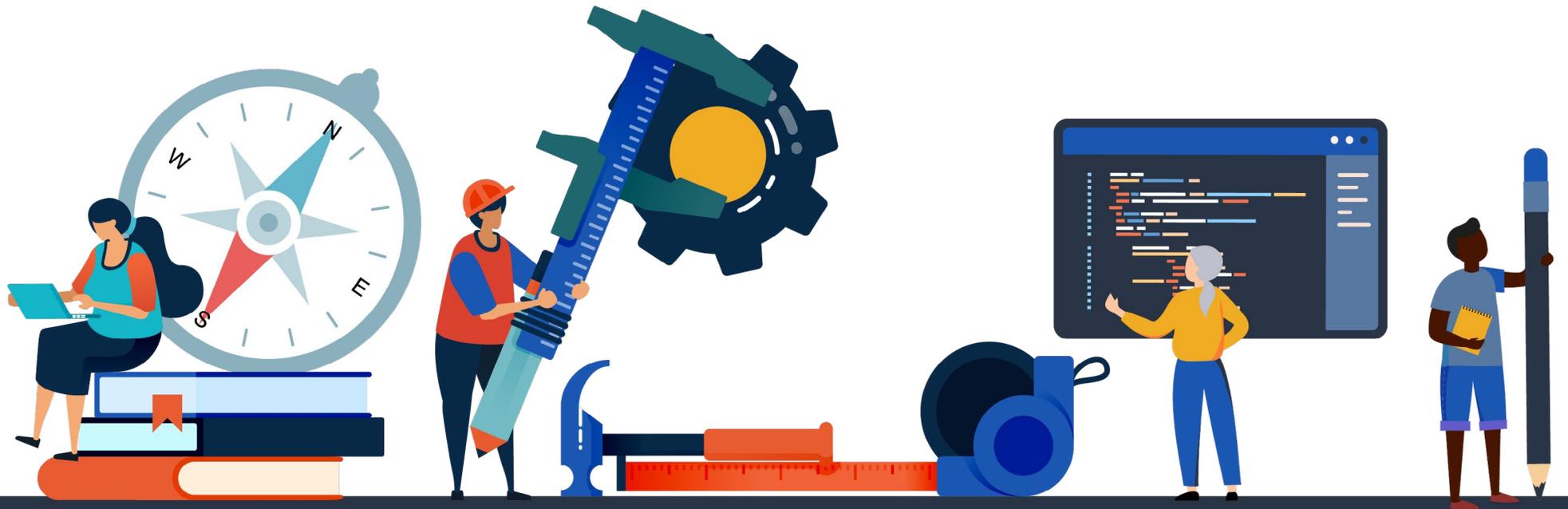


Corporate Plan 2022 to 25

ofqual



Regulating on behalf of students of all ages and apprentices



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Foreword by the Chair

Qualifications play a vital role in our education and training system. A million students take GCSEs, AS and A levels each year, and many more take vocational and technical qualifications, and apprenticeship assessments. These qualifications enable those who take them to demonstrate what they have learnt and can do, and to move on with confidence to the next stage of their career, whether that is in education or in employment.

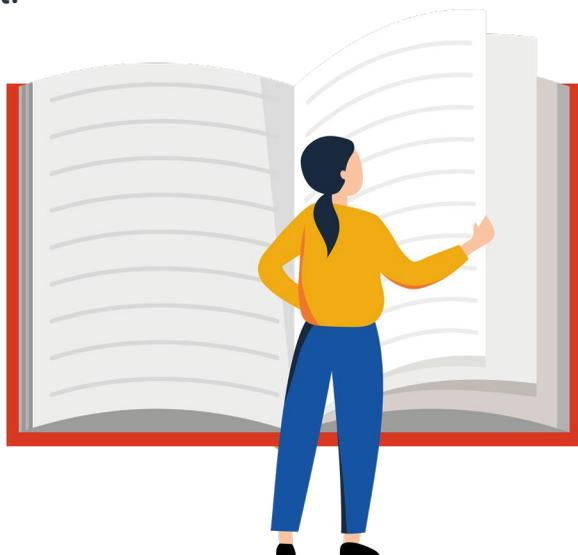
Every student and apprentice rightly expects their qualification or assessment to be of good quality, fair and meaningful. Those who use qualifications, including employers and higher education institutions, look to a qualification to provide trustworthy information as they make decisions that directly affect the futures both of individuals and of our economy and society.

Over the past 2 years, the pandemic has placed our qualifications system under the spotlight. The effects of the pandemic on students, apprentices, and on teaching and learning, are still with us. This is important context for the work of Ofqual as we set out our plans for the next 3 years.

It is our first priority to do all we can to enable the delivery of exams and formal assessments in 2022. We know this is important for fairness and for public confidence in examinations. As well as looking at the immediate implications of the pandemic for 2022, it is also time now to look to the future. It is right that we learn from the pandemic and are aspirational for students and apprentices in the years to come. I am pleased that, for the first time since 2019, Ofqual is presenting a 3-year corporate plan.

This plan places the interests of students and apprentices at its heart, and rightly so. As such, we no longer differentiate our priorities between general qualifications and vocational and technical qualifications, as we have in previous corporate plans. Rather, we place quality and fairness for all students and apprentices right at the top of our strategic priorities, whatever combination of qualifications they may be taking.

