

# Ofqual Board

## Paper 75/16

**Date:**

25 January 2017

**Title:**

Vocational and Technical Qualifications Update

**Report by:**

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**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. A paper covering proposals for a consultation on Functional Skills reform will be submitted separately.

**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. Regulation
  - b. Reform updates including:
    - Applied Generals
    - Functional Skills
    - Technical Education (Qualifications and Apprenticeships)
  - c. Strategic relationships

## Regulation

4. **2016 Audits.** As part of our Baseline Review, and ahead of our 2017 activity, we have brought our remaining 2016 audits to a close:
  - *This paragraphs has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
  - We have liaised with the Security Industry Authority and the Home Office, and will publish our regulatory report about the security sector shortly.
  - We have completed our 2016 statement of compliance activity and will incorporate the findings into our annual report. We will also analyse our audit findings to further develop our approach to the 2017 statement of compliance process.
5. **Current Activity.** We have completed a number of audits looking at the delivery of qualifications which are included in DfE performance tables. The audits considered design and development arrangements, external verification and quality assurance. One of these audits is the subject of further investigation. We have also worked with SRR to consider approaches to the assessment and grading of performance table qualifications. AOs have made a number of changes to their qualification submissions to DfE as a result. In addition to the immediate feedback provided to DfE, we will combine this work with the outputs of current commissioned research work in this area (see paragraph 8 below).
6. *This paragraphs has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
7. We have implemented a number of changes as a result of the VTQ baseline review of regulation, including Event Notification handling, that now feed into multi-disciplinary case conferences and our risk analysis. VTQ receives around 40 event notifications from Awarding Organisations each month and they are handled by the Standards team using a portfolio approach (about 25 awarding organisations each). In addition to informing our current risks and issues, a historic analysis of VTQ Event Notifications has identified that the most commonly reported issues relate to malpractice/maladministration and system failings that have led to incorrectly issued or late results.
8. *This paragraph has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

## Reform

9. *This paragraph has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
10. *This paragraph has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
11. The Department aims to introduce a separate reform programme for Digital Functional Skills. This is being taken forward in partnership with

the DCMS who put advice up to the Minister (Matt Hancock) just before Christmas, awaiting decision in January. We provided advice to support this and expect to be involved. The proposed timeline anticipates first teaching in September 2019.

12. *This paragraph has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
13. **Technical Education - Apprenticeships.** Draft strategic guidance from the Department to the Institute for Apprenticeships has now been published and the 'quality partnership' we recommended is featured. We continue to engage closely with those in the set-up team, most recently Mike Keoghan who is the IFA's Deputy Chief Executive. One of our key risks relating to apprenticeships continues to be the fact that there are four options that trailblazers can choose to provide External Quality Assurance (EQA). We have had further meetings with other providers of EQA who are sector-specific, including the Engineering Council and CITB. They feel that our regulatory approach is complimentary to their EQA approach, and that they need us to provide regulatory 'teeth'. The Department's draft strategic guidance to the IFA states that 'the Institute may wish to consider whether all of the currently available EQA options should continue'. Irrespective, we should expect a number of other EQAs to seek our involvement in their approach.
14. Perhaps more pressing, we understand that the first End Point Assessments produced by Ofqual-regulated Awarding Organisations will be available from May. This puts some pressure on us to agree our policy position, in particular our approach to how EPAs will appear on our qualifications register. Establishing our position for this should be relatively clear cut. However, we also need to consider how to reflect EPAs where we are not providing the EQA role, but are being developed by Awarding Organisations that we regulate. We will be bringing detailed proposals to the Board Strategy Day on 24 February in order to take your views.

### **Strategic Relationships**

15. Reform continues to be the main issue in the majority of our stakeholder engagements. On apprenticeships and technical education, we met with several professional bodies and trailblazer groups, most recently automotive sales and land-based engineering. On functional skills, we continue to meet regularly with Government and the Education and Training Foundation. We spoke at a Capita conference on functional skills reform in Dec and also delivered an awarding organisation seminar for those interested in delivering new functional skills qualifications.
16. To further support the reform programme, we are developing a survey of employers, to understand their perceptions of current vocational qualifications. The tender for this survey was issued in late December with the intention of surveys being carried out in February and March; we expect to report findings in early May. We are connecting this work with that of the research team at DfE, who have taken over the employer

surveys previously run by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES).

17. We held our quarterly meeting with FAB Board members in December. The relationship with FAB remains positive, although they have formally raised to us their concerns about the oversight of apprenticeships, and Ofqual's role within this. Their view is that Ofqual should be taking a publicly stronger position on the risks posed by having multiple external quality assurance options for end-point assessments.
18. It is anticipated that this will be one of the key topics for awarding organisations at our conference, which is being held on 28 February 2017 at the Vox Conference Centre in Birmingham. Plans for the conference are progressing well and we are in the process of confirming two keynote speakers who will talk about the plans for implementing vocational education reforms.

### **Finance and Resource**

19. We are on track to meet our targeted expenditure this financial year.

#### **Impact Assessments**

##### Equality Analysis

20. No specific issues.

##### Risk Assessment

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

##### Regulatory Impact Assessment

22. No specific issues.

#### **Timescale**

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

#### **Communications**

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

#### **Internal Stakeholders**

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

#### **External Stakeholders**

26. We continue to build relationships with VTQ external stakeholders, as detailed in the Strategic Relationships section above.

Paper to be published	Yes (with some closed sections)
Publication date (if relevant)	N/A