

Update on our monitoring of exam boards' marketing and support events July 2018

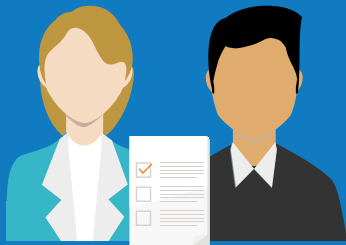


What is Ofqual's 'Mystery Shopper' programme?

Since 2015, we have gathered feedback from a sample of exam boards' marketing and support events for their new and reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels. This programme of work helps us to gain assurance that our [rules](#) are being met. The programme helps to ensure that exam boards are not providing information at events that is misleading or that could undermine the validity of the assessments.

- Information might be misleading if it implies that qualifications are easier than required or that it is not necessary to teach certain topics.
- The validity of an assessment might be undermined if confidential information about the assessment is disclosed. This might include information about topics on which exam questions will be set in a particular exam series.

What does Ofqual ask those attending the training events to do?



We ask our external experts (who are also teachers) to tell us about the information provided at the event. This could include what is said about how the subject should be taught, assessed and marked.

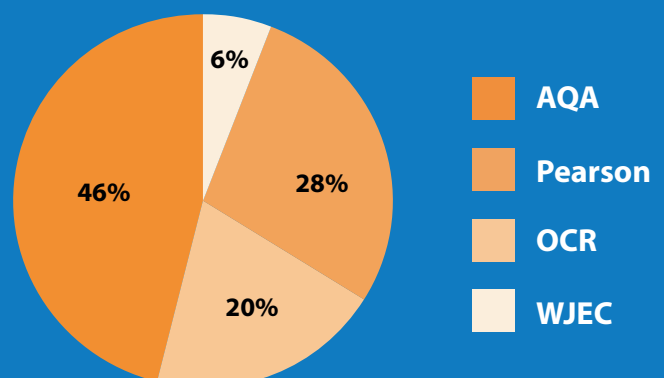
We ask them to tell us about various aspects of the training provided; for example, textbooks being promoted or if other resources or competitors' qualifications are referenced and if it appears any additional assessment information, not found in the qualification specification, is provided.

We ask the external experts to structure their observations using a template. An example can be found in our previous [interim report](#) in Annex 2.

How does Ofqual decide which events to attend?

Our choice of events is informed by the reform programme for GCSE, AS and A level qualifications – for example in Phase 1 our focus was on GCSE (9-1) English and mathematics qualifications. These qualifications have large entry numbers each year. In the first year of a new qualification being available there is a higher likelihood that centres will change exam board. As a result, there is greater competition between exam boards during this period. Our attendance at the events of each exam board has been broadly aligned with their market share for GCSEs and A levels during the 2014-2017 summer examinations.

Average combined GCSE and GCE market share for summer 2014-2017 series



We attended events delivered by exam boards and publishers. We only attended publisher events where the training was being delivered by individuals who were affiliated to an exam board. Where we attended events held by publishers, these are included in the relevant exam board's figures.

The timing of events meant we were not able to attend any Phase 1 WJEC events held in England. Overall WJEC held fewer events than the other exam boards in England and so we attended proportionately fewer of their events.

What happens at teaching training events?

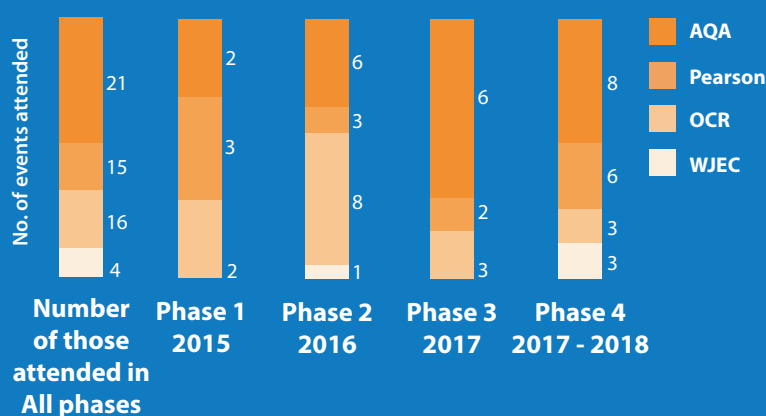
Exam boards' events broadly fall into these two categories:

1. 'Prepare to teach' – usually free of charge, they provide high level information about the specification, the qualification content and structure. They are mainly used to inform a teacher's choice of specification.
2. 'Teacher support' – usually fee-based, they provide more details about specific aspects of the qualification to help teachers deliver the specification and prepare students for assessments.

Attendance at exam boards' events:

We commissioned external experts (who were also teachers) to attend events on our behalf. To increase the number of events on which we received feedback, we also invited feedback from external experts who were already attending an event as part of their teaching role.

