



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

**Fifty first meeting of the Board of the
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority**

**Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 14 September 2006
At the English Speaking Union, London W1**

Present

Members

Sir Anthony Greener	Chairman
Mr Richard Greenhalgh	Deputy Chairman
Dr Ken Boston	Chief Executive
Mr Mike Beasley	
Ms Clare Chapman	
Dr Helen Gilchrist	
Mr Edward Gould	
Mrs Sue Kirkham	
Mr Jim Rose	
Mr Nick Stuart	
Sir David Watson	
Mr Ian Ferguson	

Observers

Ms Jane Joyner	Ofsted
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Staff

Ms Mary Curnock Cook	Director, Qualifications and Skills
Mr David Gee	Managing Director, NAA
Mr Mike Green	Director, Human Resources
Ms Isabel Nisbet	Director, Regulation and Standards
Mr Arthur Jordan	Director, Finance
Mr David Robinson	Director, Communications and Marketing
Mr Mick Waters	Director, Curriculum
Ms Carol Copland	Director, Legal and Corporate Affairs
Mr Andrew Hall	Director, Strategic Resource Management
Mr Mark Luggar	Corporate Governance Manager
Ms Claire Herbert	Board Support Coordinator

Apologies for absence

Sir Mike Tomlinson	
Mr Stephen Goulder	Secretary to the Board
Mr John Valentine Williams	Welsh Assembly Government
Mr Ralph Tabberer	DfES

Minutes of the Board meeting on 13 July 2006

1. The minutes of the 13 July 2006 meeting were approved.

Matters arising from 13 July 2006

Minerva Programme

2. Managing Director of the National Assessment Agency, David Gee, advised that an outline of the revised costs of the Minerva programme would be presented to the Board at its meeting on 9 November 2006.

Chief Executive's report

3. The Chief Executive, Dr Ken Boston, highlighted the following key issues in the report:

Stretch and Challenge

- 3.1 QCA has been remitted by Government to examine ways in which to provide greater stretch and challenge at GCE A level. The Board confirmed that QCA should advise Ministers by the end of September on how this might be achieved through the addition of an A* grade.

Functional Skills

- 3.2 Functional Skills standards provide the underpinning statements on which assessment and qualifications are built. The establishment of standards for mathematics has been a lengthy process, but the Functional Skills Board has now agreed them. Director, Qualifications and Skills, Mary Curnock Cook, advised that Celia Hoyles, Chief Advisor on mathematics to the Secretary of State, has expressed some concerns over the standards, which are now being addressed by the Functional Skills team.

Executive risks

- 3.3 Ken Boston drew Members' attention to the executive risks. The only red risk is that relating to the implementation and operational plans for the Specialised Diploma. This is being addressed by the Department of Education and Skills.
- 3.4 Director of Regulation and Standards, Isabel Nisbet, commented that it was prudent to keep executive risk DEL9—relating to detecting problems with quality assuring the examinations and testing systems—at its current status of amber-red. Mike Beasley enquired if the risk's status could be decreased, as there seemed to be robust management action in place to ensure the risk is controlled. Isabel Nisbet agreed that she would undertake a revised analysis of the risk's current assessment.
- 3.5 David Sherlock enquired why QCA uses a four-point scale to assess its risks, rather than a three-point scale. Ken Boston noted that the four-point scale is used elsewhere in government, and was introduced to QCA following a recommendation from

PricewaterhouseCoopers. Director of Legal and Corporate Affairs, Carol Copland, will review the current assessment of risk, based on the framework, and report back to the Board at its meeting on 9 November 2006.

iGCSE

- 3.6 Edward Gould enquired why the iGCSE was not available to students in England, particularly to English as additional language (EAL) students, who have difficulty accessing the GCSE because of language barriers. Mary Curnock Cook commented that the iGCSE has never been submitted by awarding bodies for accreditation in England, and therefore cannot currently be offered. Further discussion took place around the naming of the iGCSE and its association with the GCSE, despite the two being separate qualifications with significant differences in content and demand. The Board agreed that if a need existed for EAL students in England to sit an iGCSE exam, the need should be assessed and, if necessary, QCA could accredit a new qualification to meet that need. However, the name of the iGCSE would have to change, to ensure that the two qualifications would not be confused or perceived as being comparable in their standard and demand.

e-Business Group Strategy

- 3.7 Nick Stuart, Chair of QCA Audit Committee, asked that the OGC Report on the EBG Strategy be presented to the Audit Committee at its meeting on 17 October 2006.

