

Interview transcript from 7th July 2009



Kathleen Tattersall, Chair of Ofqual, talks to Alison Kershaw from the Press Association.



Alison Kershaw: Thanks for taking the time to talk to me. I just wanted to start today with just asking you about the SATs because obviously the results have gone back to schools today. One of the things I wanted to ask you about was why do you think that public confidence in the SATs is so low now, and do you think there's a good reason for this?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well public confidence, of course, was damaged last year by the delays in the results and then, of course, that led to questions about why. So we actually don't have that situation this year because, as you know, the results are back in schools, 99.9% of them are back and the odd 0.1% is all about kind of individuals where there might be a question raised about the script or the mark, and that's being resolved on a one-to-one basis by QCA and the school. So we now have a situation where there's a complete package of results which are back, and I think that will go a long way to restoring public confidence in the system. Whether you have SATs is a different question and it's a question for Government. And, of course, Government has taken a particular decision at Key Stage 3 and we are left with the SATs at Key Stage 2 and there's lots of work going on to explore different ways of assessing students, including the single level tests.

So there are a lot of issues which Government is actually addressing through its expert groups, and it would be far too easy to say they're simply doing that because they fear that public confidence has been lost in the SATs, I think they're doing that because every year we've got to be sure that the system of assessment that we have in place is the right one for today's students. So that's under way and I really do believe that the fact that this year's publication of results has passed off so quietly, because there aren't any fusses from the schools, will go a long way to restoring confidence in the system regardless of whether there are SATs or not.

Alison Kershaw: Obviously the unions are still saying that they believe that around one in five of the results are wrong, is that something that you've looked at yourself over the last few years to see whether you think at Ofqual that there is a problem with the actual results?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well you're probably aware of two things Alison. The day that we were launched, when we had our public launch in Coventry in 2008, we announced that we would be looking very carefully at the issue of reliability in all its guises; reliability of the tests themselves, reliability of tests taken on different days, reliability of marking and so on, and that was not just in the SATs but right across the qualifications system. And since then we've been undertaking some research, various bodies have been working to contract with us, and when we're able we will be publishing some of that material. And the programme as a whole is lasting for two years so it's something that we take very, very seriously. More specifically on the SATs, you might recall that in March of this year the QCA published a major piece of research which had been taking place over the previous three years, and in that they did raise questions, and at the time I expressed concerns that the research raised about Key Stage 3 English and the marking of Key Stage 3 English. And I think that's where the one in five comes from that the unions quote.

Alison Kershaw: Yes.

Kathleen Tattersall: And the concerns were particularly about the marking of Shakespeare, for example, where clearly there were differences of judgement about what level the students should be awarded. Now of course we have moved on from there, we don't have the Key Stage 3 tests any more and the question for us will be whether we can be confident in the marking quality for this year in the SATs, and we've been monitoring, as the work has gone along, the quality controls in place to ensure that marking is accurate in English and maths and science. And of course, now that the results are out we'll be listening to see whether schools have any particular concerns and we'll be taking into account in our judgement any concerns that they raise, although we're very aware that when they ask for a review of marking for an individual or for a group it can be prompted by all sorts of different factors so it's not necessarily a very reliable indicator of quality as the request for review.

But more importantly, what we do intend to do is to build on the research which QCA has done in the past and we'll do further research into this issue of the quality of marking so that later this year we'll be able to make a statement based on evidence about the quality of marking in 2009, in the same way that last year we made a statement about the quality of marking in 2008. So I think it's premature to actually quantify any error rates in the marking of the SATs. I think we need to have a much more considered view based on the evidence that we gather from the research that we will do now that the results are out and, as I say, the research that we do will be following on very much from the pattern of research which QCA itself did in the past.

Alison Kershaw: So which bit are you actually looking at then? If you say that schools returning results isn't necessarily a good indication of how many are wrong, which part of the system are you actually looking at to see how good the quality of marking is? Is it looking at the actual papers yourselves?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well we won't ourselves, what we will do is commission a body of researchers to actually undertake marking research, and that will be looking at scripts of students as well as looking at the systems in place to actually ensure that markers all mark in a reliable manner. So we will actually set a brief and invite people to tender for research, and when that research is complete we'll publish the findings and we will also base our judgement partly on that, partly on what we pick up from schools - and at the moment I'm hearing nothing from schools, I have to say. I had a meeting with teachers last week and specifically asked if there were any concerns at that stage about the SATs and there wasn't a single person said anything in that particular meeting. But we will be having a very rounded view informed by the research, informed by teachers' views and informed by schools' views, and we will be making a statement later this year when that research is complete.

Alison Kershaw: Can I ask you, do you think that the SATs tests are actually fit for purpose? Are they benefiting the pupils, the way the system is at the moment?

Kathleen Tattersall: I think there are various judgements about that and Ofqual doesn't have a particular view as to whether they benefit the students, but I'm very conscious that there is one group of opinions of teachers that say yes they do benefit the students, they are something which they find useful, particularly when students move from their primary schools into secondary schools, and there are others who say that they're not beneficial at all. So I think the jury's out on that but as the regulator we don't have a particular view on that matter. What we do have a view on is that whatever system exists, whether it's SATs or anything else that might come along, we have to ensure that it's the best system that we can possibly have in terms of its organisation, in terms of its quality and in terms of the reliability that we were just talking about.

Alison Kershaw: Okay. And obviously following the expert group on assessment findings that came out a couple of months ago, the system will change next year, what kind of impact is that going to have when you're dropping sites, and obviously the exams will be moving later into the year, will there be issues then about how the system is actually beneficial given the fact that the students won't be getting their results back until after they've started secondary school?

Kathleen Tattersall: Yes. We were asked for a view on that and one of our concerns wasn't necessarily to do with the impact of the point where the student gets the results, it was the impact on the student and our concern was whether the system as a whole, that is qualifications and tests running side by side as it

were, whether the system as a whole could sustain results coming out at a later point. Whether, for example, it would impact on the number of markers available for qualifications, given the fact that we're talking about Key Stage 2, the crossover of markers from Key Stage 2 into the qualifications system is very minimal and so we didn't see any particular issues, and we made that clear in the response that we gave when we were asked for a view as to the desirability of moving the SAT results to a later point. I think you really would have to ask teachers themselves what their views were in terms of the impact on the use that they can make of the data and, indeed, on the impact on students who, of course, are going to have to wait for longer to know exactly what level they're at. So again, I don't think it's something which the regulator should take a view on; it's our job to make sure that the system can sustain whatever arrangements are made across the piece.

Alison Kershaw: And in your view there won't be a problem with that next year? With SATs being ...

Kathleen Tattersall: We took soundings from the awarding bodies and others in coming to the conclusion that it would not impact on the system as a whole, and the system could sustain the results being published later.

Alison Kershaw: Okay, that's great. Just moving on a bit to talk about standards. I was just wondering, I know you mentioned it briefly before, but how the health check on reliability is going. I know it's almost I think a year now into that two year check that you're doing into the assessment system?

Kathleen Tattersall: Yes, indeed. I mean we're just over a year into it and there are a variety of bodies which are pursuing various strands of reliability. For example, one strand is a review of grading and reporting methods across the world, I mean are we unique in reporting in grades because, of course, in reporting in grades and dividing a mark range into several pieces there's always questions raised about whether you've actually got it right, your boundary right, and whether candidates themselves are ranked correctly in order to get the correct grade. So one of the strands is to look at the various ways in which different countries across the world actually report attainment and whether they have the same sort of issues that we have in this country as to whether the grading or the reporting is reliable; is it an issue elsewhere, as it tends to be in this country. Also raising the very fundamental question as to exactly what do we mean by reliability. We tend to talk about reliability in terms of the marking and the grading, as I've just done myself, but there are all sorts of factors actually affect reliability. Some of it's the test construction itself, is one test as reliable as another. If a candidate were to take a test on different days would the candidate get the same result.

And so we're raising all those questions and that particular strand or those particular strands of the research are coming to an end this year, and it would be my expectation that as soon as we actually have

reports we will put them on our website so that you can see for yourself how the work is progressing. And then there'll be other fundamental issues that we'll be raising, for example, how reliable is teacher assessment? Some parts of the world have teacher assessment rather than tests, is that a reliable way of going about assessment or do you actually have the same sort of issues appearing in teacher assessment as you do in an externally provided assessment system? So as we go along we'll be publishing, and not just wait until the end of the two years.

Alison Kershaw: Okay. So does that mean that you could be looking at a system where you recommend that maybe grades aren't used but there is some kind of sort of grade point average system as they use in the States instead in future?

Kathleen Tattersall: Oh I don't think we would just pull something like that out of the air and make a recommendation because I think if you actually look at every system you find features which are so very different from country to country. I mean you've instanced the States there and their system is incredibly different to ours, and indeed isn't universal, you will find different versions in different parts of the States. So I think it would be very foolish of us to think that because reliability, for example, did not feature as a big issue in some systems that that system, whatever it might be, would be the one that we should choose here. Were we to come to any thoughts on what would be the way forward it would be in a much more rounded way, bearing in mind that the curriculum and the nature of teaching and the nature of the organisation within this country have a bearing on what sort of assessment system we should have, and the issues of reliability, many of which are very cultural. So we're not going to be plucking out of the air just a particular recommendation, that's not our intention. What we want to do is explore the issues, we want to be able to engage the public in those issues and have a better understanding of the issues rather than simply saying we should move to that.

Alison Kershaw: Okay. Moving on from that, do you think that it's getting harder now to monitor standards given the massive changes that there have been to the exam system, the qualifications system over the last years, and continuing to be in the future?

Kathleen Tattersall: It's always very difficult monitoring standards over time and I think what you've instanced as change is clearly a major factor in the monitoring work that you do. I mean I think it's very easy to say that standards over time must be maintained, of course they must and I would say that what we're really talking about is that we have to ensure that the demands we make on students are as great as they ever were, but the context in which those demands are made does change considerably both in terms of the organisation of the examinations, whether it's a terminal examination, whether it's got some teacher assessment, whether it's a unitised examination, all of which are factors which obscure the issue of the demands made on students, and indeed the content itself. And the content we now have,

particularly in science examinations, just didn't exist ten, fifteen, twenty years ago or longer. I mean take questions like DNA with which we're all familiar because it's such a fundamental part of life and you read about it both in the criminal justice system and elsewhere, it just didn't exist in the public consciousness a mere fifty years ago. So the content obscures it, the structure of the examinations obscures it, but at the end of the day we've got to be able to try to apply professional judgement to say the demands made on students in this set of examinations in this particular year are as great as the demands made on students five years ago, ten years ago, and that's what we try to do but, as you say, change, and rapid change, doesn't make it any easier to come to conclusions.

Alison Kershaw: When you say that all these changes obscure the demands on students, does that mean it makes it harder to almost see what the demands on students are because there are so many different ways of looking?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well if you take, for example, unitised examinations which I believe make great demands in themselves on students because the examinations themselves are more frequent and there is, as I've said on other occasions, there is no hiding place for the student from any part of the specification, you know, they can't take a gamble that something won't come up so they won't actually learn that because unitised examinations mean that you are testing in a broader way than ever was the case in the past when terminal examinations did make a selection of what would be assessed in any particular year, and that selection might vary from year to year and there might be a bit of overlap. So when I say that it obscures, some people would say well, you know, it's a shorter test, it's on a specific part of the syllabus therefore it must be easier, and I say no, it can't be easier partly because that test in itself has to be of the same level of demand whenever it is taken and partly for what I've just said, that every part of what a student is learning is now subject to testing, but because the system is different and you don't have the direct comparison with a terminal examination then it becomes in some ways more difficult to demonstrate that the students are being subjected to the same level of demand as students were in the past.

Alison Kershaw: Okay, because you can't compare like with like.

Kathleen Tattersall: You're talking about different sorts of like, you might be talking about, as it were - let's say you might even be talking about the same syllabus which you might be doing in mathematics or even in English, but you are testing it in such different ways that there are differences which people find difficult to make judgements on.

Alison Kershaw: Carrying on from that slightly, obviously from September GCSEs will be modular, or a lot of them will, when A Levels were made modular there was a large jump in the overall grade levels that year. Do you expect to see the same next year, that there will be an improvement in grades?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well it's difficult to say. I mean if you go back those years of A Level, the jump as you put it was not kind of a universal jump, it did vary across subjects. And I say that because at the time I was a chief executive to one of the awarding bodies so I was very conscious that we had differences across subjects and those differences were explained in terms of the nature of the demands being made on students and the way in which they had responded to those. And I suspect that in 2012 when we get our first results that we'll find some variation across subjects. What we will be looking for as the regulator is that whatever the percentage returns are in terms of people getting an A* or an A, or a grade G at the other end of the scale, then that is backed up by the evidence of what the students have done, and that's always got to be the case. And we are working with the awarding bodies to anticipate the way in which they will handle the technical evidence, the statistical evidence that comes from the examinations and what we know about students going into those examinations, and use that evidence alongside the evidence of the scripts which the chief markers, the chief examiners will be considering. So we've got to have a very evidence-based approach to the grading of the subject which we will be able to demonstrate when the results actually come out. And I have no idea at this particular stage what the nature of those results will be, whether there will be a jump or whether there will be a fairly steady progression from the current situation to the future one.

