

Ofqual Board

73/16 Paper

Date:

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Title:

General Qualifications Update

Report by:

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Responsible Director:

Julie Swan, Executive Director for General Qualifications

Paper for information and decision

Open paper



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 issues reported in the paper.
 - (b) Delegate to the Chief Regulator sign-off for:
 - a. the very small amendments to be made to the Conditions and Guidance for GCSE and GCE Ancient languages, once the revised content has been finalised; and
 - b. a consultation on proposals to revise the regulations for Project qualifications and remove those regulations related solely to the Diploma and Principal Learning qualifications.

Contents of the paper

3. The paper includes updates on:
 - i. **Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching in 2017**
 - ii. **Reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals**
 - iii. **Summer 2016 Exam Series Delivery**
 - iv. **Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration**
 - v. **Modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts) and Biblical Hebrew**
 - vi. **General qualifications other than GCSEs and A levels**
 - vii. **Evaluating the reformed qualifications**
 - viii. **National assessments**
 - ix. **Stakeholder Engagement**

Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching in 2017

4. We are continuing to prioritise the accreditation of qualifications due for first teaching from September 2017. As at 18 January there were 57 specifications accredited. We will update the Board on progress at the meeting.
5. Although turnaround has been faster than in previous years, overall the exam boards' success at each round has been similar to 2016. All parties would like to see more specifications accredited more quickly. We continue to accredit the specifications that meet the accreditation criterion as quickly as we can. For the specifications that do not meet the criterion we provide written feedback to the exam boards and offer additional oral feedback to the exam boards' subject teams.

Reviews of marking and moderation and appeals

6. We published official statistics on reviews of marking and moderation in early December.¹ These were the first data published since we introduced the new requirements on exam boards' approaches to reviews of marking, moderation and appeals. We will publish statistics on appeals in March.
7. The data showed that the total number of reviews reduced by 25% on 2015. Proportionally, the number of reviews represented 2% of all

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reviews-of-marking-and-moderation-for-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2016-exam-series>

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GCSE, AS and A level entries, which was a slight decrease from the 2015 figure of 2.5%.

8. 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 both fewer unit entries and the greater availability of university places.
9. The proportion of qualification grades changed following review fell slightly in 2016 (18.3% of those reviewed) compared to 2015 (18.9% of those reviewed).
10. We are putting in place a programme of work to monitor the exam boards' implementation of the new requirements for reviews of marking and moderation, and appeals. In particular, we will seek to understand the extent to which the number of mark changes made following review in 2016 is explained by reviewers changing marks even where no marking error was found (contrary to our requirements), and the extent to which it is explained by reviewers finding and correcting marking errors on review (which will be of interest in the context of our work on the quality and consistency of marking).
11. Working with colleagues in SRR, our programme of work will include:
 - an online survey of both marking and moderation reviewers to seek an insight of their understanding of the new requirements;
 - reviews of a sample of reviewed scripts using both exam board reviewers and our subject experts;
 - the collection and analysis of exam boards' marking data to inform our continued marking metrics work;
 - an audit of exam boards' original marking quality measures and examiner performance management and payment/reward;
 - using metrics to inform the test stage of the audit – to challenge exam boards' actual decision making on marker quality/performance in the 2016 series.
12. We have previously updated the Board on the wider evaluation we are undertaking of the changes introduced last year, the outcomes of which will inform our outstanding decisions.
13. There are five decisions still to be taken in relation to the implementation of our new requirements which we had deferred while we gathered further evidence to inform them. The Board delegated in September 2016 responsibility to the Chief Regulator to make these decisions.
14. Based on our analysis of the evidence we have collected we propose to recommend that we:

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- introduce the requirement for exam boards to make marked GCSE scripts available to centres before the deadline for requesting a review of marking in readiness for the Summer 2020 series onwards;
- introduce the requirement for exam boards to provide the reasons for review of marking decisions automatically in readiness for the Summer 2020 series onwards;
- introduce the requirement for learners to be able to ask for the results of centre-marked assessments in readiness for the Summer 2018 series onwards;
- defer implementation of the removal of automatic grade protection that currently applies following a review of moderation while we review the approach to moderation more generally. This will allow us to determine whether there are changes that could be made to the moderation process that might be fairer and better support accurate marking.
- implement the framework of key dates as per our consultation in May 2016, with immediate effect.