Key stage 3 review

- 4 Director, Curriculum, Mick Waters, thanked Board Members for their contribution towards the draft programmes of study.
- 5 As part of the formal update on the progress of the key stage 3 review and the first draft of the programmes of study, QCA will provide advice to the Secretary of State at the end of September. Mick Waters requested Board endorsement for the following:

Web platform

- 5.1 Mick Waters presented a demonstration of a web-based platform for the revised curriculum, and outlined how it would reduce fragmentation of the curriculum and facilitate a curriculum that inspires and engages all learners, through a multimedia interaction between subjects. The Board endorsed the approach to continue to develop the web-based platform and commented that it was an excellent piece of work.

Key stage 4 programmes of study

- 5.2 Mick Waters recommended that the key stage 4 programmes of study for English, mathematics, ICT and citizenship be brought into the same format as key stage 3, in order to ensure clear and smooth progression between key stages 3 and 4, which will provide a sound basis for the new GCSEs. The Board endorsed the change in format.

Attainment targets and level descriptions

- 5.3 Mick Waters proposed a programme of work on the nature and timing of possible changes to the attainment targets and level descriptions, which would come into effect in 2011. The Board approved the proposed programme of work. Sue Kirkham noted that the changes may result in increased workload for teachers, and that this should be taken into consideration.

Location of QCA

- 6 David Gee advised members that the Board sub-committee on location had met on Tuesday, 12 September 2006. He presented an analysis of the six locations, which focused on the evaluation criteria and financial and operational weightings and sub-weightings; the wider economic impact assessments; the cost of moving and cost comparisons for the various locations; recruitment comparisons; property available in the six locations; staff survey results; and commuting distances to London from the six locations.
- 7 David Gee informed members that the selection was completed in two phases of analysis. After phase one, the Executive decided to take Birmingham, Coventry, Nottingham and Sheffield to the next stage. Bristol was not selected on operational acceptability grounds; Derby was not selected due to its lack of education-based organisations and low match of its labour pool. After phase two, Nottingham was eliminated due to its poor choice of property and inadequate labour pool Sheffield was eliminated due to low staff interest in both commuting and flexible and assignment based working, and it also ranked poorly on diversity and its operational and financial scoring. The two locations left were Birmingham and Coventry.
- 8 The QCA Executive, taking into account the analysis and research conducted, recommended to the Board that the Coventry area be the future location of QCA.
- 9 David Gee informed Members that, despite achieving a high ranking, Birmingham would cost £10m more to move to than the Coventry area and that QCA's presence in Birmingham would have an insignificant impact on Birmingham's regeneration, which is a vital factor in satisfying Office of Government Commerce (OGC) requirements. QCA's presence in Coventry, however, would have a positive impact on Coventry's regeneration and was more likely to be approved by OGC. Additionally, high staff interest in commuting to Coventry would afford a smoother transition and more robust business continuity for QCA for 2008 delivery.
- 10 David Gee also confirmed to Members that, as the cost of relocation to the Coventry area is below the figure assigned for QCA, it may not be necessary to seek additional funding from Treasury. Approval, therefore, could be given by DfES and OGC alone.
- 11 The Board accepted the Executive recommendation that QCA relocate to the Coventry area.

- 12 A letter will be prepared for the Chairman to advise the Secretary of State of the Board's decision, and forward the detailed business case for QCA's relocation to the Coventry area.
- 13 Helen Gilchrist commented that, as the transition period from moving from London to being fully operational in Coventry is likely to be a number of years, QCA must develop and deploy strategies to ensure the involvement, engagement and retention of as many staff as possible.

Report on the delivery of the National Curriculum tests 2006

- 14 David Gee introduced a review of the successful delivery of the National Curriculum tests in 2006. The Board noted the review and congratulated David Gee and his team for the smooth delivery of the 2006 test cycle.
- 15 David Gee reported that, from 2007 test cycle, markers would no longer receive advanced copies of test papers, to minimise the risk of maladministration.
- 16 Sue Kirkham enquired if the return of English scripts in 2007 would again be delayed. David Gee stated that this would be necessary to guarantee the quality of the results, but that it was expected an earlier return would be possible for the 2008 cycle. Sue Kirkham requested that this be communicated to schools as soon as possible.
- 17 Mike Beasley noted that a Transition Manager would be required to manage a possible handover from one contractor to another—for the delivery of national curriculum tests from 2008 to 2012—for the twelve months before and after handover. David Gee commented that detailed succession plans were already being drawn up and that processes were identified and documented to ensure an efficient and correct handover.

