

CORPORATE REPORT

Corporate Plan 2021 to 2022

ofqual

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Foreword by the Interim Chair

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a deep impact on the education and training of young people and adults in all parts of the country. The needs and interests of those students and all those that use and rely on qualifications continue to be at the heart of our work.

Our primary focus for 2021 to 2022 is to put in place the fairest possible assessment arrangements we can, in light of government policy and the constraints of the pandemic. We have evaluated carefully the events of 2020 and engaged widely at each stage on plans for 2021. Indeed, our consultations on arrangements in light of the government's decision that exams will not go ahead received more than 100,000 responses – by far the largest consultation we have ever undertaken. I am grateful to all those who took the time to respond. We read every response and take the views of all very seriously.

The government has announced its priorities for the qualifications system this year, and Ofqual has set out detailed arrangements for general, vocational and technical qualifications. Our focus now is to ensure that these qualifications are awarded as safely and fairly as possible. This is a whole-system endeavour. I know that this is a significant responsibility for teachers in particular. As a school leader, I talk to teachers every day about the demands and pressures they face. We are absolutely committed to doing all we can to minimise the burden on teachers, schools, colleges and training providers in the role they are to play this year.

Sadly, the effects of COVID-19 will not be restricted to 2021 and work is well underway to look ahead to 2022 and beyond. We will deploy Ofqual's significant expertise in assessment to evaluate the effects of COVID-19 on our role within the qualification system. We will look for opportunities to improve the resilience of the system and support public confidence in standards, both this year and in the years to come.

Looking to the future, I am pleased that Ofqual continues to play a key role in the introduction of new technical qualifications and quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments. The goal of our regulation is to secure qualifications that command the confidence of employers, that enable learners to develop in their working lives and that play a part in post-coronavirus (COVID-19) economic recovery.

In all of our work, our commitment is to engage with as many people as we can. We will be transparent about the impact of COVID-19 on how qualifications are awarded, so that those who rely on them understand and are equipped to use their grades. We will look to the future, with the interests of students, apprentices and all taking regulated qualifications at the forefront.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Bauckham'.

Ian Bauckham CBE

Interim Chair

Foreword by the Interim Chief Regulator

The power of a regulated qualification to support progression to the next stage of education or employment is more important than ever as the nation reels from the effects of COVID-19. They matter personally to the more than 1 million people who are awarded GCSEs, AS and A levels each year, and the millions more who take vocational and technical qualifications. They are also important to our society and to our economy.

This corporate plan sets out the work that we will do to ensure that qualifications continue to play that vital role in the year ahead. We have announced arrangements to enable as many results of qualifications as possible, of all kinds, to be issued this year so that students secure a grade and can progress. There are no simple answers to the challenges wreaked by COVID-19. These arrangements represent the fairest possible route in the circumstances and in the context of government policy.

For GCSE, AS and A levels, and some vocational and technical qualifications, grades will be based on the judgement of teachers. With exams not taking place this provides the best possible basis for valid assessment of student attainment, in a way that allows flexibility for the circumstances students have faced throughout COVID-19.

Exam boards have a key role to play in delivering results that are as fair as possible. They have provided guidance and materials for teachers to use in reaching their judgements and will quality assure the results that centres submit. Our role is to regulate the exam boards to ensure that those arrangements are properly implemented.

Many vocational and technical qualifications can be delivered safely and fairly with adaptations to their existing practices. We will monitor the steps that awarding organisations take with the goal that as many learners as possible are able to secure a qualification and continue on their journey.

The level of disruption each student has faced throughout COVID-19 has not been equal. The assessment process should not add to this difference. We will evaluate the arrangements we put in place to analyse the impact on students with particular protected characteristics.

I'm pleased to see that awarding organisations have embraced greater use of technology this year, to enable learners to continue to take their qualifications despite public health restrictions. COVID-19 has acted as a catalyst to these new approaches and we anticipate more changes across the market. We welcome these innovations and have been active in engaging with awarding organisations to support their safe implementation in the interests of learners, quality and fairness.

In the use of technology, and in many other areas too, there is much to learn from COVID-19 and its effect on the qualification industry. We will evaluate the response of the industry so that we are best positioned to apply the learning to regulate for public confidence and standards in response to COVID-19 and looking ahead to the future.

We can fulfil our role only through the work and capability of our people. This plan sets out how we aim to ensure that we have a diverse and inclusive workforce with the right skills, who can work safely, effectively and with the data and technology they need - wherever they are.

