

## The Results Generation

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‘It is an annual ritual for some education commentators to claim that our exam results are evidence of grade inflation and “dumbing down”. This is demoralising for teachers and insulting for students who have worked hard all year.’

Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007<sup>i</sup>

The government has made it clear that it wants its performance in education to be measured through exam performance. In itself, this demand is not necessarily problematic. What is deeply problematic, however, is the fact that the government has also made it clear that it is prepared to go to any lengths, however detrimental to ‘stakeholders’, to achieve the exam performance it is after in the short-term. Limited by flawed long-term education policies, it has resorted to quick-fix strategies to bolster results. Ultimately, the government’s treatment of A-levels has displayed a greater commitment to generating its results than to the students who produce them. This self-serving agenda has become a recurring theme throughout the education system and this is why we have focussed this summer on the disparity between education statistics and learning standards.

When concern is voiced, particularly in the case of A-levels, it is quashed as reactionary carping about declining standards from an imaginary ‘golden era’. Critics are positively gagged by accusations of elitism and a devaluing of students’ efforts. It is vital therefore that our aim here is clear: whilst there may be some instances of underlying snobbery from those questioning the value of today’s A-levels, our concern is about the growing chasm between learning and grade production, about protecting students’ interests as opposed to defending the existing, malfunctioning system.

What we are challenging is not students’ efforts – there is no reason to think they are not trying as hard as they can – but rather a set of flawed A-level arrangements, hampered by politicisation.

With flaws in the A-level system so stark, the results are annually questioned in the media. Each year, the government’s unflinching reaction is a pantomime of outrage. But surely the real outrage is the fact that the government asks to be judged by its results, yet refuses to engage in any discussion on *how* these results are attained.

However the government may feel about such scrutiny, it is imperative that through the media a spotlight is maintained on the generation of results. Although a standards watchdog, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA), nominally guards the value of A-level courses and exams, we have found its scope to be limited to such an extent that their role is futile (see page 7).

There is, however, robust evidence that A-level exams are not as challenging intellectually as they have been in the past. This is significant because it has the consequence of students learning less and lowering the horizons of all students in the

state sector. As the private sector turns its back on A-levels in favour of qualifications which are more demanding and more useful,<sup>ii</sup> a dangerous divide between private and state education students is being built. If higher A-level grades but a widening gap between the rich and poor is progress, then the future is bleak. This is exactly the sort of ‘progress’ useful politically in the short term but destructive for students in the long term that the government is currently realising.

## **Establishing the disparity between grades and standards**

Dr Robert Coe of Durham’s Curriculum Evaluation and Management Centre (CEM) has analysed student attainment for many years. He uses results taken from the CEM’s ALIS (A level Information System), which is designed to help schools gauge the general academic abilities of their students. The project conducts a test called the Test of Developed Abilities (TDA), which includes both vocabulary and maths sections, on thousands of students that are also taking A-levels. Essentially, the test examines fluency and numerical abilities. This is used as a baseline to compare A-levels from year to year as well as from subject to subject. It does not test any particular curriculum, but shows the general ability of students taking A-levels.

Coe’s most recent study comparing the TDA scores to A-levels was produced in April 2007 for the Office of National Statistics, using scores from 1988 to 2006. It compared students who scored 50 on the TDA in different years, and saw how this reflected A-level results. Overall there was an unambiguous trend towards students of the same ability gaining better A-level grades. In fact, on average, there has been a rise of one grade since 1996 and two grades since 1988.<sup>iii</sup>

It should be noted at this point that evidence of grade inflation does not demonstrate that students have become less intelligent over the years. What it shows is that either the curriculum or the exam - or both - have become less demanding. External analysis of this kind does not identify exactly where within a system the alterations have occurred, but what it does demonstrate is that the students’ general abilities are becoming increasingly detached from the A-level grades they achieve.

## **Establishing why: how A-levels have ‘changed’**

‘There’s no doubt that A-levels have changed significantly over the past 20 years but there is no evidence to suggest that they have become any easier.’  
Mike Cresswell, director-general of the exam board AQA<sup>iv</sup>

An investigation into A-level courses, suggests quite the opposite. Less challenging subject material, highly exam focused syllabuses and extensive opportunities for re-taking do not necessarily mean students are doing less work. However, they do make for less intellectually demanding courses with lower learning horizons. In this context, ‘easier’ *does* seem to be appropriate shorthand.

