operated from its base in Belfast since May 1996, though its remit has been changed and widened since Ofqual was established as the regulator of all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Our expertise remains in place and is of great value to the organisation. With a wealth of experience in regulation behind them, our Northern Ireland team is sensitive to the differences in policies, skills priorities and funding strategies between Northern Ireland and England. With the support of corporate services from our headquarters in Coventry, including Human Resources, IT and Finance, the team is integrally linked to the full range of regulatory services. There are a wide range of corporate functions that support the regulation of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland, leaving the local team to focus on its principal role of regulating to make sure that vocational qualifications meet the needs of Northern Ireland stakeholders, including learners, employers and the public more widely.



### Left to right:

Back row: Maggie Galliers, Ofqual Board member; Therese Rogan, Northern Ireland Director of Foundation Degree Forward; Trevor Carson, Director of LSDA Northern Ireland; Dr Catherine O'Mullan, Deputy Director, Support and Development at Northern Regional College; Elsbeth Rea, Professional Advisor with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

### Front row:

Sandra Burslem, Ofqual Board Deputy Chair; Ray Coughlin, Northern Ireland Committee Chair; Donna Sheerin, Regional Director at First4Skills; Justin Edwards, Director, Curriculum and Student Services at Southern Regional College.

# Section 3



## Regulation in Northern Ireland – entering a new era

Since 1997 and up to the establishment of Ofqual in 2010, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) regulated NVQs in Northern Ireland. The regulation of all general (academic) qualifications and all other vocational qualifications apart from NVQs was the responsibility of CCEA.

The establishment of Ofqual, with its additional responsibilities for the regulation of all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland meant that some aspects of CCEA's role were to be transferred to us. To inform the implementation of the new arrangements the two regulators consulted stakeholders about how the new arrangements

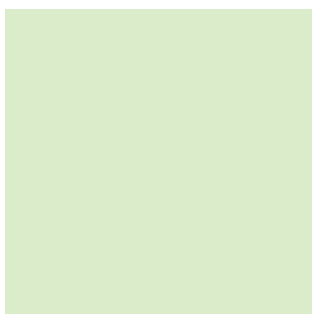
### HIGHLIGHTS

- Northern Ireland Board Member appointed
- Northern Ireland Committee established
- Transfer of responsibilities from CCEA to Ofqual
- First meeting with the Northern Ireland Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee.

would affect them.

Stakeholders were strongly of the view that CCEA and Ofqual should work together to minimise confusion and potential duplication in the roles and responsibilities of the two organisations.

Accordingly, the two organisations drew up a joint transition plan and kept all those involved with vocational qualifications informed of developments. In addition, the relevant teams from each of the two regulators have worked



together to agree and implement an effective handover of functions, a joint communications strategy, and protocols for exchange of information and ongoing collaboration in areas of shared responsibility and mutual interest.

Within her first week of appointment in March 2011 our new Chief Executive, Glenys Stacey, came to Northern Ireland to meet CCEA. The two regulators in Northern Ireland are committed to the principle of good communication with each other and with others to ensure users of the system understand their respective roles and can have confidence in them.

## The Regulation of Vocational Qualifications in Northern Ireland Committee

**To help the team in its work in Northern Ireland our Board set up the Regulation of Vocational Qualifications in Northern Ireland Committee. This important Committee, which met for the first time in November 2010, provides us with strategic advice on the implementation and impact of the regulation of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The Committee keeps us informed on stakeholders perspectives, and provides regular feedback from Northern Ireland on policies and ways of working as they are being developed. The Committee also provides a very useful forum for debate and discussion.**

The Committee met formally on two occasions during 2010/11. In its first meeting the members heard about the wider work of Ofqual and the role of the Northern Ireland team. Members heard from the Deputy Chair and discussed the priorities and agenda for the coming year.

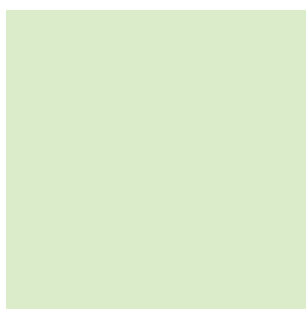
The second meeting heard from DEL officials who outlined the key policies and programmes of work relating to vocational qualifications, stimulating discussion on how these might impact on regulation and vice versa.

