

Ofqual Board

Paper 48/15

Date:

18 November 2015

Title:

Chief Executive's Report

Report by:

Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator

Paper for discussion

Open paper (appendices 1 and 2 closed)



Issue

1. This short report updates the Board on strategy and progress. It updates the Board on known and relevant Government policy priorities and sets out known strategic risks.

Recommendation

2. The Board is asked to note progress and to review the organisation's strategic risk register.

Considerations

Policy Developments

3. There are no significant developments to report in relation to vocational qualifications or apprenticeships' policy. The Chair and Chief Regulator are due to meet with minister Boles in early December.
4. Similarly, general qualifications policy remains stable, albeit Government is proposing changes to the proportion of students expected to take EBacc subjects in future, with a new target for 90% of secondary school pupils to study the core subjects of English, maths, science, history or geography and a language at GCSE. Currently, the figure is around 39%.

5. The Minister of State for Schools remains interested in reviewing the exam board model, with some internal (DfE) work underway. We remain ready, at the request of Government, to provide advice on matters related to our remit and inform options for achieving Government's policy objectives here. We have expressed already the desirability of a sufficient period of stability in the system, to complete the demanding programme of qualification reform already underway.
6. On National Assessments, the Government no longer proposes the primary assessment review mentioned in my last update. We expect to be formally consulted soon on a broad range of policy proposals for National Assessments: maintaining the recently introduced baseline tests, introducing KS 1 tests and KS2 multiplication tests, and the resitting of KS2 tests for those students not performing to expectations.
7. The Chair and Chief Regulator are due to meet with the Secretary of State for Education and then Minister Gibb later this month.
8. Jeremy Benson attended a meeting last month with representatives from a large number of regulators to hear from the Better Regulation Executive about the implications of the Enterprise Bill, which is currently before Parliament. We had been concerned that the proposal to extend the Business Impact Target to regulators would impact on our independence, but we were assured that it is simply to allow reductions on burden by regulators to contribute to the £10bn target burden reduction for the Parliament, which previously related to Ministerial Departments. The Bill does not give Ministers any powers to set targets for statutorily independent regulators, nor to hold them to account for delivery of any savings.
9. The proposals are therefore broadly in line with our duties around burden. We are developing a burden strategy, which SMG has considered. We will consider as part of this practicalities such as our relationship with the Regulatory Policy Committee, an independent group that reviews regulators' assessments of burden.
10. The Chair and Chief Regulator gave evidence at a hearing of the Education Select Committee on the 14 October. The hearing focused on Ofqual and a general update of our work. Our subsequent offer to hold a workshop on qualifications and assessments with Committee members (as many are new to the role) has been accepted and we expect to run the workshop in the New Year.

Strategy

11. Following the Board strategy day, the senior team has been reviewing our level 0 strategy and level 1 Vocational Qualifications' strategy, aided by the helpful comments and reflections of Board members on the day. Final drafts will be available to Board members at the January 2016 meeting. Meanwhile, we are continuing to develop and apply our strategies with

vigour: Board members will be updated with VQ metrics at the Board meeting.

Progress in delivery

12. The Board is asked to note progress against planned activity during the 2015/16 business year, as shown at appendix one. We continue to make good progress delivering our corporate plan for 2015-18.

13. Following a recent Executive team review, we believe our biggest challenges for the remainder of the year are a) the ongoing demands of accreditation and disappointing success rates and b) marking, where myths prevail and we accept we have a task to ensure the public and others are sufficiently well-informed. We have established a project with the aim of making the public discourse on marking more realistic. Meanwhile, we continue to work with exam boards so that they can ensure us of a sufficient supply of quality markers in 2017 and beyond.

Capacity and capability

14. Recruitment continues to progress well: with new faces arriving at pace now, we are reducing our dependency on interim and temporary staff, as anticipated. Board members are referred to the COO report for more detail. It is a pleasure to see all directorates filling out, most especially the Strategy, Risk and Research Directorate. It is maturing, and gaining influence throughout the organisation and beyond – most recently, by making a strong contribution to the AEA-Europe annual conference.

15. Recruitment and selection for the next Chief Regulator is underway. Board members are referred to the candidate information pack, at <https://www.gatenbysanderson.com/job/chief-regulator-at-ofqual-in-coventry-london.4564> . As interest has been slower than hoped, we have agreed to extend the deadline for applications by one week. Board members will be updated on the level of interest at the meeting.

16. The COO report mentions emerging findings from this year's staff survey. All trends are positive, with a delightful step-change in some areas (for example, in staff assessment of our leadership). Of most concern is the stubbornly persistent view that we are not good enough at dealing with poor performance, albeit we are seen as a little better at this year when compared to 2014. Some of what we do here is not visible to others, of course, but nevertheless we will focus especially now on the basics, with intent.

17. The half-year round of star chamber reviews identified areas where further investment would be appropriate and we are now taking decisions to redirect spend to reserve projects that can now be funded. Board members will see from the COO report that we anticipate sufficient funds for the remainder of the year. However, additional funding will be required next year should the substantial reform of Functional skills proceed, and discussions are underway.

Strategic Risks and Issues

18. Board members are asked to review and comment on Ofqual's strategic risks and mitigations, as shown in the register attached at appendix two. Progress on established risks is moderate or good.
19. There are two new risk areas to draw to Board members' attention: firstly, a risk that the National Reference Test may not meet expectations and secondly, risks associated with the appointment of a new Chief Regulator and CEO. Board members are referred to the updated risk register for further details.

Future Look

20. The forward planner for the Board is attached at appendix three. We will continue to deliver the plans and actions agreed.
21. Our plans for the December Awarding Organisation conference remain on track. By the year end we will have published our inter-subject comparability reports and commentary, our Spring Audit consolidated report and our consultation on EARS and Appeals – all significant documents.

Impact Analysis

Internal stakeholders

22. Relations with the PCS union remain positive. We are establishing a staff forum to complement existing arrangements with the union, as the majority of staff are not union members.

External stakeholders

23. Relationships with external stakeholders remain positive, although Board members will be aware of some difficulties with HMC.
24. We have undertaken a successful series of off-the record briefings with education journalists, designed to increase their understanding of key issues.

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

Appendices list:

- Appendix one: Corporate Plan Progress Report – closed
Appendix two: Strategic Risk Register - closed
Appendix three: Board Forward Plan

Forward Planner - Ofqual Board

Subject	18 Nov 15	20 Jan 16	23 Mar 16	May 16	June 16	July 16	Sept 16	Nov 16	Jan 17	March 17	Note
Reporting/Governance											
CEO Report	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
COO Report	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	Jan report to include H&S update
Strategy, Risk and Research Directorate Update	x			x				x			
Strategy			x						x		
Business and Financial Plan											
Business and Financial Plan			x						x		
Annual review of Governance Framework	x							x			
Review of Advisory Group Membership			x							x	
Report on the work of Board Committees	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
2014/15 Annual Report and Accounts					x						teleconference
2015 Annual Report to Parliament	x	x							x		early draft in November
Dates for Board & Committee meetings in 2015/16	x							x			
Regulatory Business											
General Qualifications Directorate Update	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Vocational Qualifications Directorate Update	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
National reference test		x				x			x		
Awarding reformed qualifications (2017 onwards)	x										
Subjects for 2017 reform - post consultation decisions	x										by electronic business
Monitoring Financial Risk	x	x									
S96 Equality Act post consultation proposals		x									
agreeing policy on inter-subject comparability				x							