

Ofqual's Work on Quality of Marking



October 2014

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A) Statistics analysis

Issue	Activity and timeline
i. Analysing this year's enquiries about results data and requiring more information from exam boards	
<p>Our quality of marking work¹ showed that, in general, the quality of marking for GCSE and A level is good. Only 0.6 per cent of GCSE and A level grades are changed following an enquiry about results (EARs). However, the number of EARs has been increasing each year in recent years, and this year there have been slightly more grade changes than in previous years. We are concerned about that, and what might lie behind the increases.</p> <p>The increase in EARs may reflect teachers' genuine anxiety because of recent changes to qualifications and to school performance measures. It could also reflect teachers' falling confidence in marking: from a recent survey, we know that confidence is less than it once was, and so one might expect more appeals.</p> <p>However, the increases in EARs and grade changes could also mean that marking quality is actually deteriorating, and we want to know whether it is. One might assume so from the figures, but it is not that straightforward.</p> <p>In subjects such as maths, for example, there is usually a right answer to an exam question and we can expect all</p>	<p>As normal, exam boards will be required to submit final EAR data and a report on their own analysis in November. This data includes information on the average size of the mark adjustments for every GCSE and A level question paper.</p> <p>In addition, we are requiring exam boards to provide a detailed breakdown of the causes of any grade change. Causes may include: system or technology errors; work that was not marked as a result of system or human error; and misapplication of the mark scheme. For the latter category we will collect the size of the mark change and will distinguish between mark changes that represent indefensible errors and those that may have occurred because of legitimate differences of opinion between equally skilled markers.</p> <p>We are requiring exam boards to take swift action should they uncover issues during their analysis.</p> <p>We will publish a report of the data and analyses in December 2014 alongside final EAR statistics.</p> <p>By March 2015, we will require exam boards to have up-to-date, detailed quality of marking action plans based on what this analysis</p>

markers to give the right answer the same mark. But in some other subjects, markers can have slightly different views about the quality of an answer. Two markers may each give an answer a slightly different mark, reflecting a legitimate difference of view. This happens more often in subjects like history or English, because of the nature of those subjects. And it is more likely for those questions that require essay type answers.

When marks change following an EAR, they usually change by just a small amount. Small changes are more understandable in subjects like English because of legitimate differences of view, but are not so understandable in subjects like maths. We want to know what has been happening in each subject.

We also want to know about big mark changes, and what lies behind any and all of them.

The closer the original mark was to the next grade boundary, the more likely it is that an EAR will result in a grade change. We want to know for each subject how many successful appeals fell into this category – how many had marks close to the boundary.

When we pull together the information about the size of mark changes, the subjects in question, the reasons for big

shows. In particular we will require action plans for the improvement of marking for any exam papers that have high numbers of significant grade changes.

Marking is increasingly done online which allows the live monitoring of marking. As part of these action plans, we will require exam boards to consider how the live monitoring of marking quality can be improved to prevent large grade changes from occurring.

We will require exam boards to monitor and report the impact of these plans on the quality of marking in summer 2015.

mark changes and the closeness of marks appealed to the next grade boundary, we will be able to make an informed judgement about whether or not marking is deteriorating, and if it is, then we will begin to see why, and what can be done about it. We will also be able to compare the four exam boards, to see if there is any in particular we should be concerned about .

¹ Review of Quality of Marking in Exams in A Levels, GCSEs and Other Academic Qualifications, February 2014 (www.ofqual.gov.uk/standards/quality-of-marking).

B) Design

Issue	Activity and timeline
i. Improving the Enquiries About Results and Appeals system to make it more simple, transparent and fair	
<p>Some teachers lack confidence in the EARs and Appeals system. We think it can be made more simple, transparent and effective.</p> <p>Marker retraining to deal with EARs</p> <p>Markers undergo training before marking so that they have a common understanding of the marking standard. This is called standardisation. We think markers should be re-standardised before they deal with appeals.</p> <p>Appeals happen several weeks after marking, but we nevertheless want re-markers to apply the mark scheme as well as if they had just been standardised. Re-standardisation would remind markers of the marking standard. This already happens in some cases, but not in every subject and not at every exam board.</p>	<p>In December 2014 we will be consulting on our proposals to improve the system. Should we change the system as we suggest, then exam boards are likely to need time to develop their own systems, but some improvements can be made in time for summer 2015.</p> <p>To ensure a consistent approach across exam boards we will require all markers to be appropriately re-standardised prior to undertaking EAR marking. This will take effect from summer 2015.</p>

Extended reviews of marking

Currently schools and colleges that are concerned about marking can submit a challenge in relation to a sample of students, usually representing 10 per cent of the students who sat the exam. The exam board will review the marking of that sample of students and conduct an extended review if it identifies a trend of significant under-marking at that school.

It is not clear to teachers how exam boards decide whether or not to conduct an extended review of marking, and exam boards differ in their approach. This creates a suspicion that decisions to extend a review of marking are inconsistent, and can be negotiated. We think that exam boards' decisions to conduct an extended review should be consistent, transparent and well communicated.

