

Ofqual Board

Paper 9/16

Date:

18 May 2016

Title:

General Qualifications Update

Report by:

Julie Swan, Acting Executive Director for General Qualifications

Responsible Director:

Julie Swan, Acting Executive Director for General Qualifications

Paper for information and decision

Open paper (paragraphs 35 - 39 and Annexes B - D closed)



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) agree that the decision on whether the proposed content for low take-up languages can be effectively regulated is taken by electronic business and that the sign off for our consultation is delegated to the Chief Regulator;
 - (c) delegate authority to sign off the consultation on entry level qualifications and any decision to remove the regulations, to the Chief Regulator; and
 - (d) note the decisions taken using the Board's urgency procedure, as set out in paragraphs 9-11.

General Qualifications Directorate

3. The paper includes updates on:
 - i. The accreditation of subjects due for first teaching 2016;
 - ii. The accreditation of subjects due for first teaching 2017;
 - iii. The development of subject content and assessment arrangements for subjects scheduled for first teaching 2017;
 - iv. Low take-up languages;
 - v. Regulation of entry level qualifications;
 - vi. Setting grade standards in new GCSEs;
 - vii. GCSEs and A levels offered in Wales and Northern Ireland;
 - viii. Removal of the Code of Practice and changes to reviews of marking and appeals;
 - ix. Summer 2016 exam series delivery;
 - x. A level Modern Foreign Languages;
 - xi. Stakeholder engagement.
 - xii. National assessments

Reformed Qualifications for First Teaching 2016

Accreditation

4. At 11 May there were 125 specifications accredited for teaching from September 2016. This represents 80 per cent of the original submissions and leaves 31 proposed qualifications yet to be accredited. There are now accredited specifications from more than one exam board in every subject (except those where only one exam board has developed a specification). The overall picture is represented below:

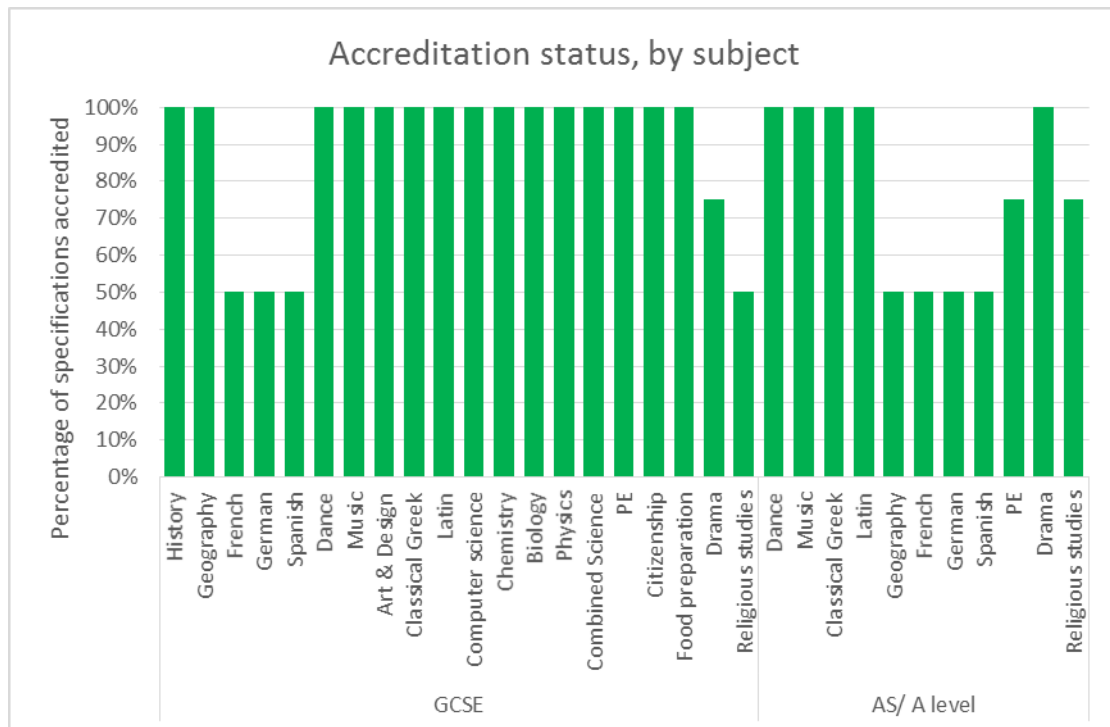


Chart 1: Percentage of specifications accredited by subject.