Summer 2016 Exam Series Delivery

15. We published in December our report on the summer 2016 series.² The infographic we published with the report, attached at annex 2, illustrates the scale of the series.

Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration

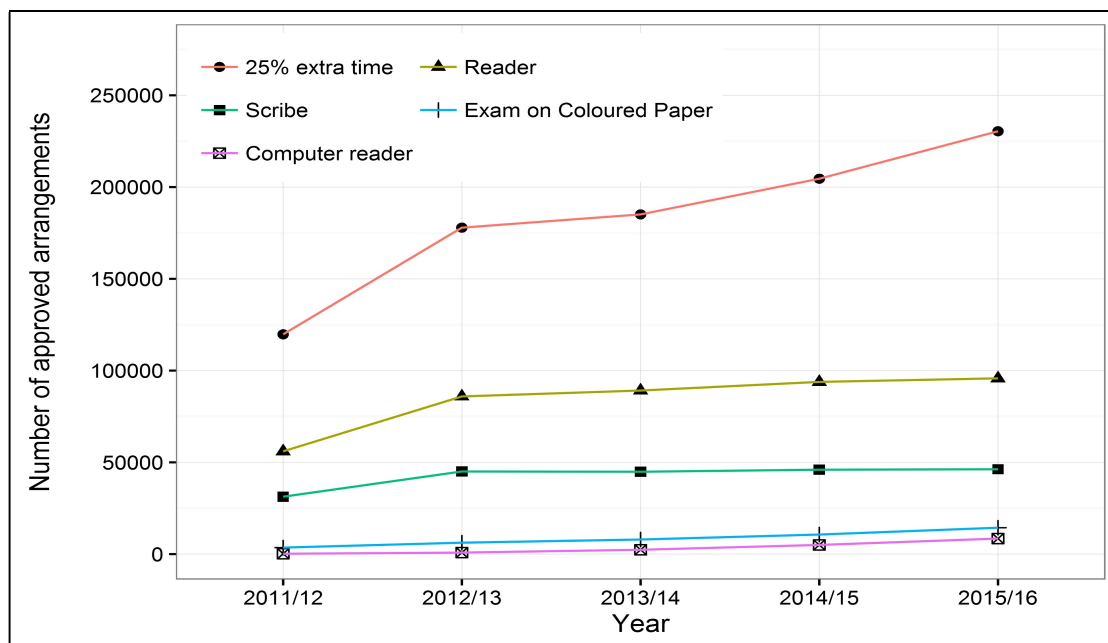
16. We also published in December the official statistics on Access Arrangements³ (the exam boards' collective term for Reasonable Adjustments made for disabled students and some other forms of adjustment). We separately published statistics on Special Considerations.⁴ The statistics on access arrangements show that the number of approved requests for adjustments rose again in the academic year 2015/16. This increase in the number of requests for extra time was noteworthy, as illustrated in the figure below:

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-publishes-reports-relating-to-2016-gcse-as-and-a-levels>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-arrangements-for-gcse-and-a-level-2015-to-2016-academic-year>

