

# Ofqual Board

## Paper 55/17

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**Title:**

Vocational and Technical Qualifications Update

**Report by:**

Phil Beach CBE

Executive Director, Vocational and Technical Qualifications

**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 the direction of travel and principal risks associated with our involvement in T Levels (separate slide presentation).

**Reform**

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

3. **Functional Skills (FS)** We launched our policy consultation as planned on 27<sup>th</sup> September, following the helpful discussion at the September Board meeting. Our engagement strategy for the 8 week consultation period includes a range of stakeholder and AO events. We are also putting in place a Functional Skills Oversight Board, attended by senior Ofqual and AO representatives that met for the first time on 30 October. This regular interaction with AOs is designed to enable the type of collaborative work that proved helpful in GQ reform and de-risk a taut delivery timeline.
4. We intend to review the reformed FS assessments before they are made available, to check their fitness for purpose. To support this, we commissioned a 'comparative judgement' research exercise by SRR (as has been used previously in various high-stakes GQ subjects) to establish

a 'baseline' of the level of difficulty in the existing assessments. We are currently reviewing the outcomes from this, but it appears that the degree of alignment across AOs looks broadly reasonable. We are now considering these findings in terms of reform and the maintenance of standards of current qualifications.

5. **Apprenticeships.** We are making good progress with developing, and publicising, our regulatory approach to Apprenticeships. We are intending to publish this month a 'refreshed' set of documents, explaining our approach to external quality assurance and summarising findings from the large number of Assessment Plans we have reviewed to date.
6. We have been approached by trailblazers to regulate 86 Apprenticeship standards and continue to conduct technical advisory group meetings to provide feedback on assessment plans. We have also commenced our pilot upfront evaluation of End Point Assessments (EPAs) and continue to develop our supervision of the transition between outgoing and reformed apprenticeships. Our increasing visibility of the end-to-end process of end point assessment development has informed our recent input to the Institute's Quality Alliance forum. We have identified the fact that just because an End Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) is matched to an apprenticeship standard, there is no guarantee that EPAs are being developed. This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.
7. We continue to set the conditions for an increased role as an External Quality Assurance organisation, which requires End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) to be recognised by Ofqual. We commissioned an external review of our recognition process and have identified some improvements that we might be able to make. We have made clear that we do not intend to 'lower the bar' for recognition. Nevertheless, we think that we could increase the success rate of applicants; a factor that underpins an increased External Quality Assurance (EQA) role for Ofqual.

## Regulation

8. **Strategic Priority 3; Centre controls and Direct Claim Status.** Our project to investigate the operation of what is widely known as Direct Claims Status (DCS) continues. When DCS is given to 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. This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.
9. **Applied Generals** Applied Generals now have 40% (mandatory) external assessment, unlike their predecessors where there is no such requirement. However both legacy and reformed qualifications remain funded, so many colleges continue to use the legacy qualifications. We wrote to the AOs in September to seek their views about the withdrawal of legacy Applied Generals and we are currently analysing their responses. The initial indication is that the transition will be complex because some legacy qualifications are used in current apprenticeships and more widely for adult learning.

10. Once we have completed our analysis, we will be developing policy options that will need to take into account the need to retain current apprenticeship and adult education provision and provide clarity to users of qualifications (including HE). A clear understanding of the position is critical and we are due to chair the first meeting of an Applied General Maintenance of Standards group on 23 November.

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

### **Strategic Relationships**

12. The Federation of Awarding Bodies' annual conference on 19 October was a key highlight of engagement with AOs. The Chief Regulator gave a well-received speech signalling the organisation's focus on VTQs and emphasising our wish to work with AOs to shape the new VTQ landscape. In addition, we delivered two seminars and manned a well-attended stand.
13. In recent weeks we have spoken at two Association of Colleges conferences; a Headteachers' conference; the School Leavers' Conference; Coventry & Warwickshire employers' network; the Royal Society; and the National Skills Academy Network. We will host the third meeting of the VTQ Stakeholder Group on 8 November.
14. Looking to the immediate future, we are preparing for the 21 November event "Shaping the Qualifications Landscape", aimed at employers and skills organisations. The aim is to improve their understanding of the role that Ofqual plays in the qualifications landscape and explain how they can engage with us and the wider system.

### **Finance and Resource**

15. We are considering submitting a variation of our additional apprenticeships budget bid to the Department, given that the rate of EPA development is slower than expected.

#### Equality Analysis

16. No specific issues.

#### Risk Assessment

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

#### Regulatory Impact Assessment

18. No specific issues.

### **Timescale**

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

### **Communications**

20. Nil.

**Internal Stakeholders**

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

**External Stakeholders**

- 22. 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

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