A further meeting provided an opportunity for Committee members to meet all members of our Board and to hear from the Minister for Employment and Learning who was attending the meeting.

Members also came together to discuss the consultation on our new approach to regulation and to provide comment on other consultations.

## Meeting our equality duties

**As a designated body under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we have statutory responsibilities to consider how our policies might adversely impact on different equality groups and how the policies might be adapted to better promote equality of opportunity for learners from the specific equality groups in Northern Ireland.**



We first consulted on our new approach to regulation and ways of working in December 2009. Since equality groups, in particular those representing disabled people, identified issues of potential impact in this previous consultation, the proposals were revised and a new set of more detailed proposals were consulted on in October 2010, in the public consultation, *From Transition to Transformation*.<sup>12</sup> As part of this consultation, respondents were invited to comment on issues impacting on equality informed by a summary Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) consultation document.

All key stakeholders in Northern Ireland were advised of the consultations and offered briefings. A number of stakeholders responded and briefings were provided to those who requested them. A total of 77 responses were received and a report on the findings and the actions we will take will be published this summer.

During 2011/12 we will be revising our Equality Scheme and preparing to submit a new Scheme to the Northern Ireland Equality Commission.

## Developing our relationships

**We have a long association with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), spanning more than 14 years. The relationship is maintained primarily through regular meetings at an operational and strategic level and these are underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding signed in January 2011.**



We are answerable to the Northern Ireland Assembly for ensuring that all resources available are used properly and provide value for money.

We do this by accounting for an annual budget agreed with DEL and by presenting this report. We will build on this relationship and review how we account to the Assembly in discussion with



Ofqual Board, Regulation of Vocational Qualifications in Northern Ireland Committee, Ofqual Executive Board and Danny Kennedy, former Minister for Employment and Learning, on the occasion of the Ofqual Board meeting in Belfast in January 2011

<sup>12</sup> *From Transition to Transformation* (2010): <http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/from-transition-to-transformation>

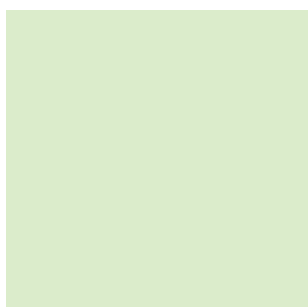
DEL and the Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee.

Our Board is committed to holding one of its meetings each year in Northern Ireland. In January 2011 our Board and the Northern Ireland Committee met the former Minister for Employment and Learning, Danny Kennedy, and heard him speak of how important the work of Ofqual was in Northern Ireland in checking that vocational qualifications are robust, fit for purpose and maintain public confidence.

## Meeting with the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning

We were pleased to be able to meet the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for Employment and Learning in February 2011. We set out how the regulatory system works to maintain standards and promote confidence in regulated vocational qualifications.

This was a first visit to Stormont for our Deputy Chair, Sandra Burslem, who was accompanied by



Danny Kennedy said:

"I recognise and appreciate the value and worth of the regulatory work of Ofqual. A key element of my Department's strategy is based on ensuring that the skills and qualifications needed by employers in Northern Ireland are identified and these needs met. A regulated system of vocational qualifications, in which everyone can have confidence, is a key ingredient of this approach."

Although our day-to-day work impacts less on DE policies and programmes, we maintain sufficient contact to ensure an open dialogue on any issues affecting the use of vocational qualifications in schools. DE officials also attended briefings on our consultations and on our approach to regulation and the systems we have in place to manage these.

Ray Coughlin, the Northern Ireland Committee Chair and Joan Gormley, Head of Northern Ireland Operations. We had a good exchange with a wide range of members and we were delighted to accept an invitation from the Chair to return to the Committee at a future date.



# Reform of vocational qualifications

**Over the course of the last five years vocational qualifications have undergone substantial reform. The Northern Ireland Vocational Qualification Reform Programme (NIVQRP) Board was established as part of a major cross-UK programme of reform of the vocational qualification system. The broad aim of the programme was to increase the relevance, value and flexibility of vocational qualifications by involving employers in the development and planning process.**

Many awarding organisations worked hard during the year to meet the expectations of the Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme. This involved them demonstrating to us that they could meet the requirements of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and designing their vocational qualifications so they were unitised and credit-based. By February 2011 there were over 7,500 QCF qualifications.



