



## Developing new GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications for first teaching in 2017

### Analysis of the consultation on assessment arrangements

#### Part 3 of 3

11<sup>th</sup> January 2016

Ofqual/16/5840



This report has been commissioned by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation.

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## **Executive summary**

### **Background**

From 29<sup>th</sup> October 2015 to 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016, Ofqual undertook a consultation on *Developing new GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for first teaching in 2017*. This was the third in a series of three consultations and covered the following subjects and qualifications:

- Short course GCSE: physical education; and
- Reformed A levels and AS qualifications: geology; politics.

Other subjects and qualifications being reformed for first teaching from 2017 were subject to separate consultations in 2015. A list of these subjects is presented in Appendix 2.

The three consultations sought views and feedback on the proposed assessment arrangements (exam and/or non-exam based as appropriate), assessment objectives, and whether GCSEs in these subjects should be tiered. It also sought feedback on the equality impact of the proposals in relation to individuals who share a protected characteristic<sup>1</sup>.

Following a tendering process, Pye Tait Consulting was contracted by Ofqual to undertake the analysis of responses to this consultation. Responses were logged by Ofqual and handed over to Pye Tait Consulting for impartial analysis and anonymous reporting in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct.

Ofqual invited responses through a variety of media, including submission of an online, electronic or paper copy of the completed consultation questionnaire; via email or other hard copy correspondence.

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<sup>1</sup> Protected characteristics include: Age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

## **Overview of responses**

In total, 25 valid consultation responses were analysed to inform this report, of which 24 were received in the form of completed questionnaires and one as a free-format email<sup>2</sup>.

Of these, the majority (16) provided official (i.e. organisation-level) views and the remainder (9) provided personal views.

Most responses (19) were received in relation to AS and A level politics, with four attributable to AS and A level geography and four attributable to GCSE physical education (short course).

Based on responses to the Likert-scale questions ('strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'), the majority of respondents agree with most of Ofqual's proposals. These findings should be treated with caution given the low base number of respondents, especially for AS/A level geology and GCSE physical education – short course.

There are no clear patterns in the extent of agreement/disagreement by 'type' of respondent. The main exception is GCSE physical education – short course, for which awarding organisations are generally favourable and representative bodies generally unfavourable with respect to the split of exam/non-exam assessment, as well as the appropriateness of the proposed assessment objectives.

A number of specific suggestions have been given for enhancing the assessment objectives in certain subjects. These are set out in the main body of the report.

### **AS and A level geology**

Four respondents provided views in relation to AS and A level geology, with all in general agreement that:

- these qualifications should continue to assess practical skills;
- questions should assess students' knowledge and understanding of practical work; and
- the proposed assessment objectives and weightings of those objectives are appropriate.

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<sup>2</sup> Three additional responses addressed matters relating to subject content which are outside the scope of this consultation, have not been included within this report, and are therefore subject to separate analysis.

Two respondents (an awarding organisation and sixth form college) disagree that the grades at A level should be based on exam marks only, with the sixth form college also disagreeing in relation to the AS level. These respondents also disagree that the results of practical skills assessments for A level geology should be reported separately on certificates, without counting towards the final grade.

Respondents are strongly of the view that practical work and associated techniques (particularly field-based skills) are essential to the subject, with mixed views as to the appropriateness of assessing these solely via exams.

## **GCSE physical education (short course)**

Four respondents provided views about short course GCSEs in physical education, with all in agreement that these qualifications should not be tiered.

Opinion is divided as to the proposed 60:40 ratio of exam to non-exam assessment, with two awarding organisations in agreement and two representative/interest groups in strong disagreement. A similar division also applies in relation to the appropriateness of the proposed assessment objectives.

The main concern is that physical education is by its nature a practical subject and that pupils learn and achieve competence through the physical application of knowledge, skills and understanding.

With the exception of one representative/interest group, all other respondents agree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate.

## **AS and A level politics**

A total of 18 respondents provided views in relation to AS and A level politics.

The majority (72%) agree that AS levels in this subject should be assessed entirely by exams, while 28% disagree. A smaller majority of 61% agree that the A levels should be assessed entirely by exams, with 36% disagreeing.

Two thirds (67%) agree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate at AS and A level and more than three quarters (78%) agree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate.

A minority of respondents feel that some non-exam assessment would better align the subject to the way it is taught in higher education, with the suggestion that there could be greater weighting at A level on assessing analytical skills and the ability to think critically.

## **Equality impact**

Comments on the equality impact of Ofqual's proposals principally raised two main points. Firstly, there is a positive observation in relation to AS and A level geology that removing the requirement for graded assessment of fieldwork activities could increase the range of geology fieldwork sites that may be used, in turn potentially increasing participation in practical activities by students irrespective of any physical impairment. Secondly, a concern has been raised that exclusive use of exams as an assessment method could actively discriminate against those who would excel in non-exam assessments.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and context

In February 2013 the Secretary of State for Education initiated reform of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications.

The reform of GCSEs is intended to make them more challenging so pupils are better prepared for further academic or vocational study, or for work. They should also provide a basis for schools and colleges to be held accountable for the performance of their students<sup>3</sup>.

The reform of AS and A levels is to make sure they properly equip students for higher education and to provide a strong foundation for onward employment. Post-16 courses of study aim to be internationally comparable in developing knowledge, skills and understanding<sup>4</sup>.

Ofqual is responsible for ensuring that the reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications are of the right standard and have regard to Government policy aims. GCSE and AS/A level qualifications are being reformed in three phases. The first phase will begin teaching in September 2015, the second phase from September 2016 and the third phase from September 2017.

The third phase includes 13 GCSEs, one GCSE short course and 16 AS/A level qualifications which will begin first teaching in September 2017. The first AS awards for these qualifications will take place in summer 2018 and the first GCSE and A level awards will be given in summer 2019. A full list of these subjects and qualifications is presented in Appendix 2.

