

CONSULTATION DECISIONS

# **Moderation and verification of centre assessment judgements**

Awarding organisation controls for centre assessments

**ofqual**

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Summary of decisions .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Areas with changes to our consultation proposals .....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Areas where we propose to implement our proposals as consulted on .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>3. Decisions .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Areas with changes to our consultation proposals .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<b>Moderation and verification .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Minimum requirements .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Implementation date .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>Areas where we will implement our proposals as consulted on .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>Qualifications subject to moderation or verification .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Centre controls – approval, monitoring and taking action .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Centre-assurance strategies .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Results, certificates and appeals .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4. Equalities impact assessment .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>5. Regulatory impact assessment .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<i>Minimum verification requirements .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Centre controls – approval, monitoring and taking action .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Centre assurance strategies .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Next steps .....</i>	<i>26</i>

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Where assessment judgements are made by centres<sup>1</sup>, it is important that awarding organisations can be sure that the standards being applied are as accurate and consistent as possible. The public should be confident in a learner's result whenever or wherever the assessment is taken. It is also important that qualifications can be delivered in ways that are manageable for centres, and that they meet the needs of those that use them.
- 1.2 We set rules around this, and our current rules require an awarding organisation to check results for each group of learners before they are issued. We know however that in many cases this is not being done, and if it were, some vocational and technical qualifications may no longer be deliverable.
- 1.3 To address this, we consulted, between 25 February and 20 May 2019, on how to regulate the controls in place between awarding organisations and centres, where centres make assessment judgements on behalf of an awarding organisation. Our proposals were intended to strike a balance between ensuring an appropriate level of awarding organisation control over centre assessment judgements, and ensuring qualifications can be delivered to meet the needs of users.
- 1.4 We set out in this document the decisions we have taken following that consultation, and explain how we have taken account of respondents' feedback to our consultation. Alongside this document, we have published our analysis of consultation responses<sup>2</sup> and our technical consultation<sup>3</sup> on the rules and guidance necessary to implement this approach.

<sup>1</sup> An organisation undertaking the delivery of an assessment (and potentially other activities) to Learners on behalf of an awarding organisation. Centres are typically educational institutions, training providers, or employers.

<sup>2</sup> [Analysis of consultation responses](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Consultation on Conditions and guidance](#)

## 2. Summary of decisions

### Areas with changes to our consultation proposals

2.1 In the following areas, we have decided to amend our original proposals in light of responses received. We explain these in more detail later in this document, and summarise them below.

Original proposal	Decision
<p><b>Amend our definition of Moderation and provide a new definition for the term verification</b></p>	<p>We have decided to modify our definition of Moderation and to remove references to verification. In place of defining verification, we will instead require awarding organisations to put in place a Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process, of which Moderation will be one distinct form.</p>
<p><b>Set minimum requirements that an awarding organisation’s verification process must meet</b></p>	<p>We have decided to set minimum requirements that an awarding organisation’s Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process must meet. These will be similar to those which we had proposed would apply for verification, but we will amend these to make them less prescriptive, and reduce their potential burden. In particular, we have decided not to specify a minimum number of centre visits per year, and to require awarding organisations instead to determine the most effective controls for the qualifications it is offering in the centres that deliver them as part of their Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny.</p>
<p><b>Require awarding organisations to meet these requirements by January 2021</b></p>	<p>We have decided that as it may be possible to meet some aspects of these requirements more quickly than others, we will allow awarding organisations to phase their introduction. We will require all requirements to be met in full no later than September 2021, but would expect an awarding organisation than can implement them in part, or in full before this, to do so.</p>

## Areas where we propose to implement our proposals as consulted on

2.2 We have decided to implement our other proposals as consulted on, subject to some minor adjustments. These are set out in more detail later in this document, and are summarised below.

Proposal	Decision
<b>Require that all centre assessment judgements are subject either to Moderation, or to another form of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny</b>	We will require that all centre assessments are subject to a form of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny, of which Moderation will be one specific form.
<b>Require that centre assessment judgements in certain qualifications must always be subject to Moderation</b>	We will require Moderation of centre assessments in certain qualifications and are consulting on what these should be as part of our technical consultation.
<b>Require that for all other qualifications where centres make assessment judgements, Moderation should be the starting point and allow for verification where an awarding organisation can justify why moderation cannot be implemented for a qualification</b>	We will expect awarding organisations to consider whether Moderation, or another form of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny provide the most effective controls to ensure standards for the qualification, in the centres delivering it.
<b>Where verification is used, to provide guidance on the circumstances in which an enhanced verification approach should be considered</b>	We will expect an awarding organisation to use a risk-based approach to determining when, and how, it will be appropriate to go beyond our minimum requirements as part of its Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny.
<b>To require all awarding organisations to have in place a centre-assurance strategy, explaining its approach and rationale for its moderation or verification controls</b>	We will require an awarding organisation to explain its approach, and the rationale for it in a Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy.
<b>Set requirements that an awarding organisation's centre-assurance strategy must meet</b>	We will set requirements that an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy must meet.

