

Elsewhere, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) might inherit some of the money saved from the abolition of the QCDA for funding engagement activities, similar to the Aimhigher programme¹¹ – and of a similar order. It is likely that a small funding stream will need to be made available in order that universities can allow staff adequate time to engage in this process, thereby ensuring 'quality' rather than 'tick box' engagement.

It may be that seconding academics to awarding bodies during the early stages of the design process to ensure the standard was properly set would be a good use of seedcorn monies. Certainly, continuous engagement from early design through to production will require some element of incentivisation, given the vast range of other duties expected of the modern academic.

The impact criteria of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) could also provide a helpful lever. There is a perfectly reasonable case to be made that disseminating knowledge to the next level down of the education system is nearly as important as some other RAE criteria. Clearly, it would not rate as importantly as an academic paper but is of great importance to the long-term health of the nation.

And it may well be that the HE Academy could usefully turn its mind to how it might provide a service both to HE and wider education by providing structures and resource to encourage such engagement.

Stability

A current unhelpful part of the process is the frequency of qualification 'accreditation cycles'. The frequency of these changes is driven by regulatory pressures rather than by a change in the structure and

content of knowledge in subject areas, change in effective pedagogy, evidenced innovation in curriculum practices, or emerging needs in the learner group. None of these factors work to particular timescales.

Because the reaccreditation process occurs on a frequent basis and requires the change of a qualification across all subject areas, awarding bodies are required to engage across the whole of the user group and in a limited period of time. This reduces the likelihood of quality engagement. In addition, repeated changes to qualifications which are beyond and more frequent than those necessitated by subject and pedagogical change, as mentioned above, can have a negative impact on maintaining the standard of qualifications.

Regulatory engagement ought to be based on a presumption in favour of stability which should prevail over the current approval process of synchronised accreditation to ensure compatibility across boards. A General Duty under the current Section 129 (1)¹² would embed a more acceptable approach into the process.

In summary, our thesis is that: standards of qualifications are better maintained if they are owned by the users and deliverers rather than through a bureaucratic process. If this responsibility is returned to users and communities of practice, minimal and useful regulation can then follow.

11. Aimhigher is a national programme which aims to widen participation in higher education by raising HE awareness, aspirations and attainment among young people from under-represented groups. http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner/programme_information/about_aimhigher.cfm

12. Section 129 General duties: (1) So far as is reasonably practicable, in performing its functions Ofqual must act in a way – (a) which is compatible with its objectives, and (b) which it considers most appropriate for the purpose of meeting its objectives.

EXAMINATIONS RESEARCH

Statistical Reports

The Statistics Team Research Division

The ongoing 'Statistics Reports Series' provides statistical summaries of various aspects of the English examination system such as trends in pupil attainment, subject uptake, qualifications choice and subject provision at school. These reports, produced using national-level examination data, are available on the Cambridge Assessment website:

http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Our_Services/Research/Statistical_Reports

The following reports have been published since Issue 10 of *Research Matters*:

- Statistics Report Series No. 20: How old are GCSE candidates?

- Statistics Report Series No. 21: A-Level uptake and results by gender, 2002–2009
- Statistics Report Series No. 22: GCSE uptake and results by gender, 2002–2009
- Statistics Report Series No. 23: A-Level uptake and results by school type, 2002–2009
- Statistics Report Series No. 24: GCSE uptake and results by school type, 2002–2009