



Ofqual **Strategy** 2025 to 2028

Unlocking futures. Supporting growth.

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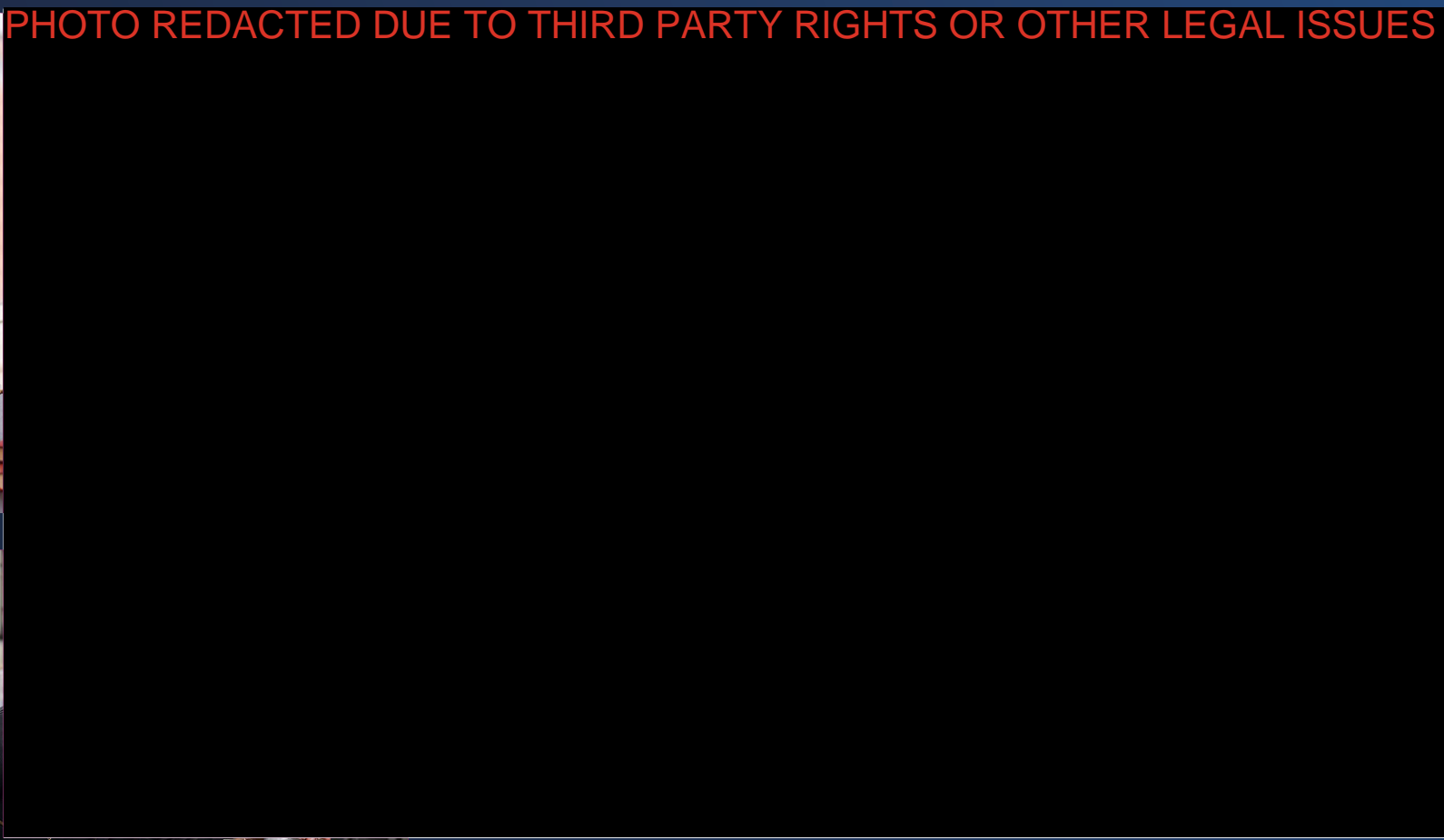
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Chair’s Foreword



I was delighted to be appointed as the new Chair of Ofqual from January 2025. Having spent many years in education in leadership and executive roles, I have seen first-hand how important qualifications are for students and apprentices. As an educator, the interests of all students and apprentices are always uppermost in my mind and will inform my work as Chair.

