

**Minutes of the meeting of the 66<sup>th</sup> Ofqual Board Meeting  
Held at 10am on Wednesday 22 March 2017 at Ofqual, Spring Place,  
Coventry CV5 6UB**

Present:

## Ofqual Board

Tim Balcon	
Sally Collier	Chief Regulator
Mike Cresswell	
Maggie Galliers	
Anne Heal	
Barnaby Lenon	
Roger Taylor	Chair
Tom Taylor	
Neil Watts	
Julius Weinberg	

## Ofqual

Marc Baker	Chief Operating Officer
Phil Beach	Executive Director for Vocational & Technical Qualifications
Jeremy Benson	Executive Director
Vickie Bentley	Interim Board Secretary
Phil Carr	Associate Director for Standards for Design & Development of VTQ
Catherine Large	Director for Vocational Qualifications
Michelle Meadows	Executive Director for Strategy, Risk & Research
Natalie Prosser	Director for Legal
Chris Shadforth	Associate Director for Communications
Julie Swan	Executive Director for General Qualifications

## Observers

Paul Bird	Associate Director for Finance
Jim Busher	Senior Manager for Strategic Policy & Risk
Michael Hanton	Associate Director for Strategic Risk and Policy
Clare Rowntree	Private Secretary

### **84/16 Closed Board Session**

**85/16 Welcome and apologies for absence**  
Apologies from Terri Scott were noted.

**86/16 Declarations of Interest (closed?)**

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

**87/16 Minutes** of the meeting held on 25 January 2017

It was agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting were a true and accurate record.

**Matters arising** from past meetings of the Board

The Matters Arising Paper was noted and the following comments were made:

77/16: Board Engagement: A structured plan of how the Board could be more visible would be produced by the Chief Operating Officer and brought to the Board at the next meeting.

77/16: Staff Survey: It was agreed that the results of the Pulse Survey would be brought back to the Board by the Chief Operating Officer and discussed at the July Board Meeting.

**88/16 Chief Regulator's Report**

The Chief Regulator provided the Board with a review of the paper and the key points in it which included:

- General qualifications.
- Vocational and technical qualifications.
- Enforcement.
- People, resources and stakeholders.

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

There was a detailed conversation on Functional Skills during which the Board was updated on feedback from the VTQ Stakeholder group. This group expressed a

desire to understand: our approach to reforming these qualifications; and the issues with current qualifications are what might need to be changed.

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

The Board commented that as there are many vocational and general qualifications it would be helpful to map out qualifications and provide how they fit in to the system, which level they are, and who/which career path they are targeted to. It was agreed that the VTQ strategic relationships team would prepare a diagram for this to be circulated to Board members and used at the induction briefings for new members on 16 May.

The Board asked if a report on the National Reference Test (NRT) could be provided by the NFER detailing what went well and what could be improved upon etc. The Chief Operating Officer advised that he had attended a meeting with NFER and provided feedback to them which they had agreed to respond to. It was agreed that the NRT feedback would be tabled for the July meeting when a full operational report would be available and possibly the invitation could be extended to the NFER.

#### **89/16 Vocational and Technical Qualifications Update**

The Executive Director for Vocational and Technical Qualifications provided the Board with an overview of the paper and the key points in it which included:

- Regulation.
- Enforcement Action.
- Strategic Relationships.
- T- Levels.

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

The Board discussed VTQ reform and it was agreed that Ofqual's position needs to be clear and the primary concern should be to protect learners in transit.

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

The Board received an update on Functional Skills and were advised that the date has now been delayed due to issues with content and this additional time was going to be used to ensure the finer details are in place. The Executive Director for Vocational and Technical Qualifications advised the Board that there would be a further update in respect of Functional Skills, handwriting and assessment at the Board Meeting in May.

### **90/16 Regulating Apprenticeships**

The Director of Vocational Qualifications and Executive Director for Vocational and Technical Qualifications provided the Board with an update following the Board Strategy Day and an overview of the Apprenticeships paper. They advised the Board of the options which had been discussed at the Board Strategy Day which were agreed as decisions.

The Board raised concerns about how Ofqual's reputation may be affected if the landscape remains blurred. They also expressed concern about partnering with External Quality Assurance providers with whom there may be conflicts of interest. It was acknowledged that the role of External Quality Assurance is different to regulation.