From 1996 to 2006, the number of A-level entries has increased by 95,000. However, this increase has not been reflected in more traditional subjects. In fact, many have a

declining number of entries: physics, French, German and mathematics have all registered reductions of between 3,000 and 11,000 over the last decade. By contrast, psychology has increased by 30,000; media and film studies by 16,000; ICT by 12,000 and PE by 10,000.<sup>v</sup> Underlying this shortfall is a desire to avoid ‘riskier’ subjects, replacing them with subjects that are more likely to guarantee high grades.

Officially, qualifications in these subjects are worth exactly the same as traditional subjects but, as Peter Tymms and Robert Coe have demonstrated, some A-level subjects are less demanding than others: ‘It is perfectly clear from our research that two A-Levels are not equal, with some more severely graded than others.’ Their research found that students with Bs in GCSE history, economics, geography, English language and literature, sociology and business studies went on to attain C on average in the same subjects at A-level. However, Coe and Tymms found that those with Bs in GCSE maths, computing, German, French, chemistry, physics and biology were more likely to get Ds at A-level.<sup>vi</sup>

With the message that the exam grade is more important than the subject currently being driven home in schools, students are now increasingly inclined to reject ‘harder’ subjects (the subjects Coe and Tymms found to have worse ‘grade returns’). This scenario is causing considerable concern:

- Richard Pike, chief executive of the Royal Society of Chemistry has argued that schools are discouraging students from taking maths A-level and encouraged instead to do easier subjects in a bid to boost their league table rankings. He noted ‘This contrasts starkly with countries like China, in which mathematics is seen as integral to the sciences and to the nation’s economy...’<sup>vii</sup>
- Richard Wilson of the Institute of Directors has stated that increasing shortfalls within the workforce were because of students choosing ‘soft’ subjects like psychology and media: ‘The main concern of the IoD in these key subject areas is that the pool of potential teachers is getting smaller and that is very worrying.’<sup>viii</sup>
- David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers has argued that ‘soft’ subjects may be helping students get into university but that ‘In the long term I’m not sure it does very much for their career prospects.’<sup>ix</sup>
- Kathleen Tattersall, chair of the Institute of Education Assessors has described how history is becoming an endangered subject as more students opt for subjects such as media studies and photography.<sup>x</sup>
- Robert Kirby-Harris, chief executive of The Institute of Physics has argued that it is ‘crazy’ that A-level students are opting for subjects which have ‘poor career prospects’.<sup>xi</sup>
- Lord May, president of the Royal Society has stated that ‘We are still facing a crisis in physics, maths and chemistry A-level’.<sup>xii</sup>
- Eric Frisk, of the National Association of Head Teachers has argued that ‘A-level results are at an all-time high and competition for university placements is extremely competitive... Consequently, students are taking “the safe” option when picking A-levels at the expense of subjects like physics and chemistry that could potentially be more rewarding to themselves and of greater value to the economy.’<sup>xiii</sup>

- Alan Wood, chief executive of Siemens has warned that ‘The growing shortage of scientists, engineers and science and maths teachers will have serious long-term consequences for the UK unless we get more young people to take the subjects at least to A-level.’<sup>xiv</sup>
- An ICM survey commissioned by the Association of Colleges has shown that many students feel that teachers steer them towards courses in which their school does well, ‘...rather than the subjects matching their needs’.<sup>xv</sup>
- Richard Brown, chief executive of the Council for Industry and Higher Education has suggested that the government should go so far as to pay students to take science A-levels to make up for the shortfall in science graduates.<sup>xvi</sup>

### Exam-driven courses

‘For arts subjects, questions have become more predictable and specifications much more tightly prescribed, while for science A-levels, long questions have given way to fragmented and easier ones and candidates are led through questions. Opportunities for analysis, creativity, extended argument and problem-solving have all declined. The exams have made our schools duller places.’