Alison Kershaw: Do you think that the public are fully aware of how A Levels and GCSEs too are changing, and is that maybe part of the reason why there is this annual argument about that exams aren't what they were?

Kathleen Tattersall: Yes, I think you have put your finger partly on one of the difficulties which I think all examination systems and regulation have, and that is to communicate very effectively with the public what the nature of the system is, what changes are coming along, what the impact on their own children may be, you know, for example taking the unitised system which we've just been talking about, that their children are going to go through a system whereby they will be having testing more frequently than was the case when it was just a terminal examination. And I think parents do need to know that because obviously it's a very stressful time for their children and, indeed, a stressful time for parents to actually see their children through this particular period. So as a regulator we believe that we need to be very transparent and open in everything that we do, publishing, as I've said earlier, reports on reliability, what we also need to do is to be publishing some ready guides to the GCSE system, the A Level system, the Diploma system, the other examinations which are increasingly open to young people, and indeed not

forgetting the fact that much of our examination system is a system which adults take, and particularly on the vocational side. Only the other week we celebrated VQ Day, Vocational Qualifications Day, celebrating the award of millions of qualifications to adults throughout the country, but we do need to be very, very clear and very transparent and involve the public much more than has been the case in the past in the sort of thing that they can expect from the system and how it's going to impact on themselves and on their children.

Alison Kershaw: Do you think that there are unrealistic expectations of the exam system now amongst the public?

Kathleen Tattersall: I think there always have been unrealistic expectations. I don't think the public in a sense is any different now than it used to be, other than the fact that I think people today, quite rightly, are much more questioning of any sort of system that they come into contact with, be it the medical system or the legal system, or indeed the examinations system, and I think if we say that people are, as it were, expecting more it's only kind of the general trend of society that people are much more vocal about their expectations of whatever system they're coming into contact with, as I said, medical or otherwise. But I think what people have always expected is that the examinations system will be one which they can trust, it's going to be one which enables whoever takes the examinations and qualifications to move on to a different stage of their learning, or indeed into employment, it's going to open doors into universities, and I think that's the basic expectation which has always been there and it's one which the system has to deliver. The main purpose of qualifications, it seems to me, is to be able to open a door which is going to enhance your life and is going to make your employment prospects better, it's going to make your prospects of moving on in learning, into higher education much better. But I think people are much more vocal than they were in the past of expressing those expectations and I think it's quite right that they should be.

Alison Kershaw: Well talking about that though, just there you were saying that they're not necessarily realistic expectations, is there an expectation that every exam will always get the right grade all of the time, and is that something that the public should expect?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well that comes back, doesn't it, to the question of reliability, and it comes back to one of the reasons why we thought that reliability was such a very crucial issue that a new regulator should get its teeth into right from the beginning, and part of that is to be able to engage the public in an issue which is always difficult. Yes, I think there is an expectation that every grade, every level will be absolutely right. In reality, whenever you involve human beings in a system, be that the people who set the tests or the people who mark the tests or the people who grade the tests, and indeed the candidates themselves, then you are going to have an element of unreliability because human beings are not perfect.

Now I don't think that in itself is a concept which will be alien to the public, we don't give the public sufficient credit for being sensible and sensitive to issues of that kind. And if you again draw on other areas of life, I think there was a time when the medical profession was very reluctant to issue information about success rates in operations, for example, because they feared that that would lose public confidence. But in reality, the medical profession is now much more open than it was and the reality is that people actually do understand all the difficult factors that go into making for success in the medical context, and I believe that the same will happen as we are more open in the examination system about issues like reliability. Unrealistic expectations will become much more realistic because people will understand the issues better.

Alison Kershaw: So it's basically about this issue of dumbing down every year will become less and less the more the public are aware of how the exam system works?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well I didn't use the term dumbing down, and it's not a term that I would ever use so please don't attribute that to me.

Alison Kershaw: No, no, it's just shorthand for saying that ...

Kathleen Tattersall: I don't believe that examinations have been dumbed down at all. Examinations are as demanding now for young people, whatever the nature of the examination system, as they were in the past. And the people who set examinations set out with a determination to make those examinations as demanding, and it's our job as the regulator to be able to monitor what happens and to be able to give clear messages about the demand of examinations. Where we find a problem incidentally, as we did quite recently when we published our report on science and we said that the 2008 examinations suggested that there was some slippage in terms of the demand made on students, both in terms of the syllabuses and in terms of the examinations, where we find a problem we will say so, and the intention of saying so will be to redress the problem, and we have been making demands on the awarding bodies to actually put right the problems that we perceived in those examinations, and that work is ongoing. So I don't believe in dumbing down, what I do believe is that everyone sets out with the intention of making the examinations demanding and what I do believe in is that regulation will actually throw light on whether that was a successful thing or not, and where it's not successful regulation will demand that we rectify the problems that are perceived.

