



CCEA Regulation Annual Report 2014/15





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Foreword

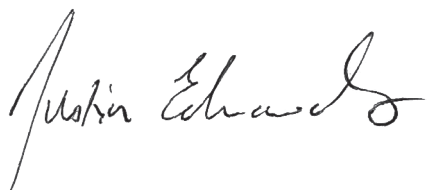
This report summarises the activities undertaken by CCEA in its regulatory role in Northern Ireland for the following types of qualifications: A/AS level; GCSE; Entry Level and Other General. CCEA Regulation also has an advisory and support role working to the Department of Education (DE) and Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). The report covers the work undertaken between April 2014 and March 2015.

The report outlines achievements for the CCEA regulated qualifications taken by learners in Northern Ireland. For A/AS level and GCSE qualifications, achievements are shown for Summer 2014. The report also sets out how we recognise and monitor the qualifications of the awarding organisations that we regulate, as well as indicating the numbers and types of qualifications that were accredited. Prior to April 2012 all qualifications were accredited on a three country basis across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, due to diverging policies across the three jurisdictions, this report gives detail only on those qualifications that are accredited for use in Northern Ireland.

We have a key role in providing advice and support to DEL including developments in Europe regarding qualifications and qualification systems. This report covers work in relation to: European Qualifications Framework (EQF); European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET); and European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO).

CCEA Regulation also manages a number of projects, reporting to DE and DEL where appropriate. The major focus for project work in this report has been work on the Unique Learner Number (ULN) and the Personal Learning Record (PLR).

The report provides a wide range of data relevant to learner achievement in Northern Ireland and information on our work in relation to the regulation and development of qualifications. We hope that, as our stakeholders, you will find this report to be of interest. Further information on our work can be accessed on the website www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation.



Justin Edwards
Chief Executive

Regulation Remit

The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has responsibility for curriculum development, qualifications, assessment and specific regulatory powers, as set out within the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998:

‘CCEA shall develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications, and accredit, where such criteria are met, any qualifications submitted for accreditation.’

‘CCEA shall keep under review all aspects of relevant external qualifications, and publish and disseminate information relating to relevant external qualifications.’ CCEA Regulation sets requirements both for regulated qualifications and for the relevant awarding organisations that offer them. This is achieved using a number of tools including recognition (the approval of an awarding organisation to ensure it has the capability to offer qualifications before it can operate in the regulated system), and accreditation (the review and approval of qualifications to ensure they meet the appropriate criteria). An awarding organisation’s recognition is subject to ongoing compliance with the conditions of recognition. Compliance is monitored as part of CCEA regulatory activity. This work is carried out, where appropriate, in partnership with the qualifications regulators in England (Ofqual) and Wales (Welsh Government).

CCEA Regulation undertakes regulation and development activities for the following qualifications – GCE A-level, GCSE, Entry Level and Other General – working to the Department of Education (DE). We also carry out regulation and development for skills qualifications, particularly Essential Skills – working to both DE and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). In addition we provide advice, support and guidance, including development activities, for vocational qualifications working to DEL.

Currently, we have a key role in the development and implementation of several related European initiatives being introduced by the UK Government to support lifelong learning and mobility.

Recognition Criteria, General Conditions and Regulatory Documents

Introduction

We are currently responsible for the regulation of all qualifications, other than vocational qualifications, offered to learners in Northern Ireland. This means we regulate GCE A-levels, GCSEs, Entry Level and Other General type qualifications as defined on the Register of Regulated Qualifications. Awarding organisations wishing to offer these types of qualifications in Northern Ireland are required to be recognised to be compliant with the CCEA Recognition Criteria and must also meet the CCEA General Conditions for Recognition.

Becoming a Recognised Awarding Organisation

The CCEA General Conditions of Recognition January 2015 can be accessed on the Accreditation page of the CCEA website www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation. The applicant awarding organisation should ensure the qualification types for which it is applying are regulated by CCEA Regulation. Applicants need to undertake a robust evaluation ahead of applying for recognition, and evidence of this must be submitted on the evaluation template along with the completed Recognition Application Form. Both documents can be found on the CCEA Regulation page of the website www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation/recognition

The Process of Becoming a Recognised Awarding Organisation

The application is evaluated in line with the CCEA Recognition Criteria and the CCEA General Conditions of Recognition. As part of the recognition process we will meet with representatives of the prospective awarding organisation (including its governing body) to test and validate the evidence provided and to seek clarification if required. The recognition decision will be communicated to the applicant with an explanation if unsuccessful. We received one application for recognition in 2014–15 and are currently processing it.

Once Recognised

After recognition each awarding organisation is subject to the CCEA General Conditions of Recognition and any additional subject-specific qualification conditions. In order to stay recognised, awarding organisations declare their compliance with the CCEA General Conditions of Recognition on an annual basis, by completing the Statement of CCEA Compliance.

Statements of compliance from 12 awarding organisations were submitted by Friday 25 July 2014. This ensures their continued recognition to offer qualifications in Northern Ireland regulated by CCEA Regulation. Details are outlined later in this report.

Regulatory Documents

The CCEA Criteria for Recognition and the CCEA General Conditions for Recognition, along with various subject and qualifications criteria documents can be found on the CCEA Regulation webpage. In addition to the CCEA General Conditions of Recognition, there are several other regulatory documents with which there must be compliance depending on the particular type of qualification.

These documents are listed below:

GCE/GCSE

GCSE, GCE Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice

GCSE Controlled Assessment Regulations

GCE AS and A level qualification criteria

GCE AS and A level subject criteria (where these exist)

GCE subject criteria for applied A levels

GCSE qualification criteria

GCSE subject criteria (where these exist)

Northern Ireland GCSE and GCE Design Principles

Entry Level

Northern Ireland Entry Level qualification criteria

All of these documents can be accessed at www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation.

Compliance

The CCEA Annual Statement of Compliance 2014 required awarding organisations to confirm compliance with all of the CCEA General Conditions of Recognition and to provide a report on Condition B2.6, which deals with how awarding organisations conducted face-to-face meetings with centres/teachers in Northern Ireland in the previous 12 months.

Twelve CCEA Statements of Compliance were submitted by Friday 25 July 2014 from the following awarding organisations that are currently active in Northern Ireland and that we regulate:

- AQA
- Ascentis
- Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
- Cambridge International Examinations
- City and Guilds of London Institute
- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
- International Baccalaureate Organisation
- National Open College Network
- OCR
- Pearson
- Royal Academy of Dance
- WJEC

We introduced new CCEA General Conditions of Recognition during 2014/15. On 1 September 2014 Condition C3 'Arrangements with publishers' was introduced to minimise the risk of any detrimental effect on standards and public confidence that could arise through the endorsement of resources by awarding organisations. Subsequently, on 1 January 2015, as a result of the removal of the accreditation requirement in England for Other General and Entry Level type qualifications, Condition E5.2 'Assurance that qualifications comply with the conditions' was introduced. This required awarding organisations to submit every three months a list of qualifications that they intend to upload to the Register of Regulated Qualifications for offer in Northern Ireland.

