
Corporate Plan 2017-20

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Foreword

by the Chair



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Taylor', written in a cursive style.

Roger Taylor, Chair

I am pleased to present my first corporate plan as Chair of Ofqual. It is written during a period of significant transformation in the education and training landscape in England. Qualifications and assessments, their quality and the public's confidence in them will be pivotal in achieving meaningful change, and we will play our full part in enabling that.

Already we are engaged in Functional Skills reform, new apprenticeship standards and the early stages of technical education qualification reform – in response to government's 2016 Skills Plan and the development of new T levels. Together, these reforms represent an ambitious step towards clarity of choice for learners, a stronger voice for employers and a better-equipped workforce.

While reform of vocational and technical qualifications is just getting off the starting blocks, reforms to GCSEs, AS and A levels have moved from the design stage to implementation. The first new AS levels were awarded in 2016, and this year, GCSE and A level students will sit exams in a number of new qualifications. We are engaging widely to build awareness of the changes. This includes reassuring schools that our approach to awarding will mean that students are not disadvantaged if they are the first to be assessed on the new qualifications.

The future of primary assessment has also come under review. We will consider how we adapt our regulatory approach to any change in government policy in this area, while remaining focused on promoting standards and monitoring validity.

Amidst far-reaching change, our mission is simple: for assessments and qualifications to have quality built in from the outset and maintained throughout delivery so that the outcomes meet the needs of learners, employers and the wider economy. We will make use of all the levers at our disposal to achieve this, including deep assessment expertise, intelligently targeted use of our regulatory powers and our independent position.

The pace of reform envisaged is striking and not without risk. Over the lifetime of this plan the qualifications market will likely evolve as policy initiatives come to fruition, and new technologies emerge. We will monitor developments actively and work with others to mitigate any risks to delivery that may arise, while being careful not to prevent innovation that would benefit learners, or enhance market efficiency and value for money.

All this adds up to a significant body of work with complex interdependencies. It is certainly a programme only achieved by working together with government, its agencies and other independent bodies, and stakeholders across the system to deliver the best outcome for learners and the nation.

Foreword

by the Chief Regulator



S Collier

**Sally Collier,
Chief Regulator**

This is my first corporate plan since I came into post as Chief Regulator in April 2016. Over the past year, we have made significant progress against our identified goals and objectives, and here we present our plan for 2017/18 and beyond.

The safe delivery of new GCSEs, AS and A levels in England this summer will be the culmination of several years of intensive reform. We will be working closely with exam boards to ensure they deliver accurate results, on time, and that standards are maintained. We will then begin a process of thorough evaluation to ensure the changes and benefits are delivering as intended.

Our desire is for marking to be the best it can be. Central to our approach is a better understanding of how good marking is currently. We will conduct additional research over the coming year and actively work with the exam boards to help identify any improvements that can be made. We continue to work towards a system for reviews and appeals of marking outcomes that is clearer, more consistent and fairer for all students.

Since I arrived at Ofqual, government priorities for vocational and technical qualifications and assessment have moved on significantly. So has our approach to this part of our remit. Supporting the development of high quality apprenticeship end-point assessments is a priority for us in 2017. We have been working closely with other bodies to develop a coherent approach to quality and will play our full role in

finalising the outstanding operational decisions related to apprenticeship reform, and associated development of T levels. We will also continue to play our part in the redevelopment of Functional Skills qualifications, to make sure they remain relevant to employers.

Building awareness and understanding of these various changes is essential for public confidence. We have already embarked on a comprehensive communications and stakeholder engagement campaign regarding GCSEs, AS and A levels that will extend through this summer series and beyond. We will also enhance our communications to support reform in vocational and technical qualifications. As I have done in the past twelve months I will prioritise visiting schools and colleges to gather the views of principals, heads, teachers and learners.

In primary assessment, our responsibilities focus on monitoring validity and promoting assessment standards, rather than test delivery. We will continue to advise government on policy, and keep our approach under review.