## Left to right:

Joan Gormley, Ofqual; Roger McCune, Regulation Manager CCEA; Sir Reg Empey, former Minister for Employment and Learning; Tony Monaghan, Education Liaison Officer Bombardier Aerospace; Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Chief Executive Belfast Metropolitan College; Dr Tony Barnhill, University of Ulster.

In turn we undertook a significant volume of activity to recognise organisations to operate in accordance with the QCF and to accredit their new qualifications.

When interim Ofqual, together with our fellow regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland, published the regulatory arrangements for the QCF it made a commitment to evaluate the arrangements in practice. It undertook the evaluation over a two year period. It published an interim report in January 2010 and the final report in June 2011. We highlighted in the report the lessons that should inform future qualification reform programmes and on which we can draw when we develop a single framework to which all regulated qualifications can be referenced.

As members of the NIVQRP Board we worked alongside partners in Government, with CCEA and with representatives from training and education, skills and employment, careers and awarding organisations to oversee the reforms being implemented in Northern Ireland. In June 2010 the successful ongoing implementation of such an ambitious reform programme was highlighted at a VQ Conference held in Belfast with an audience representing a wide range of interests in vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

# Celebrating vocational qualifications

**Learners and other users of vocational qualifications are at the heart of our objectives to promote confidence in the qualification system and promote awareness of the benefits of vocational qualifications. As the regulator for all vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland it is important that we join learners and their employers to celebrate their achievements. Such occasions provide us with an important opportunity to promote the benefits of regulated vocational qualifications and to raise awareness of the range of regulated qualifications available.**

## VQ Day

VQ Day was held on 23rd June 2010 across Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland to celebrate the achievement of the millions of people, of all ages, who gain a vocational qualification every year. The awards, organised in Northern Ireland by DEL, were a tremendous success. Northern Ireland received the highest number of nominations of the four nations. We were pleased to be able to contribute to this by chairing the steering group and being part of the judging panel. The event itself also afforded an opportunity for Kathleen Tattersall, our Chair at the time, to address a large cross-sector audience on the importance of regulated vocational qualifications to learners and to employers.

“The VQ Learner of the Year Award demonstrates the talent, skill, commitment and effort of individuals who are shining examples of excellent achievement in a vocational field.”

(Kathleen Tattersall, OBE)

## Northern Ireland Apprentice of the Year 2010

The Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Awards also offered an important platform for us to speak about how regulated vocational qualifications enhance the apprenticeship experience. The Apprentice of the Year competition showcases excellence in apprenticeship training and last year over 100 learners were nominated for the prestigious title of Northern Ireland's Apprentice of the Year 2010. The nominations were received from virtually every sector and a wide cross-section of further education and training providers. As Chair of the judging panel, Joan Gormley, Head of Operations for Ofqual in Northern Ireland, addressed the audience to stress how impressed she was by the excellent partnerships between learners, their employers and their training providers that she saw when visiting apprentices in their place of employment.



### Left to right:

Stephen Nolan radio presenter; Joan Gormley, Ofqual; Sir Reg Empey former Minister for Employment and Learning.

## Land and Property Services Awards at Stormont

Joan Gormley joined John Wilkinson, Chief Executive of Land and Property Services (LPS), to celebrate with staff who completed a range of vocational qualifications including management, customer service and chartered surveying. LPS is an executive agency of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel and has been investing in staff training as part of a significant transformation programme. In her keynote speech, Joan Gormley reflected on our own transformation and she applauded the agency's commitment to staff training to help prepare teams for the upheaval caused by transformation.

## Vocational qualifications working for learners

**There are many examples of learners achieving great success through vocational qualifications and Northern Ireland's participation in WorldSkills London 2011 highlights the exceptional talent we have across a wide range of vocational areas.**

Northern Ireland had its best ever performance this year in the selection for the UK Squad for Worldskills, the largest international skills competition being held in London in October 2011. The 14 young people selected for the squad make up just under a sixth of the squad, a higher proportion than any other part of the UK.

