

# **Developing New GCSEs, AS Qualifications and A levels for First Teaching in 2016**

A Regulatory Impact Assessment



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# Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Changes to the assessment arrangements.....	2
Non-exam assessment.....	2
Tiering .....	2
Assessment objectives.....	2
3. Assessing costs and benefits of the changes to assessment arrangements .....	5
Non-exam assessment.....	5
Qualifications where the percentage of non-exam assessment is decreasing .....	5
Making assessment more similar across exam boards.....	6

## **1. Introduction**

GCSEs, AS qualifications and A levels are being reformed. We are introducing regulatory requirements to achieve comparability for similar qualifications in the assessment arrangements across the exam boards. We regulate how these arrangements are implemented to secure standards over time.

This regulatory impact assessment (RIA) considers the impact of the new assessment arrangements compared with the pre-reform assessment arrangements for the following qualifications:

**GCSE:** art and design; computer science; dance; music; physical education.

**AS and A level:** dance; music; physical education.

We have previously set out our principles for tiering and assessment arrangements for all general qualifications. We have considered whether it is appropriate to implement these changes, against a comparator of continuing the status quo.

## **2. Changes to the assessment arrangements**

### **Non-exam assessment**

We have revised the percentage of non-exam assessment in each qualification in line with our principles that non-exam assessment should only be used when there is not a valid way of assessing through examination, and, in most circumstances, the percentage of marks which are attributed through non-exam assessment should be the same across all exam boards. This resulted in the changes set out in table1 below.

### **Tiering**

We set out our principle that tiering should only be used when it is not possible to adequately assess all students using the same examination questions. For qualifications in this impact assessment this represents no change.

### **Assessment objectives**

We have revised assessment objectives for each subject. The changes are made on a subject-specific basis, and largely represent realigning assessment objectives with the changes made to the specification's content by the Department for Education (DfE).

Additionally, we propose to move from a situation where an assessment objective could make up a wide range of the marks for a subject, to where it must make up the percentage set out by us. This means that, historically, awarding organisations could have a very different weighting between assessment objectives for the same qualification. The new system will reduce the differences between specifications for the same subject.

Subject	GCSE		AS qualification		A level	
	Current weighting of non-exam assessment	Proposed weighting of non-exam assessment	Current weighting of non-exam assessment	Proposed weighting of non-exam assessment	Current weighting of non-exam assessment	Proposed weighting of non-exam assessment
Art and design	100%	100%	N/A		N/A	
Computer science	25–60%	20%	N/A		N/A	
Dance	80%	60%	60%	50%	55%	50%
Music	60–80%	60%	60–70%	60%	60–70%	60%
Physical education	60%	<u>40%</u>	35–50%	30%	35–50%	30%

Table 1

### **3. Assessing costs and benefits of the changes to assessment arrangements**

#### **Non-exam assessment**

##### **Qualifications where the percentage of non-exam assessment is decreasing<sup>1</sup>**

- Computer science GCSE
- Dance GCSE
- Music GCSE
- Physical education GCSE
- Dance AS and A level
- Music AS and A level
- Physical Education AS and A level

In total this makes up around 240,000 entries annually.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst we have set out the reductions in weightings in non-exam assessment, we have not prescribed what this means for the future number or size of non-exam assessments or the length (or number) of examination papers. For subjects where the reduction in non-exam assessment is small, it is possible that awarding organisations will continue to set a similar number of tasks, which will create the same workload and costs.

The exam boards will set the length of exam papers based on their assessment strategies. It is possible that, for some subjects, increasing the proportion of exam-based marks will mean increasing exam time. This would have cost implications for exam boards, as they incur the cost of preparing longer or additional papers, as well as the additional costs of marking them.

It is difficult to tell the net impact of a reduced percentage in non-exam assessment on exam boards, without being sure of the impact on overall length and mix of assessment. It seems likely that when exam boards set their

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<sup>1</sup> This includes subjects where there will be a fall from the largest proportion of non-exam assessments awarding organisations are currently able to offer.

<sup>2</sup> Data from JCQ summer 2014, England only

assessment strategies they will consider manageability and costs alongside standards to deliver valid assessments.

For schools, a reduction in the number or size of the non-exam assessments should reduce the time spent by teachers preparing students for the assessment, and marking the assessments. It's possible that the teacher will use this time to undertake other tasks, including preparing students for exams.

The principal driver and main benefit of reducing the proportion of non-exam assessments is to improve the validity of the qualifications by ensuring that the nature of the assessment is appropriate to the skills, knowledge and understanding being assessed.

### **Making assessment more similar across exam boards**

We have moved from a situation where exam boards could, in many cases, choose the weighting of assessment objectives and non-exam assessment from a range, to one where each specification would be expected to have the same weighting. This will have benefits as it means that the assessment arrangements are more similar across exam boards, so wider users of qualifications can be confident that the same qualification is of a comparable standard, no matter which exam board or specification was used.

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