The Board agreed to review the recognition process to become an awarding organisation specifically in relation to those wishing to provide Apprenticeship End Point Assessments. This might result in a narrower, proportionate process although the bar would remain as high.

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

### **91/16 Strategy, Risk and Research Update**

The Executive Director for Strategy Risk and Research provided the Board with an overview of the paper and the key points within it which included:

- Strategic Risk Register.
- GCSE Maths research into issues that may affect the ability to maintain standards, such as tier entry choices.
- Improvements to the presentation of official statistics.
- The impact of the proportion of native speakers on the grading of A-level MFLs.

The Board discussed the MFL research and the proposal to make a small adjustment to standards at grade A. Publication of the research needs care to ensure the right message is conveyed. In particular, it was agreed the message should make clear how this work relates to the Ofqual policy decision regarding inter-subject comparability and the need to build a compelling case for any further change to grading standards.

**The Board agreed the publication of the Corporate Plan.**

**92/16 General Qualifications Update**

The Executive Director for General Qualifications provided the Board with an overview of the key issues in the paper.

The Board discussed the extended ground for appeal which was piloted in three GCE subjects in 2016. This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

It did not believe such concerns should stop improvements being made to the appeals arrangements. It was important that all schools had ready access to clear information about the appeals system.

The Board discussed the data in the paper on the use of reasonable adjustments. Members suggested there would be value in gathering evidence on whether (i) the provision of extra time removed or reduced the disadvantage that would otherwise be experienced by disabled students and (ii) advantaged students who were inappropriately given extra time. The Board noted that, whilst the data indicated different levels of use of reasonable adjustment in different types of centre, Ofqual should not at this stage target any investigations to reflect this.

The Board noted a Westminster Hall debate had been scheduled on GCSE English literature for the following month and that performance table measures were likely to have encouraged schools to enter more students, of a wider ability range, for GCSE English literature in 2017 than in previous years.

**93/16 Chief Operating Officer's Report**

The Chief Operating Officer provided the Board with an overview of the paper and the key points.

The Finance Director summarised the financial position which overall showed a year to date underspend of £954k compared to the budget. Significant deliverables were scheduled for quarter 4 and the year-end position was expected to be between £350k and £500k underspend.

The Board were advised that the final audit reports for 2016/17 had been submitted. During the year, 6 audits had been undertaken of which 5 had been given a substantial assurance rating and 1 report a moderate assurance rating.

**The Board agreed the recommendation from the Audit and Risk Committee to confirm the Internal Audit Plan for 2017/18.**

The Chief Operating Officer outlined the position on staff sickness and how the average level of sickness had been disproportionately affected by the number of staff (6) on long term sick. He reported that this situation will change by the year end due to recent returns to work and also the departure of two staff who left at the end of February.

The options for accommodation were discussed.

**The Board agreed the recommendation to submit the Lease/Licence Exception Request Form to the Government Property Unit to extend the current lease on Spring Place.**

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

**94/16 Report on the work of board committees**

The Board considered the paper and Committee Meeting Minutes held since the last Board Meeting and received an update from the Chair of the various Committees.

**95/16 Review of board committees**

The Board considered the paper and the recommendations within it and it was agreed:

- a. Neil Watts would be reappointed to the Finance Committee for the term of his extension to the Board.**
- b. The Vocational Advisory Group should be disbanded in its current form in favour of a more flexible approach to sourcing external vocational expertise.**
- c. The Board Committee Membership would be reviewed following the appointment of the new Board Members.**

**96/16 Publication of Papers**

The Board agreed that the papers would be reviewed by the Chief Regulator and Chair and subject to any redactions, all open papers would be published

**97/16 Other Business**

This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

***(ii) Communication Themes and Deliverables – Week by Week***

The Associate Director for Communications provided the Board with a summary of our messages related to GCSE, AS and A level results in August 2017, and how they map to our planned outputs

The Board commented that any communications concerning the new grading needs to be dealt with care and compassion. They also commented that communications explaining the mix of number and grades would help employers, parents and children understand how they relate to each other.

As many schools will take differing times to get used to the new grading system, it is important that schools are not criticised for grades which are not as expected this summer.

It was agreed that there should be some communications directed towards governors as they are an important stakeholder.

**98/16 Date of Next Meeting**

The next board meeting will be on Wednesday 17 May 2016.

