



Fifty fifth meeting of the Board of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 29 March 2007 at the Chesterfield Hotel, London W1

Present

Members

Sir Anthony Greener	Chairman
Dr Ken Boston	Chief Executive
Mr Mike Beasley	
Mr Edward Gould	
Mrs Sue Kirkham	
Mr Ian Ferguson	
Mr Nick Stuart	
Sir David Watson	
Mr Richard Greenhalgh	

Observers

Ms Jane Joyner	Ofsted
Mr Ralph Tabberer	DfES

Staff

Mr David Gee	Managing Director, NAA
Ms Mary Curnock Cook	Director, Qualifications and Skills
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
Mr Mick Waters	Director, Curriculum
Mr Mark Luggar	Corporate Governance Manager
Ms Claire Cattle	Board Support Coordinator

Apologies for absence

Mr David Sherlock	
Ms Clare Chapman	
Mr Jim Rose	
Mr Ioan Morgan	
Mr John Valentine Williams	Welsh Assembly Government

1. Minutes of the Board meeting on 1 February 2007

1.1 The Board approved the minutes of 1 February 2007.

2. Matters arising from 14 December 2006

2.1 The Board noted the further research to be done on the reasons why candidates re-sit A Levels.

3. Mentoring

3.1 The Chief Executive, Dr Ken Boston, introduced Peter Redfern, Remi Sarumi, Zoë Nash and Kevin O'Sullivan, QCA staff members and mentors to pupils at Pimlico School in Westminster Local Authority. The group talked to Board Members about their mentoring work and commented on the sometimes challenging but rewarding experiences they have had with pupils. The Board congratulated them on their dedication and commitment and for being exemplary role models to pupils. The Board encouraged communication of this work to all staff members, and continuation of such work with schools in the West Midlands, after QCA's relocation.

4. The Chief Executive's Report

Annual Review

4.1 Ken Boston informed Members of the third successful Annual Review held on 21 March 2007, which reviewed QCA's achievements over the last 12 months. Board Members commented that it was a very effective channel for communicating the work and achievements of the QCA and encouraged the QCA Executive to think of how it might build on the format for future Reviews.

Making Good Progress

4.2 Ken Boston reported that the QCA is working closely with the DfES to finalise the project initiation document for the development of the pilot for Progress Tests in line with the DfES consultation paper *Making Good Progress*, published in January 2007. Board Members requested that an update be provided to the Board at its meeting on 17 May 2007.

A Grade*

4.3 Ken Boston reported that the QCA had formally written to the Secretary of State proposing that an A* grade be awarded to those students who achieve a grade A at A level and at least 90 per cent of the UMS on the aggregation of their A2 units.

Qualifications and Credit Framework

4.4 Ken Boston reported that he had met with the Secretary of State to discuss the QCF. They agreed that it would be critical to the successful delivery of the Diploma and the aims of the Leitch Review that the DfES, QCA and other partners work collaboratively and engage with employers. Director of Qualifications and Skills, Mary Curnock Cook, commented that it was necessary to ensure that employers' needs and requirements are met, and that the QCA and other partners should be charged with consulting employers. Ken Boston and Mary Curnock Cook will be meeting with Phil Hope, Minister for Skills at

the DfES, in the near future, and will report back to the Board the outcomes from the meeting.

Diploma

- 4.5 Ken Boston reported that the QCA Diploma programme remains on course, and the successful Gateway consortia had been announced.

iGCSEs

- 4.6 Ken Boston informed Members that ministers propose to write to the two awarding bodies that offer iGCSEs informing them that, in order for the qualification to be used in state schools, the iGCSE would need to be submitted to the regulators for accreditation and that it would need to be accredited under a different name (from iGCSE). He commented that QCA is committed to working with the two awarding bodies to ensure a satisfactory outcome.

