

Corporate Plan 2015–18

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Foreword

by the Chair and Chief Regulator



We are pleased to present Ofqual's corporate plan for 2015–18.

We set out here a comprehensive programme of work to fulfil our statutory objectives and to provide valued qualifications for those who study, teach and otherwise rely on them. We say what we plan to do so that both established and upcoming regulated qualifications are effective, deliver as intended, and support good educational and training outcomes.

Last year we set out our strategic priorities. They included developing the way we regulate – concentrating on the validity of qualifications throughout their life cycle – and improving fairness and transparency in qualification delivery. We also planned to increase our focus on vocational qualifications (including apprenticeships) and to improve some important qualifications, including some that are not much in the public eye.

Validity, fairness and transparency have been central considerations as we reform GCSEs, AS and A levels so that they allow teachers to deliver the curriculum well, with a more level playing field for students. The reforms are on track, with the first new qualifications

being taught from September 2015 and work for those due for first teaching in 2016 and 2017 well in hand. We will retain our regulatory interest in the new qualifications throughout their life cycle to be sure that their aims are met.

To improve vocational qualifications, we have decided to withdraw the Qualifications and Credit Framework, as it proved more of a hindrance than a help to the qualifications system. Instead, we propose a simpler, descriptive framework. Also, rather than rely on more limited checks, we now increasingly expect awarding organisations to demonstrate to us that their qualifications are sufficiently valid from end to end, and audit them to make sure that they can. We provide more detail of our work in our recent report to Parliament.

Looking ahead, our priorities have not changed. We are continuing to focus on validity and on the providers of vocational qualifications and apprenticeships assessment (where we think we have a significant contribution to make). We want to see a system that is responsive to employers and that can provide the knowledge and skills they and their organisations require to succeed.

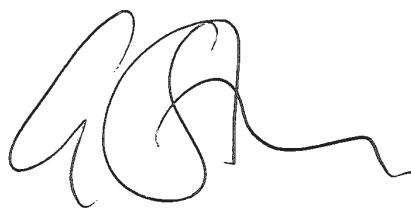
We appreciate that our work is important to each student's future and to the education system as a whole. We believe we can continue to make a difference, and set out our plans to do so, and to continue to develop our competence and capacity (as encouraged by the Education Select Committee) so that we deliver as much as possible, as well as possible.

Those who study and rely on qualifications should have faith in them, know they stand up well internationally, and have confidence in their outcomes. As new GCSEs, AS and A levels are awarded in 2017 and beyond, we will hold standards steady.

While every government of course has the right to establish its own policies, we recognise the great burden that qualification reform places on schools and colleges, and hope that there will be sufficient stability in the near future to allow them to do their work well.

Amanda Spielman

Amanda Spielman, Chair



Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator

About Ofqual



Our role

We are the independent qualifications regulator for England and (for vocational qualifications only) Northern Ireland. We regulate so that qualifications are sufficiently valid and trusted. We make clear and considered judgements for the benefit of those who study, and rely on, regulated qualifications.

The government decides the National Curriculum for primary and secondary schools, the qualifications that can be offered, and the accountability framework by which schools are evaluated. Government

departments in England and Northern Ireland also determine funding for certain vocational qualifications and apprenticeships delivered in colleges and by employers and training providers. Many qualifications that we regulate are bought and used privately, with no government involvement or funding.

Our objectives and duties

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

- 1 To secure qualifications standards
- 2 To promote National Assessment standards¹
- 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.

¹ This document sets out our role in relation to Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and National Curriculum Assessments. Collectively we refer to these as National Assessments.

We regulate awarding organisations that offer qualifications in England and those that provide vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. We do not regulate degrees. Education and skills policy is devolved and as we regulate we are mindful of the qualifications policy in each administration.

Equality

We must have due regard to equality and diversity in developing policy and in carrying out our regulatory activities. We provide further details on how we do that in this plan.

Innovation

Technological and other innovations present opportunities for the sector and benefits for students. We are interested in and supportive of innovation that will enable tomorrow's qualifications to be sufficiently valid, more reliable and better delivered. We will not unduly prevent or discourage innovation, save where innovation would threaten validity.

Regulatory burden

We keep the weight and effect of our regulation under review. This includes making sure that we are not imposing or maintaining any unnecessary burden.

We follow good regulatory practice, particularly the Better Regulation Executive's five principles of good regulation and the Macrory report *Regulatory Justice: Making Sanctions Effective*.²

To comply with the new growth duty being introduced this year, we will have regard to the desirability of promoting economic growth as we regulate.

