

Ofqual Board

Paper 42/17(a)

Date:

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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

To note the issues raised in the report and agree to reactivate the reform committee, with new members, to support vocational and technical qualifications (paragraph 3).

Reform

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

3. **Governance.** As the pace of reform picks up, we have considered how best to provide agile and appropriate governance to support our decision-making. To support VTQ work, we want to reactivate the Reform Committee of the Board that we used successfully for GCSE and A Levels. This can be done within the existing governance framework but new members need to be appointed to the committee. As before, the Board will

be asked to delegate specific decisions to the sub-committee, principally to enable us to progress issues more quickly than the frequency of board meetings currently allows.

We recommend that the Board adopts new members on to the Reform Committee and reactivates it in order to support VTQ reform.

4. We have also re-purposed our Technical Design Authority meetings to become a decision-making forum chaired by the Chief Regulator. This is already proving useful; the Functional Skills consultation proposition that the Board will consider has been through this revised process.

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14. **Audit and Regulation.** We continue to take a thematic approach to audit activity. We have commissioned audits that are looking at: how risks associated with IT changes are managed; how malpractice is identified and handled; and follow-on activity from our 2016 audits. A summary of audit activity and recent regulatory events are included as an Appendix.

Strategic Relationships

15. We continue useful discussions with Ofsted (focussed on risk management), ESFA (on developing an MoU) and UCAS (managing Applied Generals awarding and messaging). We are also engaged with Qualifications Wales (QW) in relation to a review of their General Conditions and Guidance (GC&G). We have agreed with QW that any

divergence between our respective GC&G will need to be supported by a clear rationale. Separately, QW plans to announce the findings of an audit of First Aid qualifications shortly; we are considering the implications of their findings for us and working with them on messaging.

16. In support of our ongoing review of Direct Claims Status, we have engaged the Federation of Awarding Bodies to support a workshop to explore current practices. This 'without prejudice' workshop with a small number of Awarding Bodies will take place on 22 September. Looking further ahead, we have set the date for our annual AO Conference for 27 February in Birmingham.

Finance and Resource

17. Our business case to the Department for funding for the Functional Skills reform programme has now been approved for this year (£469,000). Our business case for funding for Apprenticeships is being considered in early September. We are currently recruiting to a number of posts in the Directorate in light of this new funding.

Equality Analysis

18. No specific issues.

Risk Assessment

19. Our risk assessment will be informed by the strategic approach that we take to reform.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

20. No specific issues.

Timescale

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

Communications

22. Nil.

Internal Stakeholders

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

External Stakeholders

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

Paper to be published	Yes (with some closed sections)
Publication date (if relevant)	N/A

VTQ AUDIT AND REGULATORY SUMMARY

Audits

IT Audit. This audit examined the capability of AOs to issue the results of assessments. We receive a large number of Event Notifications that IT failures have occurred in this area, so our audit focussed on this. We now have findings for all seven AOs tested, with concerns that AOs are not testing their IT systems once they are live. These were reviewed at our Case Management Conference (CMC) on 25 August, and a range of actions are to be taken forward, including determinations of non-compliance. We will be conducting follow-up audit work in 2018.

Malpractice audit. The majority of VTQ Event Notifications relate to malpractice. This audit, based on one conducted in GQ, was designed to focus on Awarding Organisations' identification and handling of such incidents. Audits have been completed and we are following up on these with specific Awarding Organisations where malpractice has been prevalent.

Follow-up audits. Regulatory Compliance has completed a series of follow-up audits to check where we found risks to a number of Awarding Organisations' compliance in previous audits. We will consider the audit findings in September and determine if any action is required, as well as how we might communicate the outcomes generally.

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