

The new principal learning qualifications

Interim findings from the monitoring of the new level 2 qualifications in 2009



Date: March 2010
Product code: Ofqual/10/4716

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Executive summary

In 2009, Ofqual monitored three new qualifications in principal learning, as part of a two-year programme that will report fully in 2011. This is an interim report based on first-year findings only.

Ofqual found that, generally, internal assessments were appropriate with good quality marking criteria. However, Ofqual has required awarding organisations to address several issues relating to guidance for consortia/centres on setting tasks for controlled assessment and applying the marking criteria.

Another key area of Ofqual's monitoring was the scrutiny of question papers, controlled assessments and associated mark schemes. Across all three awarding organisations, Ofqual found that, overall, question papers were clear, well written and accessible to candidates, and had good quality mark schemes.

However, Ofqual has required awarding organisations to address a small number of issues relating to question papers and mark schemes. Some question papers did not provide enough opportunities for more able candidates to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge, understanding and skills. Some of the acceptable answers in the related mark schemes did not adequately reflect the demands of the questions.

Another important area of monitoring was the observation of meetings held by the awarding organisations, to ensure they were conducted in accordance with the regulatory requirements. Across all awarding organisations, Ofqual was satisfied that the processes and meetings it observed were in line with requirements.

Ofqual has required awarding organisations to agree appropriate action plans to address the issues raised by its monitoring. Ofqual will monitor the implementation of these action plans in future series.

Introduction

Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications, examinations and tests in England. Its work ensures that children, young people and adult learners get the results their work deserves, that standards are maintained and that the qualifications learners receive count now and in the future.

The awarding organisations that offer principal learning qualifications operate within a regulatory framework, which is set out in the following documents:

- *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293; 2004)
([www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/6944_regulatory_criteria_04\(1\).pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/6944_regulatory_criteria_04(1).pdf))
- *Regulatory arrangements for component and Diploma awarding bodies Recognition criteria and operating rules* (Ofqual/08/3761; 2008)
(www.ofqual.org.uk/files/Ofqual_Operating_Rules_web.pdf)
- *Arrangements for awarding and setting standards in the Diploma Principal Learning, project and Diploma* (Ofqual/08/3865; 2008)
(www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/ofqual-08-3865_DASG_report.pdf).

Ofqual carries out a programme of monitoring activities each year to assess the performance of awarding organisations against the regulatory criteria. One of these activities is the scrutiny programme. This is an in-depth study of the assessment process across a sample of qualifications being offered by the different awarding organisations.

The scrutiny of a qualification aims to:

- determine whether the required qualification criteria and regulatory requirements have been met
- determine whether the assessments were fair and effective in measuring achievement by candidates in respect of the stated assessment criteria and learning outcomes
- determine whether the procedures designed to ensure consistency of practice and comparability of standards were implemented effectively
- identify any aspects of the specification(s) that appear to have constrained fair, effective and reliable assessment
- identify any good practice that is worthy of encouragement and dissemination, to promote continuing improvement in the quality of examinations.

Each scrutiny involves a team of consultants, who are experts in their subject. The team observe meetings held by the awarding organisation, analyse question papers, mark schemes and internal assessments, and review a sample of candidates' work.

Following each scrutiny, Ofqual reports to the awarding organisation, indicating how, if necessary, it should improve its provision. The awarding organisation produces an action plan in response, which details how and when any issues will be addressed.

Monitoring the new qualifications

Principal learning is sector based and subject related and forms an integral part of the Diploma but is also a stand-alone qualification in its own right. Principal learning includes a minimum of 50 per cent applied learning and consists of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that support progression through each line of learning into the sectors and subjects concerned. Opportunities to develop and apply generic skills are also integrated into principal learning.

In 2009, Ofqual carried out scrutinies of three level 2 principal learning qualifications, available for first teaching from September 2008. The qualifications monitored were:

- AQA-City & Guilds level 2 Principal Learning in engineering (7332)
- Edexcel level 2 Principal Learning in society, health and development (ZSH20)
- OCR level 2 Principal Learning in creative and media (H807).