Next comes our commitment to play our part in creating a qualifications market that is clear, effective and efficient. Regulation is a powerful tool in achieving this goal. Those who offer, take or use qualifications should be confident that those qualifications are fit for purpose. A well-regulated qualifications market provides that assurance and protects everyone involved.



Ofqual's deep assessment expertise, access to expansive data and our convening power afford us a unique role in shaping the future of qualifications and assessment. We are ambitious in that goal. Regulation must enable good innovation that is in the interests of students and apprentices. Our research should guide and inform the adoption of new and better approaches, particularly where these solve problems in assessment.

The pandemic has, rightly, catalysed questions about not if, but when, and how, greater use of technology and onscreen assessment should be adopted. All proposed changes need to be carefully assessed for their impact on students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. It is right that we use research and evidence to challenge existing practice so that we continue to improve what we offer for students and apprentices.

I am personally hugely grateful for the engagement of so many people in our work. Only by working together can we secure qualifications that meet the interests of students, apprentices, employers and all those that use qualifications both today and well into the future.



**Ian Bauckham CBE,
Chair**



Foreword by the Chief Regulator

I am delighted to publish our 2022 to 2025 corporate plan – the first in my tenure as Chief Regulator. At its heart is my personal commitment that central to all our decisions and actions will be the interests of students of all ages and apprentices. They will be our compass, our true north. I know the power of qualifications from my own personal experience and from my time working on the frontline of schools in some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. Qualifications open doors. They are a passport to new opportunities and possibilities.

To fulfil that role they must be trusted, understood, good quality and fair. This corporate plan sets out the work that Ofqual will do to make sure that regulated qualifications are just that. Students and apprentices take qualifications in different stages of their lives, in different contexts and for different purposes. It's important, therefore, that the range of regulated qualifications meets those different needs.

Yet also, the choice must be clear, and the market navigable. The Ofqual Register of Regulated Qualifications is already an excellent source of information about the range of regulated qualifications on offer and is used by many thousands of people each year. Ofqual will begin work in the coming months to explore options to significantly enhance the Register to better support those that use qualifications. We look forward to engaging broadly with stakeholders in this work.



Our most immediate priority, with students and apprentices firmly in mind, is of course to ensure the secure delivery and awarding of qualifications in 2022. Students have faced real and significant challenges throughout their course of study due to the pandemic. In response to that, Ofqual, alongside the Department for Education (DfE), has introduced an unprecedented level of support for students taking GCSE, AS and A level exams – including advance information on exam content in many subjects and a safety net in grading. For vocational and technical qualifications the diversity of qualifications on offer means there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. So Ofqual has maintained the flexibility for awarding organisations to do what is right for students in their specific qualifications. Across the board, we know that students, parents and society at large want a return to exams and formal assessments, and they want grades that they trust and understand. We believe these measures are an important first step in a return to normality.

To make sure that we really are placing the interests of students and apprentices at the heart of our work, I have launched our first ever Ofqual listening tour. This will enable me to meet students, apprentices, teachers and school and college leaders across the country to hear first-hand their views, concerns and ideas. It has already proven so valuable and I’m grateful to all those that have given me their time and shared their views. Wide and deep engagement is crucial to Ofqual’s effectiveness, and we are committed to that.

That also extends to our relationships with those we regulate. Of course, we set high expectations of them – to deliver quality and fairness for students. And we will take any and all action that we need to, to protect students. But I know that we will regulate most effectively on students’ behalf if we take a co-regulatory approach – working with those we regulate – and this will be our focus in the period of this corporate plan.

In addition to holding the statutory post of Chief Regulator, I serve as Accounting Officer, answering to parliament for how we deploy public funds in pursuit of our statutory objectives, and – of course – as Chief Executive of Ofqual. I am incredibly proud to lead the expert and committed Ofqual team as we emerge from the pandemic. Ofqual exists to further statutory objectives, yes; but it is made up of and powered by its people. We intend to strengthen and grow both our expertise and team, as we take on new responsibilities in the regulation of apprenticeship assessments, and vocational and technical qualifications. Being an inclusive, engaging and purposeful place to work is vital to delivering the ambitions set out within this corporate plan, so that we can best meet the needs of those we serve.

I look forward to meeting as many of you that read this plan as I can – in schools, colleges, training providers, awarding organisations and beyond. I know that working together will be key to our success in regulating for students of all ages and apprentices.



**Dr Jo Saxton,
Chief Regulator**



Ofqual's role

Ofqual is the independent, expert regulator of qualifications and assessments for England. Ofqual regulates on behalf of students of all ages and apprentices to make sure that qualifications, apprenticeship end-point assessments and National Assessments are good quality.

