

CORPORATE REPORT

Corporate Plan 2020-21

ofqual

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Foreword by the Chair

We are experiencing a time of great change and instability in both our education and training system and across the whole of society as the country responds to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Yet our primary responsibility to all those that take, use and rely on qualifications and assessments remains the same – that they can be confident in their quality and value. This is the part we play in supporting the lives of children, young people and adults that take qualifications, and the economy.

Our annual report and accounts for 2019-20 sets out our early work in response to coronavirus (COVID-19) to ensure that as many students, apprentices and other learners as possible are able to obtain a qualification this year and progress with their lives, whilst also ensuring that outcomes are as fair as possible.

This spring, we have defined, consulted on and established new arrangements both for vocational and technical qualifications and general qualifications. This work is built on broad and deep collaboration across the sector with students, teachers and tutors, schools, colleges and training providers, employers and professional bodies, and the awarding organisations and exam boards we regulate to find the best solutions to complex and difficult challenges.

I want to thank all those who responded to our consultations on these arrangements on an unprecedented scale. It is critical that the voices of all involved continue to shape and inform our work.

This corporate plan sets out our priority work for the immediate future. It covers the activity required to secure the best possible arrangements for students, employers and qualification users this summer and autumn, and the work we need to do to plan for qualifications to be taken in 2021. The future is uncertain and we will take all the steps we can to prepare for the scenarios that may arise.

We also plan to continue some priority programmes that will secure quality in regulated qualifications in the longer-term, including important work in support of the government's ambitious reform agenda for technical education, and the choices available to students post-16. We are preparing for potential expansion of our external quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments, in line with the simplified system announced for consultation by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. We will also continue work to regulate the technical qualifications within T Levels, working alongside the Institute.

As we work towards the priorities outlined in this corporate plan, we will remain focussed on protecting the interests of the millions who take and use the qualifications and assessments we regulate. We will continue to listen, to understand and to partner with others to achieve our aims. In uncertain times this is more important than ever.



Roger Taylor

Chair

Foreword by the Chief Regulator

Every year, more than a million students take GCSEs, AS and A levels. Many more take vocational and technical qualifications and apprenticeship end-point assessments. To every individual, each qualification or assessment matters – as true today, as any time.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) has changed the arrangements for many exams and assessments this year. We have announced an extraordinary regulatory framework for vocational and technical qualifications, and arrangements for ensuring the fairest possible results for students taking GCSEs, AS and A levels, so that the highest number of individuals expecting a qualification result obtain their qualification this summer.

The level of change brought by coronavirus (COVID-19) means that the arrangements are inevitably not ideal, but we seek at all times to chart the best course available within the constraints we face. This is only possible due to the extensive and continued engagement with the broadest range of stakeholders we have ever worked with.

I am particularly grateful to the thousands of professionals in schools, colleges and training providers who have worked with awarding organisations to provide centre assessment grades in those qualifications most critical for progression through education, including GCSEs, A levels and Applied General qualifications. We know this was a difficult task with little time for preparation. You can be assured that the standardisation of these centre assessment grades by exam boards and awarding organisations will be as robust and fair as it can be.

Our amended regulations for vocational qualifications allow awarding organisations additional flexibility to adapt their assessments so more learners receive an outcome this summer, where it is fair and reliable to do so. We are engaging extensively with awarding organisations as they work through and implement changes to their assessments.

There remains much for us and many others to do to secure qualifications which hold the confidence of the public and ensure outcomes that are as fair as they can be. I am proud of the resilience and commitment of our people as they work with others to address the unique challenges coronavirus (COVID-19) brings to assessment, qualifications and apprenticeships. I look forward to continuing to work with our people, teachers, parents, students and other representative bodies across the sector as we deliver the priorities outlined in this corporate plan.



Sally Collier
Chief Regulator

Our role

Ofqual is the independent qualifications regulator for England. We regulate 160 awarding organisations, and about 12,250 qualifications for which certificates were issued last year. These include GCSEs, AS and A levels, and a broad range of vocational and technical qualifications.

We have five statutory objectives set out in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

In brief, they are to:

1. Secure qualifications standards.
2. Promote National Assessment standards.
3. Promote public confidence in regulated qualifications and National Assessment arrangements.
4. Promote awareness of the range and benefits of regulated qualifications.
5. Secure that regulated qualifications are provided efficiently.

In 2020/21, Ofqual will receive funding of £23.1 million to resource delivery of this corporate plan. We expect to review our future funding with government over the course of the year.