As set out in the government's [Skills for Jobs White Paper](#), we will work alongside the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) to bring forward the next phase of the reforms, to deliver good-quality qualifications that serve employers' needs. We will also increase our work providing external quality assurance for apprenticeship end-point assessments, as requested by the Institute.

This work plan is shaped by our response to COVID-19, but has regulation for the interest of students, apprentices and all taking regulated qualifications at its core. I look forward to working with partners across the system to deliver it.



Simon Lebus

Interim Chief Regulator

Our role

Ofqual is the independent qualifications regulator for England. We currently regulate 161 awarding organisations, and about 11,600 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 5 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 2021 to 2022, Ofqual will receive funding of £25 million to deliver this corporate plan. We expect to review our future funding with government over the course of the year.

Our context

We regulate in the context of government policy. It is government policy that many exams will not take place in 2021. We have provided advice to government on alternative arrangements for the awarding of grades in place of exams. We have also taken decisions on arrangements to be put in place in light of its policy priorities. The safe award of qualifications is central to this plan.

A transformation of the technical education landscape in England is underway through programmes of reform. We are active in each of these and we are using our expertise and regulatory powers in the interests of learners and employers. Our aim is to secure the validity of, and promote public confidence in, qualifications the government introduces.

This includes our work to:

- regulate the technical qualifications within T level programmes
- provide external quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments
- support the introduction of Higher Technical Qualifications at Level 4 and 5

We will be actively involved in helping to secure the high-quality qualifications that government wants to introduce as an outcome of the post-16 qualifications review.

National Assessments have been cancelled for the last 2 years. As they are reintroduced, our focus is on their validity. We will monitor and advise on risks to validity of the transition to new assessment arrangements and the Standards and Testing Agency's overall test delivery.

Our approach

Ofqual has a range of regulatory tools which we can use to achieve our objectives. Each year we undertake a range of activities targeted at the greatest risks to our statutory objectives.

This year our primary focus is to:

- put in place the fairest possible arrangements in light of COVID-19
- play our part in the government's reform of vocational and technical qualifications, including fulfilling our expanded role in the quality assurance of apprenticeships end-point assessments

We will talk and listen to a wide range of stakeholders so that our work is targeted well and our decisions are properly informed by those they will affect. For example, we will pay close attention to the implications of our decisions for teaching and learning, for equality, and for public confidence in qualifications.

Ofqual controls entry to the regulated market, creates rules and provides guidance for awarding organisations to ensure regulated qualifications are fit for purpose, valid and delivered safely.

We monitor qualifications as they are delivered and conduct evaluations of how qualifications function to ensure they are meeting the needs of users and are being delivered safely and efficiently.

Where qualifications are not meeting users' and learners' needs, we have a range of enforcement tools at our disposal – to make sure the situation is put right.

We monitor how awarding organisations manage incidents which might have an impact on learners, standards or public confidence, and intervene where necessary to mitigate that impact.

Where evidence is weak or non-existent we conduct and publish research to inform future thinking. We gather data and publish statistics to provide transparency on key features of qualifications and the qualifications market.

Where appropriate, we use the reform of qualifications as an opportunity to ensure that qualifications are well designed, threats to validity are minimised, and that risks to safe delivery are anticipated and mitigated.

We work with and, wherever possible, align our approach with the regulators in the devolved administrations, in order to minimise burden on those impacted by our regulations.

Our priorities

Regulating GCSE, AS and A levels in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Students' education has been disrupted by COVID-19. As a result, the Secretary of State announced in January that GCSE, AS and A level examinations would not go ahead as planned in 2021 for a second successive year and would be replaced with teacher assessment.

We know the importance of these qualifications for students' futures, including their progression into further study, training or employment. We are working closely with the government and others to make sure students can receive grades and progress while ensuring that the qualifications remain meaningful.

Following joint consultation with the Department for Education (DfE) we have implemented an alternative approach by which students will be issued with results this year. Our aim is for the results to be as fair as they can be and that students can progress in their lives.

What we plan to do in 2021 to 2022

1. Oversee exam boards' compliance with our regulations on the provision and collection of teacher assessed grades for GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2021.
2. Oversee exam boards' arrangements for both internal and external quality assurance of teacher assessed grades, including their information and support for centres and teachers.
3. Engage closely with organisations involved with determining and issuing grades and those who will use and rely on the grades, both to support their understanding of the approach and to inform our actions.
4. Proactively communicate the approach to students and parents, through information and guidance, and via a range of media.
5. Oversee exam boards' arrangements to deliver secure results on time in summer 2021 and secure appropriate and timely arrangements for appeals against results.
6. Evaluate the arrangements for awarding GCSE, AS and A levels in 2021, including analysing the impact on students with particular protected and other characteristics, and researching the experiences of teachers, students and others.

