

21 June 2017

## **Summer 2017 Data Exchange Procedure**

This letter is to notify you that we have published the Summer 2017 Data Exchange Procedures for GCE and GCSE qualifications (the procedures) and accompanying templates on our website. The procedures are a Regulatory Document and come into effect immediately.

It is important that grade standards across all exam boards are consistent. Reviewing awarding data in advance of results will provide us with some assurance that this has been achieved.

As in previous years, the information shared with the regulators and between exam boards is confidential and should only be used for the purpose of monitoring summer award outcomes.

## **Consultation**

We consulted all affected exam boards in respect of the procedures. We discussed the procedures with you at the Maintenance of Standards meeting on the 24 May 2017 and have allowed an opportunity for representations.

There was a single contentious issue in respect of the proposed approach for generating predictions for the reformed (9-1) GCSE specifications in English language, English literature and mathematics this summer. We explained the rationale for our proposed approach at the Maintenance of Standards meeting and allowed an opportunity for representations.

We have carefully considered all of the representations made during the meeting and those made afterwards, and have reviewed our proposals in light of those representations.

The rationale for our final decision, to proceed as we proposed, is set out in this letter.

## **Background**

This summer, the first awards will be made for reformed (9-1) GCSE qualifications. Ofqual has said previously that we will carry forward the grading standard from pre-reform GCSE qualifications as part of our comparable outcomes approach. We have

taken time to consider the way in which predictions should be calculated to help us achieve this intention.

We discussed at the Standards and Technical Issues Group (STIG) how the predictions should be generated for reformed (9-1) GCSE English language, English literature and mathematics, due to the potential impact of the increase in the number of entries from year 11 candidates. In English language, and to a lesser extent in English literature, this increase is mainly due to schools entering their candidates for the reformed GCSEs rather than level 1/2 certificates (also known as international GCSEs), as they did in recent years.

The JCQ Standards and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) subsequently recommended that the predictions for reformed (9-1) GCSE English language and English literature specifications should be based on the 2016 outcomes for GCSE and level 1/2 certificates, and that the predictions for reformed (9-1) GCSE mathematics specifications should be based on the 2016 outcomes for GCSE only.

While there was agreement between us and STAG that the 2016 reference series is preferable to the 2015 series (as a result of the KS2 boycott in 2010), there was disagreement in respect of the outcomes that should be included when predictions are calculated.

At the Maintenance of Standards meeting on 24 May, having carefully considered the recommendation made by STAG, we set out our proposed approach for generating predictions for the reformed (9-1) GCSE specifications in English language, English literature and mathematics this summer – that is, to generate predictions based on the 2016 outcomes for GCSE candidates only. We set out our rationale for this approach at that time and have summarised that rationale below.

### **Considerations**

We consider that, as a matter of principle, maintaining the GCSE qualification standard should be the priority this summer. GCSEs differ from level 1/2 certificates in structure, assessment design and content. Further, as can legitimately happen, the relationship between KS2 results and GCSE grades is not the same as the relationship between KS2 results and level 1/2 certificate grades. Indeed, KS2-based predictions are not routinely used to drive the maintenance of grading standards in level 1/2 certificates.

We also consider that combining outcomes from GCSE and level 1/2 certificates to generate predictions is difficult to justify given the methods used for generating GCSE predictions in recent years, where the predictions have been based on GCSE outcomes only. While it might be argued that using only 2016 GCSE outcomes to generate predictions does not reflect the whole candidature sitting GCSEs in summer 2017, this is a difficult argument to sustain. In 2013-2016 we did not adjust predictions in any way to account for candidates moving away from the GCSE to take level 1/2 certificates. We believe it is therefore difficult to justify adjusting the basis of predictions to take account of candidates returning to the GCSE cohort, when there was no adjustment when they left.

We are aware of the importance of ensuring we have confidence in the outcomes used to set standards in the first of the new GCSEs, since the grade standards set in 2017 will form the basis of standards in subsequent years. At a level of principle, we believe that any approach for 2017 should be the same for all three reformed subjects. We therefore do not support the STAG proposal to use different outcomes in the basis of the KS2-based predictions for English language/literature, and mathematics. We are also mindful that when agreeing an approach for 2017, it is important to consider whether this is appropriate for GCSE subjects being awarded for the first time in 2018 and 2019, so that we are consistent over time. To do otherwise risks making arbitrary decisions within a year and between years.

Since the Maintenance of Standards meeting, we have received representations to the effect that calculating predictions without including level 1/2 certificates risks undermining public confidence. We recognise this potential but believe that the same is potentially true of the STAG proposal. Further, we believe the risk to standards if we include the data for level 1/2 certificates outweighs any potential risk to public confidence.

We continue to believe that the predictions for each of the reformed specifications should be based on the GCSE outcomes from 2016, due to the rationale set out above. We have therefore finalised the procedures on the basis that predictions used for awarding reformed (9-1) GCSE English language, English literature and mathematics specifications will be based on GCSE outcomes from 2016.

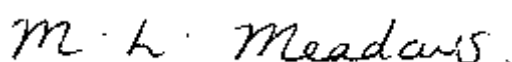
The following materials will be available next week from the secure collaborative portal:

- Summer 2017 Data Exchange Procedure
- Exam board specific reporting templates
- Details of our processes for reviewing outcome data, which has also been published on our website.

In recent years we have published on our website any correspondence with exam boards about maintaining standards in GCSEs, AS or A levels in the summer. We intend to do the same this year.

I look forward to reviewing the outcomes with you at the Maintenance of Standards meetings on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> August. In the meantime, if you or your colleagues have any questions, please get in touch with Cath Jadhav or Rachel Taylor.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Meadows  
Executive Director Strategy, Risk and Research, Deputy Chief Regulator