

Ofqual Board

Paper 41/17

Date:

20 September 2017

Title:

Strategy, Risk and Research Directorate Update

Report by:

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Responsible Director:

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Paper for discussion/information

Open paper, with some paragraphs and all annexes closed.



Strategic Policy and Risk Team

Issue

1. This report provides an update on the work of the Strategy, Risk and Research Directorate since the last Board meeting. It includes the following items:

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

Regulation Development and Impact Team (paragraphs 11 – 16)

- Proposed changes to the Business Impact Target;
- Qualification Wales' review of their Standard Conditions of Recognition and potential impact on Ofqual;
- Launch of the Ofqual handbook.

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Legal Team (paragraphs 17 – 20)

- Report on current enforcement actions

Standards Team (paragraphs 21 – 39)

- 2017 awarding;
- Impact of external assessments in Applied Generals.

Research and Analysis Team (paragraphs 40 - 47)

- Research into online training of examiners.

National Assessments (paragraphs 48 – 60)

- 2017 test delivery including semi-colon marking;
- Research into moderation;
- Next stage of content validation work;
- Consultation plans on changes to regulatory framework.

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

Strategy and Corporate Planning

3. In August as we approach the end of the second quarter, the Strategic Management Group reviewed our top 30 strategic priorities for 2017/18. We identified a few minor changes to the broad ordering and scale of the priorities, and added three new strands of work. First, work to review a sample of performance table qualifications submitted to the DfE. We will also be engaging with DfE and Ofsted on some of the policy implications of how performance tables are used and influence qualifications. Second, work to evaluate how moderation in general qualifications functions. Third, work in response to Qualifications Wales' review of their conditions, to ensure there is ongoing coherence in our regulatory frameworks.
4. The Board will also note that we have increased the scale of the work we are doing to address malpractice, in light of the incidents this summer related to Pre-U qualifications in particular. An updated version of the top priorities is in Annex A.

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Risk and Markets

9. The Single View of Risk system went live in beta form in mid-July. It has been well received and is already informing activity. The Board will receive a short demonstration of the tool during this agenda item. Work is already underway on the second release, with improvements planned to the user interface and the creation of an intelligence capture process.

10. The annual refresh of our systemic risk register will soon conclude. Our thanks to the Board for their contribution through the comparative judgement exercise to rank the risks by likelihood and impact. We will report the findings to the Board at the October strategy day, and use them to inform strategy development for 2018/19.

Regulation Development and Impact Team

Business Impact Target (BIT)

11. Ministers are considering the introduction of a £5m 'de minimis' threshold for BIT. This would mean that new regulatory measures with an impact on business of less than £5m would not require a BIT assessment. Instead, we would record these on our summary of measures excluded from the BIT. We expect a decision on this point in the near future. If approved, this would take most Ofqual regulatory activity out of scope¹. Further, a 'Call for Evidence' is due to be issued by BEIS at the end of 2017. This will invite views from government departments, regulators and wider stakeholders on BIT policy.

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¹ BEIS informs us that if this threshold had been applied in the 2015-17 parliament it would have taken over 90% of all measures reported by departments and regulators out of scope of BIT.

Ofqual Handbook

19. In October, we will launch the Ofqual Handbook, a new online resource that brings together 6 existing documents: our General Conditions of Recognition, the associated guidance, and our Logo Requirements, Additional Certificate Requirements, TQT Criteria and level descriptors.

20. The Handbook incorporates a number of new and improved features:

- Simpler, at-a-glance, navigation – related requirements and guidance are grouped together, with no need to navigate between different documents.
- Enhanced interactivity – including hyperlinked cross-references and tooltips on defined terms.
- Better accessibility – including compatibility with assistive software such as screen readers, speech recognition and magnifiers.

21. We will be running the Handbook alongside existing documents while we gather feedback, before taking decisions about rollout in the New Year.

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Standards Team

Summer 2017 results GCSE

26. New GCSE qualifications graded 9-1 were awarded for the first time this summer in England in English language, English literature and mathematics. We agreed with exam boards that statistical predictions are the most effective way to carry forward grade standards to the new qualifications. We used the same principles developed for AS and A level when awarding the reformed GCSE qualifications¹, and observed the majority of the 9-1 GCSE awarding meetings.

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29. On results day we published outcomes for 16-year-olds in each of the reformed GCSE subjects, compared with GCSE and international GCSE outcomes from summer 2016. This shows that overall outcomes were stable at grades A/7 and C/4. The 16-year-old cohort for reformed GCSE subjects increased this summer, particularly in English language and English literature. This was due to students taking the GCSE qualification rather than international GCSEs as they had done in previous series, following changes to school performance tables. The reformed English literature GCSE is also now the main route to gain a qualification containing literature (previously students could take GCSE English which incorporated both language and literature).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guide-to-gcse-results-for-england-2017>

30. We published analysis of centre-level variability for GCSE, focusing on reformed subjects and EBacc subjects. The analysis showed that centre variability was similar to previous years. In addition to the static reports we also made interactive graphs for centre-variability available on results day: users are able to select the subject, grade, centre size and centre stability that they are interested in and the graphs update accordingly.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/639724/Variability in GCSE Results for Schools and Colleges 2015 to 2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/639724/Variability_in_GCSE_Results_for_Schools_and_Colleges_2015_to_2017.pdf)

<http://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk:3838/2017/GCSE/CentreVariability/>

31. For reformed GCSEs we also made available an interactive app that allowed users to see the grade distributions for the reformed GCSE qualifications. Users are able to see the number of students achieving each grade in each subject, the number of students achieving combinations of grades across the three subjects, and the most popular combinations of grades.

<http://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk:3838/2017/GCSE/9to1/>

32. Some concerns have been expressed about the apparently low grade boundaries in the new GCSE maths higher tier papers. We noted in our results day commentary (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guide-to-gcse-results-for-england-2017>), that the design principles for the new 9-1 maths GCSEs are different from those for the A*-G qualifications. The overlapping grades (those accessible on both tiers) are now 5 and 4, slightly higher than the previous C and D. In addition, our rules require half of the marks on the higher tier paper to be targeted at grades 9 to 7, and half of the marks to be targeted at grades 6 to 4. We published an

infographic showing how this targeting relates to the average grade boundaries as a percentage of the maximum mark (. At 18%, the grade 4 boundary on the higher tier is not that surprising, given that only about one-sixth of the marks on the paper will be targeted at grade 4. On the foundation tier, where our rules require half of the marks to be targeted at grades 5 to 3 and half to be targeted at grades 3 to 1, the average grade boundary mark for grade 4 was 51%.

33. It is worth noting that the concerns expressed have tended to be from general commentators rather than from the maths community, who would be much more familiar with the design principles for the papers in terms of grade targeting. There is, though, a risk that in 2018 and beyond, we might see more students inappropriately entered for higher tier if teachers believe that it is easier (in terms of the number of marks to be achieved) to get a grade 4 on higher tier than on foundation. We will continue to collect data on the tier breakdown of entries so we can monitor this risk.

34. The outcomes for unreformed GCSE subjects were generally stable. The overall outcomes in GCSE (combined) science decreased relative to last summer, but the 16-year-old outcomes remained stable. We were able to explain that the changes in the overall outcomes were due to a decrease in entry from year 10 students this summer, who generally out-perform the year 11 students. The year 10 students will be waiting to take the reformed GCSE science specifications in summer 2017.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guide-to-gcse-results-for-england-2017>

AS and A level

35. Results for AS and A levels were generally stable compared to previous years, including in the reformed AS and A level qualifications. This is despite a drop in entry of around 40% for the reformed AS qualifications. Exam boards generally met predictions for the reformed AS and A level qualifications, suggesting that the AS cohort was representative of those taking AS in previous series. We published a summary of our monitoring and a guide to AS and A level results.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/639880/Summer_2017_monitoring_summary.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guide-to-as-and-a-level-results-for-england-2017>

36. We published analysis of centre-level variability for both AS and A level. The reports generally focused on the larger entry reformed AS and A level subjects, and the analysis showed that centre-variability was similar to previous years. In addition to the static reports, we also published interactive graphs for centre-variability: users are able to select the subject, grade, centre size and centre stability that they are interested in and the graphs update accordingly.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/variability-in-as-and-a-level-results-for-schools-2015-to-2017>

<http://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk:3838/2017/Alevel/CentreVariability/>

37. For new AS and A levels we agreed that statistical predictions are the most effective way to carry forward grade standards to the new qualifications. As in summer 2016 for new AS, we worked with exam boards to develop a set of principles for awarding the new AS and A level qualifications this summer, which they all agreed². We attended a number of reformed AS and A level awards in each awarding body to observe how these principles were operationalised in practice.
38. Following the outcomes of our work on native speakers we agreed with exam boards to adjust the grade A predictions for A level French, German and Spanish by +1%. This was welcomed by stakeholders who felt that the presence of native speakers was impacting on the grading in these subjects. The proportion of students achieving grade A in A level French, German and Spanish increased this summer, as did the proportion of students achieving grade A* (grade A: French +1.7%, German +1.8%, Spanish +2.5%; grade A*: French +1.5%, German +0.4%, Spanish +1.8%).