7. Informed by the consultation, put in place new regulations for an additional exam series in autumn 2021.
8. Monitor delivery of the additional autumn exam series, requiring exam boards to identify and address risks to the secure delivery and award of qualifications.
9. Consult on the approach to the assessment of GCSE, AS and A levels in 2022 and put in place appropriate measures to mitigate risks to fairness and validity which may result from disruption to education, taking into account government policy.
10. Require exam boards to address identified risks to the safe delivery and award of GCSE, AS and A levels in 2022.
11. Investigate learning loss through national and international reviews of research.
12. Use the National Reference Test to test performance and assess the effect of COVID-19 in maths and English for year 11 students.

Outcomes

The outcomes we are working to deliver are:

- students obtain GCSE, AS and A level results in 2021 that are as fair as possible and can use them to progress to the next stage of their lives
- grades awarded in 2021 are sufficiently robust so that, alongside other contextual information, they can support effective decisions by students, schools, colleges, higher education institutions and employers
- an autumn exam series is safely and fairly delivered
- appropriate arrangements are in place for the secure awarding of GCSE, AS and A levels in 2022
- published evaluation of the 2021 approach enables learning for the future

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

Following the government's decision that external assessments for many vocational, technical and other general qualifications should not take place in 2021, we have conducted a joint consultation with the Department for Education. As a result of the consultation, we have announced our approach for regulation of the award of these qualifications.

There is a diverse range of technical, vocational and other general qualifications which provide learners with essential skills, knowledge and understanding to support progression into work, further and higher education. These qualifications differ in their purpose, structure and context and also in the extent to which their delivery has been impacted by COVID-19.

Our approach gives awarding organisations flexibility to put the appropriate arrangements in place for awarding their qualifications. This means that qualifications can be assessed and awarded securely, and as fairly and consistently as possible. We want to ensure that learners taking qualifications most similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels are not advantaged or disadvantaged in comparison to their peers.

What we plan to do in 2021 to 2022

1. Implement the VTQ Contingency Regulatory Framework (VCRF) to regulate the award of vocational, technical and other general qualifications in 2021.
2. Monitor the delivery of qualifications in 2021, requiring awarding organisations to address identified risks to the valid adaptation of qualifications, and the secure and timely delivery of results.
3. Coordinate awarding organisations' application of the VCRF within particular sectors of the economy, and across qualifications which are most similar to each other.
4. Engage closely with employers and those who rely on these qualifications to ensure our approach is informed by their experiences and views.
5. Proactively communicate the approach to 2021 assessment to centres, students and parents, via a range of media, and monitor the provision of information and guidance provided by awarding organisations.
6. Evaluate the impact of the VCRF including analysing the impact on students with particular protected and other characteristics.

7. Evaluate the effectiveness of the VCRF, and any adjustments which may be required to mitigate risks to fairness, validity or secure delivery of qualifications in 2022.
8. As an external quality assurance (EQA) provider, work with the Institute as they determine appropriate flexibilities to apprenticeship end-point assessments (EPA), and undertake EQA of the assessments once implemented.

Outcomes

The outcomes we are working to deliver are:

- as many students, apprentices and other learners as possible receive secure and timely outcomes for vocational and technical qualifications in 2021 that are as fair as possible and which help them progress to the next stages of their lives
- vocational and technical qualification and EPA outcomes are sufficiently robust that they can support effective decisions by students, schools, colleges, higher education institutions and employers
- there will be appropriate coherence in arrangements for qualifications most similar to each other, particularly those most similar to GCSE, AS and A level, and those of similar purpose in particular sectors of the economy
- employers will be assured of the quality of the end-point assessments completed by their apprentices, and that this is a secure and valid assessment of their knowledge, skills and behaviour
- appropriate arrangements are in place for the secure awarding of vocational, technical and other general qualifications in 2022
- objective evidence on the effectiveness of the arrangements is in the public domain

Supporting quality in regulated qualifications and assessments

The government's programme of reform in vocational and technical qualifications is broad and ambitious. We are playing an active part in these reforms. We will work closely with the Institute and DfE to secure high-quality qualifications for those who take, use and rely on them.