Compliance Activities

We use a number of processes to ascertain if recognised awarding organisations are compliant with the CCEA General Conditions of Recognition and additional subject and/or qualifications criteria. Monitoring of awarding organisation processes, scrutiny of qualifications and audit of incidents of error, complaints or investigations are all used to check compliance.

Incidents of Error, Complaints or Investigations

During each examination series awarding organisations are asked to report incidents of error, complaints or investigations to the qualifications regulators. For summer 2014, winter 2014 and spring 2015 series we managed reports from the five general awarding organisations on incidents affecting the conduct of their examinations. Working jointly with fellow regulators when appropriate, we monitored corrective actions taken and future precautionary measures proposed by the awarding organisations. We ensured DE was kept informed of all incidents.



Accreditation

The Accreditation Process

GCSEs and A levels are revised or reformed every 5–7 years to ensure that the qualifications meet all regulatory requirements and reflect any changes in educational policy. Traditionally, this has been done through a process of accreditation carried out jointly by the three regulators of GCSEs and A levels – Ofqual (England), Welsh Government (Wales) and CCEA Regulation. However, due to policy divergence between England, Wales and Northern Ireland this has now evolved into separate processes being conducted in each of the three countries. Awarding organisations wishing to offer GCSEs and A levels in these countries must submit specifications and specimen assessment materials to the regulator for accreditation prior to being permitted to offer their qualifications in centres.

Northern Ireland is retaining an open qualifications market, which means that A levels and GCSEs that have been accredited by Ofqual and Welsh Government will also be offered in schools here, as long as they comply with Northern Ireland educational policy. Awarding organisations that wish to offer GCSE and A level qualifications in Northern Ireland must meet the high level criteria for these subjects, designed by CCEA Regulation. For those GCSEs and A levels designed by CCEA Awarding Organisation (CCEA AO) for use in Northern Ireland, design principles have been developed which must be adhered to.

Accreditation of CCEA AO A Levels

In light of the changes to three country working on accreditation, we designed a two-stage accreditation process for CCEA AO's A levels. In the first stage, CCEA AO submitted a qualification strategy for approval. Once this was approved, CCEA AO was free to submit the specification and specimen assessment materials for accreditation. In this second stage of the process, the submissions were reviewed by us (in phases) and external subject experts who each completed an accreditation report. Each submission was considered by a wider group of the accreditation team at the monthly accreditation review meeting and at this meeting the decision was taken whether or not to accredit the qualification. Detailed feedback was sent back to CCEA AO with a date when it could resubmit the amended materials.

Prior to starting the accreditation process in October 2014, we designed the process with its associated paperwork, briefed the CCEA AO and its writing teams and recruited and trained subject experts.

The following documentation was designed for use in the accreditation process:

- Accreditation handbook
- Qualification strategy template
- AO briefing material
- Training material for accreditation subject experts
- Accreditation report
- Accreditation feedback report

Qualification Strategies

Twenty-four qualification strategies were submitted and approved between October 2014 and March 2015.

Subject Experts

Sixty-four subject experts were recruited and trained by us between April 2014 and March 2015.

A Level Accreditation

Up to the end of March 2015, six A levels had been submitted for accreditation.

Qualifications Awarded in Northern Ireland

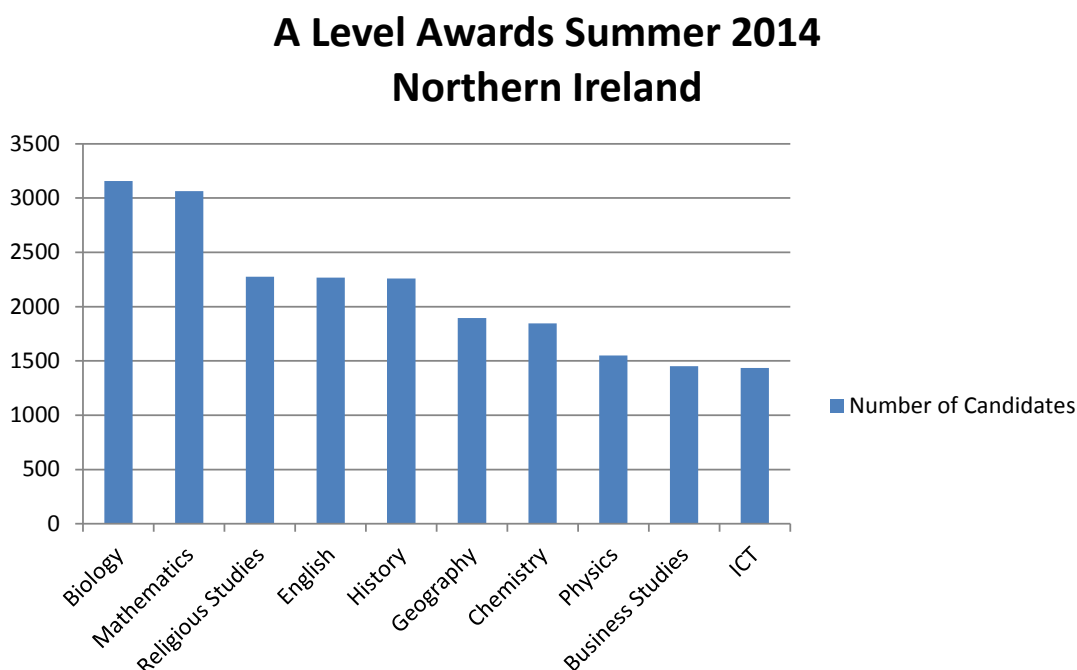
This section outlines the achievements in Northern Ireland for GCSEs and GCE A-levels that were awarded in the Summer 2014 examinations series. GCSE, GCE A level and GCE AS level qualifications are high stakes examinations within 14–19 education and specific details of achievements for these qualifications taken by learners in Northern Ireland are detailed below.

GCE A Level

There were 31,540 GCE A level achievements awarded in June 2014 (32,836 in 2013).

Figure 1 shows the 10 qualifications with the greatest number of achievements for Northern Ireland in June 2014 across all of the GCE A level categories. Biology had the greatest number of achievements at 3,158 (3,359 in 2013) with Mathematics having 3,065 (3,176 in 2013). Other achievements are Religious Studies with 2,275 (2,503 in 2013), English with 2,268 (2,287 in 2013) and History with 2,260 awards (2,363 in 2013).