5. We will update the Board on any further progress at the meeting.
6. The majority of the outstanding specifications are in modern foreign languages. We invited the two affected exam boards to meet further with us to make sure they fully understood why we have been unable to accredit their specifications.
7. When the Board met in March, there were some subjects for which there were no specifications accredited. We considered contingency arrangements and arranged to hold a special Board meeting in early May to consider whether the contingency arrangements should be invoked. In light of progress we cancelled that meeting.

Reformed Qualifications for First Teaching 2017

The development of subject content and assessment arrangements for subjects scheduled for first teaching 2017

8. We continue to put in place the regulations for those subjects to be taught from 2017. We have published our regulations in most subjects and will finalise the others by the end of the month. The work has been completed on or ahead of schedule, giving the exam boards at least two months' notice of the final requirements before they make their submissions. The exam boards have seen and discussed with us drafts of the requirements well ahead of formal consultations and final publications.
9. We identified the need to make some small changes to the assessment arrangements for three of the subjects that the Board had previously agreed. Given the small scale of the changes and the need to avoid

delay, the amendments were agreed by the Chair and Chief Regulator under the Board's urgency procedure. The Board is invited to note these decisions, set out below.

10. In statistics we have changed the weighting of the assessment objectives at GCSE, AS and A level. None have been changed by more than 5 per cent. The changes were in response to new issues raised by mathematics subject associations, issues the exam boards have experienced in developing their new assessments and to better align the requirements between GCSE, AS and A level. We have made a small change to the assessment objectives in classical civilisation at AS and A level to more accurately reflect the subject content. These changes are shown in annex A.
11. We have also confirmed that GCSE ancient history includes marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar, as in other similar subjects. This reflects our consultation position. Nothing in the consultation responses suggested we should change our position. This was unintentionally omitted from our recommendations to the Board.

Accreditation for first teaching 2017

12. We should receive on 19 May 12 GCSE, AS and A level specifications for design and technology and 4 specifications for GCSE Business. This will mark the start of the accreditation programme for subjects to be taught from September 2017. Everything is in place for the programme.

Low take-up languages

13. We have previously told the Board that AQA and Pearson will continue to offer GCSEs and A levels in low take-up languages but that OCR is withdrawing from the market.
14. We understand that, with the exception of Dutch, GCSEs and A levels in all the currently available low-take-up languages will be provided by other exam boards.
15. DfE is developing new AS and A level content for these and other low take-up languages that will not require students to be assessed on their spoken language skills. They expect to consult on it in mid-July. We will consult in parallel on the assessment requirements. In line with the arrangements put in place for earlier stages of reform, the Board is asked to agree that the decision about whether the proposed content can be effectively regulated is taken by electronic business and that the sign off for our consultation is delegated to the Chief Regulator.

Entry level qualifications

16. We inherited from QCA regulations that apply to all qualifications at Entry level, which we adopted when we were formed. These are the only set of level-specific regulations we have. They largely duplicate aspects of our General conditions of recognition. The main additional

requirement they set is for all entry level qualifications to have a minimum percentage of external assessment, regardless of subject content. We do not believe the requirements are necessary or appropriate. They restrict the way assessments can be developed. Our consultation will set out why we propose to withdraw the regulations.

17. It will remain possible for awarding organisations to provide entry level qualifications. If we withdraw the specific regulations, they will need to comply with the General Conditions only. We expect these proposals will be uncontroversial and unlikely to attract much attention.
18. We ask the Board to delegate authority to sign off the consultation and to delegate any decision to withdraw the regulations to the Chief Regulator.

Setting GCSE grade standards consultation

19. At its January meeting, the Board discussed our planned consultation on grading new GCSEs. Following the decisions taken at that meeting, we launched a consultation that:
 - confirms our intention to take broadly the same approach to the awarding of the new GCSEs awarded from 2018 onwards as we have already announced for English language, English literature and mathematics;
 - proposes a 'tailored' approach to determining how grade 9 is awarded; and
 - proposes that this 'tailored' approach applies to all new GCSEs, including English language, English literature and mathematics, despite the fact we have already announced a slightly different approach in these subjects.
20. The consultation ends in mid-June. We will bring the outcomes and recommendations to the Board in July.

GCSEs and A levels offered in Wales and Northern Ireland

21. Historically the same GCSE and AS and A level qualifications were taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Following reforms, different qualifications will be taken in each jurisdiction. We are working with colleagues in CCEA (regulator) and Qualifications Wales to set out the similarities and differences between the qualifications. Our main audience is those who use qualifications when making decisions about employment or admission to higher education. We know there is demand for such a publication.
22. We are focusing on factual information and not making judgements about the relative merits of the different qualifications or their comparability. As there is no overarching method for securing it, we will not claim or commit to comparable standards. However, as each

regulator has made commitments to carry forward existing standards at the point of reform, we do not plan to emphasise potential differences of standard either. We plan to publish the statement before new AS qualifications are awarded this summer.

