

Summer 2016 Exam Series Report



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1. Introduction

Every summer we monitor exam boards' preparation for and delivery of exams in GCSE, AS, A level and similar alternative qualifications, such as Level 1/2 certificates, International GCSEs, Cambridge IGCSEs[®], Cambridge Pre-Us and International Baccalaureate Diplomas.

These are provided by a small number of exam boards: AQA, Cambridge International Examinations (Cambridge International), International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), OCR, Pearson and WJEC.

Our priorities during any exam series are that:

- exams are delivered to plan;
- results are issued on time and are accurate so that users can rely on them; and
- standards in the same qualifications are aligned between exam boards in each qualification subject and over time.

The summer exam series is the largest of any single exam series we regulate. During summer 2016, around 1,800 GCSE, AS and A level exams were taken over a period of seven weeks. This generated 15.4 million scripts, which were marked by approximately 54,000 examiners. Overall there were over 8.1 million certifications. We require the exam boards to effectively manage the risks and issues associated with the delivery of such a large scale operation.

We have produced an infographic¹ to illustrate the scale and key stages of the exam series. The infographic also provides useful context to accompany the content of this report.

How we regulate and monitor the summer exam series

The assessment materials for the exams are often produced at least a year before the exams take place. Schools and colleges typically finalise entries on behalf of their students in February, and exam boards make plans to deliver assessment materials to schools and colleges. The bulk of the delivery of the exam series can be divided into five phases: exam planning; exam administration; marking; awarding and post results.

We meet with exam boards, individually and collectively, throughout the year to discuss their management of the exam series. We focus on different issues according to the phase of the exam delivery cycle, including the recruitment of examiners, scheduling of standardisation (where examiners are standardised in

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-2016-summer-exam-series-report

marking) and awarding meetings, marking progress, issuing of results, and tracking of reviews of marking.

We require the exam boards to notify us of any issues² that could have, or have had, a negative impact on students, qualification standards, or public confidence; and to tell us how they are dealing with the issues. We call these ‘event notifications’.

We review these notifications, and intelligence from other sources, to identify any common or specific risks to the delivery of exams and qualifications.

We require the exam boards to manage any issues that arise. If we think an exam board’s approach is inadequate or inappropriate, or that it is likely to breach our rules, we will tell the exam board. Depending on the type of issue and its impact, we will:

- give the exam board the opportunity to review its approach in light of our concerns; and/or
- take regulatory action, including to direct that the exam board takes specified steps to prevent or mitigate any negative impact and to comply with our rules.

Our priority during the exam period is that exam boards manage issues quickly and effectively with minimal impact on students. During this period we intervene only where we feel it is necessary to protect standards, public confidence or to mitigate the effect on students. However, after the exams are finished we analyse the issues which occurred during the summer and evaluate why they might have happened and how effectively they were managed by the exam boards. At that point, we decide what, if any, regulatory action may be required and/or how the information gathered over the summer feeds into our ongoing monitoring of the exam boards.

In this report we summarise the key issues that occurred in 2016, the decisions we have made and the areas where we are undertaking further work in light of the analysis we have completed.

² See Condition B3 of our General Conditions of Recognition:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/529394/general-conditions-of-recognition-june-2016.pdf

2. Delivery of summer 2016 exam series

Context

The first 13 reformed AS qualifications³ were taken and awarded this summer, alongside the legacy AS qualifications.

We also know that some of the exam boards were reviewing their operating models and IT systems and were implementing internal restructures.

We have seen increasing use of social media by students in recent years to express their feelings about an exam paper, or a question within a paper, that they have just taken. It is becoming common for the mainstream media to identify and repeat these posts. We do not normally respond to such comments during the exam series. We may choose to consider whether a paper or a question within it has been inappropriate, and if we have concerns we will raise these with the relevant exam board.

The Department for Education's (DfE) Progress 8⁴ measure took effect as part of the secondary school accountability system. This means each GCSE grade is attributed a value in the accountability measures, rather than all the focus being on students achieving a 'C' grade or above. This was also the last year in which Level 1/2 certificates, including international GCSEs and Cambridge IGCSEs[®] would count in DfE's performance tables. Each of these factors may have influenced school and college entry decisions.