Alison Kershaw: Okay. Are there subjects that you're looking at at the moment where there are concerns? Or again with science, as you looked at science for 2009 that have just been taken to see whether the standards have been almost improved on from previously?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well obviously we will do some follow-up work but I mean most of the work that we're doing at the moment in that regard is actually, I mean we set out very clearly our various demands and one of them was that we should review the criteria for future science examinations so that we actually are very clear in the demands which the future specifications will make, and in the meantime for the specifications which exist for students in 2009, 2010 and however long it takes to change the actual specifications, we will continue to ensure that the awarding bodies set questions which are demanding and that the grading of the students represents the standards which we expect from examinations whether they're taken two years ago or two years hence. And we've been doing quite a lot of work with the awarding bodies on those fronts and the awarding bodies have been very responsive to the demands that we've made, and we're confident that the problems that we saw in the 2008 examinations will not re-emerge in the form that they did in 2008. So what a regulator can do is both work with the awarding to improve the examinations and secondly, of course, we will reflect on an examination once it's been held to make sure that those improvements actually came through in the real world of the exam.

Alison Kershaw: One of the other things I wanted to ask you about was, I think it's in the regulator's report this year where you expressed some concerns about new qualifications coming in too quickly, can you just explain to me what those concerns were, and also whether you have concerns over the way in light of that that the Diploma's being introduced?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well the concerns we were expressing were that, change across a number of qualifications and the Diploma is not a particular one that was in my sights when I was making these statements, but the changes across a number of qualifications had been made without full exploration of the consequences of those changes. And in the past - and it does touch on some of our earlier conversation about how changes impact on perceptions of difficulty and so on, but in the past there was a much more systematic approach to introducing new qualifications where there were pilot studies, pilot examinations where the pilot would be restricted to quite a small number of centres and students so that you could learn lessons from those first examinations and you could build in changes which were seen to be desirable in the light of experience. And at the same time, in all of those pilots you always protected the interests of the students, you know, they were not, as it were, guinea pigs who were going to fall by the wayside. Now basically what I was saying in that report was that that sort of considered, measured approach to change actually has a lot of benefits because it does avoid putting large cohorts of students at risk where the nature of the assessment is in the real context seen to be deficient. And so basically I was arguing in that report and setting out some principles for the introduction of new qualifications.

Now the Diploma, I have to say, is already in the system so I wasn't particularly saying anything about the Diploma because that is there. It so happens that the Diploma is in itself being phased in, if you think

about it, because different lines of learning are coming in at different stages, and also there's a very stringent means of evaluating whether schools are ready to come into the Diploma system. This is not Ofqual, this is the department, the gateway process, and there are various conditions that they have to meet, including, of course, working with other schools or colleges to provide the full range of experience that students are going to be having in the Diploma. So you could say that in many ways the Diploma does coincidentally meet some of the principles we were laying down about phasing things in, and I do think we have an opportunity in the Diploma system as it unfolds over the next few years to actually consider aspects of it to make sure that it is working in the interests of all students, and if it's not to advise – and this is what our role would be here – to advise Ministers of any issues which they needed to consider as the Diplomas were rolled out in the future. So it's really, my thoughts on these principles and my thoughts on piloting were all about ensuring that the system is as good as it can be when it's rolled out to the whole cohort of students at any given time.

Alison Kershaw: Does that mean that you would have concerns about the GCSEs all being brought in as modular all in one go from September?

Kathleen Tattersall: No. Well I mean some of them aren't being brought in in one go are they, because I mean, for example, the science that we reported on in March was in itself unitised, it was kind of a forerunner of the unitised. So in some ways what we were saying about science was also kind of a clear indication to those who are setting examinations in other subjects of the pitfalls that they have to avoid. So I think in the case of GCSE you will find variations in the pattern of assessment at the moment within GCSEs, which is one of the reasons why I said that when we come to the awards of the unitised system in two years' time that it won't become a uniform change across the piece because some of what will be new in one subject will not be quite as new in another because the subject already has certain features which are similar to the unitised approach. So I don't particularly have those concerns in the case of the unitised GCSE, and I would also base what I've just said on the fact that unitisation has been something that has come within the system as a whole, A Levels, GCSEs, other examinations of course, and particularly vocational examinations that I'm thinking of, it has come very gradually over the years and I think people, as it were, know what to expect and the pitfalls to avoid. So I don't have particular concerns there.