Mark Woods, who is on the UK squad for wall and floor tiling also came first in this year's Skillbuild Northern Ireland competition, and won the trophy for Best Overall Skillbuild NI Young Apprentice 2011. Mark is following in a family tradition. His brother, Trevor, won the bronze medal in joinery at



**Mark Woods**

WorldSkills Calgary in 2009. Mark is a true advocate of how vocational qualifications can get you to where you want to be in your chosen career. His advice to other young people considering a vocational career is:

"Definitely give it a try and take every chance you get".

That is a sentiment that is echoed by Stacey Sharples who claimed the title of Northern Ireland Apprentice of the Year at the annual awards



**Stacey Sharples**

ceremony in May 2010.

At the time Stacey was employed by Mango, a major fashion retailer with a franchise in House of Fraser, Belfast. Since then she has moved into the world of training and she is now working as a trainer in the very company where she gained her own awards. This dramatic change means everything to Stacey who wants to help other learners achieve the great success she did.

Another highlight for learners in Northern Ireland came when John McAnally, studying at South Eastern Regional College, won the Young Learner of the Year after achieving NVQ Level 3 and Advanced Technical Certificate in Plant Maintenance. Ian McIlveen, studying at Southern Regional College won the Learner of the Year (25 years and over) after gaining an ILM Level 5 in Management.

They are seen here at the award ceremony with Sir Reg Empey, former Minister for Employment and Learning (winners Ian McIlveen and John McAnally), Kathleen Tattersall former Chair and Chief Regulator of Ofqual and Linda Bryans, TV presenter.



Ian McIlveen and John McAnally

## Vocational qualifications working for employers

During the year we met a number of employers in Northern Ireland to ask them how vocational qualifications were working within different sectors and whether they were fit for purpose and meeting their needs. The employers we met told us they had excellent partnerships in place with their awarding organisations, sector representatives and training providers. Using the Register to search for qualifications they were able to ensure their training was matched to relevant qualifications that met the needs of their organisation.

Employers cited the importance of the role of the external verifiers who gave them confidence that quality systems were in place. They also highlighted the importance of having flexible arrangements for training to suit shift and part-time work patterns and cited many examples where their provider partners would be prepared to deliver training or carry out assessments at both a time and a place to suit the employer and the individual learner.

The following examples show some of the benefits of investing in vocational qualifications highlighted by Northern Ireland employers.

## Schrader Electronics

Schrader Electronics needed to improve its production efficiency so invested in improving the skills of 60 production operatives to NVQ Level 2 in Performing Manufacturing Operations. An unexpected challenge to Schrader was the fact that 35 per cent of the participants were foreign nationals whose first language was not English. Schrader invested in the translation of training materials into Polish and Slovak to ensure the programme was not hindered. Savings in excess of £1m were attributed to the results of the training. The total cost of the programme was £58,000. The return on investment within the first year was ten times greater than the investment, proving excellent value for money.

Additional outcomes included the improvement in housekeeping standards and the flexibility of the learners and their willingness to develop further by seizing opportunities to be trained on different machines to increase their ability to move between different departments.



**Paul Gardner, Kerrie Quigley, Conor Drumm of Schrader Electronics.**



## NACCO Materials Handling Group

NACCO Materials Handling Group designs, engineers, manufactures, sells and services a comprehensive line of lift trucks and parts which they market globally. At the start of 2009, NACCO, like all companies, faced an unprecedented recession but rather than reduce manpower the company embarked on an extensive training programme to improve the skills of their workforce. The programme was designed around the NVQ in Business Improvement and included project management and problem-solving training to enable them to tackle a 43 per cent fault rate in trucks supplied to one of their main dealers. The target to reduce the fault rate to ten per cent has now been met and over 30 per cent of the workforce gained a regulated qualification. The strong leadership and investment in training through the recession period raised trust and confidence across the company and NACCO have emerged from recession with a more highly skilled workforce ready to address this upturn and giving them an edge over competitors.

## Mivan Group

The Antrim-based Mivan Group is one of the world's leading specialist construction companies and celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2010. Mivan is involved in interiors and themed facades and is a respected market leader in the cruise ship outfitting market. Dedicated specialist joinery employees who have completed their NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Joinery assisted Mivan to secure and complete over £3.5m in cruise ship work during 2010.

