

Analysis of Responses to our Consultation on Conditions and Guidance for AS and A level Geology



May 2016

Ofqual/16/6008

Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction.....	3
The consultation on the Conditions and guidance for GCSE, AS and A level geology.....	3
Background	3
Who responded?	4
Approach to analysis	5
Data presentation	5
Views expressed – consultation response outcomes	6
Our approach to regulating AS and A level geology.....	6
Our proposed Conditions and guidance	10
Equality Impact Assessment	10
Other issues	10
Appendix A: List of organisational consultation respondents.....	12

Executive Summary

Our consultation about the Conditions and guidance for AS and A level geology took place between 18 March and 15 April 2016. The consultation questions were available to complete online or to download. A copy of the consultation is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/as-and-a-level-reform-regulations-for-geology>.

There were four responses to the consultation, three from organisations, and one from an individual. One respondent, who was an organisation, did not comment directly on our proposals, but instead provided general comments on the process for reform of GCSEs, AS and A levels. We have therefore based our analysis on the other three responses.

The respondents broadly supported our proposals, though one respondent raised concerns relating to the monitoring arrangements we proposed in relation to the separately reported assessment of practical skills in A level geology.

We set out the responses in more detail below.

Introduction

The consultation on the Conditions and guidance for GCSE, AS and A level geology

This report is a summary of the views expressed by those who responded to our consultation on the Conditions and guidance for AS and A level geology, which took place between 18 March and 15 April 2016.

Background

New GCSE, AS and A level qualifications are being introduced in England. We have consulted on and announced our policy on the general design of these new qualifications. We have also set out our policy and technical arrangements for the subjects for which teaching began in September 2015¹, and for the subjects which will be introduced for first teaching from September 2016².

Following an earlier consultation, we took decisions on the design of the reformed AS and A level qualifications in geology that are to be introduced for first teaching from September 2017³.

This consultation focused on the regulatory arrangements that we must put in place to make sure that awarding organisations design, deliver and award the new AS and A levels in geology in line with our policy decisions.

¹ New GCSEs in English language, English literature and mathematics, as well as new AS and A levels in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English language and literature, English Literature, history, physics, psychology and sociology.

² New GCSEs in art and design, biology, chemistry, citizenship studies, classical Greek, combined science, computer science, dance, drama, food preparation and nutrition, French, geography, German, history, Latin, music, physical education, physics, religious studies and Spanish. New AS and A levels in classical Greek, dance, drama and theatre, French, geography, German, Latin, music, physical education, religious studies and Spanish.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developing-geology-politics-and-pe-short-course-for-2017-teaching>

Who responded?

We received four responses to our consultation. All of these were from individuals or organisations based in England or Wales.

Table 1: Breakdown of consultation responses

Personal / organisation response	Respondent type	Number
Personal	Student	1
Organisation	Awarding organisation	2
Organisation	Representative group	1

Approach to analysis

We published the consultation on our website. Respondents could choose to respond using an online form, by email or by posting their answers to the consultation questions to us.

This was a consultation on the views of those who wished to participate and while we made every effort to ensure that as many respondents as possible had the opportunity to reply, it cannot be considered as a representative sample of the general public or any specific group.

Data presentation

We present the responses to the consultation questions in the order in which they were asked.

The consultation asked 16 questions and each had a different focus. Respondents could choose to answer all or just some of the questions.

For some of the questions, respondents could indicate the extent to which they agreed with our proposals, using a 5-point scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree), as well as providing comments on our proposals.

During the analysis phase we reviewed every response to each question.

Views expressed – consultation response outcomes

In this section we report the views, in broad terms, of those who responded to the consultation document. We have structured this around the questions covered in the consultation document.

A consultation is not the same as a survey and the responses only reflect the views of those who chose to respond. Typically these will be those with strong views and/or particular experience or interest in a topic. What follows is a fair reflection of the views expressed by respondents to the consultation.

As noted above, one respondent chose not to answer our questions directly, and instead submitted more general comments. We set these out under 'Other issues' below.

A list of the organisations that responded to the consultation is included in Appendix A.

Our approach to regulating AS and A level geology

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce a Condition which requires exam boards to comply with the relevant subject content and assessment objectives?

All three respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposal to introduce a Condition which requires exam boards to comply with the relevant subject content and assessment objectives.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that such a condition supports comparability between exam boards with regard to content and assessment.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce guidance which clarifies how exam boards should interpret our assessment objectives?

Two respondents agreed or strongly agreed with our proposal to introduce guidance which clarifies how exam boards should interpret our assessment objectives.

One respondent (an organisation) neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, commenting that guidance which clarifies interpretation of the assessment objectives can be helpful. However, they suggested that the assessment objectives should be drafted so that they are clear and easy to understand, and should not include wording that could be misconstrued, or which has a clear technical meaning, as this often creates rather than reduces confusion.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce rules for exam assessment to ensure exam boards take a consistent approach to assessing mathematical skills and practical skills in AS and A level geology?

All three respondents agreed or strongly agreed with our proposal to introduce rules for exam assessment to ensure exam boards take a consistent approach to assessing mathematical skills and practical skills in AS and A level geology.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that it is important for student progression to higher education that a common standard and consistency is maintained across the sciences (Biology/Chemistry/Physics and Geology).

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to assessing mathematical skills in exams for AS and A level geology?

All three respondents agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach to assessing mathematical skills in exams for AS and A level geology.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that the need for consistent use of appropriate mathematical skills was highlighted as important by former A level students and higher education stakeholders. The respondent supported our proposed approach, suggesting that it was likely to result in a better contextual use of maths in geology at an appropriate level for a science AS and A Level.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to assessing geological skills and techniques in exams for AS and A level geology?

