

## Ofqual Board

### Paper 07/17

**Date:**

17 May 2017

**Title:**

Strategy, Risk and Research Update

**Report by:**

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Michelle Meadows

**Paper for discussion/information**

**Open paper, with some paragraphs and all annexes are closed.**



#### **Strategic Policy and Risk Team**

#### **Strategy and Corporate Planning**

1. We published the 2017/20 Corporate Plan on the 31<sup>st</sup> March, as intended<sup>1</sup>. The first report of progress against the new Corporate Plan will be included in the Chief Operating Officer's report for the July meeting.
2. Our All Staff Event on March 23<sup>rd</sup> provided an opportunity to set out our key strategic priorities to the organisation. The programme also provided training and updates to staff on the 'strategic enablers' that would best position us to achieve our priorities in the year ahead. These included the use of evidence and intelligence, presentation of data, and the use of new information management tools. The day was well received by colleagues.

#### **Strategic Risk**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-unveils-corporate-plan-2017-to-2020>

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### **Risk and Markets**

7. In light of proposed market reform in technical qualifications – primarily a move to a single provider model – the team has been involved in supporting VTQ colleagues to identify potential market impacts and risks. This work has contributed to ongoing discussions with the Department for Education regarding T Level policy development.

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8. We will maintain active engagement in this aspect of reform, so that as DfE clarifies plans for the implementation of T Levels, we can identify likely impacts on other regulated awarding organisations, and any risks to learners.
9. We continue to monitor on a monthly basis entry and exit to the market and changes in market share, along with other intelligence regarding market changes.

### **Regulatory Development and Impact Team**

#### **Business Impact Target**

10. We submitted six assessments of qualifying regulatory provisions and a summary of non-qualifying regulatory provisions to the Regulatory Policy Committee by their deadline of 31 March<sup>2</sup>. Three of the six assessments have been confirmed as 'fit for purpose' and the remaining three have been returned to us with formal 'initial review notices'.

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<sup>2</sup> Qualifying Regulatory Provisions are new regulatory activities that impact business; Non Qualifying Regulatory Provisions are activities which fall within one of the published BIT exclusion categories e.g. audit. We have to report a summary of the latter activities but are not required to calculate their economic impact.

14. In view of the general election, the current BIT reporting period has been extended from 26<sup>th</sup> May to the date of the election, 8<sup>th</sup> June. We are still required to publish our validated BIT assessments and NQRP summary by 9<sup>th</sup> June, for inclusion in the BEIS annual report.

### **Legal Team**

15. The Legal team continues to work closely on all strands of VTQ reform including Functional Skills, Apprenticeships and T Levels. In particular, they are involved in developing our operational approaches around recognition and upfront evaluation.
16. The team continues to be closely involved in both VTQ and GQ casework. This work particularly arises from incidents and event notifications and the team is involved end to end, including where formal investigations have been commissioned. This is a substantial pull on Legal resource and is an area where the team adds significant value.
17. The team is well integrated into the delivery monitoring and standards activity ahead of the summer series. This is with a particular focus on ensuring our ability to require grade boundary adjustments, should that prove necessary.
18. There continues to be a material volume of enforcement and pre-enforcement activity. This includes three active financial penalty cases. Two new significant enforcement cases have been referred to the team since the last Board meeting. One direction case has been discontinued and will now proceed as a "no further action" adjudication.
19. The team has undertaken a notable amount of work managing internal reviews arising from complaints. The volume and nature of complaints is not exceptional but the team has provided substantial feedback to support continuous improvement to their management.

### **Standards and Comparability Team**

#### **Summer 2017**

20. Since early April, we have been meeting regularly to review risks and notifications sent to us by exam boards. We have published several blogs on some of the more technical aspects of awarding this summer, and these were well received by stakeholders. Some have generated a number of comments, to which we have responded.
21. We are in the final stages of finalising our awarding requirements for this summer. Inevitably the reforms have meant there is more detail to discuss (for example around the detail of how grade 9 will be set, and the impact of the 'return' of IGCSE candidates to GCSE English), but

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the discussions with exam boards have been constructive and collaborative and they are supportive of the requirements we will put in place.

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### **BTEC social media research**

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*This section (paragraphs 23 –246) has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

### **Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) native speaker research**

25. The report, published at the end of April, has been well received by stakeholders. We committed to taking action this summer. Exam boards have also been carrying out research into alternative prediction methods for MFL and we continue to discuss with them the specifics of the action for this summer.

### **National Reference Test**

26. We have reviewed NFER's report on the quality of marking in this year's tests. The quality is satisfactory and similar to last year. We have also started to analyse the data from the student survey. By the time the Board meets, we will also have reviewed the technical report for the 2017 tests.

### **International Standards Setting Symposium**

27. On 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> March, over 40 assessment practitioners and academics from about 20 jurisdictions around the world came together at Brasenose College, Oxford, for the Standard Setting Symposium. People travelled (at their own expense) from as far away as Chile, South Africa, Korea and Australia to attend the event.
28. The symposium is part of our joint work with Oxford University and AQA which focuses on national, school-leaving or university entrance examinations from a wide range of jurisdictions around the world. The project aims to describe the processes used to set or to maintain standards in these examinations and to explore the concepts relating to standards behind them. We are aiming to use some of what we learn to help improve the awarding processes used for examinations in England.
29. The symposium included papers from 12 case study jurisdictions. There were discussions about the meaning of exam standards, about the main driver of standards in some jurisdictions, and about major examination controversies in other countries. In a very fruitful session, participants produced and presented posters showing who holds power and responsibility for standards in 20 international examinations.
30. The symposium was a great success and provided many ideas for further exploration. The main next step in the work involves building on the discussions we have had by writing a groundbreaking book. We are aiming to publish in September 2018. Along the way, we are hoping for further inputs and insights when we present our work at assessment conferences.