Figure 1: Top 10 GCE achievements in Northern Ireland by subject – June 2014



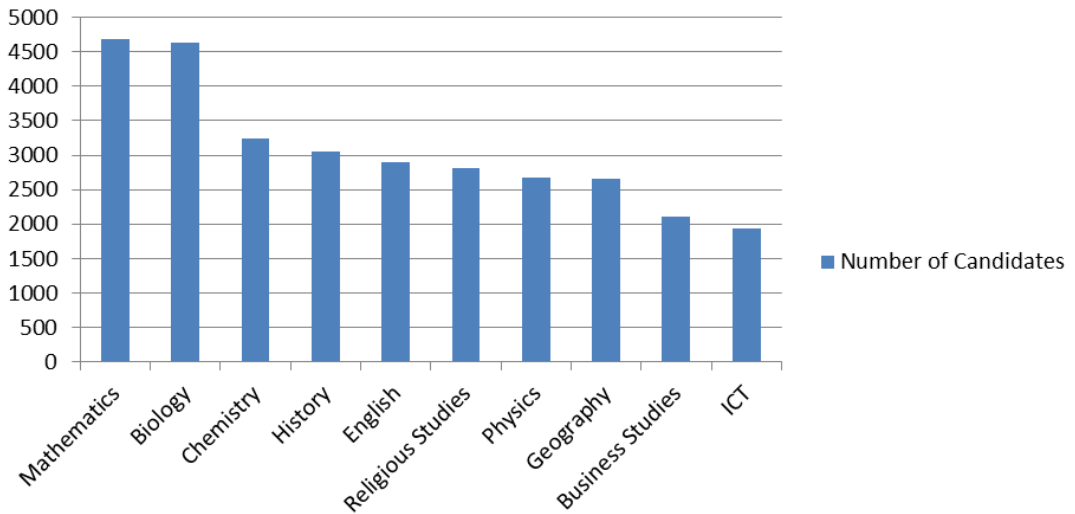
GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

There were 45,751 GCE AS qualification achievements in June 2014 (43,472 in 2013).

Figure 2 shows the AS qualifications with the greatest number of achievements for Northern Ireland in June 2014 across all of the GCE Advanced Subsidiary subjects. Mathematics had the greatest number of achievements at 4,679 increasing from 4,396 in 2013. Other achievements are Biology with 4,634 (4,627 in 2013), Chemistry with 3,239 (2,945 in 2013) and History with 3,049 (2,885 in 2013).

Figure 2: Top 10 GCE AS achievements in Northern Ireland by subject – June 2014

AS Level Awards Summer 2014 Northern Ireland

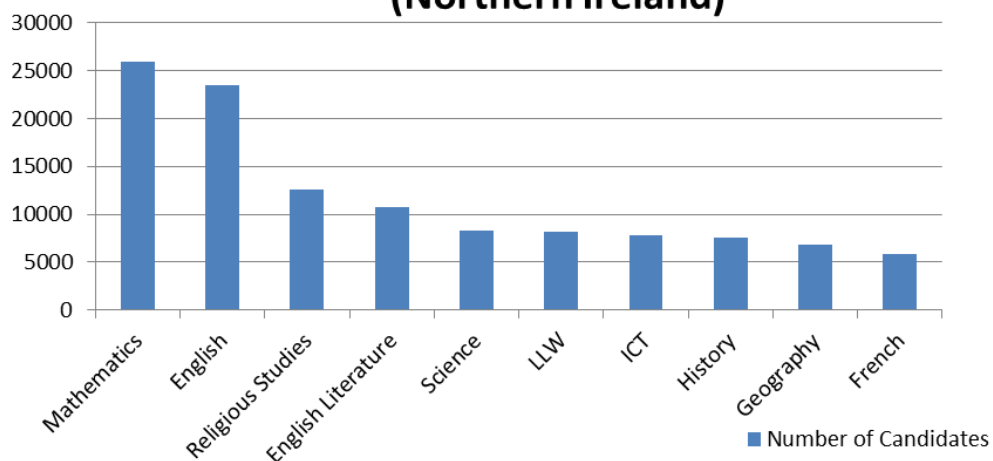


GCSE

There were 172,692 GCSE achievements in Northern Ireland in June 2014. The greatest number of achievements for GCSE was 25,954 for Mathematics (25,578 in 2013) and 23,510 for English (224,079 in 2013). Figure 3 shows the qualifications with the greatest number of achievements for Northern Ireland in June 2014 across all of the GCSE categories. Religious Studies and English Literature were in third and fourth place with 12,605 (12,925 in 2013) and 10,724 (11,016 in 2013) achievements respectively.

Figure 3: Top 10 GCSE full course achievements – June 2014

GCSE Awards Summer 2014 (Northern Ireland)

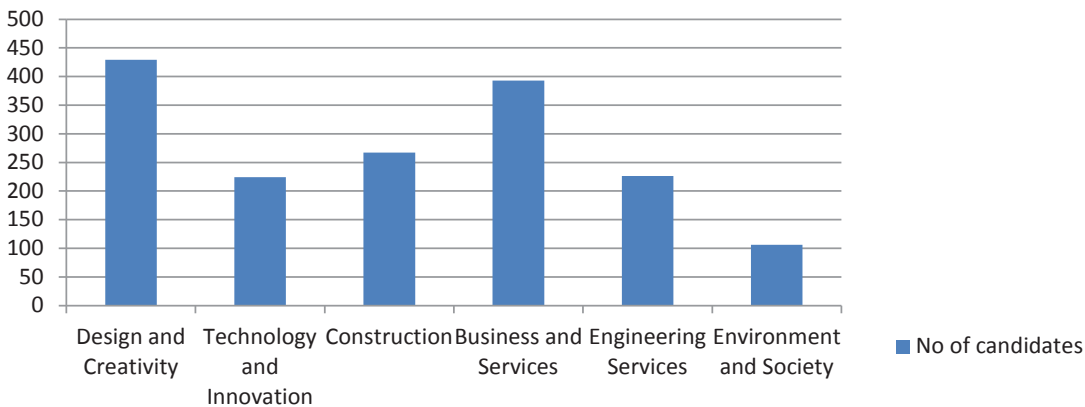


Other Qualifications

We are also responsible for the regulation of Other General and Entry Level type qualifications. Occupational Studies qualifications are classified as Other General type. The Occupational Studies qualifications were revised in 2013 and in 2014 the first certificates were awarded. These are displayed in Figure 4. The greatest number of certificates was awarded in the subject areas of Design and Creativity with 429 achievements and in Business and Services with 393 achievements.

