



## Fifty seventh meeting of the Board of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

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### Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 19 July 2007 at the Chesterfield Hotel, London W1

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#### Present

##### *Members*

Sir Anthony Greener	Chairman
Dr Ken Boston	Chief Executive
Mr Richard Greenhalgh	Deputy Chairman
Mr Mike Beasley	
Mr David Sherlock	
Mrs Sue Kirkham	
Mr Nick Stuart	
Sir David Watson	
Sir James Rose	

##### *Observers*

Ms Jane Joyner	Ofsted
Mr Ralph Tabberer	Department for Children, Schools and Families
Mr John Valentine Williams	Welsh Assembly Government

##### *Staff*

Mr David Gee	Managing Director, NAA
Mr Mick Waters	Director, Curriculum
Ms Isabel Nisbet	Director, Regulation and Standards
Mr David Robinson	Director, Communications and Marketing
Ms Carol Copland	Director, Legal and Corporate Affairs
Mr Andrew Hall	Director, Strategic Resource Management
Ms Sue Georgious	Head of Vocational Learning Qualifications
Mr Mark Luggar	Corporate Governance Manager
Ms Claire Cattle	Board Support Coordinator

#### Apologies for absence

Ms Cynthia Hall	Member
Ms Clare Chapman	Member
Mr Ioan Morgan	Member
Mr Ian Ferguson	Member
Ms Mary Curnock Cook	Director, Qualifications and Skills

## **1. Minutes of the Board meeting on 17 May 2007**

1.1 The Board approved the minutes of 17 May 2007.

## **2. Matters arising from 17 May 2007**

2.1 The Board congratulated Sir James Rose on his recent knighthood and acknowledged his valuable contribution to the QCA and the education sector.

2.2 The Chairman informed the Board that, following approval by the Secretary of State, Cynthia Hall was appointed to the QCA Board, effective 1 June 2007 for a three-year term. He also confirmed the Secretary of State's reappointment of Nick Stuart for a further three years, effective 1 June 2007.

## **3. The Chief Executive's Report**

### *Tests for progression—single level tests*

3.1 Ken Boston updated the Board on the preparations for the two-year pilot, scheduled to start in December 2007, of Single Level Tests (SLTs). He said that SLTs were an important step towards personalising learning, in that they would provide teachers with diagnostic information on individual performance, while also providing summative information on school and system performance.

### *Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)*

3.2 Ken Boston reported on the progress of discussions with employers about the recognition of employer-provided training. It was noted that the QCF is the foundation for achieving the Leitch Report targets, and that this is widely recognised by employers.

### *Functional Skills*

3.3 Ken Boston reported on some of the issues involved in ensuring standardisation and comparability across the qualifications and assessments being developed to enable young people and adults to achieve functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT. It is currently proposed that functional skills should be incorporated into GCSEs, which have no pre-determined grade boundaries, cover both levels 1 and 2, and include both tiered and untiered papers. For adults, it is proposed that there should be a stand-alone test at each level, and a fixed pass mark. Both approaches are at the pilot stage, and it is becoming apparent that there are serious and perhaps insurmountable difficulties in ensuring comparability of standards between the two. Validity and reliability in the assessment of functional skills might better be achieved by a bank of stand-alone tests, delivered online and on demand for both GCSE students and adults. Successful completion of the tests would be a requirement for completion of GCSEs.

### *International Baccalaureate (IB)*

3.4 Ken Boston reported that the QCA, the Northern Ireland regulator and the Welsh Assembly Government were satisfied with the DELLS (now DECWL) investigation into the International Baccalaureate's re-use of its 2005 history paper 2 in the 2007 examination. He reported that no evidence was found that there had been an impact on overall candidate performance, and that the immediate issue had now been resolved.

#### *Awarding body fees*

- 3.5 Director of Regulation and Standards, Isabel Nisbet, reported that QCA was working collaboratively with awarding bodies on the scrutiny of fees proposals. She indicated that QCA had received additional remits from the DCSF to extend QCA's work beyond GCSE and A level fees to other widely used qualifications; and to study how the qualification market operates, to look at how best to ensure value for money in the qualification system.

#### *Secondary Curriculum Implementation Conferences*

- 3.6 The Board congratulated Director of Curriculum, Mick Waters, on the successful launch of the secondary curriculum programmes of study and the successful regional conferences.