Our priorities

Regulating GCSE, AS & A levels in response to coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Secretary of State's announcement in March that all exams in schools and colleges would be cancelled marked a significant change for students, teachers and parents preparing for GCSE, AS and A levels. It also meant substantial change for exam boards, and the way we fulfil our role as regulator of a system which is secure, fair and delivers qualifications with currency.

We have announced our approach for GCSE, AS and A levels in both summer and autumn 2020, following extensive consultation. Our focus is now on implementation. Coronavirus (COVID-19) will have an impact beyond the next few months. Our plans include programmes to ensure secure delivery of a fair examination series in the autumn, for those who want to take that opportunity. Given disruption to the education of students preparing to take qualifications in 2021, we are working closely with government and others to mitigate the effects as far as possible, whilst ensuring that the qualifications remain meaningful and confidence in them is secured.

What we plan to do in 2020-21

1. Require exam boards to address identified risks to the secure and on-time delivery of GCSE, AS and A level results in summer 2020.
2. Ensure exam boards develop and implement the approach to the secure collection and statistical standardisation of centre assessment grades announced following our consultation.
3. Ensure exam boards implement appropriate arrangements for the appeal of GCSE, AS and A level results in line with our requirements.
4. Evaluate the extraordinary arrangements for awarding GCSE, AS and A levels in 2020, including researching the impact on students with particular protected and other characteristics, and the experience of teachers, students and others.
5. Establish regulatory arrangements for an additional exam series for GCSE, AS and A levels in autumn 2020.
6. Require exam boards to identify and address risks to the secure delivery and award of GCSE, AS and A levels in autumn 2020 and monitor delivery of the series.
7. Make sure exam boards maintain established grade standards in GCSE, AS and A levels in autumn 2020.
8. Develop and consult on arrangements to mitigate risks to the fairness and validity of GCSE, AS and A levels to be awarded in 2021 which may result from disruption to education.

Outcomes

- As many students as possible obtain GCSE, AS and A level results in summer 2020 so they can progress to the next stages of their lives.

- Students have an opportunity to take GCSE, AS and A level exams in autumn 2020 if they wish.
- Grades awarded are as fair as possible.
- Students, schools, colleges, higher education institutions and employers are confident in the grades awarded.
- Appropriate arrangements are in place for the secure awarding of GCSE, AS and A levels in 2021.

Regulating vocational and technical qualifications in response to coronavirus (COVID-19)

There is a very broad range of vocational, technical and other general qualifications, with differing purposes, contexts and means of assessment. Our approach therefore provides parameters within which awarding organisations have flexibility to put in place the appropriate arrangements for awarding their qualifications.

We have announced an extraordinary regulatory framework to support the award of results to learners due to take assessments this summer and autumn, wherever awarding organisations can validly calculate a result, or adapt assessments. We are working closely with awarding organisations and their representative bodies, representatives of schools, colleges and training providers, learners, higher education institutions, employers and professional bodies to support the fairest outcomes for all those relying on these qualifications this year.

What we plan to do in 2020-21

1. Implement an extraordinary regulatory framework that is well understood by all involved.
2. Oversee and coordinate awarding organisations' interpretation of the extraordinary regulatory framework, including through a technical advisory function.
3. Monitor awarding in summer and autumn 2020, requiring awarding organisations to identify and address risks to the secure and timely delivery and award of vocational and technical qualifications and end-point assessments where exceptional arrangements are made.
4. Evaluate the extraordinary regulatory framework for awarding vocational, technical and other general qualifications in 2020, including the impact on students with particular protected and other characteristics.
5. Develop arrangements to mitigate risks to the fairness and validity of vocational and technical qualifications to be awarded in 2021 which may result from disruption to education.

Outcomes

- As many students, apprentices and other learners as possible receive outcomes for vocational and technical qualifications in 2020 so they can progress to the next stages of their lives.
- Vocational and technical qualification outcomes are as fair as possible.

- Vocational and technical qualification outcomes in 2020 are as valued as in any other year.
- Appropriate arrangements are in place for the secure awarding of vocational and technical qualifications in 2021.

Supporting quality in regulated qualifications and assessments

Qualifications and assessments which are fair, delivered securely, and which accurately reflect the performance of those who take them underpin education and training. We will continue priority programmes to secure quality in regulated qualifications in the medium term alongside our emergency responses in light of coronavirus (COVID-19).

