

Confirmed Assessment Arrangements for Reformed GCSE, AS and A level Qualifications – Parts 2 and 3

covering:

GCSEs:

Citizenship studies

Food preparation and nutrition

Drama

Religious studies

AS and A level qualifications:

Drama and theatre

Religious studies



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Confirmed assessment arrangements for reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications for first teaching in 2016

In September and November 2014 we consulted on proposed assessment arrangements for a number of the remaining reformed subjects that are planned for first teaching in September 2016. The Department for Education (DfE) consulted in parallel on proposed content requirements for the same subjects.

Our consultation covered proposed assessment arrangements for:

GCSEs in:

- Citizenship studies
- Design and technology
- Food preparation and nutrition¹
- Drama
- Religious studies

AS qualifications and A levels in:

- Drama and theatre
- Religious studies.

We set out in this document the decisions we have taken on the assessment arrangements for these subjects. The DfE has also confirmed the content requirements for them, which it has published on its website.²

Following these consultations the DfE has announced that new GCSEs in design and technology will be developed in time for first teaching in September 2017, rather than 2016. We will not confirm what the assessment arrangements are for this subject until the content requirements are finalised later this year.

In deciding on the assessment arrangements we have carefully considered the responses to our consultation and the potential impact of our decisions in terms of regulatory burden and on those with protected characteristics. Alongside this

¹ This title of this subject has been amended; it was consulted on as 'cooking and nutrition'.

² www.gov.uk/government/collections/gcse-subject-content

document we are publishing a full evaluation of the responses to our consultation together with our assessments of the potential impact of our decisions.³

We have already made overarching decisions about the purpose and the design of reformed GCSEs, AS qualifications and A levels. You can find more information on the changes we are making to these qualifications on our website.⁴

Tiering

We have previously confirmed that new GCSEs should only be tiered where a single set of assessments cannot in a valid and manageable way assess students across the full ability range. Accordingly and in line with our consultation proposals, we have decided that none of the GCSE subjects included in this consultation will be tiered. As is the case currently, all reformed AS qualifications and A levels will be untiered.

Assessment objectives

After considering the responses to our consultation and reviewing the changes the DfE has made to the content requirements following its consultation, we have finalised the assessment objectives for the subjects on which we consulted. We have published the final versions on our website⁵ so that they can be considered alongside the confirmed subject content requirements published by the DfE.⁶

The subject content for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in religious studies was finalised later than for other subjects. We are still considering what changes we need to make to the assessment objectives to ensure they appropriately reflect the content requirements and take into account responses to our consultation. We will publish the finalised assessment objectives in March.

³ *Developing New GCSEs, A Levels and AS Qualifications for First Teaching in 2016 – Parts 2 and 3 Regulatory Impact Assessment and Developing New GCSE, A Level and AS Qualifications for First Teaching in 2016 – Parts 2 and 3 Equality Analysis Report*. Available at:

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcses-as-and-a-levels-new-subjects-to-be-taught-in-2016

www.gov.uk/government/consultations/religious-studies-gcses-as-and-a-levels-new-qualifications-for-2016

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/timeline-of-changes-to-gcses-as-and-a-levels

www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-the-facts-gcse-and-a-level-reform

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessment-objectives-ancient-languages-geography-and-mfl

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/collections/gcse-subject-content

Short courses

Short courses will continue to be available in a number of subjects. We will confirm further arrangements regarding the timing and availability of these in due course.

Balance of exam and non-exam assessment

To determine how new GCSEs, AS qualifications and A levels should be assessed we are applying a common set of principles to each subject. We consider that where subject content can be validly assessed by exams, set and marked by exam boards, this should be the default method of assessment. Where other forms of assessment are necessary to assess essential subject skills or knowledge, the non-exam assessment must:

1. strike a balance between valid assessment of essential knowledge and skills, sound assessment practice and manageability;
2. be designed to fit the requirements of the particular subject, including the relative weighting of exams and other components assigned to it;
3. be designed so that the qualification is not easily distorted by external pressures from the wider system.

If we determine that a subject should include a proportion of non-exam assessment, that proportion will apply to all qualifications offered by exam boards in that subject.

Having applied these principles to the updated content requirements and taken into account the responses to our consultation, we have decided on the balance of exam and non-exam assessment for the subjects on which we consulted. Table 1 summarises our decisions.

Table 1 – Overview of our decisions on the proportion of non-exam assessment

Subject	GCSE		AS qualification		A level	
	Current weighting of non-exam assessment	New weighting of non-exam assessment	Current weighting of non-exam assessment	New weighting of non-exam assessment	Current weighting of non-exam assessment	New weighting of non-exam assessment
Citizenship studies	60%	None	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Food preparation and nutrition	N/A ⁷	50%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Drama ⁸	60–100%	60%	40–100%	60%	40–70%	60%
Religious studies	None	None	None	None	None	None

These confirmed weightings are unchanged from those on which we consulted. We explain below the reasons for our decisions in each subject.

Citizenship studies GCSE

We proposed in our consultation that this subject should be assessed entirely by exam, with 15 per cent of marks allocated to questions that assess specific knowledge, understanding and skills relating to taking citizenship action.

Having considered the responses to our consultation and the requirements of the subject content, we have decided to adopt these arrangements for new GCSEs in citizenship studies. For short course GCSEs in citizenship studies, there is no requirement for students to take citizenship action. Therefore, there will be no requirement for a proportion of the marks in the exam to be allocated to the knowledge and understanding gained from such activity.

In making our decision we have balanced the importance of ensuring that students gain experience of taking citizenship action against the need to secure valid, reliable and fair assessment outcomes for them.

Many respondents who disagreed with our proposal stated that taking citizenship action cannot be validly assessed by exam. Some also identified specific elements of taking citizenship action that could not be assessed validly by exam, such as

⁷ Food preparation and nutrition is a new qualification. Details of the current weighting of non-exam assessment are therefore not available.

⁸ The A level and AS qualification are titled 'drama and theatre'.

advocacy, campaigning, and collaboration. These elements, however, are not specified in the subject content requirements. As we explained in our consultation, direct assessment of students taking citizenship actions risks devaluing students' practical experiences by limiting the choice of citizenship actions to those that are most likely to lead to good assessment outcomes and are manageable, rather than those most likely to contribute well to good learning and development. Responses to our consultation that argued against assessment by examination did not identify viable alternative approaches that would lead to valid and reliable assessment of taking citizenship action.

We have decided that students will not be assessed directly on the citizenship action they have taken. The arrangements we are putting in place mean that students will be assessed on the knowledge, understanding and skills they have gained from taking citizenship action, through specific questions included in the exam. The subject content requirements now make clear that centres will need to confirm in writing to exam boards that students have completed an in-depth investigation leading to citizenship action. The DfE has also updated the subject content to specify more clearly those aspects of the subject that should be assessed in relation to taking citizenship action.

Some respondents also disagreed with the proposed weighting of questions relating to citizenship action and argued this should be higher to reflect the importance of this aspect of the subject. Considering the overall content requirements, however, we are not persuaded that the weighting should be higher. The subject content requirements make clear which aspects of the content the questions targeting citizenship action should focus on. We consider that 15 per cent is substantial enough to ensure this aspect of assessment is meaningful and to provide an incentive for teachers and students to engage meaningfully in citizenship action as part of the course.

Overall, we are confident that the assessment arrangements we are putting in place will secure valid and reliable assessment of the subject content requirements and ensure that students gain meaningful experience of taking citizenship action.

Food preparation and nutrition GCSE

We consulted on a weighting of 50 per cent non-exam assessment for this subject. Respondents were evenly split between those who supported and those who disagreed with this proposal. Of those who disagreed, most favoured a 60 per cent weighting. The most common argument in support of this view was that 60 per cent reflects the practical nature of the subject and is consistent with current qualifications. The subject content requirements for this subject, however, are different from those of the qualifications that are currently offered. There is also a considerable emphasis within the subject content requirements on theoretical knowledge and understanding as well as practical skills and applied knowledge and understanding.

We therefore remain of the view that the assessment of this subject should be split evenly between exam and non-exam assessment.

Drama⁹ GCSE, AS and A level qualifications

In line with our consultation, we have decided that non exam assessment should count for 60 per cent of assessment in GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in this subject.

Views on the proposals for GCSE were broadly split on this issue. Those who agreed said that a 60 per cent weighting would work well, that it suited the practical nature of the subject and that it reflected the same weighting as one of the GCSEs currently available. Those who disagreed with the proposal all referred in their comments to concerns relating to a perceived lack of emphasis on practical work. Arguments against the proposal did not assert, however, that assessing 40 per cent of the qualification by exam could not be done validly, nor that the weighting did not appropriately reflect the content.

For the AS and A level there was more support for the proposed 60 per cent weighting. Again, the main concern of those who disagreed with our proposal was that the weighting did not give sufficient prominence to practical work, rather than specific concerns about the validity of the proposed approach.

We continue to consider that a 60 per cent weighting of non-exam assessment is appropriate for this subject and will support valid and reliable outcomes.

Religious studies GCSE, AS and A level qualifications

We have decided that assessment in this subject should be entirely by exam as it is currently. Most respondents to our consultation agreed with this proposal, arguing that the current approach works well and that non-exam assessment can encroach on valuable teaching time. Many also said assessment by exam was likely to lead to fairer outcomes for students. Those who disagreed argued that non-exam assessment would allow students to explore the subject in more depth, but did not argue that the subject could not be assessed validly by exam.

⁹ The A level and AS qualifications are titled 'drama and theatre'.

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