

**Minutes**

Board Meeting

Time and venue

9.00am by Microsoft Teams

Date

Thursday, 27 May 2021

Attendees**Board**

Ian Bauckham	Interim Chair
Susan Barratt	
Delroy Beverley	
Lesley Davies	
Hywel Jones	
Simon Lebus	Chief Regulator
Dr Catherine McClellan	
Dame Christine Ryan	
Matt Tee	
Mike Thompson	
Frances Wadsworth	

Ofqual

Niamh Field	Board Secretary
Claire Gill	Director - Strategic Relationships VTQ (item 18/21)
Daniel Gutteridge	Director of Legal
Michael Hanton	Director of Strategy and Markets
Charlie Henning	Associate Director, People and Culture (item 21/21)
Janet Holloway	Associate Director Standards for Design, Development and Evaluation of General Qualifications (item 20/21)
Cath Jadhav	Director for Standards and Comparability/SRO General Qualifications 2021 Programme (item 18/21 and 19/21)
Catherine Large	Executive Director, Vocational & Technical Qualifications
Jane Parsons	Director of Communications
Sean Pearce	Chief Operating Officer
Emma Scott	Director VTQ Operations (item 18/21)
Julie Swan	Executive Director, General Qualifications

15/21 Welcome and apologies for absence

There were no apologies.

16/21 Declarations of interest

Hywel Jones declared that he was now permanent in his role as Director of Secondary Schools, Astrea Academy Trust.

There were no other new declarations of interest.

17/21 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes from the Board Meetings held on 28 April 2021 were approved and the matters arising were noted.

With regard to the action from the previous meeting in relation to how the internal Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) working group will interact with Board members going forward, it was noted that the Executive Sponsor will meet with the Board's EDI Champion three times per year ahead of Board meetings.

18/21 Awarding 2021 Update

The Board received an update on awarding in 2021, including Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) and General Qualifications (GQs) summer and autumn series and communications approaches.

The Board was advised of the significant programme of monitoring and assurance activity that is in train regards the awarding of VTQs this summer.

The Board was also updated on activity relating to the regulation of Technical Qualifications in T levels, and Functional Skills Qualifications.

The Board received an update on the range of communications outputs and engagement activity underway. Intelligence from centres is highly valuable for eliciting insights of experiences of learners and providers and the decisions they are making, and subsequently informing AO monitoring and policy advice. The wish for VTQs to be treated with parity, whilst recognising the necessary and valuable difference of regulatory arrangements, remains high across the sector.

The importance of publishing the guidance for appeals as soon as possible was noted.

The Board was reminded of the approach for sampling in QA as indicated by exam boards. The Board noted that a comparison of centres' grade profiles for GCSEs and A levels overall with historical data from 2017, 2018 and 2019 would be one of the methods used. In addition, Exam Boards had indicated that centres that were flagged at stage 2 of the quality assurance process or that submitted late Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs), or were subject to malpractice and whistleblowing claims would be more likely to be included in the targeted sample. The quality assurance process will be weighted to English and Maths at GCSE, but all subjects will be in the scope of quality assurance and evidence behind the grades for any subject could be scrutinised.

It was noted that the likely results profile this year necessarily remains unknown. In response to a question from the Board regarding independent schools, the Board was advised that there was nothing in the design of arrangements that would systematically advantage any particular centre type. Quality assurance would consider whether the evidence behind a grade indicated the reasonable exercise of academic judgement, but the limitations of the approach meant that grade inflation was likely. It was also noted that better supported students may likely perform better in their assessments and thus generating evidence that would support more generous grading decisions.

It was noted that level 3 results in all four parts of the UK will be published on the same day, with the exception of the results for the International Baccalaureate, which are due on 5 July 2021.

The Board noted that a small number of private candidates had experienced difficulty with the arrangements and a number of distance learning providers and representative groups have been engaged with to discuss the issues. The Board noted that these stakeholders expect that private candidates may make greater use of the appeal process.

The Board noted that the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) will not be relevant this year as they refer to processes followed by awarding organisations to secure compliance with the usual regulatory framework. It was necessary to set revised ToR which will apply to the way GQ qualifications are awarded in summer 2021, and this would require public consultation.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to agree to delegate to the Chief Regulator, in consultation with the Chair, all decisions necessary to put in place revised ToR for EPRS.

The Board welcomed the update provided on the significant ongoing communications work underway. The Communications Team had completed recruitment to fill existing posts and ensure capacity for the summer. The Director of Communications will continue to explore options to ensure capacity to handle enquiries during the peak summer period.

19/21 Awarding 2022 Update

The Board received an update on the current proposals for awarding in 2022 for both VTQs and GQs. It was anticipated that consultation on arrangements would launch after TAGs have been submitted for 2021, and would likely be a joint consultation with DfE for both VTQ and GQ.

RESOLVED:

The Board resolved to agree:

- i. With regard to arrangements for VTQs to be awarded in summer 2022, to delegate to the Chief Regulator, in consultation with the Chair, all necessary decisions in relation, including, but not limited to, decisions in relation to the approach to consultation, the policy proposals for consultation, final policy decisions, and the implementation of those decisions, including amendment of any regulatory framework; and

- ii. With regard to arrangements for GQs to be awarded in summer 2022, to extend the delegation agreed at the 28 April 2021 meeting to cover both adaptations and contingency proposals to the Chief Regulator in consultation with the Chair.

20/21 Outcomes of consultation on revised GCSE Modern Foreign Languages

The Board received a verbal update on the initial analysis following the consultation on the revised content and assessment approaches to GCSE Modern Foreign Languages. Ofqual's consultation on assessment approaches was run in parallel with DfE's consultation on the proposed revised subject content.

A high-level overview of the 1130 responses received was provided and it was noted that the number of responses had increased following prominent public discussion relating to the content. The level of agreement with the proposals varied. The overall approach and support for the proposed assessment objectives, tiering approach and the use of non-exam assessment for the speaking element was also discussed. The full analysis report will be presented to the Board at a future meeting, however, any recommendations arising from the consultation will have dependencies on the DfE's decisions on the content. It was noted that DfE is considering whether to proceed with the current timeline to implement the revised approach from 2023/24.

21/21 Health and Safety Annual Report 2021

Consideration was given to the Health and Safety Annual Report 2021 and it was noted that Ofqual remained a low-risk environment, in particular as staff have been working remotely for the past 12 months. The focus of health and safety during this period has been on staff wellbeing and COVID risk assessments and there were no significant issues of concern to escalate to the Board.

The Board asked for assurance prior to final approval that the report was comparable with other departmental bodies. The Associate Director, People and Culture, will look to do this and draw on best practice over time.

RESOLVED:

Subject to the comments made above, the Board resolved to approve the Health and Safety Annual Report 2021.

22/21 Publication of Papers

Agreed to publish open papers

23/21 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The meeting ended at 10.45am