

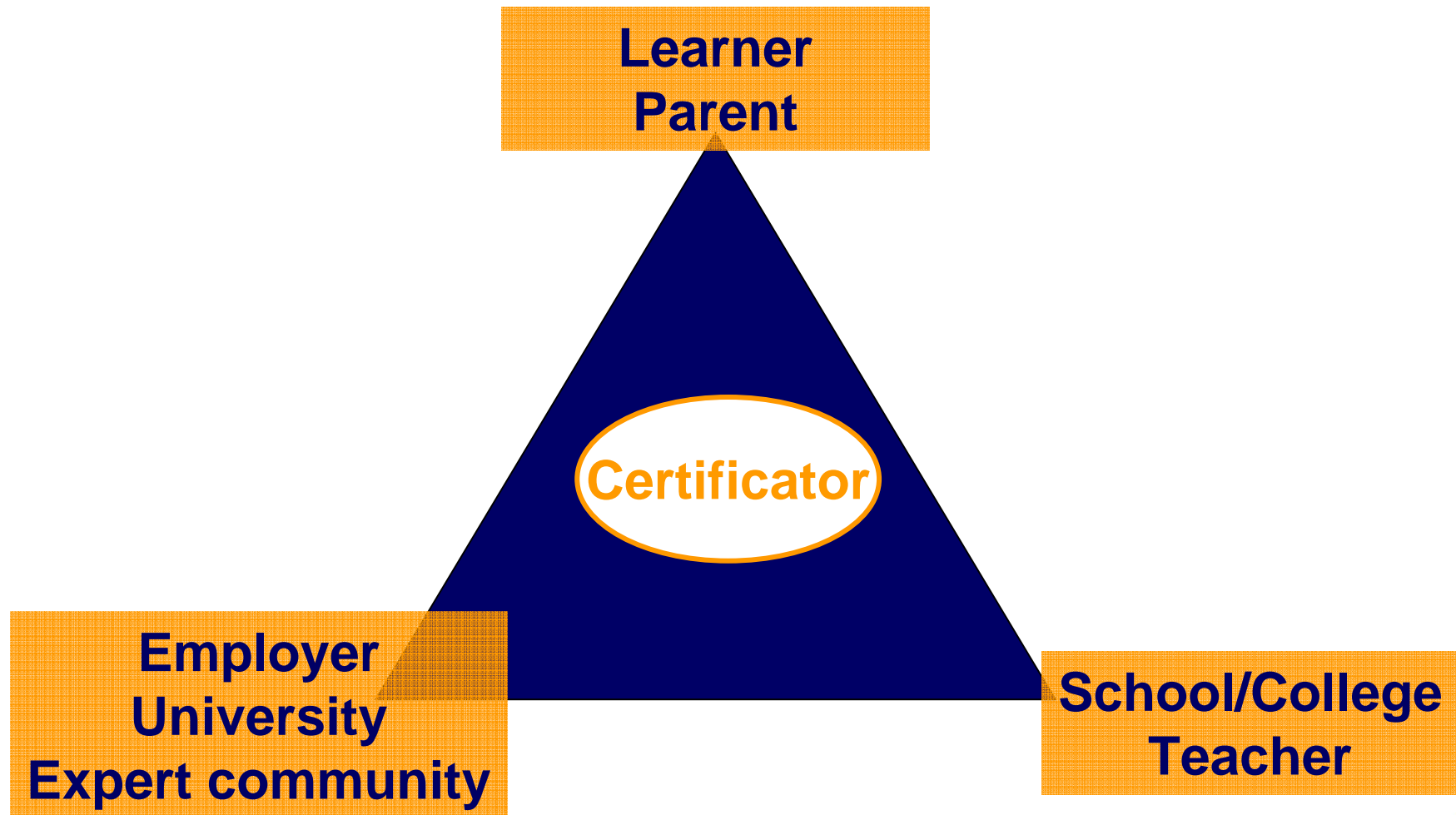
# Qualifications in a Healthy Ecosystem

**Greg Watson, Chief Executive, OCR**

# What's a qualification?

A portable record  
of knowledge or skills acquired  
independently and fairly assessed  
to a defined standard  
and valued for certain purposes  
by someone else

# Who “owns” a qualification?



# Public policy and qualifications

**Over two decades, qualifications have become:**

- **A tool of economic policy**
- **A measure of institutions and teachers**
- **A measure of policy success**
- **A measure of international competitiveness**
- **A means of protecting the learner**
- **A focal point of criticism of UK education**

# Public policy and qualifications 2009

Diagram one – Primary influences and funding flows for the qualifications system in England

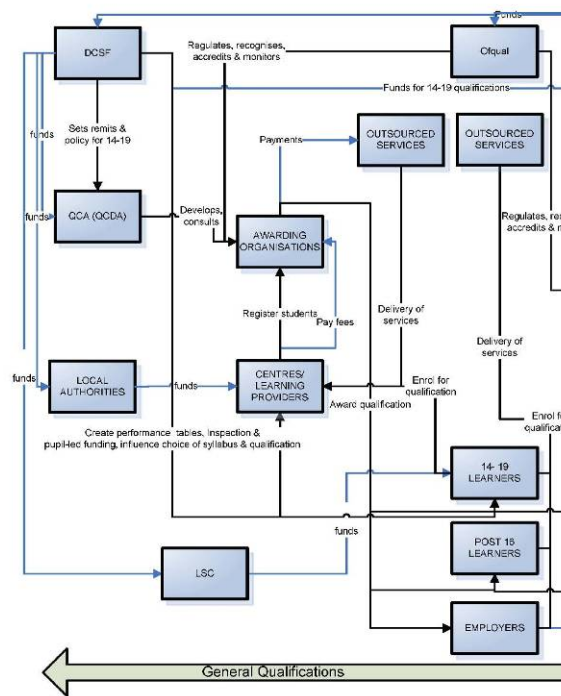
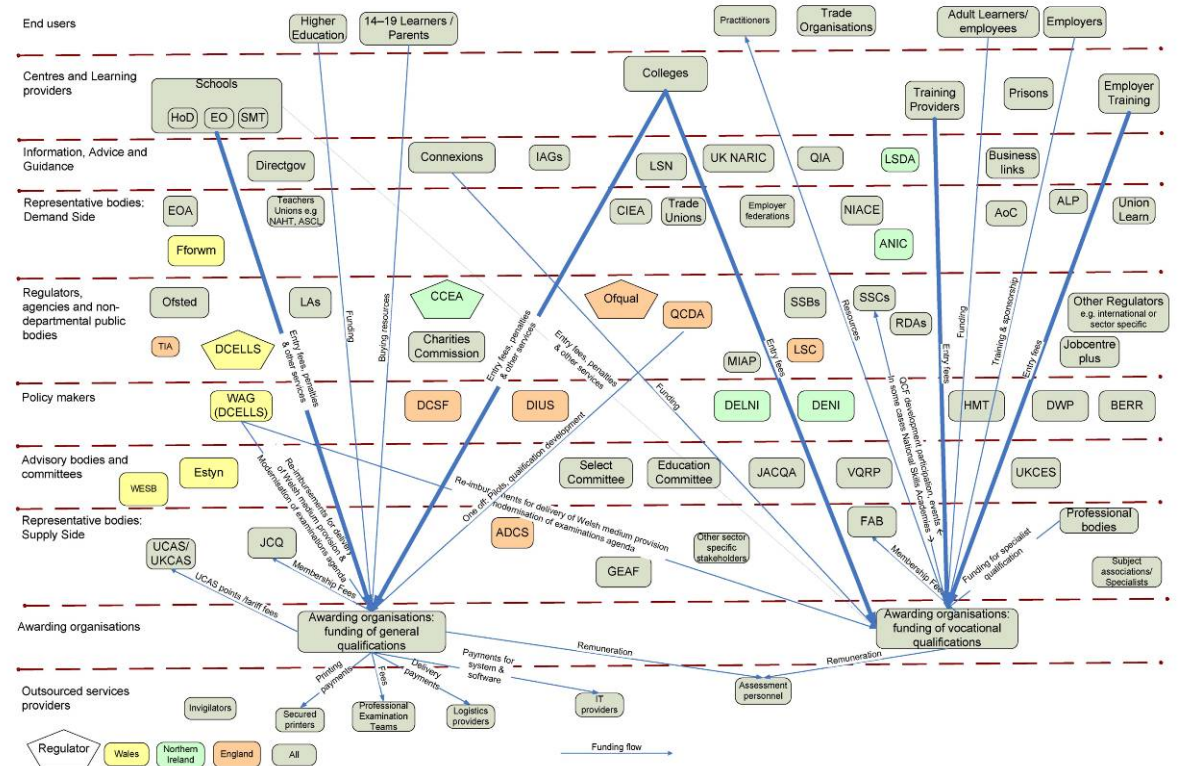


Diagram two – Funding flows for awarding organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland



Source: PWC mapping study for Ofqual 2009

**Six Tales:  
Three Good,  
Three Bad**





# RSA CLAIT

- **Late 1980s – PCs in the workplace**
- **Former typists return to work**
- **Enterprising colleges teach first IT courses**
- **Exam board spots trend**
- **Employers convened to help specify standards**
- **3 million learners to date**





# OCR Nationals

- **Early 21<sup>st</sup> century**
- **Growth in pre-19 vocational education**
- **Loss of GNVQ in schools**
- **Frustration at adapted adult qualifications**
- **Schools/colleges and employers as specifiers**
- **Rapid second iteration where qualifications unsatisfactory**
- **Unprecedented growth within first five years**







# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Science

- **Widespread concern about disengagement of 14-16-year-olds**
- **University-based research**
- **Radical change in teaching approach**
- **Genuine pilot and evaluation**
- **Engagement effect proven**
- **Teacher support as critical success factor**





