

[News story: Ofqual unveils corporate plan 2017 to 2020](#)

Ofqual's new [Corporate Plan](#) which covers the period 2017 to 2020, builds on work undertaken over the past 12 months. It is focused in particular on:

I am delighted to be unveiling the first corporate plan since I came into post in April 2016. Over the past year we have made significant progress against our identified goals and objectives

The most visible aspect of our work remains the continuing focus on general qualification reform and the safe delivery of new GCSEs, AS and A levels will be the culmination of several years of intensive reform. We are working closely with exam boards to ensure they deliver accurate results, on time, and that standards are maintained. We are also working towards a system for reviews and appeals of marking outcomes that is clearer, more consistent and fairer for all students.

Since I arrived at Ofqual, government priorities for vocational and technical qualifications and assessment have moved on significantly, and as a result, so has our approach to this part of our remit. We are working closely with government on the redevelopment of functional skills qualifications, to make sure they remain relevant to employers. We are also closely engaged with government to support the development of T-levels and similarly are working with other bodies on finalising the outstanding operational decisions related to apprenticeship reform, including the development of high quality apprenticeship end-point assessments.

In primary assessment, our responsibilities focus on monitoring validity and promoting assessment standards, rather than test delivery. We will continue to advise government on policy, and keep our approach under review.

We have taken a wide range of regulatory action over the past year, including issuing our first fines. This plan makes clear that we will undertake both proactive regulatory activity, and stand ready to react where our risk analysis demands it.

To support these goals we will continue to develop and motivate our people and target expertise wherever we see it.

[Press release: NI parties invited to](#)

intensive talks

The main political parties in Northern Ireland are being invited to attend political talks on Monday 3 April at Stormont Castle, Belfast.

The talks will have two objectives.

First, to secure a coalition agreement to form the basis of the formation of a new Executive. Second, to address the implementation of outstanding issues from previous Agreements.

In a shared approach, the UK government and Irish government have agreed this phase of talks will be best supported by an intensive process to drive progress.

This includes:

- An agreed agenda;
- A structure of bilateral meetings;
- Regular roundtables; and
- A coordination mechanism across all the issues.

The talks will be conducted in accordance with the well-established three stranded approach.

News story: UK entrepreneurs are disrupting the business world

Joint list by Maserati and The Sunday Times names 9 companies that have progressed with Innovate UK funding in top 100 game changers.

The [Maserati 100](#) highlights the emerging entrepreneurs who are challenging the established order with their disruptive technologies. Now in its third year, these awards celebrate the positive impact innovative start-ups have on the economy and society as a whole.

Nine businesses that have received funding from Innovate UK featured in the list.

- [Crisp Thinking Group](#) – using Crisp’s software, companies are able to moderate and monitor social media to protect their brands. It has offices in Leeds, London and New York. Crisp received funding to prototype their real-time social media management platform

- [Ella's Kitchen](#) – making and selling organic baby food since 2006, the company now employs 70 people in the UK and takes 20% of the market. Global turnover is more than \$100 million. Ella's Kitchen has taken part in 3 knowledge transfer partnerships (KTP) with the University of Reading, to look at its marketing, raw materials and packaging

[Ella's Kitchen: transforming the organic baby food market](#)

- [Horizon Discovery](#) – a gene-editing biotech company, Horizon Discovery supports the discovery of new medicines, including personalised medicines for treating cancer. It has already acquired a number of US companies to further grow the business. Innovate UK funded collaborative research and development projects to find innovative approaches for the manufacture of high-value, genome-edited cell lines
- [M Squared Lasers](#) – the Glasgow-based company designs and manufactures lasers for use in industry, defence, healthcare and energy. Its revenues totalled more than £8 million last year. Innovate UK has funded several projects to help M Squared Lasers optimise laser emission intensity, develop high precision, handheld spectrometry and grow the market

Nils Hempler of M Squared Lasers.

- [Metail](#) – offering virtual fitting rooms to allow shoppers to create 3D models of themselves and try on clothes. Evans and House of Holland are among the retailers to have signed up. Metail received Innovate UK funding for feasibility and proof of concept studies, as well as prototype testing. This helped the company to develop computer vision techniques and digitise garments with lower costs and simpler operations
- [Ocado](#) – a pioneering online supermarket with annual sales of £1.3 billion. Ocado was involved in a collaborative, 24-month project to trial a range of vehicles with hydrogen dual-fuel technology, in order to reduce the carbon of its vehicles
- [Swiftkey](#) – predictive keyboard software that's installed in more than 300 million smartphones and tablets. Last year Swiftkey acquired by Microsoft in a deal reported to be worth \$250m. Swiftkey received 2 Innovate UK grants, to test its idea for an app that would transform the way people used keyboards and help prototype it

Swiftkey shown working on a mobile device.