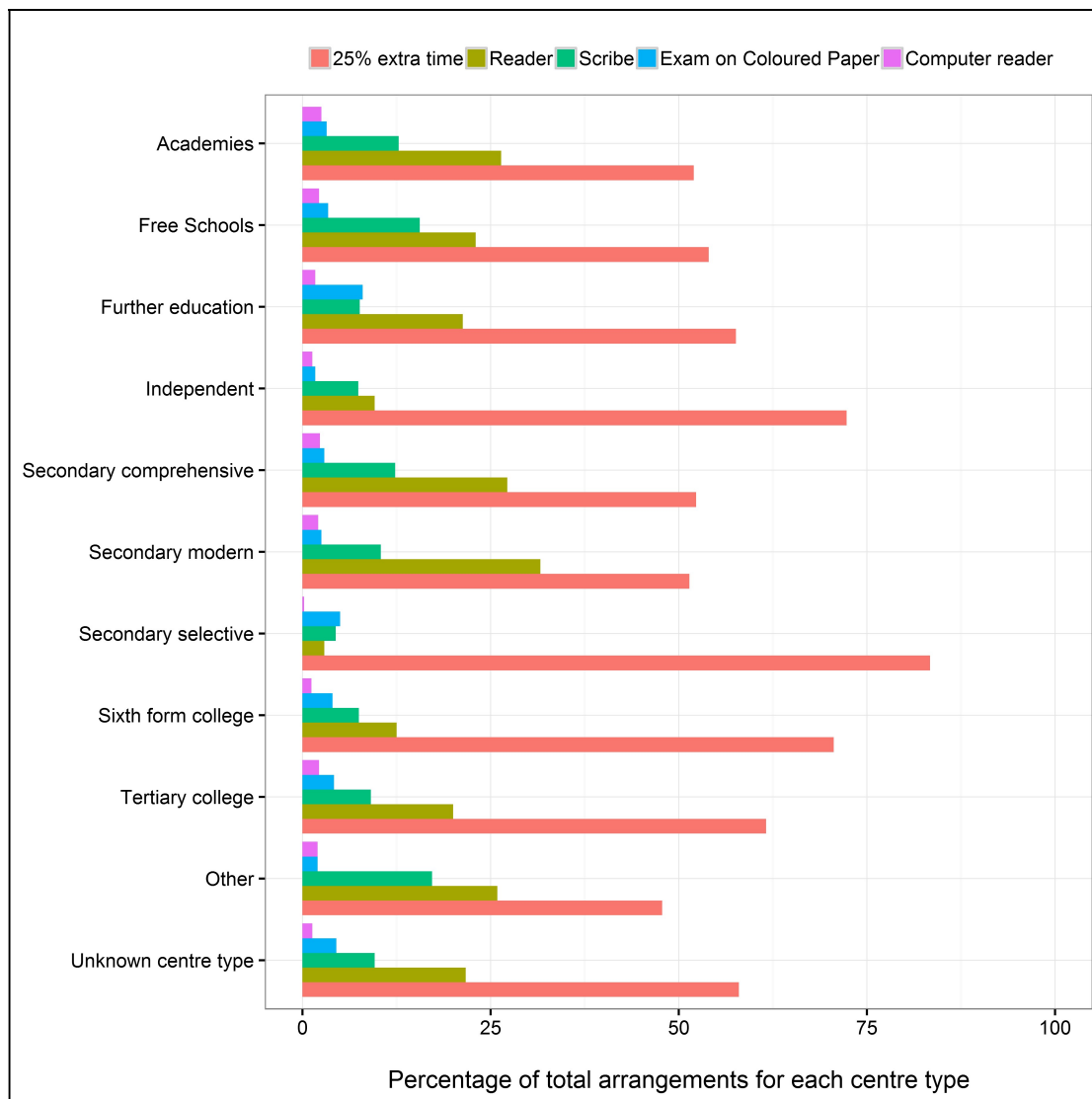
⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-consideration-in-gcse-and-a-level-summer-2016-exam-series>

Approved access arrangements for the five most common types of arrangement, 2011/12 to 2015/16

