



Minutes

Board Meeting

Time and venue

9.00am by Microsoft Teams

Date

Wednesday, 17 March 2021

Attendees

Board

Ian Bauckham	Interim Chair
Susan Barratt	
Delroy Beverley	
Lesley Davies	
Hywel Jones	
Simon Lebus	Chief Regulator
Dr Catherine McClellan	
Dame Christine Ryan	
Matt Tee	
Frances Wadsworth	

Ofqual

Beth Black	Director for Research and Analysis; SRO VTQ 2021 Programme (item 209/20)
Daniel Gutteridge	Director of Legal
Michael Hanton	Director of Strategy and Markets
Katy Harding	Associate Director, Finance and Commercial (items 210/20 to 212/20)
Charlie Henning	Associate Director, People and Culture
Cath Jadhav	Director for Standards and Comparability; SRO General Qualifications 2021 Programme
Catherine Large	Interim Executive Director, Vocational & Technical Qualifications
Andy Lester	Private Secretary to the Chief Regulator (acting as Board Secretary)
Michelle Meadows	Executive Director, Strategy, Risk and Research
Jane Parsons	Director of Communications
Sean Pearce	Chief Operating Officer (from item 215/20)
Ian Stockford	Director of Strategic Projects (Item 214/20)
Julie Swan	Executive Director, General Qualifications

203/20 Welcome and apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Mike Thompson.

204/20 Declarations of interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

205/20 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes from the Board Meetings held on 11 February 2021 were approved as presented. There were no matters arising.

The reports and recommendations from Board Committees were received and noted.

206/20 Decisions taken by Electronic Business

The Board noted the decisions it had taken by electronic business:

- i. National Reference Test 2021 Arrangements (circulated for information and comment on 05 February 2021)
- ii. Communications Strategy Plan – Post Consultation (approved 19 February 2021)
- iii. Alternative arrangements for awarding 2021 (approved 24 February 2021)

The Director of Communications updated on the activity subsequently undertaken to support the communications strategy plan, including media, publications and speeches by both the Chief Regulator and Chair.

207/20 Chair's Update

The Chair updated the Board on his appearance at the Education Select Committee alongside the Chief Regulator and the Minister of State for School Standards. He noted that there had been opportunity to emphasise some key messages.

208/20 Chief Regulator's Report

The Chief Regulator noted that an extensive body of work had been undertaken in the first phase of preparations for the award of qualifications in summer 2021 and that decisions were announced. The organisation was now working intensively with awarding organisations and the DfE on guidance for schools and colleges.

Areas of media and stakeholder focus in light of the announcements have included the likelihood of some further grade inflation compared to the established standard, arrangements for appeals, the impact on teachers and comparisons between the four jurisdictions in the UK. The Chief Regulator updated the Board on the DfE's plans to ensure private candidates had access to the arrangements, and noted that working arrangements with the DfE remained effective.

Progress towards transition of the external quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments was reported.

An update on Ofqual's research into learning loss was provided, including how this was designed alongside the extensive work of other organisations and researchers in the sector. The potential value of the National Reference Test to understand the extent of lost learning was noted. The Board's attention was drawn to research Ofqual will publish shortly on Centre Assessment Grades in 2020.

The Board noted the extensive work completed by Ofqual, and commended the purposeful way Ofqual continues to meet the challenges it faces.

The Board resolved to defer its consideration of whether to delegate approval of the decisions arising out of the consultation for an autumn examination series to the Chief Regulator in consultation with the Chair until after a presentation from the Executive Director for General Qualifications in its next item of business.

209/20 Awarding 2021 Update

The proposals to be set out for consultation for an autumn examination series for GCSE, AS and A levels were outlined by the Executive Director for General Qualifications. The presentation considered the availability of the series to students, the proposal that the exams would be in 'normal' form without adaptations or other easements, and that the consultation would seek views on whether exams for AS levels should be available.

The Equalities Impact Assessment was outlined. It was noted that student preparedness is a key concern. Ofqual had consulted in December on potential adaptations for summer exams in 2021, before the Government's January decision that exams should not go ahead in summer 2021. Responses had emphasised the need for student support to manage adaptations, and risks to disadvantaged and disabled students where support was not available. It was noted that most students would not have opportunity to be supported to understand the impact of adaptations for autumn examinations, which argued in favour of these examinations being in the normal form. This would also reduce burden for exam boards and centres.