We have taken a wide range of regulatory action over the past year, including issuing our first fines. This plan makes clear that we will undertake both proactive regulatory activity, and stand ready to react where our risk analysis demands it.

To support these goals we will continue to develop and motivate our people and target expertise wherever we see it.

About Ofqual

Our role

Ofqual is the independent qualifications regulator for England. We currently regulate 158 awarding organisations, providing about 17540 live qualifications.

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

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| 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.

Our context

We regulate qualifications within the context of government policy. Over recent years, this led us to reform the structure and assessment arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels. We engage actively in providing advice to government on policy matters related to national assessments.

The government published its plan to simplify and improve technical and professional education for 16 to 19-year-olds in England in summer 2016. We have begun work with other government bodies and stakeholders to deliver the associated reforms to Functional Skills qualifications, technical education and apprenticeships.

Our approach

We will be transparent in our dealings with awarding organisations: setting out the work we are planning; inviting consultation on matters that affect them; and being clear about the evidence underpinning our actions. Our aim is to make our expectations clear, to provide guidance on our requirements and provide examples of both good and poor practice to aid awarding organisations to be compliant.

We work extensively with stakeholders across the sector to improve what we do, to consider the impact of our actions and to inform others affected by our decisions. At the forefront of

each decision we make are the interests of learners, the impact on teaching and learning and the confidence of those who use and rely on qualifications. The range of stakeholders interested in our work, and who can make a positive contribution to it, is broad. For each strand of work, we identify the relevant groups to inform; consult; or involve.

Gathering intelligence and analysing the evidence available to us, we target the greatest threats to the sustained provision of sufficiently valid qualifications, risks to public confidence and fairness.

We align our regulatory approach with those of the regulators in the devolved administrations, where appropriate, in order to minimise burden on awarding organisations.

Our resources

The 2015 Spending Review, covering the period 2016 to 2020, set our core administration funding at £15.3m for 2017/18, down from £15.5m in 2016/17. Over the 4-year Spending Review period, we will reduce our level of administration funding by £1.1m. We will achieve this through efficiency savings and maintaining tight management controls to reduce our expenditure. We will continue

to work within a head count of 200-205 people.

Specific programme funding reduces from £4.0m in 2016/17 to £2.4m in 2017/18. The delivery of the National Reference Test accounts for £2.0m of the 2017/18 programme funding.

The table below shows our funding for the remaining period of the Spending Review. We may also require additional funding for vocational and technical qualification reform in 2017/18.

| | 2017-18 £m | 2018-19 £m | 2019-20 £m |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Administration funding | 15.3 | 15.0 | 14.7 |
| Programme funding | 2.4 | 2.1 | 2.5 |
| Total | 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. We also regulate some of the qualifications that are taken as alternatives to GCSEs and A levels.

In Goal 1, we set out what we will do to regulate general qualifications; complete the GCSE, AS and A level reform programme, and evaluate the quality of the reformed qualifications.

Objective 1

Regulate for the validity of general qualifications

What we plan to do 2017–18

1. Require the exam boards to address identified risks to the safe delivery and award of GCSEs, AS and A levels.
2. Make sure exam boards set appropriate and consistent grade standards in new GCSEs, AS and A levels, as they are first awarded, and that they maintain grade standards in all other GCSEs, AS and A levels.
3. Evaluate the quality of exam boards' marking, how they undertake reviews of marking and moderation, and decide the grounds on which appeals must be accepted.
4. Review how well standards in Project and 'core maths' qualifications are set and take appropriate action if required.

5. Investigate different approaches to maintaining qualification standards, moderating teachers' marking, and factors that influence the predictability of assessments.
6. Take forward our work on inter-subject comparability and decide whether standards should be adjusted in any subjects.
7. Develop the operational approach to how the results of the National Reference Test may be used in GCSE awarding in future; and deliver the test in 2018.
8. Continue to keep the use of reasonable adjustments for disabled students and special consideration arrangements under review.