Removal of the Code of Practice, changes to Reviews of Marking and Appeals

23. At its meeting on 23 March 2016 the Board agreed that a Board Committee should recommend to the Chief Regulator the action we should take, in light of the responses to the consultation on withdrawing the Code of Practice and on reviews of marking and appeals.
24. The Board Committee met on 8 April to consider our proposals (minutes attached as annex B). Following this the Chief Regulator agreed we should:
 - Remove the Code of Practice (the Code) with effect from summer 2016 for GCSEs, AS and A level but retain it for Principal Learning and Project qualifications.
 - Produce guidance for schools on how the exam system works.
 - Put in place explicit requirements on exam boards to train their markers and moderators. (Although this is currently in the Code of Practice, we did not originally consult on this, so will need to do so in the technical consultation. But it otherwise seems inconsistent explicitly to require training of reviewers but not of the original markers/moderators).
 - Implement all the proposals on which we consulted for reviews and appeals with effect from 2016. Subject to the following alterations:
 - i. To *permit* the return of GCSE scripts by exam boards in 2016 but not *require* this until a later date.
 - ii. To require exam boards to pilot in 2016 the extended grounds on which appeals could be made (to include that the mark could not reasonably have been awarded) with a view to rolling the approach out in full, subject to the findings of the pilot, in 2017. The pilot would be in A level Mathematics, Religious Studies and Geography.
 - iii. To introduce the requirement on centres to provide, from 2017, for reviews of teacher-marked assessment when requested by a student (as we proposed in the consultation). But that we make our requirement more permissive so the review does not have to take place within the centre.
 - iv. To allow exam boards to give reasons for the outcome of a review separately from the outcome itself, for both marking and moderation. This is to prevent the return of outcomes being

delayed, while allowing centres to understand the reasons for decisions before deciding whether to appeal.

- v. To produce guidance on when marks should and should not be changed on review/appeal (we will consult on draft guidance).
 - vi. To require exam boards to set their own deadlines for reviews and appeals, but give ourselves the power to put in place our own dates or to set a framework in which dates must be set. As dates have already been published for 2016, we will consult on a framework for use from 2017 onwards.
- Introduce new rules, replacing those in the Code, for setting grade boundaries. These go no further than the current requirements.
 - Retain the Code of Practice for Principal Learning and Project in 2016, but consult on similar rules as for GCSE and A level in 2017.

Summer 2016 Exam Series Delivery

- 25. The summer exam series is underway. It is a large-scale exercise. In summer 2015, 2.1 million students took around 1,700 different GCSE and AS and A level exams, which generated 22 million scripts. These were marked by 55,000 examiners and led to 8 million awards. In summer 2016 there will be around 1,800 GCSE and A level exams leading to approximately 7.7 million awards. Taking into account other general qualifications, such as CIE's IGCSEs® and International Baccalaureate Diplomas, there will be about 2,070 general qualifications exams taken this summer, during 2 May - 30 June.
- 26. We have captured in our summer series risk register (see Annex C) a number of risks that could prevent the successful delivery of the summer series. The register includes details of controls we have in place to mitigate or manage the risks, and of contingencies.

A level Modern Foreign Languages

- 27. In September 2014 we published our analysis of the A levels in French, German and Spanish offered by AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC. We undertook this work in light of concerns that very able students were not always achieving the highest grades. Our report included a number of recommendations to exam boards to improve the extent to which their assessments properly differentiated between learners, particularly at the highest level.
- 28. Exam boards reviewed their 2015 question papers and mark schemes in the light of these recommendations and made changes, in some cases to both question papers and mark schemes, and in others to mark schemes only.
- 29. We will publish a report detailing this work in May.

30. We have also looked at some of the exam papers and mark schemes to be used this summer. We are considering whether we should take any actions in light of our findings.

Stakeholder Engagement

31. We are developing plans for managing the summer awarding narrative. We will be writing to all schools shortly and will follow up with a number of speaking engagements, culminating in a conference on 29 June.
32. For reformed qualifications, our narrative is focused on the potential for increased centre-level AS volatility. We have already informed Ministers, via officials, how this might look and the steps that exam boards will take to minimise volatility. For current qualifications, we expect a continued focus on A Level modern foreign languages.
33. We will use our planned June conference to deliver key messages and explain the decisions we have taken on changes to reviews of marking and appeals. This will continue the engagement we have had with key stakeholders before, during and after our consultation.
34. We will also discuss quality of marking at the event on 29 June. We know that some stakeholders continue to find it difficult to reconcile a lack of absolute assessment precision with 'hard edged' accountability and selection outcomes.

