

25 April 2018



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Dear

I am writing to set out our expectations about your delivery of the summer 2018 exam series, and our approach to monitoring this. We recognise that many of your qualifications are available to learners in Wales and Northern Ireland, and the regulators in these jurisdictions (Qualifications Wales and CCEA) support our expectations.

We know that you, like us, want every exam series to run smoothly. We recognise that in such a complex and high volume delivery system it is impossible to eradicate all risk of issues occurring. Our priority during this summer is to ensure that where these arise you deal with them promptly and appropriately.

This summer, as well as reformed and legacy GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications, you will be awarding new Level 3 Applied General and Technical Level qualifications for the first two-year cohort of students. Taken together with the other qualifications at Levels 1 and 2 included in the Department for Education (DfE) performance tables, there will be higher volumes of assessments and scripts in the system, particularly during the summer period. Therefore, we will monitor and manage the risks to delivery more closely, starting in summer 2018, in line with the approach we take for general qualifications.

Management of risks and incidents

We expect you to have already taken all reasonable steps to identify the risks associated with the summer series and that you have appropriate contingency plans in place to prevent or mitigate any Adverse Effects.

Earlier this year we spoke with you and your senior leadership team to seek assurance that you were ready for the challenges of the summer 2018 exam series. Following that review, we wrote to you highlighting a number of areas of risk for this summer. We expect you to effectively manage those risks, and any other risks you identify, over the summer.

Notifying us about events

In accordance with Condition B3, you must tell us promptly if you believe an event has occurred, or is likely to occur, that could lead to a potential or actual Adverse Effect. You should also have regard to our Guidance to Condition B3, which sets out when you should notify us of an event. You should make any notification through our Portal.

Last year we highlighted particular types of issues, which we consider notifiable. We continue to expect you to notify us about those types of issues for all qualifications. For example,

- We recognise that there will be minor or isolated events that cause a disturbance or disruption to the delivery of an assessment, such as an individual school experiencing unexpected fire alarms during an exam. We understand that you will deal with these cases in line with established procedures so that they will not cause prejudice to learners, or adversely affect standards or public confidence in qualifications. However, we would expect you to notify us promptly where an event occurs out of the ordinary, or affecting a number of centres, that could cause a significant and / or uncontained disturbance or disruption, which then requires you or your centres to follow a specific course of action.
- We expect you to notify us promptly where scripts are confirmed missing (e.g. destroyed or stolen) before the issuing of results. We would not expect you to inform us of instances where you become aware of missing scripts and before you have finished looking for them.
- We expect you to notify us promptly about any potential for, or actual, media or social media coverage that would have a potential or actual Adverse Effect. This includes where the volume of coverage triggers you to take some form of action to monitor or respond to the potential issues raised.

We wish to minimise any unnecessary and time-consuming exchanges about the information we need to consider how you are dealing with the event. Where you do not have the information available at the time of your notification, it would be helpful if you can set out when you expect to be able to provide additional details. If the event is complex and it would be easier to discuss with us the detail of it please let us know. In these cases, following discussion, we would expect the necessary notification or information in writing.

Now that you submit event notifications via our portal, we also take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of completing the fields on the portal as fully as possible, but particularly in linking to the relevant qualification from the Register. In terms of the vocational qualifications included in the performance tables, it is important that we can accurately identify the relevant titles as being included in these categories when we come to assess and manage any events.

Assessment material errors

You must continue to notify us promptly of assessment material errors (including in modified or Braille papers) in accordance with Condition B3. We acknowledge receipt of the letter from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) dated 20 April 2018 to which we will respond separately. We will consider the points raised in this letter, ahead of summer reporting.

However, for now, for this summer we will consider any assessment material error in assessments for a reformed GCSE, AS or A level or in any of the four categories of vocational qualification in the DfE performance tables to constitute a 'substantial error'. Therefore, we expect you to notify us promptly about all assessment material errors in assessments for reformed GCSE, AS or A level or in any of the four categories of vocational qualification in the performance tables, including those for which you issue an erratum notice. We will also continue to collect data about all assessment material errors for these qualifications after the summer.

