

Reforming GCSEs

Technical Consultation – Including Draft Conditions of Recognition for New GCSEs in English Language, English Literature and Mathematics

December 2013

Ofqual/13/5358

Information pages

About you*

Your details:

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Would you like us to treat your response as confidential?* If you answer yes, we will not include your details in any list of people or organisations that responded to the consultation.

Yes No

Are the views you express on this consultation an official response from the organisation you represent or your personal views?*

Personal views

Official response from an organisation/group (please complete the type of responding organisation tick list)

If you ticked 'personal views', which of the following are you?

Student

Parent/carer

Teacher (but not responding on behalf of a school or college)

Other (including general public) (please state capacity) _____

If you ticked 'official response from an organisation/group', please respond accordingly:

Type of responding organisation*

- Awarding organisation
- Local authority
- School/college (please complete the next question)
- Academy chain
- Private training provider
- University or other higher education institution
- Employer
- Other representative group/interest group
- Other representative group/interest group (please skip to type of representative group/interest group)

School/college type

- Comprehensive/non-selective academy
- State selective/selective academy
- Independent
- Special school
- Further education college
- Sixth form college
- None of the above (please state what) _____

Type of representative group/interest group

- Group of awarding organisations
- Union
- Employer/business representative group
- Subject association/learned society
- Equality organisation/group
- School/college or teacher representative group

None of the above (please describe the nature of your group)

MEI is a charity and a membership organisation. It is an independent curriculum development body for mathematics. It is a major provider of mathematics teaching and learning resources, and of mathematics CPD for secondary school and post-16 mathematics teachers.

MEI developed and manages the DfE-funded Further Mathematics Support Programme.

Nation*

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- Other EU country (please state which) _____
- Non-EU country (please state which) _____

How did you find out about this consultation?

- Our newsletter or another of our communications
- Via internet search
- From our website
- From another organisation (please state

below)

At a meeting with other mathematics educators

Other (please state below)

May we contact you for more information?

Yes

No

*Denotes mandatory fields

Consultation questions

Question 1 – Draft Conditions that will apply to all new GCSEs

Do you have any comments on the draft Conditions for all new GCSEs?

Yes No

If yes, please provide them here:

Question 2 – Draft Conditions and guidance on new GCSE English language

Do you have any comments on the draft Conditions and guidance on new GCSE English language?

Yes No

If yes, please provide them here:

Question 3 – Draft Conditions on new GCSE English literature

Do you have any comments on the draft Conditions on new GCSE English literature?

Yes No

If yes, please provide them here:

Question 4 – Draft Conditions, requirements in tiering and guidance on new GCSE mathematics

Do you have any comments on the draft Conditions, requirements on tiering and guidance on new GCSE mathematics?

Yes No

If yes, please provide them here:

The targeting of 50% of marks in each tier at the top three grades in the tier may not allow appropriate differentiation and challenge at the top end of the Higher tier because it will be possible for the awarding bodies to allocate relatively few marks to the mathematical skills and techniques related to the bold content, meaning it may be possible for students to earn the large majority of their marks across grades 4 – 7. This means it is likely that students will be able to access the top grades without demonstrating confidence and competence in the full range of mathematics included in the GCSE.

Furthermore, the 50% of marks available for the bottom three grades in the tier will lead to low grade boundaries for the bottom two grades in the tier. Since the overlapping grades for tiers are 4 and 5, it is predictable that one of these will be regarded as equal in importance to the current grade C for performance tables and student progression.

Students might be expected to achieve grade 4/5 on the Higher tier with 30% of the marks, or fewer, while requiring in the region of 70-80% on Foundation tier for the same grades. Schools and colleges concerned about their examination statistics may enter borderline students for the Higher tier, in the hope that they will be more likely to gather enough marks on that tier to achieve a level 2 threshold grade, rather than entering them for the Foundation tier, where they would need to demonstrate real mastery of fundamental mathematics needed for their future life and work to achieve the threshold grade. If schools enter most grade 4/5 students at Higher tier, this will make it difficult, if not impossible, to ensure that the overlap grades mean the same at both tiers.

Ofqual's June 2013 GCSE reform consultation implied that there would be greater differentiation at the higher grades of GCSE. However, the proposed tiering system has five grades at Foundation tier but six (with an allowed seventh grade 3) at Higher tier. This will lead to narrower grade boundaries at Higher tier than at Foundation tier with consequent lower reliability of grading at Higher tier.

Students expected to achieve the lower grades in Higher tier will experience examination papers which will include a significant proportion of questions they cannot answer; a large proportion of the marks on the paper will be inaccessible. These students will then be expected to continue with some level 3 mathematics in years 12 and 13, while feeling that they did not understand GCSE. This does not bode well for recruitment to the new level 3 Core Maths courses, or for students' ability to use mathematics when they progress to either further education or employment; moreover, such students have not been able to demonstrate the fluent knowledge, skills and understanding of mathematical methods and concepts which the aims of GCSE Mathematics require.

Our concern is that the wrong tiering system has been chosen and that this will result in the negative consequences described above. The GCSE content was designed to have:

- a Foundation tier covering up to grade 5;
- a Higher tier covering grades 5, 6 and 7, on which students could demonstrate real competence and confidence in the fundamental mathematics they will need for everyday life and work, and future study of 'Core Maths';
- a 'Higher tier extension paper, assessing the bold content of the curriculum and more sophisticated mathematical reasoning and problem solving skills, to be taken by higher tier students who wished to access grades 8 and 9; these students would be well-prepared to go on to study AS Mathematics and beyond post-16.

Without the Higher tier extension paper a major opportunity to improve GCSE Mathematics will be lost. Without it: (i) schools and colleges will still be faced with the dilemma of deciding on the tier into which they should enter a borderline level 2 student, in order to maximise the student's chances of achieving a level 2 pass (equivalent to a current grade 'C'); (ii) more able students will still be able to achieve top grades without properly mastering the mathematical skills and techniques they need for higher level study in mathematics and strongly mathematics-based subjects. The model proposed above, with a Higher tier extension paper, addresses both of these issues and would significantly improve the current GCSE Mathematics structure.

Question 5 – Draft accreditation criterion for new GCSEs

Do you have any comments on the draft accreditation criterion for new GCSEs?

Yes No

If yes, please provide them here:

Question 6 – Proposals to revise the accreditation criteria for current GCSEs

Do you have any comments on our proposal to revise the accreditation criteria for existing GCSEs to bring them in line with the single accreditation criterion proposed for new GCSEs?

Yes No

If yes, please provide them here:

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