These scrutinies form part of a two-year programme, which will report fully in 2011. This is an interim report based on first-year findings only, and the findings should be taken in context of the limited sample of candidates' work on which they are based.

Schemes of assessment

AQA-City & Guilds level 2 Principal Learning in engineering (7332)

The specification comprises eight units, of which one is externally assessed and seven are internally assessed. Each unit is either 30 or 60 guided learning hours (GLH) in size, and they combine to make a total of 420 GLH.

Edexcel level 2 Principal Learning in society, health and development (ZSH20)

The specification comprises nine units, of which one is externally assessed and eight are internally assessed. Each unit is either 30 or 60 GLH in size, and they combine to make a total of 420 GLH.

OCR level 2 Principal Learning in creative and media (H807)

The specification comprises seven units, of which one is externally assessed and six are internally assessed. Each unit is 60 GLH in size, and they combine to make a total of 420 GLH.

Further details of the schemes of assessment for each of the above specifications can be found in Appendix A, and each specification is available from the website of the respective awarding organisation.

Internal assessment

Each awarding organisation provided detailed coverage of the required specification content and assessment criteria for internally assessed units within the qualification and unit specifications. These were backed up by good quality guidance and exemplification for consortia/centres and candidates.

Awarding organisations provided model assignments that consortia/centres were able to use or adapt. For some units, exemplar work with mark allocations and a commentary, explaining how and why the work had been awarded each mark, was also available.

Marking criteria for the internally assessed units in AQA-City & Guilds' and Edexcel's specifications were generally clear and enabled consistent application. However, there is some concern about the marking criteria for OCR's specification. They are potentially confusing with little guidance for assessors on how to apply the criteria to incomplete or uneven performance in different mark bands.

There was evidence across the Edexcel and the OCR specifications that candidates' responses had been limited by poorly designed consortia/centre-set tasks.

Next steps

Ofqual now requires the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series. Ofqual will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately. Although these action plans are currently at a preliminary stage, each awarding organisation has outlined a range of actions.

Edexcel will ensure that consortia/centres receive further feedback and support on centre-designed tasks so that, in future, tasks are set appropriately.

OCR is providing additional guidance and training for consortia/centres on how to interpret and apply the marking criteria, including how to assess partial evidence. It is asking its moderators to identify clearly, in their feedback reports to consortia/centres, any areas where the coverage of the assessment criteria in consortia/centre-designed tasks is weak.

External assessment

Principal learning must be assessed by a combination of internal and external assessment. At level 2, a total of 60 GLH must be externally assessed.¹

All three qualifications scrutinised in 2009 contain one 60 GLH unit that is externally assessed. For AQA-City & Guilds engineering and Edexcel society, health and development, this consists of a written examination paper lasting 1 hour 30 minutes.

The question papers for both AQA-City & Guilds engineering and Edexcel society, health and development were clear and accessible to a range of candidates. However, each of them consisted of short-answer, structured questions and there were limited opportunities for candidates of higher ability to show the extent of their knowledge, understanding and skills through extended writing or interpretation of data.

The mark schemes for both the AQA-City & Guilds engineering and Edexcel society, health and development question papers were clear but showed some disparity between the use of command words in the question papers and the acceptable answers listed in the mark schemes. For the AQA-City & Guilds engineering unit, acceptable answers in the mark scheme did not always reflect the demands of the questions. In the Edexcel society, health and development question paper, some questions of comparable level of demand, using the same command words, attracted

¹ Criteria for accreditation of specialised diploma qualifications at levels 1, 2 and 3 (QCA/06/3002).

different numbers of marks. As a result, both mark schemes did not always reward candidates appropriately.

The externally assessed unit for OCR creative and media is assessed by a controlled assessment task (a brief) that is set by the awarding organisation and marked by a visiting examiner. Candidates for this OCR unit are allowed 30 hours preparation time and 15 hours production time to respond. The controlled assessment brief was an appropriate assessment tool, but the stated time period, or window, allowed for the assessment was inconsistent with the information provided in the specification.

