



Minutes

Emergency Board Meeting

Time and venue

08.30am by Microsoft Teams

Date

Wednesday, 03 June 2020

Attendees

Board

Susan Barratt	(until 32/20)
Ian Bauckham	
Delroy Beverley	
Sally Collier	Chief Regulator
Mike Cresswell	
Lesley Davies	(until 32/20)
Catherine McClellan	
Roger Taylor	Chair
Matt Tee	(until 32/20)
Mike Thompson	

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
Matthew Humphrey	Director of Legal Moderation and Enforcement
Cath Javad	Director of Standards and Comparability
Kate Keating	Director of Communications
Michelle Meadows	Executive Director, Strategy, Risk and Research
Sean Pearce	Chief Operating Officer
Ian Stockford	Director, Strategic Projects
Julie Swan	Executive Director, General Qualifications
Anona White	Private Secretary to the Chief Regulator

28/20 Welcome and apologies for absence

Catherine McClellan was welcomed to the meeting having been appointed to the Board on 1 June 2020.

Apologies were received and accepted from Frances Wadsworth and Hywel Jones.

The Chair reported that the use of Microsoft Teams for board meetings had been working well and consideration should be used to using this more frequently for meetings going forward. This would be further discussed at the Board meeting on 17 June 2020.

ACTION: RT, NF

29/20 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

30/20 Options for considering appeals against standardisation of centre assessment grades based on changes to centres' arrangements impacting the composition of the entry

At the Emergency Board Meeting on 20 May 2020, the Board requested that the General Qualifications (GQs) team further explore whether it would be possible, appropriate and fair to create an appeals process to consider claims that organisational changes to a centre's arrangements could lead to this year's examination entry cohort being *sufficiently different in profile* to render the application of a model based on recent cohorts at the same centre insufficiently accurate and therefore unfair.

The GQ team presented the Board with a number of options for consideration.

The Strategy, Risk and Research (SRR) team continued to work at pace and had carried out preliminary research to understand how significant a shift in cohort demographics would need to be in order to have an appreciable effect on outcomes for students. Board members appreciated the difficulties here: cohort demographics can change over time and from one year to the next for a number of reasons, but dynamic measurement of the change is challenging.

Board members agreed that research should continue into the extent to which the impact of demographic changes on a cohort's performance in exams could be measured and could reliably be replicated through adjustments to the standardisation model.

The manageability of the appeals system was considered. The scale and practicalities of putting all the arrangements in place was a huge challenge in addition to ensuring that exam boards could deliver the approach for the 150+ qualifications. The priority for Ofqual remained to ensure that as many students as possible received their results on time in summer 2020.

It was noted that centre level effects would be difficult to measure in advance of awarding. Instead, where there was a significant change of demographic composition should be referred to Ofqual's Technical Advisory Panel. It was

anticipated that the research on effects at national level would be complete or more advanced at the time that appeals would be considered.

It was noted that exam boards would need to work together to ensure that there was a consistent approach to dealing with appeals. The establishment of a cross-exam board technical forum was proposed to determine how best to undertake any corrective action on the historical data in the standardisation model, should it be needed.

The board agreed that it would be unfair if a student's results were reduced as a consequence of an appeal based on a demographic argument, and brought with the aim of increasing results for fellow students. To this extent, students in a cohort affected by a demographic change would be no different to students in a cohort affected by an administrative error in the data. The Board agreed that grade protection should apply to those appeals.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to agree to:

1. Continue preliminary research into the extent to which the impact of demographic changes on a cohort's performance in exams can be measured and could reliably be replicated through adjustments to the standardisation model; and
2. Prepare draft proposals for consultation corresponding to the preliminary proposals that:
 - i. Appeals should proceed only where criteria specified by Ofqual were satisfied;
 - ii. The purpose of such criteria should be to allow appeals only in cases of a demographic change with an impact which could be measured through research and reliably replicated through the standardisation model;
 - iii. Whenever the criteria were satisfied, replacement results for the relevant cohort should be calculated by re-running the standardisation model set up to account for the impact of the demographic difference on the basis of technical advice provided by the exam boards working collaboratively;
 - iv. Replacement results should be issued to centres and students only to the extent that students' results are improved; and
 - v. Appeals on this basis should be managed by exam boards.
 - vi. Appeals brought on the basis of demographic changes would be afforded grade protection.

31/20 Update on the Standardisation Model

The Director of Strategic Projects gave a presentation on the standardisation of GCSE, AS, A level, EPQ and AEA maths qualifications in summer 2020. The presentation covered the following points:

- i. Summer 2020 challenges;
- ii. Board and operational decisions previously taken;
- iii. The statistical model and the two approaches considered: Direct Centre-level Performance and mark or grade-based regression;
- iv. Candidates with missing data;

- v. The approach to testing for accuracy;
- vi. The predictive accuracy of the two approaches for GCSEs and A levels;
- vii. Centre sub-group analyses;
- viii. Equalities analyses, including gender, ethnicity, social deprivation (IDACI), SEN;
- ix. Decisions that still needed to be made around the handling of arithmetic grade boundaries, different year groups, the identification and handling of centres with small entries and the identification and handling of small or atypical subjects; and
- x. The treatment of demographic characteristics.

The Board were informed that the Expert Advisory Group supported an approach grounded in the Direct Centre-level Performance approach. The board asked that a review of the approach be undertaken along with a comparison with centre assessment grades.

The Board noted the complexity of the approach, and how important accessible guidance would be to explain how grades were arrived at. It stressed the importance of Ofqual communicating clearly how it had considered a large number of options and how decisions were reached.

The Board welcomed a further opportunity to consider information relating to the handling of arithmetic grade boundaries, different year groups, the identification and handling of centres with small entries and the identification and handling of small or atypical subjects.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to agree that an approach grounded in the Direct Centre-level Performance (DCP) approach be adopted to determine calculated grades in GCSE, AS, A level, EPQ and AEA mathematics qualifications for summer 2020, unless later notified of any significant technical or equalities issues.

32/20 Using the National Reference Test in 2020

The National Reference Test (NRT) 2020 took place between 24 February and 6 March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic did not negatively impact the number of schools taking part or the number of students taking the NRT test. It was therefore proposed that the results of the 2020 NRT, which remained confidential at this stage and would not be published until GCSE results day on 20 August 2020, would be considered in the same way as in previous years.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to agree that the fairest approach would be to consider the NRT evidence as usual this summer, and if there was sufficient evidence to make an adjustment, then the adjustment would be made to the predictions that would be used as part of the statistical standardisation process.

33/20 Any Other Business

The Board agreed to appoint Catherine McClellan to the Technical Committee and to the Standards Advisory Group. Catherine would also be invited to attend the Expert Advisory Group for exam grading.

Board members commended staff for their hard work during these exceptional circumstances.

There was no other business.

The meeting ended at 10.30am.