Ofqual hosted three public policy consultations in 2015 relating to the phase three qualifications<sup>5</sup>. Each consultation covered a specific tranche of subjects and sought views on assessment arrangements (including exam and/or non-exam based assessment, as appropriate), assessment objectives, and whether the GCSEs in these subjects should be tiered. Ofqual also sought feedback on the equality impact of the proposals in relation to individuals who share a protected characteristic<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reforming-qualifications-and-the-curriculum-to-better-prepare-pupils-for-life-after-school/supporting-pages/gcse-reform>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reforming-qualifications-and-the-curriculum-to-better-prepare-pupils-for-life-after-school/supporting-pages/a-and-as-level-reform>

<sup>5</sup> Live dates for Ofqual's consultations covering the phase three subjects and qualifications: Consultation 1 – live from 16<sup>th</sup> July to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015; consultation 2 – live 10<sup>th</sup> September until 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015; consultation 3 – live from 29<sup>th</sup> October until 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Protected characteristics are as follows: Age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

This report relates to the third tranche of the phase three qualifications:

- Short course GCSE: physical education; and
- Reformed A levels and AS qualifications: geology; politics.

The findings of this consultation will inform Ofqual's decisions on the structure and assessment of these qualifications.

The Department for Education (DfE) is leading on the development of subject content, with Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). The DfE has therefore conducted a separate consultation on the subject content for these qualifications.

Ofqual plans to consult separately on the technical regulatory requirements that exam boards wishing to design, deliver and award these qualifications must meet. It is intended that the exam boards will develop new qualifications in the subjects listed above ready for first teaching by schools and colleges from September 2017. The exam boards' specifications, to be taught from that date, should be available to schools and colleges from autumn 2016.

## **1.2 Summary of proposals**

This section presents a summary of Ofqual's proposals as part of this consultation. Full details are provided in the consultation document: *Developing new GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for first teaching in 2017 (part 3)*<sup>7</sup>.

### **1.2.1 Changes to assessment arrangements**

In order to strike a better balance between exam and non-exam assessment, Ofqual proposes three main changes to the way reformed qualifications in these subjects should be assessed:

1. To define the percentage of marks to be allocated to exam and non-exam assessment, removing or reducing any current flexibility and promoting comparability between exam boards;
2. To reduce or maintain the proportion of non-exam assessment that has been previously permitted in GCSEs, AS and A levels; and
3. To remove non-exam assessment from subjects where the content can be assessed by exam.

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<sup>7</sup> The consultation document is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developing-geology-politics-and-pe-short-course-for-2017-teaching>

Where non-exam assessments are used, Ofqual will work with the exam boards to make sure that appropriate and robust arrangements are put in place. These will include the introduction of external marking where practical, strengthening the moderation of teacher marking where that is used, and other measures aimed at reducing incidents of malpractice.

### **1.2.2 Changes to assessment objectives**

The assessment objectives for each subject describe the principal abilities that students taking that qualification must be given the opportunity to develop and demonstrate. The assessment objectives have a key regulatory role in ensuring that:

- Students are assessed on the relevant abilities for the subject and on an appropriate balance of those abilities; and
- Requirements are comparable between different exam boards' qualifications, and over time.

Ofqual has worked with subject and assessment experts to develop and improve the current assessment objectives. In revising these, Ofqual has aimed to make sure they are as clear as possible and that they:

- Fulfil their core purpose of describing the abilities that a student taking the relevant qualification should be required to demonstrate;
- Specify only the abilities that students should be required to demonstrate, not the content itself;
- Relate to each qualification as a whole, and so address the full range and balance of abilities that are relevant;
- Are sufficiently precise and detailed that they can be used consistently for setting and evaluating assessments;
- Provide a degree of flexibility in their application to enable alternative approaches where these are legitimate; and
- Promote progression between GCSEs, AS and A levels.

### **1.2.3 Tiering of GCSEs**

Ofqual 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<sup>8</sup>.

## **1.3 Overview of the consultation, analysis and reporting**

### **1.3.1 Acquisition of responses**

The consultation document explained the proposed assessment arrangements and featured a questionnaire for individuals or organisations to complete and return. In addition, or as an alternative to completing the questionnaire, Ofqual invited responses via email or letter.

Responses were logged by Ofqual and handed over to Pye Tait Consulting for impartial analysis and anonymous reporting in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct.

Responses were received in a combination of ways, including:

- Completion of an online version of the consultation questionnaire;
- Submission of an electronic copy (Word/PDF) or printed copy of the consultation questionnaire;
- Email (with or without the enclosure of an electronic copy of the consultation questionnaire in MS Word/PDF format); and
- Letter (with or without the enclosure of a completed hard copy of the consultation questionnaire).

The scale and format of consultation responses is presented in Section 2.

### **1.3.2 Analysis and reporting**

This report presents the findings from the formal consultation questionnaire and summarises views and feedback raised via emails and letters. A combination of tables, charts and textual analysis is used to collate and set out the findings.

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<sup>8</sup> Ofqual set out the technical issues and arguments for and against tiering as part of its June 2013 consultation on new GCSEs.

Chapters 3 to 5 present the findings for each subject in turn. Each chapter begins with a summary of the subject-specific proposals, followed by the Likert-scale question responses in visual chart form (i.e. those questions asked on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'). Percentages may not always add up to precisely 100% due to the effect of rounding.

Within each chart, the base number of responses to each question is shown in brackets. It should be noted that base numbers shown in the charts only include responses to the Likert-scale questions and do not take account of any additional free-format responses.

Each chart is followed by a descriptive account of all respondents' views and opinions as they relate to the assessment arrangements for that subject. A selection of quotations is also included to illustrate the main findings.

Given the relatively low volume of responses received for most subjects (see Table 3) cross-tabulations of responses to the Likert-scale questions (e.g. by type of respondent) have not been performed as this would not be sufficiently robust and meaningful. However, the descriptive analyses of respondents' supporting comments do draw these distinctions where possible.

A mixture of numbers and percentages are used to describe the breakdown of respondents, as appropriate.

## 2. Summary of consultation responses

### 2.1 Overview

In total, 25 valid consultation responses were analysed to inform this report, of which 24 were received in the form of completed questionnaires and one as a free-format email<sup>9</sup>.