<b>Put in place guidance about the actions an awarding organisation should take where it discovers through its verification process, that a learner has been issued with an incorrect result</b>	We will require an awarding organisation to take account of our guidance when deciding whether to correct an incorrect result that has been issued, which it identifies through its Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process.
<b>Allow awarding organisations to revoke certificates that have been issued in reliance of an incorrect result</b>	Where an awarding organisation's decision to correct an incorrect result leads to a need to revoke a certificate that has been issued in reliance on that result, we will allow for revocation of these certificates.

## 3. Decisions

### Areas with changes to our consultation proposals

- 3.1 In the areas set out below, we have made changes to our consultation proposals to reflect respondents' feedback.

#### *Moderation and verification*

##### ***What we proposed***

###### **Amend our definition of Moderation and provide a new definition for the term Verification**

Moderation will require awarding organisations to check results and make adjustments if needed, for each group of learners, before results are issued.

Verification will allow for periodic checking of centre assessment decisions by awarding organisations, but these will not necessarily have to take place for every group of learners.

##### ***Responses received***

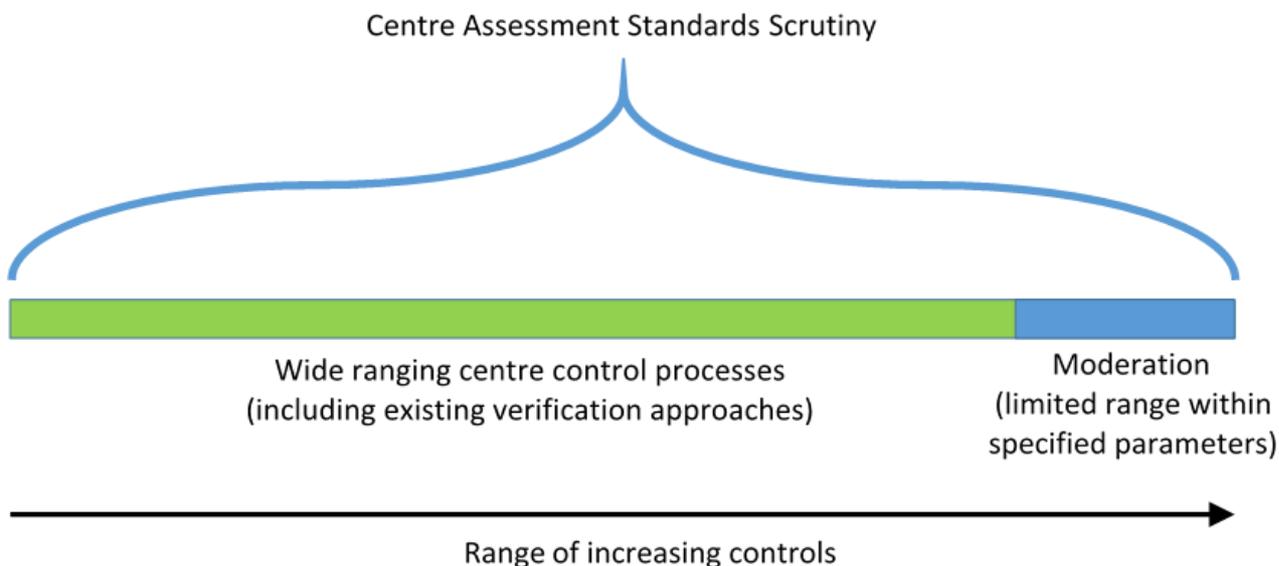
- 3.2 Respondents generally supported the greater clarity that recognising alternative approaches through the amended definitions would bring. In particular respondents commented that they would allow a more realistic and systematic approach to internal quality assurance.
- 3.3 The main concerns expressed in relation to this proposal were about the use of the term 'verification'. Some respondents said that our proposed approach, which sought to draw a distinction on the basis of when the checks take place, and the purpose of the checks, focussed too much on the impact on results themselves, ignoring some of the wider processes that are currently considered to be a part of verification. They commented that as understood currently, verification covers a wide range of processes, such as training, monitoring and quality assurance, in addition to checking the quality of centres' assessment judgements. They commented that defining verification in the more narrow way we had proposed, with a focus on results, was likely to lead to confusion amongst awarding organisations and centres.
- 3.4 In addition to comments on the use of the term verification, other respondents also requested clarity in relation to other terminology used, such as cohort; marking and visit.

## Our decision

- To require awarding organisations to put in place a **Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny** process to scrutinise the standards of assessment judgements made by centres
- To modify our definition for Moderation and to remove references to verification
- For Moderation to be a distinct form of **Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny**

### Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny

3.5 We have decided to amend our approach to distinguishing between Moderation, and the controls we had referred to in our consultation as 'verification'. We will no longer use the term verification, and are instead consulting on requiring awarding organisations to have in place a process for scrutinising centre assessment standards, which will be referred to as Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny. Moderation will be one form of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny and, where it is used, Moderation must always take place before results are issued. Other forms of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny could take place before, or after results are issued on a periodic basis. We have set out our proposed definitions for Moderation and Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny in our technical consultation, which we have published alongside these decisions. Our proposed approach is illustrated in the diagram below.



3.6 The purpose of an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny will be to evaluate assessment judgments made by centres. This process will incorporate a wide range of controls, which awarding organisations will determine based on the risks relating to the qualification and the centres delivering it. Through its Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny, an awarding

organisation will be expected to do all it reasonably can to ensure that the assessment remains, or was, fit for purpose, and that the criteria against which learners' performance is differentiated are being, or were, applied accurately and consistently by assessors in different centres, regardless of the identity of the assessor, learner, or centre.

- 3.7 Moderation will be one distinct way of conducting Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny. Where centres make assessment judgements on awarding organisations' behalf, our view is that this provides for the highest level of control over results, as the awarding organisation has an opportunity to check, and intervene if necessary, before any result issued. For some qualifications (for example most GCSEs and A levels) our view is that it would not be appropriate for centres to make assessment judgements and for results to be issued without awarding organisations first checking a sample of these. We have decided, as set out in our consultation, to retain, and continue to refer to, Moderation. We explain in our technical consultation the qualifications for which we propose Moderation must apply.
- 3.8 Where it is not possible to carry out such checks, or where other controls are more effective for ensuring the standards of centre assessment judgements, we have decided to require awarding organisations to put alternative controls in place as part of their Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny. Such checks will provide a different level of control to Moderation – although an awarding organisation may not check a sample of all results before they are issued, it will be expected to put other arrangements in place to effectively scrutinise the standards of centre assessment judgements. The most effective approach is likely to vary based on risk-factors relating to the qualification and the centres delivering it. Taking account of the feedback to the consultation, we have decided not to refer to these approaches as verification; they will instead form part of an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process.
- 3.9 We are looking to provide guidance on the factors an awarding organisation might consider when determining its Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process. We also intend to provide guidance on the approaches an awarding organisation might take having considered these factors. We have included draft guidance as part of our technical consultation. We are also considering whether examples of such approaches may be helpful as part of this guidance, and intend to discuss this further with awarding organisations during the consultation period.

## **Terminology**

3.10 As part of our approach, we have considered other terminology used in our requirements. We have described above our decision not to refer to verification. We have sought, as far as is possible, to make sure that all terms used are as clear as possible, and this is reflected in our proposed Conditions, requirements and guidance, which we have published as part of our technical consultation. There are other terms such as marking, which could refer to assigning a numerical mark, or determining a level of competence against assessment criteria, which are used elsewhere in our regulatory framework. Where this is the case, in order to ensure consistency, we have used the same terminology, where we intend it to mean the same thing.

## **Minimum requirements**

### **What we proposed**

<b>Set minimum requirements that an awarding organisation's verification process must meet</b>
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To require a consistent minimum level of awarding organisation control, for example, a minimum frequency of monitoring visits by the awarding organisation.
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### **Responses received**

3.11 Respondents generally agreed that it was helpful to set clear expectations for the controls that should be in place between awarding organisations and centres. They did not agree, however, about what these minimum controls should be. Specifically, respondents did not agree with our proposals relating to:

- the number of visits (2 per year plus 1 unannounced);
- sampling (how an awarding organisation should sample learner work to ensure its standards are being met);
- retention of learner evidence (the need to retain evidence to enable post-results changes to be made in the event that an issue that could affect past results is discovered on a monitoring visit); and
- notification to other awarding organisations (where an issue in a centre causes an awarding organisation to change the level of control it has in place with a particular centre).

3.12 Respondents also expressed concerns that the requirements we proposed were too prescriptive, and would stifle innovation and impose unnecessary burden on awarding organisations and centres. In particular, they stated that the proposed requirements would require them to expend unnecessary resources on low risk centres and that there would be a disproportionate impact on centres with low volumes of certificates. Respondents commented that in some instances, they would be unable to meet the proposed minimum requirements, for example, for some types of centre (such as prisons) it would not be feasible to conduct a completely unannounced visit.

3.13 Respondents did not feel that the requirements we proposed would lead to the improvements we were seeking, and that there were more effective ways to ensure the standards of assessment judgements made by centres, making use of awarding organisations' existing risk-based approaches. They commented that these approaches would allow for the appropriate minimum level of control to be determined based on a specific qualification or centre, and to be scaled up or down accordingly.

### ***Our decision***

- **To set minimum requirements that an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process must meet**
- **To require awarding organisations to determine and take the most effective approach for ensuring the standards of assessment judgements made by centres**
- **To no longer prescribe detailed requirements (for example numbers of visits)**

### **Minimum requirements**

3.14 We have decided to implement our proposal to set minimum requirements that an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process must meet. Our view is that it is important, in order to maintain standards and public confidence, for effective controls to be in place. We have seen evidence that, although in some cases awarding organisations have robust controls in place, this is not always the case. We think that by setting out minimum requirements for awarding organisations to meet, we can help ensure that users of qualifications can be confident in the standards of qualifications, whenever or wherever they are taken.

3.15 We recognise that in order for these controls to be effective, they need to be manageable for awarding organisations and centres, and effective for the qualification and centres delivering it. We have a duty not to impose or maintain unnecessary regulatory burdens, and have considered this carefully as part of our decision making. We have decided to set less prescriptive requirements than we had originally proposed, and to instead require awarding organisations to implement a risk-based approach to determine the most effective controls for ensuring the standards of centre assessment judgements for their qualifications. We will require that awarding organisations take all reasonable steps as part of their Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process, to ensure that assessments remain fit for purpose and that the criteria against which Learners' performance is differentiated are applied accurately and consistently across different centres.

### **Visits**

- 3.16 As a result of this decision, we will not prescribe a minimum number of visits that awarding organisations must undertake each year. We will instead require, as part of the steps an awarding organisation takes to ensure the assessment remains fit for purpose, that it undertakes annual activities in respect of each centre, which could take place face-to-face or remotely. These annual activities should enable the awarding organisation to scrutinise marking undertaken by the centre, and to observe assessments and marking taking place where this is possible and would be effective.
- 3.17 Although we will not prescribe a minimum number of visits, we would still expect there to be face-to-face contact between awarding organisations and centres each year, and for some of the activities to take place at short notice, which could still be unannounced where this is possible. We are proposing to provide guidance setting this out.

### **Sampling**

- 3.18 We have decided to also set requirements in relation to how an awarding organisation samples a centre's marking of assessments. There are a number of variables in relation to an awarding organisation's sampling approach, and it will be for an awarding organisation to balance these. It will need to determine how to sample units within qualifications, ensuring that it has an approach to sampling all units, although recognising that the structure of some qualifications will mean it is not possible to sample all units every year. An awarding organisation will, however, need to be able to demonstrate that its approach will allow it to be confident in the standards of assessment judgements made by centres for all units in its qualifications. We will also set out other factors which an awarding organisation must consider when determining its sampling approach, for example to take account of specific risks relating to the centre or qualification, the number of learners, the range of attainments of those learners, and the number of people involved in quality assurance within a centre. Our requirements will also set out the need for those conducting Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny activities on behalf of an awarding organisation to be appropriately trained and competent to do so.
- 3.19 We will require awarding organisations to set out their approach to meeting our minimum requirements, including how and when they might go beyond these, as part of their Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy. Where we identify issues with an awarding organisation's approach, either for particular qualifications, or centres, or across an awarding organisation's activities, we will consider whether to require the awarding organisation to put in place strengthened controls which might include specifying the controls which it must use.

### **Retention of evidence**

- 3.20 In response to concerns about our proposed requirement for awarding organisations to retain sufficient evidence to enable them to review any issues that may have arisen in between visits to a centre, we have decided to amend our proposal to allow for awarding organisations to balance the need to be able to correct identified issues, with ensuring that doing so does not impose an unnecessary burden on awarding organisations or centres.
- 3.21 We have decided to require that an awarding organisation must consider what evidence it is necessary for its centres to retain in order that it can carry out its Centre Assurance Standards Scrutiny process effectively. We will require awarding organisations to incorporate a requirement to retain that information into the enforceable agreement which we require it to have with its centres. This will allow for awarding organisations to develop approaches that do not rely solely on the retention of large amounts of evidence. For example, an awarding organisation could design its approach to sampling such that regular remote sampling activities provide it with a greater level of assurance, which could reduce the need to retain evidence for a long period. Alternatively, they could develop approaches that allow them to identify and correct issues, without necessarily relying on the storage of physical evidence, for example by retaining such evidence remotely. Our requirements will require awarding organisations to determine and develop effective approaches for the qualifications they offer.

### **Notification to other awarding organisations**

- 3.22 In light of the concerns raised, we have decided to set out our expectations for an awarding organisation to notify other awarding organisations where it identifies issues with centre performance as part of its Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process, as guidance. By making this guidance to which awarding organisations must have regard, instead of a requirement, it will address the concerns raised in response to the consultation about the practicalities of doing so.
- 3.23 We have taken this approach instead of removing this expectation entirely, as we consider it important that where issues are identified, a centre does not simply move from one awarding organisation to another, without the issue being addressed. But we do not want to impose a requirement that awarding organisations cannot meet and we also want to allow awarding organisations to respond effectively to identified issues, which in some cases could lead to additional guidance and support in response to identified issues. Our guidance will set out the need for awarding organisations to consider, in the event of an issue being identified, whether it is appropriate to make other awarding organisations aware, and to do so where it does.
- 3.24 We have set out our proposed minimum requirements, and our guidance on these, as part of our technical consultation.

## Implementation date

### What we proposed

#### **Require awarding organisations to meet these requirements by January 2021**

We proposed that for new qualifications being developed, awarding organisations should meet our new qualifications at the point where these qualifications are made available. For existing qualifications, we proposed to allow a year from the publication of our final Conditions and guidance.

### Responses received

3.25 Some respondents agreed with the proposed timescales, however, many expressed concerns that this would not allow sufficient time to fully implement, and comply with, our proposed requirements. Respondents suggested that it would take between 12-18 months to review processes, make necessary changes, implement these in centres, and train centres on any changes. They felt that the proposed implementation time did not take into account the consequent changes such as IT changes and recruiting additional staff that would be required in order to meet the requirements.

3.26 In addition to the amount of time needed to meet our proposed new requirements, respondents also commented on the timing within the year when any changes are made. Many respondents felt that it would be less disruptive and burdensome to centres and awarding organisations, for changes to be aligned with an academic year. They felt that making changes part way through an academic year could be confusing for centres, and that introducing changes in September would allow for more effective implementation, as this is when many courses begin.

### Our decision

- **To allow awarding organisations to phase the introduction of our new requirements, with full implementation no later than September 2021**

3.27 We consider it important that our new requirements are met as soon as is possible, to ensure that effective controls are in place between awarding organisations and centres to ensure the standards of centre assessment judgements. We also recognise that there needs to be a manageable time period in order to meet our requirements in full.

3.28 We have decided to allow awarding organisations to phase the introduction of these requirements, recognising that it will be possible to implement and meet some aspects more quickly than others. Awarding organisations should seek to implement all of our requirements as soon as is possible, prioritising those aspects that, in relation to its current processes, will have the greatest impact on ensuring the standards of centre assessment judgements. In meeting our requirements, awarding organisations should ensure that they are met, in full,

no later than September 2021, and where some, or all of these requirements can be met sooner than this, they should be. If we consider it necessary for specific qualifications to meet our requirements sooner than this, we will set this out as we implement our new requirements.

3.29 We believe this approach will reduce the regulatory burden of our new requirements, by allowing awarding organisations to phase their implementation. Whilst September 2021 will be the latest date by which they must be met in full, we would expect an awarding organisation to be able to demonstrate its progress towards full implementation ahead of this. In particular, if an incident occurs which calls into question an awarding organisation's controls with its centres, we would seek to understand its approach to achieving full compliance with our requirements.

## Areas where we will implement our proposals as consulted on

### *Qualifications subject to Moderation or verification*

#### ***What we proposed***

- **Require that all centre-marked assessment is subject to either Moderation or verification**
- **Require that centre-marked assessment in certain qualifications must always be subject to Moderation**
- **Require that for all other qualifications with centre-marked assessment, Moderation should be the starting point**
- **Allow for verification where an awarding organisation can justify why Moderation cannot be implemented for a qualification**

#### ***Responses received***

3.30 Respondents generally agreed that centre-marked assessments should be subject to either Moderation or verification. Respondents differed in their preferred approach for given qualifications. Some said that Moderation should be the starting point where it can be implemented effectively for a qualification. Others commented that for many qualifications, the delivery model would not allow for Moderation, therefore they could only be verified. Respondents suggested it would be better to permit a more flexible, risk-based approach where awarding organisations can determine the most effective approach for a qualification and the centres delivering it.

3.31 There was broad agreement from respondents in relation to the qualifications which we proposed should always be subject to Moderation. Concerns were raised about the extent of the list and what criteria will be used to determine whether a qualification should be on this list or not. Some respondents questioned whether Technical Qualifications should be included due to practical elements and others expressed concern about the effects of applying

this too widely. Other respondents suggested that a number of other qualification types should be included in this category including licence to practice qualifications and all qualifications that report outcomes on a grading scale.

3.32 Respondents agreed that pre-results checking allows for strong control over results that are issued, although a number of respondents misunderstood our proposal and were concerned that the proposal was actually a requirement for all qualifications to be moderated, or that the level of justification required for qualifications to be verified would be so high as to essentially require all qualifications to be moderated. Other respondents requested clarity on how this requirement would interact with their existing 'Direct Claim Status' arrangements.

### ***Our decision***

- **To require that all centre assessments are subject to Centre Assessments Standards Scrutiny, with Moderation being a distinct form of this**
- **To require some qualifications with centre assessment to always be subject to Moderation (e.g. GCSEs and A levels)**
- **Where we have not required Moderation, to require awarding organisations to determine the most effective approach to ensure the standards of centre assessment judgements**

3.33 We have decided to implement our proposals to require all qualifications to be subject to a form of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny, and to require, for some qualifications, that this must take the form of Moderation.

3.34 We have explained earlier in this document that Moderation provides for the highest level of control over results (other than the awarding organisation marking assessments itself), as the awarding organisation has an opportunity to check, and intervene if necessary, before any result is issued. For some qualifications (for example, GCSEs and A levels<sup>4</sup>) our view is that it would not be appropriate for centres to make assessment judgements and for results to be issued without awarding organisations first checking a sample of these. We have set out in our technical consultation the qualifications for which we expect this to be the case.

<sup>4</sup> Other than where this requirement has been disapplied for the spoken language assessment in GCSE English language and the practical science assessment in A level biology, chemistry, geology and physics.

3.35 We recognise that in some qualifications, this level of control may not be manageable, or there may be other more effective ways of ensuring the standards of centre assessment judgements. We have therefore decided, as consulted on, to allow other controls, and to require awarding organisations to determine the most appropriate approach to ensure the standards of centre assessment judgements, based on the risks relating to the qualification, or the centres delivering it. We will require an awarding organisation to explain its approach to carrying out Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny.

## *Centre controls – approval, monitoring and taking action*

### *What we proposed*

<b>Where verification is used, to provide guidance on the circumstances in which an enhanced verification approach should be considered</b>
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### *Responses received*

3.36 Respondents supported the approach to enhancing the controls in certain circumstances. Many told us that some of the suggested practices outlined in the consultation are standard practice as part of their risk-based approaches. Other respondents listed a number of other circumstances in which an enhanced verification approach should be required, including:

- when third-party subcontractors deliver qualifications for the first time
- high staff turnover or any external indication of financial concerns
- extra-large centres or those with a number of satellite sites
- licence to practice qualifications
- where there are internal quality assurance or training issues
- where there is only a small pool of assessors
- short courses
- roll-on-roll-off courses
- high risk qualifications, such as ESOL

3.37 Some respondents suggested that a slightly different approach should be adopted, such as incorporating the enhanced verification circumstances in centre agreements.

### *Our decision*

- **To require awarding organisations to take a risk-based approach to deciding when and how to go beyond our minimum requirements as part of their Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process**

3.38 We have decided to implement our proposal to provide guidance on when an awarding organisation should enhance its approach beyond our minimum requirements. We have decided, however, not to refer to this as 'enhanced verification'. One reason for this is to align with our approach to no longer define verification as the alternative approach to Moderation, as described

earlier in this document. Additionally, a number of respondents had misunderstood our proposals to mean that enhanced verification was a separately defined single level of control that would apply in addition to Moderation and verification. This was not what we had intended – our intention was to refer to a risk-based approach to scaling up or down an awarding organisation’s overall approach.

- 3.39 Instead of referring to enhanced verification, we will instead provide guidance on going beyond our minimum requirements, making clear that this is a risk-based approach and not a separately defined level of control. We will also provide for Ofqual to require an awarding organisation to enhance its approach where we consider this necessary in response to an incident or other event. Our proposed requirements and guidance are set out in our technical consultation, which we have published alongside these decisions.

## ***Centre-assurance strategies***

### ***What we proposed***

- **To require all awarding organisations to have in place a centre-assurance strategy, explaining its approach and rationale for its Moderation or verification controls**
- **Set requirements that an awarding organisation’s centre-assurance strategy must meet**

### ***Responses received***

- 3.40 Respondents were supportive of the requirement for a centre-assurance strategy and the need for awarding organisations to set out their justifications for the approach adopted. Several respondents stated that this proposal aligned with their existing processes, whilst others expressed concerns about the potential for duplication of documentation and the burden this would cause. Others requested more clarity about what information needs to be included and the form this can take, for example, whether hyperlinks to existing documents are acceptable or not. Some respondents suggested that this may assist awarding organisations in standardising their documentation requirements for centres.
- 3.41 Respondents expressed their desire for further guidance, or an exemplar for the strategy, in order that the production of the strategy, or strategies, does not become unduly burdensome and overly complicated. Further clarity on the exact information that needs to be included, specifically, what level of detail the justification of approach and consideration of when this will be varied, needs to go into in the strategy. Respondents queried whether a single document would be sufficient to meet our requirements, or whether separate documents would need to be developed for each qualification.

## **Our decision**

- **To require awarding organisations to produce a Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy, and to set minimum requirements that the awarding organisation's strategy must meet**

3.42 We have decided to require an awarding organisation to produce a strategy setting out its approach to Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny. To reflect the decisions taken in this document, this will be referred to as a Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy, instead of a Centre Assurance Strategy as we had originally proposed.

3.43 We consider it important that an awarding organisation is able to set out its approach to the controls it has in place with centres, and that we can hold them to account for delivering the appropriate controls. We will set requirements that an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy must meet, and will provide guidance to help awarding organisations understand these requirements.

3.44 The strategy will be a key part of an awarding organisation's approach to delivering qualifications which rely on centre assessment. Where awarding organisations decide what controls to put in place based on risk, it will be important that we are able to understand from their strategy how they have evaluated risk, what factors they have taken into account and how they have weighed competing factors. The strategy should explain how the awarding organisation can have confidence that the level of control it decides upon is sufficient to meet our requirements. The Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy should set this out, and we will use this as part of our regulatory approach to ensure that awarding organisations meet our requirements, and take action where we find that they do not. We will take a strategic and risk-based approach to evaluating awarding organisations' strategies, for example, through specific programmes of work, our audit programme or as part of our response to an incident or event. We will communicate our intentions during the implementation period.

3.45 Feedback from the consultation raised concerns about the possible burden of producing such a document. In response, we will make it clear in our requirements and guidance that the document will need to provide a comprehensive, coherent and logical explanation of the approach. However, where other processes that exist elsewhere form part of its approach, an awarding organisation may refer to these rather than duplicating them in its strategy. We will also make clear through our requirements that awarding organisations may choose how to approach their strategy – they could have a single overarching strategy covering all of their qualifications, or separate strategies for different qualifications or types of assessment.

