



Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State

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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Ed Balls'.

LAUNCH OF OFQUAL

Thank you for your letter of 14 May setting out your priorities for the first year of Ofqual.

Let me once again congratulate you on your appointment as the first chair of the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual). The establishment of Ofqual – initially within existing legislation as part of QCA, but in due course, and subject to Parliamentary approval, as a fully independent organisation – is an important step forward. It will provide a robust, transparent regulatory framework which can give people confidence in the standards and value for money of both new and existing qualifications and tests. It will also provide a visibly independent quality assurance of our qualifications and assessment reform programmes – though, as you say, it is important that Ofqual is not only independent of Government but seen so to be.

I should like to put on record my support for the work you and your colleagues have undertaken so far in setting up Ofqual, and for the priorities you set out in your letter. Your work on reliability in both external and teacher assessment will be particularly important in strengthening public confidence in standards and providing a foundation for you to regulate effectively in the future.



department for
children, schools and families

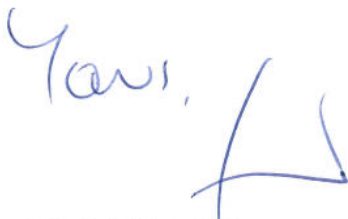
Going forward, I would like to highlight two issues of particular importance and where your role in ensuring standards will be vital. First, single level tests, where, as I said in the Children's Plan, national implementation will be subject to your endorsement of this approach; and secondly, Diplomas, where it is essential to show that standards are being maintained.

Assessment and standards issues are complex and technical, and there is clearly a significant amount of public interest in this area. This is quite right; we must actively engage the public in a well-informed standards debate and so continue to build public trust and confidence in the quality and rigour of qualifications and tests. I welcome your determination to set out the issues as clearly as you can for the public to judge and I look forward to the public debate which you will structure in parallel with Ofqual's technical work on reliability. Public confidence in standards is just as important as ensuring that qualifications are as challenging as they were in the past. Your efforts to establish a reputation for evidence-based, expert and impartial work – and engaging the public in that work - are the key to establishing Ofqual as a credible, independent and authoritative voice in public debate. And I recognise that Ofqual is the public champion of the learner in that debate; learners' interests must be at the heart of all that we do.

As you know, we committed earlier this week to legislating in the next Parliamentary session to establish Ofqual on a statutory footing, and, like you, I want to make sure that you have the powers you need to be an effective regulator. Our officials will need to continue to keep closely in touch as we prepare for the legislation, and as you review your resource needs at mid-year.

I look forward to continuing to work with you, your officials and the Ofqual committee over the coming year.

I am copying this letter to John Denham, Barry Sheerman and Sir Anthony Greener.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ed Balls', with a stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

ED BALLS MP