Paragraphs 35-39 redacted – publication of these paragraphs would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

40. Our exam stakeholder engagement group met on May 4th. We provided updates on reformed qualifications, invited early feedback on our section 96 (Equality Act) proposals, discussed next steps with the reviews of marking and appeals policy changes, discussed our research on CIE's IGCSE® English First Language and our consultation on setting grade standards in GCSEs.

National Assessments

41. STA provided details of their proposed approach to standard setting in the new national curriculum tests which will be taken at the end of KS1 and KS2 this year. These are the first tests of a new national curriculum and a new expected standard will be set. STA asked for our views on their approach ahead of a ministerial briefing and we confirmed that, within our regulatory remit, we were content with their approach to standard setting.
42. Nevertheless, we raised in our response issues that we think should be given close attention during implementation. We raised these in the context of our interests in assessment standards and public confidence in national assessments. We noted the challenges of setting a new standard in isolation and the difficulty in maintaining standards given the difficulty in separating genuine improvements in pupil performance from those due to test familiarity. We also reflected the likelihood of

significant public concern if the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard is lower than the current figure. We have suggested that STA conducts a proactive communications plan to inform schools, pupils and parents about the new expected standard and how it relates to standards in previous years. A copy of our response is attached at annex D.

- 43. As has been well-publicised, a live KS1 spelling test was accidentally published on the STA website. A full investigation is underway and Ministers announced that schools will not be required to administer the test this year. This delivery issue was managed appropriately by STA; we were kept informed.
- 44. A second investigation is underway into an apparently early release of a KS2 test to a password-protected site for markers and into the consequences of this. We have not been directly involved with either of these investigations. We will update the Board at the meeting.
- 45. We have attended marker training sessions arranged by Pearson and will attend a sample of standardisation sessions. We have also started to scope a validity study that will consider the content coverage of the KS2 maths tests. The study will be conducted after the live assessments have been completed this summer.

Finance and Resource

- 46. We continue to prioritise our resource-intensive work to support delivery of the FT2016 and FT2017 phases of the reform programme.

Impact Assessments

Equality Analysis

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

Risk Assessment

- 48. Risks are included within the risk register. There are no other specific risks this month.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

- 49. No specific issues.

Communications

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

Paper to be published	Yes, except paragraphs 35 - 39 and annexes B - D
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting

<p>If it is proposed not to publish the paper or to not publish in full please outline the reasons why with reference to the exemptions available under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), please include references to specific paragraphs</p>	<p>Publication of the sections identified would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs</p>
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ANNEXES LIST:-

- Annex A Assessment objectives – changes agreed by Board urgency procedure
- Annex B Minutes of Board Committee meeting 8 April 2016 (closed)
- Annex C Summer series risk register (closed)
- Annex D Advice to STA on National Assessments (closed)

Annex A: Assessment objectives – changes agreed by Board urgency procedure

AS/A level Classical civilisation

	Assessment objective	Weighting	
		AS	A level
AO1 (AS)	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literature and either visual/material culture or classical thought • how sources and ideas reflect, and influence, their cultural contexts • possible interpretations of sources <u>and</u> perspectives <u>and ideas</u> by different audiences and individuals 	45–55%	-
AO1 (A level)	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literature, visual/material culture, and classical thought • how sources and ideas reflect, and influence, their cultural contexts • possible interpretations of sources <u>and</u> perspectives <u>and ideas</u> by different audiences and individuals 	-	40–50%

(We are proposing no changes to the other assessment objective)

GCSE Statistics

	Assessment objective	Weighting
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding, using appropriate terminology and notation, of standard statistical techniques used to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collect and represent data • calculate summary statistics and probabilities 	50 5%
AO2	Interpret statistical information and results in context and reason statistically to draw conclusions	25%
AO3	Assess the appropriateness of statistical methodologies and the conclusions drawn through the application of the statistical enquiry cycle	20 5%

AS and A level Statistics

	Assessment objective	Weighting	
		AS	A level
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding, using appropriate terminology and notation, of standard statistical techniques used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to collect and represent data to calculate summary statistics and probabilities in relation to hypotheses and inference 	60 55%	5 50%
AO2	Interpret statistical information and results in context and reason statistically to make predictions, construct arguments, make decisions and draw conclusions	25 0%	25%
AO3	Critically assess the reliability and validity of statistical methodologies and the conclusions drawn through the application of the statistical enquiry cycle	20%	20 5%