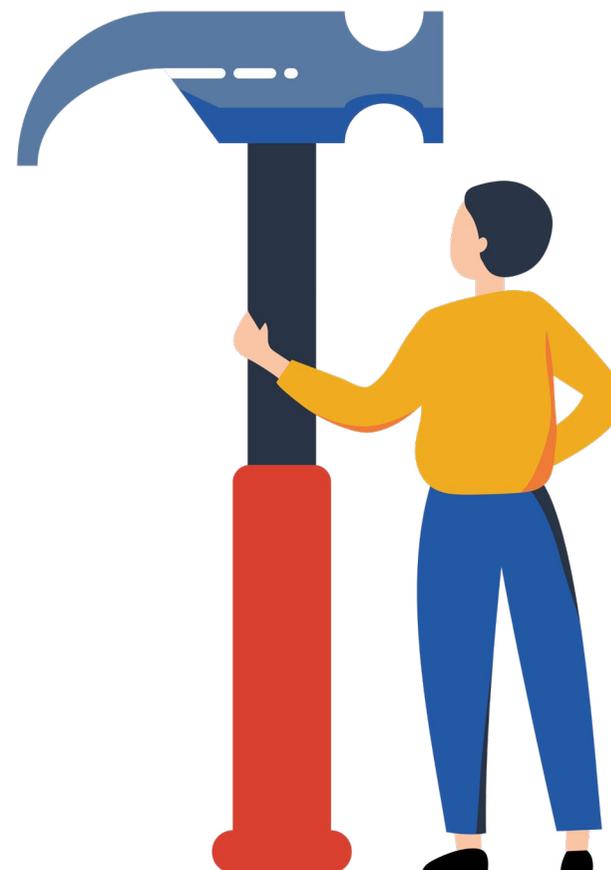
Ofqual regulates 205 awarding organisations, and over 11,600 qualifications for which 10.8 million certificates were issued in 2021. These include GCSEs, AS and A levels, apprenticeship assessments and a broad range of vocational and technical qualifications.

Ofqual is independent of ministers and is accountable to Parliament for the maintenance of standards in qualifications and assessments. Independence is important to securing confidence in the standards and validity of qualifications for students, apprentices, and those who use and rely on qualifications. At the same time, Ofqual provides government with expertise in assessment and has a key role in enacting government policy in relation to qualifications.

Ofqual works in partnership with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) on technical qualifications and apprenticeship end-point assessments.

Parliament created Ofqual to:

-  secure standards in qualifications and apprenticeship end-point assessments
-  promote public confidence in qualifications, apprenticeship end-point assessments and National Assessments
-  oversee National Assessments and assure their validity
-  improve public awareness and understanding of the range of qualifications available, to support clarity of choice in the market
-  secure that qualifications are provided efficiently and that their price represents value for money
-  raise awareness of the benefits of regulated qualifications, and of being a regulated awarding organisation



Regulating on behalf of students of all ages and apprentices

Ofqual's powers enable us to act as the guardian of standards and a champion of fairness. In all our work, we have committed that students and apprentices will be our compass – their collective interests will shape the approach we take, our decisions and our focus.

Listening to all those who take, use and rely on qualifications is key. Ofqual meets regularly with, and gathers the views of, a wide range of people. That includes students, parents, teachers, employers and higher education institutions, as well as the general public. This helps us to target our work, to inform our decision making and to make sure that we evaluate the impact we have. We pay close attention to the implications of our decisions for teaching and learning, for equality, and for public confidence in qualifications.

Students, parents and those who use qualifications and assessments need to be confident that standards are set appropriately and that they can be trusted. Regulation makes sure that information about the qualifications on offer to students is readily available and that there is transparency of pricing. Ofqual holds awarding organisations to account and makes sure that students and apprentices are treated fairly if problems arise.

Regulatory approach

Ofqual regulates awarding organisations that design, deliver and award qualifications and apprenticeship end-point assessments. We control entry to the regulated market, and we create rules and provide guidance for awarding organisations to help make sure regulated qualifications are fit for purpose, valid and delivered securely.

Ofqual sets requirements that awarding organisations must continuously meet, and we monitor their compliance with those requirements. We take action to address problems, to make sure awarding organisations put things right, and that students and apprentices are treated fairly.

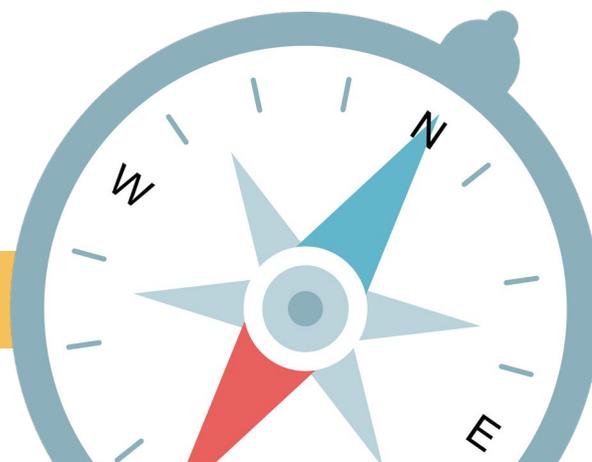
To make regulation as effective as possible Ofqual is developing a co-regulatory approach. Working with awarding organisations has the potential to enhance effective risk identification and the development of controls to address those risks. It enables regulation to stay fit for purpose as awarding organisations innovate. It also supports arrangements that reduce burden both for awarding organisations and the centres that provide qualifications to students and apprentices.

Co-regulation does not preclude the use of any research, investigation, or enforcement tools where this is appropriate. This is essential to protect students and apprentices and public confidence in regulated qualifications. Rather, it enables the best balance of regulatory approaches and supports the development of a regulated market with the capacity and capability to deliver good quality qualifications.

Assessment capability

Ofqual is a leading organisation in assessment research and qualification market data analysis. This capability is central to our ability to take evidence-based decisions. We use research and data to promote improvement in how qualifications are delivered, in the interests of students, and so to promote public confidence too. We gather data and publish statistics to provide transparency on key features of qualifications and the qualifications market.