Figure 4: Occupational Studies achievements by subject – June 2014

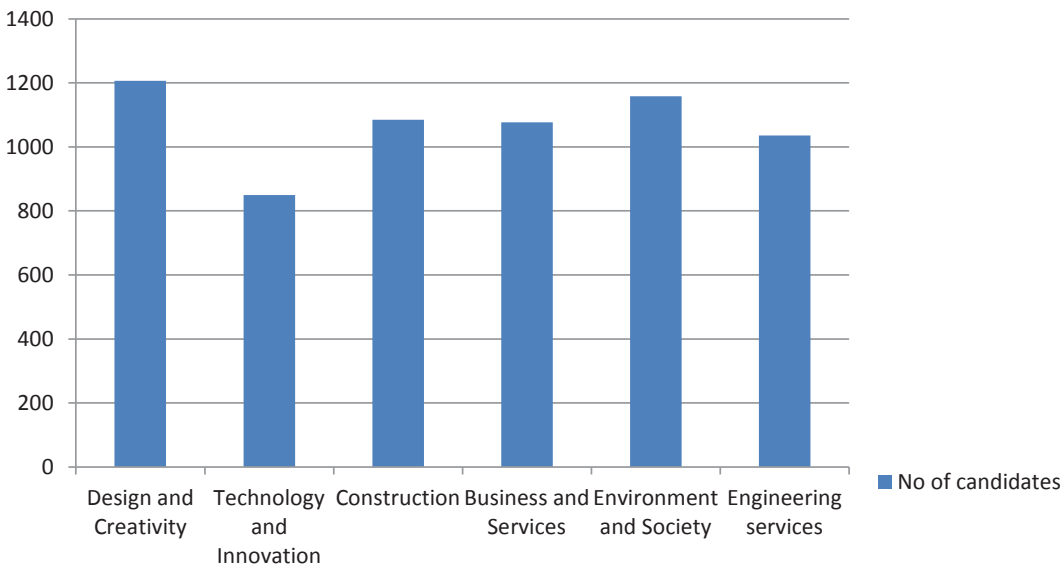
Occupational Studies New Specification Awards Summer 2014



In Summer 2014, the existing (legacy) Occupational Studies qualifications were awarded. The greatest number of certificates was awarded in the subject areas of Design and Creativity with 1,207 achievements and in Environment and Society with 1,158 achievements. These are displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Occupational Studies (legacy) achievements – June 2014

Occupational Studies Legacy Specification Awards Summer 2014

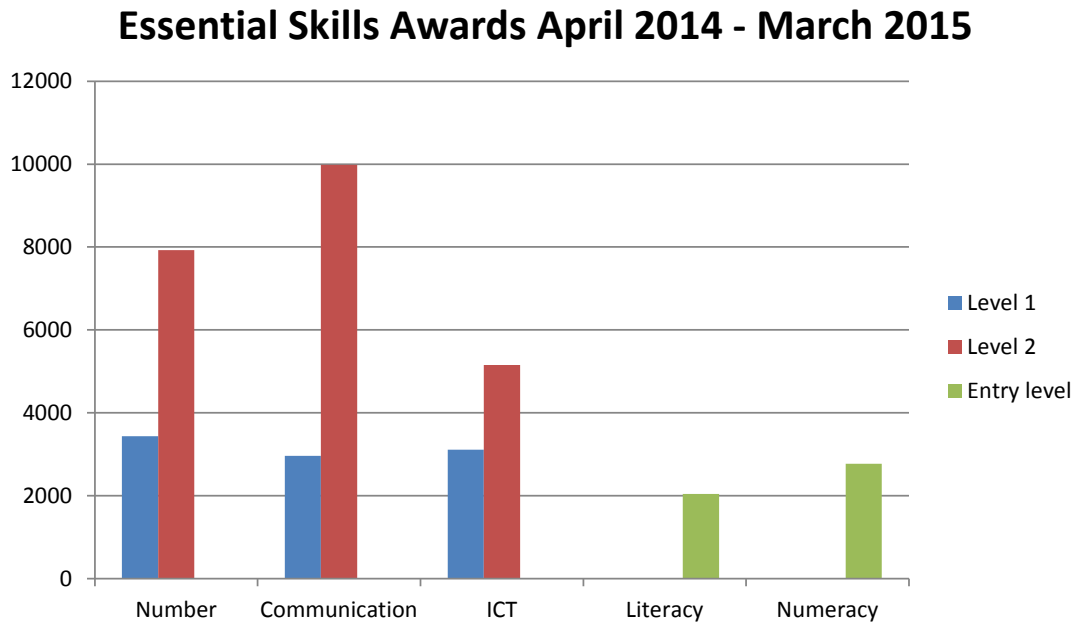


Essential Skills

Essential Skills qualifications were developed in line with the DEL Essential Skills for Living Strategy in 2002 to improve the levels of literacy and numeracy (and latterly Information and Communication Technology (ICT)) of post 16 learners in Northern Ireland.

Essential Skills qualifications had 37,384 certifications in 2014/15 which was down slightly from the 41,410 certifications in 2013/14. These qualifications are taken in the three subject areas of Application of Number, Communication and ICT. These achievements are represented visually below in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Essential Skills achievements by subject and level
April 2014 – March 2015



Advice, Guidance and Support

We have a remit to provide advice to both DE and DEL on a range of matters relating to qualifications. This work may be commissioned by DE and/or DEL for a specific purpose relating to Northern Ireland only, or it may be commissioned by another body as part of a two/three/four country project. This work may be undertaken either by us independently or in conjunction with other regulators or other partners across the four countries. From April 2014 to March 2015, we undertook a range of projects that are detailed below.

Advice on A Level Science Practical Assessments

We were asked to provide advice to DE as to whether practical assessments in A level sciences should continue to contribute to the overall grade. This was prompted by the decision in England to remove this contribution when reformed A levels were introduced for first teaching in 2015. Work was undertaken to consult with Subject Officers, the Learned Societies, and representatives from universities to gather opinions to be collated into a report to DE containing our advice on the issue. In September 2014, Minister O'Dowd announced that all science A levels offered in Northern Ireland must have awards that take into account the assessment of practical skills.

Review of Discount Codes

The current discount codes are used by DE in conjunction with the school performance measures. We were commissioned to review the current discount code system, and to make recommendations as to how these codes should be used in the future. We undertook a comprehensive review of the work carried out by the Department for Education (DfE) in England on this issue. DE is now considering this advice before making a decision.

Review of New UCAS Tariff Points

We and the other regulators engaged with Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) to review and give feedback on the proposed new tariff points. The main aim was to ensure that the new points system was fair, transparent and that comparable qualifications from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland would be allocated comparable points. This work is ongoing and involves regular update meetings between the four qualifications regulators and UCAS.

Review of Assessment Objectives

We undertook a review of the assessment objectives used by CCEA AO in its current A level specifications and those proposed by Ofqual for reformed qualifications. We compared these two sets of assessment objectives and reported on how they could be used to elicit higher order thinking skills from candidates. The outcomes of this work were shared with CCEA AO.