#### *Reorganisation of the QCA's Sponsor Department*

- 3.7 Ralph Tabberer outlined recent changes in the machinery of government. The DfES has been replaced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). QCA will work collaboratively with both Departments, although its sponsor will be DCSF, and remits would formally come from the DCSF. QCA would examine further the proposed working of these arrangements and seek immediately to confirm the agenda with DIUS.

#### *Performance Reporting*

- 3.8 Members noted the new performance report, which outlines QCA's major programmes of work and the status of delivery for each programme's milestones. The Board requested, for its meeting in September, an outline of QCA's top priorities.

### **4. A Level resits**

- 4.1 Isabel Nisbet introduced findings from recent research into A level resits. The research found that resitting is concentrated in AS units; that only a small number of students resit units more than once; that there are similar patterns of behaviours across maintained schools, independent schools and colleges; that, on average, resitting results in a candidate gaining 20 uniform marks, approximately one-third of an A level grade width; and that subjects in which the proportion resitting AS units is comparatively high include those where government is keen to see entries rise—mathematics, sciences and modern languages.
- 4.2 The Board agreed that effective communication was needed to inform the public debate around resitting. The Board accepted the recommendation that present resit rules, which do not limit the number of resits allowed at AS or A2, should continue.

### **5. The international dimension of QCA's work**

- 5.1 Isabel Nisbet introduced Tom Leney, Head of International Unit, and David Pepper, Senior Researcher. Tom Leney outlined the strategic direction of QCA's international work, as well as encouraging Members to view and interact with QCA's INCA website, QCA's international review of curriculum and assessment frameworks internet archive, providing open access to information on the education systems of 20 countries.
- 5.2 The Board recognised that QCA is committed to building a world-class education and training framework and the work of the international team is vital for facilitating that. The Board requested, for its meeting on 12 September 2007, a comparison of standards in England and other countries, including whether different curriculum assessment frameworks influence standards; and a study of the impact of globalisation on England's

qualifications and standards, including how the QCF fits in; and whether QCA should have a role in regulating the standards of exported English qualifications.

## **6. Possible amendments to the Education Act 1997**

- 6.1 Isabel Nisbet reported that amendments to the Education Act 1997 would probably be necessary for implementation of the Leitch Report, as well as changes to arrangements for regulation of qualifications in Northern Ireland. She reported that QCA is working with the DCSF.
- 6.2 The Board discussed QCA's approach to regulation to ensure standards are maintained, by reviewing standards over time and, when necessary, implement changes to criteria, resulting in changes to specifications of qualifications.
- 6.3 The Board recognised the high profile and the critical nature of this issue and requested that a paper on QCA's regulatory role be brought to the Board at its meeting in September for further debate.

## **7. 3/4 country regulation**

- 7.1 Isabel Nisbet introduced a paper on 3/4 country regulation, setting out the potential tensions between preserving common regulation across 3/4 countries and internal and external developments which may lead to greater differences between countries in the context, strategy and style of regulating qualifications.
- 7.2 The Board confirmed that it believes that retaining joint regulation across 3/4 countries is highly desirable and beneficial, and that any proposal which would increase national differences be clearly identified early, reported to the Board and the Board be fully appraised of the implications for 3/4 country regulation when taking its decision. The Board requested, for its meeting in September, proposals for dealing with issues which may be fundamentally important for QCA's policy direction, but which may conflict with the maintenance of 3/4 country regulation, as well as procedures for escalating and discussing national differences.

## **8. Leitch implementation plan**

- 8.1 Sue Georgious, Head of Vocational Learning Qualifications, summarised the findings of the Leitch Review Implementation Plan, following its publication on 18 July 2007. The main headlines were that it is an England only policy, except where specifically referenced as being UK wide; it provides the skills plan to 2020 and policy direction for DCSF and DIUS; and it accepts all the targets set by Leitch. She also informed the Board that the new Commission for Employment and Skills would be fully operational by 2008. The National Employer Panel and the SSDA would cease to exist from 2008.
- 8.2 The Board expressed its disappointment that the implementation plan related only to England, despite the Leitch Report having UK-wide implications.
- 8.3 Discussion continued on the future roles of QCA and SSCs, given that SSCs will have an increased role in respect of vocational qualifications. The Board agreed that the SSCs' role should focus on the content of the qualifications, but that it was QCA's role to accredit qualifications and regulate standards.