The Board questioned whether the proposal not to adjust autumn 2021 exams was the right one. It was informed that the potential negative impact on disadvantaged and disabled students had factored significantly in the proposals, informed by the December consultation outcomes. The proposal will, however, mean that some students could be examined on aspects that they have not been taught.

The Chair noted that questions had been raised on this point, and these would be considered alongside responses to the consultation in forming Ofqual's policy post consultation.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to delegate approval of the decisions arising out of the consultation for an autumn examination series to the Chief Regulator in consultation with the Chair.

The Director for Standards and Comparability updated the Board on other key activity to be completed for the award of GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2021. This included information which would be made available to schools and colleges before and shortly after Easter, and exam boards' plans for operationalising the quality assurance and appeals processes.

The Director for Research and Analysis updated on key activities in the award of VTQs in 2021. A key concern for Ofqual and the sector is consistency, and Ofqual is undertaking extensive engagement to support consistency of approach within specific qualifications, qualification groups and sectors. JCQ members are also preparing a VTQ version of the centre guidance, to the same timeline.

The Board sought information on the monitoring approach to the award of International Baccalaureate and Pre-U qualifications, and was assured it was an area of focus.

210/20 Finance Update

The Board noted the update, including the key reasons that a larger underspend had emerged in recent months, which included support from Ofsted, the deferral by the Secretary of State in the last quarter of the financial year of the 2021 National Reference Test into the next financial year, and the release of a contingency.

211/20 Standing Financial Instructions – Scheme of Delegation

The Board noted that the proposal had been subject to scrutiny and challenge from the Finance and HR Committee and was presented with the Committee's endorsement.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to agree the Scheme of Delegation for Board approval of contracts over £500k and the proposed delegations outlined in table 1 of the report.

212/20 Approval of 2021/22 Budget

The Board was informed that the budget presented for approval was consistent with Ofqual's submission and remit under the 2020 Spending Review and had been scrutinised by the Finance and HR Committee. A particular focus of those discussions had been on the capacity building aspects identified.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to approve the budget of £24.649m for 2021/22.

213/20 2020 People Survey Update

The Associate Director for People and Culture introduced the discussion. Ofqual recognised that it is very important that action is taken and seen to be taken based on the results, and the Executive had committed to do the same.

The Chief Regulator reported that there was a deep commitment to staff wellbeing among the senior team, which had been a frequent item of discussion in his three months in post.

214/20 Ofqual’s approach to Technical Education Qualifications

The Board was briefed on progress with reforms to the technical education family of qualifications, which includes T Levels, apprenticeships and other technical qualifications. It noted the recently published Skills White Paper as the culmination of Government policy over a number of years including the Sainsbury and Augur reviews. The White Paper confirms that Government sees regulation as the way to secure quality in these qualifications, and that this will be confirmed in changes to Ofqual and the Institute’s legislation.

Ofqual was considering the broader range of its regulatory tools that could support quality, to complement its established practices. In particular, Ofqual is considering the capabilities that have served AOs well during the pandemic: strength of connection with centres, relationships with employers, assessment expertise. Ofqual could place greater emphasis on regulating for these qualities at entity level, to supplement its focus on qualification quality.

The Board recognised the existence of other actors in the system who will influence the quality of this family of qualifications; most notably the Institute. Ofqual needs to think about its strategy to secure quality so as all the system levers work in concert.

215/20 Review of the composition of the Standards Advisory Group

The Board considered the proposal. It sought assurance on the extent and breadth of VTQs expertise within the Standards Advisory Group, and was informed that those members most expert in VTQs were proposed to be retained in the group.

The Board considered the purpose of the group. It noted that the group is advisory to the Board on certain technical assessment issues, and provides a broad and varied range of expert perspectives to management rather than specific or binding recommendations. The group also supports Ofqual engagement with influential voices in this expert community.

The Board questioned whether the proposal provided for sufficient diversity, and whether this review provided an opportunity to ensure Ofqual’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion extended through all its functions. It was informed that the new members had been proposed to diversify the age and experience of membership, but there was limited representation from the BAME community within the assessment community with the expertise to contribute to this technical advisory group. The Board encouraged the Executive to consider whether international expertise might support more diverse representation.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to re-appoint the independent members of its Standards Advisory Group for a 12-month period.

The Board requested that further consideration be given to the proposed additional appointees to the group. **ACTION: MM**

216/20 Publication of Papers

Agreed to publish open papers

217/20 Any Other Business

The Chair proposed and the Board resolved that all future meetings of the Board should be scheduled to be no longer than three hours in duration.

ACTION: NF

The meeting ended at 11.57am.