Next steps

AQA-City & Guilds and Edexcel will review their question papers to ensure that there are opportunities for more able learners to demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and understanding.

AQA-City & Guilds will ensure that mark schemes are more closely aligned with the question papers in future.

OCR will ensure that externally set briefs issued from January 2011 will provide a clearer indication of the assessment window. OCR will also issue an additional guidance document for teachers, to highlight the extension to the window for live performance outcomes.

Awarding organisation meetings

A sample of meetings held by each awarding organisation was observed throughout the scrutiny process. These meetings were observed to check compliance with the regulatory criteria and to ensure that each awarding organisation had appropriate measures in place to meet its responsibilities to set fair, effective and reliable assessments; to train and/or standardise examiners, moderators and consortia/centres; and to award grades and ensure standards were set appropriately.

The following types of meetings were observed:²

- question paper evaluation committees: meetings to finalise draft question papers and mark schemes
- training: meetings to provide consortia/centres with information on new qualifications, setting tasks, establishing standards and/or marking candidates' work
- standardisation of examiners: meetings to discuss the application of the mark scheme and to produce a final version that enables all examiners to mark consistently and to the same standard
- standardisation of moderators: meetings to discuss the application of the mark scheme and to ensure that moderators have a clear and common understanding of how to moderate centre marks accurately and consistently
- moderation visits to consortia/centres: visits by awarding organisations to centres to review the marking of internally assessed work
- awarding: meetings to determine unit grade boundaries, and grade outcomes for a specification as a whole, by considering candidates' work and supporting statistical evidence (key boundaries are those awarded using the collective professional judgement of the awarding committee and are the thresholds defining grades C/U and A*/A).

Ofqual was satisfied that awarding organisation processes and procedures were appropriate and in line with regulatory requirements. It was also our view that awarding organisations adopted appropriate strategies to deal with setting standards in units where there were very small entry numbers.

² A full list of awarding organisation meetings observed is contained in appendix B.

Grading standards

Setting standards in new qualifications can be challenging. Ofqual has been working with awarding organisations since 2006 to help set appropriate standards for the new principal learning qualifications. Ofqual has set up and chaired the Diploma Awarding and Standards Group, which published the *Arrangements for awarding and setting standards in the Diploma* (Ofqual/08/3865); produced an interim archive to exemplify the expected standard for each line of learning; and held meetings to review standards and arrangements for awarding, following each examinations series.

As part of the scrutiny process, a sample of candidates' work was reviewed at key grade boundaries. However, the sample was relatively small and unrepresentative of a more typical cohort because of the low number of candidates who entered in 2009 and the high proportion of those candidates completing principal learning within 12 months. **The findings in this section of the report must, therefore, be considered in light of the limited sample of evidence on which they are based.**

Bearing in mind the limitations of the evidence, Ofqual observed that:

- The candidates' performance on the written question papers for both the AQA-City & Guilds and Edexcel specifications may have been limited to some extent by the questions not being challenging enough. Although this could be seen to affect the A* grade boundary, it does not appear that the outcomes for learners, which were appropriate and fair to candidates in this first, atypical year, have been adversely affected. However, awarding outcomes will be kept under close review.
- The externally assessed unit for OCR creative and media was similar to the internally assessed units in terms of the assessment criteria and evidence required. The following concerns, therefore, relate to both types of assessment. The quality of work at both key grade boundaries for OCR's specification was of a lower standard than equivalent sector specialist qualifications at level 2. Candidates' work around the C/U boundary showed poor structuring and selection of evidence, and candidates' work around the A*/A boundary lacked enough evidence of the creative outcome.
- The candidates' work for the internally assessed units of Edexcel society, health and development was not of the appropriate standard for a level 2 qualification, with candidates' responses lacking suitable depth at both key grade boundaries.
- The standard of internally assessed work for AQA-City & Guilds engineering was judged to be appropriate, but there were concerns that some centres had not followed the guidance and had not provided enough evidence for ephemeral and group work. These concerns also relate to OCR creative and media, in

which consortia/centres had not used witness statements effectively, candidates' contributions to group work were incorrectly identified and a significant amount of the evidence provided by candidates was irrelevant or incorrectly referenced.

