

# Ofqual Board

## Paper 26/17

**Date:**

June 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 provides an update on the work of the Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQ) Directorate since the last Board meeting.

**Recommendation**

2. To note the issues raised in the report and the specific recommendations for Apprenticeships and Applied Generals provided in the respective Annexes.

**Vocational and Technical Qualifications update**

3. This paper includes an update on the following key areas:
  - a. Reform updates including:
    - Applied Generals
    - Functional Skills
    - T Levels
    - Apprenticeships
  - b. Regulation
  - c. Strategic relationships

## **Reform**

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## **Strategic Relationships**

23. We have necessarily been more internally-focussed during purdah. We continue to develop materials to explain the current complex VTQ landscape and how we anticipate it changing as a result of reform. High-level diagrams are attached and we would welcome feedback from the Board.
24. We have received findings from the survey we contracted (to York Consulting) which aimed to understand user perceptions of applied generals. Higher Education Institutions, schools and colleges and learners who use Applied Generals (mainly BTECS, and other equivalent Level 3 qualifications) were canvassed. This high-quality report, which we expect to publish in the Autumn, sets out some clear conclusions including:
  - Broad agreement that Applied Generals fulfil an important role in providing pathways for students not suited to, or not inclined towards, more academic or more vocational programmes.
  - In certain subject areas (arts, ICT and sport) Applied Generals tend to be preferred by HEIs over A-levels and are seen to provide an appropriate foundation for HE study. This is reversed in more academic subjects such as sciences.
  - The absence of significant examination components has, in the past, been a central part of their appeal. There is concern in the school and college sector about how the changes to Applied Generals may affect students who struggle to perform well under examination conditions.
25. We have also conducted a separate survey to explore employers' perceptions of the full range of vocational and technical qualifications. This survey establishes a baseline, based on good sectoral and geographical coverage, which we want to broaden in future years to cover a wider range of respondents. We see this as a useful longitudinal survey that will provide information during the reform of technical education.
26. Our work with external stakeholders has included providing views to the Institute for Apprenticeships on a proposed Quality Statement. We are also in negotiation with the Education and Skills Funding Agency on an MoU to allow more streamlined data sharing.
27. We held our second meeting of the VTQ Stakeholder Group. Membership of the group is now up to nearly 40; comprising mostly of education and industry representative groups (including the Association of Colleges, Association of Employment and Learning Providers,

Association of School and College Leaders and the British Chambers of Commerce) and government bodies including the DfE and Education and Skills Funding Agency. Topics for this meeting included a discussion on the impact of changes to Applied Generals, a high level review of the findings of our recent surveys and the latest developments on policy around apprenticeships, functional skills and technical education.

### **Finance and Resource**

28. We have submitted a supplementary bid to the Department for resource to support the Functional Skills reform programme which will be considered in July. Delays to this programme has required a re-profiling of expenditure. We anticipate submitting further business cases to support our work on Apprenticeships and T Levels in due course. More broadly, the combined reform task, including apprenticeships and technical qualifications, could not be met within current resources. We have therefore submitted a supplementary bid to the Department. Progress has been slowed due to purdah.

### **Impact Assessments**

- Equality Analysis  
29. No specific issues.

- Risk Assessment  
30. Our risk assessment will be informed by the strategic approach that we take to reform.

- Regulatory Impact Assessment  
31. No specific issues.

### **Timescale**

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

### **Communications**

33. Nil.

### **Internal Stakeholders**

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

### **External Stakeholders**

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

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| Paper to be published | Yes (with some closed sections) |
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