To acknowledge the achievements of various individuals and departments that have made a significant contribution to the company's performance Mivan held its first Recognition Evening in September 2010. The highlight of the evening was the Mivan's Apprenticeship Joinery Programme which is conducted in-house in partnership with Springvale Training Ltd enabling Mivan to fast-track individuals through the programme where appropriate.



**Michael Hogan of the Mivan Group.**

# Section 4



## New approaches to regulation

**The establishment of Ofqual in statutory form both facilitates and requires a new approach to regulation. In some areas we have already transformed the way we regulate and in other areas we are well on the way to transformation.**

Qualifications in Northern Ireland, Wales and England are awarded by awarding organisations, a mixture of limited companies, charities, learned bodies, craft and industry associations and employers.

This system offers variety and choice and room for innovation. However, with qualifications, learners do not have the same protection as they do when

purchasing most consumer goods; they cannot send their qualifications back if they do not do what they promised. Independent regulation of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland is therefore necessary to protect learners, provide the public with the assurance that regulated qualifications are valuable and keep their value over time and check that qualifications are providing value for money.

# How we regulate

**In June 2010 we published the results of our first major consultation, *Regulating for Confidence in Standards*.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the organisations and individuals who took part welcomed the establishment of an independent regulator and our proposed strategic approach to regulation. There were requests for greater detail and clarification, points that were addressed in our subsequent major consultation exercise.**

In October 2010 we issued three consultations

- *From Transition to Transformation*
- *Economic Regulation and The Fee-capping Process*
- *Complaints and Appeals for Regulated Qualifications.*

We received 138 responses in total and published an analysis of consultation responses prepared by YouGov<sup>14</sup> in February 2011 which covered all three consultations.

In Northern Ireland we ran parallel consultation exercises with our stakeholders to ensure that local messages and opinions formed part of the consultations. Ten organisations from Northern Ireland responded to the consultations and in the main they and all the respondents were supportive of the approach to regulation set out in the consultations. They welcomed a risk-based, organisation-level regulatory system and supported the conditions and criteria set out in the consultation as appropriate for a well-regulated system. In the main they also supported the establishment of a single over-arching regulated qualifications framework, providing greater clarity for all stakeholders.

## Why we regulate

- Users need to be able to make informed choices between qualifications
- Without regulation, users might be tempted to choose qualifications for the wrong reasons (for example, because they are cheaper or users think they may be easier)
- Without regulation, awarding organisations (suppliers) might be tempted to compromise quality for commercial reasons
- External pressures may affect confidence in qualifications
- The public needs to be assured that standards and rigour are being maintained
- Users need to be assured that the system is offering value for money to them and the taxpayer.

In *From Transition to Transformation*, we set out how, in line with the ASCL Act, we will regulate awarding organisations rather than each qualification. We will maintain a close interest in high-volume, high-stakes qualifications such as those required for licence to practice, but we will not scrutinise each and every regulated qualification. We will strike a new balance

13. *Regulating for Confidence in Standards* (2009): [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2009-12-11-consultation-regulating-for-confidence-in-standards.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2009-12-11-consultation-regulating-for-confidence-in-standards.pdf)

14. *Analysis of consultation responses for Ofqual* (February 2011): [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-04-08-Analysis-of-consultation-responses-for-Ofqual.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/11-04-08-Analysis-of-consultation-responses-for-Ofqual.pdf)

between the review of individual qualifications, regulating awarding organisations, and maintaining and driving qualifications standards. Having consulted extensively last year we are now implementing this approach. In Northern Ireland a workshop was held for key stakeholders, including indigenous awarding organisation representatives to provide this information at a local level.

Our approach places the responsibility and accountability for quality and standards of qualifications firmly with the recognised awarding organisations who award them. We will monitor qualifications and bring together evidence from a variety of sources about risks and concerns relating to regulated qualifications, putting ourselves in a strong position to take evidence-based, proportionate and targeted regulatory action.

At the centre of our qualifications regulatory arrangements are our *General Conditions of Recognition*<sup>15</sup> which will come into force in July 2011. These conditions set out the requirements that all awarding organisations must meet if they are recognised to offer regulated qualifications.

