

Ofqual Board

Paper 60/16

Date:

30 November 2016

Title:

General Qualifications Update

Report by:

Julie Swan, Executive Director for General Qualifications

Responsible Director:

Julie Swan, Executive Director for General Qualifications

Paper for information and decision

Open paper, closed annexes



Issue

1. This paper updates the Board on the General Qualifications (GQ) Directorate's key work since the last Board meeting.

Recommendations

2. The Board is asked to:
 - (a) note the progress on key GQ issues;
 - (b) *This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.;*
 - (c) agree to consider the final content and assessment arrangements for low take-up languages by electronic business if this would avoid additional delay for exam boards developing their qualifications.

General Qualifications Directorate

3. The paper includes updates on:
 - i. Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching in 2017
 - ii. Review of regulatory requirements relating to confidentiality
 - iii. Reviews of Marking and Appeals
 - iv. Summer 2016 Exam Series Delivery

- v. Summer 2017 readiness review
- vi. GCSE grading
- vii. GCSE Computer science
- viii. General qualifications other than GCSEs and A levels
- ix. Evaluating the reformed qualifications
- x. Low take-up languages
- xi. Three country statement
- xii. National Assessments
- xiii. Stakeholder Engagement

Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching in 2017

- 4. As at 15 November there were 24 specifications accredited. We will provide an update at the meeting. An Accreditation Comparison Statement is annexed at Annex A

Review of regulatory requirements relating to confidentiality

Background

- 5. *This section (paragraphs 5 – 30) has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

Reviews of Marking and Appeals

- 31. At its last meeting the Board agreed to delegate to the Chief Regulator the decisions we have yet to take on reviews of marking and appeals. We expect most of the decisions will be made in the new year and we will update the Board then.
- 32. We will not consider whether to require exam boards to allow appeals on the ground of a marking error until we have evaluated the pilot of this approach in three A level subjects this year. We will then consider whether to introduce the new ground for appeal to all subjects and, if so, the rules needed to allow these appeals to function appropriately.
- 33. The evaluation will involve:
 - looking at whether our rules for the new ground for appeal allows cases to be considered effectively;
 - talking to those involved in appeals, including those from schools and colleges who have brought the appeal, to understand their experience;
 - understanding from exam boards the impact on them of the options; and
 - analysing the data from all the appeals conducted this year to see how appeal numbers in the pilot qualifications compared to the rest.

34. The evaluation is starting now and will conclude in February 2017. Our aim is to announce our position in April 2017 to allow exam boards to put in place any new arrangements in that summer.
35. We will be publishing in December official statistics on reviews of marking and appeals for summer 2016. The data will help us understand how the exam boards and schools and colleges responded to the changes introduced this year.

Summer 2016 Exam Series Delivery

36. We met with the exam boards during October to discuss their notification of events and how they had managed incidents. There are a few outstanding issue to resolve. We are now preparing a report of the summer series to be published 14 December. The report will be a refined version of previous years' reports and will be accompanied by a simple infographic which depicts the complexity and scale of the summer series.

Summer 2017 readiness review

37. The exam boards cannot eliminate all risks to the safe delivery and awarding of qualifications. However, having considered a range of options, we have decided to contract an external organisation to review the exam boards' readiness for delivering 2017 – focused on the extent to which exam boards have identified and are managing the risks to safe delivery in 2017, particularly in light of any financial constraints and any changes they may have made to their governance arrangements, structures and/or ways of working.

GCSE grading

38. We are drafting the regulations to put the Board's decisions in July on setting the grade standards of new GCSE this into effect. We will publish a 4-week technical consultation on 30 November seeking views on the draft Conditions and Guidance. We will then final put the regulations in place in the new year in good time for 2017 awarding.

GCSE Computer science

39. We continue to have concerns about the risks of malpractice and inaccurate marking in the reformed GCSE computer science. The exam boards have each now updated their assessment strategies with their final plans for managing the risks in this subject. We are reviewing these. We will expect the exam boards to keep their arrangements under review and we will need to consider whether it remains appropriate to permit non-exam assessment in this qualification.

General qualifications other than GCSEs and A levels

40. We have reviewed and revised our approach to regulating general qualifications, other than GCSEs, AS and A levels. We have decided which of these qualifications to prioritise for further scrutiny. We have decided to focus on new IGCSEs® and other qualifications that are not new GCSEs but are graded 9-1,

Extended Project qualifications and those qualifications that meet the government's 'core maths' measure.

41. Having reviewed the appropriateness of the regulatory requirements we have in place for these qualifications, we are not proposing any significant new regulatory requirements. Instead we will be looking at awarding organisations' compliance with our existing rules and gathering information to consider potential issues in relation to these qualifications.
42. For example, we will review the exam papers for qualifications that count towards the DfE's core maths performance measure, that were awarded for the first time this year, to understand whether they complied with our General Conditions and were in line with the published sample assessment materials. We plan to audit the standard setting and awarding of these qualifications in 2017 – when it is anticipated that volumes of students taking these qualifications will increase.

Evaluating the reformed qualifications

43. As part of our work to evaluate the reformed qualifications we will be gathering feedback from teachers on the first delivery and assessment of AS qualifications this summer. There will be two conferences for a sample of the subjects available in the first tranche of reformed qualifications; sciences, English and history. We will seek qualitative evidence on the impact of the reforms. We will then decide whether the approach should be used for the wider evaluative work on A levels in 2017.

Low take-up languages

This section (paragraphs 44 – 45) has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

Three country statement

46. In the light of the different reform programmes in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, some stakeholders, particularly those who use qualifications in employment or higher education entry requirements, are keen to know how the different forms of GCSEs and A levels available across England, Wales and Northern Ireland relate to each other.
47. We have worked with the other regulators to publish a statement that sets out the similarities and differences between GCSEs, AS and A levels in the different jurisdictions. The statement does not include any judgements about the relative merits of the qualifications or about their comparability. In particular, in the absence of any overarching method for securing it, no claims or commitments are made to comparable standards. However, as each regulator has made commitments to carry forward existing standards at the point of reform, we have not emphasised potential differences of standard either.
48. We will update the Board at the meeting on the publication of the statement. A final draft of the statement which is in the process of being signed by all regulators is annexed to this paper at Annex B

National Assessments

We made a short submission to the Education Select Committee for its review of national assessments; this is annexed to the paper. We are recruiting for a permanent member of staff to lead our work to keep national assessments under review.

Stakeholder Engagement

49. We held an Examination Stakeholder Engagements Group meeting on 9 November when we brought colleagues up to date with recent developments, including on the National Reference Test and marking consistency.
50. We have also been attending ASCL's series of regional events and AoC's annual conference and supporting the 9-1 campaign.

Finance and Resource

51. We continue to operate within agreed budget.

Impact Assessments

Equality Analysis

52. We have not identified any specific equality related issues in any of the matters covered in this paper.

Risk Assessment

53. Risks are included within the risk register.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

54. We will consider the regulatory impact of the remaining aspects of our reforms for reviews of marking and appeals to inform our final decisions.

Communications

55. An update on communication of GQ related issues is included in the Chief Operating Officer's report.

Annexes

Annex A: *Redacted*

Annex B: *Redacted*

Annex C: *Redacted*

The annexes have been redacted as their publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs

Paper to be published	Yes –
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Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting
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