KRA3 Operational Performance Report

- 4.7 NAA Managing Director, David Gee, informed Board Members that the Minerva Programme Board agreed that the General Qualifications convergence aspect of the Minerva Programme be decoupled from the Diploma delivery support, and that the GQ objectives will be addressed through a separate project. A paper, outlining the changes in more detail, will be presented to the Board at its next meeting on 17 May.

Financial Performance Report

- 4.8 Director of Strategic Resource Management, Andrew Hall, reported that the QCA would have a notional overspend in 2006-07, as relocation redundancy provisions are allocated in this financial year. DfES colleagues are aware of the matter and have committed to providing the appropriate documentation to cover this. He reported that it was likely that QCA would continue to have a relatively high headcount of contractors until QCA could accommodate new recruits in Coventry.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 Director of Legal and Corporate Affairs, Carol Copland, introduced an update on QCA's risk programme of work. She informed Board Members that the Executive had identified strategic risks for 2007/08, and presented them for Board Members' comment. The Board approved the strategic risks, subject to the amendment to risk ID 5, which should make specific reference to the risk of delivery failures in the examinations and testing series.
- 5.2 Carol Copland presented QCA's internal *Statement of Risk Appetite* for 2006/07, which provides guidance on the level of risk considered appropriate against seven broad risk areas: operational delivery, reputation, cost efficiency, financial and internal controls, reform and thought leadership and working with external partners. The Board commented that *the Statement of Risk Appetite* for 2007/08 provides depth and clarity to the level of risk considered appropriate. Board Members approved the *Statement of Risk Appetite* and the recommended tolerances for each of the strategic risks identified for 2007/08.

6. IT Strategy

- 6.1 Andrew Hall presented QCA's condensed IT Strategy, which focuses on three key areas: Business Analysis, Systems Development and Service Management. He proposed that the Service Management function should be outsourced, and said that the driving aim of outsourcing the function is not cost savings, but rather improving the capability and quality of the service so that it becomes an effective enabler of greater efficiency savings elsewhere in QCA. Some Members raised concern that outsourcing would result in a loss of inhouse expertise and control; however, it was generally agreed that the proposed direction of travel was sound. Andrew Hall indicated that the more detailed IT Strategy, including all the supporting analyses, was available for any Board Members who wished to see it.
- 6.2 The Board approved the competitive tendering of the IT Service Management function, and requested that a progress report be made to the Board at its meeting on 19 July 2007.

7. GCSE Review

- 7.1 Mary Curnock Cook introduced the discussion by noting that GCSEs form part of an increasingly broad range of qualifications available to 14–16 years olds. The accreditation end date of 2010 (with last teaching in September 2008) for existing GCSE qualifications affords an opportunity to ensure that GCSEs continue to be fit for purpose. National consultation on draft subject criteria will start at the end of May 2007 and finish in September 2007. The QCA will continue to trial and pilot new developments to ensure that specification changes are adequately tested prior to national roll-out.
- 7.2 Board Members commented that GCSEs have been very successful in encouraging participation and ensuring more learners leave school with qualifications. Board Members further commented that GCSEs must continue to be accommodated within wider qualification reforms and current and future innovations, and must continue to meet the needs of learners.
- 7.3 Mary Curnock Cook informed Members that formal advice would need to be given to the DfES and she would report back to the Board with the findings of the consultation at the Board meeting on 12 September 2007.

8. Strategic Plan—allocation of resources in 2007-08

- 8.1 Andrew Hall provided a summary of financial resources allocated to each of the strategic objectives outlined in QCA's Strategic Plan.
- 8.2 Andrew Hall said that it was highly unlikely that the additional transition costs of the Tornado contract and the revenue carry-over reduction (£1.5 million) could be absorbed by QCA's core budget. It was noted that the DfES remit letter to the QCA committed the Department to working with QCA to agree an action plan for covering the costs, by stopping activities and / or allocating additional DfES resources to make up any potential shortfall, if the position remains the same by the time of the 2007–08 mid-year review. Andrew Hall also pointed out that, given the high level of salary and

third party contractual costs, the possibility of QCA finding sufficient underspend to cover the funding gap was remote, and that this point had been made clear to the Department. Ralph Tabberer reconfirmed that this approach to the funding requirement would be adopted, as outlined above.