GCSE Irish Standards Review Research

Issues have arisen with the awarding of GCSE Irish. The particular points made relate to the amount of raw marks required for certain grades in CCEA GCSE Irish when compared to other languages.

In February 2015, we commenced a review of standards in CCEA GCSE Irish by way of comparison with CCEA GCSE French. The resultant report will be shared with

CCEA AO for its consideration. If appropriate, the directorate will then be required to submit an action plan to us as to how they intend to address any issues raised.

Access Arrangements Training Events

All UK post-primary centres must comply with the regulations and guidance on Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments issued annually by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ).

After discussions with DE, we organised six full-day information events presented by Patoss¹ (www.patoss-dyslexia.org), which took place in September, October and November 2014. The presentation consisted of the annual updates to JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments (2014–15), and also included demonstrations of a variety of available test materials suitable for use in access arrangements.

The events were well received and well supported by centres, with over 140 delegates attending across the six events.

Universal Services

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) contract annually for the purchase of development work on National Occupational Standards (NOS), Apprenticeship Frameworks and qualification related products. CCEA Regulation carried out this work as part of their contractual arrangements for DEL.

We are a member of the UK NOS panel which quality assures the products that have been commissioned to ensure that Northern Ireland employer needs have been met. In carrying out this particular work in 2014/15, we met with a number of employer representative bodies as follows:

- NI Social Care Council
- Lantra Consortium
- Skills Active
- Habia
- Careers Development Institute
- People 1st
- Semta
- Eskills
- Skills for Health
- Improve
- Skills for Logistics
- CfA
- IMI
- Skills for Justice

E-Assessment

E-assessment is a growing area of qualifications development particularly with professional and technical qualifications. As part of the Electronic Assessment Research and Development Forum (eA R&D Forum) CCEA Regulation worked on three and four country projects. The outcomes from this work informed development of advice and guidance on Regulatory Principles for e-assessment.

¹Patoss is a Professional Association for teachers and assessors of students with Specific Learning Difficulties.

During 2014/15 we published a three country report on Centre Readiness for E-assessment and developed case studies of school and college capacity and readiness to develop the use of e-assessment in qualifications for 14-19 year olds. A copy of the report and case studies can be viewed at www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation/guidance/e_assessment/research.

We worked with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to investigate international aspects of e-assessment in qualification development. This review was carried out to inform the eA R&D Forum agenda and used as a basis for more collaborative work between the jurisdictions.

During May and June, we supported the DEL review of their Blended Learning Strategy and use of electronic personal learning planning tools. This included an audit of current practices in the six further education colleges and training organisations, and reporting of findings to DEL.

You can access extensive guidance on the development, administration and use of e-assessment at www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation.

Qualifications Provision for Learners Aged 14–19 with Special Educational Needs

In 2011 we commenced a two year project of development work with Special Schools and Learning Support Centres (LSC). This project looked at how the achievements of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) could be promoted and recognised. The context for this work was the DE Entitlement Framework policy which aims to ensure that all learners aged 14–19 have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. A number of Special Schools and LSCs trialled the use of learning programmes. These were programmes of qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1 accredited to both the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

As a result of the findings, DE issued guidance to Special Schools and LSCs in February 2014, to advise and support them in their provision of accredited programmes of learning. In addition, we produced a number of case studies showing the practice in six of the schools that took part in the pilot project. The case studies can be accessed at www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation/projects/sen_project/case_studies.

As a final outcome of this project, we developed the Qualifications Guide for Special Schools and Learning Support Centres. This guide outlines the current and most suitable qualifications for learners in Special Schools in Northern Ireland. The guide gives detail on the curricular content, assessment method and has links to the relevant awarding organisation's website for further details. All of the qualifications in the guide have been reviewed for their relevance and progression opportunities to further education, training and employment. Minister O'Dowd endorsed this document at a launch event, held in February 2015, which was attended by 60 teachers from across the province.

The guide can be accessed from the CCEA website at http://ccea.org.uk/accreditation/projects/sen_project/qualifications_guide

Occupational Studies

In early 2013, we developed guidance around the mapping of Cross-Curricular Skills (CCS) to a sample of units of Occupational Studies, as part of the guidance produced for the Review of Occupational Studies 2011/13. Following on from that work an evaluation of the guidance is underway involving a small group of college and school teachers/lecturers currently delivering the relevant units. This evaluation exercise will inform updates to guidance for the use of Occupational Studies in order to support the development of the Cross Curricular Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT.

Progress File

Materials and support for Progress File for learners in DEL funded Training for Success (TfS) programmes were provided throughout the year. These included Widening Horizons learner materials, tutor training packs, and bespoke in-house training and support sessions. During 2014/15 12 tutors attended support events and 3395 Presenter folders were produced.

We released new bespoke materials in June 2014, including new learner materials and folders, exemplar materials, case studies and tutor guidance materials. The content of the materials is aligned to TfS requirements for Employability and Personal Effectiveness, as well as the general learning and administrative processes for training programmes. Further detail can be found at www.ccea.org.uk/accreditation/guidance/progress_file

European Activities

European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

The EQF aims to link different national qualifications systems more effectively. It acts as a translation device for employers and individuals so they can better understand qualifications from different EU countries.

Introduction

The UK Government has signed up to the implementation of a range of European Union initiatives and our work supports DEL in its contribution to this.

From 2010 the UK EQF National Co-ordination Points (NCPs) for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have worked together in a programme of EQF activities. We are the designated Northern Ireland EQF NCP. We were responsible for managing the UK EQF budget and work programme from April 2013 to March 2014 and this work came to a successful conclusion with submission of the final report to the European Commission in May 2014. Another EQF grant call was issued in October 2014 and we took responsibility for managing the submission of the UK application as well as the budget and work programme for the grant period of January 2015–December 2015. This work programme has included projects under the themes of UK Re-referencing, Communications and European Liaison.

UK Re-referencing

The UK presented its report on referencing the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), the QCF and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to the EQF in January 2010. It was one of the first reports to be accepted by the EQF Advisory Group (EQF AG). Since 2010 the referencing process has evolved considerably and is currently being reshaped on the basis of the national experiences and, to a lesser extent, the more prominent position of the EQF in the world. The UK EQF NCPs are undertaking a project to scope out what would need to be done in the UK to update all of the referencing reports. Based on this work, a pilot exercise is underway to update the SCQF referencing report.

Communications

In order to promote the participation of all relevant stakeholders and networks and bring the EU recognition tools closer to the end users the 2014/15 communications work includes:

- A survey with UK awarding organisations to establish the extent to which they are making the EQF level visible on qualification certificates;
- Regular meetings of the UK European Co-ordination Group for Vocational Education and Training (VET) Initiatives;
- A review and update of current materials including the publication European VET Initiatives in the UK and related promotion leaflet; and
- A series of awareness raising seminars throughout the UK targeting careers information and guidance within education and employment services.

