

# Developing New GCSEs, A levels and AS Qualifications for First Teaching in 2016 – Part 3

# covering:

GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications Religious studies

November 2014

Ofqual/14/5548

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## **Executive summary**

New GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications are being introduced in England. The new qualifications are being introduced in three phases, with the first new qualifications being taught from September 2015. This consultation covers GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies which, along with a number of other subjects, are due to be taught from 2016. This consultation should be read in conjunction with our earlier consultation on some of the other subjects that will be taught from September 2016: Developing new GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications for first teaching in 2016 – Part 2.

#### Balance of exam and non-exam assessment

We are applying a common set of principles to all GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications as they are reformed. Where subject content can be validly assessed by exams, set and marked by exam boards, this should be the default method of assessment. Where other forms of assessment must be used to assess essential subject skills or knowledge, the non-exam assessment must:

- (a) strike a balance between valid assessment of essential knowledge and skills, sound assessment practice and manageability;
- (b) be designed to fit the requirements of the particular subject, including the relative weighting of exams and other components assigned to it;
- (c) be designed so that the qualification is not easily distorted by external pressures from the wider system.

Having considered the proposed subject content for GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies and applied our principles, we are of the view that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> New GCSEs to be taught from 2015 – English language, English literature, mathematics. New A levels and AS qualifications to be taught from 2015 – English language and literature, English language, English literature, physics, chemistry, biology, art and design, computer science, sociology, economics, history, business, psychology.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> New GCSEs to be taught from 2016 – French, German, Spanish, ancient languages, history, geography, science, biology, chemistry, physics, art and design, dance, music, computer science, physical education, drama, religious studies, citizenship studies, design and technology, cooking and nutrition. New A levels and AS qualifications to be taught from 2016 – modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics, geography, dance, music, physical education, drama and theatre, religious studies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/developing-new-qualifications-for-2016-part-2

the subject content for each of these qualifications can be validly assessed by exams, set and marked by exam boards.

#### **Tiering**

We have previously confirmed that new GCSEs should only be tiered where a single set of assessments cannot in a valid and manageable way assess students across the full ability range. We propose that GCSE religious studies should be untiered.

#### **Assessment objectives**

We have worked with subject and assessment experts to develop better assessment objectives for the new qualifications, to make sure they are as clear, specific and precise as possible and cover the full range of abilities for the subject. We are seeking feedback on the proposed assessment objectives and their weightings together with our other proposals.

#### How to respond

If you have an interest in GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications we hope you will respond to this consultation. The closing date for responses to this consultation is 5th January 2015.

You can respond to this consultation in one of the following ways:

- Complete the online response at: <a href="http://surveys.ofqual.gov.uk/s3/developing-new-qualifications-for-first-teaching-in-2016-part-3">http://surveys.ofqual.gov.uk/s3/developing-new-qualifications-for-first-teaching-in-2016-part-3</a>.
- Email your response to <u>consultations@ofqual.gov.uk</u>
  Please include the consultation title (GCSE, A level and AS qualification subject requirements) in the subject line of the email and make clear who you are and in what capacity you are responding.
- Post your response to: GCSE, A level and AS Qualification Subject
   Requirements, Ofqual, Spring Place, Herald Avenue, Coventry, CV5 6UB.

#### **Evaluating the responses**

To evaluate responses properly, we need to know who is responding to the consultation and in what capacity. We will only consider your response if you complete the information page.

A third party will evaluate the responses on our behalf. Any personal data (such as your name, address and any other identifying information) will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and our standard terms and conditions.

We will publish the evaluation of responses. Please note that we may publish all or part of your response unless you tell us (in your answer to the confidentiality question) that you want us to treat your response as confidential. If you tell us you wish your response to be treated as confidential, we will not include your details in any published list of respondents, although we may quote from your response anonymously.