The launch of Ofqual’s new 3-year strategy marks an important milestone for the organisation and for qualifications in England. Ofqual was created in 2010, establishing the principle of independent regulation of qualifications and national assessments in England. That means that in 2025, as this strategy is launched, Ofqual is celebrating its 15th birthday. Across those 15 years many millions of students and apprentices have gained qualifications, with the protection of regulation confirmed by the Ofqual logo on their certificate.

Ofqual’s Board plays a critical role in the organisation. Through our strategy, we set the direction and the main priorities for this next period. The strategy also provides a point of reference when we evaluate the work we have done and the progress we are making. The Board will pay close attention to the delivery of the priorities set out in this strategy.

The Board and I recognise the many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, signalled in this strategy. This period will likely see curriculum and assessment reform; the acceleration of digitisation in education; and continuing reform in the field of vocational and technical qualifications and apprenticeships. As we look to the future, our focus will be squarely on ensuring that qualifications continue to unlock opportunities for students, whilst continuing to play their critical role in a productive economy.

I look forward to working both with our Board and with the excellent team at Ofqual, led by our Chief Regulator Sir Ian Bauckham CBE, as we move into the new strategic period from 2025 to 2028.

Dr Susan Tranter
Chair

Chief Regulator's Foreword

I am delighted to introduce Ofqual's new 3-year strategy.

I came to the role of Chief Regulator from a career in teaching and school leadership, so I have seen the importance of qualifications in enabling young people to progress for many years. I know the energy and commitment that young people put into preparing for assessments and exams, and the hard work teachers and others in schools and colleges commit to supporting them. That is why it is so important that our qualifications are high quality and demonstrably fair to everyone involved. It is a privilege to lead the organisation tasked with maintaining confidence in those qualifications.

Trust in qualifications is strong across society, amongst students, parents, and those who use qualifications to make decisions about employment or further and higher education. Our qualifications have an international reputation, contributing to the UK's standing abroad.

Ofqual's job is to set a standard for quality and fairness and to ensure that the organisations providing qualifications meet that standard. This applies whether they are vocational or

technical qualifications, GCSEs, A levels, or apprenticeship end-point assessments. A central part of Ofqual's role is to ensure that qualifications hold their value over time. This is both to be fair to students and apprentices, who will carry their qualifications forward into their working life, and to maintain the public's confidence in our qualifications and the standards they represent.

As well as unlocking the future for students, trustworthy qualifications play a central role in the economy, reducing friction and duplication. Vocational and technical qualifications have high levels of credibility among employers. Those who achieve high-quality and trustworthy qualifications will be more likely to find the right job, make progress in their career, be more productive, enjoy a lifetime wage premium, and contribute more to the economy, including through taxation. In this way, trustworthy qualifications support economic growth.

While maintaining stability, quality, and confidence is central to Ofqual's role, we undertake this work in a changing world. We see this in the examinations system, including rising demand for support with examinations and other assessments. Technology and artificial intelligence are changing our world

rapidly, impacting qualifications. There are likely to be changes in what students are expected to learn, and in how they are assessed. This means that qualifications reform is likely to be an important feature of our work. Maintaining the quality of our qualifications and the reputation and confidence they command will require a dynamic and agile approach to regulation. Standing still is not an option.

We are framing our new strategy around the concept of stewardship of the qualifications system. Stewardship, an approach in regulation gaining interest around the world, will enable us to respond flexibly and with agility to changing needs and circumstances, while maintaining a focus on our core values and objectives of fairness for all, stable standards, and strong trust among students, employers, and the public.