They sit alongside other regulatory arrangements which together are designed to implement a risk-based approach to regulatory investigation and action. Once an awarding organisation is recognised against our published criteria, it is required to meet our general conditions, and we can take regulatory action where it has not done so. We are consulting on and will shortly be finalising our policy on taking regulatory action. We will publish our fee-capping policy separately.

## The year ahead

Our first year as the regulator for vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland has been eventful. During our first year we worked to establish our role and to develop our new functions. Of course we are still a relatively new body. Our role in Northern Ireland did not commence in full until April 2010. We do not

claim that in 12 months we have become everything that we want to become. We can report, however, that we have successfully established Ofqual as a fully functioning, independent statutory body with the systems in place and the regulatory framework to fulfil our statutory objectives.

We still have challenges to meet and these will feature very much in our work going forward. We need to know more about the Northern Ireland market. We do not yet have sufficient data on vocational qualifications used in Northern Ireland. To address this, we have instructed all awarding organisations that we will expect regional data to be provided to us in the future so that we can measure and report on the vocational qualifications market. This data will inform us of the current qualification landscape in Northern Ireland in terms of qualifications offered and achievements gained.

We have been very visible to the stakeholders who needed to know about our role in Northern Ireland and about the changes we are making to the way we will regulate in the future. We will be looking to engage with higher education more and we are seeking further representation from this sector on our Northern Ireland Committee.

We have had excellent opportunities to meet with learners through our involvement in the Apprenticeship of the Year Awards, VQ Learner of the Year Awards and visits to colleges and employers; but more engagement is also planned through new learner panels to highlight and debate issues important to them.

Our focus will remain on promoting public confidence in the qualifications we regulate in Northern Ireland and on making sure that they meet the needs of learners, employers and the wider public.

15. *General Conditions of Recognition* (May 2011): [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-16-general-conditions-of-recognition.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2011-05-16-general-conditions-of-recognition.pdf)



## Statutory objectives in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009

1. The qualifications standards objective is to secure that regulated qualifications:
  - a. give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding, and
  - b. indicate a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable regulated qualifications.

(The current Education Bill proposes an amendment to the qualifications standards objective, with commencement expected by the end of this year.)

2. The assessments standards objective is not applicable to Northern Ireland

The assessments standards objective is to promote the development and implementation of regulated assessment arrangements, which:

- a. give a reliable indication of achievement
  - b. indicate a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable assessments.
3. The public confidence objective is to promote public confidence in regulated qualifications and regulated assessment arrangements.
4. The awareness objective is to promote awareness and understanding of:
  - a. the range of regulated qualifications available,
  - b. the benefits of regulated qualifications to learners, employers and institutions within the higher education sector, and
  - c. the benefits to awarding organisations of being recognised.
5. The efficiency objective is to secure that regulated qualifications are provided efficiently and in particular that any relevant sums payable to a body in respect of a regulated qualification represent value for money.

# Achievements against statutory objectives

We are providing in this report an assessment of the extent to which we have met our statutory objectives. This is provided in the following tables. We have not reported on our assessments standards objective, as it is not relevant to our work in Northern Ireland. We will do so in our separate report to Parliament. To increase our data on vocational qualifications used in Northern Ireland we have instructed all awarding organisations that, we will expect regional data submissions in the future.

**Statutory objective**

The qualifications standards objective – to secure that regulated qualifications give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding, and indicate a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable regulated qualifications.

**Assessment**

A key focus of our regulatory arrangements is to secure the standards and validity of qualifications and we have been tightening our regulatory arrangements this year with the consultations on new criteria and conditions. To ensure Northern Ireland views were incorporated into these consultations, five consultation events took place in Northern Ireland to encourage key stakeholders to respond. This will put us in a stronger position to take action on standards where we need to in future.

There are 15,000 regulated qualifications of which 8,812 are vocational qualifications so we have to target our resources accordingly.

Our assessment is that this was a successful year for our standards work. The new regulatory approach we are putting in place, and the proposal to strengthen our standards objective, will require us to reconsider how we approach our standards work in future. We do not underestimate the challenges ahead. Through our extensive stakeholder network in Northern Ireland we will input into Ofqual’s vocational qualifications monitoring plans to ensure vocational qualifications offered in Northern Ireland are fit for purpose.