Phase 1: Exam planning

Exam entries

Schools and colleges are responsible for submitting entries to the exam boards for each exam or assessment to be taken by their students. In summer 2016, over 21 million entries⁵ were made on behalf of over 1.9 million students for GCSE, AS, A level and other Level 1/2 qualifications.

³ The reformed AS subjects are: art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English language and literature, history, physics, psychology, and sociology.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>

⁵ This does not include data for IBO qualifications or Cambridge Pre-U qualifications.

In June 2016 we published provisional entry data for the summer 2016 exam series⁶; and in November 2016 we published actual entry data for the 2015/2016 academic year⁷.

AS qualifications are becoming fully stand-alone qualifications in England. Students do not have to take an AS in order to take an A level in these reformed qualifications. Total entries to the 13 reformed AS qualifications taken for the first time this year fell by about 14% relative to entries last year to the legacy AS qualifications they are replacing.

Reasonable adjustments and special considerations

The exam boards are required to make reasonable adjustments (e.g. to provide modified papers) for disabled students. They can also make or allow other arrangements (e.g. to use a scribe) for students who have temporarily experienced an illness, injury or some other event outside of their control that will affect their ability to demonstrate their knowledge, skills or understanding. The exam boards refer to these arrangements collectively as access arrangements.

In November 2016 we published statistics on access arrangements for GCSEs and A levels during the 2015/16 academic year⁸. The number of approved access arrangements rose by 8% on the 2014/15 academic year, continuing the upward trend over the last five years. The number of approved requests for modified question papers also rose, by 20%. This may be because of the introduction of new types of modified question papers in recent years and better information being available to schools, students and parents. We have included more information in this year's statistical release about the number and type of schools and colleges whose students received access arrangements.

The exam boards collect and use data to monitor how access arrangements are being used and to check that schools and colleges have the required evidence to support the applications they make. We have asked the exam boards to provide the data they collect, which we will analyse to inform our view of the effectiveness of the systems they have in place to approve and monitor access arrangements.

Exam boards can also make post-exam adjustments to students' marks to take account of temporary and unexpected illnesses, injuries or other events. They refer to these as special considerations. We publish statistics about these separately⁹. In

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/summer-2016-exam-entries-gcses-level-1-2-certificates-as-and-a-levels-in-england>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/entries-and-late-entries-for-gcse-and-a-level-2015-to-2016-academic-year>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-arrangements-for-gcse-and-a-level-2015-to-2016-academic-year>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-consideration-in-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2016-exam-series>

summer 2016, the number of approved requests for special consideration increased by 5% on summer 2015, partly due to significant events, such as flooding, which affected entire school cohorts.

We had some indication in summer 2016 of some inconsistencies in the way exam boards were dealing with the requests they received for special consideration. For example, in cases where students were given incorrect question papers by their schools or colleges, some exam boards recognised that the students' performance could have been affected by this confusion, and gave them special consideration; others dealt with this matter differently by providing the students with estimated marks. We want to ensure fairness in the exam system, so that an exam board only approves requests where it is appropriate to do so, and that its decisions are consistent for similar cases. We will be auditing exam boards' handling of special consideration requests and will require them to improve their approaches if we find weaknesses.

Assessment materials

Exam boards write and produce assessment materials for upcoming exam series, including question papers, stimulus materials, and mark schemes, often a year or more before the relevant exam series occurs. We require the exam boards to produce assessment materials that are clear, appropriate and fit for purpose.

Errors can occasionally occur during an exam board's production of assessment materials. If undetected, errors in question papers and stimulus materials could affect students' ability to answer the questions as intended; and errors in mark schemes could lead to students being awarded incorrect marks.

Where an exam board detects the errors before the exams are taken, it can usually minimise the potential negative impact by issuing a correction or 'erratum' notice. However, some errors may not be detected until after an exam has started or been taken. Where this is the case and the exam board believes the error could have a negative impact, we require it to notify us. This year we also clarified to the exam boards that they should report errors in modified assessment materials (such as large font, or braille exam papers) as well as those in standard versions.

We categorise these errors by their potential level of impact. The categories are as follows.

Category 1 - errors which make it impossible for students to generate a meaningful response to a question/task

Category 2 - errors which cause unintentional difficulties for students when they are responding to a question/task

Category 3 - errors which do not affect a student's ability to generate a meaningful response to a question/task

Table 1 below shows that the total number of reported assessment material errors in summer 2016 more than tripled compared to last summer. We acknowledge that some of this apparent increase might be the result of the fuller reporting of errors to us.