3.46 We are consulting on our proposed requirements and guidance for Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategies in our technical consultation which we have published alongside these decisions.

## *Results, certificates and appeals*

### *What we proposed*

- **Put in place guidance about the actions an awarding organisation should take where it discovers through its verification process, that a learner has been issued with an incorrect result**
- **Allow awarding organisations to revoke certificates that have been issued in reliance of an incorrect result**

### *Responses received*

3.47 Respondents generally agreed with our proposal to provide guidance in regard to actions which should be taken where a learner is issued with an incorrect result. In addition, respondents offered a number of comments, addressing areas including that the guidance should be clear and unambiguous, should allow for awarding organisations to exercise some discretion, and should take into account the range of qualifications, especially in the vocational sector. Some respondents expressed concern at the potential repercussions on learners that revocation of certificates could cause, and stated that this should play a role in any decisions.

### *Our decision*

- **To provide guidance on the factors awarding organisations should consider when deciding whether to correct an incorrect result that has been issued, as part of their Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process**
- **To allow awarding organisations to revoke certificates that have been issued in reliance of an incorrect result, as part of an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process**

3.48 We have decided to implement our proposals as consulted on. We already have guidance that sets out the factors an awarding organisation should consider if it discovers incorrect results, but this has been written on the basis that the awarding organisation would already have had opportunity to check results before they have been issued. Under a form of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (other than Moderation), it is possible that results may be issued without an awarding organisation first having chance to sample check them. Additionally, depending on the awarding organisation's approach to sampling and visiting centres, any error may not be discovered until some time after results have been issued. With this in mind, our guidance will set out some factors for an awarding organisation to consider when deciding what

action to take and how it should balance these factors in making its decision. Our proposed guidance is included in our technical consultation, which we have published alongside these decisions.

- 3.49 We consider the proposed guidance (and that already in place) sets out clearly the factors which an awarding organisation should take into account when deciding whether to correct results. However, the decision whether or not to correct a result will be for the awarding organisation to take in the first instance, based on its consideration of the guidance and the individual facts; we cannot write guidance which sets out unambiguously what decision an awarding organisation should take in particular scenarios.
- 3.50 We have decided also to implement our proposal to amend our Conditions to allow awarding organisations to revoke certificates where this is necessary as a consequence of a decision to correct a result. Respondents to the consultation raised concerns that in some cases, it would be difficult to physically revoke a certificate, as awarding organisations would not have contact details for learners, and if they have left the centre, the centre may not either. We recognise this concern, however we don't think the fact it is difficult should prevent an awarding organisation from doing all that it can to revoke a certificate. We will draft our requirements such that an awarding organisation must take all reasonable steps to revoke a certificate where the result has been corrected as part of an awarding organisation's Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process. Our draft Condition is included in the technical consultation which we have published alongside these decisions.

## 4. Equalities impact assessment

- 4.1 We asked in our consultation whether there were any positive or negative impacts caused by our proposals on people who share particular protected characteristics<sup>5</sup>.
- 4.2 Respondents commented that our proposals were likely to impose additional burden on centres, particularly in relation to the minimum number of visits we had proposed to require each year. A number of respondents said that the burden of our proposals would be felt disproportionately by small centres, who may be forced to cease offering courses as a result of the increased cost and added burden. Respondents commented that it is often these small centres that offer qualifications in niche areas, and many of these qualifications are taken by learners with protected characteristics, particularly disabled learners. Respondents also commented on whether the proposals would impact on qualifications that are mainly delivered online, again commenting that any impact on online qualifications could be felt disproportionately by disabled learners.
- 4.3 One respondent commented that our proposals would have a positive impact on learners with protected characteristics, as the proposals to allow verification approaches would allow for more flexibility in the delivery of qualifications, which could support those with protected characteristics taking qualifications.
- 4.4 We have considered these potential impacts as we have developed our proposals. Our view is that many of the changes we are proposing in response to consultation feedback, will help to address these impacts. We have set out our decision to no longer prescribe a minimum number of visits each year, which should reduce the burden of our proposals across all centres. By reducing the impact on all centres, then small or niche centres offering qualifications often taken by disabled learners are less likely to be significantly affected by our proposals, which should minimise the impact on disabled learners.
- 4.5 We have also set out our decision to set requirements which allow awarding organisations to take a risk-based approach to the controls they put in place with centres. This will allow awarding organisations to adapt their controls appropriately to take account of the needs of disabled learners as part of their centre controls.

<sup>5</sup> We have considered the potential impact of the proposals on people who share protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

- 4.6 We have not identified any further positive or negative impacts on learners that share a protected characteristic as a result of our proposals. We are seeking further views on this as part of the technical consultation we have published alongside these decisions.

## 5. Regulatory impact assessment

- 5.1 We have considered the regulatory impact of our proposals and set out our view of the potential impacts as part of our policy consultation. We have set out our updated impact assessments below.
- 5.2 We are discussing our approach with the qualifications regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland, alongside our discussions on proposals included in the current *Consultation on changes to the Conditions of recognition*<sup>6</sup>. It will be for each regulator to make its own decision on any changes to its own regulatory requirements in relation to the proposals covered in this document, and we will continue to discuss this work with them as our consultation progresses.