New Applied General Qualifications (AGQs)

39. We observed awarding meetings for a small number of reformed BTECs to give us an understanding of the kind of evidence and the decision-making process involved in the setting of grade boundaries in new Applied General qualifications. From the observations, it seemed that the steer that Ofqual provided ahead of the awards was taken into consideration: awards were mainly driven by judgmental evidence, although consideration was given to a number of statistical indicators (including item level statistics and measures of the ability of the candidature).
40. In order to monitor the awarding of these qualifications, we collected data at unit- and qualification-level on results from the four major providers of Applied General and Technical qualifications. This represents around 60% of the market. This allowed us to gain visibility of results ahead of their publication and to inform reactive communications.

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² See appendix 3 of the data exchange
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/620964/Summer_2017_data_exchange_procedure.pdf

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Research and Analysis Team

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National Assessments

Summer monitoring

54. We have completed our monitoring of this summer's assessments which included observations of marker training, seed selection, moderation (see below) as well as maintaining an high-level overview of STA's progress and risk management over this period. We observed both KS1 and KS2 test standards confirmation meetings to assure ourselves that the new standards set in 2016 had been effectively maintained. Results and raw score to scaled score conversion charts were published as planned on 4 July and on the same day marked scripts were made available to schools.

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Content validation study

63. Following on from our content validation study of the KS2 reading and mathematics tests, we have been carrying out additional focus group-based research in relation to the 2016 reading test. In particular, we have been considering, with experts in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, whether we can understand the cause of teachers concerns over the accessibility of the test.

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Regulatory Framework review

64. We have completed the internal work required to review and update our Regulatory Framework for National Assessments. This is in accordance with the approach outlined and approved by the Board in July. We have also engaged with a wider group of stakeholders to explain our role and understand views on our role as well as on the assessments themselves. We have had positive engagement to date both from STA and stakeholders in relation to our intended Framework review.

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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> |

ANNEXES LIST:-

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ANNEX B

Top 30 - August 2017 Update

Highest priorities

Lowest priorities

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Functional Skills Reform | C – L |
| Reformed qualifications as first assessed, and summer 2017 results | C – L |
| Centre controls, including direct claim status | C – M |
| Marking, appeals and reviews implementation | C – M |
| Regulating/Strengthening/ Reforming BTEC and Applied Generals | C – M |
| Performance table qualifications, particularly at Level 2 *NEW* | F – S |
| Technical Education (Qualifications) | C – S |
| Strategic / systemic work to address malpractice | GQ: CM VQ: CS |
| Quality of marking | C – M |
| Technical Education (Apprenticeship) | C – L |

Red – size and nature of work currently unclear, pending external decisions
 Orange – key changes from August update

| | |
|---|-------|
| GQ Moderation *NEW* | C – M |
| Reactive activity based on persuasive intelligence / high impact issues | C – L |
| National Assessments | F – S |
| Three Country Regulatory Framework Coherence *NEW* | C – S |
| NRT delivery & supporting research | F – S |
| Inter-subject comparability | C – M |
| Accreditation 2017 & 2018 [Now lower priority] | C – S |
| 9-1 communications plan [Now lower priority] | F – S |
| Evaluation of GQ reform | C – M |
| Contingency planning for market transition, inc. existing monitoring of market trends | F – S |

Nature of work
 C – Comprehensive
 F – Focused
 R – Reactive to external, unforeseen events only

Indicative scale
 L – large
 M – medium
 S – small

| | |
|---|-------|
| Improving awarding research and Exam Board developments | F – S |
| Special considerations and reasonable adjustments | F – S |
| Regulating other GQs, according to our strategy | F – S |
| Building up technical credibility in vocational research arena | F – S |
| Efficiency and VFM in the system, including piloting | F – S |
| Regulation of low risk entities | F – S |
| Conceptualising & embedding validity | F – S |
| Comparisons with unregulated qualifications, inc. international quals | R |
| Licence to practice qualifications | |
| ESOL, Tier 4 qualifications, Occupational VQs taken outside schools | |

General Qualifications
 Vocational Technical Qualifications
 Cross-cutting