Table 1:

	Reported assessment material errors							
	Total		Category 1		Category 2		Category 3	
	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015
AQA	19	4	6	2	11	2	2	0
Cambridge International	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
IBO	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	0
OCR	9	3	6	2	3	0	0	1
Pearson	1	3	0	2	1	0	0	1
WJEC	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total	37	11	16	6	18	3	3	2

Note: numbers reported include those from AQA, Cambridge International, IBO, OCR, Pearson and WJEC.

The number of errors must be seen in the context of the volume of materials produced. For summer 2016, the exam boards developed nearly 18,200 question papers and supporting stimulus materials. There were errors in 29 of these, representing approximately 0.16% of the total volume. Exam boards also modify question papers and stimulus materials to enable disabled students to access the exams. This year they provided 43,173 modified papers for AS, A levels and GCSEs. There were 7 errors in modified papers this year – about 0.02%.

All of the errors reported to us this year were in question papers, rather than in stimulus materials. The unmodified question papers for which errors were reported were taken by approximately 323,000 students in total. Not all students would have been affected by the errors, or affected to the same degree, as some of the questions were optional and some students will have recognised the error without becoming distracted by it. We monitored the exam boards' handling of all cases to make sure they were considering and addressing, as far as possible, any disadvantage to students. Exam boards have different ways of compensating for the potential negative impact of an error on students to make the outcomes as fair as possible. For example, 36% of the errors were in multiple choice questions each worth one mark. In these cases, the exam boards usually credited all students with a mark for the affected question.

The errors in the modified papers were introduced during the modification process, so they did not appear in the standard versions of the paper. However, they are no less serious in terms of their potential impact for those individual students affected. Last year we encouraged exam boards to participate in research by the Royal

National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) into the accessibility of GCSE exam papers in braille and modified large print, and to work with RNIB in addressing its subsequent findings. We will continue to provide a forum for equalities stakeholders and the exam boards to work together to develop best practice for the production of modified papers.

Table 2 shows that there was not a direct relationship between the number of errors made and the number of assessment materials produced by an exam board. We know that exam boards have different quality assurance mechanisms to prevent and detect errors. The figures suggest that exam boards' arrangements are not equally effective. Alternatively, it is possible that we are not being notified of all assessment material errors.

Table 2:

	Number of reported assessment material errors in standard question papers or stimulus materials	Number of standard question papers and stimulus materials produced
AQA	15	4,860
Cambridge International	4	340
IBO	1	804
OCR	6	3,437
Pearson	1	5,921
WJEC	2	2,835
Total	29	18,197

The number of errors in some exam boards' materials is noteworthy. We will seek assurance from each of them that they have identified the causes of these errors and taken steps to reduce the occurrence of errors in future. We will also bring the exam boards together ahead of summer 2017 to make sure they adopt a common and consistent approach to notifying us of errors.

In summer 2017, there will be more assessment materials because of the reforms to GCSEs, AS and A levels. We want to be sure the exam boards have put in place appropriate processes and resources to prevent, identify and correct assessment material errors. We will be reviewing the exam boards' arrangements in this area. Most assessment materials for summer 2017 will already be in the final stages of

development. However, if we identify specific concerns about an exam board's products or processes, we could require them to introduce additional quality checks.

Phase 2: Exam administration

Security breaches

Exam boards, schools, teachers and students all have a responsibility to ensure the confidentiality of assessments is maintained.

Schools are responsible for distributing the correct papers to the right students in line with the exam timetable.

Security breaches occur when confidential assessments are accessed or released before the scheduled time. The use of social media and digital messaging can mean that a security breach in one school can be difficult to contain, if confidential information is disseminated.

Where a breach happens, we expect the exam board affected to investigate the extent of the breach and take all reasonable steps to mitigate its impact. Exam boards might, for example, replace exam papers (provided there is sufficient time and the associated risks can be managed) and monitor social media for evidence of a wider security breach. Exam boards may also conduct statistical analyses of students' performance at individual or cohort level to see if there is any indication they have gained any advantage from a breach. Exam boards can amend students' marks in light of their findings.