Two respondents (both organisations) strongly agreed with our proposed approach to assessing geological skills and techniques in exams for AS and A level geology. One of the respondents commented that the proposed approach was strongly supported by the schools and colleges that they had consulted.

One respondent (an individual) strongly disagreed with our proposed approach. The respondent suggested that there should be non-exam assessment in this subject. They indicated that the non-exam assessment could be similar to the coursework that is proposed for A level geography and A level archaeology. They argued that students perform better in coursework than they do in exams, and that the inclusion of coursework would support a student if they had a bad day in their exams.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the completion of practical skills activities for A level geology?

All three respondents agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach to the completion of practical skills activities for A level geology.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that the practical skills endorsement in reformed biology, chemistry and physics A levels had been well received by both students and teachers. Instead of the practical activities being assessment-driven they are now perceived by students and teachers as supporting the teaching and learning of AS and A level science. The respondent commented that they would in all likelihood see a similar effect in geology.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the assessment of practical skills for A level geology?

All three respondents strongly agreed with our proposed approach to the assessment of practical skills for A level geology.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that the approach emphasises the equivalence of all science subjects. They suggested that the approach will assure higher education that a student with an A level grade and practical endorsement is equipped to take part in a first year undergraduate general science course.

Despite stating that they agreed with the proposed approach, one respondent (an individual) commented that the practical skills assessment should be assessed through non-exam assessment.

Question 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to marking of practical skills for A level geology?

All three respondents strongly agreed with our proposed approach to marking of practical skills for A level geology.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that their experience of the same approach within A level biology, chemistry and physics has shown that it can work.

Question 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to monitoring of practical skills for A level geology?

Two respondents (one organisation, one individual) either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach to monitoring of practical skills for A level geology.

The organisation commented that they strongly supported the proposal for geology not to be included within the same monitoring arrangements as the A level science subjects. They noted that it is often not the case that the geology department/teacher works closely with the science department: instead they often work more closely with the geography department. However, this being the case, the respondent questioned

the worth in an exam board informing any other exam board for whom that school delivers A level practical assessments when there are issues with geology. They felt that this approach could result in extra monitoring visits taking place for the A level sciences when they are not needed.

The respondent expressed the view that subject specialists were the best people to monitor practical skills for A level, and that they planned to use A level geology teachers for monitoring visits. They stated that feedback from centres has confirmed that this approach would be valued by centres.

The organisation also commented that the proposal that all geology centres will be monitored at least once in a two-year cycle would be welcomed by the geology community because it shows there will be a sufficient amount of monitoring taking place to make the practical endorsement valid.

One respondent (an organisation) disagreed with the proposed approach, commenting that the proposed approach does not follow the common approach and working solution in place for A levels in biology, chemistry and physics. They expressed the view that the optimum solution should reinforce that there are four sciences being taught (biology, chemistry, physics and geology) and that there is a common approach being taken to sharing expertise within the science teaching communities and in ensuring compliance within each centre.

Question 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to certificate requirements for A level geology?

Two respondents (both organisations) strongly agreed with our proposed approach to certificate requirements for A level geology, though neither of the respondents provided any further comment.

One respondent (an individual) did not respond to this question.

Question 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to fieldwork for AS and A level geology?

All three respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach to fieldwork for AS and A level geology.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that fieldwork in geology is laboratory work in which the geologist learns to apply their knowledge in three dimensions, equip themselves with a range of skills to apply in future investigations and acquire the ability to evaluate and make decisions based on complex and/or incomplete data. The respondent stated that the proposed approach is supportive of these aims and addresses concerns of stakeholders (higher education institutions, industry and learned societies).

Our proposed Conditions and guidance

Question 12: Do you have any comments on our proposed Conditions and requirements for AS and A level geology?

Question 13: Do you have any comments on our proposed guidance for AS and A level geology?

None of the respondents provided any comments in relation to our proposed Conditions or guidance for AS and A level geology.

Equality Impact Assessment

Question 14: We have set out how our proposals for AS and A level geology may impact (positively and negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic.⁴ Are there any potential impacts we have not identified?

Two respondents (one organisation, one individual) provided comments in relation to this question.

One respondent (an organisation) commented that the new approach has the potential to make fieldwork more accessible by allowing more accessible sites to be chosen.

One respondent (an individual) commented that students perform better in coursework than in exams.

Question 15: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

Question 16: Do you have any comments on the impacts of the proposals on students who share a protected characteristic?

None of the respondents provided any comments in relation to questions 15 or 16.

Other issues

As noted above, one respondent did not comment directly on our proposals. Instead, they noted that it was important for relevant subject associations to be consulted in relation to individual subjects, that qualification reform needed to take account of the

⁴ 'Protected characteristic' is defined in the Equality Act 2010. Here, it means disability, racial group, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

needs of all relevant stakeholders, and that qualification reform should be phased in gradually over time.

One respondent expressed the view that non-exam assessment marks should form part of a single overall grade for A level geology, rather than having the outcomes of a student's practical work reported separately on certificates. This issue was the subject of our earlier policy consultation on A level geology,⁵ and was outside the scope of this consultation.

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/developing-geology-politics-and-pe-short-course-for-2017-teaching

Appendix A: List of organisational consultation respondents

When completing the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

Below we list those organisations that submitted a response to the consultation.

ASCL

OCR

WJEC

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