Qualification reform can be an important opportunity to change qualifications more fundamentally to make sure that they better meet the needs of students and those that use qualifications, such as employers. Where government initiates reform, Ofqual's role is to use regulation to secure quality, clarity and consistency in qualifications.



Regulated qualifications

We regulate



205

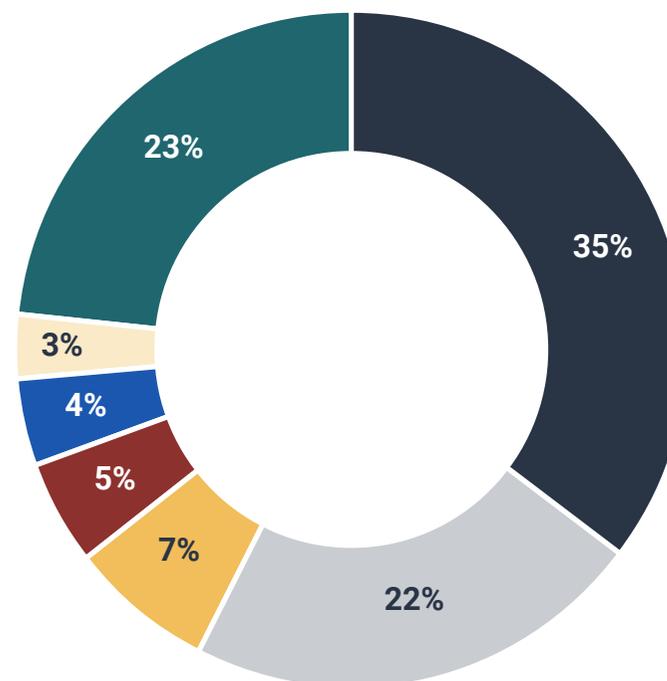
Awarding organisations

Over

11,600

active qualifications
with certificates

Market share by number of certificates in England



Active qualifications

General qualifications		Vocational and other qualifications	
	709		10,311
GCSEs	20%	Preparation for Life and Work	16%
AS levels	15%	Health, Public Services and Care	15%
A levels	19%	Business, Administration and Law	11%
General qualifications not included above	46%	Retail and Commercial Enterprise	10%
		Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	10%
		Arts, Media and Publishing	8%
		Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	8%
		Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	6%
		Leisure, Travel and Tourism	6%
		Education and Training	5%
		Qualifications in other sector subject areas	5%

National VTQs	
	631
Functional Skills	29%
Tech Levels	26%
Applied Generals	20%
Technical Certificates	14%
Technical Awards	11%



292
EPA qualifications





10.8 million

Total certificates awarded

Certificates by category



6,372,000

998,250

3,392,730

- General qualifications 6,372,000
- National VTQs 998,250
- Vocational and other qualifications 3,392,730

Information relates to England from September 2020 to August 2021 – source AQMR 2020/21, and additional analysis of data supporting the report.

General qualifications

General qualifications other than GCSEs, AS and A levels
239,820

A levels
763,745

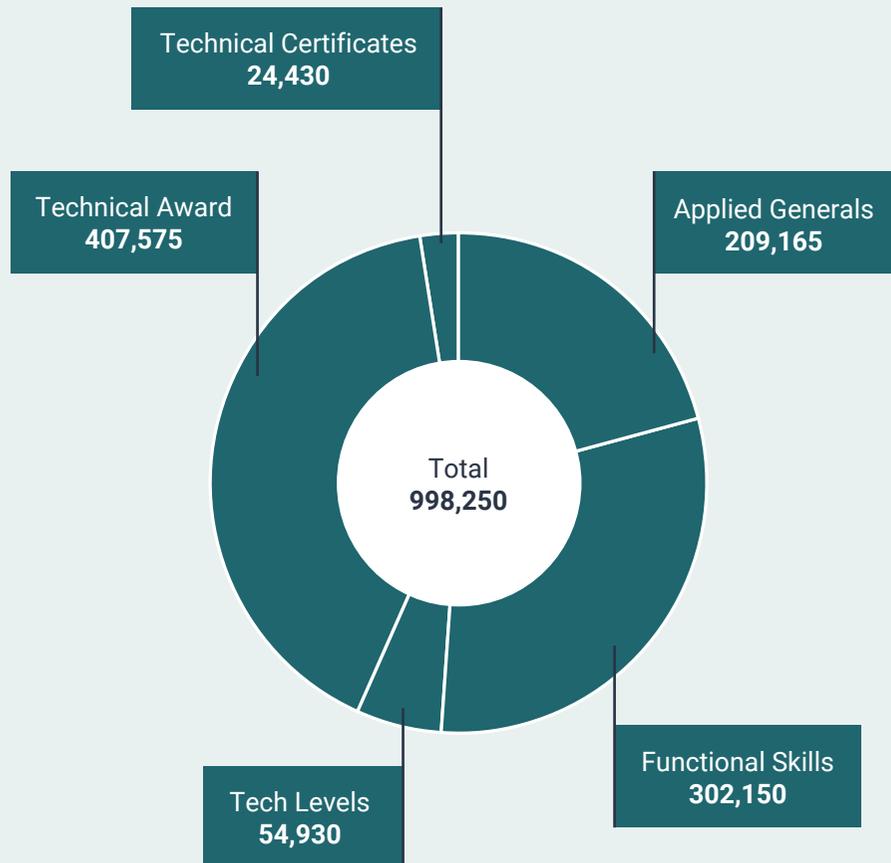
AS levels
55,130

Total
6,372,000

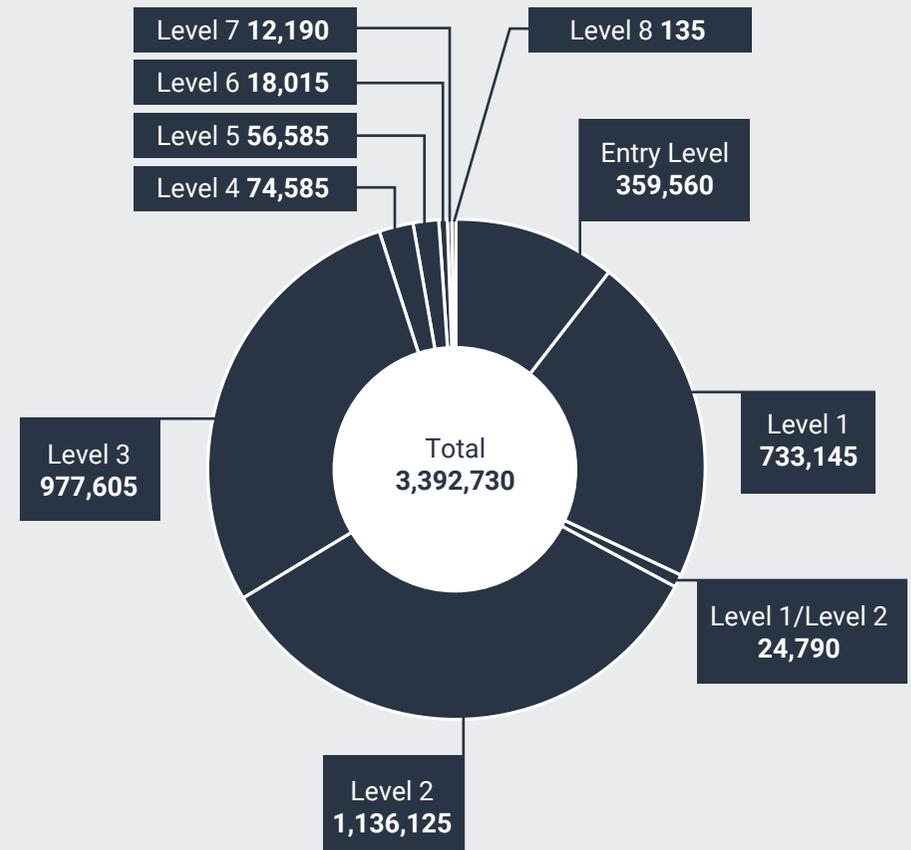
GCSEs
5,313,310



National VTQs



Vocational and other qualifications



Ofqual's priorities

1. Quality and fairness for students and apprentices

2. Clarity, effectiveness and efficiency in the qualifications market

3. Shaping the future of assessment and qualifications

4. Developing Ofqual as an effective, expert regulator and inclusive employer

1

Quality and fairness for students and apprentices

Ofqual will focus regulatory activity, research and engagement on making sure that qualifications and assessments are good quality, as fair as they can be and that they meet the needs of employers and other users of qualifications. At the heart of good quality qualifications and assessments is validity – assessing the right thing, in the right way, to provide accurate and useful assessment results. Good qualifications must be designed well. They must be delivered securely to create a level playing field for all who take them, and they must be awarded in a way that protects standards. For assessments to be as fair as possible, students and apprentices should not be advantaged or disadvantaged either by assessment design that favours certain groups of students over others or by malpractice (cheating).

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a significant effect on the delivery of qualifications over the past 2 years and will continue to have implications in the years to come. We will act to make sure that qualifications are as fair as they can be, and that they play their proper role in supporting effective teaching and learning as students recover from the pandemic.

Outcomes

We are working to deliver the following outcomes:

- students and apprentices taking qualifications can be confident they are assessed fairly
- qualifications are delivered securely to create a level playing field for all who take them
- qualifications are valid – they meet their stated aims, support progression and their standards are maintained over time
- public confidence in and the validity of National Assessments is maintained



What we plan to do in 2022 to 2025

We plan to:

- oversee the reintroduction of exam-based assessment in 2022 across general, vocational and technical qualifications where they were cancelled due to the pandemic
- secure trust and confidence in awarding arrangements for 2022 and beyond, and be ready to implement contingency arrangements if needed due to the impact of the pandemic
- confirm arrangements for 2023 and beyond, including delivering a fair and well-understood approach to grading
- monitor, evaluate and report on the validity of National Assessments delivered by the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) including test development and standards maintenance processes
- engage with students and apprentices to enable us to regulate effectively on their behalf
- work in partnership with IfATE on technical qualifications, T Levels, higher technical qualifications and apprenticeship end-point assessments
- support the introduction of new Digital Functional Skills qualifications into the market
- provide practical information to students to help them feel confident in preparing to take assessments
- evaluate the impact on teaching, learning and examinations of advance information provided for 2022 GCSEs, AS and A levels
- continue our work to prevent malpractice and encourage the reporting of malpractice where it occurs
- introduce new guidance for awarding organisations on designing and developing accessible assessments, following consultation
- evaluate the use of extra-time in assessments provided to disabled students as a reasonable adjustment
- continue to monitor quality of marking and require exam boards to make specific improvements if needed
- undertake research into methodologies for identifying potential bias in written assessments
- explore approaches better to reflect genuine changes in performance over time in general qualification grading, including continuing to run and use the National Reference Test



2 Clarity, effectiveness and efficiency in the qualifications market

The qualifications market needs to work well for all those that purchase, take and use qualifications and assessments. It should have the right breadth of high-quality qualifications both to meet employer needs and to allow students to select the right mix of qualifications to meet their needs.

Ofqual will work to make sure that students, apprentices and those advising them are able to easily understand the range of subjects and different types of regulated qualifications available to them.

We want to improve the information available to those that purchase qualifications – helping them achieve value for money and improving the efficiency of the qualifications market.

Regulation is an assurance both of the quality of the qualification and of the capability of the awarding organisation providing it.



Outcomes

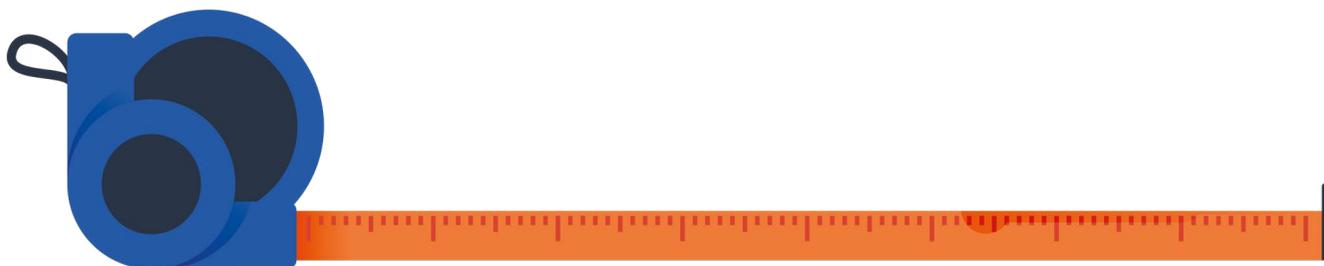
We are working to deliver the following outcomes:

- students, apprentices, schools, colleges, employers and all who use and rely on qualifications are well informed and have confidence in them
- regulation which supports a coherent and navigable qualifications market for students, apprentices, employers and other qualifications users
- users better understand the benefits of regulation and regulated qualifications
- those who purchase qualifications are more confident they have secured value for money
- systemic issues are identified and addressed to secure public confidence, maintenance of standards and efficiency
- significant awarding organisation shortfalls are addressed to protect the interests of students and apprentices
- the qualifications market is more efficient

What we plan to do in 2022 to 2025

We plan to:

- continue to use our recognition process to evaluate new entrants to the regulated market, and reduce burden by streamlining this with the DfE (formerly Education and Skills Funding Agency) for approving End Point Assessment Organisations
- produce refreshed guidance, following consultation, on end point assessments
- develop and consult on arrangements to secure high-quality qualifications as part of the government's post-16 qualifications review
- begin a programme of work to develop the Register of Regulated Qualifications to improve clarity and navigability of the qualifications market
- monitor price changes in the market and publish the annual qualifications price index to reveal the extent of price changes across the industry
- monitor the financial health of regulated awarding organisations in light of the effects of the pandemic on the market
- publish research and data to promote awareness and understanding of how qualifications operate
- implement a new vocational and technical qualifications data strategy to gather and report on data required for effective regulation
- advance and embed co-regulatory approaches to developing the capability and capacity of the regulated qualifications industry and making sure that regulation is effective and enabling of growth and innovation – in the interests of students and apprentices
- work with DfE to review the Sector Subject Area Classification System to provide greater clarity, consistency, and robustness in its use
- continue to develop our strategic partnership with IfATE, supporting their work to bring together key organisations providing assurance to users of the quality of technical qualifications and apprenticeships





3 Shaping the future of assessment and qualifications

Ofqual has a key role to play in leading, influencing and enabling innovation and transformation in assessment and qualifications. New approaches to assessment, including the use of technology, have the potential to improve quality and fairness for students and apprentices and to strengthen the resilience of how qualifications and assessments are delivered.

Research is fundamental to all we do. We will use our research and assessment expertise to advance understanding across the sector helping to shape the future of assessment and qualifications in England.

We will use our expertise and regulatory powers to inform, enable, promote and, where appropriate, require the adoption of new approaches – in the interests of students and apprentices.

