

# Ofqual Board

## Paper 08/17

**Date:**

17 May 2017

**Title:**

General Qualifications Update

**Report by:**

Julie Swan, Executive Director for General Qualifications

**Responsible Director:**

Julie Swan, Executive Director for General Qualifications

**Paper for information**

**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 note the issues reported in the paper.

**General Qualifications Directorate**

3. The paper includes updates on:
  - i. **Summer 2017 exam series delivery**
  - ii. **Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching in 2017**
  - iii. **Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching 2018**
  - iv. **Westminster Hall debate on GCSE English literature**
  - v. **Piloting of different approaches to assessment**
  - vi. **Appeals of reviews of marking and moderation**
  - vii. **Modern Foreign Languages**

- viii. Ancient Languages**
- ix. Drama**
- x. Stakeholder engagement**

#### **Summer 2017 Exam Series Delivery**

- 4. The summer exams series will be underway by the time the Board meets. We track the events that inevitably rise and intervene where the exam board concerned is not appropriately managing an event. We have worked through a number of scenarios and considered how we would respond to different types of event. We are using software to monitor social media activity, and will use triggers to inform whether we should respond to social comment. We are maintaining a dashboard which we discuss weekly with the Chief Regulator

#### **Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching in 2017**

- 5. We continue to make progress with the accreditation programme since the last update to the Board. As at 9 May, there were 11 specifications outstanding and 106 accredited. With the exception of AS and A level statistics (one of the subjects that AQA dropped and Pearson picked up), all GCSE and GCE subjects have at least one specification accredited. We will provide an update on any further progress at the meeting.

#### **Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching 2018**

- 6. We are moving in to the final stages of the GCSE and GCE reform programme with the accreditation of the last tranche of modern foreign language qualifications and those in biblical Hebrew. The first submissions were received on 27 April (GCSE Portuguese and Turkish) and the first panel, for GCSE Turkish, will be held on 9 May. We will continue to keep our website updated with the relevant information in order for teachers and other stakeholders to have sight of the progress of these qualifications and to provide updates on progress to the Board.

#### **Debate on GCSE English literature**

- 7. We have supported DfE in responding to a parliamentary petition about GCSE English literature. The petition called on government to “Authorise open book examinations for GCSE English Literature 2017”. It received over 100,000 responses, and so was scheduled for a debate in Westminster Hall. This took place on Monday 24 April. We provided written and face to face briefing to the Minister and attended the debate
- 8. Two Labour MPs spoke in the debate: the Chair of the petitions committee Helen Jones MP, and Emma Lewell-Buck, MP for South

Shields. In our guidance to exam boards on GCSE English literature, we are clear that we do not expect students to have access to full texts during their exams. The Minister's response to the debate aligned with our position in this area. He focussed on correcting misunderstandings regarding the place of 'memorisation' in the subject, explaining the approach to assessment and the problems with allowing students access during their exams to the whole text of the novels, plays or poems they have studied.

9. There was also a petition on GCSE mathematics that closed on 3 May. It focused on the need for students to be able to recall formulae that were previously provided to students in the examinations. This is a requirement of the government's GCSE mathematics content. There were c.92,000 signatories to the petition. The government has published its response to the issue.

### **Piloting of different approaches to assessment**

10. This section has been redacted, as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

### **Appeals of reviews of marking and moderation**

11. We advised the Board at its last meeting that we would provide an update on the evaluation of the appeals pilot. For the pilot, exam boards allowed appeals in three A level subjects on the grounds of a marking error that was not addressed at review, as well as allowing appeals on procedural grounds.
12. We previously advised the Board that, from what we had seen, there seemed no good reason not to roll out the extended ground for appeals further this year. Having completed the evaluation, this remained our view. A short summary of our key findings is provided below.
13. Analysis of the data has shown that:
  - there was an increase in appeals submitted (47 appeals submitted in the pilot subjects in 2016 compared to 27 in the same subjects in 2015. 40 of the 47 submitted in 2016 were on the extended ground), and
  - more appeals cases resulted in grade changes following appeals (10 appeals cases submitted in the pilot subjects had grade changes in 2016 compared to 3 cases in the same subjects in 2015. 9 of the 10 cases in 2016 were on the extended ground).

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14. We found that:

- centres generally welcomed the changes; they felt the additional ground allowed them to appeal on relevant grounds;
- exam boards were able to operationalise the new ground of appeal although, in a limited number of cases, we had concerns about the way particular cases were handled which we are taking up directly with exam boards; and
- extending the grounds will have a limited financial impact on exam boards and schools and colleges, although this would inevitably add to their workload if more appeals were made as a result.

15. Based on this evidence, we concluded that we should roll out the new requirement to all GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Project qualifications. The Board delegated this decision to the Chief Regulator. She has decided that, in light of feedback from the exam boards and schools and teachers, we should implement the new arrangements in a phased manner so that they are introduced:

- to all AS and A level subjects in 2017
- to GCSE (9-1) English Language, English Literature and Mathematics in 2018, and
- to all remaining GCSE subjects in 2019.

16. We have yet to make a final decision on the grounds that should be used for appeals to the outcome of Project qualifications in 2017.

17. We will announce the decisions following the election, at which time we will publish the outcomes of our evaluation and research into the conduct of reviews and appeals.

### **Modern Foreign Languages**

18. We have published our decisions and revised conditions and guidance for A level modern foreign languages for first teaching in 2018. DfE called the content for these languages ‘languages with smaller cohorts’.

19. The Board considered, via electronic business in February, our reservations about the subject content title also being used as the qualification title. We consulted on options for an appropriate title and invited further suggestions. Only three respondents (of the five who responded in total) answered the question about titling – both AQA and Pearson backed the *Language (Listening, Reading, Writing)* option as the best indicator of the skills assessed. This was our preferred option too. We have decided that the qualifications will have this title.

### **Ancient Languages**

20. We have published our decisions and revised conditions and guidance for GCSE, AS and A level Ancient Languages, so they are suitable for biblical Hebrew, and in line with the revised subject content. Following consultation, we made some small changes to our proposed guidance in the light of some helpful comments about our expectations for translation. The final provisions are otherwise in the form on which we consulted.

### **Drama**

21. We have published our decisions and revised conditions and guidance for GCSE and A level drama. The revisions followed changes to the subject content made by DfE, which aim to ensure that students see a live performance during their course of study. Following consultation, we confirmed we would implement all our proposals. This means schools and colleges must now sign a statement to confirm they have provided the opportunity for their students to attend a live performance. We made clear that this would only be in respect of students taking their exams from summer 2019 onwards.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

22. Until the purdah restrictions limited our activity, we continued to take opportunities to promote the reforms and 9-1 grading in particular, for example by having a stand at the national Federation of Small Businesses conference.
23. We have also had a range of specific engagements with key stakeholders. In particular, we have met with the head teacher associations, teacher unions and key subject associations in reformed subjects to discuss the reforms in detail. We focused on the award of new qualifications this summer and the issues of main interest to their members. We also explained the Board's position on inter-subject comparability. These engagements allowed us to share a range of important information which they could then disseminate to their respective memberships.
24. We have gained a better understanding of areas on which we need to focus future communications. We have further targeted engagements planned leading up to results days.

### **Finance and Resource**

25. We continue to operate within agreed budget.

**Impact Assessments**

26. Equality Analysis

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

27. Risk Assessment

Risks are included within the risk register.

28. Regulatory Impact Assessment

The regulatory impact of our reforms for reviews of marking and appeals was considered in our final decisions.

**Communications**

29. 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