Anthony Seldon, Master of Wellington College<sup>xvii</sup>

The emphasis on grades has also become apparent in each course’s content. To date, the greatest shift from education to exam preparation at A-level has been the introduction of Curriculum 2000. Each course is now tightly targeted to optimising scores. The AS/A2 system divides each course into six modules with the three AS modules the easier ones. The new course allows students to take any single module at four points in the year, allowing one segment of knowledge to be learnt in one term and then disposed of – a process described as ‘learning to forget’.<sup>xviii</sup> This encourages constant attention to the assessment criteria in the upcoming exam(s). Furthermore, throughout the course, students are inundated with materials and advice on how to bolster their exam scores through targeted learning and mark maximisation techniques.

A key way to boost an overall grade has been to re-take AS modules (which are normally taken in the first year of the course) until they make up for any weaker performance that students incur in the harder A2 modules. Despite initial assurances from the QCA that the AS/A2 modular system would not lead to widespread re-sitting, in 2006 the watchdog itself noted that repeated test taking has become more common<sup>xix</sup> and most worryingly, that the most common re-sitting pattern is to retake AS modules,<sup>xx</sup> described by the QCA as covering ‘the less demanding material in an A-level course’.<sup>xxi</sup>

Much improvement in A-level grades has been attributed to this combination of learning to forget and opportunity for re-sits. The head master of Harrow, Barnaby Lenon commented that ‘The main reason for the improved A-level grades is not that the questions have got easier, but that students are allowed to sit parts of the A-level

[modules] at different stages of the course and they are allowed to re-sit modules in order to improve grades.<sup>xxii</sup>

Such changes have made it more difficult for universities to tell which students showing top grades on paper are really suitable for further study and which have achieved their results more through trial, error and cramming. This is not just about specific subject knowledge but general ability including language fluency. Only this week, Dr Bernard Lamb, a geneticist at Imperial College London, published some of the elementary spelling mistakes made by undergraduates on the course that he teaches.<sup>xxiii</sup> This disparity ties in with the growing discontinuity between having a good grasp of basic skills and gaining good grades at A-level, as Robert Coe's study found.<sup>xxiv</sup>

As a consequence, many universities now wish to review the results for all individual modules taken by students, including A-level modules and GCSE re-sits. The University of Reading, for example, has announced that from August 2007 it 'will receive the individual unit marks for each qualification'. Their explanation was that this was in order to '...allow universities to make fair decisions applicants must provide full information on their completed qualifications. For example, if an applicant achieved GCSE English Language grade D in June 2004, then re-sat the subject and achieved grade B in June 2005 then both attempts should be shown on the UCAS application.'<sup>xxv</sup>

This change, although necessary when the grades alone do not distinguish between students sufficiently, defeats one of the aims of modular courses which was to prevent one single exam on a particular day having too great an influence on a student's academic outcomes. Professor Alan Smithers of Buckingham University argued that the use of individual scores 'imputes more meaning to the percentages than they will bear. Would it be fair, for example, to award a university place on a 73 rather than 72? More, it would serve mainly to identify the punctilious.'<sup>xxvi</sup>

## The government's persistent denial that standards have altered

'Over 20 or 30 years, I don't think there is any doubt whatsoever that absolute A-level standards have fallen. They have edged south, continuously over a long period of time. I think all university academics and a good proportion of sixth-form teachers would agree with my assertion.'

Sir Peter Williams, appointed by Gordon Brown to review the teaching of maths, commenting on grade inflation in his own areas, maths and physics<sup>xxvii</sup>

Defying not only experts, but even their own advisors, ministers have stubbornly denied the charge of changing standards:

- Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families: '...the independent Qualifications and Curriculum Authority keeps standards under close review.'<sup>xxviii</sup>

- Jim Knight, Minister of State for Schools and Learners: ‘I am assured by our regulator, the QCA, that an A at A-level is something that young people should be just as proud of...I think, categorically, that there has been no grade inflation, that an A at A-level is worth just as much as it was twenty-five years ago when I got mine.’<sup>xxxix</sup>
- Andrew Adonis, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools and Learners: ‘I do not agree with the view that A levels are getting easier. The independent qualifications agency [QCA] keeps standards under review, and reports that they are being maintained.’<sup>xxx</sup>

## The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority – Guarding Standards?

‘We have a rigorous and independent exams regulator committed to safeguarding standards and grade integrity.’  
Ed Balls, Secretary of State for children, schools and families<sup>xxxi</sup>

As we have seen above, it is with constant reference to this ‘independent watchdog’, the QCA, that ministers reject these claims. However, a ‘guardian of standards’ is an inappropriate description of what the QCA actually does and this ‘commitment’ to standards referred to by Balls is highly questionable.

