

# Ofqual Board

## Paper 92/16

**Date:**

22 March 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 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 note the issues reported in the paper.

**General Qualifications Directorate**

3. The paper includes updates on:
  - i. **National Assessments**
  - ii. **Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching in 2017**
  - iii. **Reviews of marking and moderation and appeals**
  - iv. **Readiness for summer 2017 exam series delivery**
  - v. **Reasonable adjustments**
  - vi. **Stakeholder engagement**
  - vii. **Finance and resource**
  - viii. **Impact assessments**
  - ix. **Communications**

### **National Assessments**

4. The DfE is due to publish a consultation on statutory primary assessment. We are awaiting confirmation of the date of publication. We will consider how to respond to the proposals in the consultation and whether our response should be public. We will update the Board on the consultation at its next meeting. In light of the interest in these assessments, we expect that the consultation will run for 12 weeks, allowing time to update the Board at the next meeting.
5. We have arranged an internal secondment to lead our work on national assessments for the next six months. This will enable us to make sure our oversight of these assessments is properly co-ordinated and that we are appropriately targeting our activities over the summer.

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

6. We have made good progress with the accreditation programme since the last update to the Board. As at 15 March 2017 were 96 specifications accredited, with 21 outstanding. We will provide an update on further progress at the meeting.

### **Reviews of marking and moderation and appeals**

7. If a school or college remains concerned about results following a review of marking or moderation, it can appeal to the exam board. Traditionally, appeals have only been accepted by an exam board where a procedural failure is alleged by the school or college. Last year we extended the grounds in three AS and A level subjects so an appeal could be brought on the grounds of a marking or moderation error that remained following review. We committed to review this pilot before deciding whether to extend this option to other subjects.
8. The pilot subjects were physics, geography and religious studies. Across all exam boards there were 47 appeals in these subjects in 2016 (covering 194 candidates and 38 centres).
9. The research team has been supporting the evidence gathering in providing analysis of the appeals data. We have commissioned an independent researcher to interview both panel members and appellants to understand their experience of the pilot. We have also conducted a review of a sample of appeals to understand the nature of the subject expertise used by boards and appellants in these cases. We are analysing data for patterns and trends; considering the burden imposed by the additional ground for appeal; and reviewing exam boards' processes and the paperwork from a sample of pilot appeals.
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### **Readiness for summer 2017 Exam Series Delivery**

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### **Reasonable Adjustments**

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### **Stakeholder Engagement**

39. We have appointed Richard Garrett to the post of Director of Strategic Relationships for General Qualifications. Richard was previously an associate director in the General Qualifications Directorate and has been closely involved with the qualifications reform programme from the start.
40. We held our spring meeting of our Stakeholder Engagement Group on 6 March. We considered with the group key issues of interest in the lead up to summer 2017, including the series of blogs we are publishing. Our focus on clear and timely communications was well received.
41. We also discussed our recent announcement on reviews of marking and appeals. Our decision that schools should give students access to the marks from teacher-marked non-exam assessments, to allow them to decide whether to request a review of marking, generated most discussion. It was clear from the discussions that, whilst the Code of practice required that centres should allow students to seek a review of internally marked assessments, this facility has not been widely promoted.
42. We have continued to take opportunities to promote the reforms and 9-1 grading in particular, for example by having a stand at the national ASCL conference.
43. A Westminster Hall debate will be held on 24 April, following a determination by the Petitions Committee, relating to GCSE English literature.
44. The concerns behind the petition are that students will not have access to the full texts of the novels, poems or plays studied when they take their exams in this subject.
45. The DfE's content requires students to study a range of intellectually challenging and substantial whole texts in detail including Shakespeare, 19th-century novels, Romantic poetry, and fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards. It requires students to study no fewer than 15 poems by at least five different poets, and a minimum of 300 lines of poetry. The assessment arrangements reflect those requirements and are designed to reward students who have gained a deep understanding of literature and who have read widely throughout the course.
46. The content also requires that students are examined on texts which they have not read previously ('unseen' texts). Students will need to read widely during their studies to prepare them for the 'unseen' text in the exam and to be able to critically compare and contrast a range of texts using 'relevant quotation and detailed textual references' to demonstrate the breadth of their understanding of literature. These

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‘unseen’ texts might, but do not have to be, by authors whose works students have studied as set texts.

47. We do not expect awarding organisations to give, or allow students to have, access during their exams to copies of the whole texts they have studied. However, exam boards can provide students with relevant extracts. The exam boards have each chosen in their sample assessment materials to provide students with extracts of the texts they have studied.
48. We are concerned that students will be misled by such debates into believing that they will get good marks simply by memorising and writing out the poems or texts they have studied. Students will not need to learn and remember the exact words of poems or texts by heart or write those out in full within the exam in order to succeed.
49. To gain good marks, students will need to be able to show that they are familiar with the texts - that they have studied them – and that their understanding is sufficiently developed to be able to compare them with other texts that might have been given to them in the exam. The student will need to write about a poem they have studied and that is not given to them in the exam, but that does not require them to reproduce the text in full. Rather it requires students to recollect details from the poem so as to compare it with one provided in the exam.
50. We will give new prominence to the messages in the previous Chief Regulator’s blog that made it clear that GCSE English literature is about understanding not memory <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2015/03/18/gcse-english-literature-learning-and-understanding-not-memory/>
51. The school accountability measures have been designed to encourage schools to enter students for GCSE English literature. If a student sits the exams for the qualification, their GCSE English language grade will be double-weighted for performance table purposes, even if the English literature outcome for the student is a U.
52. There is a risk that concerns about the accessibility of GCSE English literature, combined with the potential unintended consequences of the accountability policy, could give rise to particular stakeholder and media interest in the subject this year.

### **Finance and Resource**

53. We continue to operate within agreed budget.

### **Impact Assessments**

54. Equality Analysis

The debate on GCSE English literature is likely to raise concerns about the accessibility of the qualification to some disabled students.



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### 55. Risk Assessment

Risks are included within the risk register.

### 56. Regulatory Impact Assessment

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**

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

Paper to be published	Yes - but not necessarily all the information on the reviews of marking and appeals pilot.
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting