

CONSULTATION DECISIONS

# Changes to our rules for GCSEs, AS and A levels in music and dance – decisions

**ofqual**

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## Introduction

Following the first delivery of the reformed GCSEs and A levels in music in summer 2018, we identified two issues with the way our rules for the performance assessment in these qualifications operated in practice. Both issues also apply to the reformed AS qualification in music. One of the issues also applies to the reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels in dance. Furthermore, we also identified an editorial error in our rules for the reformed GCSE in dance.

We therefore proposed to:

- Revise our requirements in GCSE, AS and A level dance and music to allow exam boards to determine how to mark a student's performance when that performance falls short of the minimum required length.
- Add a footnote to the conditions for GCSE and GCE music, to broaden the range of acceptable reference material beyond a traditional written score or lead sheet, where such a score or lead sheet is not available.
- Revise our requirements for how many dances students are required to perform in the GCSE dance performance assessment, in order to align with the Department for Education's (DfE) subject content.

We consulted on our proposed changes between 9 November and 9 December 2018. Full information on the consultation can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-gcse-and-gce-music-and-dance>.

## Summary of decisions

We received a total of 370 responses to our consultation. After analysing all responses and assessing the likely impact of our proposals, we have decided to immediately implement all of our proposed changes.

## Details

### **Minimum assessment times in performance assessments**

Currently, our rules for GCSE and GCE music and GCSE and GCE dance state that “the only evidence which will be admissible” is a performance or performances of a stated minimum duration. This means that students who do not perform for the minimum required time must receive no marks for their performance.

We expected that students would be guided to select pieces that would comfortably meet the minimum length requirements. However, we have seen that some students have performed pieces which have fallen slightly short of the minimum time. While students should meet the minimum performance times and therefore should be penalised if they do not, in some cases, we think it would be disproportionately severe to prevent students from gaining any marks for the performance at all.

We therefore consulted on revising our rules, to remove the reference to “the only evidence which will be admissible”, and instead stating that the assessment should

“require each Learner to perform” for the required minimum duration. This revision would allow exam boards to determine the most appropriate approach to marking performances that do not meet the required minimum duration.

Regarding this proposal, 95% of respondents indicated that they were in favour. 80% of respondents stated that they “strongly agree”, while a further 14% indicated that they “agree”.<sup>1</sup>

Of the four exam boards that offer the qualifications, AQA, OCR and WJEC stated that they “strongly agree” with the proposal, while Pearson indicated that they “agree”.

Overall, respondents found the current rule to be disproportionately punitive, potentially unfair and inappropriate for the nature of the qualifications.

Several respondents felt that it is important for there to be a consistent approach across the exam boards to marking performances which fall short, with Pearson stating a preference for the exam boards to work with JCQ to establish a collective approach. It will be for each exam board to determine the approach they wish to take, either individually or collectively.

Some respondents suggested that a short performance can be sufficient to exemplify the standard, thereby bringing into question the need for a stated minimum duration at all. We feel that a minimum duration is important to help secure comparability across exam boards. We still expect students whose performances fail to meet the minimum expectation to be penalised in some way.

Some respondents felt that students should simply observe the rule as written. However, given the overwhelming support for our view that the current rule could be disproportionately severe we have decided that our proposed revision is the fairest and most appropriate course of action.

We will therefore implement our proposal with immediate effect.

### **“One or more dances”**

In GCSE dance, our rules for the performance assessment are, unintentionally, slightly inconsistent with the DfE’s subject content. As written, our rules require students to perform one single dance, rather than giving them the opportunity to split their performance into two or more discrete dances (as permitted by the subject content).

We therefore proposed to amend our conditions to require students to perform “one or more dances”, rather than “a dance”.

Regarding this proposal, 55% of respondents were in favour. 40% indicated that they “strongly agree”, while a further 15% stated that they “agree”.

42% indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree”.

Only 2% of respondents opposed the proposal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The apparent mathematical discrepancy is due to the percentage figures being rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>2</sup> The apparent mathematical discrepancy is due to the percentage figures being rounded to the nearest whole number.

AQA is the only exam board to currently offer GCSE dance. AQA “strongly agree” with our proposal.

A desire for clarity and consistency was expressed in the consultation responses.

We note that a significant proportion of respondents stated that they “neither agree nor disagree” with the proposal. However, the reasons given were either because the respondents did not teach or offer the qualification themselves, or because the need for the revision was not apparent (as it will not require a change to the specification that is currently being taught). To clarify, the revision is intended purely to address the unintentional inconsistency between our subject-level conditions and the DfE’s subject content.

A view was expressed that the inconsistency could be resolved through a reconsideration of the language used to describe the required performances. However, we feel that the simplest and most desirable option is for the wording of our conditions to replicate the wording of the DfE’s subject content (i.e. “one or more dances”).

We will therefore implement our proposal with immediate effect.

### **Score or lead sheet**

Our rules for the performance assessment in GCSE and GCE music require that centres provide exam boards with a score or lead sheet for the performance, so that the examiner can assess the accuracy of the performance. However, the way in which the requirement has been interpreted has differed across exam boards. We believe that some flexibility is appropriate, as not all styles or genres of music use written scores or lead sheets.