The QCA was established in 1997 to oversee the government’s National Curriculum and to establish regulatory guidelines for the examining boards. It reports directly to ministers and the education secretary appoints its board with striking leeway allowed for ministerial discretion.<sup>xxxii</sup> Therefore, the QCA is, in reality, neither independent of government appointment nor of the government’s agenda.

This problematic lack of independence came to the fore in October 2002 when it became clear that the new exam system had dramatically underestimated the increase in grades brought on by the move to the modular AS/A2 A-levels. The government allegedly pressured the QCA to ensure that results were kept at the same level as the previous year. In other words, the grades awarded to individual students were to be changed to satisfy a demand from the government for the statistics to add up.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The heads of the exam boards subsequently said that they would prefer to work with a truly independent QCA accountable to parliament, rather than to ministers.

### Conflicting Remit

The problem of having an exam regulator that is also the enforcer of government changes to the curriculum, is that it systematically ignores the shifts in curriculum standards brought about by its own work. This flaw is exemplified in its own attempts to review standards. These exercises are designed to be ‘... a rolling programme of reviews on a five-year cycle to ensure examination demands and grade standards are being maintained in all major subjects’. These include physics, chemistry, history, French and German. These reviews are designed to ensure that standards remain the same not only over time, but also between the competing examining boards which award A level qualifications.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The chosen method in these reviews is to use a number of teachers and academic reviewers (between three and twenty) to look over two sets of examination materials (including scripts, syllabuses and marking schemes). One set of scripts from 5 years ago is examined (as well as, in some cases, ten and twenty years ago) and one set from the most recent exam. The reviewers examine scripts from the borderlines of two grades – between A and B, and, E and fail. In other words, the scripts that have just reached the best grade and those that have just avoided receiving a fail. The reviewers are asked to judge whether the standards of the scripts have remained at the expected level using a multiple-choice key.

It is not clear exactly how the various opinions of the teachers are combined to form the conclusion in each report, which is descriptive rather than quantitative. However, the tendency is for the conclusions to argue that the courses have changed significantly (so that they cannot be compared), but that standards have remained broadly the same (see, for example, the conclusions of the physics review).<sup>xxxv</sup>

Sometimes the conclusions do flag up potential problems. One study of A-level mathematics concluded that ‘There was... some cause for concern about standards at both grades in OCR in 1998, which were judged below expectation and below that required in 1995.’<sup>xxxvi</sup> Nevertheless, a concern voiced in a review is frequently left unacknowledged by ministers, since the government has the prerogative to pick and choose the warnings.

Instead of the QCA, it was the media which ultimately compelled the government to commission an inquiry into A-level standards conducted by former HMCI Mike Tomlinson following the A-level ‘grade-fixing fiasco’. The inquiry reported in 2002 that, amongst other recommendations, the QCA needed an independent committee to review and advise publicly on whether standards were being maintained. Charles Clarke, then education secretary, agreed to this and enacted it.

From then on many of the government’s assurances of the QCA’s objectivity about exam results have been based on the role of independent scrutiny by external experts. Ed Balls recently argued that ‘a panel of independent international experts has concluded that no exam system is so tightly managed as our A-levels’.<sup>xxxvii</sup> This refers to a one-off panel which reported on the validity of exams in 2002, succeeded by the continuous reporting panel agreed to by education secretary at the time, Charles Clarke.