#### 1. Introduction

#### The scope of this consultation

- 1.1 In this consultation we are seeking views on the design, assessment arrangements and assessment objectives for GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies.
- 1.2 The Department for Education (DfE) is consulting in parallel on the subject content for the qualifications. If you wish to comment on the proposed content for GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies please respond to that consultation. We encourage you to read the proposed content before you respond to this consultation on assessment arrangements, as our proposals relate to qualifications designed to support the teaching and assessment of that content.
- 1.3 We will make decisions on the structure and assessment of religious studies qualifications in light of responses to this consultation. We will then consult on the technical regulatory requirements that exam boards wishing to design, deliver and award the qualifications must meet.
- 1.4 It is intended that the exam boards will develop the new qualifications ready for first teaching by schools and colleges from September 2016.<sup>5</sup> The exam boards' specifications, to be taught from that date, should be available to schools and colleges from autumn 2015.
- 1.5 We do not repeat here the reasons why GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications are being reformed, the options about the qualifications' structure and assessments we have considered, or the full range of decisions we have already taken. This information can be found on our website.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.6 We set out in Appendix 1 of our September consultation<sup>7</sup> some of the documents relating to the background to these important reforms and progress

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> www.education.gov.uk/consultations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> New GCSEs in French, German, Spanish, ancient languages, history, geography, science, biology, chemistry, physics, art and design, dance, music, computer science, physical education, drama, religious studies, citizenship studies, design and technology, cooking and nutrition will be taught first from 2016. New A levels and AS qualifications in modern foreign languages, ancient languages, mathematics, further mathematics, geography, dance, music, physical education, drama and theatre, and religious studies will also be taught first from 2016.

 $<sup>^{6}\</sup> www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-and-assessments/qualification-reform$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/developing-new-qualifications-for-2016-part-2

so far. Appendix 1 of our September consultation also sets out information on the purpose and key features of reformed GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications.

- 1.7 Our proposals for assessment in this subject are based on the principles we have applied in other subjects.
- 1.8 For further details on the assessment of new GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications, please see our earlier consultation: Developing new GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications for first teaching in 2016 – Part 2.8

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/developing-new-qualifications-for-2016-part-2

# 2. Subject-specific proposals

#### Religious studies

#### **GCSE**

2.1 The DfE is consulting on the content for GCSEs in religious studies.9

#### **Proposed assessment arrangements**

2.2 In current GCSEs in religious studies all assessment is by exam. Although the proposed content requirements for this subject are notably different from the current ones, these differences relate to the breadth and depth of the knowledge and understanding that students must demonstrate in this subject. The proposed content does not introduce any essential aspects of the subject that could not validly be assessed by examinations alone. We therefore propose that there should be no non-exam assessment in new GCSEs in religious studies.

#### **Tiering**

2.3 Currently GCSEs in religious studies are not tiered. We propose that the new GCSEs in religious studies should not be tiered either.

#### **Proposed assessment objectives**

2.4 The proposed assessment objectives are clearer than the current ones for the subject. We propose that the current permitted weighting ranges should be replaced with an absolute weighting to enhance comparability between different qualifications in this subject.

Assess	ment objectives	Weighting
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion, including:  similarities and differences between and within religions and beliefs;	50%
	the nature of religious beliefs and teachings and their impact on individuals, communities and societies.	
AO2	Analyse and evaluate questions and issues related to	50%

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> www.education.gov.uk/consultations

religious beliefs, values and teachings:	
<ul> <li>using and applying knowledge and understanding of religions;</li> </ul>	
<ul> <li>constructing well-informed and balanced arguments.</li> </ul>	

#### **Current assessment objectives**

Assess	ment objectives	Weighting
AO1	Describe, explain and analyse, using knowledge and	50%
	understanding.	
AO2	Use evidence and reasoned argument to express and	50%
	evaluate personal responses, informed insights and	
	differing viewpoints.	

#### **Consultation questions:**

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in religious studies should not be tiered?

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in religious studies?

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in religious studies?

Question 5: Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?

#### A levels and AS qualifications

2.5 The DfE is consulting on the content for A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> www.education.gov.uk/consultations

#### **Proposed assessment arrangements**

2.6 In current A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies, all assessment is by exam. As with the GCSE, the proposed new content specifies the required knowledge, understanding and skills required in more detail, but we believe all aspects could be validly assessed by examination. We propose that there should be no non-exam assessment in new A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies.