- [The Floop](#) – this tool collects data for motor insurers from a driver's phone or a black box in their vehicle. Floop has more than 70 staff in Sheffield and clients include Direct Line and AIG. Floop was involved in a collaborative funding project to accelerate the development, market readiness and deployment of automated driving systems
- [The Framestore](#) – an innovative special effects firm that has worked on films including Gravity, the 2013 Oscar winner for Best Visual Effects. The Framestore received funding in 2 collaborative projects: to create an extensible, pluggable digital security framework that protects media companies; and the development of a production pipeline process that improves quality, speeds up production and reduces costs

[Press release: New £1 million flood competition to protect more communities](#)

A new ground-breaking competition will allow flood defence projects around the country to apply for a share of £1 million to help protect even more homes and businesses, Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom announced today.

This government funded competition is the first of its kind and will be open to innovative projects that plan to use landscape features such as ponds, banks, meanders, channels, and trees to store, drain or slow flood water.

Natural flood management already forms an important part of the government's flood strategy and funding these new projects builds on £14m already committed to similar schemes across the country.

Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom said:

I am delighted to offer more support for local communities looking to employ natural flood management measures to better protect their homes and businesses.

We now carefully look at flood risk across an entire catchment area from a river's source to the sea – to make sure we have in place the best tailored mix of natural as well as concrete, engineered defences to better protect communities.

The Environment Secretary announced the new competition in Leicester, where a natural flood management scheme is already successfully in place reconnecting the floodplain with the river.

This scheme has not only reduced the flood risk to 1,200 properties, it has transformed public spaces along the river, with improved seating areas and cycle paths for the local community to enjoy. A total of 100 trees and 7,000 shrubs have been planted and wildlife such as grey heron and little egret are now regularly seen around the area.

The new natural flood management competition will give small-scale natural flood management projects around the country the opportunity to apply for funding, so they too can achieve similar results.

Environment Agency Chair, Emma Howard Boyd, said:

At places such as Leicester, Morpeth, and Medmerry, the Environment

Agency has already shown that natural flood management can reduce flood risk alongside traditional flood defences and property resilience.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to natural flood management: it's about using a range of measures, from creating ponds and woody dams to redirecting river channels, that work together to reduce flood risk. This competition is a great way to explore the different ways these approaches can benefit communities and the environment.

Details of the competition and how to apply are available [here](#).

The deadline for competition entries is 19 May 2017 and the successful projects are expected to be announced by the end of June 2017.

Notes to editors:

- Applications are to be submitted through existing Catchment Partnerships – bodies formed of local people, landowners and statutory bodies that work together to manage whole river catchments.
- Upstream management of flooding is already a central theme in many areas, including the Cumbria and Calderdale Flood Action Plans.
- The Government has already provided £4.1m to natural flood management demonstration projects in Holnicote (Somerset), Pickering (North Yorks) and Upper Derwent (Derbyshire).

[News story: Sir David Norgrove appointed as Chair of the UK Statistics Authority](#)

Sir David Norgrove has been appointed by Her Majesty the Queen as the new Chair of the UK Statistics Authority.

He has a long-standing record as a public servant and user of statistics, having previously served as Chair of the Low Pay Commission (2009 to 2016) and the Pensions Regulator (2005 to 2010).

Welcoming the appointment, Ben Gummer, Minister for the Cabinet Office said:

Sir David will make an exceptional Chair of the UK Statistics Authority. Having chaired the Low Pay Commission and the Pensions Regulator, he has an exemplary record and one which will stand him in good stead as Chair of the UK Statistics Authority.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Sir Andrew Dilnot for his excellent work over the last five years and wish him well in his future endeavours.

The appointment was the subject of an open recruitment exercise following the Code of Practice set out by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, a pre-appointment hearing with the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and approval by Parliament.

Sir David will take up the post on 1 April 2017, for a renewable five year term. He does not hold any other ministerial appointments.

Further information

The UK Statistics Authority was established on 1 April 2008 by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, with a statutory objective to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good.

Sir David Norgrove is an external member and Deputy Chair of Oxford University Council. He has been a trustee and Deputy Chair of the British Museum, and chaired the Low Pay Commission from 2009 to 2016, the Pensions Regulator from its inception in 2005 until 2010, Risk First from 2012 to 2015 and Amnesty International Charitable Trust from 2008 to 2014. He chaired a Government review of the family justice system in 2010 and 2011 and subsequently served as Deputy Chair of the Family Justice Board, having chaired it from its inception in 2012 until 2016.

David began his career as an economist at the Treasury and worked in a Chicago bank before becoming Private Secretary to the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. He spent 16 years with Marks & Spencer and became a member of the Board there. David was knighted in the 2016 New Year Honours for services to the low paid and to family justice.

The role has a time commitment of 2 days a week and remuneration of £57,000 per annum.