What we plan to do in 2018–20

1. Identify and require exam boards to address risks to the safe delivery and award of GCSEs, AS and A levels.
2. Maintain grade standards in all GCSEs, AS and A levels and oversee standard setting for new GCSEs, AS and A levels as they are first awarded.
3. Oversee delivery of the National Reference Test each year. Review the results from the initial tests and consider their potential use in GCSE awarding from summer 2019 at the earliest.

Outcomes

- General qualifications are sufficiently valid: in particular, that qualifications meet their stated aims and standards are maintained over time and aligned across exam boards.
- Our regulation supports good assessment and educational outcomes.
- Schools, colleges and students have confidence in exam delivery and the quality of marking.

Objective 2

Oversee reform of general qualifications

What we plan to do 2017–18

1. Accredit GCSEs, AS and A levels that will be first taught from 2018.
2. Continue our campaign to provide information about new GCSEs, AS and A levels, focusing especially on the 9 to 1 grading scale for GCSEs.
3. Continue to evaluate reformed qualifications, including the effect on teaching and learning of separately evaluated assessment of practical science at A level, and the impact of moving from a modular to linear qualification structure.
4. Begin to evaluate the extent to which other features of the reformed qualifications meet the qualification's purpose, including gathering feedback from teachers and other key stakeholders.

What we plan to do in 2018–20

1. Continue our evaluation of reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels.
2. Provide information about reformed qualifications, especially the new GCSE grading scale.
3. Adjust our regulations if necessary in light of evaluation.

Outcomes

- GCSE, AS and A level reform programme is complete and our requirements ensure that they meet their purpose.
- Stakeholders are familiar with the changes we have made, what it means for them, and have confidence in the reformed qualifications.

Goal 2

Regulating and reforming vocational and technical qualifications

We regulate vocational and technical qualifications so that they are sufficiently valid and worthy of public confidence. We take a risk-based approach to ensure that our resources are targeted effectively.

In Goal 2, we set out what we will do to regulate existing qualifications and the steps we will take to regulate newly reformed qualifications and assessments as they are introduced. The programme of reform is broad, including Functional Skills qualifications, new apprenticeship standards and reform to technical education, as set out by government in the post-16 Skills Plan.

Objective 3

Regulate to support the reform of vocational and technical qualifications

What we plan to do 2017–18

1. Set regulatory requirements for reformed Functional Skills qualifications to be taught from 2019.
2. Evaluate these new Functional Skills qualifications before they enter the market.
3. Set and implement regulatory requirements for new Apprenticeship End-Point Assessments.
4. Coordinate our approach with the Institute for Apprenticeships, the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Education and Skills Funding Agency through the proposed Quality Partnership.
5. Work with the Department for Education to define and develop our regulatory approach to Technical Education Qualifications.
6. Provide information to students, further and higher education, teachers, parents, employers, and others about changes to reformed qualifications, using their feedback to tailor our approach.

What we plan to do 2018–20

1. Complete the introduction of reformed Functional Skills qualifications.
2. Continue to oversee the introduction of regulated Apprenticeship End-Point Assessments.
3. Support the introduction of technical education qualifications into the market.
4. Develop a programme of research to evaluate the effect of qualification reforms.
5. Provide information to stakeholders, using their feedback to tailor our approach.
6. Monitor the impact of reform on the operation of the qualifications market.

Outcomes

- Reformed qualifications produce sufficiently valid outcomes and meet their stated aims.
- Stakeholders are aware of and understand the changes we have made, their rationale and what they mean for them.
- The public understand and have greater confidence in reformed qualifications.

Objective 4

Regulate for the validity of vocational and technical qualifications

What we plan to do 2017–18

1. Review our regulatory approach to Applied General qualifications.
2. Undertake systemic work to address malpractice.
3. Review awarding organisations' moderation practices and centre controls.
4. Review the fitness for purpose of qualifications used in performance tables.
5. Ensure quality is maintained in qualifications in transition.
6. Review awarding organisations' use of IT in the awarding process.
7. Undertake further reactive regulatory activity where our risk analysis demands it.
8. Continue to collect and use feedback from qualification users and representative groups.

