



**Minutes**

Emergency Board Meeting

**Time and venue**

08.15am by Microsoft Teams

**Date**

Wednesday, 29 July 2020

**Attendees**

Board

Susan Barratt

Ian Bauckham

Sally Collier

Chief Regulator

Mike Cresswell

(from item 77/20)

Hywel Jones

Catherine McClellan

Dame Christine Ryan

Roger Taylor

Chair

Matt Tee

(until 79/20)

Frances Wadsworth

(from item 78/20)

Ofqual

Niamh Field

Board Secretary

Daniel Gutteridge

Director of Legal

Michael Hanton

Director of Strategy and Markets

Janet Holloway

Associate Director Standards for Design, Development and Evaluation of General Qualifications

Matthew Humphrey

Director of Legal Moderation and Enforcement

Kate Keating

Director of Communications

Michelle Meadows

Executive Director, Strategy, Risk and Research

Sean Pearce

Chief Operating Officer

Julie Swan

Executive Director for General Qualifications

Lucy Sydney

Director of Strategic Relationships

Anona White

Private Secretary to the Chief Regulator

**75/20 Welcome and apologies for absence**

Apologies were received and accepted from Delroy Beverley and Mike Thompson.

**76/20 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**77/20 Proposed changes to GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021**

The Board noted the content of the papers and analysis of the c29,000 consultation responses received, and the proposed changes. It noted that the proposed changes would free up teaching time in some subjects, address potential public health safeguards in others and, in a limited number of subjects, would reduce the content required to be taught. The Chief Regulator and Executive Team had presented the proposed changes to the Minister of State for Schools on 23 July 2020.

The Board discussed the timetable for exams in 2021, but noted that changes to the exam timetable were not a decision that Ofqual could make alone. The reduction in subject content was a decision for Ministers. It was noted that Ofqual would work with DfE, the exam boards, colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland, and HE to undertake a further analysis of the options, the risks and the mitigations.

The following comments were made:

- i. The wording related to content sampling should be aligned across all subjects e.g. English Literature, History and Ancient History.
- ii. Some professional organisations, subject organisations and trade unions thought that further reduction in content was necessary.
- iii. The most popular subject combinations had been considered and most learners would have some alteration. It would be helpful to present the popular combinations and quantify the reduction to demonstrate the impact of changes on candidates' overall assessments.

**RESOLVED:**

The Board resolved to agree:

- i. The exam and assessment arrangements for each GCSE, AS and A level to be awarded to students in summer 2021.
- ii. Not to take decisions on changes to the GCSE, AS and A level rules that would permit exams to be held in July 2021 pending further discussions.
- iii. Exam boards should accommodate optionality needed to deliver the agreed flexibilities but should not introduce further optionality beyond that in exams.
- iv. That Ofqual should not generally require the exam boards to change the length, number or format of the exam papers, except as necessary to accommodate specific changes to the exam and assessment arrangements.

**78/20 Update on 2020 Appeals guidance**

The Executive Director for GQs reported that the consultation on the statutory guidance for appeal arrangements 2020 had closed and c130 responses had been received.

Consideration was given to the scenarios where changes in school leadership, teaching and learning and governance arrangements could affect a centre's performance.

An Appeals Committee would be established internally to hear appeals; the membership would comprise representatives from Ofqual and the exam boards to ensure consistency of approach. The Appeals Committee would meet daily in the period directly after results days which would be resource intensive. In discussion.

*This section has been redacted on the basis it contains legally privileged information.*

The Board noted the need for a fair and consistent appeals process that was in line with what it had consulted upon. The Board noted that there would be certain circumstances where a centre would be unlikely to reach the threshold for appeal. It considered whether there should be a stage before the Appeals Committee to provide advice to appellants on the merits or weaknesses of their case.

The Board supported the approach to appeals and the statutory guidance for publication. Sign-off of the final statutory guidance had been delegated to the Chief Regulator.

The Board discussed concerns over 'outlier' candidates identified through the standardisation process. It was noted that no advice was included in the statutory guidance on this issue. The Board considered challenges in establishing a definition of an 'outlier' to support any adjustment prior to the issuing of results. In particular it noted that there is a scale of 'outliers', and any 'cut-off' would in essence be arbitrary. The Board therefore noted the importance of a means for issues with 'outliers' to be addressed within appeal arrangements and requested further work be completed.

The Board confirmed no further avenues for additional grounds of appeal should be explored beyond those set out in the papers except in relation to outlier candidates.

#### **79/20 Update on AS and A levels in 2020**

The Executive Director, Strategy, Risk and Research reported that the AS and A level maintenance of standards meeting with the exam boards had taken place on 23 July 2020. At that meeting, the results data was scrutinised with the exam boards to address any issues that needed to be addressed prior to exam boards confirming results.

Based on this final data, at grade A and above, the CAGs were over 12% more generous than the 2019 outcomes, and just over 6% at A\*. Overall, adjustments to CAGs were as follows – 39% would go down, 59% would remain the same, and 2% would go up. The subject with the highest percentage of grade changes

was Biology, with 51% going down (6% by two grades), 48% remaining the same, and less than 1% would go up.

In terms of overall outcomes, at grade A and above, the calculated grades were likely to be over 2% higher at grade A and just over 1% at A\*. This varied by subject, and in some subjects, the level of inflation was much higher. This was because they were subjects with a high proportion of entries from centres with small entries. There were a range of subjects, such as Music, MFL, Classical Subjects and Performing Arts) with more than 10% inflation and there were four subjects with c9% inflation at grade A.

The Board asked which subject and environment were least inflationary, i.e. with the most accurate CAGs. This information was not immediately available but would be provided.

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

**79/20 Any Other Business**

There was no other business.

The meeting ended at 10.30am.