#### **Proposed assessment objectives**

2.7 The proposed assessment objectives specify more clearly than the current ones the core abilities for the subject. They promote comparability through the use of fixed weightings rather than ranges and there is a difference in weighting between A levels and AS qualifications to help to promote differentiation. In addition, a significant weighting is proposed for each assessment objective.

Asses	sment objectives	Weig	hting
		AS level	A level
AO1	<ul> <li>Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of religion, including:</li> <li>religious belief, thought and relevant issues;</li> <li>explaining the nature of religious beliefs and teachings and their impact</li> </ul>	50%	40%
	on individuals, communities and societies;  making connections across different aspects of the study of religion and belief		
AO2	<ul> <li>Analyse and critically evaluate questions and issues related to religious beliefs, values and teachings:</li> <li>applying knowledge and understanding of religion;</li> <li>using evidence and reasoning;</li> <li>constructing well-informed and</li> </ul>	50%	60%
	balanced arguments.		

#### **Current assessment objectives**

	Assessment objectives		Weighting	
		AS	A2	A level
AO1	Select and demonstrate clearly relevant knowledge and understanding through the use of evidence, examples and correct language and terminology appropriate to the course of study.	65-75%	55-65%	60-70%
	In addition, for synoptic assessment, A level learners should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the connections between different elements of their course of study.			
AO2	Critically evaluate and justify a point of view through the use of evidence and reasoned argument.  In addition, for synoptic assessment, A level learners should relate elements of their course of study to their broader context and to aspects of human experience.	25-35%	35-45%	30-40%

#### **Consultation questions:**

Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that AS qualifications in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that A levels in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

Question 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies?

Question 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for AS qualifications in religious studies?

Question 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for A levels in religious studies?

Question 11: Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?

## 3. Equality analysis

#### Ofqual's role, objectives and duties

3.1 We are subject to the public sector equality duty. We have set out in appendix 1 how this duty interacts with our statutory objectives and other duties.

# Equality impact analysis relating to proposed changes to GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications

- 3.2 We have considered the potential impact on students who share protected characteristics<sup>11</sup> of the application of the principles and features that will apply to all new GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications. Our equality impact analyses for our earlier consultations on GCSE, A level and AS qualification reform are therefore of interest and we encourage you to read them.<sup>12</sup>
- 3.3 We do not repeat here all of the evidence we have considered, as this can be found in our earlier reports. We focus instead on the specific issues that are relevant to the subject on which we are now consulting.
- 3.4 During this consultation we will continue to seek and consider evidence and feedback to our proposals that might help us identify any potential subjectspecific impacts on students who share a protected characteristic. We will also seek views from interested groups during the period of this consultation, including the Access Consultation Forum and our External Advisory Group for Equalities.
- 3.5 Exam boards and other awarding organisations are required to consider the accessibility of their qualifications at design stage and to remove any unjustifiable barriers.

 $\underline{www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-06-18-equality-analysis-of-the-a-level-reform-consultation.pdf} \\ \underline{comment.ofqual.gov.uk/developing-new-qualifications-for-2016}$ 

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> For the purposes of the public sector equality duty, the protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> www.ofqual.gov.uk/documents/equality-analysis-report-on-reforms-to-gcses-from-2015

#### **Assessment arrangements**

#### GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies

- 3.6 We have proposed that new GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies shall not be tiered and that all assessment shall be by examination. We have also proposed changes to the current assessment objectives.
- 3.7 We have not identified any negative impacts on students who share protected characteristics resulting from our proposals with respect to GCSE religious studies.
- 3.8 Nor have we identified any negative impacts on such students which would result from our proposals with respect to A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies.
- 3.9 Any issues concerned with the proposed content will be considered by the DfE who will be carrying out their own Equalities Impact Analysis on their subject content proposals.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Consultation questions**

Question 12: We have not identified any ways in which the proposed requirements for reformed GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified? If so, what are they?

Question 13: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts.

Question 14: Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

www.education.gov.uk/consultations

# 4. Responding to the consultation

#### Your details

To evaluate responses properly, we need to know who is responding to the consultation and in what capacity. We will therefore only consider your response if you complete the following information section.