What we plan to do 2018–20

1. Undertake systemic work to review assessor competence and capability.
2. Continue to review the fitness for purpose of qualifications used in performance tables.
3. Undertake regulatory activity according to areas of prioritised risk.
4. Survey awarding organisations' views of the impact of our regulatory requirements on innovation and consider any revisions required in response.

Outcomes

- Qualifications are sufficiently valid and meet the needs of stakeholders.
- Qualifications support good educational and training outcomes.
- A stable and evidence-based regulatory environment that encourages the development and delivery of valid qualifications.

Goal 3

Keeping the validity of National Assessments under review

In Goal 3 we set out how we will monitor the validity of National Assessments, and what we will do where we identify threats to sufficiently valid assessments. Our programme of work will adjust accordingly in light of any Department for Education consultations on changes to National Assessment arrangements, and to the outcome of the Education Select Committee inquiry into primary assessment.

Objective 5

Monitor and evaluate the validity of National Assessments

What we plan to do 2017–18

1. Monitor, evaluate and report on significant risks to the validity of National Assessments.
2. Monitor the maintenance of standards at key stage 1 and 2.
3. Provide a view on the Standards and Testing Agency's technical advice to Ministers on any changes to National Assessment arrangements.
4. Investigate and publish our findings on the content validity of key stage 2 reading and maths tests.

What we plan to do in 2018–20

1. Continue to evaluate the extent to which the validity of National Assessments is being secured.
2. Continue to keep under review the standards of National Assessments over time, including if any changes are made to the current arrangements.

Outcomes

- Increase assurance of the validity of National Assessment arrangements

Goal 4

Develop and manage our people, resources and systems

To enable our work, we will continue to build our capacity and develop our people. The effective and efficient use of our resource, including through the use of technology and engagement with the wider Civil Service, will ensure we make the best use of public money. We will also take further steps to make our data more accessible to others.

Objective 6

Build our capability and manage our resources efficiently and effectively

What we plan to do 2017–18

1. Continue to attract and retain a skilled and talented workforce.
2. Improve our staff engagement and develop our managers.
3. Implement a new talent management process.
4. Determine the future location of our office.
5. Improve our digital presence and processes including our awarding organisation portal.
6. Improve access to and use of Ofqual data by other stakeholders.
7. Enhance procurement and contract management processes.

What we plan to do in 2018–20

1. Complete the implementation of savings and efficiency targets agreed in the Spending Review.
2. Continue to develop and motivate our people in line with evolving strategic priorities.

Outcomes

- Our people are proud to work for Ofqual and have the tools and skills to deliver our strategic priorities.
- We have a programme of work that is affordable within the Spending Review settlement and will deliver our strategic priorities.
- Stakeholders are increasingly able to make effective use of our data.
- Minimal organisational disruption resulting from any change in our office location.

Measuring our impact

We will survey our stakeholders to assess indicators of confidence in the qualifications we regulate and provide a measure of the impact we are having. This will include the continuation of our annual perception survey to measure confidence in general qualifications over time, and measuring understanding and awareness of the new 9 to 1 grading scale for reformed GCSEs. As reform of vocational and technical qualifications gets underway, we will survey stakeholder's views of these qualifications, to form a baseline for future evaluation.

We will measure the impact of specific, high profile regulatory decisions through a range of targeted, deep research projects. This includes evaluating the impact of our changes to the assessment of practical skills in A level science, and the changes exam boards made in response to our research into the difficulty of reformed GCSE mathematics. Similarly, we will evaluate the perceived difficulty of current, and then new Functional Skills qualifications, post reform. Having removed the Qualifications and Credit Framework rules in 2015, we will review the initial impact of introducing the Regulated Qualifications Framework.

Ofqual's Annual Report and Accounts sets out our progress on delivering the commitments in this Corporate Plan, a summary of the regulatory activity we have undertaken, and the impact of our actions.



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