

Ofqual Board

Paper 68/17a

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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

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: reviews of marking, GCSE computer science, the use of extra time in exams, exam boards' readiness for summer 2018, accreditation and stakeholder engagement. There is a separate paper on our review of the role of teacher/examiners.

Recommendations

3. The Board is recommended to note the updates reported in the paper.

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

Reviews of teacher-marked assessments

4. For many years, students have had the right to ask for a review of any mark given by their teachers where that mark contributes to their GCSE, AS or A level grade. When we introduced the new Conditions on reviews of marking we made it explicit that students should be given those marks – and before they were submitted for moderation. This had previously been an implicit requirement of the Code of Practice.

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5. We are aware from stakeholder feedback of disquiet within schools about the practical arrangements and risks associated with our explicit requirement that they should tell students their marks. It is clear that many centres have not traditionally done so. Schools and their representative bodies have raised many detailed questions with the exam boards about the practicalities of the process. We have strongly encouraged the exam boards to provide their centres with helpful guidance and have suggested how they could improve the initial draft they produced.

GCSE Computer Science

6. The Board has previously considered concerns about the availability on social media and internet sites of support for students answering the non-exam assessment tasks in GCSE computer science. It delegated to the Chief Regulator, in consultation with the Board Chair, authority to decide how to respond to those concerns.
7. We consulted from 27 November to 22 December 2017 on our proposal to change the assessment arrangements for the qualification. In summary we proposed that for students taking their exams in 2018 and 2019:
 - Students' grades must be based on their performance in their exams alone, rather than the exams contributing 80% of the marks to the grade with the remaining 20% from students' performance in the non-exam assessment task. The exams must continue in the form exemplified in the exam boards' sample assessment materials.
 - Schools must give their students an opportunity to undertake the non-exam assessment tasks set by their exam boards and make 20 hours available in the timetable to allow them to undertake the task. Exam boards must receive from schools statements confirming they had made such provision. This would make sure all students had an opportunity to develop their skills, apply their knowledge and understanding of the subject, and go some way to making sure all students had a similar experience, regardless of whether they had yet to start, were part way through, or had completed the task when the arrangements were changed.
 - Teachers would not formally have to mark students' tasks, although they might do so to provide feedback to students.
8. We received 2556 responses to the consultation.
9. The responses to the consultation confirmed our view that the situation was untenable. Unless we addressed it, the qualification would not be fair for all students and public confidence in the qualification would be at risk.

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10. While it was clear most respondents agreed there were significant shortcomings with the current non-exam assessment arrangements, views were mixed on the need for, and the form of, any immediate changes to the qualification's assessment arrangements. Even those who agreed on the need for immediate action had different views on the action we should take. The responses did not persuade us there was a better model to that we proposed in the consultation.
11. The Chief Regulator, having consulted with the Chair, decided to implement the approach we proposed with immediate effect. We announced our decision on 8 January 2018 when we also published a summary of the responses.
12. We have not decided on the assessment arrangements for students taking their exams after 2019. While we understand that teachers and exam boards need time to prepare for any longer-term changes, and students should know what to expect from a qualification, we want to make sure we take the right decision for the future. We will take into account the ideas put forward in response to the consultation and consult on a preferred approach before we decide on arrangements for 2020 and beyond. If appropriate, we will extend the 2018/2019 approach to 2020.

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

Readiness for summer 2018

13. We are visiting each of the four main exam boards for a day during January/February to explore with them their readiness for delivering the summer 2018 series. We are seeking information from the boards on how they are managing the key risks they have identified to safe delivery this year and how they have learned from last year's events. At the time of writing, we have visited three of the boards.
14. We undertook a similar exercise last year, with support from three individuals external to Ofqual. We are delivering this year's reviews with internal resources only.

Stakeholder engagement

15. We continue to build on our strong relationships with key stakeholders. We engaged actively and successfully with key groups representing schools, colleges and teachers to help them understand the position on reviews of marking. We did the same in the lead up to our GCSE computer science consultation and as we were about to announce our decision. The stakeholder groups commented positively on our computer science consultation whilst acknowledging the situation was regrettable.
16. During January, we are speaking at a series of conferences for exams officers. In this way, we expect to engage with about 1250 exams officers in total. We are acknowledging the important role exams officers

play in securing the proper running of exams, encouraging them to report any concerns they might have about malpractice and providing an update on current key issues.

Accreditation of qualifications for first teaching 2018

17. As at 23 January, we had accredited 11 specifications (out of 18). Further progress will depend on the turnaround times of the exam board that has outstanding specifications and on the timing of DfE’s changes to the GCSE ancient languages content to accommodate some amendments to the Biblical Hebrew requirements.

Finance and Resource

18. We continue to operate within agreed budget.

Impact Assessments

Equality Analysis

19. We considered the potential impact on students who share particular protected characteristics of our proposed changes to the assessment arrangements for computer science. We included a section on the equality impact in our consultation document, the summary of responses and our decisions document.

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

Regulatory Impact Assessment

20. We considered the regulatory impact on centres and exam boards of the proposed changes to the assessment arrangements for computer science. We included a section on the regulatory impact in our consultation document, the summary of responses and our decisions document. We have published our Regulatory Impact Assessment that informed our decision on GCSE computer science.

Communications

21. 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 sections
Publication date (if relevant)	After the meeting