This year, as with last year, the most frequent cause of security breaches was schools or colleges handing out the wrong exam papers. This accounted for 22 out of 63 (35%) breaches reported, compared with 23 out of 61 (38%) breaches reported last year. We would like to see the number of mistakes further reduced. In 2015, the GCSE and A level exam boards introduced a new rule requiring two people in a school or college to check an exam package before opening it and handing the papers out. Exam boards are considering what additional safeguards they can put in place for summer 2017.

The second most frequent cause of security breaches this year was the leak of confidential information contained in the assessment materials on public forums or shared on social media. These accounted for 19 out of 63 (30%) breaches reported, compared to 11 out of 61 (18%) breaches last year. These included cases where worked solutions to live questions were posted on forums, or students who took the exam early (usually because of an exam timetable clash) disclosed the topics on which questions were asked.

In light of these events this summer, we will be auditing the exam boards' arrangements with schools and colleges, with a particular focus on security

breaches. We will also monitor how effectively the exam boards monitor social media to identify the scale and nature of potential security breaches.

Malpractice

Everyone involved in the delivery of an exam has a role to play in preventing and reporting malpractice, whether they are schools, students or examiners. We take allegations of malpractice very seriously and we expect exam boards to do the same.

Exam boards require schools and their own examiners to report all suspected incidents of malpractice and to cooperate with any subsequent investigation. Each allegation of malpractice must be considered and investigated. Where it is proven, the exam board should take proportionate action against the schools, teachers or students responsible.

This year we produced a series of posters and postcards¹⁰ aimed at schools and colleges to encourage teachers, students and the public to report malpractice.

We recognise that a student can be given confidential exam information without seeking it, for example because it was shared on social media. However, they should report this to their schools or exam boards if they come across confidential information. We saw some cases this year where students had their results withheld for failing to report malpractice, because even though they had not actively sought the information they were given, they had not reported this had happened.

We do not require exam boards to report all cases of suspected malpractice while they are still investigating. However, we do expect them to tell us about cases they are investigating or have investigated that might have wider implications for standards and public confidence. For GCSEs and A levels we collect and publish data on the number of malpractice investigations carried out by the exam boards and their outcomes, including the types of sanctions imposed by exam boards¹¹. The number of penalties issued to school and college staff increased by 48% in summer 2016 compared to last year. In contrast, the number of penalties issued to schools and colleges decreased by 41%. The number of penalties issued to students remained stable.

This summer we received 13 malpractice event notifications compared to 15 last year. Table 3 shows the notifications this year broken down by the alleged source of malpractice.

¹⁰ <https://uk.pinterest.com/ofqual/posters-postcards-report-cheating-malpractice-or-e/>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/malpractice-for-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2016-exam-series>

Table 3

Alleged source of malpractice	Number of event notifications
Students	2
Schools/Colleges	6
School/College Staff	3
Examiner	2
Total	13

In addition to concerns about malpractice that are reported to us by exam boards, we also receive reports of suspected malpractice directly from students, teachers, parents and others. If they raise concerns about malpractice within their own workplace, they may be protected by legislation that covers whistle-blowers from recriminations by their employer. We have a whistleblowing policy which sets out the types of concerns we can deal with and how these can be reported to us¹². This summer we received 23 separate allegations of malpractice directly, compared to 28 last summer; 19 of the allegations this summer were from whistle-blowers and four were from members of the public who did not work at the place within which malpractice was alleged.

We monitored how the exam boards dealt with the event notifications and the allegations we passed onto them to investigate to assure ourselves that they were taking appropriate action. In some cases we questioned the exam boards about the way they conducted their investigations, such as who carried out the investigation and the proportionality of any sanction. We have also reviewed a number of exam board investigation reports to consider whether the investigation was carried out effectively. Where we did not have confidence in the exam board's handling, we asked it to justify its approach. In the majority of cases, the exam board was able to provide further assurance. However, there are still a small number of ongoing cases we are continuing to monitor.

We will continue to review how we deal with allegations of malpractice that are made directly to us.

Phase 3: Marking progress

Exam boards must notify us if they believe there are issues that might affect their ability to issue results accurately and on time. This year, we asked the exam boards to give us advance notice of early concerns they had about marking progress.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-malpractice-or-wrongdoing-to-ofqual>

Three exam boards alerted us to potential delays in relation to the marking of a total of five components¹³ this summer, compared to a total of 21 components last summer. In all five cases the delays did not affect the completion of marking.

