

Ofqual Board

Paper 53/17

Date:

15 November 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 with closed sections



Issue

1. This paper updates the Board on the General Qualifications Directorate's key work since the last meeting.
2. The paper includes updates on: issues arising from the 2017 summer series, the review of the involvement of teachers in developing exam papers, GCSE computer science, GCSE Biblical Hebrew, the use of extra time in exams and a summary of progress with the accreditation of reformed qualifications

Recommendations

3. The Board is recommended to:
 - a. note the updates reported in the paper;
 - b. delegate to the Chief Regulator a decision on whether to adopt DfE's revised subject content for GCSE Biblical Hebrew into our regulatory framework; and
 - c. consider whether we should, in respect of schools and colleges that (without obvious good reason) applied for extra time in respect of 50% or more, or 1% or fewer, of its students in both 2016 and 2017:

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- i. invite the centre to review its practice;
- ii. ask the JCQ Centre Inspection Service to consider including such centres in its programme of visits for spring 2018;
- iii. bring the centres to the attention of Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate, as appropriate.

Summer 2017 Exam Series Delivery

4. We have heard concerns from some schools and their representative bodies about the number and scale of mark and consequent grade changes AQA has made following reviews of marking for GCSE English language. The figures will be included in Official Statistics that we will publish in December, so we cannot yet discuss the data in any detail. We are seeking to understand from AQA the reasons for the concerns we are hearing. We will provide an update to the Board at the meeting.

Review of role of teachers writing exam papers

5. Our review continues into:
 - the relative risks and benefits associated with the current practice, whereby some question writers and exam paper reviewers¹ are also teachers and, if this practice continues,
 - whether the current safeguards are sufficient.
6. We are now able to draw on:
 - The 149 responses to our call for evidence, which closed on 31 October.
 - The discussions at the event we held on 20 October, attended by about 40 people with direct interest in and/or experience of the practice.
 - A range of qualitative and quantitative information provided by the exam boards.
7. We will add to this the report of one of our subject experts (who has worked as a teacher and as an examiner) who has interviewed a number of people who have acted in a dual teacher/examiner capacity and the information we have gathered from some other countries on teachers' involvement in writing exam papers.
8. So far, we have heard many arguments in support of teachers writing exam papers, focusing on the skills and experience required to ensure

¹ It is important to note that many teachers mark exams. Markers do not have access to exam papers or questions before the exams are sat. Exam boards use different terminology to describe the roles of the people who write or check questions/exam papers before they are taken.

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questions are accessible to students of a wide range of abilities, effectively discriminate, can be completed within the allocated time and stay within the curriculum but are not unduly predictable. Very few people who have engaged with our review have suggested teachers should not write exam questions.

9. We have, however, also heard suggestions about the way current safeguards could be improved, for example by ensuring only exam board staff know exactly which papers/questions will be used in any one sitting.

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

11. We will update the Board at the meeting on our emerging thinking.
12. We committed when we announced the review to publish a progress update before the end of the year. We plan to publish this in mid-December with our report on the 2017 summer exam series.
13. We expect members of the Education Select Committee to take a keen interest in our review when we appear before them for the Committee's hearing on exam integrity. We were invited to submit a short letter on exam integrity, ahead of the hearing, a copy of which is attached at annex A.

GCSE Computer Science

14. We flagged to the Board at its September meeting our concerns over the availability on social media and internet sites of support for students answering some of the non-exam assessment tasks in GCSE computer science. Since then we have held meetings with the exam boards and spoken with people who have particular insights into how the qualification is being taught and the non-exam assessment managed. We required the exam boards to provide us with evidence of how they are monitoring for, and detecting, malpractice and the actions they have taken.
15. The evidence we have seen suggests that, despite the best efforts of the exam boards, potential malpractice is taking place in a manner that cannot be controlled or closed off. It is difficult to see how exam boards can mitigate the risks of malpractice sufficiently to assure teachers and students who are abiding by the rules that the arrangements for the qualification will be fair for all.
16. We are considering the evidence, the actions available to us and the evident and potential consequences of those actions. At its last meeting the Board delegated decision on this issue to the Chief Regulator in consultation with the Board Chair. We will provide an update to the Board on any actions taken and planned.

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Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching 2018

18. As at 30 October 2017, 6 specifications (out of 18) had been accredited.

Finance and Resource

19. We continue to operate within agreed budget.

Impact Assessments

20. Equality Analysis

21. We are subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (s.149 of the Equality Act 2010). This requires us, when exercising our functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between people who are disabled and those who are not. We should regard to this duty when we decide whether we should take any action in respect of schools that make very few requests for extra time for their students.

22. Risk Assessment

Risks are included within the risk register.

23. Regulatory Impact Assessment

The potential regulatory impact of any changes to the arrangements by which active teachers contribute to the development of live assessment materials could be significant and will be evaluated as options are considered. We are also considering the potential impact of any proposed changes to GCSE computer science arrangements.

Communications

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

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