Of these, the majority (16) provided official (i.e. organisation-level) views and the remainder (9) provided personal views.

The breakdowns of personal and official respondents are shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

**Table 1 Type of personal respondent**

|  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
| Student  | 0 | 0%  |
| Parent or carer                                    | 1 | 11% |
| Teacher (but not responding on behalf of a school) | 5 | 56% |
| Educational specialist                             | 2 | 22% |
| Other <sup>10</sup>                                | 1 | 11% |

Base: 9 respondents

**Table 2 Type of official respondent**

|  |   |     |
|--|---|-----|
| Awarding organisation                            | 4 | 25% |
| Local authority                                  | 0 | 0%  |
| School or college                                | 9 | 56% |
| Academy chain                                    | 0 | 0%  |
| Private training provider                        | 0 | 0%  |
| University or other higher education institution | 0 | 0%  |
| Employer   | 0 | 0%  |
| Government department, agency or organisation    |   | 0%  |
| Other representative or interest group           | 3 | 19% |

Base: 16 respondents

The four responding Awarding Organisations are recognised by Ofqual to provide 'general' (as opposed to 'vocational') qualifications

<sup>9</sup> Three additional responses addressed matters relating to subject content which are outside the scope of this consultation, have not been included within this report, and are therefore subject to separate analysis.

<sup>10</sup> The respondent classified as 'other' was a Further Education College Campus Director.

The nine school/college respondents include four comprehensive or non-selective academies, two independent schools and three sixth form colleges.

The three representative or interest groups include one employer or business group, one subject association or learned society and one independent charity.

Further information about the profile of consultation respondents is presented in Appendix 1.

## 2.1 Responses by subject and qualification

The breakdown of total responses by subject is shown in Table 3. Where one individual/organisation provided a response in relation to more than one subject, this is reflected in the overall total.

Most responses (19) were received in relation to AS and A level politics, with four attributable to AS and A level geography and four attributable to GCSE physical education (short course).

**Table 3 Total responses by subject and qualification**

| <b>Total responses</b>                 | <b>27</b> | <b>100%</b> |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| AS and A level geology                 | 4         | 15%         |
| GCSE physical education (short course) | 4         | 15%         |
| AS and A level politics                | 19        | 70%         |

Table 4 shows the breakdown of total responses by subject and type of official respondent. Table 5 shows the same breakdown by type of personal respondent.

**Table 4 Total responses by subject and type of official respondent**

|  | <b>Total responses</b> | Awarding organisation | School or college | Other representative or interest group |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--|
| <b>Total responses</b>                 | <b>18</b>              | <b>6</b>              | <b>9</b>          | <b>3</b>                               |
| AS and A level geology                 | 3                      | 2                     | 1                 | -                                      |
| GCSE physical education (short course) | 4                      | 2                     | -                 | 2                                      |
| AS and A level politics                | 11                     | 2                     | 8                 | 1                                      |

**Table 5 Total responses by subject and type of personal respondent**

|  | <b>Total responses</b> | Parent or carer | Teacher (but not responding on behalf of a school) | Educational specialist | Other (please state below) |
|--|------------------------|-----------------|--|------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Total responses</b>                 | <b>9</b>               | <b>1</b>        | <b>5</b>   | <b>2</b>               | <b>1</b>                   |
| AS and A level geology                 | 1                      | -               | 1  | -                      | -                          |
| GCSE physical education (short course) | -                      | -               | -  | -                      | -                          |
| AS and A level politics                | 8                      | 1               | 4  | 2                      | 1                          |

## **3. AS and A level geology**

### **3.1 Overview**

The rules for current AS and A levels in geology are the same as those for AS and A levels in biology, chemistry and physics. This means current qualifications are assessed through a mixture of exams (70 to 80 per cent) and non-exam assessment (20 to 30 per cent).

The proposed subject content for AS and A levels in geology specify practical skills in the same way as for biology, chemistry and physics. Ofqual believes the most appropriate way to assess this content for geology is to adopt an approach consistent with what has been decided for equivalent qualifications in biology, chemistry and physics. On that basis, Ofqual proposes that:

- Exams for AS and A levels in geology should include questions that assess students' knowledge and understanding of practical work;
- Grades for AS and A levels in geology should be based solely on exam marks; and
- For A levels in geology only, students should be assessed separately on their practical skills – with a separate pass/fail grade reported on their certificate.

The proposed assessment objectives and weightings are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6 AS and A level geology – assessment objectives**

| Number | Assessment objectives   | Weighting A level | Weighting AS level |
|--------|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| AO1    | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of geological ideas, techniques and procedures.   | 30-35%            | 35-40%             |
| AO2    | Apply knowledge and understanding of geological ideas, techniques and procedures.   | 40-45%            | 40-45%             |
| AO3    | Analyse, interpret and evaluate geological information, ideas and evidence, including in relation to issues, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ make judgments and reach conclusions;</li> <li>▪ develop and refine practical design and procedures.</li> </ul> | 25-30%            | 20-25%             |

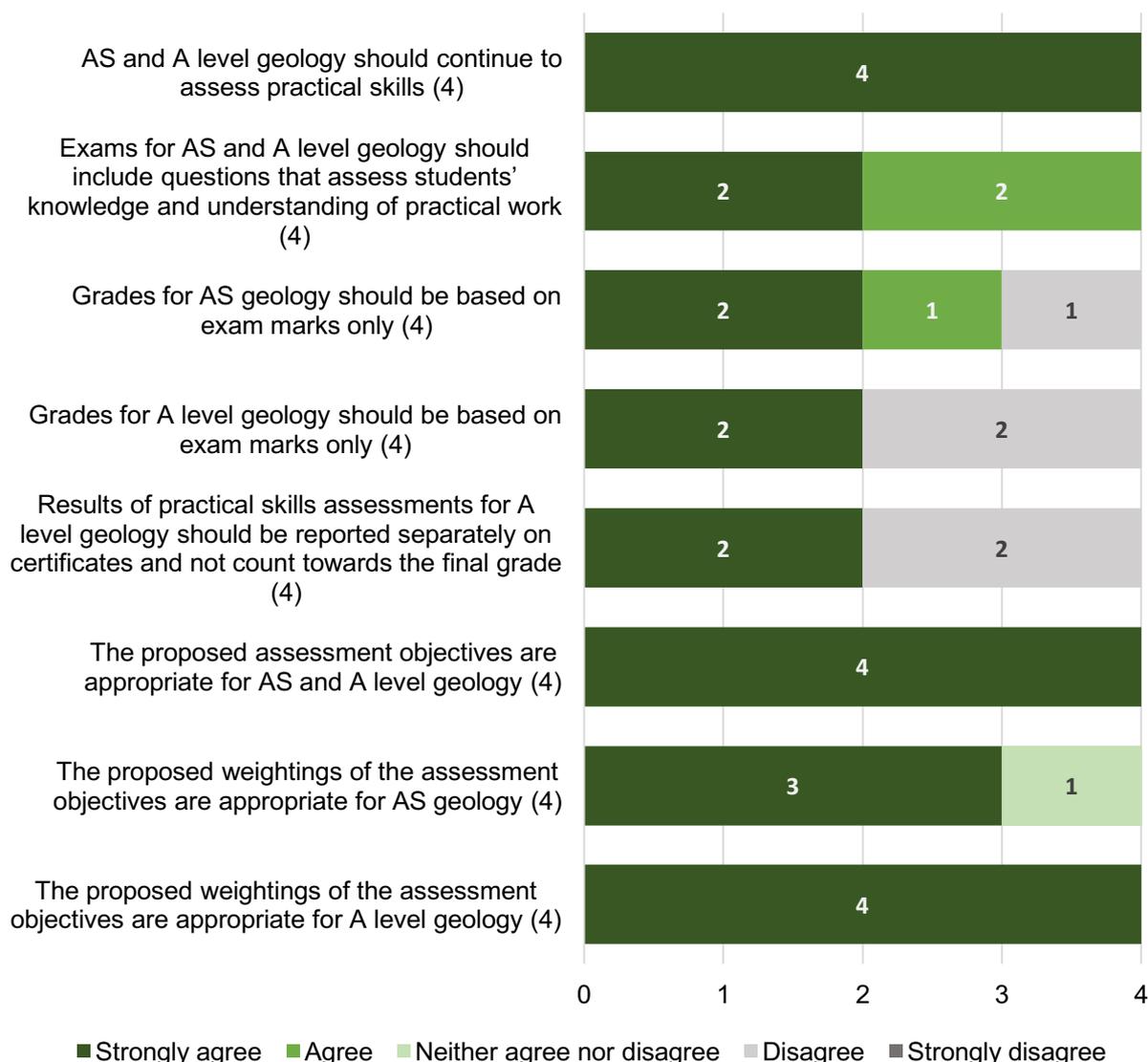
Four respondents provided views in relation to AS and A level geology, with all in general agreement that:

- these qualifications should continue to assess practical skills;
- questions should assess students' knowledge and understanding of practical work; and
- the proposed assessment objectives and weightings of those objectives are appropriate.

Two respondents (an awarding organisation and sixth form college) disagree that the grades at A level should be based on exam marks only, with the sixth form college also disagreeing in relation to the AS level.

These respondents also disagree that the results of practical skills assessments for A level geology should be reported separately on certificates, without counting towards the final grade (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 Summary of responses – AS and A level geology**



## 3.2 Assessment arrangements

### 3.2.1 Assessment of practical skills

Respondents are strongly of the view that practical work and associated techniques in AS and A level geology (particularly field-based skills) are essential to the subject. They argue that these skills are transferrable to other sciences and will ensure sufficient preparation for onward study in higher education.

*“Geology as a subject has its foundation and origins in observation, recording and analysis, particularly field based skills. The development of these skills is fundamental to further progress in Earth Sciences and as transferable skills for any Science student.”*

Sixth form college

*“Most A level geology students will progress to STEM courses in higher education where they will be required to carry out significant laboratory based learning (up to 40% in the first year).”*

Awarding organisation

### **3.2.2 Inclusion of questions to assess knowledge and understanding of practical work**

An awarding organisation commented that the proposal to assess practical skills as part of a written examination (such as planning, implementation, analysis and evaluation) would be fair to all students and would relieve marking pressures on teachers. This is linked to a concern that students’ experiences of coursework and investigative work might vary from centre to centre, i.e. “some centres might offer rich experience of practical activity, while others might deliver this in short condensed sessions”.

Another awarding organisation pointed out that as no form of non-exam assessment is proposed, that exam questions relating to practical work must therefore be set.

### **3.2.3 Assessment based on exam marks only**

One awarding organisation in favour of assessment by exam marks only, is of the view that exams will enhance the reliability of marking. A second awarding organisation also made the point that the current AS specification permits assessment by exam marks only and that this is the route favoured by approximately 80% of candidates.

At A level, the inclusion of some non-exam assessment is favoured by one awarding organisation. The reasons are that it will allow greater scope for higher level assessment of geological skills and that candidates from many centres often submit work worthy of first-year undergraduates. It is therefore considered important that this same depth of study is not lost if only ‘satisfactory completion’ is required.

A sixth form college disagreeing with assessment by exam marks only at AS and A level feels that laboratory-based practical skills should be tested in a laboratory or classroom, albeit under exam conditions; furthermore that geological fieldwork has its own particular set of skills that should be assessed in the field.

### 3.2.4 Reporting of practical skills assessments for A levels in geology

One awarding organisation and one teacher agree that the results of practical skills assessments for A levels in geology should be reported separately on certificates and not count towards the final grade. This is on the basis that:

- assessment of practical skills, techniques and use of equipment should be competence-based in line with the other natural sciences;
- assessment of certain practical work in geology can be very subjective;
- a pass/fail mark is most appropriate for practical skills; and
- this approach should improve the delivery of practical activities by freeing up teachers to teach them beyond the limitations of a tightly-specified assessment.

