

Ofqual Board

Paper 91/16

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Title:

Strategy, Risk and Research Update

Report by:

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Responsible Director:

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Paper for discussion/information

Open paper, annexes are closed.



Strategic Policy and Risk Team

Strategy and Corporate Planning

1. Board members are asked to review and agree for publication the Corporate Plan in Annex A. It sets out our key priorities for 2017-20, with a particular focus on our commitments for 2017-18. This draft incorporates comments from the Board at, and subsequent to, the Board Strategy Day in February.
2. Based on the Board's sign off, the report will be published on the 31st March, as well as being sent to a range of key stakeholders. On March 23rd, at our All Staff Event, we will brief colleagues on our plans for the year ahead, and consider what will equip us to achieve our goals.

Strategic Risk

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

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

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Regulatory Development and Impact Team

Regulatory Burden Statement

6. We have a statutory duty to publish a Regulatory Burden Statement. The Statement attached at Annex C is for the period 2015-17. It includes reference to what we have done during this period, as well as what we propose to do in the next 12 months, to review our regulatory functions and ensure that we do not impose or maintain any unnecessary burdens. The Statement also includes a section on how we welcome innovation and that our rules shouldn't unduly prevent it.
7. The statement will be published on 31 March 2017 alongside the corporate plan.

Digital transformation of the regulatory framework

8. We have been exploring ways we can use GOV.uk to improve the accessibility and usability of our Conditions and Guidance. As a first step, we will be piloting an online, interactive, version of our General Conditions (which also incorporates the associated guidance and rules such as our Logo and Certificate Requirements) over the summer. The format we will be piloting has been successful for a diverse range of Government publications, including the [Highway Code](#) and HMRC's [tax manuals](#). Depending on feedback from the pilot exercise, we will consider a wider rollout of this format across our full suite of Conditions and Guidance.

Legal Team

9. The Legal team continues to work closely on all strands of VTQ reform and have been actively involved in developing regulatory approaches for apprenticeships, Functional Skills and Technical Education Qualifications both in relation to deciding our operational approach and to inform our wider positioning.
10. Work is ongoing in relation to considering the implementation of new rules on reviews and appeals and detailed planning to ensure we can take formal action, if needed, to maintain standards during the summer awarding period.

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

Standards and Comparability Team

Educational Assessment Seminar

13. At the beginning of March, we held our annual Educational Assessment Seminar, with representatives from exam boards and other organisations with an interest in assessment issues, as well as researchers and others from within Ofqual. Presentations covered a number of themes:
 - Evaluating reform: focusing mainly on the changes to A level science practical skills but also reporting on our research into the impact of AS decoupling;
 - Improving awarding: including rules of thumb for combining different sources of evidence, using common items to maintain standards, and consideration of the approach used for new GCSEs in mathematics in Wales in November 2016;
 - Standard setting in VQs: considering possible approaches to setting standards in reformed Applied General qualifications;
 - Marking and moderation: including our research into features of mark schemes that might improve reliability; research exploring one way to

measure inter-marker reliability; our research into how moderators make decisions; research into what makes a good seeding script; online standardisation; and how feedback from marking and seeding data might inform item construction.

New GCSEs in maths

14. At the end of February, we published the findings from a small-scale survey of schools teaching the new GCSE mathematics qualifications.¹ The research aimed to explore how schools were deciding the tier of entry for students, in the context of more content and papers that are more demanding. The findings were reassuring, schools told us they are being more cautious in entering students for higher tier than in recent years.

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

16. We also met with a small group of key stakeholders in the maths community: bloggers, subject association representatives and others who had expressed an interest. We explained the changes in the new specifications, the impact of our rules, and the mechanisms we have put in place to make sure standards are carried forward appropriately from the legacy qualification and are comparable between boards and tiers. We subsequently published a note of that meeting as a blog.

A level MFL

17. We are intending to publish research considering the impact on the maintenance of standards of native speakers in A level MFL in April. This will be as part of the materials published alongside the Board's policy decision on inter-subject comparability (ISC).