Phase 4: Awarding

GCSE, AS and A level standard setting

We closely monitor standard setting in GCSEs, AS and A levels. We do this because we expect close comparability of grade standards between different exam boards and between different specifications in any one subject. Exam boards send us data from their GCSE, AS and A level awards, detailing the results against statistical predictions of the proportions of students likely to achieve the key grades.¹⁴

Our aims in this monitoring are to:

- maintain standards year on year;
- align standards across exam boards in a subject;
- secure public confidence in the results being issued.

We expect exam boards' outcomes to be close to predictions, unless they can provide evidence to justify different outcomes. We set reporting tolerances to be used, based on the number of students entered for a qualification. For example, for qualifications with more than 3,000 students about whom we know their prior attainment, exam boards must report and provide evidence to justify any outcomes that are more than one percentage point away from the prediction. For smaller entry qualifications, the reporting tolerances are wider.

We have published separately further information about the comparability between exam boards, within a subject, in summer 2016.¹⁵

In August we published a summary of our monitoring work¹⁶, which included details of the way in which we monitored the first new AS awards in England, details of the number of awards and those that were outside the reporting tolerances, and our actions to align grade standards in GCSE mathematics.

¹³ Qualifications are made up of a number of components, and students usually take an exam or non-exam assessment for each component.

¹⁴ At GCSE, the key grades are A*, A, C and F; at AS they are A and E, and at A level they are A*, A and E.

¹⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofqual-2016-summer-exam-series-report

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-2016-gcse-as-and-a-level-a-summary-of-our-monitoring>

Cambridge IGCSE® First Language English

As with the previous two years, we have closely monitored the awarding of Cambridge IGCSE® First Language English due to the increasing number of entries for this qualification. In 2016 the standard was similar to that in previous years.

From summer 2017, this qualification will no longer count in the DfE performance tables and therefore the number of students taking this qualification is likely to reduce significantly. Cambridge International is also in the process of withdrawing it from our regulation, and summer 2017 will see the last awarding of the current version of this qualification. We will monitor the awarding of the 2017 summer series as we have done over the last two years.

Phase 5: Post Results

Incorrect results

Exam boards sometimes issue incorrect results due to marking, moderation, processing or administrative errors. The reasons for an error can range from incorrect adding up of marks to unreasonable exercise of academic judgement. The numbers of incorrect results arising from marking or moderation errors and identified through a review of marking or moderation are reported separately as part of our publication on the review of marking and moderation statistics.

Exam boards sometimes identify processing errors while dealing with review of marking requests, carrying out internal reviews, or responding to complaints. They must notify us when they have issued incorrect results because of these errors, which are reported in Table 4. The errors we saw in summer 2016 largely occurred either while the exam boards were applying mark adjustments for special considerations (IT system errors), or while students' marks were being recorded (administrative errors). We will be reviewing the exam boards' systems and resources in relation to these areas.

Table 4:

Root cause of incorrect results	Number of events reported in 2016
Marker / AO staff administrative error	19
IT / system error	6
Centre administrative error	2
Question Paper error	1
Total	28

Note: In 11 of these events, the errors came to light after schools requested a review of marking

Table 5 shows the impact of the errors reported above on students' grades at qualification level in summer 2015 and 2016. The number of grade changes accounted for 0.01% of the total certifications made this year (8.1 million), and has reduced by 37% compared to last year. These figures are collated from event notifications made by the exam boards and are compared with figures reported at the same time in 2015.

Table 5:

	2015			2016		
	Total Grade Changes	Grade increases	Grade decreases	Total Grade Changes	Grade increases	Grade decreases
AQA	376	305	71	296	296	0
Cambridge International	97	64	33	50	48	2
IBO	0	0	0	118	118	0
OCR	968	951	17	336	318	18
Pearson	0	0	0	0	0	0
WJEC	163	163	0	216	216	0
Total	1,604	1,483	121	1,016	996	20

Note: these figures are accurate as of 2 December 2016.

We take all incorrect results, regardless of their causes, very seriously. This is why we will be considering the steps the exam boards are taking to reduce the risks that incorrect results are issued.

Reviews of marking and moderation

In August 2016, we withdrew the *GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice* and introduced additional *GCSE¹⁷* and *GCE¹⁸ Qualification Level Conditions and Requirements*. These Conditions set out rules for the way the GCSE and A level exam boards must undertake reviews of marking and moderation and consider appeals, so that the focus is on finding and correcting errors. Most of these new Conditions applied to reviews of marking and moderation and to appeals in respect of the GCSEs and A levels awarded in 2016; some of the new Conditions will come fully into force in 2017 or later.