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Sir Ian Bauckham CBE
Chief Regulator

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Why qualifications matter

Trusted qualifications matter for students and for economic growth. For students, trusted, reliable and fair qualifications unlock future opportunities. For example, vocational technical qualifications underpin professional development and enable career progression. Qualifications support entry to university courses as a next step in education. Other qualifications give students the skills they need for independent living. In each case, these achievements, and the qualifications that attest to them, are transformative.

Regulated qualifications offer students and apprentices the opportunity for recognition and value in their accomplishments. By offering a level playing field to assess knowledge, skills and behaviours, qualifications enable students, whatever their background, to access a pathway that is right for them. Trusted, reliable, fair qualifications

enable individuals to flourish, and as a result society benefits.

Regulated qualifications support further and higher education institutions to find and select the right students for courses. Qualifications support employers in identifying and recruiting appropriately skilled employees that meet their workforce needs. By supporting efficient matching of students and apprentices to opportunities, qualifications support growth.

Once in the workforce, each employee equipped with the right skills and knowledge can contribute more effectively to their workplaces. As employees develop new skills, productivity and innovation increase. This helps businesses thrive and economies grow and, in turn, supports career progression and higher earnings for employees.

Around £900 million worth of regulated qualifications and end-point assessments are sold within England each year. Qualifications regulated in England are also popular overseas with more than 8.5 million certificates issued to learners outside the United Kingdom by almost 100 awarding organisations in the 2023 to 2024 academic year. This benefits the UK economy and reputation on the global stage.

All of this is only true if the validity, reliability and fairness of those qualifications are widely recognised and trusted. Regulation secures that recognition in qualifications. Regulation of qualifications means students and apprentices can trust that their qualification attests to what they know and can do and will be recognised as doing so by universities and employers globally.

“As well as unlocking the future for students, trustworthy qualifications play a central role in the economy.”

Sir Ian Bauckham CBE
Chief Regulator

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Ofqual's role

Ofqual is the qualifications and assessments regulator for England. As a non-ministerial department, Ofqual is independent of ministers and is accountable directly to Parliament. Our independence is important in securing public confidence in the standards and validity of qualifications.

Parliament created Ofqual to:

- secure standards in qualifications so they give a reliable and consistent indication of knowledge, skills and understanding
- promote the development and implementation of national assessments that give a reliable and consistent indication of achievement
- promote public confidence in qualifications and national assessments
- promote public awareness and understanding of the range and benefits of regulated qualifications
- secure that qualifications are provided efficiently and represent value for money

Ofqual regulates **255** awarding organisations and more than **10,100 active** qualifications, for which **11.8 million** certificates were issued in the 2023 to 2024 academic year. These include vocational and technical qualifications, apprenticeship assessments, GCSEs, AS and A levels. Ofqual also regulates National Assessments delivered by the Standards and Testing Agency.

Ofqual performs this regulation in a range of ways:

- controlling entry of awarding organisations into the market
- reviewing the quality of qualifications and assessments
- creating general, qualification and subject-specific rules and guidance
- monitoring the application of those rules, supporting compliance and where necessary taking regulatory action
- where appropriate, working in a co-regulatory way on regulatory issues
- engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to promote understanding
- Ofqual has statutory duties to not impose or maintain unnecessary regulatory burden and to have regard to the desirability of facilitating innovation

Regulated qualifications

 We regulate **255** awarding organisations

 More than **10,100** active qualifications

More than **11.8m** certificates were awarded in 2023 to 2024

 **6.5 million** GCSE, AS and A level certificates

 **5.2 million** vocational and other qualification certificates

 Estimated market value – more than **£900m**

We regulate National Assessments that include approximately

 **650,000** year 6 pupils in England taking key stage 2 tests in around

 **16,500** primary schools each year

Information relates to England from 2023 to 2024 – sources: Annual Qualification Market Report 2023 to 2024, Qualifications Price Statistics: 2024 and National Assessment regulation annual report 2024

Ofqual's Strategy 2025 to 2028

Regulatory stewardship

Regulatory stewardship is the governance, monitoring and care of regulatory systems. It aims to ensure all the different parts of a regulatory system work well together to achieve its goals effectively, proportionately, and fairly, and keep the system fit for purpose over the long term.