However what this international independent panel, the Independent Committee on Examination Standards, is prepared to analyse is severely limited in scope by what it considers examinable. It has claimed that there is no point in examining whether standards have been maintained because the curriculum has been altered to such an extent:

‘Over the longer term, it makes little sense in many subjects to ask whether examination standards have been maintained since the subjects themselves have changed so much.’<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The 2002 panel even concluded: ‘There is no scientific way to determine in retrospect whether standards have been maintained. Therefore, attention should be placed on ensuring the accuracy, validity and fairness of the system from now on.’<sup>xxxix</sup>

Essentially, this argues that no two exams can ever be compared so long as they have different assessment criteria or a different curriculum. The implication is that it is impossible to actually have objective knowledge of standards at all, so there is no point in even looking for them. Therefore, safeguarding standards is impossible. In fact, however, so long as both a past exam and a current exam are measured against criteria which are kept both constant and independent, comparative assessment is possible. There are, of course, many criteria upon which to judge an exam – for example, whether they indicate aptitude for further study in that subject, or proficiency at a certain skill.

Robert Coe, whose research we discussed earlier, used a very broad set of criteria to compare exams from different years. He deduced that A-level exams had become less demanding in terms of his selected criteria. In other words, contrary to the claims of the QCA’s independent panel, it is certainly possible to test which exams have higher standards, so long as the ultimate function of exams has been determined. The problem is that neither the QCA, nor its independent panel, appear to know what the function of A-level exams is. Without any functional criteria to judge the A-levels, they have no measure to judge the standards of A-levels against each other.

This would seem to make both the work of the standards panel, and the QCA’s assurance that standards are being upheld redundant. The QCA has the perfect alibi for failing to maintain standards: the subjects in the curriculum change so often as to make them incomparable. Ironically, the QCA does not even believe its own alibi. Ken Boston, head of the QCA, continues to assure us that ‘the height of the hurdle’ is being maintained, defying their own independent panel’s warning that this stability is impossible.<sup>xi</sup> In this respect, the QCA and the government are having their cake and eating it. The public is assured that standards are being maintained, whilst simultaneously being informed that standards cannot be maintained.

It is also worth noting that the ‘ongoing’ international panel has quietly ceased operation since 2005 when the chair, Barry McGaw, and another of the three-member committee, stood down.<sup>xli</sup> Since then, despite the rhetoric, the QCA has been carrying on unmonitored by any independent scrutiny at all.

## What are A-levels for?

Our fear is that the incremental change in assessment and the curriculum at A-level is moving further and further away from what should be the aims of A-level courses:

- Providing intellectual stimulus, broadening knowledge and preparation for adult life
- Preparation for university courses
- Laying the foundations for adult employment



As we have seen, an expanding body of evidence shows that A-levels are increasingly diverging from these aims. Ed Balls states simplistically that ‘It is a sign of success that we have more young people taking A-levels and going on to university or college.’<sup>xliii</sup> The problem is that more students are going to university or college, but, as we have seen, the A-level courses are not preparing these students for further education. In fact, this policy goal towards greater ‘access’ to further education has driven A-level courses away from the preparation people need to succeed at university and beyond. In short, the sheer number of people going to university has become more important to the government than the utility of the subjects they study. Thus a generation shackled by student debt for no long-term purpose is preferable to young people without degrees. In this respect, accusations of elitism levelled at critics of A-level standards are particularly unfair. Where the elitism actually lies is in the government’s ill-conceived message that having a degree is the only true path to success and prosperity in adult life.

Mike Tomlinson’s conclusion that A-levels no longer ‘...do the job which they were initially set out to do,’<sup>xliiii</sup> is quite apt: they increasingly prepare the government for the next election rather than students for the future.

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<sup>i</sup> Editorial by Ed Balls, Times Education Supplement, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007

<sup>ii</sup> For example the Pre-U, Sunday Times, November 26<sup>th</sup> 2006  
[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/education/article649960.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article649960.ece)

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.cemcentre.org/documents/CEM%20Extra/SpecialInterests/Exams/ONS%20report%20on%20changes%20at%20GCSE%20&%20A-level.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Guardian, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2006 <http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,1844356,00.html>

<sup>v</sup> Table 15, <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000703/index.shtml>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/wear/3626496.stm>; full figures for variations between subjects up to 2006 are available at <http://www.alisproject.org/Documents/Alis/Research/A-Level%20Subject%20Difficulties.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Guardian, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2007 <http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,2064608,00.html>

<sup>viii</sup> Guardian, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2005 <http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,1548150,00.html>

<sup>ix</sup> *ibid*

<sup>x</sup> Guardian, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2007 <http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,2142843,00.html>