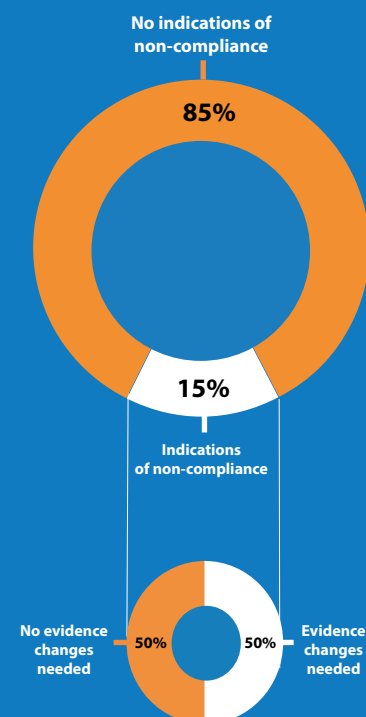
Training events attended - Phase 1-4



What does Ofqual do when someone attending a training event identifies a concern?

If an external expert, who we have paid to attend an event, is concerned that our rules have not been met, we raise this with the exam board and ask them for information on what was said at the event. We review the exam board's response to see if there is evidence that our regulations have not been followed. Where we have concerns, we follow up with the exam board. We also share feedback with exam boards if we think there is a risk that the language used, or messages provided, in events may mislead teachers. In this way, we encourage exam boards to make positive changes before they become an issue of non-compliance.

Our external experts have not had many concerns about the events they have attended. Where concerns have been raised, they have included issues such as presenters providing inaccurate information about the requirements of the qualification or misleading advice about teaching practice. Issues that needed further review were identified at 15% of the 56 events attended by external experts. Of these, 50% led to exam boards making changes to their websites, specifications and/or training sessions.



What did our external experts find?



Our external experts were asked to provide feedback on certain aspects of the events they attended. This feedback was received from both those who we paid to attend an event and those who voluntarily gave us feedback following attendance on behalf of their school. This information was reviewed in the context of our wider programme and, where necessary, we sought clarification from the exam boards.

Were comparisons to another exam board's specification made at the event?



Were details on the assessment content and/or structure, that were in addition to the exam board's published information, discussed at the event?



How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I have been able to access all training materials related to the reformed GCSE/AS/A level qualification that I expect the exam board to provide to help to prepare my students'



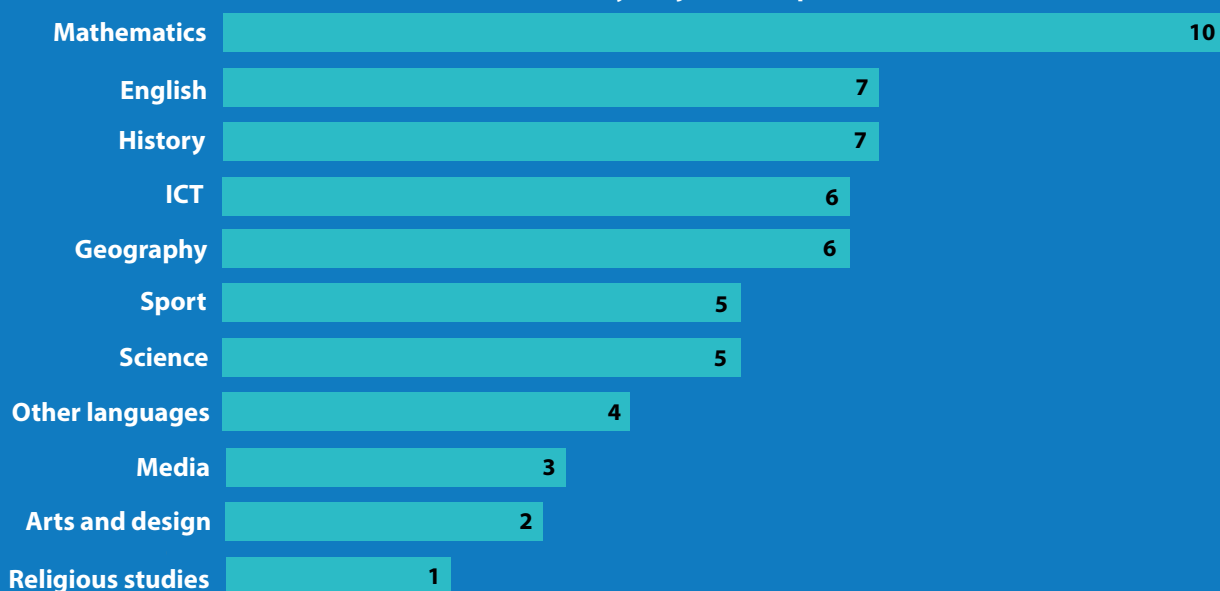
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

What subject areas did we cover through our attendance at events?

Wherever possible we aligned our attendance to the phased introduction of the GCSE, AS and A level reform programme – attending a sample of those subjects with the most significant reform changes or largest entry numbers.



Number of events we attended, by subject, in all phases



Would you like to become an Ofqual external expert?

Find out what the role of an external expert involves and how to apply on our [website](#).

We are looking for people to join us as external experts to help our work on qualifications and assessments for GCSEs, A levels, a wide range of vocational and technical qualifications and new apprenticeship end-point assessments.