This means Ofqual will:

- take a **long-term view** to maintain and enhance the value of the qualifications system for current and future generations and the long-term health of the economy
- take a **whole-system approach**, understanding our role within context and working with others to ensure the qualification system functions effectively
- be **proactive** in ensuring our regulation is fit for purpose, responding to changes, and driving innovative improvements that keep the qualifications system fit for purpose and trustworthy

These principles inform our strategy and delivery. Ofqual's decisions will be made with the aim of ensuring qualifications remain a valuable public asset for generations to come.

Context

Ofqual's strategy is about how we perform that role and act as that regulatory steward within the context of the next 3 to 5 years. Over that period, we believe these factors will be important:

- the increased recognition of special educational needs and disabilities, including mental health
- the continued growth in the use of technology in schools, colleges and the workplace
- the government's curriculum and assessment reform and new skills policy agenda
- the government's strong commitment to enabling economic growth, in a context of global economic uncertainty and tighter public finances
- the government's focus on improving efficiency across government and on the role of regulators in contributing to innovation and growth

How these factors will develop and interrelate, and what other factors may influence this period, is uncertain. Our strategy is clear on our priorities, but we will remain agile and responsive as the external environment changes.

Ofqual's objectives

Unlocking futures. Supporting growth.



Steward

Secure the safe, fair and resilient delivery of qualifications and assessments



Innovate

Oversee the improvement and reform of qualifications and assessments



Strengthen

Strengthen the performance, capacity and resilience of the market



Engage

Build confidence in qualifications



Develop

Develop the skills, processes and systems needed for effective and efficient regulation

Steward

Secure the safe, fair and resilient delivery of qualifications and assessments

All students and apprentices deserve the opportunity to take trusted, reliable, fair qualifications and assessments in which the rules are the same for everyone. They should have confidence that their work will be marked accurately and that their grade will be a fair reflection of what they know, understand and can do. Ensuring this is at the heart of our stewardship role.

In addition to continuing the oversight of delivery, our stewardship role means focusing on 3 important long-term, system-wide topics: ensuring that qualifications and assessments provide a level playing field for all; strengthening further the resilience of the qualifications system and addressing the root causes of systemic risks that emerge.

Safe: secure the delivery of assessments and consistent standards for regulated qualifications

Millions of students each year use qualifications to progress into further study, training or employment. In primary schools, statutory national assessments are used to understand how pupils are performing. For each of these different assessments to fulfil their purpose, teachers, employers, higher and further education establishments, government and the public must be confident that they are a reliable and consistent indicator of students' performance.

Our rules require awarding organisations to safely deliver high-quality qualifications and assessments, reviewing and improving these as appropriate. We will closely monitor delivery, require awarding organisations to address risks, prevent harms occurring, and make sure that students and apprentices are treated fairly when things go wrong. We will also monitor, evaluate and report on the validity of National Assessments delivered by the Standards and Testing Agency.

Fair: continue to improve the accessibility and fairness of regulated qualifications

Students and apprentices should not be advantaged or disadvantaged by assessment design or delivery that unfairly favours any one group. Ofqual's rules, supported by detailed statutory guidance on accessibility, require bias in design and delivery to be minimised. We will continue to ensure these rules remain fit for purpose and monitor how they are applied. We will provide further support and guidance as required and provide data and insight to inform improvements.

Resilient: improve the resilience of qualifications against external shocks and system-wide delivery failures

Ensuring the resilience of the qualification system against disruption is essential for maintaining the value of qualifications. External factors, whether pandemics or cyber-attacks, remain a risk to that functioning. We will work with a range of stakeholders to take a dynamic, whole system approach to identifying and addressing vulnerabilities, adapting the system to improve its resilience while ensuring robust contingency plans are in place.

