



## **GCSE English 2012**

# **A Regulatory Report on the Outcomes for Candidates in Northern Ireland**

## Foreword

### GCSE English Awarding Summer 2012

Following the issue of GCSE results in August 2012 a notable number of schools and colleges in England publicly expressed concerns that their GCSE English<sup>1</sup> results were not in line with expectations. In subsequent days similar concerns were expressed by some schools here.

At the beginning of September the Minister for Education, John O'Dowd, asked the Regulator to look into these matters and report to him on any issues with the subject awards that might have impacted adversely on GCSE students here. The regulators in England (Ofqual) and Wales (Welsh Government) have also produced reports on specific issues relating to their candidates.

In response to the Minister's request the Regulator undertook two phases of work:

#### Phase One

- an extensive review of the data provided by Awarding Organisations (AOs); and
- an online survey to allow schools and colleges to put forward any concerns they might have regarding this summer's GCSE awards.

#### Phase Two

Further detailed work to investigate:

- why some schools had lower (or higher) attainment than expected;
- the process of managing the introduction of new specifications and the implications of the changes to the subject specifications; and
- the differing attainment for candidates here across GCSE English Language and GCSE English, including an investigation into the nature and scope of the use of predictions in making qualification awards<sup>2</sup>.

The findings of this work are set out in this report. In addition, recommendations are made to address the current concerns, in order to avoid a similar situation occurring in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> This subject now includes two qualifications: GCSE English and GCSE English Language. For the purpose of this document reference to GCSE English is taken to encompass both qualifications, except where they are named individually.

<sup>2</sup> AOs use prior attainment data as part of their analysis when making an award in a qualification. In England Key Stage 2 attainment is used. CCEA uses common centres, i.e. data on schools' previous achievements in a subject at GCSE. Use of predictions and the implications of these are detailed further in paragraphs 37 to 43 and Appendix 2.

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## Executive Summary

1. Overall outcomes here at grades A\* to C were in line with performance in previous years (actual figures).
2. There were extensive changes in GCSE English in summer 2012. These included the introduction of new courses and changes to the nature of the specifications and assessment. These changes were challenging for schools and AOs.
3. There was substantial variability in performance in schools irrespective of the AO chosen. 51% of schools had lower attainment at A\* to C than in 2011, 44% showed an increase, 5% had very similar outcomes. This variability will have been increased by the changes to the subject.
4. When specifications change, AOs seek to achieve comparable outcomes<sup>3</sup> year on year to ensure fairness to candidates.
5. To help achieve comparable outcomes, AOs estimate the ability ranges of current candidates compared with those in previous years. CCEA modelled its subject award<sup>4</sup> using estimates based on candidates here. AOs outside Northern Ireland used estimates based on Key Stage 2 (KS2) statutory assessment outcomes for candidates in England.
6. 67% of candidates here entered with CCEA. Outcomes for these candidates were up on last year at A\* to C. 33% of candidates were entered with other AOs (27% AQA). Their overall qualification outcomes were down on last year.
7. AQA candidates here performed on average better than AQA candidates in England in both GCSE English and GCSE English Language. Despite this, most schools entered with AQA saw a reduction in outcomes from 2011. Analysis is complicated by the fact that there were two qualifications this year, replacing one last year, and the fact that different schools made different decisions about which candidates to enter in each of the qualifications. The decline in outcomes cannot be explained by candidate ability alone. It is more likely to be an unintended consequence of the modelling<sup>5</sup> carried out to ensure comparable outcomes across England, Wales and here.
8. CCEA did not offer January assessments here. AOs based in England did offer early entry of assessments and changed notional grade boundaries<sup>6</sup> for examination and controlled assessment (formerly coursework) units between January and June 2012. This caused confusion and concern in schools.

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<sup>3</sup> The principle that, all things being equal, a C ability candidate on an old qualification should be a C candidate on the new qualification. This is discussed further in paragraphs 34 to 36 and Appendix 3.

<sup>4</sup> Awarding is the process of grading and deciding upon outcomes for a qualification as a whole.

<sup>5</sup> Using estimates of candidate ability in the current and previous years to inform qualification outcomes.

<sup>6</sup> Individual unit assessment grades are notional. Grade descriptors are based on performance across the qualification as a whole therefore a grade is a qualification level outcome. Unit outcomes provide notional grades for the percentage of assessment available in that unit.

## Recommendations

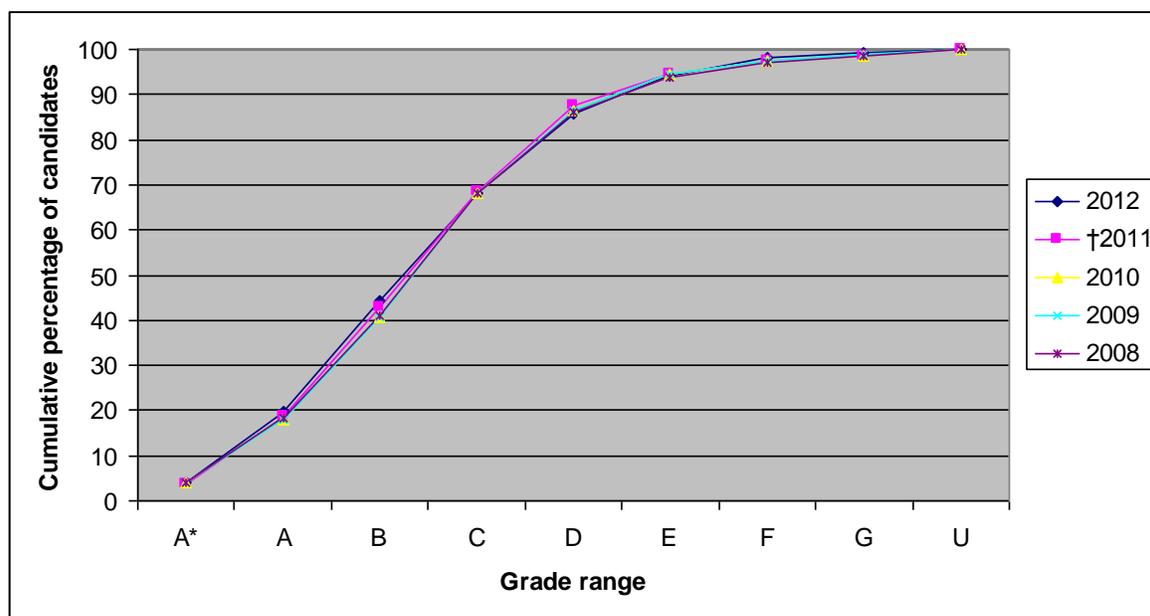
9. We recommend the following:
  - a. There should be an early resit opportunity for candidates here.
  - b. The 60% weighting for controlled assessment should be reviewed to ensure qualification outcomes are not as dependent on internal assessment.
  - c. AOs need to work through JCQ<sup>7</sup> to clarify the requirements for the management, delivery, marking and moderation of controlled assessment.
  - d. The use of predictors and their effectiveness should be reviewed.
  - e. The availability of the GCSE English specification for candidates here should be reviewed.
  - f. Schools should be made more aware of the awarding process and the issues which may arise when choosing specifications from different AOs.

