

Ofqual Board

Paper 59/16

Date:

30 November 2016

Title:

Vocational and Technical Qualifications Update

Report by:

Phil Beach CBE

Interim Executive Director for Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Paper for information

Open paper (some paragraphs closed)



Issue

1. This report updates on the work of the Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQ) Directorate since the last Board meeting.

Recommendation

2. To note the issues raised in the report.

Vocational and Technical Qualifications update

3. This paper includes an update on the following key areas:
 - a. Organisational changes
 - b. Regulation
 - c. Reform updates including:
 - Applied Generals
 - Functional Skills
 - Technical Education (Qualifications and Apprenticeships)
 - d. Strategic relationships

Organisational Changes

4. In the context of the reform challenges and associated resource issues discussed at the last board meeting, we have completed our directorate redesign. We have rebranded the directorate as vocational and technical qualifications to signal clearly to stakeholders the range of our regulatory activity. We have completed our directorate restructuring, with an associated recruitment programme, so that we now have:
 - a single team focussed on qualifications standards, with a single accountable Associate Director;
 - a policy team responsible for specific vocational and technical educational issues;
 - a design and development team that will consider the appropriate means of reviewing reformed qualifications before they enter the market. We have recruited Phil Carr as the new Associate Director to lead this work;
 - Catherine Large as the newly recruited Director VTQ, with delegated responsibility for managing the technical education reform programme.

Regulation

5. This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs
6. This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs
7. **Applied General Qualifications.** In light of public commentary on standards of BTECs, we commissioned SRR to undertake a programme of work relating to Applied Generals. We are equally interested in newly-reformed qualifications, that will be first-awarded in 2017, and legacy qualifications. Research activity will include: a review of the evidence presented to us by awarding organisations on their quality assurance processes (including the maintenance of standards over time); and a technical evaluation of a sample of qualifications selected for performance tables. The result of this analysis will be used to inform our short-term regulatory approach and improve the level of information we are able to provide the Department.
8. *This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs*
9. **Statements of Compliance (SoC).** We have received SoC from all awarding organisations (AOs). In 115 cases, the AOs have declared full compliance with no risks to future non-compliance. We have cross-referenced this with all of the intelligence available to us, and concluded that we can accept the statements. In 29 cases, we followed-up declared areas of non-compliance with the AOs. There was no discernible pattern in the non-compliance issues and in the significant majority of cases, the AOs had acceptable plans to address them. For example, a conflict of interest policy required an update; we agreed a

timetable for completion including a letter of assurance when the problem had been tackled. In 9 cases the non-compliance issues were more serious and we are taking enforcement action.

10. *This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs*

Reform

Paragraphs 11 – 14 have been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs

15. **Technical Education - Qualifications.** We participated in our first workshop with the Department on 10 October to discuss the options for regulating new Technical Education Qualifications. This included detailed discussion of design principles for the new qualifications; approaches to assessment, grading and quality of marking; funding; English and maths requirements; and accountability measures. We also gave advice on the benefits of defining a category of qualification, drawing on Functional Skills as an example. We have a further workshop planned for 29 November.
16. **Technical Education - Apprenticeships.** We engaged with the Department over the remit letter for the Institute for Apprenticeships, which features a 'quality partnership' involving the IfA, Ofsted and Ofqual. A new member of the Apprenticeship Unit has been assigned to look specifically at the quality partnership issue and we met with him in his first week (10 November). It was a productive meeting and we have proposed a workshop of key bodies and regular meetings on the subject of end-to-end system quality. He is also keen to visit us to gain an understanding of our assessment expertise and regulatory powers.
17. We have now engaged with 24 Trailblazer groups through the External Quality Assurance (EQA) process we provide. Our technical advisory group has reviewed 24 assessment plans and 12 plans have been accepted for regulation. A further 11 are being worked through with Trailblazers to come to a resolution, and 1 has withdrawn their request for our EQA support. Our aim continues to be to advise whether the assessment plans enable an Apprentice Assessment Organisation to develop an end-point assessment (EPA) that is valid and able to be regulated.
18. We have provided an analysis of our findings to SFA and DfE and offered written guidance on the most common issues for use in a review of DfE Trailblazer guidance. On 22nd November we held a half-day conference for awarding organisations involved, or seeking involvement, in apprenticeship assessment. We hosted 50 delegates from 35 AOs and representatives from FAB and JCQ. Our aim was to discuss lessons identified from the development of Assessment Plans and understand the challenges facing AAOs in developing End Point Assessments.
19. This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs

Strategic relationships

20. Sally appeared at the Education Sub-Committee on Apprenticeships, alongside Peter Lauener from the IFA and Paul Joyce from Ofsted. Sally was asked about our approach to the external quality assurance of apprenticeship end point assessments and how a greater number of apprenticeship assessment organisations might be supported. Her appearance was reported positively.
21. This engagement was reinforced in a number of external speaking engagements this quarter, including Sally's keynote at the FAB Conference, my speech to the Skills and Employability Conference and Catherine's speech to the Westminster Education Forum. Key messages included our approaches to reform and our commitment to coherent regulation.
22. We have engaged positively with the Association of Colleges this month who have offered to share intelligence and the analysis they conduct of ILR (Individual Learner Record) data. We hosted a breakout session at their conference on 15 November. We have also engaged with UCAS, with a visit to Cheltenham on 4 November. In addition to conversations on the UCAS tariff, ahead of Sally's meeting with Mary Curnock Cook, our discussion included regulatory approaches to Applied Generals and the reforms to Technical Education. They updated us on their desire to ensure that apprenticeships are valued within the UCAS system and stated that they would want end point assessments to be regulated in order to do so.

Finance and Resource

23. *This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs*

Impact Assessments

Equality Analysis

24. No specific issues.

Risk Assessment

25. Our risk assessment will be informed by the strategic approach that we take to reform.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

26. No specific issues.

Timescale

27. Timescales for each area of work are set out above.

Communications

28. Plans are in train to host the next Ofqual Awarding Organisation Conference on 28 February 2018.

Internal Stakeholders

29. All other Directorates have an interest in the work set out in this report.

External Stakeholders

30. We continue to build relationships with VQ external stakeholders, including this quarter the Federation of Awarding Bodies, the Association of Colleges, Ofsted, UCAS, the Federation of Industry Sector Skills and Standards, the Skills Funding Agency and CITB.

Paper to be published	NO
Publication date (if relevant)	N/A