

Exam Board Seminars

Final Report

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Contents

Executive summary 2
Introduction
Principles
Our conclusions 5
Our decisions
Next steps7
Detailed analysis of the role, value and risks of exam board seminars for teachers 7
Definitions and scope7
'Qualifications training' events
Risk analysis
Alternative options
Launch events 12
General training events 12
Appendix A: Call for evidence summary 14
Appendix B: Teacher event and examiner data 15
Training events for teachers15
Examiners

Executive summary

In November last year, we announced that we were looking at textbooks and other teaching aids provided by exam boards, to understand how these things affect standards of qualifications, and to decide what should be done to protect standards. Just a week later, the *Daily Telegraph* gave us evidence that examiners had been giving teachers inappropriate information about future exams in seminars run by exam boards.

We found good practice, in the main, when we listened to the seminar tapes. The evidence at that stage did not show widespread misconduct. But as reported in the media, there were specific incidents of serious malpractice. When we reported on them in December 2011, we said that we would review immediately the role, value and risks of exam board seminars, and this report sets out the outcomes of that review.

Over 4,000 exam board seminars happened last year. They were not all the same. Although we use the term seminars, there are different types of events, and we have found it helpful to categorise them into two broad groups: those that relate to a specific qualification (such as WJEC's GCSE in IT) and those that don't. It is helpful to categorise them in this way, because the role, value and risks are different.

There is also an unregulated seminar industry. Exam boards are not the only organisations offering seminars, and we know that changes to what exam boards do is likely to change those other businesses, and what they offer. The businesses that we don't regulate are free to take information that is already in the public domain, such as past papers and past mark schemes, and sell training events. We will keep a careful eye on this, and consider whether anything needs to change for the unregulated sector.

It is different for exam boards because they have privileged information and qualifications to market and sell. With privileged information – the inside track – there will always be the risk that those taking part could jeopardise qualifications by saying something about what will be in a future exam paper. And we know that that has happened in practice, because we have seen the evidence of it.

We want to see greater coherence between what students are to learn and how they are taught and assessed. We have our part to play in reducing the risk of undue 'teaching to the test', and with that in mind, we developed a set of principles to guide decision making in this review. In this report we set out the information that we have gathered about seminars, and summarise the views expressed by teachers and others who responded to our consultation on seminars. We set out our analysis, and the thinking that underpins our decision to limit the types of seminars that exam

boards can run, and encourage exam boards instead to provide the right information to teachers in transparent and accountable ways.

We have decided that:

- Exam board face-to-face teacher training seminars that relate directly to the delivery of a specific, named qualification must not occur after 31st August 2013. We expect exam boards to wind these down over the academic year 2012/13, with appropriate safeguards during this transitional period. This applies both to seminars available to all and bespoke events for individual or groups of schools¹.
- 2. There are two exceptions to this: where face-to-face training may be essential to prepare teachers to set, deliver and mark controlled assessments; and where exam boards run events to market or launch new subject specifications so long as no additional information is given to that which is available to all schools.
- 3. Exam boards should make any information necessary for the proper administration of qualifications accessible to all schools. Information must be provided in ways that minimise the risk that some of it may be inappropriate, but allow teachers to interact with experts from exam boards. Live online events or 'webinars' can continue, provided that exam boards put controls and monitoring in place to ensure that risks are reduced to a minimum.
- 4. Exam boards must make sure they have in place adequate contractual controls on their examiners and key staff to prevent them from taking part in unregulated training for teachers either during or for a reasonable time after their period of employment or engagement.

We will now regulate to put our decisions on seminars into effect.

Introduction

In November 2011, we announced a programme of work to investigate the market activities of exam boards, including training and guidance materials.

In December 2011, the *Daily Telegraph* published extracts from seminars for teachers provided by four exam boards. We reviewed urgently all the evidence given to us. The evidence consisted of tape recordings of 12 seminars led by examiners for teachers. Inappropriate information had been given to teachers about future exams at some of these events.