We therefore propose a revision to our rules to indicate that, where a written score or lead sheet is unavailable – because it does not exist – other means of referencing the performance intentions can be permitted. However, where a written score or lead sheet is available, it should still be used.

Regarding this proposal, 85% of respondents indicated that they were in favour. 71% of respondents stated that they “strongly agree”, while a further 14% indicated that they “agree”.

Three of the four exam boards were in favour of the proposal – AQA and OCR stated that they “strongly agree”, while Pearson indicated that they “agree”. However, WJEC stated that they “disagree”.

Overall, respondents felt that the change would make sure that the performance assessment can cover the full range of musical styles and genres outlined in the DfE’s subject content. Some noted that the current rule has resulted in teachers undertaking the time-consuming task of writing scores themselves. Some respondents welcomed the clarity and consistency that the revision would bring.

WJEC opposed the proposal as they were unconvinced that marking with reference to alternative material (e.g. a recording) would be as accurate as with reference to a score or lead sheet. They also expressed concerns around the time required for an examiner to become suitably familiar with a reference recording, and the logistical challenge of examiners familiarising themselves with a recording immediately before an assessment. Our rule change does not compel WJEC, or any other exam board, to accept performances where a written score or lead sheet is unavailable if they do

not wish to do so. All exam boards must make sure that, whether a written score or lead sheet is used, or where an alternative is used if they are unavailable, the approach they take to assessment results in all students' performances being marked consistently and accurately. However, in the event that exam boards do decide to accept alternative reference material (where a written score or lead sheet is unavailable), we address the likely burden that this would impose in our regulatory impact assessment.<sup>3</sup>

While Pearson were in favour of the rule change, they suggested a further revision – to allow alternative reference material not only where a written score or lead sheet is unavailable, but also where a written score or lead sheet is “not appropriate”. However, part of the reason for our rule change is to deliver clarity and consistency – we feel Pearson's suggestion would be detrimental in this regard, as it would be difficult to establish definitively when a written score or lead sheet can be considered to be inappropriate.

Some respondents questioned whether reference material should be required at all. We feel that some form of reference material is necessary, so that examiners can effectively judge the accuracy of a candidate's performance in terms of pitch, rhythm, tempo and, where appropriate, interpretation of the performance directions.

Some respondents were in favour of the rule change but expressed some concerns – that there should be sufficient guidance on what the alternative reference material should include, that there should be scope for interpretation rather than strict adherence to the reference material, and that candidates submitting alternative reference material should not be marked more leniently than those submitting a written score or lead sheet. It will be for the exam boards to address these concerns in their specifications and mark schemes and make sure that, regardless of any different approaches taken to the use of reference material, students' performances are marked consistently and accurately.

Some respondents felt that students should simply comply with the rules as they are. However, we feel that the rule change will be of benefit – making sure that the range of styles and genres covered in the performance assessment align with the DfE's subject content, and providing clarity and consistency around the permissibility of alternative reference material.

We will therefore implement our proposal with immediate effect.

### **Other consultation feedback**

Several respondents suggested other amendments that could be made to the qualifications, yet these suggestions fell beyond the scope of this consultation.

There was also a suggestion that GCSE and GCE drama could have been included in this consultation. In GCSE and GCE drama, students are required to participate in a performance of a stated minimum duration. However, our rules for these qualifications do not declare that a performance of the stated minimum duration is “the only evidence which will be admissible”. Therefore, our rules for GCSE and GCE drama do not prevent students from gaining any marks if their performance runs short, and allow the exam boards to decide how to penalise students whose performances fall short. The flexibility we are introducing in the music and dance

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<sup>3</sup> [Regulatory Impact Assessment](#), published as part of the consultation outcome

qualifications brings them into line with the regulatory requirements for the drama qualifications.

AQA suggested that the maximum duration of performances in dance should be reviewed in the same way as the minimum duration. However, our revised wording applies to any maximum times as well as to the minimum times – so exam boards will also be able to determine the most appropriate approach to marking performances that exceed any regulatory requirements regarding maximum durations.

## Implementation timescales

Several consultation respondents expressed a desire for our changes to be implemented as soon as possible. This is our intention.

Changing the rules immediately means our new expectations will be in force for this summer's exams. It does not, however, change the regulatory requirements which were in place last summer.

In 2018 exam boards decided how to deal with students whose performances could not be accepted because they were below the minimum time. In doing this we asked the exam boards to balance the need to be fair to students who did not meet the minimum requirements with the need to be fair to those who did, in order that students were not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged.

## Equalities impact assessment

No significant concerns around equalities were raised in the consultation responses.

As stated above, in the music qualifications, the admission of alternative reference material where a score or lead sheet is unavailable will broaden the range of styles and genres available in the performance assessment (in keeping with DfE's subject content). Some respondents identified that this could allow students to perform pieces from cultures in which musical scores or lead sheets are not commonly used.

One respondent identified a potential impact from broadening the performance assessment to include genres that are "perceived as challenging groups who share a particular protected characteristic. For example, rap is seen as misogynist and/or homophobic." However, they acknowledged that "safeguards to protect adverse impact, e.g. promotion of hatred, should already be covered by school policies."

## Regulatory impact assessment

We have considered the regulatory impact of our proposals in light of responses received to the consultation. We set out our view of the potential impacts in our regulatory impact assessment, which can be found [here](#).



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