

Analysis of Responses to our Consultation on Conditions and Guidance for GCSE Geography



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Executive summary

This consultation about the Conditions and Guidance for GCSE geography took place between 16th December 2014 and 13th January 2015.

There were 13 responses to the consultation from individuals and organisations, all in a form that matched or broadly followed the layout of the online consultation. Thirty-one per cent of the responses were from individuals (all teachers) and 69 per cent were from organisations.

The consultation exercise generated a small number of responses, with some positive and some negative comments on the proposals. The key points from the consultation responses are as follows:

- There was a preference for a maximum of three areas of knowledge, skills and understanding of fieldwork that require assessment in any set of assessments, rather than the proposed four areas.
- There was a preference for setting 10 per cent as the minimum requirement for the assessment of mathematical and statistical techniques, because it would be very difficult for awarding organisations to achieve exactly 10 per cent.
- The majority of respondents did not comment on the equality impact analysis questions.

1. Introduction

Technical consultation on the Conditions and Guidance for GCSE geography

This report is a summary of the views expressed by those who responded to our recent consultation on the Conditions and Guidance for GCSE geography, which took place between 16th December 2014 and 13th January 2015.

Background

New GCSEs are being introduced in England. The primary purpose of the new qualifications will be to provide evidence of students' achievements against demanding and fulfilling content and a strong foundation for further academic and vocational study and employment. If required, the qualifications should be able to provide a basis for schools and colleges to be held accountable for the performance of all of their students.

We have consulted on and announced our policy on the general design of new GCSEs, and on our policy and technical arrangements relating to those subjects that are due to be introduced for first teaching in 2015.¹

We have taken decisions on the design of the new GCSEs in geography, and these are to be introduced for first teaching in 2016.

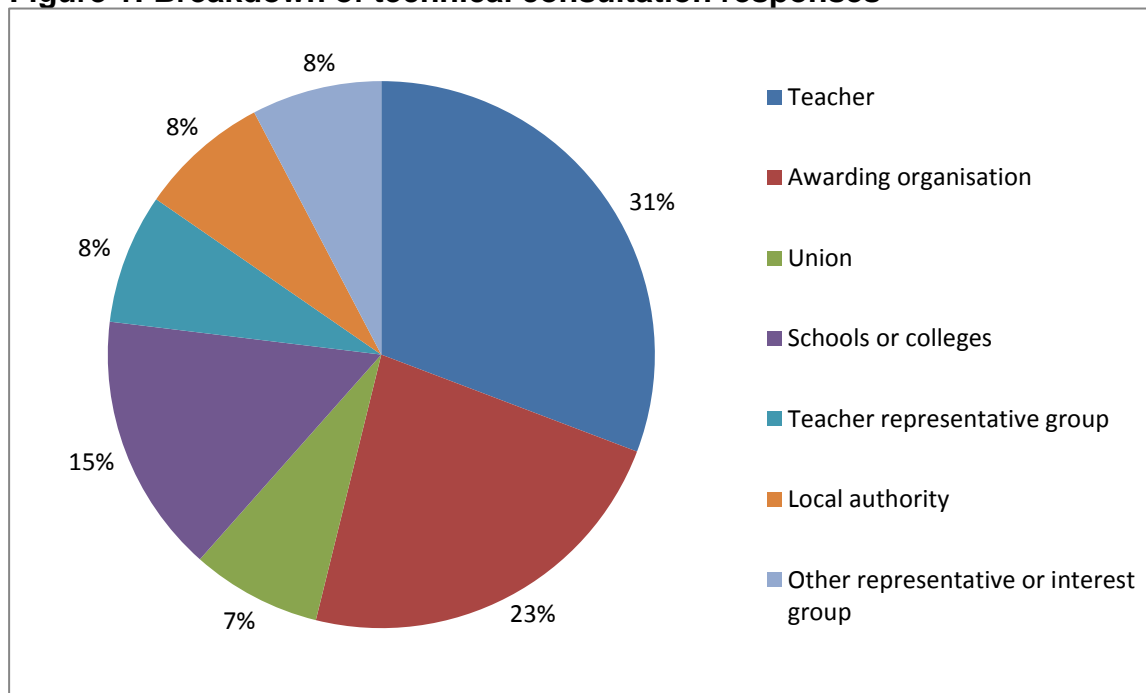
This consultation focused on more technical matters – that is, on the regulatory arrangements that we must put in place to make sure that awarding organisations design, deliver and award the new qualifications in line with our policy decisions.

¹ New GCSEs in English language, English literature and mathematics will be taught from September 2015.

