

Ofqual Board

43/16 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 progress on key GQ issues; and
 - (b) delegate to the Chief Regulator the outstanding decisions on reviews of marking and appeals.

General Qualifications Directorate

3. The paper includes updates on:
 - i. Summer 2016 exam series delivery;
 - ii. Reviews of marking and appeals;
 - iii. Monitoring exam board delivery;
 - iv. The accreditation of subjects due for first teaching in 2017;
 - v. Evaluating the reforms;

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- vi. A level Modern Foreign Languages;
- vii. A level science
- viii. Low take-up languages;
- ix. GCSE, AS and A level drama;
- x. Review of regulatory requirements relating to confidentiality;
- xi. Regulating other general qualifications;
- xii. National assessments;
- xiii. Stakeholder engagement.

Summer 2016 Exam Series Delivery

- 4. *This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
- 5. We will be meeting with the exam boards in the Autumn to discuss their notification of events and how they manage incidents. This will allow time to make changes to arrangements, if necessary, ahead of next summer.

Reviews of Marking and Appeals

- 6. We have encouraged school and teacher groups to alert us to any issues arising from the introduction of the new Conditions on reviews of marking and appeals. We have not yet heard of any significant issues.
- 7. *This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs,*
- 8. *This paragraph has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*
- 9. We did not introduce all the planned changes to reviews of marking and appeal arrangements this year, this recognised that exam boards needed time for system changes and allowed us more time to understand the potential impact on exam boards and schools. For example, we have not yet set a date by which exam boards must make available, in time to inform schools' decisions on whether to request a review of marking, all marked GCSE scripts. One exam board has told us it will need to make significant IT changes in order to provide this, which it cannot do quickly. However, one exam board made such scripts available this year and has announced that it will so next year at no charge. Another has been piloting an access to scripts service.

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10. We must decide when to make it a regulatory requirement that exam boards provide access to marked GCSE scripts. The removal of the Code of Practice has made it clear that there is no regulatory barrier to providing such a service. The choice for us is whether to push, through regulatory requirements, all exam boards to change their systems so they can provide the service at an earlier date than some might wish, or whether to rely on market pressures to drive the timetable.
11. Earlier in the year, the Board delegated the decisions on reviews and appeal arrangements to the Chair who was then acting as interim Chief Regulator. The Board also established a sub-group to advise on the decisions. The Board is asked to now delegate the outstanding decisions to the Chief Regulator and to consider whether the sub-group should be re-instated in due course to advise her.
12. The main outstanding issues to be addressed are:
 - When exam boards must give access to marked GCSE scripts (as discussed above).
 - The provisions that must be in place to enable students to ask for a review of their own teacher's marking.
 - When reasons for a review outcome must be provided by an exam boards automatically, rather than only on request.
 - The timeframes within which exam boards must manage their review and appeal arrangements.
 - Whether the extended grounds for appeals being piloted in three subjects this year should be rolled out to other subjects.

Monitoring exam board delivery

13. Our monitoring programme continues. An audit has been conducted on exam boards' procedures for investigating malpractice and an audit on their third party contracts. The malpractice findings have been shared with the exam boards and the third party findings will be shared later this month. We are considering whether any follow up action is needed.
14. The audit of exam boards' controls over the quality of marking is underway. Colleagues from SRR are contributing to this work.
15. The mystery shopper work is also continuing with subject experts attending exam boards' teacher events. We will report on their findings in the coming months.

Accreditation for first teaching 2017

16. All first submissions have now been made and were received from the exam boards on or before the agreed dates. As at 15 September there

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were nine specifications accredited. We will provide an update at the meeting.

17. To date, no specifications have been accredited on first submission. Of the first submission decisions we have made, 53% were communicated ahead of schedule, 27% on schedule and 20% one day behind schedule.
18. Fifteen second submissions decisions have been made so far, of which nine were decisions to accredit. Across the whole of the previous round, 16% of second submissions resulted in accreditation.
19. Exam boards are, so far, generally submitting second submissions more quickly than they did in the previous round. On average they are taking 28 working days from receipt of the first submission decision to re-submission. The average time across the whole of the previous round was 61 working days.
20. We are also making second submission decisions more quickly than we did in the previous round. Our average time from receipt of second submission to the issue of decision has been 10 working days. This compares with an average of 32 working days across the previous round.
21. We must, of course, treat the comparisons with the 2015/2016 data with some caution as we are comparing data for the whole of the previous series with data for just the early stages of the current series. Nevertheless, the benefits of our changed ways of working are clear.