A sixth form college disagreeing with this approach is of the view that these skills should be counted towards the final grade as they form “the fundamental basis of the subject”.

### 3.3 Assessment objectives

The proposed assessment objectives are viewed favourably on the basis that “geology is a science” and “it is appropriate that the assessment objectives are based on those used in biology, chemistry and physics” (awarding organisation).

*“The framing of the assessment objectives had benefited from the experience gained by the regulator and awarding organisations during the development of the tranche 1 and tranche 2 sciences. In particular, care has been taken to avoid potentially ambiguous terminology or create assessment dichotomies where a continuum approach is more appropriate.”*

Subject association/learned society

### 3.4 Weightings of the assessment objectives

At AS level, one respondent notes that the proposed weightings correctly place the application of geological ideas at the heart of assessment. Another commented that the balance is appropriate, with the focus at AS level needing to be on basic knowledge and understanding of the subject content, as well as the procedures and techniques required.

At AS level, a sixth form college is of the view that the upper limit of 35% for AO1 would be most appropriate and that AO2 should be set at 40%. This is on the basis that “students need to develop a greater understanding of the subject at AS level with less focus on evaluation.”

## 4. GCSE physical education (short course)

### 4.1 Overview

Current short-course GCSEs in physical education are assessed through a mixture of exam assessment (40 per cent of the marks) and non-exam assessment (60 per cent of the marks). For new GCSEs in physical education, Ofqual previously decided to allocate 40 per cent of the marks to non-exam assessment and 60 per cent to exam assessment.

Ofqual proposes that the same arrangements should apply for the short course GCSE. This is a reduction in the amount of non-exam assessment compared with current qualifications but Ofqual believes this reflects the balance of the subject content requirements.

Current GCSEs in physical education are not tiered and Ofqual proposes that the new short course GCSE should not be tiered either.

The proposed assessment objectives and weightings are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7 GCSE physical education (short course) – assessment objectives**

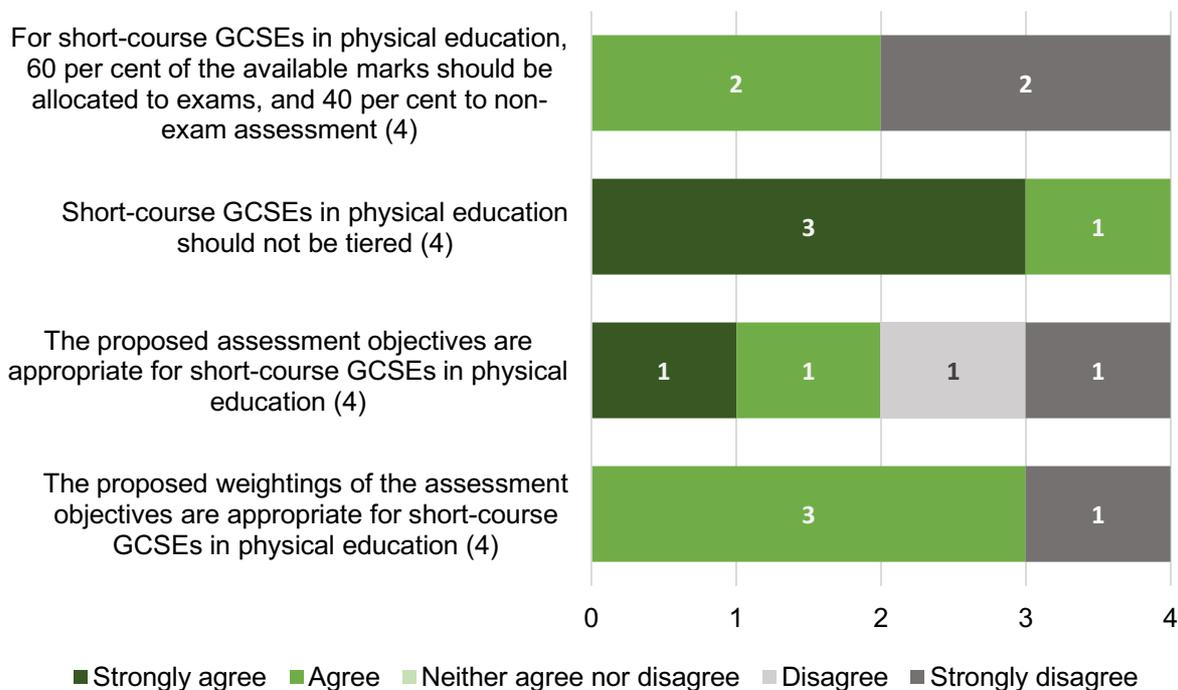
| Number                | Assessment objectives  | Weighting |
|-----------------------|--|-----------|
| AO1                   | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the factors that underpin performance and involvement in physical activity and sport. | 25%       |
| AO2                   | Apply knowledge and understanding of the factors that underpin performance and involvement in physical activity and sport.       | 20%       |
| AO3                   | Analyse and evaluate the factors that underpin performance and involvement in physical activity and sport.                       | 15%       |
| AO4<br>(short course) | Demonstrate and apply relevant skills and techniques in physical activity and sport.   | 40%       |

Four respondents provided views about short course GCSEs in physical education, with all in agreement that these qualifications should not be tiered.

Opinion is divided as to the proposed 60:40 ratio of exam to non-exam assessment, with two awarding organisations in agreement and two representative/interest groups in strong disagreement. A similar division also applies in relation to the appropriateness of the proposed assessment objectives.

With the exception of one representative/interest group, all other respondents agree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 Summary of responses – GCSE physical education (short course)**



## 4.2 Assessment arrangements

One awarding organisation in agreement with the proposed ratio of exam to non-exam assessment believes the short-course GCSE in physical education should follow the same assessment pattern as the full course to help ensure parity in the level of demand.

The two representative/interest groups in strong disagreement emphasise that physical education is a practical subject and whilst the theoretical elements of the course are very important, pupils learn through the physical application of knowledge, skills and understanding.

