

Ofqual seeks views on regulatory approach for level 3 qualifications

Ofqual is seeking views on its [proposed approach to regulating qualifications to sit alongside A levels and T levels at level 3](#) in a consultation published today. This consultation sets out proposals to regulate these qualifications so that students can be confident their qualifications are high quality.

Ofqual regulates on behalf of students of all ages and apprentices. It is important that students can access high-quality qualifications and assessments. Employers and other users need to be able to recognise the quality and relevance of these qualifications.

We are keen to hear from awarding organisations, colleges, schools, and training providers, as well as from employers, students and anyone with an interest in these qualifications, on our proposals, which include:

- the grading of qualifications
- the assessment of qualifications
- the titles of qualifications

In July 2021 the [Department for Education published its plans to reform post-16 qualifications in England](#). This followed a consultation that set out its proposals to make sure the qualifications approved for use alongside A levels and T Levels are of high quality and are relevant.

High-quality qualifications and assessments are designed and delivered in a way that enables those taking them to demonstrate fully their knowledge, skills and understanding, with a clear purpose, and are designed so that their content and assessments reflect that purpose.

Ofqual has worked closely with the Department for Education and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) to develop this proposed approach to regulating these qualifications. For alternative technical qualifications, the Institute will be responsible for approvals and will consult on its criteria and requirements for approval later this year.

The consultation will open today, Thursday 24 February, and will run for eight weeks, ending on Wednesday 20 April at 23.45.

The proposed regulatory approach is based on Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition, with extra requirements for both academic and technical alternative qualifications.

The Department for Education recently updated [its guidance on the approvals process for academic and technical qualifications](#) at level 3.

RSH reports on 2021 value for money metrics

The Regulator of Social Housing has today (24 February 2022) published its 'Value for money metrics and reporting 2021'.

[Value for money](#) is a key regulatory standard that requires private registered providers to clearly articulate their strategic objectives and to annually report on their performance against a suite of measures defined by the regulator, as well as their own objectives.

The regulator is publishing this report so that boards and a wide range of stakeholders, including tenants, can assess performance on these metrics and see how providers compare to other organisations.

The report highlights the challenges that the pandemic posed for the sector in 2020-2021. It also reinforces the importance of good quality data-driven performance monitoring, alongside clear objective setting, to mitigate risks to providers' businesses.

Providers are responding to multiple pressures on their resources, including catching up on major repairs, improving services and quality, building safety, decarbonisation and delivering new affordable homes. In this context, it will be essential that they achieve value for money in delivering their strategic objectives.

The value for money report comes after RSH released its [quarterly survey for Q3 2021](#) (published on Tuesday 22 February), which provides a more recent overview of the sector's financial health and investment forecasts for 2022.

The [value for money report](#) shows that reinvestment in existing stock fell between April 2020 and March 2021 during the coronavirus pandemic and resulting lockdowns. Reinvestment in new and existing social housing stock was 5.8% of the total value of existing stock, compared to 7.2% in 2019-2020. However, the quarterly survey shows that providers are already delivering capital investment programmes to catch up works that were delayed by the pandemic.

The sector spent less on maintenance and repairs in 2021 than it did in 2020. This was due to coronavirus restrictions delaying planned maintenance and repairs works. The median Headline Social Housing Cost metric fell to £3,730 per unit (2.7% lower than 2020). However by Q3 2021 capitalised major repairs and maintenance had exceeded pre-pandemic levels. Cost pressures are expected to increase over the short term as a result of material and labour shortages and resulting inflation. Providers will need to carefully manage those pressures as they seek to deliver repairs and investment in existing homes and development of new homes.

The sector invested £9.5bn in new supply and existing stock in 2021, compared to £12.2bn in 2020. Despite the challenging economic climate, providers delivered 41,000 homes in 2021. Investment rebounded by Q3 2021, during which providers recorded the highest ever quarterly levels for development spending.

Fiona MacGregor, Chief Executive, said:

Despite significant challenges, registered providers have maintained essential services, attracted investment and maintained their financial resilience. Although the pandemic resulted in very difficult trade-offs in 2020/21, providers are already responding with major investment programmes in existing and new homes.

Providers are faced with multiple and competing pressures on resources. They must ensure tenants' homes are safe and of good quality, alongside working towards higher environmental standards and investing in new homes.

As the sector faces greater scrutiny, it is fundamental in the context of value for money that scarce resources are used effectively and efficiently, decisions are made on a sound basis, and stakeholders understand how those decisions were made. It is more important than ever for boards to have clear objectives, good quality data and insight to deliver the most value from their resources.

The annual publication is available on the [Global Accounts page](#) of our website.

The Value for Money standard requires providers to annually report on their performance against a suite of measures defined by the regulator.

The Value for Money report is part of the regulator's continuing work to help the sector contextualise the performance of individual providers more easily. It aims to help boards compare themselves to organisations with similar business models and geographical locations. It is an annex to RSH's Global Accounts, published in December 2021.

The Value for Money metrics data file contains information at a provider level. The report is accompanied by a detailed Value for Money Technical note, which explains the metrics in greater depth. These documents and all previous VFM publications can be found on our [VFM collections page](#).

The Regulator of Social Housing promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. Its role is defined in legislation to have an economic regulation objective relating to private registered providers, and a consumer regulation objective relating to both local authority providers and private registered providers. In line with current legislation, RSH regulates consumer standards reactively.

For press office contact details, see the [media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.

[UK pledges £160 million to boost global vaccine development](#)

The UK will pledge £160 million to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to speed up vaccine development, as the Foreign Secretary and Health and Social Care Secretary urge international partners to step up and support this vital work.