European liaison

The UK NCPs have collaborated on a range of activities. The following are examples of this work:

- Representation on the EQF Advisory Group in order to co-ordinate and inform work with organisations using and implementing European transparency tools;

- Support for the work to develop the use of the EQF as a reference tool for international sectoral qualifications (ISQs). The EQF advisory group has, in the last few years, been paying particular attention to the challenge of recognising 'International' qualifications within both the EQF and NQFs. In March 2014 the EQF advisory group set up a sub group, with UK EQF NCP representation, to look at ISQs with a view to promoting a better understanding of the current position across Member States and to develop any necessary recommendations for the EQF advisory group work. A key driver for this work was the concern of the European Commission that some ISQs were being referenced to different EQF levels across Member States;
- Provision of expert input to the working group on the external dimension of the EQF. Many other countries (including Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia) are seeking to align their frameworks to the EQF. A pilot is underway with these three countries to test this out in more detail; and
- Participation in peer learning activities and other collaborative activities to share and develop best practice. This included a Peer Learning Activity on learning outcomes to support the validation of non-formal and informal learning in November 2014.

EQF referencing

This work of the EQF AG group includes discussion and peer review of EQF country referencing reports. The UK EQF NCPs continue to be well represented on this group and contribute to this peer review process. Of the 36 countries involved with the EQF referencing, 26 have undertaken the referencing process and have endorsed referencing positions. Some of these have produced updates to their reports following developments in their qualifications systems. Most European countries planned to have completed the process to link their national qualifications systems to EQF levels by the end of 2015. The results of this linking (or 'referencing') process are available at the Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe portal <http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en>.

European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

This is being developed to help people transfer and gain recognition for their learning experiences in Europe, including experiences outside formal training systems.

In 2011 DEL designated CCEA Regulation to take forward work on implementing ECVET. ECVET NCPs were also established in:

- England – ECCTIS Ltd;
- Scotland – the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP); and
- Wales (Colegau Cymru or CollegesWales).

UK ECVET Experts

Since 2011 the NCPs have worked closely with the UK National Agency to develop and co-ordinate a UK team of ECVET Experts. This ECVET Experts Project was set up in January 2012 to develop a network of experts to provide training and support, raise awareness and promote the benefits of ECVET to stakeholders. Thirteen ECVET Experts were trained to carry out this work. Following an initial two year project (ending March 2014), the UK ECVET Experts work became an integral part of the UK National Agency's work programme.

The work of the ECVET Experts in 2014/15 built upon the success of the previous ECVET Experts Project which ran until March 2014. Experts from each of the four countries in the UK have been available since September 2014 to provide one-to-one support to VET organisations and project beneficiaries looking to find out more about ECVET or receive detailed guidance on how to use ECVET within their mobility projects.

ECVET Experts adapted and developed further existing UK guidance materials to reflect the ERASMUS+ programme, with a particular focus on how ECVET can support workforce mobility. Work was also undertaken to update the ECVET Experts website with the objective of producing a more user-friendly website with additional functionality in order to support the development of an ECVET community of practice within the UK. ERASMUS+ briefing sessions took place in each of the devolved administrations during the autumn and ECVET Experts were present to explain the role of ECVET in mobility projects.

UK ECVET related materials available to organisations include:

- an easy-to-read guidance note *The Credit they Deserve*;
- an ECVET guidance note *Guidance for Awarding Organisations and their Recognised Centres*; and
- a user-friendly website (www.ecvetexperts.org.uk).

In December 2014, the UK National Agency arranged a peer learning event in Birmingham which included ECVET Experts from Malta sharing best practice and experiences with the UK counterparts. Work in this area is increasing with UK Experts working with Experts in other countries to share best practice and building upon successful ways of working including activities aimed at linking and sharing best practice between experts in the higher education sector as well as VET.

ECVET working groups

The CCEA Regulation representative on the ECVET users group was also involved in the work of two EU ECVET working groups. The first was a joint working group established to strengthen the interaction between the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and ECVET. The first of four meetings took place in September 2014 and the aim is to produce guidance which is useful at national or system level.

The second was a working group on assessment and validation of units of learning outcomes. The work of this group commenced in March 2015 and its aim is to draft a paper highlighting lessons drawn from such experiences and approaches, in terms of success factors as well as constraints. The paper will provide the basis for a guidance note for policy developers and practitioners working on the assessment and validation of learning outcomes.

ERASMUS+ Sector Consultative Group for VET

The ERASMUS+ National Agency (The British Council and Ecorys UK) have established five Sector Consultative Groups for higher education, vocational education and training, schools, adult education and youth, to ensure ERASMUS+ delivery responds to the changing needs of the UK's sectors. The first introductory meeting took place in September 2014. These groups link with the ERASMUS+

Country Advisory Groups for each of the devolved administrations. CCEA Regulation is represented on both these groups.

ESCO – European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations

ESCO is a multilingual classification system which will facilitate efficient matching between skills, jobs and learning opportunities through a common classification system. ESCO is structured on the basis of three pillars linking occupations; skills/competences; and qualifications relevant for the EU labour market and education/training.

The European Commission launched the project in 2010 and is working with key stakeholders across Europe to develop the ESCO classification system. These stakeholders are represented in the organisational structure of ESCO on the Board, Maintenance Committee and Reference Groups.

We act as the UK representative on the ESCO Maintenance Committee which has responsibility for the technical decisions concerning the development of ESCO. This Committee decides to accept or reject proposals from the Reference Groups and makes recommendations for final approval to the ESCO Board.

The European Commission launched the second term of the ESCO Board and Maintenance Committee in June 2014 for a three year period. The terms of reference were revised and the role of the Maintenance Committee now is to advise the Commission and ESCO Board on the technical and conceptual development of ESCO. It also formulates opinions on the approach for technical implementation, on quality control principles and on the revision of ESCO data.

A new remit and timescales were announced for ESCO in December 2014. It is now linked to the new Council regulation on EURES (European Employment Services) network. This means that ESCO will now be the automated system to match vacancies with job applications, based on the interoperability of national classifications. The new deliverable timescales have now been brought forward a year to 2016.

The Maintenance Committee met six times in 2014/15. Its main work has been the quality assurance and sign off of 10 Sector Reference Groups for the Occupations and Skills/Competences pillars of ESCO. As a result of shortened timelines, the remaining 17 sectors are now to be signed off via an online consultation. A pilot has commenced on testing the interoperability of ESCO with four Public Employment Services in the Netherlands, Spain, Czech Republic and France. The mappings between ESCO and National Occupation Classifications will be key in supporting countries to comply with the EURES legislation that is currently being proposed.