2. Who responded?

We received a total of 13 responses to our consultation.² Four (31 per cent) were responding as individuals and nine (69 per cent) were organisational responses. The breakdown of responses is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Breakdown of technical consultation responses



All responses received were from individuals or organisations based in England and Wales.

Table 1: Breakdown of technical consultation responses

Personal /organisation response	Respondent type	Number
Personal	Teacher	4
Organisation	Awarding organisation	3
Organisation	Union	1
Organisation	School or college	2
Organisation	Teacher representative group	1
Organisation	Local authority	1
Organisation	Other representative or interest group	1

² We entered any hard-copy responses that followed the format of the consultation into the online platform.

3. Approach to analysis

The consultation was published on our website and respondents could choose to respond using an online form. The consultation included seven questions. The questions required a yes or no response as to whether the respondent would like to comment on the issue outlined in the question. Those that responded yes were able to provide a narrative response. Respondents were also able to post or email copies of the consultation questions or provide a solely narrative response to the consultation (for example via letter).

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 of any specific group.

Data presentation

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

The consultation asked seven questions, each with a different focus. Respondents could choose to answer all or just a selection of the questions.

During the analysis phase every response to each question was reviewed. The main comments were identified and then summarised.

4. Views expressed

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 and provide analysis of the data broken down by stakeholder.

A consultation is not the same as a survey and only reflects 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.

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

Do you have any comments on the draft Conditions for new GCSE geography? (Question 1)

This question referred to the draft Conditions for the subject. We consulted on two draft Conditions. The first draft Condition proposed to put in place a requirement that awarding organisations must ensure compliance with the content requirements as published by the Department for Education.³ The second draft Condition stated that fieldwork was to be assessed by exam only and that centres should submit fieldwork statements to awarding organisations confirming that Learners had been provided with the opportunity to take place in the fieldwork specified by the content requirements.

Seven respondents answered no to this question (one personal response, six organisational responses). The six respondents who did have comments to make on the draft Conditions expressed the following views:

- Assessing fieldwork through exam will result in a lack of specialist skills, with the potential to have an adverse future impact on the workforce and pupil experience.
- The prominence of fieldwork and fieldwork skills, across six areas of skills and understanding, will help avoid predictability in questions regarding fieldwork and is commended.
- Fieldwork should not represent any more than 15 per cent of the exam.
- Fieldwork statements should be clear and easy to complete.

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-geography

- Ofqual should clearly express any likely reasons or circumstances under which changes may be made to guidance.

Do you have any comments on the draft Guidance on subject content for new GCSE geography? (Question 2)

This question referred to the draft Guidance on subject content⁴ which outlined our proposal that:

- each set of assessments should cover at least four of the six areas of knowledge, skills and understanding identified within the subject content requirements, with focus on at least two of options (iv), (v) and (vi); and
- 'fieldwork data' and 'data collected in the field' as referred to within the subject content requirements includes both 'data collected by the Learner, or group of Learners as part of a fieldwork experience' and 'exemplar data provided by the awarding organisation.'

Four respondents (one personal, three organisations) answered no to this question, and one personal respondent did not answer the question. The eight respondents who did have comments to make on the draft Guidance expressed the following views:

- There is no evidence of a hierarchy of demand in the six areas of fieldwork, and some of the guidance should be rephrased to acknowledge this.
- A maximum of three areas of knowledge, skills and understanding of fieldwork that require assessment in any set of assessments would be better, with the potential for two of these to come from the three most demanding areas (iv, v and vi). 'Fieldwork data' and 'data collected in the field' should include 'data collected by a Learner, or group of Learners, as part of a fieldwork experience' as one of the interpretations necessary to assess. This interpretation would be extremely difficult to assess in a reliable manner.
- Awarding organisations should treat the non-submission of fieldwork statements as malpractice.
- The guidance is sufficiently clear and the content well balanced.

Other comments not directly relating to the Guidance on subject content were received from the above respondents who expressed the following views:

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-geography

- Concern that a content-heavy specification will result in unmanageable assessments.
- A non-tiered exam may be too challenging for some.
- The removal of some key topics may make the content less attractive to students.
- Additional guidance on geomorphic process and changes will be required, and the component on meteorology could be broadened.
- Data collection for fieldwork should take place outside the classroom, but need not be outside the school site.