Report on the delivery of the GQ examinations 2006

- 18 David Gee presented a review of the successful delivery of the GQ examinations in 2006.
- 19 He reported that OCR had problems with the marking of an A2 history unit, an AS biology unit and a critical thinking unit, which affected a number of candidates, and resulted in the candidates receiving their marks four days late. Working with Regulation and Standards division, NAA will investigate and review the rigour with which awarding bodies manage their data.
- 20 He reported that onscreen marking had increased this year and the trend was set to continue.
- 21 He reported that there had been 3000 unallocated scripts, which was unacceptable, and that the NAA would commission work to decrease the number of unallocated scripts.
- 22 The Board again congratulated David Gee and his team for the smooth delivery of the 2006 GQ examinations cycle.

- 23 Director, Communications and Marketing, David Robinson, presented an analysis of the media exams coverage for 2006. The presentation compared media coverage on A level examinations over the last six years. In particular, there was a substantial favourable shift from 2005 to 2006 in media coverage. He also commented that the A level media campaign, in which QCA advertised in a number of national newspapers congratulating A level students for their dedicated and hard work, was very successful in raising QCA's profile.

Development of National Curriculum test provision

- 24 David Gee presented an update on the development of the National Curriculum test provision.
- 25 He reported that project Tornado had been successful in stimulating the market, and that the Competitive Dialogue procurement process—whereby the NAA engages in dialogue with the suppliers before key tender documents are issued—was proving successful in engaging suppliers to work with QCA to produce robust, innovative solutions on a sound commercial basis. Three suppliers are expected to submit tenders, with the contract being awarded to the successful supplier by mid-December.

QCA consultants budget 2006/07—analysis

- 26 Finance Director, Arthur Jordan, presented Board Members with an analysis of budgeted spend on consultants for 2006/07.
- 27 He reported that the total spend for 2006/07 was £31.286M, covering bought in products, bought in services, bought in management and bought in advice.
- 28 For future analysis, Board Members requested that bought in management and bought in advice only be reported under the heading 'consultants', as these categories represented the physical presence of consultants more accurately.

International role of QCA

- 29 Isabel Nisbet discussed future international work, including the establishment of the proposed International Unit. She reported that she will be working with Sir David Watson to prepare a more detailed paper, outlining clearer remits and costs for the team, for a future Board meeting. She stated that the International Unit would be self-funded.

Review of the work of the Board

- 30 The Chairman introduced the review of Board effectiveness and commented that a more rigorous induction programme was necessary for new Board appointments.
- 31 He drew Members' attention to the fact that there were mixed views on the effectiveness of the Board in determining monitoring criteria and ensuring that internal controls are effective.

- 32 Ken Boston asked whether the operational performance reports, contained in the CEO's report, were adequate in providing Board Members with an insight into QCA's main programmes of work and addressing this concern. Clare Chapman indicated that they provided an effective mechanism for Members to grasp an operational insight into the activities of QCA.
- 33 Nick Stuart, as Chair of Audit Committee, stated he had visibility of internal audit reports and would be able, if necessary, to report to the Board any concerns over internal control and effective corporate governance.
- 34 Board Members agreed that the work of the Advisory Groups was an effective channel for Board Members to achieve an insight into the work of QCA. The Chairman requested a review of the Advisory Groups, including a list of current Advisory Groups, their Chairs and what the Executive expected from the Advisory Groups.
- 35 Richard Greenhalgh enquired if any work had been undertaken to develop performance measures, such as key performance indicators, to measure QCA success, but noted that, with the exception of NAA, it was difficult to develop performance metrics for QCA's divisions.
- 36 The Chairman drew Members' attention to the findings about responsibility to relevant stakeholders and suggested that more work should be undertaken to build relationships with key stakeholders, particularly Ministers and DfES officials. Clare Chapman stated that formal feedback on QCA's performance from the DfES was necessary to ensure an effective working relationship.
- 37 Ian Ferguson indicated that it was equally as important to ensure that Board Members communicated the value of QCA activities to stakeholders they interact with in industry and the wider educational networks. He suggested that the Director, Communications and Marketing should provide a steer and information to enable Board Members to be more proactive in communication to various stakeholders.

Contracts over £200,000 and below £1 million

- 38 The Board noted the paper.

Agenda items for future Board meetings

- 39 The Board noted the paper.

Any other business

- 40 The Chairman noted that Dr Helen Gilchrist and Sir Mike Tomlinson were retiring from the QCA Board and thanked them both for their exemplary performance and contributions. The Chairman stated that Dr Helen Gilchrist would remain a member of the 14-19 Advisory Group.
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Dates of meetings in 2006

Thursday 9 November

Thursday 14 December