Evaluating the reforms

22. We have been shaping our plans to evaluate the reforms to GCSEs, AS and A levels. Some evaluation projects have started, for example, a three-part, multi-team, longitudinal study of the reformed arrangements for A level science practical work. This will help us understand how these arrangements have affected teaching and learning, and the viability of alternative models. We will be piloting, later this year, some teacher conferences to learn more about teachers' experiences of the reformed qualifications. Our intention is to focus on AS this year, in a small number of subjects, with a view to expanding next year to A level, on a larger scale.
23. Oversight of the work sits within the GQ Directorate. Individual work-streams, however, will be taken forward, solely or partly, by colleagues in SRR, according to expertise and function. We will work with DfE to make sure our respective evaluations of the reforms do not overlap.

A level Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

24. We published our report on A MFL level qualifications in early August, ahead of the release of the 2016 results:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544636/Evaluating_A_level_MFLs.pdf

25. We explained in the report stakeholders' concerns that the best MFL students did not always achieve the highest grades and that insufficient A*s were being awarded. We set out what we and the exam boards had done to address these concerns. The table below, taken from the report, has been updated to include the provisional 2016 results. This shows increasing percentages of A*s being awarded, against a background of generally reducing entries. It is, of course, possible that students in the lower 'tail' of the cohort have moved away from MFL qualifications, leading to a larger proportion of the highest grades being awarded.

		2013	2014	2015	2016
French	Entry	11272	10433	10328	9672
	Grade A*	6.5%	6.6%	8.1%	8.8%
	Grades A*/A	38.5%	37.6%	37.3%	37.3%
German	Entry	4242	4187	4009	3842
	Grade A*	8.2%	8.9%	8.3%	9.6%
	Grades A*/A	41.4%	40.6%	39.1%	39.6%
Spanish	Entry	7651	7601	8694	8460
	Grade A*	6.7%	7.7%	8.1%	8.4%
	Grades A*/A	36.0%	35.6%	35.0%	34.4%

26. There were some positive comments about this trend in the press. These were, however, followed by a press story that some independent schools do not believe their results reflect the appropriate rank order of their students. This view has been echoed by one of the school groups with which we have been in contact.
27. The reformed MFL A levels will be awarded 2018. In the meantime, we will consider the findings of our survey to understand more about the performance of students who take A levels in their native language.

A level science

28. The exam boards recently held a meeting to update Ofqual and a range of learned societies (including Royal Society, Wellcome Trust, Gatsby Foundation, Royal Society of Biology, Royal Society of Chemistry and Institute of Physics) on their monitoring to date of the new A level science practical arrangements.
29. An exam board survey indicated that between 2015 and 2016 the percentage of science teachers with a negative view of how the assessment arrangements will affect teaching and learning of A level science fell from 39% to 8%. This suggests the reformed arrangements are considered an improvement on previous ones.

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30. Since January, the exam boards have visited about one-third of the approximately 3000 centres offering these reformed qualifications, with the majority (over 90%) judged to meet the requirements. Where this was not the case, the exam boards are doing follow-up visits to make sure centres understand what is needed.
31. By summer 2017, when the qualifications are first awarded, exam boards plan for all the centres to have been visited at least once, in line with our requirements. The visits relate to checking, for example, that centres are providing appropriate opportunities for practical work and that they can accurately and consistently apply the assessment criteria (which are common across exam boards and sciences). The visits do not involve moderating individual assessment decisions. We have just started an audit of the processes the exam boards have put in place for this monitoring programme.
32. At the meeting, the exam boards indicated that feedback from centres on the effects of the reformed arrangements has been favourable. They are largely seen to enhance the curriculum and assessment. Students report doing a wider range of experimentation than previously. Centres are frequently exceeding the minimum requirement for 12 practical activities and those activities are being well integrated into courses of study.
33. There were contributions from teachers and students from two centres at the meeting. They spoke positively about the effects of the new arrangements in the classroom. For example, the increased freedom they allow to undertake a wide range of practical work, the scope they provide to engage in 'real science', such as experimental results not needing to be 'perfect', and the value of recording work in real-time in lab books. Although we cannot assume that the views we heard at the event were representative of the sector as a whole, this early feedback is encouraging.

