



Minutes

Emergency Board Meeting

Date

Monday, 4 May 2020

Attendees

Board

Susan Barratt

Ian Bauckham

Delroy Beverley

Sally Collier

Chief Regulator

Mike Cresswell

Hywel Jones

Dame Christine Ryan

Roger Taylor

Chair

Matt Tee

Mike Thompson

Frances Wadsworth

Ofqual

Phil Beach

Executive Director, Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Niamh Field

Board Secretary

Daniel Gutteridge

Director of Legal

Michael Hanton

Director of Strategy and Markets

Janet Holloway

Associate Director, Standards for Design, Development & Evaluation of General Qualifications

Matthew Humphrey

Director of Legal Moderation and Enforcement

Cath Jadhav

Director of Standards and Comparability

Kate Keating

Director of Communications

Michelle Meadows

Executive Director, Strategy, Risk and Research

Sean Pearce

Chief Operating Officer

Julie Swan

Executive Director, General Qualifications

Anona White

Private Secretary to the Chief Regulator

12/20 Welcome and apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Lesley Davies.

13/20 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14/20 GCSE, AS and A level results in 2020 – initial decisions following consultation on eligibility to calculated grades by year group and private candidates

The purpose of the meeting was to seek the Board's early approval of two matters on the arrangements for issuing results for GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2020 following the government's decision to close schools and colleges and cancel exams in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approval was sought for which students calculated grades should be issued, in particular, whether grades should be available for students who had been entered to take exams in Year 10 or below, and the basis on which private candidates should be able to receive calculated grades this summer.

Prior to discussing the report, the Chief Regulator reported on a number of developments that had taken place since the last Emergency Board Meeting on 22 April 2020. About 12,500 responses had been received in response to the General Qualifications (GQs) consultation and there had so far been approximately 1,000 responses to the Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) consultation which remained open until 8 May 2020.

The Chief Regulator had attended the daily Covid-19 Ministerial meeting on 1 May 2020 with Nick Gibb. Attendees were supportive of the measures that Ofqual had put in place which were considered fair and robust.

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

The Secretary of State (SoS) for Education had attended the Education Select Committee and it was anticipated that the Chief Regulator would be called in the coming weeks. The SoS had been questioned on exams and bias. He suggested that students would be able to take shortened exams in the autumn, although the detail of the autumn series offer was still being worked through with exam boards and the DfE, and would be the subject of consultation; media interest was growing.

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It was reported that colleges were looking to ensure that students could sit the autumn series even if social distancing measures were in place to ensure that those on a one or two-year programme could have as near-

normal assessment experience as possible in the next academic year. Planning for students to return to school was underway.

The Executive Director for GQs reported that the team had read all of the consultation responses and had undertaken equality and regulatory impact analysis prior to the production of the report. The full consultation report and analysis would be presented at the Emergency Board Meeting on 13 May 2020. An early decision on the two areas was required at this meeting because exam boards needed to know which students could receive calculated grades this summer before they could finalise the build of their IT systems that support the summer 2020 approach. In addition, schools, colleges and private candidates needed to know whether to withdraw entries made for any student that would not be eligible to receive a calculated grade.

In early April, there were concerns that Ofqual should not support any early entry patterns that were not in the interests of students but the decision was taken to consult on the proposal that there should be no restriction on access to calculated grades by year group or age. There was significant support for this proposal from parents, students and the majority of teacher groups. There had, however, also been concerns raised that the proposal would give some Year 10s an unfair advantage given the potential for the ongoing disruption to teaching. The proposed approach was, however, supported by those who responded on behalf of some SEND students, who may intentionally spread their exams to make them more manageable.

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The Board considered the revised proposed approach for private candidates – that exam boards should only issue results for private candidates for GCSE, AS and A levels this summer for whom a Head of Centre considered that a centre assessment grade and rank order can be reliably derived and submitted. Following the Emergency Board Meeting on 22 April 2020, the guidance which had been discussed on the provision of centre assessment grades for private candidates at that meeting had been published.

It was noted that there were potentially c20,000 private candidates made up of a diverse range of students including adults. The Heads of Centre would have to apply the same declaration and have the same degree of confidence that they do for all students when submitting centre assessment grades and rank order information for them. It was reported that the exam boards would allow private candidates to transfer to another exam centre. The process of working with private candidates would not be free or capacity unlimited but it would allow for more private candidates to get a grade this year.

Consideration was given to the autumn exam series and the possibility that social distancing would still be in place. The Board did not think it

acceptable that private candidates could not have an opportunity to sit an exam in the autumn. Engagement with exam boards was paramount to ensure there were options for private candidates to take exams in the autumn. The Executive Director for GQs reported that discussions with the exam boards were underway regarding the logistical arrangements for this. Ofqual was mindful that arrangements for 2021 would need to be considered too.

It was unknown if all private candidates were residents of the UK. Private candidates would need to provide evidence of their identity which could be more problematic for international private candidates. This had been raised with exam boards. It would be for exam boards to identify and manage these risks.

Ofqual would publish a summary of responses to the consultation. It would also publish a rationale for all aspects of the proposals and decisions regarding 2020 awarding for GQs. It was regretful that a solution for all private candidates to receive a calculated grade could not be found.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to approve that:

- i. Students in Year 10 and below, who had been entered to complete exams in GCSEs, AS and A levels this summer, should be issued with results on the same basis as students in Year 11 and above; and
- ii. Exam boards should only issue results for private candidates for GCSE, AS and A levels this summer for whom a Head of Centre considered that centre assessment grades and rank order could be properly submitted.

15/20 Update on progress on the General Qualifications statistical standardisation model

The Executive Director for Strategy, Risk & Research gave a verbal update on testing being undertaken on a variety of models to predict student grades using 2019 data.

The first option looked at whether moderation should take place for judgemental grades only or for all grades. Ordinarily only the judgemental grades were set by examiners and the other grade boundaries were then set arithmetically. One reason for this is that examiners do not then have to look at scripts on all boundaries. This year, following discussion at the Technical Advisory Group, it was tentatively proposed that national outcomes at all grades be determined using statistical predictions. Board members concurred with this approach. More testing would be undertaken to finalise the approach.

The second option sought to address how ungraded candidates could be moderated. In 2019, around 14% of AS candidates, 2.5% of A level candidates and 1.7% of GCSE candidates were ungraded. Centre assessment grades could include ungraded outcomes. For AS and A level

candidates, the difference between a grade E and ungraded was important in university admission. At GCSE, the differences in progression between grade 1 and ungraded was less clear. Here the personal consequences for a pupil of being moderated down from 1 to U were less significant. At AS the treatment of ungraded was important given the higher percentage of ungraded students. Board members discussed whether it was appropriate to treat ungraded outcomes differently for each qualification, perhaps moderating ungraded like any other grade at AS and A level but treating ungraded differently at GCSE. The Board agreed that a different approach might be appropriate but suggested that the rationale for each level would need to be explained.

The third option was the treatment of tiered grading at GCSE. Calculated grades would be collected in single rank order and the model would be more reliable if it ran at subject level rather than tier level. This might mean that some students would receive off-tier grades (in relation to the tier for which they would have been entered). This would benefit some students as it was a fairer moderation process. The Advisory Group was happy with this position. The Board did not object to this approach.

16/20 Appointment of Chair of Finance & HR Committee

At the Emergency Board Meeting on 22 April 2020, the Chair invited board members to submit expressions of interest in the role of Chair of the Finance & HR Committee. Only one board member had expressed interest in the role.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to appoint Susan Barratt as Chair of the Finance & HR Committee.

17/20 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The meeting ended at 16:05pm.