Independence of appeal panel hearings

Schools and colleges may appeal against the outcome of an EAR. The Appeals process considers whether the exam board's procedures are consistent with the Code of Practice, and have been properly and fairly applied.

The Appeals process has two stages. In the first stage following an EAR, a senior member of the exam board, who has had no prior involvement with the case in question,

We propose to require that exam boards update and then publish the principles by which decisions to extend a review of marking are made.

We will also require exam boards to communicate clearly to the relevant schools and colleges the rationale for any decision to extend a review.

This will take effect from summer 2015.

We will require exam boards to have procedures to demonstrate to schools and colleges how they meet the requirement for independent membership and to ensure that any interests of panel members are declared at the start of the hearing. This will take effect from summer 2015.

<p>undertakes a desk-based review of the exam board's processes.</p> <p>The second stage involves a formal hearing that re-examines the evidence considered at first stage, allowing the school or college to present its case to a panel of exam board representatives not previously involved in the case. The panel must have at least one independent member.</p> <p>Appeal panel hearings are infrequent. However, teachers tell us that they don't think appeal panel hearings are sufficiently independent of the exam boards. They are suspicious of the extent of true independence of the independent members, as they are paid for their attendance by the exam board, and as some of them do other work for exam boards as well.</p>	
ii. Developing better ways for exam boards to measure and report on quality of marking in future	
<p>There are several reasons that data from the EAR and Appeals system is not a good indicator of the overall quality of marking.</p> <p>The data only relates to a small proportion of marking – less than 3 per cent. It pulls together quite different things: small</p>	<p>We will create standardised quality of marking indicators across exam boards to obtain a more accurate picture of marking quality than is currently available.</p> <p>We will publish exam board performance against these measures. We expect to have these measures in place for the reformed GCSEs</p>

<p>mark changes in subjects like English and large mark changes in subjects like maths for example. It does not differentiate between poor markers and poor systems.</p>	<p>and A levels examined for the first time in 2017.</p>
<p>iii. Identifying best practice in mark scheme design</p>	
<p>One of the most important determinants of marking quality is a well-designed mark scheme. We have ensured that exam board mark schemes for the reformed GCSEs and A levels follow good design principles</p> <p>Good quality mark schemes are especially important in the more subjectively marked subjects such as English and history which contain essay questions. While a lot is known about how best to write mark schemes for such subjects, there is more that could be done that might improve their quality and so improve the quality of marking.</p>	<p>We are conducting research studies into how aspects of the design of levels-based mark schemes can affect marking quality, so that we can require exam boards to follow best practice.</p> <p>We will begin to report the findings of this long-term piece of work by summer 2015.</p>

C) Inspecting for quality

Issue	Activity and timeline
i. Requiring exam boards to upgrade action plans on quality of marking	
<p>Before the summer we wrote to exam boards to check what action they were taking in response to the issues raised in our Quality of Marking report, published in February 2014. Exam boards wrote back during the summer with action plans which we have reviewed.</p>	<p>We have identified the need for more detailed plans to be produced to address outstanding areas of concern raised in our original Quality of Marking report.</p> <p>We expect exam boards to send us revised action plans for review by early November. We will then monitor their implementation as part of our regular audit activity.</p>
ii. Requiring exam boards to improve their monitoring of markers as they mark	
<p>Each year over 50,000 markers are involved in the marking of GCSEs and A levels. We have no reason to doubt that the vast majority behave with the utmost professionalism. However, some of the extremely large grade changes that occur when marking is challenged raise questions as to whether there are some examiners who, despite standardisation, do not mark well enough.</p> <p>As marking is increasingly done online, exam boards can</p>	<p>We will require exam boards to demonstrate how they currently monitor marker probity, to consider what they could do to improve these systems and, where appropriate, to implement new more robust systems.</p> <p>We will conduct this work with an expectation that some improvements be made to the quality control of marking in summer 2015. Highly sophisticated quality control systems may take longer for exam boards to implement, but we would expect noticeable</p>

<p>make more use of marker probity systems – real-time analysis of data to identify unusual patterns such as overly speedy completion of marking – to trigger investigation and action which could include the dismissal of examiners.</p>	<p>improvements to systems to be made for summer 2016.</p>
<p>iii. Evaluating the effectiveness of marker training</p>	
<p>Before they are allowed to mark, markers are trained in the use of the mark scheme. This is part of the process of 'standardisation'. It is important that the quality of standardisation is consistently high.</p> <p>In the past, standardisation happened face-to-face, but now it is more often done online. Online standardisation is more efficient, but it is unpopular with some markers who believe that it reduces the quality of their marking. The little research that is published shows that in principle, online standardisation can be as good as face-to-face standardisation, but we cannot be sure that is so in practice.</p>	<p>We will conduct an extensive evaluation of the impact of online standardisation on marking quality; in particular to identify differences between exam boards, where it works and where it does not, and why.</p> <p>Our evaluation will include an audit of exam boards' standardisation processes in summer 2015 and a research evaluation of the impact of online standardisation on marking quality.</p> <p>We will also investigate how exam boards monitor and improve the quality of their standardisation processes over time.</p>

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