### Statutory objective

The public confidence objective – to promote public confidence in regulated qualifications and regulated assessment arrangements.

### Assessment

The confidence objective is delivered through a communications strategy and business plan. Main outputs included:

- We monitored 27 recognised awarding organisations of which 18 are operational in Northern Ireland.
- We published 14 monitoring reports on our website and there are 13 reports awaiting publication.
- Awarding organisations have produced action plans to address identified compliances and these are currently being monitored.
- We published reports on eight vocational qualifications and carried out some preliminary explorations to ascertain whether vocational qualifications monitoring was required.

Whilst work is ongoing in England to eliminate malpractice in high stakes vocational qualifications, there have been no reported cases of malpractice or maladministration in Northern Ireland during this year.

## Statutory objective

The awareness objective – to promote awareness and understanding of the range of regulated qualifications available, the benefits of regulated qualifications to learners, employers and institutions within the higher education sector, and the benefits of recognition to bodies awarding or authenticating qualifications.

## Assessment

The awareness objective is also delivered through the communications strategy, the business plan and the Northern Ireland communication plan.

This was Ofqual's first year of operation in Northern Ireland and as such a joint communication plan was put into place with CCEA to advise key stakeholders of our new role as the independent regulator for vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

Main activities during the year to support the objective have included, but not exhaustively:

- joint communication plan set up with CCEA
- five consultation exercises carried out
- meetings with 12 employers and two employer forums
- meetings with four training providers and four training provider forums
- meetings with six learners engaged in vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland
- individual meetings with the Directors of Northern Ireland's six further education colleges
- contributing speakers to four conferences and events in Northern Ireland
- meeting with five SSC representatives in Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland SSC Alliance Forum
- holding regular meetings with government departments and qualification regulators
- holding regular meetings with awarding organisations in Northern Ireland and providing quarterly input into the Northern Ireland Awarding Body Forum.

In October 2010 we launched our new Register of Regulated Qualifications and in Northern Ireland specific training was provided for Northern Ireland stakeholders. The Register is accessible through our website and enables people to view the full range of regulated qualifications and to use a variety of search functions.

### Statutory objective

The efficiency objective – to secure that regulated qualifications are provided efficiently, and in particular, that any relevant sums payable to a body in respect of a regulated qualification represent value for money.

### Assessment

Healthy competitive markets drive innovation, efficiency and consumer choice. Healthy markets include incentives to drive the right behaviours and to discourage moves in the other direction. The qualifications market(s) can only be described as healthy if standards and public confidence are maintained. This is at the heart of our approach to securing the efficient provision of qualifications and value for money in the fees charged by awarding organisations. Regulation must protect against commercial behaviours driving down standards whilst promoting efficiency.

Building on these principles and three studies we published into aspects of our role as an economic regulator, we carried out a major consultation on our plans for economic regulation and fee-capping powers and the responses were published in March 2011. To ensure Northern Ireland stakeholders' views were taken into consideration five consultation events were held in Northern Ireland which resulted in four Northern Ireland stakeholders responding to this consultation. We will be publishing our response to this feedback this summer.

The recognition conditions published in May 2011 included new requirements on awarding organisations designed to encourage more effective purchasing by centres including measures to increase price transparency and the clarity of information provided to learners, purchasers and other users of qualifications about the qualifications and associated products and services offered in the market. The conditions also require awarding organisations to manage any conflict of interest arising from their wider business activities or as a result of other actions by their employees. Awarding organisations must also have a clear rationale for where qualifications are sold together with other products and services.

We have set up a group to advise on a significant study that will be launching in July to understand the drivers and barriers to innovation in the qualification market. This study will include Northern Ireland.

# Appendix 3

## Summary of our 2010/11 expenditure (Belfast office only)

The expenditure below is the direct cost associated with providing the Belfast office. Our headquarters in Coventry provides support with corporate functions and regulatory services.

### Estimated income and expenditure 2010/11

#### Income

	£000
Funding from DEL	453
<b>Total income</b>	<b>453</b>

#### Expenditure

	£000
Permanent staff	292
Personnel overheads	29
Accommodation	50
IT and communication costs	63
Operational spend	19
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>453</b>



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