We will also continue our priority programmes to:

- secure quality in regulated qualifications in the longer-term
- monitor the introduction of new and reintroduction of existing National Assessments following their cancellation in 2020 and 2021

What we plan to do in 2021 to 2022

1. Continue to support the introduction of the new Technical Qualifications within T Level programmes.
2. Continue to provide external quality assurance (EQA) for apprenticeship end-point assessments, including for apprenticeship standards once they move to Ofqual for EQA as part of the EQA transition programme.
3. Support the introduction of new Institute approved Higher Technical Qualifications at Levels 4 and 5.
4. Develop and consult on arrangements to secure the high-quality qualifications that Government wants to introduce as part of the post-16 qualifications review.
5. Support the introduction of new Digital Functional Skills qualifications.
6. Evaluate how awarding organisations have strengthened assessments in technical and vocational qualifications at key stage 4, providing findings to inform the department's review of qualifications to be used within performance tables from 2024.
7. Monitor the development of and preparations to introduce new National Assessments, including the reception baseline assessment, multiplication tables check and revised early years foundation stage profile, providing technical advice where appropriate.
8. Monitor and regulate for the validity of existing National Assessments as these are reintroduced following their cancellation in summer 2020 and 2021.

9. Consult on and determine requirements for a new GCSE in British Sign Language, following development of subject content by the Department for Education.
10. Consult on and determine new requirements for GCSE Modern Foreign Languages (French, German, Spanish), following the Department for Education's review of qualification content.
11. Publish new guidance on developing accessible assessments and further develop our means of engagement with those representing students with particular protected and other characteristics to inform our work.
12. Evaluate and consider further enhancements to the resilience of the qualifications system and its capacity to respond to the impact of highly unusual events such as pandemics.

Outcomes

The outcomes we are working to deliver are:

- new and reformed qualifications and assessments meet their purpose, are valid and are designed to be 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, navigable for learners, employers and qualification users
- assurance of the standards and fitness for purpose of National Assessment arrangements to maintain public confidence in them

Managing our people, resources and systems

We are an established and expert organisation. We achieve our goals through our people working together and with others across the education and training system. We have changed the way we work in response to the impact of COVID-19. We will learn from these changes and build the benefits into our longer-term working practices.

We will continue to support the management and delivery of our commitments by making sure we have a diverse and inclusive workforce with the right skills and tools, and that we are efficient and effective and expert in our field, with ever better and more secure data.

What we plan to do in 2021 to 2022

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. Use our resources and expertise in the best way we can, increasing our resilience by securing additional support where needed, to deliver our corporate plan.
3. Deliver our 2021 people plan, including our commitments to support the wellbeing of our people.
4. Deliver our commitments to diversity and inclusion set out in our 2021 People Plan and our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
5. Continue to develop and use technology in how we regulate in order to reduce burden for awarding organisations and increases our effectiveness and efficiency.
6. Maintain our cyber security in line with nationally set accreditation standards and extend it to make more data available for use in decision-making and for publication.
7. 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 2022 and beyond.

Outcomes

The outcomes we are working to deliver are:

- our people work safely, effectively and efficiently and have access to health and wellbeing support
- our leaders are equipped to engage, inspire and empower and high levels of staff engagement are achieved
- we have a diverse workforce with the right people and expertise to deliver our strategic priorities
- our technology is secure and our digital platform keeps pace with demand, with our digital and data assets widely used across regulation
- our priorities are delivered efficiently, maximising value for public money and making the best use of our resources

Measuring our progress and impact

Our annual report and accounts sets out our progress in delivering the commitments in our corporate plan, a summary of the regulatory activity we have undertaken, and the impact of our actions.

Each year we undertake a range of targeted evaluations and reviews to assess the impact of our work. This year, a key focus will be on evaluating the impact of COVID-19 on the work we do and the effectiveness of the alternative arrangements.

To measure our progress and impact we will:

- carry out our perception survey to measure confidence in general qualifications and vocational and technical qualifications
- conduct focus groups and public sentiment surveys to explore students' experiences of learning in COVID-19 and track teacher, parent, student and qualification user perception of the extraordinary qualification arrangements
- evaluate the alternative arrangements implemented in 2021 including analysing the impact on students with particular protected and other characteristics, and researching the experience of teachers, students and others
- investigate the extent to which standards have changed in comparison to previous years
- work with Department for Education, Ofsted and UCAS to make data available through the secure research service to independent researchers so that they can evaluate arrangements for awarding
- participate in the Civil Service people survey to understand the impact of our people plan and policies on the wellbeing and motivation of our staff
- evaluate the impact of enhancements to our digital capabilities including our awarding organisation portal by monitoring updates and use, and engaging with users to gather and implement feedback



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