Our context

We regulate qualifications within the context of government policy and policy in Northern Ireland. Over recent years that has required us to reform assessments for GCSEs, AS and A levels, review the validity of new vocational and functional skills qualifications, and consider how best to regulate the assessment of apprenticeships.

The market for qualifications is changing, as the structure and range of publicly funded qualifications change. Some providers have left the market; others have revised their offer. As the operational and financial risks faced by firms have altered, so we have flexed our risk-based approach to ensure that we continue to target the issues of greatest concern to the sustained provision of high-quality qualifications.

² *Regulatory Justice: Making Sanctions Effective* (November 2006)

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121212135622/http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file44593.pdf>

Goal 1

Regulating and reforming general qualifications

Objective 1

Regulate for the validity of general qualifications throughout their life cycle.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Monitor and evaluate the validity of GCSEs, AS and A levels, and other Level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications.
- Conduct research on factors that impact validity.
- Establish common measures and mechanisms for reporting quality of marking across exam boards.
- Conduct research into different approaches to Enquiries about Results.
- Strengthen exam board processes for Enquiries about Results and Appeals.
- Engage the teaching profession to reduce opportunities for and maximise deterrents to malpractice.
- Consult stakeholders on the potential withdrawal of the Code of Practice, while being mindful of avoiding unnecessary change and regulatory burden.
- Complete research into inter-subject comparability, investigating technical, practical and policy issues, and publish our policy position.
- Ensure that grading standards are maintained.
- Compare awarding and standards-setting methods against alternatives, including those used in other countries.

- Evaluate the potential impact on standards of exam board support materials, marketing and teacher events.
- Maintain oversight of the fees charged for reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Complete the development of the National Reference Test with first use in March 2017.
- Evaluate reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels using technical evidence and the views of those who study and use qualifications, including any impact the reforms may have had on students with protected characteristics.
- Consult on and implement further reforms to the Enquiries about Results and Appeals processes, informed by research.

Outcomes

- Evidence that general qualifications are sufficiently valid throughout their life cycle.
- Schools, colleges and students have greater confidence in the quality of marking.
- Strengthened public confidence in exam delivery and its value for money.
- Standards are maintained.

Goal 1

Regulating and reforming general qualifications

Objective 2

Oversee the introduction of reformed general qualifications.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Oversee the delivery of reformed qualifications for first teaching in 2015.
- Consult key stakeholders on assessment arrangements for reformed qualifications to be taught from 2016 and 2017.
- Set regulatory conditions and guidance for qualifications to be taught from 2016, continuing to be mindful to minimise the potential impact on students with protected characteristics.
- Accredit subjects for first teaching in 2016 where they meet our requirements and agree subjects for subsequent content development, to be ready for first teaching in 2017.
- Define approaches to setting grading standards in GCSEs, AS and A levels and for GCSEs for first teaching in 2016 and 2017.
- Inform schools, colleges, parents and students about reformed qualifications.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Set regulatory conditions for qualifications to be taught from 2017.
- Accredit qualifications for first teaching in 2017 where they meet our requirements.
- Oversee the awarding of reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels.
- Evaluate the impact of reform in key subjects, including the effects of changes to qualification structures.

Outcomes

- Reformed specifications produce valid outcomes and meet their stated aims.
- Confidence that our regulation is supporting good assessment and educational outcomes.
- Stakeholders better understand the changes, why they are happening and the impact they will have.
- Improved public understanding of and confidence in grades awarded for reformed qualifications.

Goal 1

Regulating and reforming general qualifications

Objective 3

Regulate for the validity of National Assessments.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Set out and consult on a new regulatory approach to National Assessments focused on their quality and validity.
- Monitor, evaluate and report on risks to validity in National Assessments.
- Monitor the delivery of the 2015 Key Stage 2 tests.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Monitor the first delivery of new Key Stage 2 tests and reception baseline assessments in 2016.
- Evaluate scaled scores when these are used for the first time in 2016.

Outcomes

- Maintain public confidence in National Assessment arrangements.

Goal 2

Regulating vocational and other qualifications

Objective 4

Regulate for the validity of vocational and other qualifications throughout their life cycle.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Withdraw the Qualifications and Credit Framework rules (to be replaced by a new descriptive framework), minimising unnecessary change and regulatory burden as we do so.
- Regulate qualifications based on how they are used, the industry they support, and risks to validity and to good education and training outcomes.
- Regulate in particular the standards and validity of vocationally related and applied qualifications offered in schools.
- Continue to advise the government on the role of assessment within apprenticeships and regulate new apprenticeship assessments as requested.
- Regulate to improve the quality of assessment in functional skills qualifications, and the consistency of standards between different awarding organisations.
- Audit, and where appropriate enforce, the compliance of awarding organisations, and their qualifications, with our General Conditions of Recognition.
- Clarify how we will evaluate and audit validity and issue guidance on our rules, prioritising those that underpin validity.

- Strengthen our approach to equality in the new regulatory model, including approaches to reasonable adjustments for disabled students.
- Begin to assess the impact of our regulatory strategy.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Continue to develop our regulatory approach and risk framework to respond to changes in the external environment and target our resources effectively.
- Further develop our evidence base on assessment design, performance standards, moderation and verification.
- Evaluate our regulatory strategy and make changes as appropriate.

Outcomes

- Greater assurance that vocational qualifications are sufficiently valid and support good educational and training outcomes.
- Qualifications that are not sufficiently valid are improved or withdrawn.
- All awarding organisations assume responsibility for the validity of their qualifications as Qualifications and Credit Framework rules and unit-sharing arrangements are withdrawn.

Goal 2

Regulating vocational and other qualifications

Objective 5

Promote a healthy vocational qualifications market.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Improve the quality and accessibility of information about qualifications on the Register for Regulated Qualifications.
- Introduce a new descriptive framework (to replace the Qualifications and Credit Framework) to provide information about a qualification's level and size.
- Continue to monitor, develop and inform our regulatory approach in response to feedback from stakeholders, including equalities groups.
- Gather evidence on the efficiency of the qualifications market.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Continue to work with others to improve the quality and accessibility of information available about qualifications and skills development.
- Raise our expectations of the depth and quality of awarding organisations' engagement with employers, reflecting the needs of different industrial sectors.
- Work with others to reduce the risk of malpractice and maladministration in the delivery of vocational qualifications.

Outcomes

- Teachers, students, employers and others can navigate the qualifications system more effectively and be better informed about qualifications.
- Qualifications better meet employers' and others' needs.
- Improved assurance about awarding organisations' compliance with our regulatory conditions.

Goal 3

Developing our people, resources and systems

Objective 6

Build our capability and capacity.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Embed changes to organisation design, recruit to new roles and address outstanding skills gaps.
- Introduce a framework for skills acquisition and knowledge development for staff.
- Clearly align corporate objectives and personal objectives, and improve performance management.
- Continue to develop our internal communications strategy.
- Implement a teacher secondment programme.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Continue to build a high-performing, responsive organisation.
- Develop a talent management programme.
- Implement graduate and apprenticeship recruitment and development programmes.

Outcomes

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

Goal 3

Developing our people, resources and systems

Objective 7

Invest in better information management to improve the quality and accessibility of information.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Design a new regulatory IT platform to replace Regulatory Information Technology System (RITS) and support the new qualifications register.
- Continue to develop our risk modelling and analysis capability.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Implement the new regulatory IT platform.
- Use enhanced data analytics in our regulatory decision-making.
- Work across government to reduce regulatory burden by collecting data more efficiently and making better use of information where possible.

Outcomes

- We have the right people, processes and technology to manage data as a strategic asset.
- Data is collected once, managed digitally and centrally, is accessible, and is used to its full potential.
- Information is used more effectively to improve our evidence base and to better inform our regulatory activity.

Goal 3

Developing our people, resources and systems

Objective 8

Efficient and effective use of resources.

What we plan to do 2015–16

- Maintain effective programme and contract management discipline.
- Improve efficiency through the introduction of new IT capability.
- Implement new, consistent and risk-based processes to deliver our regulatory strategy.
- Reduce dependency on short-term and interim contracts and on external research providers.

What we plan to do 2016–18

- Maximise efficiency of key business processes.
- Reduce expenditure on corporate overheads.
- Maximise our efficiency and effectiveness through flexible deployment of our people.

Outcomes

- Agreed programme of activity with funding in place.
- Reform of new GCSEs, AS and A levels delivered on time and to budget.
- Demonstrable value for money in the use of our resources.
- Improved results across key performance indicators.
- Improved effectiveness and efficiency as a result of standardised ways of working.

Our resources

The 2012–15 Comprehensive Spending Review determined our administration and programme resources settlement at £15.8 million for the year 2015–16. We continue to receive additional funding towards work on GCSE, AS and A level reform, and the development of the National Reference Test, as these initiatives were agreed after the Comprehensive Spending Review. We will continue to engage with the government as we enter into the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Measuring our impact

To evaluate our success, we will use a range of qualitative and quantitative measures. In particular, we will develop a set of measures targeted at demonstrating and measuring:

- the improvements that awarding organisations have made to the validity of their qualifications;
- how we have taken regulatory action where we have needed to; and
- the views of stakeholders (using and improving both our existing public confidence survey and a new stakeholder survey).

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