Next steps

Ofqual and the awarding organisations will agree a series of actions to address the interim findings from Ofqual's scrutiny work. Ofqual will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately.

- Ofqual will continue to work with the awarding organisations to establish appropriate grade standards for principal learning. As part of this work, during 2010 Ofqual intends to review candidates' work for those specifications where concerns were raised about internal assessments, using a larger and more representative sample, anticipated to be available following the summer series.
- AQA-City & Guilds will continue to provide guidance to consortia/centres on evidence for group work and completion of candidate record forms throughout the assessment process, including at training, moderation and through feedback.
- Edexcel will keep awarding outcomes under review and take further action if evidence from a more representative sample of candidates' work requires it.
- OCR will provide additional guidance to consortia/centres on the appropriate use of witness statements, unit recording sheets and the effective identification and assessment of individuals' contributions to group work.
- OCR will also review awarding outcomes as part of their ongoing internal review process.

Ofqual will publish full findings from the scrutiny of the three qualifications listed in this report early in 2011, once the additional scrutiny work has been completed.

In 2010, Ofqual will also conduct scrutinies of the following principal learning qualifications: Edexcel level 3 construction and the built environment; OCR level 3 IT; and VTCT level 2 hair and beauty studies. We will report our interim findings early in 2011.

Appendix A: Schemes of assessment

AQA-City & Guilds level 2 Principal Learning in engineering (7332)

	Unit Code	Unit title	GLH	Assessment type
1	ENG2U1	The engineered world	60	Externally assessed question paper
2	ENG2U2	Engineering design	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
3	ENG2U3	Engineering applications of computers	30	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
4	ENG2U4	Producing engineering solutions	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
5	ENG2U5	Construct electronic and electrical systems	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
6	ENG2U6	Manufacturing engineering	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment

7	ENG2U7	Maintenance	30	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
8	ENG2U8	Innovation, enterprise and technological advance	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
		Total	420	

Edexcel level 2 Principal Learning in society, health and development (ZSH20)

	Unit code	Unit title	GLH	Assessment type
1	SH201	Principles, values and personal development	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
2	SH202	Working together and communicating	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
3	SH203	Safeguarding and protecting individuals	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
4	SH204	Growth, development and healthy living	60	Externally assessed question paper
5	SH205	Needs and preferences	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
6	SH206	Antisocial and offending behaviour	30	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment

7	SH207	Supporting children and young people	30	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
8	SH208	Patient centred health	30	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
9	SH209	The social model of disability	30	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
		Total	420	

OCR level 2 Principal Learning in creative and media (H807)

	Unit code	Unit title	GLH	Assessment type
1	F476	Exploring the creative and media world	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
2	F477	Promoting products, performances and ideas	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
3	F478	Individual realisation – who I am and who am I?	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
4	F479	Responding to a brief	60	Externally assessed controlled assessment
5	F480	Exploring group performance skills	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
6	F481	Exploring digital technologies	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
7	F482	Using creative and media skills in the context of the wider community	60	Internally assessed, externally moderated controlled assessment
		Total	420	

Appendix B: List of observed awarding organisation meetings

Awarding organisation	Meeting	Date
AQA-City & Guilds	Training – 'Preparing to teach'	1 May 2009
AQA-City & Guilds	Moderation visit	5 June 2009
AQA-City & Guilds	Awarding	6, 8 and 9 July 2009
Edexcel	Standardisation of moderators	5, 6 and 7 June 2009
Edexcel	Standardisation of examiners	26 June 2009
Edexcel	Awarding	9, 10 and 11 July 2009
OCR	Moderation centre visit	3 April 2009
OCR	Awarding	3, 4 and 5 August 2009
OCR	Question paper evaluation committee	2 October 2009

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First published by The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation in 2010.

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