

On your marks

A review of awarding bodies' capacity to mark GCSE, A level, principal learning and project examinations in summer 2009



Contents

Contents	1
Introduction.....	2
GCSE and A level summer examinations	3
Principal learning and project.....	3
Marking capacity for the summer 2009 examinations	4
Awarding bodies' recruitment of examiners and moderators.....	4
Marking training for examiners and teachers	5
Awarding bodies' use of onscreen marking.....	6
Awarding bodies' use of overseas markers.....	7
Moving forward.....	8

Introduction

This summer several new and revised qualifications will be awarded for the first time. These include revised AS level qualifications and the principal learning and project qualifications used for grading the Diploma. These qualifications will be awarded with existing qualifications and present challenges to awarding bodies in terms of the recruitment and training of a sufficient number of examiners and moderators. Ofqual, the regulator for qualifications, examinations and tests in England, conducted a review of awarding bodies' progress in recruiting the required number of examiners and moderators and ensuring that they have received appropriate training and support for the delivery of accurate, timely results to students in August. This report presents our findings.

For the public to have confidence in GCSE, A level and Diploma results in England, awarding bodies must have robust systems in place to deliver high quality exams that are accurately marked and lead to reliable results. Ofqual reviewed evidence of the recruitment and training of examiners and moderators who will mark this summer's examinations. The awarding bodies have implemented an extensive programme of training and support to prepare examiners, moderators and teachers responsible for assessing the new qualifications and specifications this summer. Ofqual is confident that awarding bodies will complete the marking within deadlines and ensure that marking is appropriately quality assured before the publication of results in August.

Ofqual makes sure that awarding bodies follow regulatory requirements so that, further and higher education institutions and employers can be satisfied with the integrity of the results. The following documents set out these requirements:

- *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (QCA/04/1293)*
- *GCSE, GCE and AEA code of practice (Ofqual/09/4151)*
- *Regulatory arrangements for component and Diploma awarding bodies – Recognition criteria and operating rules, version 2 (Ofqual/08/3761).*

These documents can be found on the Ofqual website under 'How we regulate'. They are designed to promote quality, consistency, accuracy and fairness in examinations and in the grades awarded to students. They do this by setting out the processes and procedures that awarding bodies must put in place and follow.

GCSE and A level summer examinations

The summer examinations period is the busiest time of the year for the GCSE and A level awarding bodies based in England (AQA, Edexcel and OCR), as well as their counterparts in Northern Ireland (CCEA) and Wales (WJEC). During this period the awarding bodies:

- process nearly 8 million student entries for GCSE and GCE examinations
- employ and train some 50,000 examiners
- mark more than 21 million exam papers
- deal with approximately 150,000 queries from schools, colleges and students.

Principal learning and project

This summer the three awarding bodies based in England will also be offering principal learning and project qualifications that contribute to the overall Diploma qualification, as well as awarding the overall Diploma.

Principal learning qualifications are available for each of the five lines of learning offered since September 2008:

- construction and the built environment
- creative and media
- engineering
- information technology
- society, health and development.

Principal learning qualifications require students to study and be assessed on newly defined sector-related material in an applied context. The project requires students to develop their organisation, research and presentation skills through the completion of a report, dissertation, artefact or performance. The overall grade a student receives for the Diploma is dependent on his or her performance in the principal learning and project components.

Awarding bodies have dedicated significant resources to ensuring they have the capacity to deliver principal learning and project qualifications this summer, and that those involved in marking have received appropriate training and guidance.

Marking capacity for the summer 2009 examinations

Drafting, distributing and marking the large number of exam papers required for national examinations is a massive undertaking for awarding bodies. It is a very complex process involving large numbers of people and takes a great deal of organisation.

To assess whether awarding bodies have sufficient marking capacity for the safe delivery of results this summer, Ofqual reviewed evidence of awarding bodies' 1) recruitment of examiners and moderators, 2) training provided to examiners and teachers in relation to the new qualifications and specifications, and 3) use of overseas marking and the quality assurance processes applied.

Awarding bodies' recruitment of examiners and moderators

GCSE and A level examinations are well established qualifications. A large number of GCSE and A level examiners and moderators return to mark and moderate each year, many of whom are teachers. The number of examiners and moderators required varies across subject areas. For subjects such as A level archaeology or Italian, an awarding body may require only two examiners or moderators for the assessment of an individual unit. Subjects such as English and mathematics will often require more than 200 examiners to mark a unit or paper.