This work will be carried out in conjunction with our fellow Regulators to ensure recommendations are implemented across all AOs operating here.

## GCSE English performance here

10. The overall grade outcomes for GCSE English here, with a 0.3% drop in attainment at A\* to C from 2011, are in line with achievement in previous years. With A\*–A grades there was an increase of 1.1% to 19.7% in 2012. Figure 1 shows the subject outcomes here since 2008.

**Figure 1:** Cumulative percentage attainment of NI candidates 2008 to 2012 [Source JCQ data]<sup>8</sup>



<sup>7</sup> Joint Council for Qualifications – facilitates the seven largest UK awarding bodies working together on standards, regulations and guidance.

<sup>8</sup> † The last award of the GCSE English qualification pre-revision was in 2011.

11. The number of candidates entering GCSE English is reducing year on year, reflecting the changes in school population. 2012 entry was 7% lower than 2011, and down 12% from 2008. Further detail is available in Appendix 1.
12. Candidates here can study either GCSE English or GCSE English Language and in summer 2012 took these qualifications with five different GCSE AOs (AQA, CCEA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC). Most candidates taking GCSE English entered with CCEA (67%) or AQA (27%).
13. CCEA combined A\* to C outcomes increased by 2.7% from summer 2011. Whilst actual results show a 0.7% decrease in non-CCEA A\* to C outcomes, taking into account the changing candidature it can be stated that there was a proportional decrease in combined outcomes A\* to C of 6.4% for the other AOs<sup>9</sup> (see paragraph 42). The outcomes of candidates here with individual AOs are given in Appendix 1.

### Changes to GCSE English courses and assessment

14. Extensive changes to GCSE English were introduced for first teaching September 2010. These are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Legacy <sup>10</sup> GCSE English	Revised GCSE English
One subject for study by all.	Two subjects available for study: GCSE English or the new GCSE English Language, with a different focus from legacy and revised English. Some common units were available across the two qualifications.
Linear assessment – all assessments were taken at the end of the course.	Unitised assessment – candidates could enter assessments throughout the course and resit those entered early.
Overall achievement in the qualification as a whole was reported to schools, i.e. an overall grade and total raw mark.	Outcomes of achievement in individual assessment units were reported to schools, i.e. raw or uniform marks for each individual assessment.
60% of the qualification was directed at a specific tier of entry, i.e. Foundation (F) tier or Higher (H) tier <sup>11</sup> . The highest grade available for F tier candidate was grade C.	40% of the qualification was directed at a specific tier of entry, i.e. Foundation tier or Higher tier. Grade C is no longer the cap for an F tier candidate.
Teacher marked assessment (coursework) made up 40% of the qualification.	Teacher marked assessment (controlled assessment) makes up 60% of the qualification.

<sup>9</sup> The share of non-CCEA candidates here has changed: in 2011 18.5% of NI candidates were non-CCEA; in 2012 this was 33%. Actual 2011 and 2012 GCSE results show non-CCEA A\*–C has fallen by 0.7%. However, due to the larger proportion of non-CCEA candidates contributing to the overall grade outcomes, it could be stated that non-CCEA candidates' results have fallen by 6.4% at A\*–C.

<sup>10</sup> The GCSE English qualification pre-revision is referred to as 'legacy' GCSE English subsequently in the report.

<sup>11</sup> Examinations were designed at two tiers of entry based on candidate ability: Foundation tier with grade C the highest grade available; Higher tier with A\* the highest grade available.

Table 1 continued

<b>Legacy GCSE English</b>	<b>Revised GCSE English</b>
Coursework tasks were set by the teacher.	Controlled assessment tasks are set by the AO.
Students could complete coursework outside school, receive individual teacher feedback and redraft it.	Students must complete controlled assessment tasks in school under timed, supervised conditions. No redrafting after work has been completed in time allocated.
Coursework mark bands were labelled A* to G.	Controlled assessment mark bands are labelled using numbers.
	Assessments allocated a weighting of 45–55% for the functional elements of English.

The subject requirements of the two revised specifications are outlined in Appendix 4.

15. The implications of the changes to the courses and assessment arrangements are as outlined below.

- Schools here could choose to enter candidates for i) GCSE English, ii) GCSE English Language, iii) GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature, with different ability classes within a school possibly following different subjects (see paragraph 16).
- Unitised delivery allowed candidates to get information on their performance in units completed early. Early unit outcomes could be banked or the unit resat to improve performance. Unitisation also allowed schools, for the first time, to see candidate performance in individual assessments and base predictions for the candidate's overall qualification grade on these. It was not possible for schools to analyse 2012 early unit performance alongside any previous performance, as schools did not have individual assessment level data from the legacy specification.
- The reduction in the weighting of external assessment options directed at a specific tier of candidate ability changed the possible outcomes available to a Foundation candidate. Candidates could, where available, enter exams at either Foundation or Higher tier, e.g. 20% F tier and 20% H tier. It also meant F tier candidates' performance in controlled assessment had a greater influence on their overall grade.
- The mark bands labelled A\* to G in the legacy coursework assessment grids led schools to believe that the marks corresponded to the given label and they viewed this as a 'notional grade'. Teachers marked with this in mind. This led to an expectation that controlled assessment boundaries should be available in advance of the awarding to help teachers mark candidates' work. As with controlled assessment in January and summer 2012, the actual boundaries for the legacy coursework components were set by the AO annually during the July awarding process.