When you notify us about an error in your assessment materials we will categorise the error using the definitions below. We have retained the wording we used last year.

Category 1	Assessment material errors which could or do make it impossible for learners to generate a meaningful response to a question / task
Category 2	Assessment material errors which could or do cause unintentional difficulties for learners to generate a meaningful response to a question / task
Category 3	Assessment material errors which will not affect a learner's ability to generate a meaningful response to a question / task

Missing scripts

We define missing scripts as any whole or part learner scripts, recordings or work for which there is confirmed attendance, but which are unavailable for marking or moderation prior to the issue of results.

We will again be collecting data from you this year in relation to missing scripts for GCSEs, A levels and AS qualifications but not for vocational qualifications included in the performance tables. We expect the data to be submitted in the same format as last year and to be sent after results days, but would appreciate if you can indicate the earliest date you are likely to submit the data.

To reduce the regulatory burden on you and to avoid duplicate requests, we will share this data with Qualifications Wales and CCEA. If you have any concerns please let us know.

Provision of assessment materials

Last year, you agreed to routinely provide us with all assessment materials, including question papers and supporting materials in all Ofqual-regulated GCSE, AS and A level subjects shortly after the relevant exam had been sat.

This year we request that you continue to provide us with the assessment materials for all GCSE, AS and A levels and also for you to provide us with the assessment materials for your Level 3 Applied General and Tech Level qualifications. For the avoidance of doubt, we do not require you to provide us with assessment materials for Level 1 and 2 vocational qualifications that are included in performance tables this summer.

Please upload the assessment materials to [our Portal](#) the morning after the relevant exam takes place. Although if a serious issue arises, we may request it sooner.

We will not usually review these materials unless we have cause to believe that there has been an issue with the assessment. We may keep the assessment materials for other purposes but we will let you know if we plan to use them. If we wish to review any mark schemes, we will make a request for them separately.

Our approach to monitoring your delivery

We will continue to acknowledge and monitor any notifications you send to us.

We will leave you to manage the event once we have information about the nature, scale and impact of the event, and we have sufficient assurance that you are managing it appropriately. We will close the event notification as soon as we are assured that the event itself has been contained, and that you have sufficiently prevented or mitigated any Adverse Effects. This does not mean that we will not carry out further work or actions after the summer to address any outstanding thematic or compliance issues.

We may intervene if we believe your approach is inadequate or inappropriate, or if we believe you are likely to breach your Conditions. Depending on the nature of the event and the urgency with which it must be dealt, we may

- Give you the opportunity to review your approach in light of our concerns; and /or
- Direct you to take a specific course of action.

Where appropriate, we will strive to monitor your delivery in a coordinated way with the other qualification regulators.

In July and September, we will provide you with interim updates on the trends and patterns we have observed; and we may ask you for further information on the way in which you have delivered the summer series.

Your named contact

Your named contact at Ofqual for any matter related to the delivery and performance of the summer series (including vocational qualifications in performance tables) is: [Maariyah Rahman](#), telephone: 02476 716828.

Should you wish to discuss an issue you do not consider to be notifiable, or any complex event notification with us, you should approach your named contact (either by telephone or through the Portal) to arrange for a meeting or phone call. We will respond to you as soon as possible, and, if required, we will arrange for a teleconference or meeting to take place within 24 hours of your email.

We would encourage you to keep us updated verbally on an emerging situation even if you do not consider it to be officially notifiable under Condition B3, for example, about delays in marking progress.

If an issue continues to escalate to a point where you believe it is notifiable under Condition B3, you should notify us via the Portal.

Setting and maintaining standards

We will want to ensure fair awarding of the qualifications so that learners in summer 2018 are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged. We will write to you separately about this.

Reporting

In line with previous years, we will publish a report on the issues that occur during the summer exam series. We will give you an opportunity to provide feedback on the report's factual accuracy before we publish. Last year you agreed for us to share a complete version of the draft report (unredacted - so each exam board's data is visible) with the other exam boards. We will do the same this year unless you express concern about this approach.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Scott

Associate Director, Standards for Delivery and Performance of GQ
Direct line: 02476 716611

CC: Qualifications Wales; CCEA Regulator