Protect: identify and address the most harmful risks to delivery of regulated qualifications

With more than 10,000 active regulated qualifications and over 11 million certificates awarded every year, issues do occur. Where things go wrong, it can be students who are most affected. Ofqual continually monitors delivery and acts to prevent harms occurring where possible. Our work includes looking at thematic connections between individual instances, to identify common root causes, and address these at source. Our work on counter-fraud is an example where we have not only tackled individual cases, but have taken a multi-agency, multi-sector approach to tackling root cause. We will continue to take this systemic approach to dealing with issues as they arise.

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Innovate

Oversee the improvement and reform of qualifications and assessments

This period will see changes to qualifications resulting from government education and skills policy, the evolution and improvement of the sector, and technology. Our stewardship role will be to guide changes into delivery, ensuring the opportunities for students and economic growth are realised while risks to the safe, fair and resilient delivery of qualifications are mitigated. We will conduct research and publish data to help evaluate and continually improve qualifications and assessments.

Reform: oversee the design and delivery of high-quality qualifications and assessment resulting from education and skills reform

The government is undertaking a review of the existing national curriculum and statutory assessment including qualifications pathways, has set out new policy intentions regarding apprenticeship assessment, and is creating a new Skills England to oversee skills strategy. These changes will have important implications for the qualifications landscape over the next decade and beyond. Ofqual will provide expert advice to inform the design of these changes and then play a key role in ensuring that qualifications remain trusted, reliable and fair during any transition and into the future.

Digital: guide the safe adoption of new technologies into assessments for regulated qualifications

Over recent years, there has been growing interest in the role of technology in assessment. The use of technology in assessment presents both opportunities and risks. Over this period, Ofqual will ensure that where on-screen assessment is introduced, it is in a way that is fair, proportionate and manageable, allowing space for innovation and growth while also maintaining public confidence in qualifications.

The rapid growth of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform many aspects of education. We are already seeing innovative uses in the classroom. Ofqual has set out guidance on the use of AI in qualifications and assessment. As this technology continues to develop, we will work with a wide range of stakeholders to support beneficial innovation while preventing harm to the value of qualifications that students take.

Assessment: collaborate in researching, developing and testing approaches to assessment for regulated qualifications

Ofqual's assessment expertise and access to data afford us a unique role in informing the future of qualifications and assessment. We will carry out research that broadens and deepens the body of knowledge across all aspects of the regulated assessment landscape. This will include how qualifications and assessments are designed and delivered, the accessibility of assessments, how standards are maintained, how results are communicated, and how certificates open pathways and enable progression to further and higher education and employment. Through sharing that research and insight more widely, we will enable improvement and innovation within the sector.

Awarding: continue to improve approaches to maintaining standards in regulated qualifications

Ofqual expects standards to be maintained in the awarding of all qualifications so that students, employers and further and higher education institutions can be confident that the standards required to achieve a grade in a qualification are stable. Awarding organisations use well-established methods to achieve this. As qualifications and assessments evolve, it is right that we continually reflect on whether these trusted methods can be improved. We will use our independent position, our assessment expertise and that of the sector to explore ways to strengthen today's approaches.



Strengthen

Strengthen the performance, capacity and resilience of the market

The qualifications system depends on a strong and healthy market of capable awarding organisations. In 2025 there are 255 regulated awarding organisations, serving many different needs. Ofqual’s role as a regulator is to secure the quality of qualifications by controlling entry to the regulated market, monitoring performance of awarding organisations, supporting compliance, and taking regulatory action where needed.

While continuing with those activities, our stewardship role means focusing on 3 additional longer-term topics: ensuring that awarding organisations have appropriate capacity, capability and governance; improving our analysis of value for money in the sector; and ensuring our regulation and practice remain fit for purpose and proportionate.

