ofqual

1 October 2019

RO letter sent via Portal

RO67/2019

Publishing details of grading aggregation approaches

Dear Responsible Officer

You may be aware of an issue this summer with some qualifications on Key Stage 4 performance tables categorised by the Department for Education as 'tech awards', where changes were made to the grading algorithm used to calculate qualification grades. This meant grades were not calculated as the specifications for the affected qualifications suggested. The situation was complicated because there was a statement in the specifications that schools and colleges would be given notice of any changes before they starting teaching a course. We issued a statement in August[1] in which we were clear that there were significant lessons to be learned by all awarding organisations about the statements they make in their specifications and associated materials, and how they communicate with schools and colleges when issues arise.

We recognise that schools, colleges and students want to understand how their unit-level results aggregate to a qualification grade. While awarding organisations would not normally wish to make changes to those aggregation algorithms and any overall grade thresholds, there may be circumstances in which it is necessary to do so to secure the maintenance of standards over time. We therefore consider that, in the interests of fairness and openness, and to mitigate risks to public confidence, awarding organisations should make clear that the grading algorithms and overall grade thresholds published, or otherwise made available to schools, colleges and students, may be subject to change.

Following the issue of results in August, we carried out a review of a small number of specifications published on awarding organisations' websites. While some do make clear that the grading algorithm or grade thresholds might be subject to changes, others do not. We believe this is potentially misleading for students.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/response-to-pearson-changes-to-btec-grading-criteria-2019

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We do appreciate that reviewing and potentially making changes to the wording of your qualifications might take a little time, but we consider this should be done as a matter of urgency. In the circumstances I expect you to confirm by 30 November 2019 that you have reviewed your published material and either:

- that you have in place appropriately clear statements about the potential for aggregation algorithms and/or overall grade thresholds to change where this is necessary to maintain standards, or
- that you will have made any necessary changes before the end of the calendar year.

You will need to confirm your position by 30 November 2019 by sending us a message on the Portal citing reference: RO67/2019. Please do the same if you have any questions or wish to discuss the specifics of your qualifications.

Yours sincerely

Phil Beach

Executive Director, Vocational and Technical Qualifications