COVID-19 has shown vaccines are the way out of pandemics, saving millions of lives and restoring cherished freedoms. The funding announced by the UK will support CEPI's drive to accelerate the development of vaccines for the deadliest infectious diseases, like COVID-19, and enable equitable access to these vaccines globally.

The announcement comes ahead of the UK government hosting the Global Pandemic Preparedness Summit on 7 to 8 March in London. The event aims to raise funds for CEPI's goal, backed by the UK during our G7 presidency last year, to cut the time it takes to develop new vaccines to 100 days, including 'variant-proof' vaccines that will work against multiple future COVID-19 variants.

The UK has supported CEPI since its inception and has provided £276 million for the organisation's life-saving work since 2018.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

UK scientists and researchers have led the way in developing vaccines to tackle COVID-19, which have saved millions of lives around the world and are key to restoring our freedoms.

The UK is hosting this important summit, providing £160 million in funding to CEPI, which will cut vaccine development times and boost vaccine manufacturing in low- and middle-income countries. I urge other potential donors to step up and fund this vital work to help us avoid future pandemics, save millions of lives and prevent trillions in economic damage.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

This pandemic is a global challenge and it has shown the best way to chart a course back to freedom is by standing side by side with our international partners.

The UK's ground-breaking science and research has led the way on vaccines and treatments, it is helping us learn to live with COVID-19. Our £160 million pledge will support CEPI's vital work to cut vaccine development to 100 days and protect us all against future health threats.

The UK, as a global leader, is helping other countries most in need because no one is safe until everyone is safe.

Dr Richard Hatchett, CEO of CEPI, said:

This funding comes at a critical moment, allowing CEPI to pursue our ambitious programme to develop 'variant proof' vaccines against COVID-19 and other betacoronaviruses as well as pursue our life saving work developing vaccines against the next Disease X and known viral threats such as Lassa Fever, Nipah and Chikungunya.

Contemplating future pandemics is difficult, especially as we continue to battle the current one, but the threat is real and we must seize this rare convergence of political will, practical experience, and scientific progress to build a world that is better prepared.

We are delighted to partner with the UK in hosting next month's Global Pandemic Preparedness Summit which will bring the global community together to focus on future threats and to explore what it will take for the world to be better prepared and, in particular, prepared to develop, and enable access to, safe and effective vaccines against new pathogens in 100 days.

We thank the UK government for elevating the 100 Day Mission to a G7 priority through its Presidency of the G7 in 2021 and for extending its support today. CEPI is proud to continue our collaboration with the UK government and its world-leading life-sciences sector to build a better, safer, more equitable future for all.

The Global Pandemic Preparedness Summit will bring together influential leaders from the world of science and health. The event will host a range of speakers in-person and virtually, including Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, Dr Anthony Fauci, Chief Medical Advisor to the President of the United States, and Dame Sarah Gilbert who developed the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

The UK government invested more than £88 million to support the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. To date, the UK has also donated 32.2 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, of which 25.3 million have gone to COVAX, a global scheme to get more vaccines to developing countries.

The UK has been at the forefront of the global response to COVID-19 from the

start of the pandemic. Today's announcement builds on up to £1.3 billion in UK aid committed to the international health response early in the pandemic, supporting vaccines, health systems and economic recovery in developing countries.

- CEPI's ambitions for the next 5 years include reducing the time for vaccine development to 100 days, producing vaccines against whole virus families and supporting the development of national and regional manufacturing capacity in low- and middle-income countries
- CEPI's \$3.5 billion investment case is available at endpandemics.cepi.net and their 100 Days Mission site at 100days.cepi.net

[UK and Belgium sign memorandum of understanding \(MoU\) on energy cooperation](#)

News story

The UK and Belgium have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to work closely on the path towards decarbonisation and future energy interconnection.



The United Kingdom's Minister for Energy Greg Hands and Belgium's Minister for Energy Tinne Van der Straeten signed an agreement on energy cooperation yesterday (23 February).

This memorandum of understanding deepens the UK and Belgium's bilateral relationship and enables closer working on important energy priorities including:

- multipurpose electricity interconnection
- offshore wind
- low carbon hydrogen
- carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS)

UK Minister for Energy, Greg Hands said:

I'm pleased to be able to agree today even greater cooperation with our neighbours in Belgium on electricity interconnection.

We already have a longstanding energy relationship and this agreement will strengthen our joint energy security and reduce our exposure to global energy prices.

Belgian Minister of Energy, Tinne Van der Straeten said:

Belgium and the United Kingdom have signed a new cooperation agreement to build a second interconnection. The existing electrical interconnector, Nemo-Link, is one of the best performing interconnections in the world. The new link, which would be connected to the energy island, is a hybrid interconnection. This dual function means that power can be exchanged directly between the 2 countries and new wind farms can also be connected to it.

Leading is most profitable. This is proven by Belgium's offshore power production, which is breaking all records this month and is having a downward effect on prices. The new interconnection fits in with the plan to turn the North Sea into one large sustainable energy plant.

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PM call with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine: 24 January 2022

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the early hours of this morning.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the early hours of this morning.

The Prime Minister said he was appalled by the unfolding events in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian President updated the Prime Minister on the attacks taking place, and the Prime Minister said the West would not stand by as President Putin waged his campaign against the Ukrainian people.

The Prime Minister said he hoped Ukraine could resist and that Ukraine and its people were in the thoughts of everyone in the United Kingdom people during this dark time.

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