I mean one of the things we haven't talked about, of course, is that unitisation is very much a feature of vocational qualifications and that, of course, enables us to set up the qualifications credit framework which is now just beginning to develop, the QCF, which will be a great boon to adults in particular who are engaged in some vocational course or training, who get credits for what they've done, who might want to change direction and carry those credits with them, or indeed might want to pause because at that

particular point in their life carrying on with the qualification would be difficult, and they'd be able to bank that credit and take it forward at a later stage. So units do give you great flexibility, particularly in the vocational field.

Alison Kershaw: Okay. The other part of the regulator's report was talking about how we don't do enough exams online, there isn't enough e-assessment, and I think they used a phrase in there about it being stuck in the 19th Century. Why is that exactly, and why is it that we don't do more exams online?

Kathleen Tattersall: Well again, it's strange isn't it, I am arguing there for a system of assessment which is actually more in tune with the learning environment that students these days experience because, you know, I mean we all know there are tiny tots whose ability to use the computer is greater than ours, and that's kind of generational thing and the more technology is developed, the more technology is part and parcel of everyday life then it would be strange to have an examination system which was still pen and paper, timed examinations and so on. So basically I'm saying we don't want that disconnect between the education system as a whole and the assessment system. And this is where it's strange. This is one area where we are incredibly cautious. You know, we might blithely bring on a new examination without piloting it but when it comes to e-assessment we are cautious because everyone's very conscious that the impact of technology in terms of assessment can have a detrimental effect on learning if you go down particular lines of assessment which are easy to do on a computer as opposed to think through how you also use technology to broaden the basis of your assessment. And by that I mean that it's easy to actually set multiple choice questions which you can do on a computer, you know, the driving test for example, you know, driving theory, you can do on a computer, you can have your results back instantly. And that's all about kind of testing generally knowledge memory, and what I want to ensure is that we also test understanding, we test the ability to evaluate, we test that broader range of skills and qualities which we expect to have in our learning environment and we don't narrow the assessment down to something which is simply easy to assess on computers.

So in the statements that I made in the Chief Regulator's Report I was basically saying we need to do far more work – and it's a message to us as well as to the outside world – far more work on looking at how we use technology to assess the broader range of skills in order that we can move the system forward and the examination and qualifications system can be in accord with the learning systems which are increasingly becoming much more varied and much more technologically based and using technology to enhance the learning experience. And I'd like to use technology to enhance the assessment experience but not at the risk of simply narrowing things by using an easy technique of assessment, namely multiple choice questions, which don't necessarily test the broader range of skills. So there's a lot of work to be done on that, but I do think as a country, and indeed worldwide, we have to work with our colleagues all

over the world where there is experience of these things, we've got to look to ways of using technology in very sophisticated ways of assessing students.

Alison Kershaw: Okay, that's good. Just one last question I've got for you. I wanted to ask you with the ASCL Bill now going through Parliament, do you think that Ofqual will get the independence that it needs? I know that there have been some, Ken Boston was one who said that Government will still try and interfere in what happens.

Kathleen Tattersall: Well can I say that we are independent now in the sense that we operate independently, but what the bill or the law, the legislation will give us is a very clear responsibility to report not to Ministers but to Parliament. So we will not be reporting to the Secretary of State. All our reports will be directly to Parliament, and my expectation would be that a Select Committee would act on behalf of Parliament in interrogating Ofqual on what it has done in the course of the year. At the moment we are operating under the legislation which QCA was given way back in 1997, with one or two amendments last year, in 2008, particularly relating to economic regulation. We will be absolutely independent, of course, of QCDA and we will ensure that everything that we do will be open and transparent as we are doing at the moment so that we will be a body which is independent of government, independent of any other organisation, have our own voice and report directly to Parliament. And I'm quite clear now that we operate as though we had all those powers, and I'm quite clear that in future we'll be able to demonstrate it without any ambiguity whatsoever.

Alison Kershaw: Okay. That's brilliant, I think that's covered everything.

Kathleen Tattersall: Okay Alison, I hope that was helpful.

Alison Kershaw: Yes, that's great, thanks very much for your time.

Kathleen Tattersall: You're welcome.