Minutes and papers from all Board and Maintenance Committee meetings can be accessed at <https://ec.europa.eu/esco/escopedia>

Policy Implementation

Entitlement Framework Audit

We provide advice and support to DE on the suitability of qualifications for inclusion on the Entitlement Framework audit, thereby helping DE to monitor schools' implementation of the Entitlement Framework policy.

Communicating Changes to GCSEs and A Levels to Schools

As Northern Ireland is retaining an open qualifications market, schools here will have a choice of qualifications designed by English, Welsh and local awarding organisations. As these GCSEs and A levels will not all look the same, CCEA Regulation worked with DE to communicate the changes and their implications to schools in Northern Ireland. This involved a series of workshops with principals, a letter explaining the changes sent to all schools and the design and maintenance of a page on the CCEA website – QualsNI, <http://ccea.org.uk/accreditation/qualsni> – which outlines all the changes to qualifications and the choices available to schools.

Entry Level Criteria for Qualifications in Northern Ireland

We commenced work in 2013 with the 11 awarding organisations that offer Entry Level qualifications in Northern Ireland, on the revision of the Entry Level criteria used for these types of qualifications. The criteria that had been used previously was developed by Ofqual and made reference to the curriculum in England. Northern Ireland introduced the Revised Curriculum in 2007 and the Entry Level criteria needed to make reference to the compulsory elements of this curriculum. It is intended that the Entry Level criteria will be finalised in late 2014 for introduction in early 2015.

Maintenance of Standards and Comparability

We work closely with our fellow regulators in England and Wales to ensure that GCSE and A level qualifications across the three jurisdictions are comparable, and that standards are maintained year-on-year. Much of this work is conducted through monthly meetings of the Standards and Technical Issues Group (STIG) which brings together representatives of the five awarding organisations and the three regulatory authorities of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In addition, for every examination series, regular Maintenance of Standards telekit meetings are held to ensure that standards are consistent across awarding organisations and over time.



CCEA Regulation Representation on Stakeholder Groups

We worked with a range of stakeholders in 2014-15, both in Northern Ireland and further afield. This work is necessary in order to ensure the advice and guidance provided to DE and DEL on qualifications and related matters is informed and objective. The groups are listed below:

- 1. Entitlement Framework Audit Steering Group:**
consisting of DE and Western Education and Library Board representatives.

This group works on the update and development of the EF definitions and the population of the EF audit database.

- 2. UCAS Qualifications Information Review Data Development Group (DDG):**
consisting of UCAS, Ofqual, Welsh Government, Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB), Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), JCQ, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), SQA, Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP).

The DDG comprises stakeholders from key organisations that have an interest in, or own, relevant data about qualifications and/or progression into higher education. It aims to ensure that pro-active working relationships can be formed, and maintained, in order to determine how the necessary data can be brought together to facilitate the development of a UCAS qualifications information database and to provide specialist advice on the viability of data exchange in order to populate the UCAS qualifications information database.

- 3. Performance Points Group:**
consisting of DE and C2K representatives.

This group reviews school reporting measures and analyses areas for review. In 2012 this involved drawing up revised DE Exams Performance Procedures guidance for post-primary schools on the return of data, reviewing summer 2012 data entry outcomes to inform short-term changes to the existing schema within School Information Management System (SIMS) and beginning work on the longer-term development of a performance measurement scheme for Northern Ireland which is designed to appropriately record the qualifications achievements of pupils at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.

- 4. UCAS Northern Ireland Standing Group (NISG):**
consisting of Northern Ireland universities, further education colleges, careers teachers, DEL and UCAS.

This group meets twice a year. The spring term meeting previews the UCAS procedures for admissions for that summer and the autumn term meeting reviews how well the summer admissions went.

- 5. Standards and Technical Issues Group (STIG):**
consisting of Ofqual, Welsh Government, JCQ, FAB and all awarding organisations with accredited GCE, GCSE, principal learning qualifications, project qualifications or functional skills qualifications.
STIG meets on a monthly basis and deals with standards and technical issues in both current qualifications and qualifications under development. It provides advice on well-founded practical solutions to technical and standards issues associated with the current qualifications and guidelines for good practice when developing new qualifications.
- 6. Contingency Management Group (CMG):**
consisting of awarding organisations, Ofqual and Welsh Government, DfE and DE.

CMG considers and recommends actions to be put in place in the event of major disruptions affecting the examinations system.
- 7. Examinations Taskforce:**
consisting of awarding organisations, Ofqual and Welsh Government, DfE personnel and teacher union representatives.

This group considers and recommends changes to the way in which the public examinations system should be run in the future; considers how significant changes in the education system might affect examinations; shares information, research findings and examples of good practice; shares information on risks to the effective delivery of public examinations across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and where possible identifies mitigating strategies; and receives reports on key issues identified in public examinations.
- 8. UK VQ Forum:**
consisting of England and Wales governments, DEL, Ofqual, JCQ, FAB, UKCES, SFA, SQA, Federation for Industry, Sector Skills and Standards (FISSS), Association of Colleges (AoC), Association of Employers and Learning Providers (AELP), National Apprenticeship Services (NAS).

This forum meets quarterly to provide opportunities for discussion on a UK basis, of all aspects of the development and regulation of vocational qualifications, reporting to Ministers in each nation.
- 9. Northern Ireland Awarding Organisation Forum:**
consisting of awarding organisations operating in Northern Ireland.

This group meets quarterly to provide an opportunity for Northern Ireland awarding organisations' representatives to be updated by a range of Northern Ireland stakeholders.
- 10. UK NOS Panel:**
consisting of UKCES, Welsh Government and SQA.

This group meets at least monthly to quality assure the outputs from the contracts commissioned by the Universal Services Commissioning Board.

NOS quality assurance procedures are also discussed and reviewed in order to ensure appropriateness for each nation and to operate standardised practices across the four nations. This group is also responsible for review and revised operation of the NOS database.

11. Regulatory Authorities Partnership Group (RAPG):
consisting of SQA, Ofqual and Welsh Government.

This group meets quarterly to provide a forum for the regulators across the four nations to explore collaborative thinking and activities, to share good practice and to harmonise regulatory operations where possible.

12. UK European Co-ordination Group for VET Initiatives:
consisting of representatives of higher education, VET institutions, social partners, sectors, the other EU recognition tools ECVET, EQAVET, ESCO, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)) and networks including UK National Recognition Information Centre responsible for promoting Europass in the UK; Careers Europe, representing Euroguidance; and the UK ERASMUS+ National Agency responsible for managing the team of UK ECVET Experts.

This group provides a co-ordination point for the implementation of all the EU VET initiatives in the UK, thus promoting understanding of the synergies between the tools. The group meets quarterly to develop and review implementation of European initiatives through the various nations within the UK.

