

Corporate Plan 2016-19

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Foreword

by the Chair



Amanda Spielman

Amanda Spielman, Chair

I am pleased to present the Ofqual corporate plan for 2016-19.

Our goals in this plan are the same as those we set in 2015, covering standards maintenance and reform in both general and vocational qualifications, as well as our own organisational development.

The context for qualifications always has to be considered carefully; qualifications are the mirror of education, not the education itself. We set our objectives in the light of feedback about how formal assessments influence education.

We are more than halfway through the reform programme covering GCSEs, AS and A levels. Teaching has already begun in English and maths GCSEs and in many new A levels. The first new AS levels will be taken in summer 2016, and early indications are that most schools and colleges will be entering students for some of these.

The government has major programmes to expand and reform apprenticeships, and also to create clear vocational progression routes, and to reform functional skills qualifications. We continue to advise on the related assessment and qualifications issues.

The individual objectives in the plan have been updated to reflect what has already been accomplished. For example, in 2015 we

replaced the unwieldy Qualifications and Credit Framework with a simple descriptive framework. As a result, it is now easier to make qualifications fit users' needs. A new more user-friendly qualification register will also be published in spring 2016.

For many people the most visible aspect of our work in 2016 will be the continuing focus on general qualification reform: accreditation of new qualifications and also decisions about changes to exam reviews and appeals; and about how exam boards will set GCSE grades 9-1.

This plan shows that there is in fact a great deal more going on. We continue to hold awarding organisations to account for the validity of their qualifications, and to take action where we find problems. We continue to work on ways of improving fairness and increasing transparency.

The re-organisation last year into separate directorates for general and vocational qualifications has helped to ensure that Ofqual has not been overwhelmed by qualification reform, but has continued to cover all the objectives in the plan, and has continued to use its resources efficiently.

Lastly, I am delighted that we will soon have a new chief executive, who we expect to join us in late April.

About Ofqual

Our role

Ofqual is the independent qualifications regulator for England.¹ We currently regulate 156 awarding organisations, providing about 13,000 live qualifications.

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

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

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

¹We will cease regulating vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland in late spring 2016. This responsibility will pass to the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Our context

We regulate qualifications within the context of government policy. Over recent years that has required us to reform the structure and assessment arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels and contribute to the reform of functional skills qualifications.

As Government establishes the new Institute for Apprenticeships and develops its approach to technical and professional education, particularly for 16-19 year olds, we will provide advice on the role and effective use of assessment and qualifications to support good education and training outcomes. Similarly, we remain actively engaged in providing advice to Government on policy matters related to GCSEs, AS and A levels and National Assessments, where there is significant change in the arrangements for testing.

The market for qualifications is changing, as Government policy develops and as skills funding decisions are increasingly devolved to employer-led bodies. We continue to take a flexible risk-based approach, targeting the issues of greatest concern to the sustained provision of sufficiently valid qualifications. These are likely to focus on risks to validity, but we will also consider risks to public confidence and fairness.

Our resources

The 2016–21 Comprehensive Spending Review set our core administration and programme funding at £15.5m in 2016/17, down from £15.8m in 2015/16. We will improve our efficiency and maintain management controls to reduce our expenditure. We continue to receive additional programme funding for work on GCSE, AS and A level reform, and for the implementation of the National Reference Test.

The table shows our funding for the remaining period of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m
Administration funding	15.5	15.3	15.0	14.7
Programme funding	4.0	2.4	2.1	2.5
Total	19.5	17.7	17.1	17.2

Goal 1

Regulating and reforming general qualifications

We regulate GCSEs, AS and A levels so that they are sufficiently valid, worthy of public confidence, produce fair and reliable results and have a positive impact on teaching and learning.

In Goal 1, we set out what we will do to regulate both existing general qualifications, and the steps we will take to complete the programme of qualification reform currently underway. We want a smooth, timely introduction for these qualifications.

We also set out our plans for scrutinising National Assessments and maintenance of their standards, as the arrangements here change in the coming years.

Objective 1

Regulate for the validity of general qualifications throughout their lifecycle

What we plan to do 2016–17

1. Ensure grade standards are maintained in GCSEs, AS and A levels.
2. Monitor exam board quality of marking.
3. Evaluate exam boards' mechanisms for quality assurance of marking.
4. Complete work to revise regulations for exam boards' reviews of marking and appeals systems.
5. Research the impact of native speaker candidates on standard setting in A level French, German and Spanish.
6. Formalise our position on inter-subject comparability, following our engagement with stakeholders.