- The provision by AOs of some units (up to 60%) which are common across two qualifications impact upon the profile of the cohort<sup>12</sup> of candidates sitting individual assessments within a qualification.

16. Policy decisions here meant a different subject offer from England (see Table 2). This information was communicated to schools here, by the Regulator on behalf of DE, in February 2010. Some AOs had already published specifications prior to the policy decision here being implemented. This meant updates relating to options for schools here were not included in the relevant guidance and subject materials of all AOs. Some schools may therefore not have had all the information they needed to make informed decisions.

**Table 2**

<b>GCSE Subject</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Wales</b>
English (as a single GCSE)	Yes	Yes	No
English Language (as a single GCSE)	Yes	No	Yes
English Language alongside English Literature	Yes	Yes	Yes
English alongside English Literature	No	No	No

17. Many schools were operating a modular assessment route in GCSE English for the first time, as well as having to become familiar with the changed content of the specification(s) and different assessments.
18. Modular qualifications have been in place for a number of years. GCE qualifications have been modular since 2000. Some subjects e.g. Science have operated modular GCSEs for a number of years. In September 2009 teaching began for revised modular GCSEs in most subjects for first award in summer 2011. Modular GCSEs in the English suite were first awarded in summer 2012. Whilst the move from a linear to a modular qualification was one of the challenges for GCSE English awards in summer 2012, the process used had successfully delivered comparable outcomes in revised GCSE awards of summer 2011. The methodology for awarding modular qualifications, whilst complex for the AOs, has operated successfully for awards at GCE and GCSE. However, the issues arising with GCSE English awarding in summer 2012 were complicated by the awarding of two qualifications replacing one legacy qualification.
19. The greater challenge for the AOs was the process of setting the qualification standards in the move to a revised specification from a legacy specification, i.e. setting appropriate overall subject level outcomes for the qualification, taking into account appropriate performance and unit level outcomes.

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<sup>12</sup> The term cohort is used to refer to the complete candidature entered for a qualification.

## School performance 2012

20. Analysis at centre level indicates issues with results in a sizeable number of centres here. Paragraphs 24 to 33 outline the concerns of schools. For many schools studying with either AQA or CCEA, grade outcomes have been lower than schools' predictions or last year's grade outcomes – for a small number studying the GCSE English specification, significantly so. However, an equally large proportion of schools have grade outcomes that are similar to or better than last year's. Furthermore, in 2011 a number of schools experienced similar variability in outcomes despite the legacy specification having been in place for five years. Table 3 illustrates the variability. Around 260 schools here enter GCSE English.

**Table 3** [source CCEA, AQA and Bath database]

Year	2012	2011
Schools with greater than 10% difference in outcomes from previous year	84 [32%]	60 [23%]
Schools with greater than 10% improved outcomes	30 [12%]	25 [10%]
Schools with greater than 10% reduction in outcomes	54 [21%]	35 [13%]

As a core subject with a high uptake here, the full range of candidate ability is included. Smaller schools can experience greater variability annually, as one candidate is more statistically significant.

21. These individual subject entry patterns and corresponding A\* to C outcomes here show further complexity, as Table 4 illustrates.

**Table 4** [source CCEA and AQA]

<b>GCSE English</b>	<b>GCSE English Language</b>
Entries: AQA 93% CCEA 5%	Entries: AQA 14% CCEA 80%
Outcomes A* to C lower than GCSE English Language	Outcomes A* to C higher than GCSE English
CCEA outcomes A* to C substantially higher than those for AQA	AQA outcomes A* to C higher than those for CCEA

22. The majority of schools here entered candidates for GCSE English Language, as a single GCSE or alongside GCSE English Literature (see paragraph 37 and 42). One-sixth chose GCSE English as their sole GCSE in this subject area. Almost 90% of AQA schools here took GCSE English. 60% of these schools entered both English and English Language with AQA.

23. AQA GCSE English Language outcomes were higher for candidates here at A\* to C than CCEA outcomes. Schools that entered candidates in AQA GCSE English saw a decline in their outcomes overall. When surveyed many schools indicated they had entered their weaker candidates for GCSE English.

## **The concerns of schools**

### Phase One: Online survey

24. The Regulator carried out an online survey of schools here to identify the scope and nature of any GCSE issues experienced in summer 2012. Some schools had also written directly to the Regulator and/or the Department. All feedback received has been considered.

25. Schools were asked whether they had concerns about awarding in:

- AQA GCSE English;
- any other English GCSE; and
- any other subject areas.

26. Of those responding who provided comments in response to the questions:

- 22 commented on AQA English/English Language;
- 32 commented on CCEA English/English Language; and
- 1 commented on OCR English/English Language.

Two written responses not captured in the survey are also added to the review (1 AQA, 1 CCEA).

27. The main concerns raised were:

- AQA: 14 noted that their A\*–C outcomes were lower in comparison to previous years. Many took the opportunity to express concerns over changes in grade boundaries between the 2012 January and June series. These schools indicated grades were below what had been predicted for this year and were not in line with their previous year's results. Teachers stated that it was unfair the students sitting the exam in June were marked with different criteria than those who took it in January.
- CCEA: Some commented that results were not in line with the previous year's results or with teacher predictions. 11 outlined a decrease in candidates achieving A\*–C, with eight noting a substantial increase in the number of Ds awarded. Some felt grade boundaries had been unclearly defined and should have been released before the assessments.
- OCR: The school noted the raised grade boundaries on controlled assessment units and expressed concern that teachers no longer know where the grade boundaries are.

28. 20 schools noted concerns with other subjects. These covered 20 different specifications. This would indicate that there were no widespread concerns in any other subjects.

### Phase Two: GCSE English specific feedback requested from schools

29. The Regulator subsequently wrote to all centres requesting further information on:

- the basis on which candidates were entered in either English or English Language in the school or centre; and
- an assessment of the impact of the introduction of 60% controlled assessment.

