**Notes from a meeting of the Ofqual Access Consultation Forum**

**held on Monday April 29th, 2019**

**at the Ramada Hotel, Coventry**

**Context**

*This body meets termly and comprises ‘disability groups’, regulators and awarding bodies to discuss a range of issues related to access to examinations and other assessments in order to support Ofqual in its duty to ensure that students with SEND have fair access.*

**Present:** Representatives from RNIB, JCQ, OCR, AQA, Ofqual, BATOD, NDCS, IEOA, STA, IB in the room; Communicate-Ed, WJEC and AbilityNet on the phone ***(You might need to Google some of these!).***

**Key points from the meeting**

Ofqual is developing **statutory guidance** on qualification accessibility. They will be consulting members of the ACF. Currently the only document in use does not have statutory status and is owned by Qualifications Wales (Fair Access by Design). It needs updating.

We heard an update on **vocational and technical qualifications**. There are 14326 such qualifications (from 156 awarding organisations) as opposed to 713 General Qualifications (eg GCSEs and GCEs). They range from entry level 1 to level 8 – much wider than GQs. Ofqual is keeping them under review.

Ofqual is undertaking, and needs help with, some research into the use of **assistive technology**. There will be focus groups of teachers and SENCOs as well as learners. They wish to explore and disseminate good practice. They would like centres to visit where good practice is taking place. This includes the use of screen readers. I pointed out that some deaf candidates who need a reader are penalised where English GCSE is concerned as they can’t have a human reader for this subject and can’t always access the computer reader available to other candidates. Something for the research to consider.

Ofqual is **reviewing modified papers** – this predominantly means those adapted physically for VI and other candidates but they will retain their ongoing monitoring of the modification of the language of examinations.

During the day the awarding bodies gave some feedback and touched on **language modification** – they referred frequently to BATOD principles – even OCR which, whilst using our principles, does not use our modifiers. I will be writing to the OCR person to find out what impact assessments they have undertaken in relation to this change which we strongly regret.

At the last meeting in October Andrea Baker had given a presentation about the **role of BATOD modifiers** and there were several references to this and how they were always considering their own approaches as a result. We will be asked to be involved in their review of accessibility.

**Past papers** are available (where they exist) free of charge from exam boards and any errors will have been corrected.

We had a presentation about the **Multiplication Tables Check** – there will be no extra time allowance within the questions as they are validated in relation to the time so they are not able to work out, just recall, the responses. I will write an article or ask for one to be written for the curriculum edition of the magazine in September. There has been extensive trialling. This year the check is voluntary but will be compulsory (for all pupils in year 4 – this has been changed from year 6). Human readers are not allowed. Font and colour can be changed. Speech recognition will not be used. No permission for access arrangements is required. There will be a three-week window during which the check will take place. Results will be available shortly afterwards.

After lunch Martin McLean from NDCS and I made a joint presentation about the changes made this year to support for **BSL users in exams** which have caused some concerns amongst some colleagues and how JCQ responded in a constructive way. I attach the slides for members’ interest. One suggestion is that awarding bodies supply videos of the questions in BSL so there is consistency across the country. This has cost implications but JCQ proposed a meeting about it. This would be with members of the DESF who had made the proposal.

We then had a presentation about a campaign to ensure that all government and public body **websites satisfy accessibility standards**. This is linked to the Equality Act and the removal of barriers for those with protected characteristics. There are 44000 such public sector sites. The government is committed to this and sites are being regularly monitored to check their accessibility standards (which should indicate which parts of the website might not be accessible, how alternative access is enabled in those cases and how complaints can be made). This has implications for awarding bodies in relation to their e-assessment and pdf papers.

**Awarding bodies** in their brief summaries, apart from referring to BATOD principles of language modification (and also those of the Autism Education Trust), highlighted the work being done to ensure access to pupils with colour blindness. Interestingly, many of the examiners when writing papers still have to be persuaded that more accessible language does not make the exams ‘easier’. All three main awarding bodies emphasised the need for question setters to adhere at all times to accessibility principles.

Ofqual concluded the meeting by reflecting on the **terms of reference** which still seem to be appropriate. It is hoped that there will be two meetings per year.

I would happily answer any questions.

**Paul Simpson, 1st May, 2019**