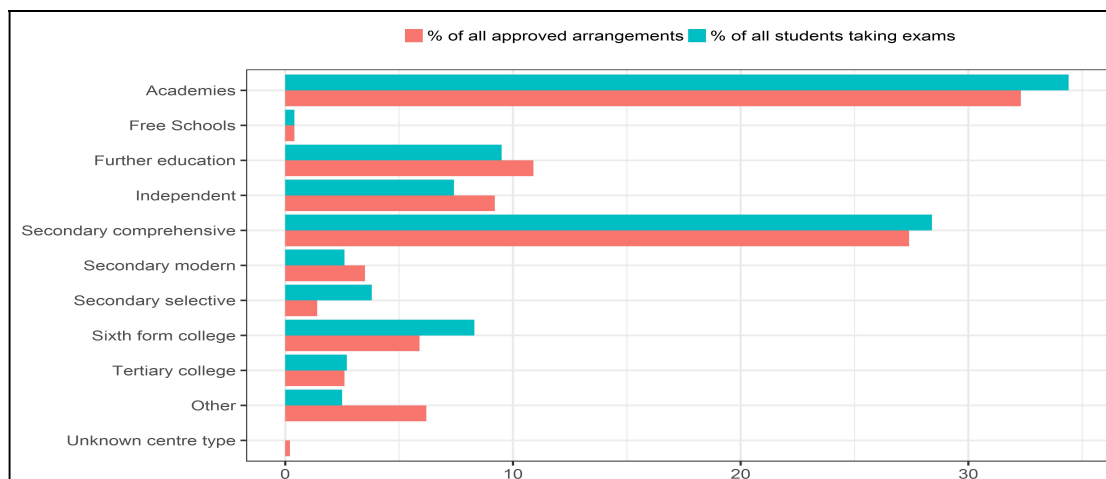


17. The data which shows the patterns of adjustments being made within different types of centre is also interesting, as shown in the two following figures:

Five most common categories of access arrangements as a percentage of total arrangements for each centre type, academic year 15/16



The percentage of access arrangements approved and the percentage of students taking exams by centre type, academic year 2015/16



18. We highlighted in the statistics report the increase in the number of adjustments approved for students taking their assessments in further education colleges. Of course, the GCSE English and maths re-sit policy means the numbers of students taking GCSEs in further education colleges has increased over recent years, as shown in the table below. A fresh application for an adjustment is made for students who move centre to re-take their GCSEs, whereas this is not normally necessary for those who re-take at their original centre.

Year	Number of arrangements	Number of students taking exams
2011/12	9050	92050
2012/13	13450	97100
2013/14	18000	106650
2014/15	25950	133200
2015/16	44850	176750

19. We are seeking to understand these trends. We are putting together a small programme of work to explore this further that will include:

- further detailed analysis of the data to uncover any trends and to create a baseline;
- talking to key stakeholder groups and exam boards;
- seeking improvements to the information about the adjustments that can be made, including a clear distinction between

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Reasonable Adjustments for disabled students and others forms of adjustments;

- reviewing how we report our statistics so that we are better able to differentiate between those adjustments given to disabled students and those given to students to address a temporary issue.

Modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts) and Biblical Hebrew

20. Our policy consultation on the assessment arrangements for modern foreign languages (alternative content for languages with smaller cohorts) closed on 18 January, as did the DfE's consultation on the subject content. We will be asking the Board to consider the final content and assessment arrangements for these qualifications by electronic business. We expect this to take place in February. We then aim to put in place the relevant Conditions and Guidance by March.
21. We have been working with DfE to make sure that we are able effectively to regulate new GCSE, AS and A level Biblical Hebrew. These qualifications will be based on the ancient languages subject content which was originally put in place for Classical Greek and Latin. We have identified the need for some limited changes to this content to reflect the fact that the grammar and syntax of Biblical Hebrew differ considerably from classical Greek and Latin and that the social, cultural and historical contexts in which the language was used are less well understood. DfE is engaging with interested stakeholders on these proposed changes.
22. Given the limited expected changes that will be made to the content, we plan to ask Chief Regulator to agree to adopt the revised content, without reference to the Board. We also expect to make a small number of changes to our Conditions and Guidance documents to reflect the final content. We ask the Board to delegate sign-off for these changes to the Chief Regulator.