30. The majority of schools who responded entered their stronger candidates for GCSE English Language alongside GCSE English Literature. For schools offering a 'stand-alone' GCSE in the subject for their weaker candidates, most entered GCSE English with AQA, or GCSE English Language with CCEA. Other schools entered all their candidates for GCSE English Language only. This is discussed further in paragraphs 37 to 42.
31. Feedback on controlled assessment was mostly positive in terms of resolving the issues around coursework. However, almost all schools had concerns about the 60% controlled assessment weighting in the subject and the corresponding impact of this on teaching and learning. This is discussed further in paragraphs 58 to 67.
32. These concerns about controlled assessment are in line with regulatory research carried out in 2011. Subsequent to the regulatory report, work is being done by AOs to standardise rules and guidance to ensure schools are clear on the requirements of controlled assessment delivery. A recommendation for work in this area is included in the conclusion.
33. The introduction of controlled assessment was one of many changes in revised GCSE English and has presented schools with significant challenges.

### **Comparable outcomes**

34. AOs seek to ensure comparability of standards year on year in each subject to be fair to past, current and future candidates. When qualifications change, this is more challenging.
35. Comparable outcomes mean roughly the same proportion of candidates will achieve each grade as in the previous year, if everything else remains the same.
36. The principle applied in setting standards for a revised GCSE is that a student should get the same grade as they would have achieved if they had taken the old version, i.e. if a student's ability resulted in a C on the legacy specification, that student (or a student of similar ability) will get a C on the revised specification. It also adjusts for the dip in performance that can arise when a new qualification is first taken. Students should not be advantaged or disadvantaged simply because they were the first to sit a new set of examinations. Further detail is provided in Appendix 3.

## Changes in the candidature

37. 83% of the cohort here entered for GCSE English Language; 17% entered for GCSE English. In Wales all students study GCSE English Language (100%), and 78–80% also study GCSE English Literature. In England candidates studying one GCSE in this subject area must enter GCSE English. The majority of candidates in England, 73%, took GCSE English Language alongside English Literature. This is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5

Country cohort	GCSE English Language	%	GCSE English	%	Total
Northern Ireland	18,536	83	3,782	17	22,318
Wales	35,331	100	0	0	35,331
England	440,076	73	159,801	27	599,877
Overall subject	493,943	75	163,583	25	657,526

38. The introduction of a second GCSE English subject and the differing policies in Wales, England and here have added a complexity to the overall cohorts for each qualification. Two discrete subject cohorts have been created, causing considerable variation in the ability profile of the candidatures for GCSE English and GCSE English Language.

39. In 2011 100% of candidates in England, Wales and here studied legacy GCSE English; however, in 2012 75% studied GCSE English Language and 25% studied GCSE English.

40. Candidates here sitting AQA GCSE English Language as their sole GCSE in this subject area (approx. 15% of AQA English entry here) were in an overall cohort with candidates in England who were all taking GCSE English Literature, i.e. those judged to be the stronger candidates. Candidates here taking GCSE English with AQA were in a cohort with candidates in England who were taking this qualification as their sole GCSE in English, i.e. judged to be the weaker candidates.

41. Many schools here studying with AQA split their entry across GCSE English and GCSE English Language. Each qualification has discrete entry cohorts, requirements and performance descriptors. Having two English courses will have made predicting outcomes for schools in 2012 more challenging than in previous years. A local school who expressed concerns about lower outcomes than predicted had changed their AO and the profile of their school entry. Previously 100% of their students did GCSE English with CCEA; in 2012 38% of their candidates were entered for GCSE English and 62% for GCSE English Language with AQA. In comparison to overall legacy GCSE English 2011 outcomes, the school's percentage A\* to C for the two-thirds of their candidates taking English Language was 14% higher; their attainment for the one-third of candidates taking GCSE English was 70% lower at A\* to C – this meant overall attainment for the school dropped. Feedback indicated this school, as with the majority of schools entering candidates here for stand-alone GCSE English, chose this option for the

middle/lower band candidates who were not studying Literature. The candidates studying GCSE English Language were the stronger candidates who were also entered for GCSE English Literature. This is in line with the cohort split in England.

### Candidate qualification distribution

42. In 2011 (GCSE English only available) CCEA had around 83% of the subject cohort here (19,712 candidates). This dropped to 67% of the candidature here in 2012. The AO share of GCSE English and English Language in 2012 is shown in Tables 6 and 7.

**Table 6: All UK entry 2012**

Awarding Organisation	Total GCSE English Language entry	Total GCSE English entry	Total subject area entry	% of total cohort
AQA	279,325	92,578	371,903	56.6
CCEA	14,832	198	15,030	2.3
Edexcel	45,474	21,116	66,590	10.1
OCR	36,446	11,247	47,693	7.3
WJEC	117,866	38,444	156,310	23.8
Total	493,943	163,583	657,526	100.0

**Table 7: Northern Ireland entry 2012**

Awarding Organisation	GCSE English Language entry	GCSE English entry	Total cohort	% of NI cohort	% of total qualification cohort
AQA	2,600	3,537	6,137	27.5	0.9
CCEA	14,832	198	15,030	67.3	2.3
Edexcel	107	0	107	0.5	0.0
OCR	933	47	980	4.4	0.1
WJEC	64	0	64	0.3	0.0
Total	18,536	3,782	22,318	100.0	
% of total NI entries	83.1%	16.9%	100%		

This changing candidature means that whilst actual 2011 and 2012 GCSE results show non-CCEA A\*-C has fallen by 0.7%, the larger proportion of non-CCEA candidates contributing to the overall grade outcomes means it can be stated that non-CCEA candidates' results have fallen by 6.4% at A\*-C.

## **The impact of candidate distribution on qualification predictions<sup>13</sup>**

43. As part of the process of awarding a new/revised specification, data is analysed by the AOs to ensure that variations in overall outcomes due to the changes in the specifications are managed appropriately. The AOs are tasked with ensuring comparability of standards at qualification level. Outcomes on individual units are aggregated to achieve the qualification grade. Part of this analysis is an estimate of the outcomes of the cohort in the qualification as a whole in comparison to previous cohorts. This is why some schools will see variability in outcomes whilst the overall qualification outcomes remain stable.
44. Each AO's qualification estimate is based on the most valid data which covers the largest percentage of their cohort as a whole. Due to the distribution of the candidature, two types of predictions were used in summer 2012. AQA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC based predictions on Key Stage 2 (KS2) attainment data; CCEA used 'common centre' data.
45. KS2 data is based on the attainment of candidates in England in statutory assessments at age 11. It is not available for candidates here (or in Wales), and therefore they are not included in KS2 based estimates. Actual AO outcomes for all candidates in a qualification will vary up or down from the estimate depending on the ability of candidates not included in the prediction.
46. Common centre data is based on schools that entered students for the subject in previous years. It is at school level, not individual candidate ability level. Therefore the centre level outcomes here in legacy English in 2010 and 2011 were the basis of CCEA's 2012 qualification estimates.
47. In summer 2012 the subject cohort was split over two qualifications, unlike previous cohorts, which were all in legacy GCSE English. This meant there were two qualifications predictions in the subject area to consider when awarding. KS2-based GCSE English predictions were lower than predictions for GCSE English Language, reflecting the different ability of the two subject cohorts in England.
48. This will have implications for candidates here who took qualifications with AOs other than CCEA.
49. A number of schools with CCEA also expressed concerns with their grade outcomes; variability in outcomes downwards is also evident across a notable number of CCEA centres. This was despite the use of common centre estimates which resulted in higher overall subject outcomes than in 2011.

## **Early entry patterns and awarding**

50. With unitised qualifications candidates can enter for different assessments at different times and can resit assessments once. This means in each assessment there are a range of possible types of candidate entry, e.g. Year 11 first sitting, Year 11 resit, Year 12 first sitting, and Year 12 resit. The final

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<sup>13</sup> This is detailed further in Appendix 2.

grade is based on the aggregation of the highest outcomes for each assessment. This is further complicated by at least 40% of the assessment having to be completed at the end of the course.

51. AQA, Edexcel and OCR offered early entry for all units. The AQA early entry pattern here is shown in Table 8. 13.7% of the results from early entries here were used in aggregating summer 2012 grades.

**Table 8**

Assessment series	Jan 2011	June 2011	Jan 2012
% AQA candidates here who entered	0.6%	3.9%	8.2%

52. CCEA and WJEC did not offer early entry of controlled assessment units but did offer some examination units prior to summer 2012. 20% of the CCEA candidature entered Unit 1 in June 2011, with the remaining 80% of the candidature taking all units in summer 2012. Of those entering early, 29% used their June 2011 outcomes when aggregating their grade in summer 2012.
53. Scrutiny findings confirm that awarding procedures which operated in England and here were in line with the Code of Practice<sup>14</sup>, which sets out the regulatory principles and practices for the assessment and quality assurance of qualifications.
54. English based AOs changed grade boundaries for examined and controlled assessment units between January and June. Boundaries can change from one examination series to the next, mainly to take into account differing demand in papers and their corresponding mark schemes. It is more unusual for boundaries to change with internal assessment units, but it is not outside agreed procedures. AOs made this decision based on having statistical evidence for the complete cohort for the qualification in the summer awards. Based on this data, summer boundaries were set in different places from January. The Code of Practice states that when tasks and marking criteria have not changed, key boundaries can be carried forward from one controlled assessment series to the next; however, this can only be if recommended by the principal moderator after completion of the moderation process, and by the designated AO officer in the light of the technical and statistical evidence available. Further detail on the awarding process is in Appendix 2.
55. CCEA did not offer January assessments in English and therefore did not face this issue when awarding June 2012 qualification outcomes.
56. When awarding, notional grade boundaries are set for each unit retrospectively, after the work has been completed by the candidates and marks submitted. Boundary marks are not available in advance of any assessment.
57. Outcomes from early assessment units were used by schools to make predictions on overall candidate outcomes. Some England-based AOs provided mark-to-notional-unit grade conversion tables. They also provided graphical representation of a school's performance in a unit in comparison to the rest of

<sup>14</sup> The GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice sets out the regulatory principles and practices for assessment.

the entry for that unit. This could have been misleading for schools, as some early units were taken by only 2% of the final qualification cohort and were worth a small percentage of the overall qualification.

### **Controlled assessment**

58. Legacy GCSE English internal assessment was through coursework. Following preparation with the teacher, candidates could complete the task outside school with access to resources as available. Completed work was submitted and teachers gave feedback to candidates, who could then redraft their work. The final draft of the task was marked and submitted for the candidate.
59. Whilst teachers can carry out substantial preparation prior to controlled assessment, candidates must complete each task individually, under timed and controlled conditions in their school or college during which access to resources and source material is limited.
60. Once the task is completed in the time allocated, the piece is then marked and submitted for the candidate. This piece cannot be reworked by the candidate outside the set time allowed. Controlled assessment is marked by teachers using mark grids provided by the AOs.
61. Marking is standardised in schools to ensure all teachers are applying a similar standard to all candidates. A sample of work is then moderated by the AO.
62. Feedback on controlled assessment was mostly positive in terms of how it resolved some of the problems with coursework – plagiarism, extensive redrafting and work being done at home – which allowed differing levels of assistance to be available for candidates. Many schools reported that students take controlled assessment much more seriously than their predecessors took coursework, allowing students to perform better. Some had delivered legacy coursework under similar conditions. Others reported controlled assessment had a negative impact on weaker ability candidates, who could not get the same level of assistance.
63. All schools responding had concerns about the 60% weighting and the corresponding impact of this on teaching and learning. The tasks changing annually were reported by many as an additional burden on teachers, as were the management of absentees and the delivery strategies in some schools. The lack of comparable assessment data from the legacy specification and the fact that grade boundaries are not available until after grading caused some centres issues with predictions and marking this summer.
64. Delivery strategies varied in schools based on their consideration of candidates' needs. Schools can choose to deliver controlled assessment in a single session for each task or split it over a number of shorter sessions. Tasks can be completed under controlled conditions in the classroom depending on individual class needs. Some schools chose to co-ordinate the teaching of a task across a year group and bring all candidates to the examinations hall to complete tasks. Some teachers expressed concerns that not all schools had followed the rules as required, suggesting some were allowing redrafting, providing writing frames and giving feedback after the task was taken.

65. Procedures are outlined in the JCQ guidance *Instructions for Conducting Controlled Assessments* at <http://www.jcq.org.uk/attachments/published/1742/JCQ%20CA%202012.pdf>
66. Schools had indicated that they would expect candidates to do better on the revised specification if their controlled assessment was good – this was due to the higher weighting of 60%, in comparison to 40% for coursework on legacy GCSE English.
67. For speaking and listening controlled assessment, no written outcome is produced; however, CCEA sends a visiting moderator to each centre to sample centre marking prior to the unit award.

## Conclusions

- 68.
- i) The overall grade outcomes for GCSE English here, with a 0.3% drop in attainment at A\* to C from 2011, are in line with achievement in previous years.
  - ii) The complexities introduced by new qualification options, specification changes and new assessment arrangements have caused difficulties in a large number of schools.
  - iii) Analysis indicates considerable variations in performance when this is compared with last year's outcomes in a large number of schools. For many schools, outcomes have been lower than schools' predictions or last year's grades.
  - iv) Scrutiny findings confirm that awarding procedures which operated in England and here were in line with regulatory requirements.
  - v) AOs sought comparable outcomes when awarding GCSE English in summer 2012. However, different approaches were taken to achieve comparable outcomes.
  - vi) Qualification predictions were developed based on a comparison of the ability of the 2012 candidates with that of the 2011 candidates. The use of different models of qualification predictions is likely to have impacted upon the outcomes of individual candidates here.
  - vii) CCEA GCSE English outcomes here were up, whilst other AO outcomes here were down. More schools entered with AQA saw a decline in outcomes than those that entered with CCEA. Candidate ability alone does not explain some of the decline in outcomes. Modelling to ensure comparable outcomes seems to have had unintended consequences.
  - viii) The availability of early entry units and the changing boundaries from January to June 2012 in some of these units caused confusion and concern in schools.

## Appendix 1: Subject cohort and Northern Ireland cohort overview

### English and English Language qualification outcomes overview

Data based on JCQ Provisional Outcomes

† Last award of legacy specification

#### Cumulative outcomes by percentage

All candidates (Cumulative)										
Year	No. of Candidates	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
2012	669534	3.4	15.0	35.5	63.9	84.9	94.3	98.1	99.3	100
†2011	649553	4.7	16.8	37.0	65.4	85.6	93.8	97.2	98.7	100
2010	705240	4.3	16.0	36.1	64.7	84.7	93.3	96.9	98.6	100
2009	701196	4.1	15.6	35.1	62.7	83.1	92.7	96.9	98.7	100
2008	721577	4.0	15.5	35.6	62.9	82.7	92.6	96.9	98.7	100

Northern Ireland candidates only (Cumulative)										
Year	No. of Candidates	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
2012	22207	4.2	19.7	44.2	68.2	85.6	94.1	98.0	99.4	100
†2011	23886	3.8	18.6	42.7	68.5	87.4	94.5	97.3	98.7	100
2010	24424	4.0	18.0	40.7	68.1	86.4	94.4	97.4	98.7	100
2009	24646	4.1	18.0	40.7	68.1	86.3	94.4	97.4	98.9	100
2008	25283	4.0	18.3	40.9	68.3	86.0	93.9	97.1	98.6	100

#### Percentage outcomes by grade

All candidates (Percentage by grade)										
Year	No. of Candidates	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
2012	669534	3.4	11.6	20.5	28.4	21.0	9.4	3.8	1.2	0.7
†2011	649553	4.7	12.1	20.2	28.4	20.2	8.2	3.4	1.5	1.3
2010	705240	4.3	11.7	20.1	28.6	20.0	8.6	3.6	1.7	1.4
2009	701196	4.1	11.5	19.5	27.6	20.4	9.6	4.2	1.8	1.3
2008	721577	4.0	11.5	20.1	27.3	19.8	9.9	4.3	1.8	1.3

Northern Ireland candidates only (Percentage by grade)										
Year	No. of Candidates	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
2012	22207	4.2	15.5	24.5	24.0	17.4	8.5	3.9	1.4	0.6
†2011	23886	3.8	14.8	24.1	25.8	18.9	7.1	2.8	1.4	1.3
2010	24424	4.0	14.0	22.7	27.4	18.3	8.0	3.0	1.4	1.2
2009	24646	4.1	13.9	22.7	27.4	18.2	8.1	3.0	1.5	1.1
2008	25283	4.0	14.3	22.6	27.4	17.7	7.9	3.2	1.5	1.4

**NI candidate outcomes in summer 2012 compared with England candidate outcomes (cumulative percentage)**

Awarding Body	No. of candidates	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
AQA English	92578 (England)	0.4	2.2	7.9	31.2	65.9	86.9	95.8	98.6	100
AQA English	3537 (NI)	0.6	3.0	11.4	36.2	70.8	90.1	96.8	99.0	100
OCR English	11247 (England)	0.4	2.5	10.7	35.5	38.1	86.1	94.2	97.2	100
OCR English	47 (NI)	2.1	10.6	44.7	89.4	100	100	100	100	100
Total NI	3584	0.6	3.1	11.8	36.9	71.2	90.2	96.8	99.0	100
CCEA English	198 (NI)	0.0	4.5	25.8	55.1	82.8	89.4	97.5	99.0	100
Total NI	3782	0.6	3.2	12.6	37.9	71.8	90.2	96.9	99.0	100
AQA Eng. Language	279325 (England)	4.5	19.4	44.4	74.8	91.9	97.4	99.2	99.7	100
AQA Eng. Language	2600 (NI)	1.9	14.9	43.9	76.0	92.7	97.3	99.2	99.8	100
Edexcel Eng. Language	45474 (England)	3.4	18.1	45.1	75.2	90.5	96.5	98.8	99.5	100
Edexcel Eng. Language	107 (NI)	1.9	10.3	37.4	81.3	95.3	97.2	98.1	99.1	100
OCR Eng. Language	36446 (England)	6.2	25.2	52.6	80.4	93.8	97.6	98.7	99.1	100
OCR Eng. Language	933 (NI)	5.1	20.8	46.2	76.2	93.3	97.9	99.1	99.6	100
WJEC Eng. Language	64 (NI)	0.0	4.7	17.2	34.4	76.6	98.4	100	100	100
Total NI	3704	2.7	16.1	43.8	75.5	92.6	97.5	99.2	99.7	100
CCEA Eng. Language	14832 (NI)	5.4	24.5	52.1	73.9	87.2	94.2	97.9	99.5	100
Total NI	18536	4.9	22.8	50.4	74.2	88.3	94.9	98.2	99.5	100
Based on calculations from Awarding Body outcomes data										

## **Appendix 2: Standards, awarding and reporting**

### **Maintaining standards**

1. Exam boards are obliged to maintain standards to make sure that, each year, students get the results they deserve.
2. Awarding bodies are tasked with ensuring standards are maintained at qualification level. A candidate getting a C grade in a qualification may not have exhibited C level work in all of their assessments, but the aggregation across all assessments awards them a C. Likewise, a candidate getting a grade D may have work of a grade C standard in one or more of their assessments, but the aggregation of attainment across all assessments places them in a D grade.
3. Maintaining standards is more challenging when qualifications change. In 2008, with the introduction of revised A Levels, and mindful of the difficulties encountered when modular A Levels were introduced in 2000, work began on developing a methodology to ensure that standards are maintained in qualifications from one year to the next. This took into account the impact on candidates sitting a revised qualification with more limited support and information available in comparison to an established qualification.

### **Awarding qualifications**

4. When awarding modular qualifications the same process is followed for GCSE and GCE awards across all subjects. Awarding is based on setting the appropriate overall subject level outcomes for the qualifications, taking into account appropriate performance and unit level outcomes.
5. Grade boundaries are set retrospectively on each unit, i.e. once the work has been completed by the candidates and marks submitted. They are not available in advance of any assessment.
6. A grade is a qualification level outcome only; grade descriptors are for performance across the totality of assessment in the qualification. Outcomes on individual units will be aggregated to achieve the qualification grade.

### **Use of predictions**

7. Prediction data is used to indicate expected outcomes at whole qualification level and is part of a wider package of information used to support the judgements made by senior examiners where they consider candidates' performance during the awarding process. The use of both qualitative and quantitative information is required by the regulators when AOs set qualification grade boundaries.

8. To map the expected outcomes for the 2011 GCSE cohort, the English AOs looked at the relationship between GCSE performance in 2009 and that cohort's attainment at Key Stage 2. This allowed them to produce a model of the relationship they could use to produce expected outcomes. Key Stage 2 data is used as the prior attainment measure in England as it is the most statistically reliable information available when predicting the expected achievement of the cohort of 16-year-olds taking their GCSEs. This is the average attainment overall at age 11, not achievement in any particular Key Stage 2 test subject.
9. KS2 tests are not taken in Wales and Northern Ireland, therefore an alternative method – common centres – is used in these regions. For the purposes of GCSE examination awarding, a common centre is a centre that has entered students for a subject in previous examination years (in this case, in 2011 and 2012). The assumption is that centres' results are likely to be similar in the previous years and that, across the cohort as a whole, comparing results for the common centres gives an indication of whether standards between years are comparable. Common centre data is available for all UK centres and all JCQ awarding organisations, allowing previous GCSE performance to be identified regardless of whether a centre has changed AO. Common centre calculations are used at whole cohort level, rather than at individual candidate level. Small entry subjects may have greater performance differences year on year.
10. Prediction data has no impact on the individual achievement of a student in the rank order of an individual assessment, nor in the qualification as a whole.

### **Setting boundaries**

11. Initial judgements will be made on unit grade boundaries – on what mark in an individual assessment constitutes, for example, a C grade. Grade boundaries are different for different units within qualifications and are different across exam series. This reflects the fact that different exams have different questions and therefore can be at differing levels of demand. This ensures fairness to candidates who are judged to have sat a paper that is more or less demanding than the paper sat by candidates in the previous series.
12. Candidates who enter exams in January will be marked using the January mark scheme and will be graded against the boundaries set for the January exam; candidates entering exams in June will be marked using the mark scheme for the June paper and will be graded against the boundaries set for the June examination.
13. Controlled assessment units are marked by teachers using a mark scheme provided by the AO. The tasks required for controlled assessments are provided by AO and change annually.
14. The boundary marks for internal assessment will also be reviewed series on series. The Code of Practice indicates that they should be carried forward only if this is recommended by the principal

moderator after completion of the moderation process, and by the designated Awarding Organisation officer in the light of the technical and statistical evidence available.

15. In the awarding of controlled assessment in summer 2012, AQA, Edexcel and OCR set different boundaries in summer 2012 from January 2012. This decision was based on having statistical evidence for the complete cohort for the qualification in the summer award.
16. In modular qualifications, the number of candidates normally entering units early in the course is small, and these candidates might not be typical of all those who will take the units at later dates. Statistical information available at the early entry awarding meetings for the first year of the specification was therefore limited. It is also more difficult for awarders to make judgements about the quality of work that candidates have produced in response to a new style of question paper. That makes it hard for the awarders to be certain exactly where to put the grade boundary for a unit so that it will reflect qualification level standards. In later awards much more information will be available to assist the awarders in their judgements.
17. Awarding bodies in England used data on Key Stage 2 performance of candidates to give a picture of the cohort sitting GCSE English in any year. WJEC also used this predictor due to their large intake from England (two-thirds of WJEC entry). CCEA uses common centre data when predicting outcomes in subjects.
18. The processes that AOs are to follow in the awarding of qualifications are set out in the *GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice* Section 6.

### **Reporting of outcomes**

19. In the legacy, linear specifications, qualification outcomes were reported as a total mark and grade. The individual notional component boundaries in linear qualifications were not published; therefore, attainment within and across individual assessments was not known to schools.
20. In a modular qualification, the unit outcomes are reported to schools. AQA and Edexcel facilitated schools transferring the mark outcomes in each unit to a notional grade in the unit. This allowed schools to see how students were performing across different assessments and was used by schools to inform predictions for grade outcomes for a candidate in the qualification as a whole.
21. It was not possible for schools to analyse the individual 2012 English unit outcomes against previous attainment, as schools did not have individual assessment level data in the subject prior to 2012. This made predicting candidate outcomes challenging for schools in this first year of new specifications.

### Appendix 3: Comparable outcomes

1. The comparable outcomes approach to maintaining standards was applied in 2009 to AS Levels, in 2010 to A Levels, and in 2011–12 to the new GCSEs (which were introduced over two years). The comparable outcomes approach for GCSEs was agreed in 2010.
2. There are good reasons to aim for comparable outcomes in the first year of a new syllabus. Students taking their A Levels or GCSEs in any particular year will be competing with those from other years for access to higher education and employment. Maintaining grade standards is most difficult when qualifications change. Teachers and students may have fewer resources and will have to rely on sample papers rather than actual past papers. Specifications may include new topics, and teachers will have no direct experience of what is expected in the actual exams. Regulators and exam boards need ways in which they can be as sure as possible that when things change, standards are nevertheless maintained and students get the results they deserve. Students should not be advantaged or disadvantaged simply because they were the first to sit a new set of examinations; the only exception to this would be when the new syllabuses were designed to be at a different standard.
3. Comparable outcomes are expected when:
  - the cohort for the subject is similar, in terms of ability, to previous years;
  - the syllabus and the exams and other assessments are fit for purpose;
  - the purpose, requirements and nature of the qualification are the same;
  - there has been no substantial improvement (or drop) in teaching and learning at a national level; and
  - previous grade standards where appropriate.Where this isn't the case, the aim is not always comparable outcomes.
4. The comparable outcomes approach should lead to just that – comparable outcomes, year on year, all other things being equal. As set out above, things are not always equal; there are sometimes changes to the cohort, for example. That is why there are small differences from year to year.

## Appendix 4: A comparison of the requirements of GCSE English and GCSE English Language

Italicised content is common across subject criteria for both qualifications.

Revised GCSE English	Revised GCSE English Language
<p><b>20% Speaking and Listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>present and listen to information and ideas;</i></li> <li>• <i>respond appropriately to the questions and views of others;</i></li> <li>• <i>participate in a range of real-life contexts in and beyond the classroom, adapting talk to situation and audience and using standard English where appropriate;</i></li> <li>• <i>select and use a range of techniques and creative approaches to explore ideas, texts and issues in scripted and improvised work.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>20% Speaking and Listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>present and listen to information and ideas;</i></li> <li>• <i>respond appropriately to the questions and views of others;</i></li> <li>• <i>participate in a range of real-life contexts in and beyond the classroom, adapting talk appropriately to situation and audience;</i></li> <li>• <i>select and use a range of dramatic techniques and creative approaches to explore ideas, texts and issues in scripted and improvised work;</i></li> <li>• make a range of effective contributions, using creative approaches to exploring questions, solving problems and developing ideas;</li> <li>• reflect and comment critically on their own and others' uses of language;</li> </ul>
	<p><b>10% Study of Spoken Language</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reflect and comment critically on their own and others' uses of language in different contexts and how they adapt language to different listeners and tasks, exploring these experiences in the contexts of wider language use and variation;</li> <li>• understand the reason for, and effect of, choices in use of standard and non-standard forms of language and how these may vary over time and place;</li> <li>• analyse the characteristics of, and influences on, spoken language.</li> </ul>

<p><b>40% Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>understand how meaning is constructed through words, sentences and whole texts, recognising and responding to the effects of language variation;</i></li> <li>• <i>evaluate the ways in which texts may be interpreted differently according to the perspective of the reader;</i></li> <li>• read a rich range of prose, poetry and drama, including a text from the English, Welsh or Irish literary heritage, a play by Shakespeare and a text from a different culture or tradition;</li> <li>• understand how texts from the literary heritage have been influential and significant over time;</li> <li>• explore how texts from different cultures and traditions may reflect or influence values and assumptions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>35% Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>understand how meaning is constructed through words, sentences and whole texts, including multimodal texts and at least one extended text, recognising the effects of language choices and patterns;</i></li> <li>• <i>evaluate the ways in which texts may be interpreted differently according to the perspective of the reader;</i></li> <li>• explore language variation and how it varies according to audience and reader.</li> </ul>
<p><b>40% Writing</b></p> <p>At least one-third of this must be allocated to the use of a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.</p>	<p><b>35% Writing</b></p> <p>At least one-third of this must be allocated to the use of a range of sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate punctuation and spelling.</p>
<p><b>Assessment</b></p> <p>60% Controlled assessment</p> <p>40% Examination</p>	<p><b>Assessment</b></p> <p>60% Controlled assessment</p> <p>40% Examination</p>

## Appendix 5: Individual AO qualification requirements

1. Overall requirements in the subjects are constant across the AOs as per the requirements in Appendix 4: the total weighting of controlled assessment; the total weighting of the exams; and the weighting allocated to each assessment objective. However, the design of each AO qualification differs within these parameters.
2. Each AO has a discrete qualification for GCSE English and GCSE English Language. Some AOs have units common to both qualifications, combined with units discrete to each qualification.
3. Across the AOs assessment units will vary in terms of:
  - unit weightings;
  - the availability of assessment;
  - the number of marks available;
  - the raw mark distribution of candidates; and
  - the grade boundaries set.
4. This is similar to the format of individual components in the legacy linear qualifications. A sample of the breakdown of individual units within some of the revised specifications is shown in Table 9.

**Table 9**

	Qualification from AO1	Qualification from AO2	Qualification from AO3
Exam 1	80 raw marks 40% of qualification English & Language	48 raw marks 20% of qualification English & Language	96 raw marks 40% of qualification English & Language
Exam 2	n/a	48 raw marks 20% of qualification English & Language	64 raw marks 40% of qualification English & Language
CA 1 Speaking & Listening	45 raw marks 20% of qualification English & Language	50 raw marks 20% of qualification English & Language	40 raw marks 20% of qualification English & Language
CA 2	90 raw marks 40% English	120 raw marks, 80 scaled marks 40% English	96 raw marks 40% English
CA 3	80 raw marks 40% Language	80 scaled marks 40% Language	96 raw marks 40% Language

## **Appendix 6: Role of the Regulator**

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 states that The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) shall have the following regulatory powers:

– with the approval of the Department of Education, develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications; and accredit, where they meet such criteria, any such qualifications submitted for accreditation.<sup>1</sup>

– seek to ensure that the standards of examinations and assessments conducted by bodies or authorities in Northern Ireland are recognised as equivalent to the standards of examinations and assessments conducted by bodies or authorities exercising similar functions elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In carrying out this function the Council shall, as far as is relevant, have regard to the requirements of industry, commerce and the professions, and of persons with special learning needs.<sup>2</sup>

1 Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 Article 75 2 Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 Article 79

2 Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 Article 79