Performance: assure the quality and performance of awarding organisations and regulate for improvement

Ofqual controls entry to the regulated market through its market recognition process. This sets a high bar for prospective awarding organisations to

meet. Ofqual monitors compliance with its conditions of recognition in various ways, engaging on any potential issues to protect students and maintain standards. Ofqual seeks to support awarding organisations to comply but will also use enforcement powers where required. Our aim is to make sure that awarding organisations continue to meet the high standards required for trusted, reliable and fair qualifications.

Capacity: strengthen the capacity, capability and governance of awarding organisations in the regulated qualifications market

For qualifications and assessments to be trusted, reliable and fair, awarding organisations must have sufficient resources and appropriate expertise to deliver the qualifications they offer. They must also have the appropriate governance to make sure the organisation is well run. Through a programme of targeted reviews, audits and monitoring we will continue work to assess the existing capacity, capability and governance of awarding organisations and take action to build and secure the capacity and capability of the market for the long term.

Market: improve the efficiency of the qualification market to ensure value for money for public spending

The qualifications market is in fact several markets, each with their own dynamics. We conservatively estimated that around £900m worth of qualifications and assessments were sold across those markets in the 2023 to 2024 academic year. Ofqual has a statutory objective to ensure that qualifications offer value for money. We provide information on pricing to improve market efficiency through transparency. Over this period, we will deepen our analysis of the direct and indirect economic impact of regulated qualifications, the supply and demand dynamics that drive value for money in the market, and through this identify further opportunities to improve efficiency and growth in the market.

Craft: ensure our regulatory toolkit remains fit for purpose and regulatory tools are effectively and efficiently deployed

Ofqual seeks to reflect developments in regulatory research and practice in our work so that we can exercise our responsibilities most effectively and with minimal burden. Learning and adapting means that the quality and efficiency of regulation can improve, and that regulatory burden can be reduced. We will continue to refine our approaches to review our rules and tools, ensuring these remain fit for purpose and are necessary. We will also review the processes that enable us to identify the greatest risks, act in an efficient and co-ordinated manner to address those risks quickly and then evaluate the effectiveness and impact of our approach.

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Engage

Build confidence in qualifications

Qualifications unlock the future for students and apprentices but only if those who use or rely on them are confident in their value. Ofqual plays a vital role in upholding that trust. We set clear expectations of how awarding organisations manage all aspects of qualification design and delivery, to ensure that they are worthy of trust and confidence. We regularly engage with stakeholders to listen, respond and target our work.

Maintaining existing levels of trust and confidence remains an important task. In our stewardship role, we will go further in 3 areas over this period, explaining more about how standards are maintained, particularly in GCSEs and A levels, playing our part in building understanding of and trust in vocational and technical qualifications, and using our research and insight to help inform wider discussions on education.

Maintain: maintain levels of trust and confidence in qualifications and assessments

Every year new cohorts of students take qualifications, changes to qualifications and modes of assessment may be introduced and the context and risks in the sector change. This means that

confidence in qualifications is not static and needs a continued focus to protect their value. We will listen to and engage with audiences to understand their views, using this insight to inform our work. We will continue to play our part each year by making available accurate and important information about qualifications to those who take and rely on them, and by providing assurance that standards have been maintained.

Deepen: build greater understanding of how awarding works and standards are maintained in GCSEs and A levels

The value of GCSEs and A levels is built on understanding and confidence that a grade represents a stable standard over time. Where there are misconceptions about how grading, awarding and standards work, this can erode that confidence. We will work with the education sector to improve understanding and prevent misconceptions that might impact confidence. We know that students get most of their information about qualifications from their teachers, so by focusing on communicating well with the education sector, we will ensure students also benefit.

Broaden: increase understanding of and confidence in vocational and technical qualifications

National vocational and technical qualifications and assessments provide students with essential skills, knowledge and understanding to support progression into work, further or higher education. It is important that students, schools, higher and further education institutions and employers value, are confident in, and understand these qualifications and assessments so that they maintain their value. Ofqual will support those advising students and apprentices to better understand, and find information on, the range of vocational and technical subjects and regulated qualifications available.