Do you have any comments on the requirements surrounding the weighting of mathematical and statistical techniques, or the requirements surrounding the use of spelling, punctuation and grammar? (Question 3)

This question referred to the requirement for 10 per cent of marks for the assessment objectives AO1 to AO4 to be allocated to the assessment of mathematical and statistical techniques, and for 5 per cent of the sum of all marks for assessment objectives AO1 to AO4 to be allocated to spelling, punctuation and grammar and the use of specialist terminology.

Two respondents (both personal) answered no to this question, and one personal respondent did not answer the question. All of the organisations had comments to make on the requirements surrounding the weighting of mathematical and statistical techniques and/or the requirements on the use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The following views were expressed:

- All three awarding organisation responses expressed a preference for the percentage weightings for mathematical and statistical techniques and spelling, punctuation and grammar to be stated as an estimated minimum rather than an exact weighting – which would allow some scope for justified movement of these percentages.
- One awarding organisation (Pearson) suggested that the marks allocated to mathematical and statistical techniques should be targeted to AO3 and AO4 only, to help to ensure comparability of assessment demand across awarding organisations.

Outside of the awarding organisations, some responses were in support of the proposed weightings. Supportive responses included the following:

- The balance is appropriate, showing support for mathematical and statistical techniques.
- The percentage allocations seem appropriate.

Those who disagreed with the weightings made the following comments:

- There should be a focus on the interpretation of figures, rather than a requirement for explaining techniques or calculating figures in the exam.
- Students have not always covered the required mathematical and statistical content in their maths GCSE.
- The percentage of marks for mathematical and statistical techniques is high and could disadvantage students who find maths challenging. Similarly, including marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar could penalise those with additional educational needs.
- The marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar and the use of specialist terminology is confusing, and the percentages allocated lack rationale.

Do you have any comments on the draft Guidance on assessment objectives for new GCSE geography? (Question 4)

This question referred to the draft Guidance on assessment objectives which outlines how we expect awarding organisations to interpret the assessment objectives in terms of discrete 'elements' within each assessment objective, coverage expectations and key areas of emphasis in each assessment objective.

Six respondents (three personal, three organisations) answered no to this question, and two respondents did not answer the question. The five respondents who did have comments to make on the draft Guidance expressed the following views:

- General support for the wording of the assessment objectives.
- Performance descriptions should be published.
- Physical geography appears to be prioritised over human geography. The absence of people or communities in the assessment objectives is odd.
- It is unfair to expect students to assess situations and materials not indicated in the specification (as outlined in AO3).
- Concern over assessing fieldwork by exam. The requirement for a fieldwork statement to be completed could lead to much less fieldwork being undertaken.

5. Equality impact analysis

We have considered the potential impact on students who share a protected characteristic⁵ of the application of the principles and features that will apply to all new GCSE, A level and AS qualifications.

We have not identified any negative impacts on students who share a protected characteristic that would result from our proposals (i) to require all assessments to be by exam, (ii) that the qualifications are untiered and (iii) for the assessment objectives. Awarding organisations are required to consider the accessibility of their qualifications at the design stage and to remove any unjustifiable barriers.

We have not identified any ways in which the proposed requirements for reformed GCSEs in geography would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified? If so, what are they? (Question 5)

Seven respondents (three personal, four organisations) answered no to this question, and two respondents (one personal, one organisation) did not answer the question. The five respondents who did have comments to make expressed the following views:

- The usual risk assessments around fieldwork need to be put in place by each school to ensure that planned visits are accessible for their whole cohort as far as possible, and that sensitivity is shown to any persons who share a protected characteristic.
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar may be difficult for students with additional educational needs.
- There are no anticipated impacts on protected characteristic groups for which the geography teaching community does not already have solutions.

⁵ For the purposes of the public sector equality duty, the protected characteristics are disability, racial group, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts. (Question 6)

Nine respondents (two personal, seven organisations) had no comment, and two respondents (one personal, one organisation) did not answer this question. The two respondents who did have comments to make expressed the following views:

- External funding for fieldwork trips would be welcomed.
- Appropriate training should be provided by awarding organisations to support inclusion of students.

Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? (Question 7)

There were no responses to this question.

Appendix A: List of organisational consultation responses

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.⁶ We have not included a list of those responding as an individual, however all responses were given equal status in the analysis.

ASCL (Association of School and College Leaders)

Buckinghamshire County Council

Geographical Association

OCR

Pearson

Voice: The union for education professionals

⁶ We haven't included organisations that asked for their responses to be treated anonymously.

Appendix B: Consultation details

The consultation questions were available either to complete online or to download.

A copy of the consultation is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/387655/gcse-geography-consultation-on-conditions-and-guidance.pdf

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