

A review of exam enquiries and appeals

Background

As part a review of the '[GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice](#)', which has been in place since 2011, Ofqual published a consultation in May 2016 seeking views on changes to regulations for exam enquiries and appeals.

The aims in making these changes were to:

- Remove rules that duplicate others.
- Ensure any errors in marking GCSEs, AS and A levels are found and corrected, in a way that is fair to all students.
- Ensure exam boards award qualifications in a consistent way.

Consultation

The consultation took place between 26 May and 24 June 2016, with feedback sought on:

- Putting in place specific requirements for exam boards to train and monitor markers and moderators (such requirements are currently imposed through the [GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice – May 2011](#));
- Publishing statutory guidance on how reviewers should determine whether a Marking Error has been made;
- Requiring exam boards to pilot the provision of the extended ground (that there had been a Marking Error) for appeal in a small number of subjects in 2016;
- Deciding when decisions should be implemented to require exam boards to put in place arrangements so that candidates can ask for the results for centre-marked assessments before deciding whether to seek a review;
- Deciding when to implement the requirement that exam boards must make marked GCSE scripts available to centres in time for them consider whether to ask for a review.

Outcomes

Following consultation, the following changes have been made:

- **Reporting the reasons following a review of marking**

In 2017, exam boards will be required to provide the reasons for any review at the same time as providing the outcome. However, there is no requirement for 2016 for those reasons to be provided with the outcome or within a certain timescale.

- **Changes to review arrangements**

Exam boards are required to publish a report each year which identifies changes to their review arrangements as a result of their monitoring of their reviews of marking and moderation.

- **Training and monitoring of markers**

Exam boards are required to train and monitor their markers and moderators.

- **Guidance on marking errors**

Amendments have been made in the statutory guidance on how reviewers should determine whether a marking error has been made.

- **A pilot for the new grounds for appeal**

Exam boards are required to pilot the new grounds of appeal for three subjects – A level geography, A level religious studies, and A level physics. Ofqual will evaluate the pilot and determine whether the requirements should be revisited in light of the findings and feedback received from exam boards, schools and colleges.

- **Review of centre marked assessments by a third party**

Reviews of centre-marked assessments can be undertaken by a third party (on the centre's behalf). It is for exam boards, through their contractual arrangements with centres, to ensure that any arrangements which a centre has with a third party are fit for purpose and allow reviews to be carried out in line with the relevant requirements.

- **Appealing a review**

If a centre remains concerned about an outcome following a review, it can appeal to the exam board. Appeals can be on the grounds that an exam board did not apply its procedures consistently or that procedures were not followed properly and fairly.

Appeals can also be made in respect of:

- Decisions regarding requests for Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration.
- Decisions regarding actions taken following an investigation into malpractice or maladministration.

The setting of a grade boundary cannot be the subject of an appeal.

Outstanding issues

The timing for implementation of the following decisions has been deferred:

- Candidates being able to request a review of a centre marked assessment.
- Exam boards to make marked GCSE scripts available to centres in time for them to consider whether to ask for a review. For exams taken in 2016, it is for exam boards to decide whether to make marked GCSE assessments available before the deadline for asking for a review of marking. They will also decide whether to charge a fee for this service.

Some awarding bodies – Pearson and WJEC – offer this service for some or all GCSE subject areas.
- Removal of the automatic protection for candidates who received an incorrect result on a review of moderation.

Next steps – what does this consultation mean for exams officers?

In summary, the impact upon exams office staff is minimal. Awarding bodies, SLT and teaching staff, however, have several factors to consider and implement.

Awarding bodies will need to review the process associated with training and monitoring examiners/reviewers, as well as providing additional information around exams appeals/reviews – and in a timelier manner.

SLT and teaching staff have to consider new/additional guidance around reviewing internally assessed examinations, as well as the grounds on which appeals are made.

Although exams office staff may have to deal with requests for access to GCSE scripts prior to a review this summer, it is likely that this will be more common next summer once SLT and teaching staff consider the process for incorporating such a request. The factors which school leaders will need to be consider include teaching staff being available on GCSE results day to discuss with students the merits of submitting an enquiry, and then, once received, the task of scrutinising the script – this may need to take place during the summer holidays?

Although Ofqual has raised the possibility of candidates approaching awarding bodies directly, logistical issues suggest that this will not be an option in the near future.

However, with some decisions and timelines still to be confirmed, exams officers should continue to monitor the outcomes of this consultation during the new academic year.

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