<sup>xi</sup> BBC News 18th August 2005 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4162230.stm>

<sup>xii</sup> BBC News 18th August 2005 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4162230.stm>

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,1707027,00.html>

<sup>xiv</sup> Guardian, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2006 <http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,1707027,00.html>

<sup>xv</sup> Guardian, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 <http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,1885692,00.html>

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- <sup>xvi</sup> Telegraph 13<sup>th</sup> April 2007  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/04/12/nmaths12.xml>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Seldon, A., Spectator, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2005  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3724/is\\_200506/ai\\_n14902185/pg\\_3](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3724/is_200506/ai_n14902185/pg_3)
- <sup>xviii</sup> Mansell, W., Education by Numbers: The Tyranny of Testing, Politicos: London: 2007, p148
- <sup>xix</sup> *ibid*, p149 – information accessed under the Freedom of Information Act
- <sup>xx</sup> QCA meeting of the board, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2007
- <sup>xxi</sup> BBC News, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2002 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/2498431.stm>
- <sup>xxii</sup> Guardian, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006 <http://education.guardian.co.uk/alevels/story/0,,1936029,00.html>
- <sup>xxiii</sup> BBC News, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/6942989.stm>
- <sup>xxiv</sup> <http://www.cemcentre.org/documents/CEM%20Extra/SpecialInterests/Exams/ONS%20report%20on%20changes%20at%20GCSE%20&%20A-level.pdf>
- <sup>xxv</sup> [http://www.reading.ac.uk/Student\\_Recruitment/advisors/news/Cashing%20in%20GCE%20Module%20results.htm](http://www.reading.ac.uk/Student_Recruitment/advisors/news/Cashing%20in%20GCE%20Module%20results.htm)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Smithers, A., (2005), *Do School Exams Need Reforming?*, Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Observer, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2007, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,2126864,00.html>
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Editorial by Ed Balls, Times Education Supplement, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007
- <sup>xxix</sup> Commenting on Radio 4's Today programme, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2007  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/ram/today2\\_seven\\_20070627.ram](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/ram/today2_seven_20070627.ram) (starting 12 minutes, 25 seconds in)
- <sup>xxx</sup> Interview, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2006, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page10560.asp>
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Editorial by Ed Balls, Times Education Supplement, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007
- <sup>xxxii</sup> A surprisingly loose and subjective definition of the people suitable for the QCA board positions is provided by the 1997 Education Act (section 21), allowing the Secretary of State to choose almost anyone at their whim – the key phrase here is ‘appear to him’ which removes any requirement for objectivity from the decision:

(4) The Secretary of State shall include among the members of the Authority -

(a) persons who appear to him to have experience of, and to have shown capacity in, the provision of education, or to have held, and to have shown capacity in, any position carrying responsibility for the provision of education;

(b) persons who appear to him to have experience of, and to have shown capacity in, the provision of training or to have held, and to have shown capacity in, any position carrying responsibility for the provision of training; and

(c) persons who appear to him to have experience of, and to have shown capacity in, industrial, commercial or financial matters or the practice of any profession.

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xxxiii See the Third Report from the Select Committee on Education and Skills for the official account: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmmeduski/153/15314.htm>

xxxiv [http://www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_4074.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_4074.aspx)

xxxv [http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/12888\\_physicsreport.pdf](http://www.qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/12888_physicsreport.pdf)

xxxvi By way of comparison, Robert Coe's figures from the TDA analysis suggested that mathematics grades had been inflated by around two-fifths of a grade over that period. Thus both techniques (in this particular case) acknowledged a problem: the QCA found 'concerns' that grades had become inflated (on one exam board) while Coe's study can tell us by how much.

xxxvii Editorial by Ed Balls, Times Education Supplement, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007

xxxviii Examination Standards: Report of the Independent Committee to QCA, December 2004, p29

xxxix QCA's International Expert Panel's executive summary, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2002

xl FE News, 2004, <http://www.fenews.co.uk/newsview.asp?n=1793>

xli [QCA] <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/cm060109/text/60109107.htm>

xlii Editorial by Ed Balls, Times Education Supplement, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007

xliii Times Education Supplement, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2007 <http://www.tes.co.uk/2417139>