Low take-up languages

34. In line with its decision in May, we will ask the Board to consider by electronic business whether the DfE's draft modern foreign language content for the AS and A levels in some low take-up languages to be taught from September 2018 could be regulated. DfE expects to finalise the content in early October. If the Board agrees the content can be regulated, we will then consult on assessment arrangements. DfE will consult at the same time on the content.

GCSE, AS and A level drama

35. At the last meeting we told the Board that DfE was considering changes to the GCSE, AS and A level drama content. The changes would be

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effective from next year. DfE has now given us the detail of the planned change.

36. The current DfE Subject Content for GCSE, AS and A level requires students to carry out an analysis and evaluation of live theatre. This may be addressed by students considering in their assessments live-streamed performances and recordings of live performances. There is currently no requirement that students attend a live theatre performance.
37. DfE wants to amend its Subject Content to introduce a new expectation that students attend live theatre during their course of study and require centres to confirm that all students taking the qualifications have been given the opportunity to do so. They do not intend to change the requirements for the analysis and evaluation of live theatre. Final proposals are yet to be agreed by Ministers.
38. This approach is consistent with other subjects where students are required to take part in activities as part of the qualification, such as in GCSE citizenship and GCSE and A level geography.
39. Once DfE has amended the content, we will consult on a change to our Conditions for this subject. This will require exam boards to seek a statement from centres that they have provided students with the opportunity to attend live theatre. The approach will be in line with similar requirements in other subjects.
40. The Board agreed at its last meeting to delegate to the Chief Regulator decisions on small changes to subject content. This update is for the Board's information.

Review of regulatory requirements relating to confidentiality

41. We are reviewing the General Conditions covering provision of information to teachers and maintaining confidentiality of assessment materials (G4, C2, D8). We introduced the requirements in 2013 following a press expose of the provision of inappropriate information at some exam board events. Our commitment to review the provisions was reiterated by the then Chief Regulator before the Education Select Committee in October 2015. The exam boards have also raised concerns about the impact of the provisions on the effectiveness of their training provision.
42. We are gathering evidence about the impact of the Conditions, including through a call for evidence to all awarding organisations, a teacher survey and focus groups. We will review the information we receive and plan to report to the Board with proposals in November.

Regulating other general qualifications

43. We considered at the recent Board workshop some of the factors we must consider when deciding how we regulate general qualifications that

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are not GCSEs, AS or A levels. The note used to inform that discussion is attached at (closed) annex A.

National Assessments

44. We are developing a Memorandum of Understanding with STA to complement our Regulatory Framework for National Assessments. Before finalising this work we will consider whether the Framework is fit for purpose, in light of the current assessments and the purposes for which they are used and the accountabilities of the organisations involved with the development and delivery of the assessments. We will report on our conclusions to the Board at a later date.

Stakeholder Engagement

45. In the lead up to results days, we maintained contact with groups representing school and college leaders and encouraged them to let us know if they were aware of any concerns about emerging about results and, then, with reviews of marking. We also alerted these groups ahead of our publication of our research on the sawtooth effect and decisions on the National Reference Test and GCSE grading.
46. We will be having further engagement with groups from the science community over the next few weeks, as they continue to consider the nature and impact of reforms to GCSE and, particularly, A level science qualifications.
47. To inform our position on reviews of teacher-marked assessments, we are holding some focus groups with teachers to understand how the requirements under the Code of practice in respect of appeals against teacher-marked assessment decisions were managed. We will also seek to understand better the concerns raised by some teachers in response to our earlier consultations about students being given the outcome of their teacher-marked assessments. Our plan is to trial some questions that we could include in a wider teacher-survey.

Finance and Resource

48. We continue to operate within agreed budget.

Impact Assessments

Equality Analysis

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

Risk Assessment

50. Risks are included within the risk register.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

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51. We will consider the regulatory impact of the remaining aspects of our reforms for reviews of marking and appeals to inform our final decisions.

Communications

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

Paper to be published	Yes –
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting

ANNEX LIST:-

Annex A: note to inform Board workshop discussion (closed)