*“We would recommend that 40 per cent of the marks should be allocated to exams and 60 per cent to non-exam assessment... This will ensure students have sufficient opportunity to demonstrate rigour and robustness in physical competence and a problem solving ability. It will also enable a robust and rigorous assessment of each student’s physical education competence.”*

Representative/interest group

*“Practical examinations would demonstrate more clearly the extent and depth of learning in this GCSE. Some pupils can articulate a specific skill on paper but may not be able to execute a performance to demonstrate the physical mastery of the skill.”*

Representative/interest group

### 4.3 No tiering

Two representative/interest groups provided supporting comments in favour of not tiering the short course GCSE in physical education. These respondents believe it is important that all pupils have the aspiration to secure a higher grade and should not be placed in a specific ‘category’.

Specifically it is argued that the exam paper should be constructed with a range of questions and marks available, in order to 1) enable differentiation within a single tier; 2) to satisfy the disparity between ‘ability’ (i.e. academic vs. sporting ability) and 3) to allow pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to study the qualification.

*“Based on the feedback received from our members, we understand that the GCSE short course in PE has offered SEN students the opportunity to study towards and try for a qualification. We believe that the revised short course can still offer these candidates this opportunity, whilst also meeting the needs for an academically demanding qualification, provided the language used in questions and the allocation of the marks are not a barrier to access for lower literacy candidates.”*

Representative/interest group

*“Some pupils often make rapid progress in the last six months alongside good support from teachers thus increasing their grades significantly and therefore could be disadvantaged if in a specific tier.”*

Representative/interest group

### 4.4 Assessment objectives

An awarding organisation agreeing with the proposed assessment objectives is of the view that the short-course GCSE in physical education should have the same assessment objectives as the full course to help ensure parity in the level of demand.

Two representative/interest groups disagree, primarily linked to their view that there is insufficient weighting given to non-exam assessment.

*“The short course should be an alternative to the full GCSE and perhaps consider different practical activities as time is limited. This option may well attract different pupils. Alternatively a short course could be linked to the key stage 4 statutory curriculum which would allow pupils to fulfil more outcomes as well as contribute to health and emotional well-being.”*

Representative/interest group

#### **4.5 Weightings of the assessment objectives**

One representative/interest group affirmed that the weightings of AO1 to AO3 seem appropriate. With respect to AO4, the removal of “analysis of performance” for the short course is considered appropriate, resulting in a pure focus on “demonstration”

Another respondent reiterated their earlier concerns that physical education is a practical subject and that this should be more strongly reflected through the assessment arrangements and associated weightings.

## 5. AS and A level politics

### 5.1 Overview

Ofqual proposes that AS and A level qualifications in politics should continue to be assessed entirely by exams.

The proposed assessment objectives and weightings are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8 AS and A level politics – assessment objectives**

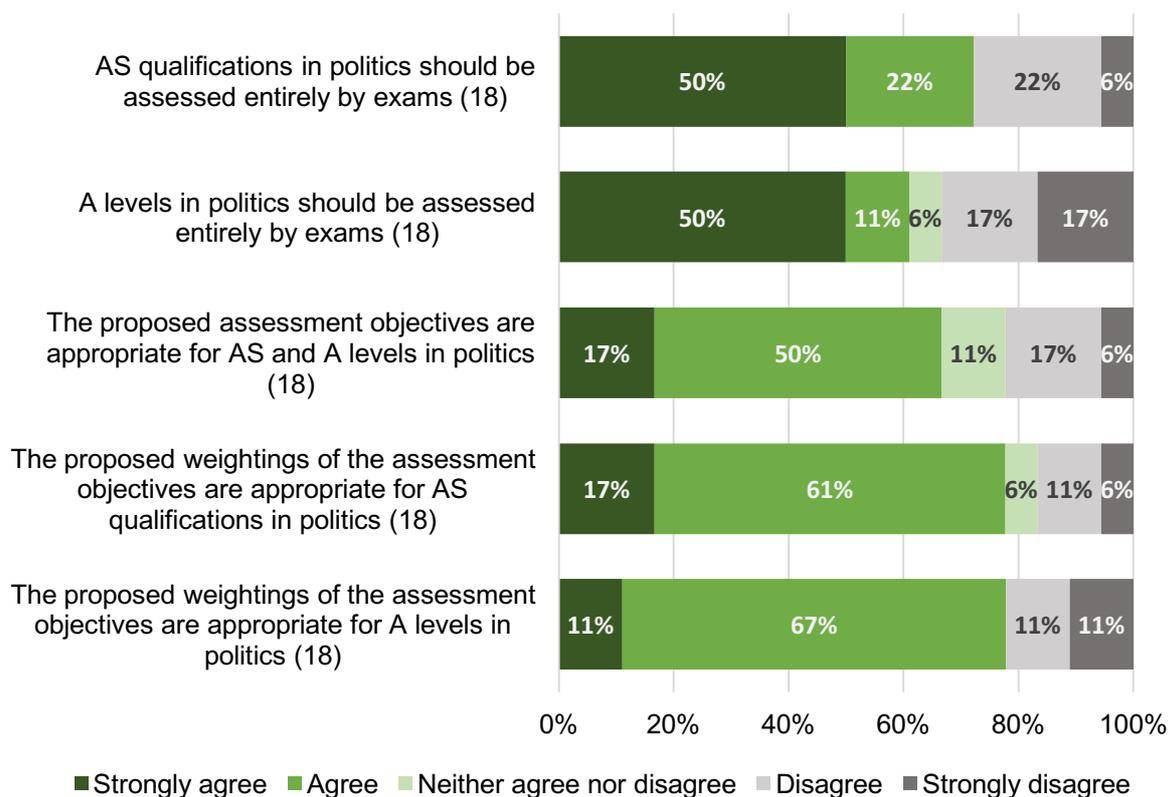
| Number | Assessment objectives  | Weighting A level | Weighting AS |
|--------|--|-------------------|--------------|
| AO1    | Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant institutions, processes, political concepts, theories and issues.  | 40%               | 50%          |
| AO2    | Comprehend and interpret political information to construct and communicate arguments and explanations.  | 20%               | 20%          |
| AO3    | Analyse and evaluate the areas of politics studied in order to identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences, leading to reasoned conclusions. | 40%               | 30%          |

A total of 18 respondents provided views in relation to AS and A level politics.