Ofqual monitors the recruitment of examiners and moderators to ensure the safe delivery of the summer examinations. For the summer 2009 series, the awarding bodies identified the need to appoint examiners and moderators to more than 80,000 posts across approximately 1,700 A level assessment units and 900 GCSE components or question papers. Awarding bodies reported that recruitment and training of examiners to mark the summer examinations is on track to ensure the delivery of students' results in August.

As with GCSEs and A levels, awarding bodies provide Ofqual with data on the recruitment of examiners for the principal learning and project qualifications. For the principal learning qualification, awarding bodies recruit examiners and moderators to approximately 1,200 posts across the five lines of learning. For the project, which is assessed by teachers before being moderated by an awarding body, 45 moderator posts need to be filled. The small number of students taking these qualifications in this first year requires a relatively limited number of examiners and moderators, and awarding bodies confirmed that they recruited sufficient examiners and moderators for the delivery of this summer's examinations and assessments.

Marking training for examiners and teachers

Awarding bodies are required to provide training and support for their examiners and moderators, as well as for teachers responsible for assessing elements of these qualifications.

Training examiners to mark new specifications

Awarding bodies have a programme of role- and subject-specific guidance and training events to prepare senior examiners. These events provided opportunities for senior examiners to discuss the unique elements of the new specifications, qualifications and marking principles to be applied. Awarding bodies provide additional induction and training for all examiners and moderators fulfilling this role for the first time. All examiners are standardised by senior examiners so that they know how the mark scheme for each question should be applied to student responses. Following standardisation, senior examiners monitor each examiner's marking at regular intervals to ensure that they apply the mark scheme accurately.

Training and support for teachers

Most qualifications have an element of 'internal assessment' marked by teachers. GCSE, A level, principal learning and project qualifications all feature components that are marked by teachers. For the project and the majority of principal learning units, student work will be marked by teachers. Therefore, awarding bodies must provide teachers with appropriate training, guidance and support to ensure they mark students' work accurately and consistently to the required standard. Awarding bodies offer an extensive number of teacher support meetings in all subject areas across the country to ensure teachers are prepared to mark the new specifications and qualifications.

Students' work assessed by teachers is moderated by the awarding body to check that the marking is accurate and consistent with the national standard before any marks are confirmed. Awarding body moderators provide feedback to teachers regarding their application of the marking criteria, identify any issues and explain how marking can be improved in future.

Awarding bodies offer a range of additional support services to teachers, particularly in relation to the delivery and assessment of principal learning and the project in this first year. This includes information, such as sample assessment materials and frequently asked questions, on awarding body websites. In addition, awarding bodies have advisers dedicated to supporting centres and consortia in their delivery of the Diploma and its component parts. Advisers provide guidance on setting assessment tasks, the conditions under which tasks should be taken, and how to interpret and apply the marking criteria. Centres and consortia can also request guidance and advice from awarding bodies on students' partially completed portfolios of work to ensure they meet the requirements of these new qualifications.

Ofqual is confident that the awarding bodies implemented a programme of training and support to prepare examiners and teachers responsible for assessing the new qualifications and specifications. Ofqual will monitor the effectiveness of awarding bodies' training of examiners and moderators through attendance at a sample of the awarding body standardisation meetings at which the application of marking schemes is agreed. Ofqual also conducts in-depth scrutinies of a sample of qualifications and subject areas. These scrutinies consider all elements of awarding bodies' delivery of those qualifications, including the training and support provided to examiners, moderators and teachers. Ofqual will be reporting on the findings of its monitoring after the summer examinations, including whether the training and support provided by awarding bodies has been effective.

Awarding bodies' use of onscreen marking

Recent years saw an increase in the use of technology in the marking process by awarding bodies. In summer 2008, nearly 8 million exam papers were marked by examiners viewing student answers onscreen. New technology means that student work can be scanned and quickly distributed to examiners anywhere in the country and helps ensure efficient use of examiner resources.

Electronic marking processes used by awarding bodies contain a number of common features. The systems involve hard copy original scripts being scanned at dedicated centres, with each item response identified separately and stored as an image on a secure website (an item may be a whole question or a designated part of a question). Examiners undergo standardisation before accessing a secure website where they view an image of students' responses onscreen. They then apply the mark scheme and enter the mark achieved by a student response onscreen immediately after marking it. The marks are then processed automatically.

Onscreen quality assurance processes help ensure rigorous monitoring of each examiner's marking. Marking is monitored through the use of items that have been marked by a senior examiner to exemplify the marking standard. Examiners must mark a number of these to the required standard before marking a given item, and again at regular intervals in the course of marking the item. If an examiner is found to be applying the mark scheme incorrectly, the awarding body will not allow him or her to continue marking, and any student responses he or she marked will be reassigned to a reliable examiner.