We have published official statistics on reviews of marking and moderation in GCSEs, AS and A levels for summer 2016¹⁹. The total number of reviews reduced by 25% on last year. Proportionally the number of reviews represented 2% of all GCSE, AS and A level entries, compared with 2.5% last year.

The number of qualification grades challenged reduced by 14% for GCSEs and 41% for AS and A levels compared to last year. The drop at AS and A level is likely to reflect in part fewer unit entries and greater availability of university places.

The proportion of qualification grades changed following review has fallen slightly this summer (18.3% of those reviewed) compared to last year (18.9% of those reviewed), and has halted the trend seen in previous years for more reviews to be requested. We will be undertaking further work to understand the extent to which marks were changed to correct marking errors (as required by the new Conditions) or changed despite no marking error being found (which is prohibited by the new Conditions).

We are now evaluating how the exam boards responded to the changes to the review process. As part of this work we will be exploring with reviewers how the new requirements were implemented and looking at some reviewed scripts to understand the extent to which reviews were undertaken in line with our requirements.

¹⁷ GCSE 9 -1 qualifications:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/546914/gcse-9-to-1-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements.pdf

GCSE A* to G qualifications: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-a-to-g-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements>

¹⁸ Reformed GCE qualifications:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/546503/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements.pdf

Pre-reformed GCE qualifications: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-for-pre-reform-qualifications>

¹⁹ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reviews-of-marking-and-moderation-for-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2016-exam-series

We are also continuing to explore the quality of the exam boards' original marking. This builds on the marking metrics work we published earlier this year²⁰. In addition, we are conducting audits of each exam board's marker recruitment and performance management and their wider quality assurance of marking processes.

3. Conclusion

The delivery of the summer 2016 exam series ran smoothly in general. Where issues occurred, such as security breaches, assessment material errors, or marking progress, we acted quickly to ensure exam boards took actions to deliver results accurately and on time, and that standards were maintained.

We have seen improvements in some areas, such as the reduction in the number of grades affected by incorrect results arising from IT and processing errors. We have also seen an increase in some types of event notifications, such as assessment material errors.

We have seen a 25% reduction in the number of GCSE, AS and A level grade changes following a review of marking or moderation, or 0.9% of the 7.7 million GCSE, AS and A level certifications. We will seek to understand the reasons for these grade changes and to understand the extent to which they were the result of marking errors.

We have set out in this report the issues we identified this summer in a number of areas of exam delivery. We closely monitored the way in which exam boards dealt with the issues as they arose. On five occasions, we wrote formally to the relevant exam board to ask them to review the appropriateness of their approach. In all cases, the exam boards either amended their approach or provided further assurances to justify their actions without us needing to take formal regulatory action.

We are now looking ahead to next summer. There will be more reformed qualifications taken, including the first sitting of GCSEs (9-1) in English language, English literature and mathematics. Our analysis of the exam series has informed our rolling programme of monitoring, audits and technical evaluations which will include:

- Targeted audits of each exam board's:
 - centre controls in relation to security breaches,

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/markings-consistency-metrics>

- approaches to monitoring social media,
- arrangements for the monitoring of reasonable adjustments and special consideration applications,
- quality assurance mechanisms to ensure marking accuracy,
- recruitment, retention and performance management of examiners.
- Analysis of data and research in relation to reviews of marking, moderation and appeals to understand the nature of the errors identified and how effectively they were corrected.

Where appropriate, we will publish our findings from these pieces of work. We will use the findings to inform:

- what, if any, regulatory action we will take regarding any exam board's failure to deliver aspects of their regulated qualifications this summer; and
- what action we might require an exam board to take to reduce any risks to the safe delivery and awarding of qualifications next year.

To gain a better understanding of exam boards' readiness, we plan to review the extent to which they have identified and are managing the risks to the safe delivery of the 2017 exam series. In particular, we will evaluate the extent to which they have identified and are effectively managing any risks to safe delivery and awarding that might arise from their governance and organisational arrangements, their ways of working and their resources.

Other stakeholders such as students, schools and colleges also play a key role in protecting the integrity of the exam system. It is important that they work together with us and the exam boards to deliver fair outcomes for all students.

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