8.3 The Board endorsed the Executive's planned allocation of resource in 2007–08.

9. Secretary of State's objectives and QCA's remit letter

9.1 Ken Boston informed Board Members that the priorities and objectives outlined in the Secretary of State's remit letter had been mapped against QCA's Strategic Plan. Andrew Hall informed Members that the resources confirmed in the Secretary of State's remit letter should be adequate to enable QCA to deliver its core programmes, but that this would be subject to a detailed review of the final version of the letter that had recently been received. He also made it clear that additional funding would be required for any new remits. Ralph Tabberer confirmed that additional funding would be provided for additional remits.

9.2 The Chairman, Sir Anthony Greener, informed Board Members that he had requested that QCA's quinquennial review, due in 2007, be postponed until after QCA had relocated and was fully operational in Coventry. If it is necessary to have some form of review in 2007, it should be limited and as specific as possible.

9.3 Ralph Tabberer confirmed that the whole process for developing next year's remit letter would be fundamentally reviewed.

10. Diploma presentation for employers

10.1 Mary Curnock Cook informed Board Members that in order to promote understanding of key qualifications reform programmes among employers, the Qualifications and Skills division was developing standard presentations for the QCF and Diploma, which she presented for Members' information and comment.

10.2 The Board provided comments and feedback on Mary Curnock Cook's presentations.

11. Report from the Audit Committee

11.1 The Chair of QCA's Audit Committee, Nick Stuart, introduced the report from the Audit Committee. He informed Members that finalising the revised Financial Memorandum and Management Statement between QCA and DfES was outstanding and the documents were due to be agreed by the end of May 2007, in time for QCA's accounts to be laid before Parliament in June 2007.

11.2 Nick Stuart further commented that the NAO had completed its interim audit report on QCA, which indicated that QCA was operating effectively. He reported that this was further evidenced in QCA's internal auditors' annual assurance report, which offered a moderate assurance rating on the design, adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal control. However, he raised concern that approximately 30 per cent of internal audit recommendations did not appear to be fully implemented.

12. Relocation

- 12.1 Andrew Hall provided a progress report on the property, people and process strands of the Relocation Programme. He informed Board Members that five tenders had been received for a new building in Coventry. An evaluation of those tenders will take place, and a full report, including recommendations for a building, will be submitted for Board approval at its meeting on 17 May.
- 12.2 Andrew Hall informed Members that, as the Adult Learning Inspectorate building had been secured as an early outpost for QCA in Coventry, recruitment from the West Midlands area was now possible. He informed Members that recruiting skilled personnel in London would be difficult from now on and that recruitment strategies should be focused on the West Midlands.

13. 14–19 Diplomas—situation report

- 13.1 Mary Curnock Cook reported that she would continue to provide a situation report on the development of the Diploma programme at every Board meeting for the foreseeable future.
- 13.2 The Board noted the paper.

14. Contracts over £1 million

- 14.1 The Board approved the funding 1) for an extension to a contract for advice on re-procuring the Tornado contract and 2) to proceed with the competitive tendering of a contract for the evaluation of the trialling and piloting of revised post-14 mathematics qualifications.

15. Contracts over £200,000

- 15.1 The Board noted the contracts detailed in Annex 1.

16. Agenda items for future Board meetings

- 16.1 The Board noted the future agenda items.

17. Any Other Business

- 17.1 The Chairman requested that Board Members confirm to Mark Luggar their availability for the proposed dates for the Board meetings in 2008.
- 17.2 The Chairman reminded Board Members that the strategy away day in September will be held in Coventry and it is likely to require Board members to spend two nights in the city. Details of the programme would follow closer to the time. He requested that the Corporate Affairs team review Advisory Group meeting dates and locations to ensure that Board Members could attend both the away day and the Advisory Groups they sit on.

The next Board meeting will take place on Thursday, 17 May 2007.