### Minimum verification requirements

- 5.3 We proposed that all qualifications should be subject to verification that meets the minimum requirements we proposed to set. We set out our minimum requirements, which included a proposal for awarding organisations to conduct 2 centre visits, and an additional unannounced visit, each year. Such approaches would represent a reduction in burden, as all qualifications which include centre assessment must currently be subject to pre-results moderation.
- 5.4 Respondents commented that our proposals would significantly increase the regulatory burden on awarding organisations, and that this would in-turn, increase the burden on centres of delivering qualifications. In particular, respondents told us that the proposed requirements in relation to visits would create significant burdens in terms of finances and resources. This would have been the case particularly where centres work with multiple awarding organisations.
- 5.5 A number of awarding organisations also commented on our proposal to require awarding organisations to retain sufficient evidence as part of their centre controls, to allow them to scrutinise results that had been issued in the event of an issue being discovered, to decide whether to make any changes to results.
- 5.6 We have considered these comments as we have finalised our approach, and have taken action to seek to reduce the burden of our requirements. In particular, we have considered the impact that our proposed minimum requirements on visits would have, and have decided not to prescribe a minimum number, and to replace unannounced visits with short notice activities, in order to reduce this burden.
- 5.7 In doing so, we have had to balance this against the need to meet our statutory objectives, in particular in relation to standards and public confidence. It is not

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-changes-to-the-conditions-of-recognition>

possible to completely remove the burden of our requirements, as some burden will always be necessary to ensure appropriate controls are in place between awarding organisations and centres. Our view is that with the changes we have made, our proposals strike an appropriate balance between these considerations.

- 5.8 In particular, we have considered the way in which we set our proposed minimum requirements, and have decided to allow awarding organisations greater flexibility to determine an appropriate risk-based approach to the controls they have in place with centres, instead of prescribing detailed requirements that they must follow. We will not, for example, prescribe a minimum number of visits that an awarding organisation must conduct each year. We will also make sure, through the drafting of our requirements, that those in relation to retention of evidence are manageable for awarding organisations and centres. We believe this approach will address many of the concerns expressed by respondents in relation to the regulatory burden of our proposals, but we are seeking further views on this as part of our technical consultation.

## Centre controls – approval, monitoring and taking action

- 5.9 In relation to our proposed requirements, we sought views on the likely cost of requiring awarding organisations to conduct a minimum number of centre visits each year. We estimated an increase in costs of approximately £400 per centre as a result of our proposals. We received a range of responses to this question, some of which agreed with our estimate, with others varying from £155 to £1,500 per visit.
- 5.10 We have decided not to impose prescriptive requirements about the number or type of visits that awarding organisations must conduct each year. Whilst this will not affect the cost of conducting individual visits, it may reduce the overall financial impact of our proposals, as awarding organisations may choose to carry out fewer than three visits on the basis of their own risk-assessment, and may also conduct alternative activities, such as remote sampling, which may reduce the cost of each individual activity.

## Centre-assurance strategies

- 5.11 We proposed that all awarding organisations must produce a centre-assurance strategy, setting out its approach to the controls it has in place with centres. We sought views on the estimated burden and financial cost of producing such a strategy.

- 5.12 We received a range of responses ranging from £100 to £100,000 for producing a centre-assurance strategy. Respondents told us this could be affected by a range of factors, such as the size of the awarding organisation, the number of qualifications it offers, the number of centres it works with, and whether the strategy was required to be a separate document for each qualification, or could be an overarching strategy. The responses received to our consultation have not enabled us to update our original estimated cost of producing a strategy (which we estimated to be £8,000). We are seeking further views on this through our technical consultation, now that we are consulting the detail of what the strategy must include.
- 5.13 We have decided to require that awarding organisations produce a Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy, and will make clear, as part of our requirements and guidance, what our expectations are for this document. We will not require awarding organisations to produce separate strategies for every qualification; we will allow each awarding organisation to determine its approach, which could include putting in place an overarching strategy covering more than one of an awarding organisation's qualifications. We will also make clear that where parts of the strategy exist in other documentation that the awarding organisation already holds, we would not require for this to be duplicated in a separate document. Whilst the strategy will still need to provide an overall rationale, where specific policies exist elsewhere, awarding organisations will be able to refer to these.
- 5.14 Whilst there will still be some burden caused by requiring production of a Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny strategy, we believe this to be necessary and proportionate to our aims of ensuring standards and public confidence. But we believe that by providing the additional clarity within our requirements that we have set out above, that some of the perceived burden of our proposals will be reduced.

## Next steps

Alongside these decisions, we have published our technical consultation<sup>7</sup> which sets out the Conditions, requirements and guidance we propose to put in place to implement these decisions. This consultation will run until 14 November 2019 and we encourage you to respond.

<sup>7</sup> [Consultation on Conditions and guidance](#)



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