13. Northern Ireland European Co-ordination Group for Vocational Education and Training:
consisting of DEL, DE, Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), Ofqual, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), CollegesNI, Skills for Justice, NI Awarding Body Forum, DEL (Quality Management, Sectoral Development Branch, Training Programmes Branch, Programme Management Branch, Employment Service, Qualifications and E-Learning Branch, FE Curriculum and Essential Skills Branch, FE Policy and Strategic Planning Branch and European Unit).

This group meets quarterly to support the successful implementation of EU VET initiatives in Northern Ireland.

14. UK EQF NCP Leads Group:
consisting of CollegesWales, SCQFP, Ofqual and Welsh Government.

This group meets regularly to plan and implement the various UK EQF projects and co-ordinate requests from the EU in relation to EQF implementation and UK attendance at EU organised events related to EQF implementation

15. EQF Advisory Group:
consisting of representatives from 35 countries implementing the EQF, stakeholders at the European level (Business Europe, EUAPME, Euro

Chambres, ETUC, CEEP, European University Association, PES, The European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning, the Council of Europe, Cedefop, Education and Training Foundation (ETF), The European Youth Forum and the European Volunteer Centre).

The EQF AG is responsible for providing overall coherence and promoting transparency of the process of relating qualifications systems to the EQF, which includes the promotion of validation of non-formal and informal learning. This group meets quarterly to review the country referencing report that each of the 35 European states is obliged to produce. CCEA Regulation forms part of the assessment team for individual country reports.

16. European ECVET Users Group

consisting of representatives from ministries, qualifications authorities, social partners, chambers of commerce, craft and industries, and research institutes (Cedefop and ETF).

The ECVET users group meets three times per year and helps co-ordinate ECVET implementation and provide the opportunity for continuous exchanges of experience and information.

17. UK ECVET Steering Group

consisting of representatives from Ecorys, FAB, AoC and the UK ECVET National Contact Points (ECCTIS, CCEA Accreditation, SCQFP, CollegesWales).

As the UK's National Agency for the Leonardo, Grundtvig and the Transversal Study Visits programme, Ecorys UK was awarded a contract to co-ordinate the UK's National Teams of ECVET Experts Project (January 2012–December 2013). The funding is provided by the European Commission's Executive Agency.

The key stakeholders work collaboratively through a steering group to provide overall strategic guidance and direction to the project, ensuring it delivers as per the contract with the Executive Agency. The steering group meets three times per year.

18. ESCO Maintenance Committee:

consisting of representatives from employment services, social partners, national education, training and qualification authorities, sector skills councils, statistical and research organisations, taxonomy and ICT experts from a number of countries across Europe.

CCEA Regulation represents the UK on this group and has responsibility for the technical decisions concerning the development of ESCO. This Committee decides to accept or reject proposals from the Reference Groups and makes recommendations for final approval to the ESCO Board

19. UK Credit Forum

consisting of representatives from the Higher Education Credit Bodies in England and Wales (NUCCAT, SEEC, WHECC), the SCQF Partnership, CCEA Regulation, Ofqual and the Welsh Government.

The forum meets three times a year and exchanges information on developments in credit and qualifications frameworks from a further/higher education, national and European perspective. It also co-ordinates responses to credit issues raised nationally or internationally and acts as a source of advice for external agencies with queries on fundamental matters relating to credit.

20. The UK and Ireland Qualifications Framework Group

consisting of representatives from SCQFP, SQA, QAA Scotland, Scottish Government, CQFW, Welsh Government, CCEA Accreditation, DEL, Ofqual, QAA, BIS and QQI.

The group meets twice a year and provides a forum for the quality assurance and regulatory bodies that maintain the NQFs and their most relevant stakeholders to meet. This group is responsible for the development and updating of the Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries leaflet which is a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

21. Northern Ireland Advisory Group for the Leonardo, Grundtvig and Transversal Programmes

consisting of representatives from Belfast Metropolitan College, CCEA, DEL, Gingerbread NI, North West Regional College, South Eastern Regional College, South West College, Southern Regional College, University of Ulster, Ecorys, British Council, Northern Regional College and St Mary's University College.

The role of the Northern Ireland Advisory Group is to offer advice and guidance on the best way of promoting the Leonardo, Grundtvig and Transversal programmes, to review the uptake of funding in Northern Ireland, raise any issues or concerns and work with Ecorys to help address any gaps in participation (either geographically or sectorally). As the UK is using ECVET to support transnational mobility and is engaging with ECVET testing through the Lifelong Learning Programme projects, CCEA Regulation, as the designated NI ECVET NCP, has a significant role within this group.

22. UCAS/Regulators Forum

consisting of representatives from UCAS and the four regulators.

This group meets on a quarterly basis to discuss issues in relation to the new UCAS tariff points. As the new points become embedded it is intended that the regulators and UCAS should continue to meet and discuss the inclusion of new qualifications in the UCAS tariff system as part of the Tariff Advisory Group, which will also include awarding organisations.

23. Exam Stakeholder Engagement Group

consisting of regulators, awarding organisations and representatives from teaching unions, bodies representing state and independent schools, colleges, universities and other interested stakeholder groups.

This group meets at least twice a year and is an opportunity for the various stakeholder groups to raise any concerns and potential issues around qualifications and examinations with the regulators.

24. Electronic Assessment Advisory Group

consisting of regulators, provider and support organisations and e-assessment developers across the UK.

This group is representative of the eAssessment Association that meets to discuss e-assessment developments across school, tertiary and higher education and to share knowledge, initiate research and influence policy development.


25. Electronic Assessment Research & Development Forum

consisting of regulators across the UK and awarding organisations from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (and previously England – under review).

This group promotes the uptake of e-assessment in accredited/approved qualifications, maintains awareness of practices and emerging developments in e-assessment, leads, co-ordinates and influences research and developmental work on e-assessment across the UK nations. It also promotes best practice in e-assessment and fosters public confidence. It does this by sharing and collaborating on pieces of research and development work and promoting communication on the outcomes/issues.

Glossary

AoC	Association of Colleges
AELP	Association of Employers and Learning Providers
CCEA AO	CCEA Awarding Organisation
CMG	Contingency Management Group
CQFW	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales
DE	Department of Education (N Ireland)
DEL	Department for Employment and Learning (N Ireland)
DfE	Department for Education (England)
eA R&D	Electronic Assessment Research and Development Forum
ECVET	The European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
EURES	European Employment Services
FAB	Federation of Awarding Bodies
FISSS	Federation for Industry, Sector Skills and Standards
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
JCQ	Joint Council for Qualifications
NAS	National Apprenticeship Service
NCP	National Co-ordination Point
NOS	National Occupational Standards
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland



SCQF(P)	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (Partnership)
SIMS	Schools Information Management System
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
STIG	Standards and Technical Issues Group
SWAP	Scottish Wider Access Programme
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UKCES	United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills
VET	Vocational Education and Training