What we plan to do in 2020-21

Ensure quality in new and reformed qualifications and assessments

1. Work with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) to support the introduction of technical qualifications within T Level programmes including reviewing applications for recognition from awarding organisations bidding to offer T Levels, submissions for accreditation of the technical qualifications they develop and agreeing joint approaches to these technical qualifications in delivery.
2. Subject to the outcome of the Institute's consultation, expand our external quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments as part of the simplified system announced by the Institute, including working with the Education and Skills Funding Agency to streamline the process for end-point assessment organisations to register and become recognised.
3. Work with the Department for Education, the Institute and the Office for Students to establish a co-ordinated regulatory approach for new Institute-approved higher technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5.
4. Set regulatory requirements for digital functional skills qualifications in conjunction with publication of the subject content by the Department for Education and conduct technical evaluation of new essential digital skills qualifications developed by awarding organisations ahead of their delivery.
5. Support the Department for Education on its review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below.
6. Begin to evaluate how awarding organisations have strengthened assessments in technical and vocational qualifications taken at Key Stage 4 in line with our new Conditions and Guidance before they are considered for use in performance tables by the Department for Education.
7. Develop regulations for a new GCSE in British Sign Language.
8. Monitor the development of and preparations to introduce new National Assessments, including the reception baseline, multiplication tables check and revised early years foundation stage profile, providing technical advice where appropriate.

Address systemic risks

1. Review the effectiveness of new security measures proposed or adopted by exam boards to secure delivery of GCSE, AS and A level exam papers.
2. Continue to require improvements to exam boards' quality of marking, including research into our expectations for the quality of marking and assessing the potential for artificial intelligence to improve the marking process.
3. Continue our review of current practices for moderating teachers' marking, and potential areas for improvement.
4. Monitor and regulate for the validity of National Assessments as these are reintroduced following their cancellation in summer 2020.
5. Work with the sector, including through the Federation of Awarding Bodies, to support implementation of our new rules for centre assessment standards scrutiny.
6. Publish new guidance on developing accessible assessments.
7. Implement changes to how we take regulatory action, following consultation last year and use the full range of our enforcement powers to address serious or persistent non-compliance.

Promote an efficient and effective market

1. Publish data and information that describe the regulated qualifications market.
2. Implement new rules in relation to transparency of qualification fees, following our consultation, and publish our second qualifications price index.
3. Assess opportunities and barriers to the increased use of technology in the delivery and awarding of regulated qualifications, including any barriers within our regulations.

Outcomes

- New and reformed qualifications and assessments meet their purpose, are valid, and delivered securely.
- Those who take, use and rely on new and reformed qualifications are well informed about and confident in them.
- Regulation supports a coherent vocational and technical qualifications market for learners, employers and qualifications users.
- Identified systemic risks are addressed to secure public confidence, qualification standards and to protect the interests of students, apprentices and other learners.

Managing our people, resources and systems

We are an established and expert organisation, achieving our goals through our people working together and with others across the education and training system. We entered the year working remotely, and using technology to do this. We will continue to make sure our people have the right skills and expertise and access to the right information and tools to work effectively and achieve the work set out in this corporate plan.

What we plan to do in 2020-21

1. Ensure that our people are safe, work in line with appropriate government policy and advice and have access to the technology and resources to fulfil their role, wherever they are working.
2. Develop our capacity and expertise to deliver our corporate plan, particularly in areas of reform or new responsibilities such as any expansion of our external quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments.
3. Implement our people, diversity and inclusion and learning and development strategies, and ensure our people have access to health and wellbeing support.
4. Reduce burden for awarding organisations and improve our efficiency through further use of digital systems in our regulatory processes.
5. Embed and improve our cyber security while making data available in a way that is pragmatic and secure.
6. Develop our medium-term financial strategy and planning and secure a new spending review settlement that enables us to achieve our priorities and fulfil our statutory objectives in 2021 and beyond.

Outcomes

- Our people work safely, effectively and efficiently and have access to health and wellbeing support through coronavirus (COVID-19).
- We have a diverse workforce with the right people and expertise to deliver our strategic priorities.
- We make the best use of up to date data, and our data is secure and used appropriately.
- Our priorities are delivered efficiently, maximising value for public money and making the best use of our resources.



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Published by:

ofqual

Earlsdon Park
53-55 Butts Road
Coventry
CV1 3BH

0300 303 3344
public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofqual