

2 June 2017

Dear colleague,

Summer 2017 GCSE and A/AS Examinations

I am writing to you in advance of the awarding of GCSE, GCE AS and A level qualifications this summer. This letter covers:

- our regulatory approach to awarding;
- changes to qualifications in light of specification reform/revision; and
- Enquiries about Results (EaRs).

Awarding

As has been custom, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) will use data from cohort performance in previous years to predict performance in this year's summer examinations. This approach –'Comparable Outcomes' – means that if the cohort this year for a subject is similar, in terms of its previous performance, to last year's cohort (and nothing else is seen to change) the overall grade outcomes for the cohort would be expected to be similar. This reflects the fact that awarding decisions are taken at cohort level.

For GCE A and AS levels all the JCQ Awarding Organisations (AOs) use predictions based on student prior achievement in GCSEs. The GCSE predictions used by AQA, Eduqas, OCR and Pearson are based on prior achievement at Key Stage 2. In Wales (WJEC) and Northern Ireland (CCEA) there are no Key Stage 2 test results; these AOs use 'Common Centre' outcomes for prediction purposes.

Changes to Specifications

GCE A and AS levels

An open market for qualifications operates in Northern Ireland. This means that GCE A/AS levels with the 'reformed' linear assessment arrangements, offered by English-based AOs, will be taken by learners here. The use of the 'Comparable Outcomes' approach ensures stability of grade outcomes at cohort level.

With CCEA A Levels there are no major changes affecting awarding this summer. However, the first awards for CCEA revised AS Levels will be made in Summer 2017. The 'Comparable Outcomes' approach again ensures stability in the cohort grade outcomes and that students are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged.

This summer the first tranche of reformed GCSEs offered by the English-based AOs- Mathematics, English Language and English Literature - will be awarded. These GCSEs will be reported using a new numerical 9-1 grade scale (with Grade 9 the highest grade). GCSE English Language is not available in Northern Ireland, as it does not meet the curriculum requirements with regard to the speaking and listening element. Stability of outcomes at cohort level will be maintained using the 'Comparable Outcomes' approach. In the transition from the legacy (letter) grades to the reformed (number) grades AOs will use the anchor points: Grade A to Grade 7 and Grade C to Grade 4.

With CCEA GCSEs there are no major changes affecting awarding this summer. CCEA Grade outcomes will continue to be reported on the letter (A* to G) grade scale.

Qualifications revision/reform will continue to impact on grading in Summer 2018 and Summer 2019. Details on these changes and timescales are set out on our website under <http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/qualsni>.

Enquiries about Results (EaRs)

This year, as in previous years, the expectation is that the marks students receive first time round should reflect their performance in the examinations. If, however, a centre is of the view that this is not the case a request can be made to the relevant AO for the mark to be reviewed. In this way, marking can be corrected where the AO establishes that an error has occurred. In Summer 2016 the percentage of grades changed continued to be less than 1% of the overall cohort taking the examinations across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is hoped that this will be an error free summer for examinations and that, when you reflect on the grade outcomes delivered by the AOs in August, they will be in line with your assessment of your students' abilities. If you have any issues of a regulatory nature please feel free to contact me at rmccune@ccea.org.uk.

My best wishes,



Roger McCune
MBE Head of
Regulation