The majority (72%) agree that AS levels in this subject should be assessed entirely by exams, while 28% disagree. A smaller majority of 61% agree that the A levels should be assessed entirely by exams, with 36% disagreeing.

Two thirds (67%) agree that the proposed assessment objectives are appropriate at AS and A level and more than three quarters (78%) agree that the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives are appropriate (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Summary of responses – AS and A level politics



## 5.2 Assessment arrangements

Respondents in favour of exam-only assessment for AS and A level politics provided a range of arguments, notably that:

- the content and skills can be adequately assessed through a written examination, as is the case for the current AS Government and Politics assessments (awarding organisation and school/college);
- exams place a premium on breadth and scope rather than depth, meaning they can be justified for AS politics given that the primary aim is to ensure wide-ranging understanding (representative/interest group); and
- coursework (if included) could be prone to ‘coaching’ (personal response – teacher).

*“This is the fairest system and preferred by my current students.”*

Personal response – teacher

The minority of respondents disagreeing that assessment of AS and A level politics should be wholly exam-based are of the view that:

- some non-exam assessment would more closely align with how politics is assessed at higher education level (personal response – teacher and official response – school or college);
- exams test knowledge and recollection skills rather than the capacity to think critically and construct a well-reasoned, well-researched and compelling argument – the latter of which are considered essential skills in politics (educational specialist); and
- non-exam assessment would mitigate “the stress and pressure of everything resting on one day” (school or college).

*“The consultation document mentions that the objective of the A level is to assess achievements of students in terms of ‘knowledge, skills and understanding that will be needed by students planning to progress to undergraduate study at a UK higher education establishment’...We therefore strongly argue that a combination of coursework and exams will give students a stronger foundation for further academic study.”*

Representative of interest group

*“The proposed objectives (particularly AO3) incorporate a tariff of 40% for what may broadly be defined as ‘analysis’ and ‘evaluation’ – we welcome this focus given that it is integral to HE teaching not only in politics and international relations but across the social sciences, arts and humanities. The integration of a coursework component would ensure this focus on analysis and evaluation can be delivered in a much stronger fashion by the A-level as a whole.”*

Representative of interest group

One respondent (an independent school) makes a more general observation that to achieve academic robustness, exam-based assessment at AS and A level should move away from 5 and 10 mark questions “which merely test knowledge, decrease the level of sophistication of the A level, and are more appropriate for GCSE”. Instead, a move towards more full-length essays would be preferable to allow for higher level analysis.

### **5.3 Assessment objectives**

Respondents agreeing with the assessment objectives consider them to be fair, appropriate, and suitable for ensuring a consistent and standardised assessment of students' work.

*“The assessment objectives are wholly appropriate for AS and A levels in politics and describe effectively the main abilities that should be displayed by a student who has studied the proposed subject content. They are comparable to the AOs for other reformed AS and A-levels and will help students develop the necessary skills to progress to undergraduate study.”*

Awarding organisation

*“The new formatted AO2 and AO3 present a wider range for candidates to be accurately rewarded and in the process effectively discriminate between levels of ability. These will be of great benefit for the full A level. The revised AO2 objective allows more flexibility in terms of the examining process and it will allow a wider remit for varied questions based on sources and varied stimulus material.”*

Personal respondent – FE College Campus Director

One personal respondent (an education specialist) has some concerns that the proposed assessment objectives are descriptive rather than analytical, meaning that students could achieve a strong A-level by memorising rather than critically engaging with the content.

Some respondents suggested changes to the proposed assessment objectives – summarised below:

- AO1: Include reference to ‘debates’ (personal response – teacher);
- AO1: Consider amending the wording slightly by replacing ‘relevant’ to ‘political’ and removing ‘political’ from ‘political concepts’ as this word is no longer needed if the first change is made. The AO would then read ‘Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of political institutions, processes, concepts, theories and issues’ (awarding organisation);
- AO2: This could be interpreted in different ways depending on whether it is intended to be linked to AO1 or AO3. If it is intended to be assessed with AO1, then it may be better as ‘Analyse and evaluate information and data with reference to political institutions, processes, concepts, theories and issues’. If it is intended for students to analyse and evaluate this information as part of AO3, then then it could instead read ‘Comprehend and interpret information and data relating to political institutions, processes, concepts, theories and issues’ (awarding organisation);

- AO3: This appears to place a strong premium on inferred comparison, yet the proposed new subject content for the politics A level does not make clear that comparison is integral (personal response – teacher);
- AO3: This may be better broken down into two sub-objectives to place an emphasis on ‘interrogation of sources of knowledge’ (AO3a) and ‘analysis’ (AO3b) (personal response – teacher);
- AO3: The wording currently suggests that more than one ‘area of politics studied’ must be assessed to allow students to identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences. This would be a demanding requirement of students and there would be limited opportunity to assess this within the current subject content. AO3 should therefore be changed to ‘Analyse and evaluate, in relation to the areas of politics studied, to explore and make substantiated judgements about political institutions, processes, concepts, theories and issues’ (awarding organisation);
- The assessment objectives could be strengthened to give a clear steer to all concerned, that the subject rewards and recognises political conjecture and credible hypothesis. A modified version of A03 could therefore read: ‘Analyse and evaluate the areas of politics studied in order to identify parallels, connections similarities, differences and offer critical insight into possible alternative options which lead to reasoned conclusions’ (Personal respondent – FE College Campus Director)

Two respondents (a sixth form college and a teacher) make the point that it is difficult to respond fully and definitively to the consultation prior to the subject content being finalised and without sample assessment material. For the college, this issue is exacerbated by their concerns over the subject content. An education specialist also notes that “the DfE is redrafting the subject content for A level politics to make sure there is a better ‘fit’ with the content at undergraduate study”.

