

Qualification support material and services

Call for Evidence

Ofqual is inviting all education establishments, subject associations, training associations, subject experts, awarding organisations and interested parties to comment on the following exploratory areas. Where possible we are asking you to provide evidence to support your responses, in particular please provide details, where feasible, of the actual textbook or study aid you are referring to.

The call for evidence is asking for a range of information, therefore please feel free to respond to all or only some relevant sections. If you have any comments that you wish to raise which do not fit easily under the questions we have asked, please include them in your response to section E.

A. Study aids produced by different publishers

Please consider the study aids developed for specifications that you are familiar with.

1] In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of study aids developed and/or endorsed by the awarding organisation or examiner that developed the specification? Please provide examples with details where possible of the textbook or study aids you refer to.

There are different models for developing study aids associated with specifications. These include the following.

- a) *The specification may be a special project following a particular philosophy of teaching and learning. Teaching materials are developed in line with this philosophy. The authors need not be examiners and the awarding body might not endorse the publication.*
- b) *Teaching materials written by an examiner (or group of examiners) after the specification has been developed.*
- c) *An awarding body may endorse books to show that they meet the requirements of the specification but may not have had any involvement in their production.*

These different models have different pros and cons.

- a) *This model of publishing helps to ensure curriculum coherence. It has a long and successful history in the UK; examples include curriculum development projects such as Nuffield, Salters, SMP and MEI. The main focus of such publications is on supporting good teaching and learning of the subject, rather than on training students to gain marks in examinations.*
- b) *Examiners have a good understanding of how the specification will be assessed, so such publications are often popular with teachers and students because of their alignment to the requirements of the examination. The positive aspect of this is that it makes the requirements of the examination clear to candidates; the downside is that there can be an excessive concentration on the requirements of the assessment, with a resulting neglect of developing wider and deeper understanding of the subject. Such publications vary in quality; examiners can be subject experts who are able to produce high quality teaching materials or they can be good assessors who find it more difficult to produce useful teaching materials.*

- c) *It is helpful for teachers to know that a particular publication is suitable for a specification. However, obtaining awarding body endorsement costs publishers money; this cost is passed on to purchasers.*

2] In your opinion, do these textbooks and study aids differ from others produced by publishers not linked to awarding organisations? Please provide examples with details where possible of the textbook or study aids you refer to.

In recent years, it has been rare for publishers to produce books and other study aids which are not specific to a particular awarding organisation. This reluctance has been linked to a perception that schools are unlikely to buy generic teaching materials. Recently, MEI has started publishing a new series for GCSE through Hodders, 'Making Sense of Maths'. This series is not linked to any particular GCSE specification, nor is it endorsed by an awarding body. The focus of this series is very much on helping students to understand mathematics with examination success following on as a consequence of improved understanding.

B. Decision making and purchase process: study aids such as textbook/s

3] What types of study aids do you prefer, and why? Please consider all kinds of study aids, including textbooks, student books, revision aids, ebooks and online materials. Please provide details (e.g. title and author etc) of particular study aids you prefer.

4] Where do you prefer to source these study aids from, and why? Please consider all sources of material, including the awarding organisation offering the specification, other training materials publishers, national subject association sources, BBC teaching aids and any other source you prefer.

5] Where you use study aids other than textbooks, why do you use these, and how do these compare to textbooks? Please provide the exact textbook/ study aid details.

6] Please describe key factors that influence your decision when choosing which study aid to use for a particular specification?

7] In what ways do the types of study aid available for a particular specification influence your decision when choosing which specification to follow for a particular qualification?

C. Impact of textbooks and study aids on teaching and learning

8] What are your views on the concerns that the design, structure and content of textbooks/ study aids may be having a negative impact on standards of teaching and learning? Please provide details of the textbook/study aid (e.g. title and author etc) you are referring to.

The MEI series of A Level mathematics text books includes subject matter which goes beyond the content of the specification, where this helps to increase student understanding. For example, small angle approximations for sine and cosine are included in the section about differentiation of trigonometric functions because this allows teachers to develop a full understanding of the topic with their students. Teachers sometimes query whether this subject matter will be examined as it is not in the specification; our reply is always that it will not be examined because it is outside the national common core for A Level Mathematics but it is included in the books to enable teachers to ensure their students have a full understanding of the subject.

There is no such thing as the ideal textbook. The best teachers use a variety of resources in teaching their students in order to enable them to achieve a strong understanding of the subject matter. Less experienced teachers sometimes rely exclusively on an awarding body endorsed textbook; this results in a less rich experience for their students.

Due to the pressure on teachers to ensure their students achieve good examination results in mathematics, they can be tempted to focus on gaining marks in examinations rather than on ensuring their students have a good understanding of the subject (which will lead to good marks in the examination).

9] In your experience, are there any specific instances where a textbook or other study aid has limited or narrowed the scope of learning for students compared to the published specification for that qualification? Please provide details of the textbook/study aid (e.g. title and author etc).

D. Training services such as seminars

10] In your opinion, what should be the objectives of seminars relating to particular specifications?

Objectives can vary depending on the exact nature of the seminar. They can include some, or all, of the following.

Ensuring teachers are familiar with the subject matter of a specification.

- *Helping teachers develop new ways of teaching the subject matter.*
- *Training teachers to conduct internal assessment and moderation.*
- *Training teachers how to conduct controlled assessment.*
- *Giving feedback from examinations, making teachers aware of common errors.*

It should be noted that awarding bodies provide materials to all centres which relate to some of the above objectives. For example, examiners' reports to centres and item level data resulting from on-screen marking give teachers information about common errors made by examination candidates.

11] How effective do you feel seminars currently provided are in delivering these objectives?

12] How appropriate is it that awarding organisations offering specifications also provide seminars and training services to follow for the same specifications? Please explain.

It is essential that awarding bodies provide training relating to internal assessment to ensure that all teachers conduct and assess in a standard way.

As already noted, feedback from examinations is provided to centres in other ways but teachers may find it more convenient to attend a seminar than to study the published material provided by an awarding body.

For the first two objectives listed above, training can be provided by other providers as well as by awarding bodies.

12] What other providers are you aware of that offer seminars and training services, and how do these seminars differ from those provided by awarding organisations?

MEI provides CPD for mathematics teachers, mainly for mathematics A Level but also for GCSE, for FSMQs and generic CPD. Most MEI training courses are suitable for all

specifications and focus mainly on improving teacher subject knowledge and pedagogy. MEI also provides tailored training for particular specifications. To do this successfully, we read the material provided by the relevant awarding body to ensure that our advice to teachers fits in with awarding body expectations, for example, in the amount of working which examination candidates are expected to show.

E. Final comments

13] Please provide details of study aids or textbooks or seminar provision that are causing concerns and why?

14] Please let us know any other comments that you have relating to the issues raised here.