Outcomes

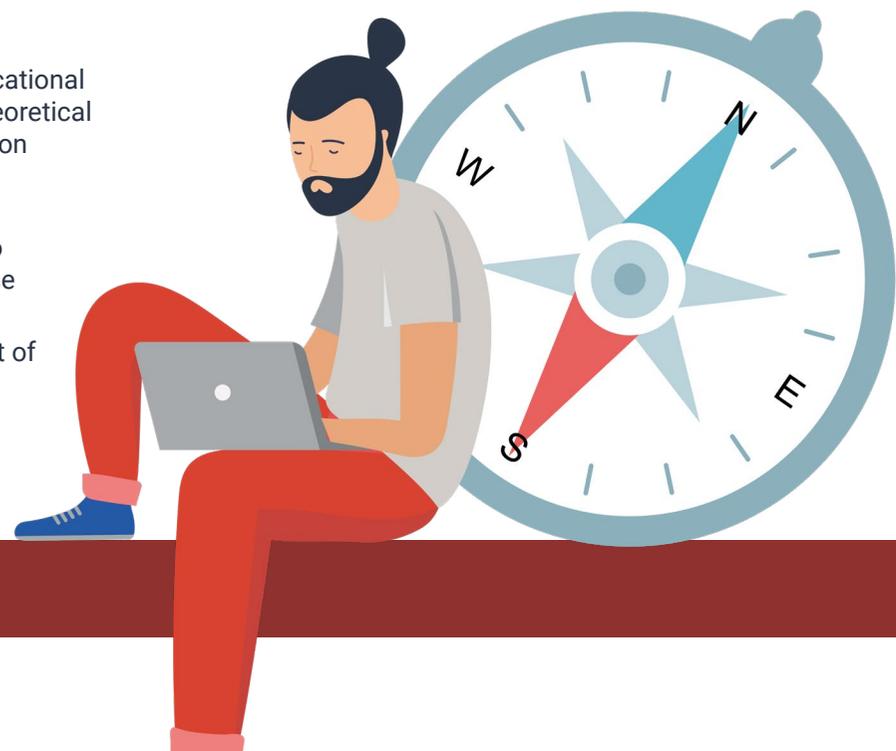
We are working to deliver the following outcomes:

- innovation in qualification design, delivery and awarding – supporting standards, public confidence, efficiency and international competitiveness
- new approaches to assessment improve quality and fairness for students and apprentices
- regulation which facilitates innovation in the interests of students and apprentices
- data which provides new insights to inform decision making, public confidence, maintenance of standards and market efficiency
- changes to qualifications are managed well, in the interests of students and apprentices

What we plan to do in 2022 to 2025

We plan to:

- consider approaches to the regulation of innovative practices and technology to make sure these promote valid and efficient assessment, and are implemented safely in the interests of students
- engage with awarding organisations to support the use of innovative practice and technology and remove regulatory barriers where innovation promotes valid and efficient assessment
- explore the feasibility of the broader use of objective test questions in high stakes assessment to improve reliability and resilience of assessment
- explore the potential role of adaptive testing, including specifically as a potential replacement for tiering in certain GCSEs
- evaluate the potential risks and benefits of remote invigilation
- consider optimal approaches to assessing competencies valued by employers
- continue our programme of research into vocational and technical qualifications to further our theoretical and technical understanding, including work on qualifications that confirm the acquisition of specified learning outcomes (CASLO)
- use data from across the education sector to broaden our insight and inform those who use and rely on qualifications
- explore opportunities for reducing the impact of the exams system on the environment
- design and develop assessment arrangements for a new GCSE British Sign Language (BSL) qualification and consider for accreditation any specifications received
- design and develop assessment arrangements for a new GCSE natural history qualification and consider for accreditation any specifications received
- produce conditions and guidance on assessment arrangements for new GCSE qualifications in French, German and Spanish, and consider accrediting specifications in these subjects
- research and evaluate qualification design approaches, including the use of assessment objectives and grade descriptors, to inform effective ongoing improvement and system change



4

Developing Ofqual as an effective, expert regulator and inclusive employer

Underpinning all of Ofqual's work to regulate on behalf of students and apprentices are our people, the data we collect and analyse, and the technology and systems we use. We will continue to develop those, so that we strengthen our expertise and so that we are effective and proportionate in our regulation.

We are committed to improving diversity and inclusion at Ofqual so that we continue to be a great place to work and be as effective as we can be in how we regulate for all students and apprentices whatever their background, community or protected characteristics.

Outcomes

We are working to deliver the following outcomes:

- a diverse workforce, including apprentices, with the right people and expertise to deliver our strategic priorities
- staff who are proud to work for Ofqual, leaders who are equipped to engage, inspire and empower, and high levels of staff engagement
- our people continue to be - and develop further - as experts in their field
- public facing services which meet the needs of those that use them, are clear and efficient
- technology and data that enable us, and those we engage, to work effectively and efficiently
- security of our data so that it can be used safely and appropriately
- value for public money by ensuring our priorities are delivered efficiently and by making the best use of our resources



What we plan to do in 2022 to 2025

We plan to:

- launch and implement a new people strategy with a focus on building capacity including through apprentices, supporting culture and developing leadership
- deliver our commitments to diversity and inclusion, set out in our people strategy, to ensure diversity of voice, equality of opportunity and to be a truly inclusive employer
- use our resources and expertise in the best way we can, increasing our resilience by securing additional capacity where needed
- make best use of technology to support our interactions with those who use and are interested in qualifications
- continue to develop and use technology in our work, including for the secure management and use of our data to increase the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of our work
- further improve our cyber security in line with nationally set standards and best practice
- develop our medium-term strategy and planning to use the resources we have to achieve the priorities set out here whilst fulfilling our statutory objectives



Impact

Each year, Ofqual carries out targeted evaluations and reviews to assess the impact of our work. We engage with those we regulate and those who use and rely on qualifications to gather feedback from them on the impact of our work.