### **Research Team**

### **Research on Moderation**

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### **Predicting Predictability research**

37. The degree of predictability for any examined assessment can have implications for validity. A certain amount of predictability is good, it avoids candidates being wrong-footed but high levels of predictability can lead to undesirable behaviours. For instance, being able to predict accurately particular topics or essay questions could lead to curriculum narrowing and superficial rote learning.

38. We are part way through research to develop a framework to help identify specifications with high levels of predictability. Possible factors to include in the framework are the congruence between question wording and specification wording; the degree of specification coverage/sampling in the exam; and longevity of the specification.

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### **Direct Claims Status**

42. We have initiated a project to investigate the operation of what is widely known as Direct Claims Status (DCS). When DCS is bestowed upon a centre by an awarding organisation, it allows the centre to claim certificates for candidates whose work is complete, and judged by the centre to be of an appropriate standard, but whose work has not (yet) been made available for moderation. It is effectively a sign that the AO trusts the centre. In a number of recent incidents, DCS may have been a contributory factor to failings identified. This has encouraged Ofqual to take a closer look at its operation.

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### **Research Advisory Group**

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45. The group were positive about the quality and relevance of all papers, and provided some useful guidance on each paper as well as on potential avenues for journal papers.
46. Two other papers were tabled for discussion and technical advice – one on assessment functioning in vocational qualifications of different types; and another technical paper on the advantages and disadvantages of weighting survey data. We are fortunate to have a small group of extremely expert researchers on the group and the technical advice, particularly on the survey data, was hugely valuable.

### **Hosting the UK Rasch Users Group**

47. On the last day of March, Ofqual hosted the annual conference of the Rasch Users Group. Rasch, a psychometric measurement model, is used widely in education research and other fields. Indeed, experts from many different fields such as education, health, information technology, engineering and robotics joined us. Several Ofqual staff presented work involving Rasch techniques.
48. In recent years, the CEM centre, University of Durham, and Cambridge Assessment have hosted the event. This kind of activity supports the credibility of our research amongst the technical assessment community.

### **Regulation of National Assessments**

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50. We provided an update on our content validation research to the Select Committee which has now been published. This project investigates validity in relation to the national curriculum test development process, under the new assessment arrangements for 2016, using the KS2

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reading and maths tests as case studies. It involves scrutinising the sets of test papers that were delivered by STA for administration in 2016. Groups of subject matter experts, for maths and reading respectively, were invited to rate each of the items from these papers in terms of the subject content and cognitive processes that seemed to be tested.

51. All of the data is now collected, the results have been analysed, and we are in the process of writing the report. The results show a large degree of intra-expert consistency in judging items in terms of the content domain, as well as a large degree of consistency between our experts and STA. As would be expected (due to its more controversial nature) there was less consistency when judging items in relation to the cognitive domain; although, encouragingly, there was still a substantial amount of intra-expert agreement, as well as between our experts and STA. Prior to reporting, we are sharing our results with groups representing people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, to explore whether the findings may shed light on concerns with last year's reading test.] ]
52. Future research is likely to focus on areas of risk to validity, such as teacher assessment, particularly of writing, however, the detail of our approach is dependent on the outcome of the Government's current primary assessment consultation (see below).]
53. Internally marked Key Stage 1 (KS1) tests are being taken throughout May and the Key Stage 2 (KS2) test window is 8-11 May. Our areas of focus of this summer's monitoring are based on our assessment of the key risks to validity. We are also monitoring delivery and risk management at a high level and keeping the test development process for future years' tests under review.

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57. On 30 March, the Department for Education released its much-anticipated consultation on the future of primary assessment. This follows many of the recommendations of the report from the NAHT's 'Assessment Review Group', published in January 2017. Key proposals are:

- a. That KS1 assessments should no longer be a statutory requirement in all-through primary schools. Instead, a baseline assessment in reception would replace the use of KS1 as a measure of progress from 2019.
- b. To remove the statutory requirement for teacher assessment of reading and mathematics at KS2 (as there are reading and mathematics tests).
- c. To make short-term improvements to remaining teacher assessment frameworks, including moving from a 'secure-fit' to a 'best-fit' model in writing to give teachers greater discretion.
- d. In the longer term, to explore alternative approaches to assess English writing, including comparative judgement and to explore alternative moderation arrangements including cluster moderation.
- e. An online multiplication check will be introduced (this is not being consulted on as it was part of the last Conservative manifesto). The consultation is on when this should be done; in year 4, 5 or 6. Results are not intended to be used as part of school accountability measures or to trigger an Ofsted inspection.

58. There is also a parallel consultation on the approach to assessing pupils working below the level of the tests, based on the Rochford Review. This proposes replacing 'P-scales' with additional, teacher-assessed, levels below the KS1 and KS2 standards to include a wider range of pupils, and a broad framework for teacher assessment of those pupils unable to access the additional levels.

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63. On 2 May, the Education Select Committee reported on its Primary Assessment inquiry, to which Ofqual submitted both written and oral evidence. The report was published earlier than expected due to the general election.

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Paper to be published	YES with the exception of closed paragraphs and annexes
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting
If it is proposed not to publish the paper or to not publish in full please outline the reasons why with reference to the exemptions available under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), please include references to specific paragraphs	<i>See guidance on exemptions below</i>

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**ANNEXES LIST:-**

**[Closed] ANNEX A Strategic Risk Register**