## **5.4 Weightings of the assessment objectives**

Respondents agreeing with the proposed weightings of the assessment objectives believe them to be reasonable and appropriately balanced. At A level, it is argued that they reflect how a student’s ability would develop over a two-year course, with an awarding body welcoming the fact that ‘analysis’ warrants 40% of the weighting.

Respondents’ suggested changes to the proposed weightings:

- A modest reduction to the weighting of AO1 at A level, given that other elements of comprehension and interpretation are more important at this level;
- Linked to the above – reduce AO1 to 35%, raise AO2 to 25% and maintain AO3 at 40%;

*“The AOs should be weighted more in favour of application, analysis and evaluation. These are the skills required for the workplace and university and there is still too much focus on regurgitating facts.”*

Sixth form college

*“Students need to learn much more about ideologies and political systems together with developing analytical skills to be able to well answer the questions. Otherwise it is only memorising.”*

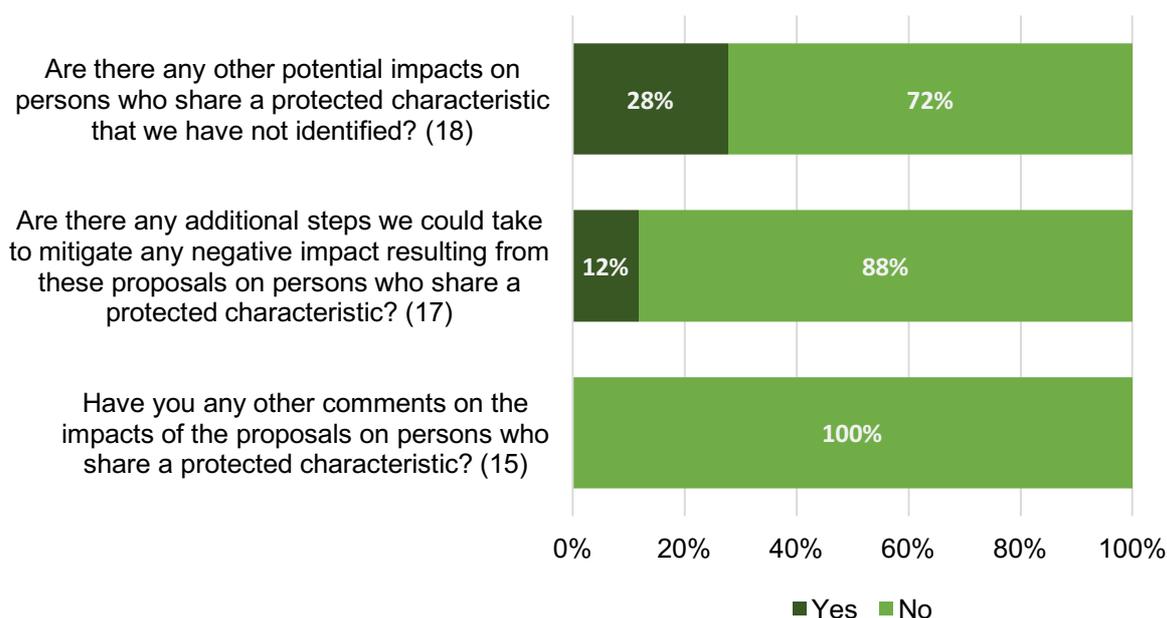
Personal respondent - parent

## 6. Equality impact

In total, 18 respondents answered the consultation questions on the potential impact of Ofqual's proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic<sup>11</sup>.

Five respondents believe there could be additional potential impact on persons who share a protected characteristic beyond that which Ofqual had already identified. Two feel that there are additional steps Ofqual could take to mitigate any negative impact (Figure 4).

**Figure 4 Summary of responses – equality impact**



Supporting comments<sup>12</sup>:

- A positive observation in relation to AS and A level geology is that removing the requirement for graded assessment of fieldwork activities could increase the range of geology fieldwork sites that may be used, in turn potentially increasing participation in practical activities by students irrespective of any physical impairment;
- There is a concern that exclusive use of exams as an assessment method could actively discriminate against those who would excel in non-exam assessments.

<sup>11</sup> Protected characteristics include: Age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

<sup>12</sup> One respondent expressed concern that the subject content for AS and A level politics lacks coverage of 'feminism', with the implication that this could have an impact on the protected characteristic of 'gender'.

## Appendix 1. Additional profiling questions

**Table 9 Nation**

|                  |    |     |
|------------------|----|-----|
| England          | 25 | 71% |
| Wales            | 4  | 11% |
| Northern Ireland | 3  | 9%  |
| Scotland         | 1  | 3%  |
| Other EU country | 1  | 3%  |
| Non-EU country   | 1  | 3%  |

Base: 35 responses (multiple answers given in some cases)

The options 'Other EU' and 'Non-EU' were selected by a single organisation with worldwide membership which provided an official response.

**Table 10 How respondents heard about the consultation**

|   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| Ofqual's newsletter or other communications | 4 | 19% |
| Social media site                           | 0 | 0%  |
| Via internet search                         | 1 | 5%  |
| Our website                                 | 1 | 5%  |
| From another organisation                   | 7 | 33% |
| Other                                       | 8 | 38% |

Base: 21 respondents

## **Appendix 2. Overview of phase 3 consultations**

Live dates for Ofqual's consultations covering the phase three subjects and qualifications are as follows:

### **Consultation 1**

***Live from 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015 to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015***

- Reformed GCSEs: astronomy; business; economics; engineering; geology; psychology and sociology; and
- Reformed A levels and AS qualifications: design and technology; environmental science; history of art; music technology and philosophy.

### **Consultation 2**

***Live 10<sup>th</sup> September 2015 until 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015***

- Reformed GCSEs: ancient history; classical civilisation; electronics; film studies; media studies and statistics; and
- Reformed A levels and AS qualifications: accounting; ancient history; archaeology; classical civilisation; electronics; film studies; law; media studies and statistics.

### **Consultation 3 (applicable to this report)**

***Live from 29<sup>th</sup> October 2015 until 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016***

- Short course GCSE: physical education; and
- Reformed A levels and AS qualifications: geology; politics.

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