Ofqual's annual report and accounts sets out our progress in delivering the commitments in our corporate plan, a summary of the regulatory activity we have undertaken and the impact of our actions.

To measure our progress and impact we will:

- carry out annual perception surveys to measure confidence in GCSEs, AS, A levels, vocational and technical qualifications
- develop our understanding and tracking of attitudes, sentiments, and experiences of students, apprentices, parents, teachers and other users of qualifications
- continue to make data available to independent researchers, through the Office for National Statistics secure research service, so that they can conduct their own independent research and evaluation of the education and assessment systems

- report on our monitoring of qualifications taken in schools, colleges, and other exam centres including GCSEs, AS, A levels and some technical and vocational qualifications
- report on our regulation of National Assessments
- evaluate the impact of advance information for 2022 on students, teachers and awarding organisations
- participate in the Civil Service people survey to understand the impact of our people plan and policies on the wellbeing and motivation of our staff
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our commitments to the diversity and inclusion of our people
- gather feedback from users to evaluate the impact of enhancements to our digital capabilities including our awarding organisation portal
- review our work to make sure we do not introduce or maintain any unnecessary burden on awarding organisations and publish the outcomes in our annual regulatory burden statement
- monitor the use of the Ofqual Register of Qualifications
- publish an annual qualification price index (QPI) to highlight how qualification prices change over time

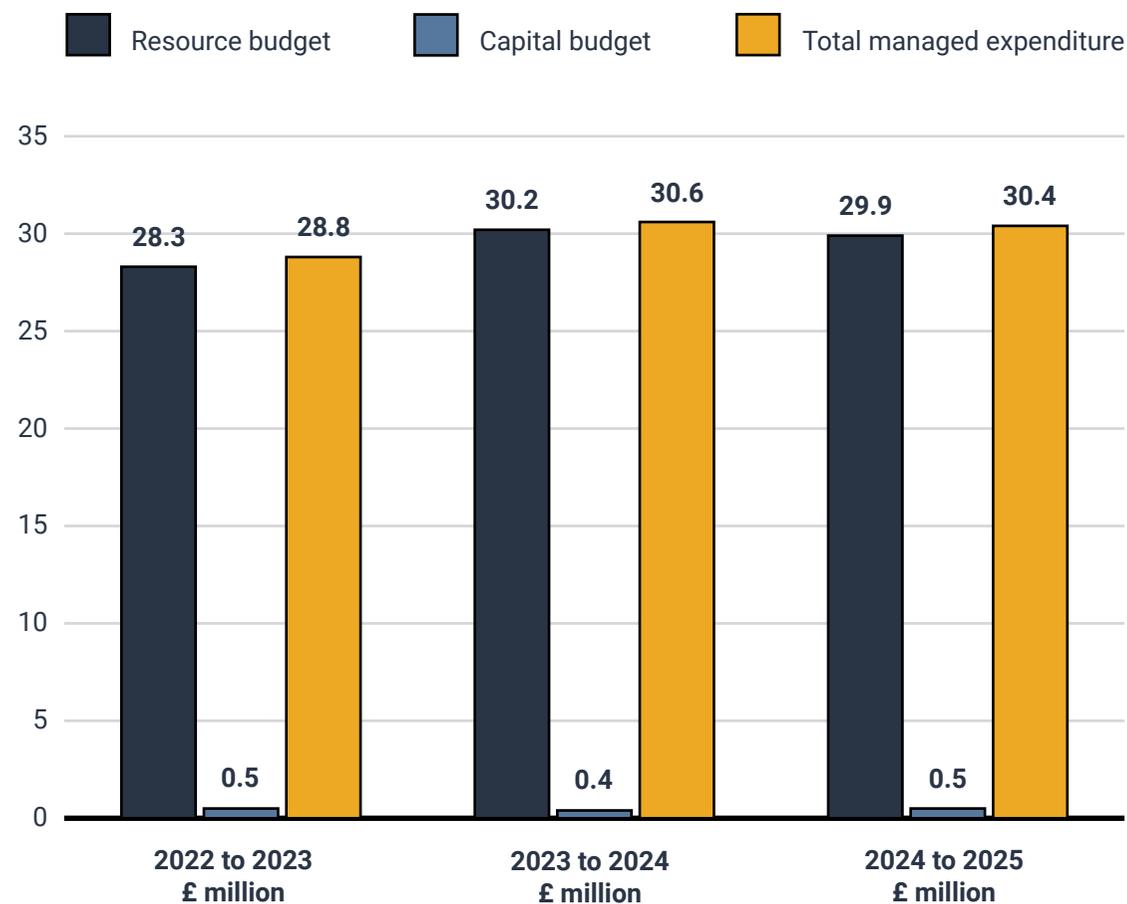


Our resources

The 2021 spending review provided Ofqual with funding to support the medium-term goals of the corporate plan. The funding in each financial year is set out in the table below. The budget includes funding for additional reform activity on vocational and technical qualifications and therefore the budget moves in line with the reform plans. Throughout the 3-year period, we will carefully plan and manage our people resources to deliver our core activities and other programmes within our funding.



Resources 2022 to 2025





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London TW9 4DU

Published by:



Earlsdon Park
53-55 Butts Road
Coventry
CV1 3BH

0300 303 3344

public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/ofqual



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