8.4 The Board recommended that QCA should respond formally to the Implementation Plan.

## **9. Report from Audit Committee**

9.1 The Chair of QCA's Audit Committee, Nick Stuart, introduced the Audit Committee's report from its meeting on 14 June 2007. He drew Members' attention to the Annual Report Accounts update, confirming that the Board, via teleconference, approved QCA's Annual Report and Accounts on 14 June 2007. Additionally, he informed Members that, following approval by the Auditor General and the Comptroller, the Accounts have now been laid before Parliament.

9.2 The Board expressed its gratitude to Nick Stuart and Audit Committee Members for the assurance the Committee provides the Board.

## **10. Secondary Curriculum Review and implementation**

10.1 Director of Curriculum, Mick Waters, reported that the final proposals for the programmes of study and level descriptions were submitted to the DCSF on 5 June 2007, and have been accepted by ministers. He outlined four strands for the implementation, covering completion of phase 1 of the web design and delivery; content for the website; assessment materials; and working with other partners to support schools' implementation plans.

10.2 He confirmed that three hard copies of the revised programmes of study would be sent to every school and that QCA will encourage schools to make use of the fully interactive, multimedia website, which will contain all programmes of study. The Board recommended that a small card be included for each teacher directing them to the URL of the website. Mick Waters accepted the recommendation and reported that he would work with Communications and Marketing to design appropriate material to be included in the dispatch.

## **11. IT Strategy update**

11.1 Director of Strategic Resource Management, Andrew Hall, provided an update on QCA's IT Strategy. He informed the Board that tenders had been received for the outsourcing of the service management function, which indicated that outsourcing was a financially viable option. The Board noted the update and endorsed the proposed direction of travel.

## **12. Relocation update**

12.1 Andrew Hall reported QCA had received DfES (the department at the time) approval to secure a lease on the Butts Road office premises and that discussions with the developer were now underway. Coventry City Council has granted planning permission for the building.

12.2 Discussion focused on the people strand of the programme and, in particular, the recruitment and retention of staff. Andrew Hall informed the Board that proposed retention schemes—one of QCA's risk mitigations—are still awaiting approval by HM Treasury and the DCSF. He confirmed that the DCSF sponsor team were involved in negotiations.

12.3 It was agreed that the Board carry out a 'deep-dive' into the relocation planning, in view of the critical importance of the relocation to the future of the QCA; Richard Greenhalgh, Nick

Stuart and Mike Beasley volunteered their expertise. The exercise will be carried out during September and October and they and Andrew Hall will report back to the Board at its meeting on 7 November 2007. Nick Stuart commented that, as part of the Audit Committee's responsibilities, the Audit Committee had reviewed SRM's risk management practices and were more than satisfied with the division's ability to manage and control any risks identified.

### **13. Design principles for 'full' level 2**

13.1 Sue Georgious introduced a paper on design principles for 'full' level 2. The Current definition of full level 2 qualifications is that they are of a certain type (eg. NVQ, five GCSE A\*–C) and/or size (larger than 325 guided learning hours for a vocationally related qualification). However, the definition does not explore which skills should be achieved; the value of these skills to employers and learners; the degree of transferability or breadth and depth of these skills; or how these skills might be best combined and achieved.

13.2 The Board noted the design principles and requested to be kept informed of developments.

### **14. 14–19 diploma: situation report**

14.1 Ken Boston provided an update to the Board on the accreditation process for the qualifications for phase 1 principal learning and project.

### **15. Contracts over £1M**

15.1 The Board approved the following five contracts:

- A contract variation for additional work as part of the delivery of Test Operations activities in the 2007 cycle, outside the scope of the original contract.
- A new contract for the development of Basic and Key Skills tests.
- Contracts for phase 1 Framework Development (QCF) testing and trialling over financial years 2006–09.
- A contract commissioning the evaluation of the QCF.
- A contract for phase 2.3 of the Minerva support programme.
- The Board also approved the tendering of a contract for the provision of recruitment support for the West Midlands market.

### **16. Contracts over £200K**

16.1 The Board noted the paper.

### **17. Agenda items for future Board meetings**

17.1 The Chairman drew Members' attention to the agenda items for the September away day and confirmed that Jim Knight, Minister of State for Schools and Learners, is scheduled to join the Board for its dinner on 11 September.

### **18. Any other business**

18.1 There was no other business.

**The Board will next meet at its away day on 11 and 12 September 2007.**