7. Complete the development of the National Reference Test and consider its future role in setting standards in GCSEs.
8. Continue to conduct research into improved methods for the maintenance of standards.
9. Review the effectiveness of our rules on exam board support materials, marketing and teacher events.
10. Compare methods of maintaining performance standards against alternative methods, including those used in other countries.
11. Audit exam boards' responses to allegations of malpractice.
12. Evaluate the potential for statistical methods to spot anomalous scores that may indicate malpractice.
13. Review exam board provision of special considerations and reasonable adjustments and their impact on fair outcomes.
14. Review our regulatory approach to general qualifications, other than GCSEs, AS and A levels.
15. Continue to research factors that affect validity.

What we plan to do in 2017–19

1. Subject to our decision on the future use of the National Reference Test outcomes, make sure the Test is delivered, provides baseline data and introduce requirements for exam board use of the outcomes.
2. Research the impact of native speakers on standard setting in other language A levels.

Outcomes

- General qualifications are sufficiently valid throughout their lifecycle.
- Our regulation supports good assessment and educational outcomes.
- Schools, colleges and students have confidence in exam delivery and quality of marking.
- Standards are maintained.

Objective 2

Oversee the introduction of reformed general qualifications

What we plan to do 2016–17

1. Set regulatory requirements for qualifications to be taught from 2018.
2. Accredite qualifications that will be first taught from 2017.
3. Monitor the delivery of reformed qualifications taught from 2015 and 2016 as they start to be assessed.
4. Monitor exam board standard setting at first awarding.
5. Put in place the regulatory requirements for how exam boards will set GCSE grades 9–1.
6. Continue to provide information to students, teachers and parents, employers, business and other stakeholders about changes to reformed qualifications, using their feedback to tailor our approach.
7. Monitor pricing of reformed qualifications and associated services.
8. Continue a programme of research to evaluate the effect of qualification reforms, including the effect on teaching and learning of separately awarded assessment of practical science at A level.
9. Provide information on the similarities and differences between the GCSEs, AS and A levels available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

What we plan to do in 2017–19

1. Accredite qualifications that will be first taught from 2018.
2. Evaluate the impact of reform in key subjects including the effects of changes to qualification design.
3. Evaluate the reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels, including any equality impacts, using technical evidence, the views of those who study and use qualifications and comparisons with qualifications taken in other countries.
4. Evaluate the impact of the regulatory approach to general qualifications and consider any necessary adjustments to our regulations.

Outcomes

- Reformed qualifications produce sufficiently valid outcomes, meet their stated aims, and standards are aligned across exam boards.
- Stakeholders are aware of and understand the changes we have made, why they are happening and what it means for them.
- The public understand and have confidence in reformed qualifications.

Objective 3

Evaluate the validity of National Assessments

What we plan to do 2016–17

1. Monitor, evaluate and report on risks to validity in National Assessments.
2. Once standards are set for new Key Stage 1 & 2 tests this summer, set out how we will monitor the maintenance of those standards over time.
3. Provide independent scrutiny of the process by which standards are set and maintained.
4. Provide a view of the Standards and Testing Agency's technical advice to Ministers on changes to National Assessment arrangements.
5. Maintain risk-based oversight of National Assessment delivery.

What we plan to do in 2017–19

1. Continue to evaluate the impact of policy changes on the validity of National Assessments.
2. Continue to monitor standards of National Assessments over time.

Outcomes

- Public confidence in National Assessment arrangements is maintained.

Goal 2

Regulating vocational and other qualifications

We have set out previously our focus on regulating for sufficient validity of vocational qualifications and expect awarding organisations to ensure this through each stage of a qualification's lifecycle.

Goal 2 sets out where our attention will be in the coming year, in addition to our ongoing investigations and enforcement in response to intelligence we receive. We will also take a range of steps, and work with stakeholders, to promote public confidence in regulated vocational qualifications.

Objective 4

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

What we plan to do 2016–17

1. Review current Functional Skills qualifications and use this to inform regulatory proposals for their replacements.
2. Scrutinise awarding organisations and their qualifications:
 - used to support occupational entry, including those used as a 'licence to practise' or as part of apprenticeships.
 - at level 6 & 7 eligible for Tier 4 visas.
 - awarded in high volumes, to recognise skills gained on 'short courses' in areas including first aid and health and safety.
 - that are vocational and vocationally-related and taken in schools and colleges, including those changed to meet new performance table requirements.

