

Ofqual Board

Paper 111/14

Date:

25 March 2015

Title:

Chief Executive's report

Report by:

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Open Paper for discussion/information



Issue

1. This report updates the Board on Government policy, Ofqual strategy development and known strategic risks. As the business year draws to a close, the Board is asked to note particularly our progress in delivering the year's work commitments, and to consider and endorse the next iteration of Ofqual's Corporate Plan.

Recommendation

2. The Board is asked to:
 - a. Review and agree the 2015-18 Corporate Plan
 - b. Review and endorse the Regulatory Strategy Statement and the Regulatory Burden Statement
 - c. Review the organisation's Strategic Risk Register and the new Issues Register
 - d. Note the executive governance arrangements below the Board

Considerations

Policy developments

3. Like others, we expect Government policy initiatives to wain as the election approaches, and with purdah fast upon us we know of nothing of direct relevance being considered, ahead of the election. We continue to await Cabinet Office guidance for purdah, due to begin on or about 30 March - albeit Parliament may prorogue at an earlier date. In anticipation, we have where possible brought forward planned

publications and announcements ahead of the expected purdah commencement date.

4. We maintain an active interest in the stated policy intentions of all parties. To date, decoupling AS/A level is the only known, stated area of contention. All parties appear to be placing an increased emphasis on apprenticeships, where arrangements will need to develop significantly in order to deliver stated ambitions or current expectations (see Vocational Qualifications Update (closed paper 106/14)).

Qualification Wales

5. The Board will see positive progress in relation to joint regulatory arrangements with the Welsh Assembly (see paper 106/14), albeit matters are not yet settled.

Strategy

6. The Board is asked to endorse for publication the next iteration of the Corporate Plan. Many of the helpful contributions from Board members at the February Strategy day are reflected in the final draft, at Appendix one.
7. Board members will wish to know of work we have considered but decided against, given the Board's agreed objectives and the priorities that flow from them. Appendix two sets out the rationale for our plans and prioritisation of activities.
8. This iteration of the plan includes for the first time a statement of mission, refined from an earlier statement describing our core business considered by the Board last autumn. We have chosen not to express a statement of vision - a matter perhaps for another time.
9. We intend to state our regulatory strategy and approach in a first Ofqual Regulatory Statement, to be published alongside the Corporate Plan. The intended audience are those we regulate, although others may well be interested, and it is intended to show what we do and why. In developing the statement we have taken into account best practice, having reviewed others' regulatory statements. To complete matters, we will be publishing our first Regulatory Burden Statement, again styled on the best practice of more established regulators. Board members are asked to review and endorse both documents, to be found at Appendix three and four.

Progress in Delivery

10. The Board is asked to note progress against planned activity during the 2014/15 business year, as shown at Appendix five. Board members should find the picture reassuring: we have delivered almost all that we set out to do.
11. Our immediate research priorities (not covered elsewhere in the Board's reports) remain business focussed, with research underway in

the following areas: mark scheme design, marking, marking quality metrics; validity definition and application; GCSE maths demand and comparability; evaluation of qualification structures at GCSE. Planned research activity for the future includes work evaluating the effectiveness of the new assessment arrangements in GCSEs, AS and A levels in the sciences.

12. Board members are updated on GCSE maths in the General Qualifications Update (closed paper 107/14). Board members will wish to note that this research is novel; it sets a precedent and is influencing our thinking for other upcoming subjects where inter-board competition is expected to be particularly sharp. GCSE maths remains set for first teaching in September 2015.
 13. Meanwhile, reform continues apace, with just two of c124 specifications for first teaching in September 2015 unaccredited. With increased communications capacity and capability, we are developing our plans for making sure schools and others are able to access the information they need to know in order to prepare well for first teaching. Plans and training are in hand for the next phase of accreditation (for subjects for first teaching in September 2016). The workload is significant, albeit we have reviewed and to some extent streamlined the accreditation process. Should a new Government determine to recouple A/AS levels, our accreditation and other reform plans will be fundamentally reviewed: we will develop contingency plans during the purdah period.
 14. We are applying principles agreed previously by the Board in order to determine which of the remaining subjects will likely have core content developed for them, for first teaching in September 2017. Exam boards have chosen not to put forward any proposals in almost twenty subjects – generally, applied subjects and/or subjects with low take-up. We expect media and stakeholder interest, with decisions about to be announced.
- Capacity and Capability*
15. Much of the organisation has and will continue to be involved in recruitment to posts in our new operating model. The Chief Operating Officer's Report (closed paper 104/14) provides a more detailed update on progress. The organisation is still busy and productive, despite the uncertainties affecting individuals as they apply for new roles. We will run a second round of recruitment for the one remaining Executive Director post (in General Qualifications) shortly.
 16. Our internal decision-making arrangements are now settled, following the move to new directorates and ways of working. Board members are provided with a summary of the arrangements at Appendix six, for information.

17. The Management Code for civil servants has been amended to require all contacts with the media to be authorised in advance by the relevant Minister, unless a specific delegation or dispensation has been agreed which may be for blocks of posts or areas of activities. Given that we are a non-ministerial department, the Chief Regulator will take the place of a Minister in authorising media contact, with appropriate delegation made to the Communications team and other colleagues as required.

Strategic risks and issues

18. Board members are asked to review and comment on Ofqual's strategic risks and mitigations, as shown in the updated register attached at Appendix seven. Broadly, the direction of travel is positive.
19. For the first time, we also present to the board an embryonic strategic issue register – Appendix eight. As yet we report just one issue deemed significant enough to report – GCSE maths.

Future Look

20. The forward planner for the Board is included at Appendix eight.
21. We will continue to deliver the plans and actions agreed. We expect to publish our corporate plan and accompanying documents, and provisional decisions in relation to First Teach 2017 subjects, ahead of purdah.
22. With Oxford University, we will be holding a Teacher Ethics symposium on 26 March. Invited speakers include Ian Mentor, Dr Richard Daugherty and Dr Paola Mattei from the University of Oxford and Ian Bauckham, past president of ASCL.
23. April 1 sees us come to the five year anniversary of our vesting. We will mark the day with staff and thank both staff and Board Members for all their contribution and commitment to the organisation, since vesting.
24. The Board will meet again in May, shortly after the general election.

Impact Analysis

Internal stakeholders

25. We continue to work productively though a period of formal consultation with staff to implement our new operating model. Dialogue remains constructive both with staff and the union. A new Branch Chair for PCS has recently been elected.

External stakeholders

26. Broadly, relationships with external stakeholders remain positive. We remain particularly focused on engaging with both the science and maths communities.

27. The Board is asked to note a small addendum to the Report to Parliament, set out in Appendix nine. This is made in response to feedback from an awarding body requesting a potentially misleading point be clarified.

Paper to be published	YES
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting

Appendices list:

- Appendix one: Corporate Plan 2015-18
- Appendix two: Corporate Plan 2015-18 rationale and prioritisation
- Appendix three: Regulatory Strategy Statement (*to follow*)
- Appendix four: Regulatory Burden Statement
- Appendix five: Corporate Plan Tracker
- Appendix six: Executive Governance arrangements
- Appendix seven: Strategic Risk Register
- Appendix eight: Strategic Issues register
- Appendix nine: Addendum to Report to Parliament
- Appendix ten: Board Forward plan