# Common Themes

- **A range of initial triggers**
- **Any of the “players” can make the first move**
- **Design has to be a shared enterprise**
- **Trade-offs between different objectives**
- **Teaching and learning dimension present from the start**
- **Careful piloting optimises outcome**



# NVQs

- **Early 1990s**
- **Policy drive to raise occupational skills across the economy**
- **Employer representative bodies commissioned as specifiers**
- **Common template**
- **Over-complex specifications, problems for learners, trainers and employers**
- **Many sectors abandoned quickly, others later**
- **Success in a few sectors**



# Curriculum 2000 A Levels

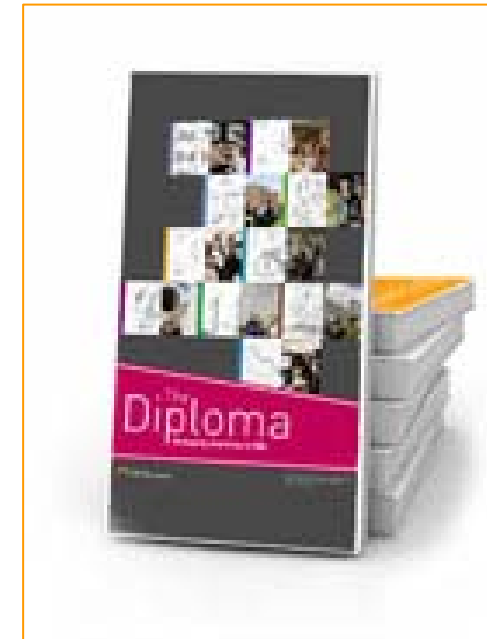
- Late 1990s
- Policy drive to standardise on modular assessment
- Crucial decisions on units and weighting taken by ministers
- Early problems with deliverability and burden
- Lack of school and college involvement
- Crisis in 2002, ostensibly about standards, but borne of underlying frustrations





# Diplomas

- **Early 21<sup>st</sup> century**
- **Policy drive to create highly valued vocational education**
- **Employer/HE committees (DDPs) commissioned as specifiers**
- **Linear process – curriculum, then assessment, then teaching**
- **Lack of school and college involvement**
- **Complex programme to deliver**
- **Take-up well below targets**

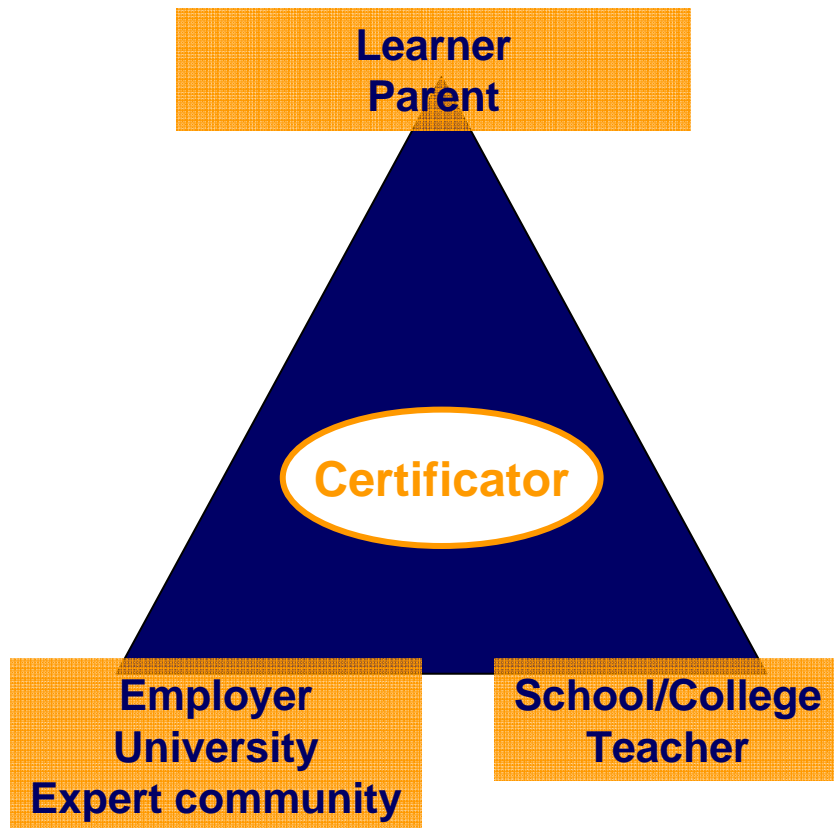




# Common Themes

- **Policy initiative**
- **Large-scale ambitions, therefore high political stakes**
- **Common design constraints**
- **Over-specification of detail**
- **Process driven by “expert” corner of triangle**
- **Assessment problematic, in terms of standards and cost/complexity**
- **Teachers least involved stakeholders**

# Conclusions



- **Successful qualifications result from careful trade-offs between stakeholders**
- **Curriculum, assessment and pedagogy need to develop sympathetically**
- **Piloting allows refinement before large scale use**
- **Excessive political stakes mitigate against trade-offs, collaborative development and disciplined piloting**
- **Future policy-making and regulation in this area should learn from success**