We will publish our evaluation of responses. Please note that we may publish all or part of your response unless you tell us (in your answer to the confidentiality question) that you want us to treat your response as confidential. If you tell us you wish your response to be treated as confidential, we will not include your details in any published list of respondents, although we may quote from your response anonymously.

any published list of respondents, although we may quote from your response anonymously.
Please answer all questions marked with a star*
Name*
Position*
Organisation name (if applicable)*
organisation name (ii applicable)
Address
Email
Talanhana
Telephone

Would you like us to treat your response as confidential?*
If you answer yes, we will not include your details in any list of people or organisations that responded to the consultation.
() Yes () No
Is this a personal response or an official response on behalf of your organisation?*
() Personal response (Please answer the question 'If you ticked 'personal views''
() Official response (Please answer the question 'Type of responding organisation')
If you ticked 'Personal views' which of the following are you?  ( ) Student
() Parent or carer
() Teacher (but responding in a personal capacity)
() Other, including general public (Please state below)
If you ticked 'Official response from an organisation/group', please respond accordingly:
Type of responding organisation*
( ) Awarding organisation
( ) Local authority
() School or college (please answer the question below)
() Academy chain
() Private training provider
() University or other higher education institution

() Other representative or interest group (please answer the question below)

() Employer

School or college type
() Comprehensive or non-selective academy
() State selective or selective academy
() Independent
() Special school
() Further education college
() Sixth form college
() Other (please state below)
Type of representative group or interest group
() Group of awarding organisations
() Union
() Employer or business representative group
() Subject association or learned society
() Equality organisation or group
() School, college or teacher representative group
() Other (please state below)
Nation*
() England
() Wales
() Northern Ireland
() Scotland
() Other EU country:
() Non-EU country:

How did you find out about this consultation?
() Our newsletter or another one of our communications
() Our website
() Internet search
() Other
May we contact you for further information?
() Yes () No

# **Questions**

### GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious studies

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?

() Strongly agree
() Agree
() Neither agree nor disagree
() Disagree
() Strongly disagree
Please give reasons for your answer
Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that GCSEs in religious studies should not be tiered?
() Strongly agree
() Agree
() Neither agree nor disagree
<ul><li>( ) Neither agree nor disagree</li><li>( ) Disagree</li><li>( ) Strongly disagree</li></ul>
( ) Disagree
( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree
( ) Disagree ( ) Strongly disagree

# Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in religious studies?

) Strongly agree
) Agree
) Neither agree nor disagree
) Disagree
) Strongly disagree
Please give reasons for your answer
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?  ) Strongly agree
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?  ) Strongly agree  ) Agree
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?  ) Strongly agree  ) Agree  ) Neither agree nor disagree
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?  ) Strongly agree  ) Agree  ) Neither agree nor disagree  ) Disagree
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?  ) Strongly agree  ) Agree  ) Neither agree nor disagree  ) Disagree  ) Strongly disagree
Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed veightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for GCSEs in eligious studies?  ) Strongly agree  ) Agree  ) Neither agree nor disagree  ) Disagree  ) Strongly disagree  Please give reasons for your answer

Question 5: Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of this subject?
() Yes () No
Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that AS qualifications in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?
() Strongly agree
() Agree
() Neither agree nor disagree
() Disagree
() Strongly disagree
Please give reasons for your answer
Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that A levels in religious studies should be assessed entirely by exam?
() Strongly agree
() Agree
() Neither agree nor disagree
() Disagree
() Strongly disagree
Please give reasons for your answer

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Question 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate for A levels and AS qualifications is religious studies?	n
() Strongly agree	
() Agree	
() Neither agree nor disagree	
() Disagree	
() Strongly disagree	
Please give reasons for your answer	
Question 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for AS qualification religious studies?	ons
() Strongly agree	
() Agree	
() Neither agree nor disagree	
() Disagree	
() Strongly disagree	
Please give reasons for your answer	

# Question 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate for A levels in religious studies?

() Stron	gly agree
() Agree	
() Neithe	er agree nor disagree
() Disag	ree
() Stron	gly disagree
Please g	give reasons for your answer
Questio this sub	on 11: Do you have any further comments relating to the assessment of pject?
() Yes	( ) No

Question 12: We have not identified any ways in which the proposed

requirements for reformed GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications in religious

# **Equality impact**

() Yes

() No

studies would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified? If so, what are they?