The separation of scripts into individual items means that awarding bodies can categorise items and allocate them to markers based on the type of response each item elicits. Items that elicit a very limited range of response, such as one-word answers, can be allocated to markers who do not need to have subject-specific knowledge to apply the mark scheme accurately. Items that require students to display specialist subject knowledge or provide extended answers are assigned to expert markers who have the relevant subject knowledge and expertise. All markers

undergo standardisation and quality assurance checks before they are authorised to begin marking.

Awarding bodies' use of overseas markers

The development of onscreen marking systems means that awarding bodies can explore how some parts of the marking process can be completed outside of the UK. Currently, Edexcel allocates the marking of some items to markers based overseas. AQA makes use of overseas keying agencies for some items to facilitate marking in the UK. These processes are described below.

OCR conducts some of its marking using onscreen systems but does not use markers or support processes based overseas.

Ofqual reviewed evidence supplied by awarding bodies regarding the quality assurance processes in place for marking activity undertaken overseas to check that marking is accurate and reliable.

Edexcel explored the use of overseas marking for several years and conducted comprehensive trials to ensure its accuracy and reliability before expanding its use. Edexcel's scanning system enables student answer scripts to be divided into individual items. All items marked overseas are 'clerical items'. Clerical items require no specialist knowledge to mark. These are generally responses to questions that elicit a very limited range of response that can be marked quickly with the aid of an easily assimilated mark scheme. The marking of items requiring expert markers is not undertaken overseas.

Beginning in 2003 Edexcel, with the support of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), conducted trials of clerical marking in several overseas destinations, including America and Australia. In all cases, the trials involved the re-marking of items that had already been marked in the UK and a comparison of the marks awarded. The trials also measured the accuracy of markers against test items introduced into the system. In all cases, marking was at least as reliable overseas as in the UK.

Edexcel currently operates one clerical marking centre in the UK and one in Australia. All of Edexcel's clerical markers are graduates who must pass a written test before being appointed to mark. Clerical markers are trained on a question by question basis. The system of training and monitoring of markers is the same whether markers are based in Australia or the UK. All clerical marking takes place at a marking centre. Markers are monitored constantly by their team leader and the marking centre manager. At regular intervals, unknown to the markers, test items are introduced into the system. If these are not marked accurately, the marker will be stopped from marking.

Edexcel has used a clerical marking centre in Australia since 2007, with 17.2 million items across 128 papers marked there in summer 2007, 14.5 million items across 88 papers in 2008, and a projection that there will be 12.5 million items across 133 papers marked there this summer.

AQA makes use of overseas services to facilitate marking in the UK. Students' responses are prepared, scanned and segmented in the UK according to whether they can be auto-marked or not. Those that can be auto-marked are referred to as 'auto items'. Auto-marking is suitable for marking multiple-choice type responses, single-word solutions from a list or a definitive, one-word answer that requires no interpretation.

The auto-items are placed in electronic files and sent to keying agencies based in India, China and the Philippines. Trained staff at the keying agencies view the items onscreen and key into a database exactly what each student wrote. All answers are double-keyed as a quality check and monitored for accuracy. The files are then returned to the UK. All responses to a question are presented to a senior examiner for marking.

Since 2007, AQA has designated approximately seven per cent of the items marked onscreen to be auto-marked.

Ofqual is content that the quality assurance procedures employed by awarding bodies for activities undertaken overseas are robust and consistent with the quality assurance procedures applied to marking undertaken in the UK. The public can have confidence in the accuracy of outcomes resulting from overseas marking activity. Ofqual will continue to monitor awarding bodies' use of onscreen marking and overseas marking to check that assessments are accurate and standards maintained.

Moving forward

Ofqual will be monitoring summer examinations in England to make sure that they are delivered safely and securely, and that students, further and higher education institutions and employers can be satisfied of the integrity of the results. Through this monitoring, Ofqual will determine the effectiveness of awarding bodies' recruitment and training of markers and the support available to schools and teachers.

Ofqual wishes to make its publications widely accessible. Please contact us if you have any specific accessibility requirements.

First published by The Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator in 2009

© Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2009

Ofqual is part of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). QCA is an exempt charity under Schedule 2 of the Charities Act 1993.

Reproduction, storage or translation, in any form or by any means, of this publication is prohibited without prior written permission of the publisher, unless within the terms of the Copyright Licensing Agency. Excerpts may be reproduced for the purpose of research, private study, criticism or review, or by educational institutions solely for education purposes, without permission, provided full acknowledgement is given.

Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344
Textphone 0300 303 3345
Helpline 0300 303 3346

www.ofqual.gov.uk