General qualifications other than GCSEs and A levels

23. *This paragraph has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
24. We are commissioning an audit of exam boards' approaches to managing the risks associated with the Extended Project Qualification which is assessed entirely by non-exam assessment. The take-up of this qualification is expected to grow.
25. We will consult during February on our proposal to remove the Code of Practice for Principal Learning and Project qualifications. We will propose new regulations for Project qualifications to replace some of

those that will be removed if we withdraw the Code. We will also move all regulations for this qualification into a single place and make some small changes so the requirements align with the rest of our regulatory framework. We do not propose to introduce any additional requirements for Principal Learning qualifications and plan to withdraw all other regulations which only relate to these qualifications; the qualifications are, anyway, all being withdrawn. We will also take this opportunity to remove the regulations for the Diploma qualification, which is no longer offered. We ask that the Board delegates sign-off for these changes to the Chief Regulator.

Evaluating the reformed qualifications

26. In December we held two full-day meetings with groups of teachers whose students had been assessed on the first of the reformed AS qualifications in biology, chemistry, physics, psychology, English (language, literature, language and literature) and history. The events were attended by 34 teachers who represented a range of centre types and geographical locations. The number of attendees was small so that we could get detailed input and engage effectively with it.
27. The focus of these meetings was to get initial and immediate feedback on the impact of the reforms and on any issues that might suggest the need to review our regulatory arrangements. It also served to trial this approach for the larger events planned for autumn 2017 on the reformed A levels and GCSEs.
28. The views expressed about the overall demand of the reformed AS qualifications were mixed. Some attendees suggested an increase relative to the legacy qualifications, with others suggesting there had been no change. Those who suggested an increase typically linked it to the amount, nature and coverage of subject content. For instance, the requirement for mathematical skills in AS sciences; assessment arrangements that required coverage of all the prescribed content without allowing short-cuts in teaching and study; and straightforward increases in areas of study, such as the number of prescribed texts in English. We will, however, be keeping this under review as part of our reform evaluation.
29. There were some concerns over the burden of maintaining records of students' performance for the assessment of practical skills in the science subjects and with the consistency of the monitoring visits of those assessments carried out by the exam boards. However, despite this, there was a general view that the new arrangements for practical science represented a significant improvement over those in the pre-reformed qualifications.
30. A significant and almost consistent message from both meetings was that centres are reviewing their use of the AS qualifications and are likely not to be entering students for them after one year of study in the future.

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The challenge of co-teachability was a recurring topic, particularly in the English subjects and history. A number of teachers reported that their centres were considering making their standard course of study three A levels and the Extended Project Qualification. If this becomes common practice the cohort profile for AS qualifications may change and become a year older, as candidates who find the A level too demanding might fall back on the AS.

31. Decreased student motivation was a fairly consistently reported trend. The result of the mixed economy (with AS 'counting' to the A level outcome in some subjects but not in others) was suggested to have led to individual students 'trying harder' for some subjects than for others, with a negative impact on motivation for the reformed AS qualifications.
32. Finally, we asked the attendees about any impact of the changes on particular students. No such potential equalities impacts were noted.

National assessments

33. *This paragraph has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

Stakeholder Engagement

34. During January we will be attending and presenting at three regional events organised by the Exams Office – a group that represents school exam officers. These will provide opportunities to encourage exam officers to make sure they understand how the qualification reforms will have an impact on their role. We will also stress the important contribution school staff play in the safe delivery of exams and other assessments and the consequences when things go wrong, such as the wrong exam papers being given out to students.
35. We have identified exam officers as having a key part to play in the 9-1 information campaign. We will use the events to stress the key messages of that campaign too.

Finance and Resource

36. We continue to operate within agreed budget.

Impact Assessments

Equality Analysis

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

Risk Assessment

38. Risks are included within the risk register.

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Regulatory Impact Assessment

39. We will consider the regulatory impact of the remaining aspects of our reforms for reviews of marking and appeals to inform our final decisions. Our proposed removal of some regulations referred to in the paper could reduce regulatory burden on awarding organisations.

Communications

40. An update on communication of GQ related issues is included in the Chief Operating Officer’s report.

Paper to be published	Yes – but not section on national assessments
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting

Annex 1 – infographic on summer series 2016