18. This research showed that native and non-native speakers perform differently on the A level assessment. However, due to the low number of native speakers, the impact on the statistical predictions used to inform the setting of grade boundaries is relatively small.

19. We have been considering whether to take action based on these findings, and, if so, what this action should be. Given the limitations of the research, making a precise one-off adjustment to the statistical predictions to account for the presence of native speakers is not possible. We are therefore considering changing the reporting

¹ <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2017/02/10/gcse-maths-choosing-the-right-tier/>

tolerances applied to A level MFL this summer such that they are only in a positive direction. This is currently the case for the A* boundary.

20. To illustrate, rather than exam boards being expected to meet prediction within +/- 2%, they would be expected to meet prediction within +2% and would encourage their examiners to make use of the scope for 2% generosity where their judgment of the script evidence supported it. This runs the risk that the exam boards make different use of the tolerance but it will be possible to check for this and to suggest (or require) changes if appropriate.

21. We would then evaluate the impact of this change as part of the building of the case for potential further adjustment in line with the ISC policy. We intend to discuss our intended approach with exam board technical colleagues on the 21st March.

Blogs

22. We had a very positive response to our recent blog about why schools should not try to predict grade boundaries.² We are planning a series of blogs in the run up to the summer exams, to explain some of the more technical issues that we think stakeholders should be aware of, including:

- Comparable outcomes in the context of new A levels and the decoupling of AS;
- Myth busting – countering assertions such as GCSEs are supposed to be criterion-referenced, comparable outcomes means schools can't improve, it's poor practice not to set the grade boundaries in advance;
- How we will achieve/measure comparability between boards;
- Setting A* at A level – how it will work in linear qualifications, and in those with small entries or multiple options;
- Setting grade 9 in new GCSEs – the formula will be used on matched 16 year-olds, and what happens in future years;
- Our requirements for the summer – flagging that grade 5 will be arithmetic, but also more technical details such as boards will be aiming to get as close as possible to predictions rather than using tolerances;
- Our approach to monitoring the summer, including exam delivery, with a particular focus on social media and that we intend to be silent when exams are being taken;
- Details of how a prediction matrix works (possibly an animation).

Research Team

Marking reliability studies

² <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2017/02/03/grade-boundaries-the-problems-with-predictions/>

23. In the January report to the board, we described our plans to conduct marking reliability studies in the first quarter of 2017. These involve the blind re-marking of scripts in GCSE English Language, GCSE Biology, AS English Literature and AS History. We are also conducting experimental work into legitimate differences of opinion as to the mark worthiness of student work, and into other methods of capturing judgements about scripts i.e. different forms of comparative judgment.
24. These studies are under way and on track to complete data collection by the end of March.

Official Statistics Transformation Programme

25. We began an Official Statistics Transformation Programme in January 2017. This was to refresh our statistical bulletins to:
- update their content, given recent policy changes (e.g. around reviews of marking and appeals) and qualification changes (e.g. decoupling of AS and A level) ensure that we are providing relevant analysis; and
 - make the bulletins more engaging for readers. Other government departments have been updating their statistical bulletins to make them more accessible and appealing, in line with guidance from the UK Statistics Authority.
26. We intend to adopt a new design template for our bulletins after discussions with other government departments, as well as the Government Statistical Service. The template aims to present information in a clearer, more concise and targeted manner. We have considered different types of users (e.g. expert analysts, information foragers and inquiring citizens), and their needs in terms of accessible headlines, narratives and charts, and depth of analysis and data available.
27. The basic principles of the new template include that the key headlines or narratives are presented on the front page, with further detail within and that data tables are made available for the 'expert analysts'. We have prepared a sample report based on historical data using the new template, included in Annex D.
28. We aim to implement the new template and content to all our future bulletins.

Paper to be published	YES
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting, redact paras 5 and 15

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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:-

ANNEX A *Closed*

ANNEX B *Closed*

ANNEX C *Closed*

ANNEX D *Closed*