¹ When we say schools in this document we means schools, colleges and other educational providers

We took immediate action in relation to one January 2012 exam that had been put in jeopardy (see below), and we required exam boards to put in place extra controls over seminars while we undertook this review.²

Every exam board that offers GCSE and A levels³ has undertaken its own investigation, whether or not it was in the media exposé. These investigations have included: reviewing transcripts of the events recorded for the *Daily Telegraph*; reviewing all training, guidance and support materials; and speaking to examiners and delegates (from the events in question and from others). Exam boards made a number of changes to specific exam papers as a result of their quality assurance and investigations:

- WJEC postponed its GCSE ICT paper due to be taken in January and replaced it with a new paper taken in March. The original paper was not sent to schools. The June 2012 paper was also changed.
- Edexcel made a change to a GCSE Design & Technology paper for summer 2012, because exam topics were hinted at in a seminar. This change was made before the paper had been sent to schools.
- OCR changed a GCSE Government & Politics paper for June 2012 due to the pattern of assessment in the compulsory topic. It also made changes to two June 2012 GCSE Latin papers because of an OCR examiner's related activities. These changes were made before papers had been sent to schools.
- WJEC also made changes to its GCSE History specification, which we considered before we accredited the revised qualification.

In February and March 2012 we called for evidence on materials and activities provided by exam boards. We summarise the evidence that we received in Appendix A. Informed by the evidence that we received, we then spoke with teacher associations, exam boards and the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors to understand in detail their views on seminars.

² Specific controls included recording of events, shadowing of trainers, additional training and guidance to presenters.

³ AQA, Edexcel, OCR, CCEA and WJEC.

Principles

We developed a set of principles to guide our review.

Qualifications demonstrate students' achievements – knowledge, skills and understanding. They should support and reflect high quality teaching and learning. They are valuable only if people trust that someone's qualification, and the grade, is an accurate signal of that learning. Without this trust, a qualification loses its value.

All aspects of the qualification system must promote trust and consistency, and be seen to do so. This means all those on whom the qualifications system depends – such as students, teachers, schools, examiners, markers, exam board staff and regulators – need to behave with professionalism and integrity. The system must be designed to promote and support this integrity. Checks and balances must be clearly in place to identify and respond if attempts are made to undermine the system.

There are five principles underlying our analysis of the role, value and risks of exam boards' training events for teachers:

- Schools need enough information to enable them to teach the curriculum and understand the nature of the exam and other assessments to be taken.
- Information considered essential by an exam board should be made available to all schools.
- Examiners and members of exam boards who have contributed to, or have access to, any information about a forthcoming exam should not share this information with any teacher or student in any circumstances.
- We should not stop an activity that is essential to the delivery of the associated exam (for example the training of internal assessors).
- Where current arrangements are not posing an immediate risk to standards, changes should be made in a measured way to limit unforeseen circumstances.

Our conclusions

Our conclusion is that seminars concentrating on a specific qualification present unacceptable risks to the wider education system. There is a real risk that inappropriate information about the future content of secure exams is disclosed. And there is a risk of narrowing the curriculum through sessions on how to teach the specification. We have talked to exam boards about these risks, and the controls that they have in place. We have concluded that it is not possible to reduce the risks to an acceptable level, and so seminars relating to a particular qualification should stop.

We have also talked to exam boards about possible future arrangements. Information needed by schools about the structure of a qualification and its assessment methodology can be, and often is, made readily available via the internet, including through online events or 'webinars'. We think that exam boards can make better and more use of such technologies, and they agree.

We conducted an analysis of seminars, categorising them into two broad groups: those that relate to a specific qualification (such as WJEC's GCSE in IT) and those that don't. It is helpful to categorise them in this way, because the role, value and risks are different. The analysis is summarised at Appendix B.

We have concluded that seminars in the second category – that is, training events of a more general nature – do not present the same level of risk, and may continue at present. Exam boards also run launch and marketing events for new qualifications. If these are to continue we will need to be sure that adequate controls are in place. We will continue to review them and to consider the issues and risks that they present.

Our decisions

- Exam board face-to-face teacher training seminars that relate directly to the delivery of a specific, named qualification must not occur after 31st August 2013. We expect exam boards to wind these down over the academic year 2012/13, with appropriate safeguards during this transitional period. This applies to both seminars available to all and bespoke events for individual or groups of schools.
- 2. There are two exceptions to this: where face-to-face training may be essential to prepare teachers to set, deliver and mark controlled assessments; and where exam boards run events to market or launch new subject specifications so long as no additional information is given to that which is available to all schools.
- 3. Exam boards should make any information necessary for the proper administration of qualifications accessible to all schools. Information must be provided in ways that minimise the risk that some of it may be inappropriate, but allow teachers to interact with experts from exam boards. Live online events or 'webinars' can continue, provided that exam boards put controls and monitoring in place to ensure that risks are reduced to a minimum.
- 4. Exam boards must make sure they have in place adequate contractual controls on their examiners and staff to prevent them from taking part in unregulated

training for teachers either during or after their period of employment or engagement.