() Yes () No

Question 13: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts.

() Yes () No

Question 14: Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?


# Accessibility of our consultations

We are looking at how we provide accessible versions of our consultations and would appreciate it if you could spare a few moments to answer the following questions. Your answers to these questions will not be considered as part of the consultation and will not be released to any third-parties.

Do you have any special requirements to enable you to read our consultations? (For example screen reader, large text, and so on)
( ) Yes ( ) No
Which of the following do you currently use to access our consultation
documents? (Select all that apply)
() Screen reader / text-to-speech software
() Braille reader
() Screen magnifier
() Speech to text software
() Motor assistance (blow-suck tube, mouth stick, etc.)
( ) Other
Which of the following document formats would meet your needs for accessing our consultations? (Select all that apply)
( ) A standard PDF
() Accessible web pages
() Large type PDF (16 point text)
() Large-type word document (16 point text)
( ) eBook (Kindle, iBooks or similar format)
() Braille document

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() Spoken document
( ) Other
How many of our consultations have you read in the last 12 months?
()1
()2
()3
()4
()5
() More than 5

# **Appendix 1**

#### Ofqual's role, objectives and duties

Our statutory objectives include the qualifications standards objective, which is to secure that the qualifications we regulate:

- (a) give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding; and
- (b) indicate
  - i. a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable regulated qualifications; and
  - ii. a consistent level of attainment (but not over time) between qualifications we regulate and comparable qualifications (including those awarded outside of the UK) which we do not regulate.

We must therefore regulate so that qualifications properly differentiate between students who have demonstrated they have the knowledge, skills and understanding required to attain the qualification and those who have not.

We also have a duty under the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to have regard to the reasonable requirements of relevant students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, of employers and of the higher education sector, and to aspects of government policy when so directed by the Secretary of State.

As a public body we are subject to the public sector equality duty (PSED).<sup>14</sup> This duty requires us to have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct which is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The exam boards that design, deliver and award GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications are required by the Equality Act, among other things, to make

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Equality Act 2010, section 149

reasonable adjustments for disabled people taking their qualifications, except where we have specified that such adjustments should not be made.

When we decide whether such adjustments should not be made, we must have regard to:

- (a) the need to minimise the extent to which disabled persons are disadvantaged in attaining the qualification because of their disabilities;
- (b) the need to secure that the qualification gives a reliable indication of the knowledge, skills and understanding of a person upon whom it is conferred;
- (c) the need to maintain public confidence in the qualification.

Legislation therefore sets out a framework within which we must operate. We are subject to a number of duties and we must aim to achieve a number of objectives. These different duties and objectives can, from time to time, conflict with each other. For example, if we regulate to secure that a qualification gives a reliable indication of a student's knowledge, skills and understanding, a student who has not been able to demonstrate the required knowledge, skills and/or understanding will not be awarded the qualification. A person may finding it more difficult, or impossible, to demonstrate the required knowledge, skills and/or understanding because they have a protected characteristic. This could put them at a disadvantage relative to others who have been awarded the qualification. It is not always possible for us to regulate so that we can both secure that qualifications give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding and advance equality between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. We must review all the available evidence and actively consider all the available options before coming to a final, rational decision.

Qualifications cannot be used to mitigate inequalities or unfairness in the education system or in society more widely than might affect, for example, students' preparedness to take the qualification and the assessments within it. Whilst a wide range of factors can have an impact on a student's ability to achieve a particular mark in an assessment, our influence is limited to the way the qualification is designed and assessed.

We require the exam boards to design qualifications to give a reliable indication of the knowledge, skills and understanding of those on whom they are conferred. We also require the exam boards to avoid, where possible, features of a qualification that could, without justification, make a qualification more difficult for a student to achieve because they have a particular protected characteristic. We require exam boards to monitor whether any features of their qualifications have this effect.

In setting the overall framework within which exam boards will design, assess and award the reformed GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications, we want to understand the possible impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic.

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion and belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation.

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