Inform: use our insight, research and data to inform sector understanding on qualifications, assessment and education

Research and data from qualifications and assessments can reveal insights into the education system more generally. It can tell us whether standards are improving or not, whether uptake in particular qualifications is changing, and about regional disparities, or disparities between different groups of students. Ofqual's research and evaluation can aid understanding of the educational outcomes of policy choices. We not only use our research to shape our own regulatory approach and expectations but through sharing our data, analysis and research more widely, we can also help inform those seeking to understand and improve the education system.

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Develop

Develop the skills, processes and systems needed for effective and efficient regulation

Ofqual depends on the skills and expertise of our people. Our teams are highly engaged and view us as an inclusive employer. We will work hard to maintain this culture and on continuing to attract and retain a diverse range of people. We will focus on providing the right learning and development opportunities for our teams and to maintain our governance processes for high quality, consistent decision making.

Beyond this, our stewardship role means a focus on the continual improvement of our processes and the exploration of technology to improve decision making. We will review all our key processes over this period, ensure our systems enable frictionless operations to improve our efficiency, while seeking excellence in data management and analysis.

Inspire: maintain a diverse, collaborative, inclusive culture where everyone can apply their expertise, bring clarity and solve problems

Ofqual consistently achieves high scores in the annual civil service staff survey, particularly for staff engagement

and inclusivity. We aspire to a culture where everyone can work together – including across the sector – to apply expertise, bring clarity and solve problems. We believe in the strength of diverse teams and will continue to seek diversity across Ofqual and particularly at senior levels. We will continue to create an inclusive working environment, where everyone feels welcome and is able to perform at their best.

Grow: develop our people and build the expertise we need to succeed in our strategy

Ofqual succeeds because of the skills and expertise of our people. We have a broad range of expertise, from qualifications and assessment through regulatory practice to financial insight. We know our teams would like more formal and informal opportunities to learn and develop skills, and more opportunities to develop careers in Ofqual. We will assess and develop new skills required for our strategy, such as digital or data analysis, and we will work to provide more structured opportunities for learning and development in Ofqual.

Efficient: support our regulation with more efficient, friction-free processes and systems

Ofqual's people operate best when they are supported by efficient processes and systems. We will review our regulatory processes, focusing first on those that have the biggest impact. We will identify improvements, including through better use of technology and opportunities to exploit artificial intelligence, to improve our efficiency and effectiveness. We will review our processes to ensure that the burden on those we regulate is minimised and reduce the time it takes for us to make regulatory decisions wherever possible.

Transform: transform our ability to regulate effectively through excellent data foundations and analytical tools and reporting

Ofqual manages a range of data and always applies high standards of data security and data management. We only seek to collect data where this is relevant to regulatory processes. We will improve the analysis of data to develop insights that drive good decision making in an efficient and timely manner, including through the appropriate use of artificial intelligence. We will seek to join up our datasets, generating both real-time and trend-based insight across the whole system. Our goal is that using data, our regulation can become more precise, targeted and timely.

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Impact

Regulatory stewardship focuses on system outcomes over the long-term. This makes understanding Ofqual's impact even more important. Over this period, we will improve our understanding of impact, our ability to describe it, analyse it, attribute it, and as a result to improve and focus our work.

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 on the impact of our work. Ofqual's annual report and accounts set out our progress in delivering our strategy, 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 perception surveys to measure confidence in GCSEs, AS, A levels and, vocational and technical qualifications
- develop our understanding 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 vocational and technical qualifications

- regularly evaluate the effectiveness and impact of our regulatory tools and decisions to understand if they have met their intended purpose
- report on our regulation of national assessments
- 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 annual qualification price statistics to highlight how qualification prices change over time

Over the course of this strategy, we remain committed to our aim to improve how we articulate our impact and outcomes, including identifying, where it is possible to do so, where harm has been prevented, and to use this to measure success on objectives and goals.

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