3. Evaluate how awarding organisations:
 - secure user support for qualifications.
 - set and maintain standards.
 - establish controls in colleges and training providers.
4. Regulate the quality of end-point assessments within reformed apprenticeships where we are asked to do this.
5. Promote validity and comparability by providing awarding organisations with information, including additional guidance on our Conditions.

What we plan to do 2017–19

1. Scrutinise and evaluate qualifications and parts of the qualification lifecycle based on our analysis of information and intelligence about risks to valid assessment.
2. Put in place regulations to support valid assessment in reformed Functional Skills qualifications and scrutinise them before they are made available to colleges and schools.
3. Review the initial impact of removing the Qualifications and Credit Framework rules and introduction of the Regulated Qualifications Framework.

Outcomes

- A greater assurance that vocational qualifications are sufficiently valid and meet employers' needs.
- A greater assurance that other qualifications, including Functional Skills, are sufficiently valid and support good educational and training outcomes.

Objective 5

Promote public confidence in regulated vocational qualifications

What we plan to do 2016–17

1. Improve the usefulness of our Register of Regulated Qualifications, including the range and quality of information provided.
2. Seek employer and other views on high volume qualifications used for occupational entry and apprenticeships in a sample of sectors – beginning with engineering, construction and hair and beauty – and use this to inform our approach to regulating occupational qualifications.
3. Continue to collect and use feedback from qualification users, stakeholders and representative groups.
4. Develop a research programme into vocational assessment.
5. Review evidence of the quality of vocational assessment skills in colleges and other providers, and consider whether action is needed.
6. Enhance our new IT Portal to extend the efficient exchange of information from and to awarding organisations.
7. Align the approaches of qualifications regulators in the devolved administrations to minimise burden on awarding organisations.

What we plan to do 2017–19

1. Continue to seek and use feedback to inform our approach to vocational qualifications.
2. Continue research into vocational assessment.
3. Continue to make the qualifications market easier to understand and navigate

Outcomes

- A stable and evidence-based regulatory environment that encourages and supports awarding organisations to invest in developing and delivering valid qualifications.
- People can more easily access information about qualifications and make better informed choices about them.

Goal 3

Developing our people, resources and systems

To enable our work, we will continue to build our capability and develop our people. Indeed, we are mindful of making effective and efficient use of all our resource, and set out a range of actions we are taking to make the best use of public money.

Objective 6

Build our capability and develop our people

What we plan to do 2016–17

1. Develop our people, particularly to strengthen our assessment and regulatory capability.
2. Complete recruitment to our operating model.
3. Plan for and invest in long term workforce capability.
4. Begin to implement location independent working.
5. Align corporate and personal objectives and improve performance management.
6. Build our bank of external subject experts, particularly in vocational assessment.

What we plan to do in 2017–19

1. Review pay comparability with the external market.
2. Further develop our people in line with our corporate priorities.
3. Expand our use of location independent working.

Outcomes

- We have the right people and skills to enable us to achieve our goals and objectives.
- Our people are proud to work for Ofqual and equipped to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

Objective 7

Use our resources efficiently and effectively

What we plan to do 2016–17

1. Implement a five-year budget that delivers the £1.1m savings expected by 2020 in our Comprehensive Spending Review settlement.
2. Identify our long term space requirements and determine accommodation options available when our current lease ends in March 2018.
3. Migrate business processes to more efficient digital platforms.
4. Continue to streamline and reduce cost in our IT provision.
5. Support wider access to our data by the research community and implement improved data sharing with other Government bodies.

What we plan to do 2017–19

1. Implement new accommodation arrangements at the end of our lease in March 2018.
2. Reduce expenditure on corporate overheads and improve efficiency through exploiting the use of enterprise resource planning.

Outcomes

- Agreed programme of activity that is affordable within the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement.
- Minimal organisational disruption as a result of the end of our current accommodation lease in 2018.
- Staffing levels protected through improved value for money and efficiency savings in non-staff expenditure.

Measuring our impact

Ofqual's Annual Report to Parliament sets out our progress on delivering our statutory objectives, the regulatory activity we have undertaken, and the impact of our actions.

We will continue to evaluate our success, and seek new ways to measure our impact.

We undertake an annual perception survey to measure confidence in qualifications over time. We will also use a new stakeholder survey to measure our impact, alongside our routine engagement with stakeholders.



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