5. We will not stop exam boards running events to market or launch new subject specifications so long as no additional information is given to that which is available to all schools.

Next steps

- We will put our decisions into effect using our regulatory tools. Meanwhile, interim controls will continue. We have already consulted on a new condition of recognition that will strengthen our current requirements regarding the confidentiality of assessment materials, and we will quickly bring this into effect.
- 2. We will talk more with schools, teachers and their representatives, and with others, about seminars that are not specific to qualifications, but are of a more general nature before we decide whether we should influence or put in place safeguards around these activities.
- 3. We will specify the scope, and safeguards to secure the integrity of, seminars on controlled assessment and launch events.
- 4. We will continue our programme of work to strengthen GCSEs and to make sure that specifications do not offer opportunities inappropriately to narrow the course of study required.

Detailed analysis of the role, value and risks of exam board seminars for teachers

Definitions and scope

There are two main types of seminars that exam boards offer to schools and teachers:

- events that relate directly to a particular qualification, known in this document as 'qualifications training'
- 'general training events' that provide teacher training but do not relate directly to a particular qualification.

Our analysis focuses on qualifications training, specifically about GCSEs and A levels.

Qualifications training events

Qualifications training seminars are based on a particular qualification, for example, Edexcel A level English Literature, or OCR GCSE Design and Technology. The seminars tend to cover one or more of the following:

- explanation of the qualification specification (particularly where new specifications are being introduced)
- guidance on how to teach that specification
- consideration of examiner reports from recent exam series
- delegates marking real but anonymised recent candidate scripts (often placed just above grade boundaries) so that teachers understand how certain grades can be achieved.

All exam boards offer these seminars. They vary in number and nature, depending on the exam board. We estimate that about 4,000 of these seminars take place each year. The cost to schools of these seminars varies. Sometimes they are delivered for free. Often they are charged at between £100 and £200 per delegate. For a fee, most exam boards also deliver bespoke events to specific schools or colleges on request.

Most of the events are delivered face-to-face, but there is some use of online tools such as 'webinars'. Often these seminars are led by examiners who also prepare question papers and mark schemes for the qualification that is the subject of the seminar. More information about these seminars is set out in Appendix B.

Risk analysis

Risk 1: That inappropriate information about the content of future exams will be shared with teachers at these events

There is evidence that some teachers attending qualifications training seminars expect to receive privileged information about those qualifications. A recent Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) survey on exam pressure found that nearly a third (31 per cent) of teachers, lecturers, leaders and education staff said that they help pupils to prepare for tests and exams by attending meetings to find out exam themes.⁴ In its analysis, the ATL cites accountability measures that have increased pressures on schools and teachers to perform well in exams.

 ⁴ Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2012) 'Education staff and pupils under tremendous strain as exam pressure mounts',
2nd April, www.atl.org.uk/Images/Annual%20conference%202012%20-

^{%20}Education%20staff%20and%20pupils%20under%20tremendous%20strain%20as%20exam%20pressure%20mounts%20-%20ATL.pdf (accessed 25th April 2012).

On the basis of appeals cases dealt with, the Chair of the Examinations Appeal Board has concluded of these events that:

There is no doubt that what is offered, and what is expected from the centres, is an 'inside track' on what the specification really means and how questions should be answered to gain maximum marks. We have never had any suspicion that there was any malpractice intended in this service, but clearly there could be a perception on the part of the receiving centres that there is an advantage to be gained.⁵

Qualifications training events are 'live' environments where information could be deliberately or inadvertently disclosed that undermines the integrity of the qualifications system. Even with the most robust monitoring, there is the opportunity for informal discussion between sessions.

There are particularly high risks where bespoke qualifications training seminars are offered to individual schools. They are typically delivered by senior examiners going to the school that has requested (and normally paid for) the training. The content may be unknown except to the school and senior examiners or awarding organisation employees.

Our analysis shows that there is a real risk that inappropriate information about the content of future exams is shared at face-to-face qualifications training seminars. The risk cannot be entirely removed.

Risk 2: That the content of these events could lead to a narrowing of teaching and learning

We have reviewed how exam boards market these seminars. There is a focus on how to teach to the qualification specification. Teaching tightly to the specification can have a negative impact if teachers decide to narrow teaching and learning to focus exclusively on what is in the qualification specification. A minority of teachers responding to our call for evidence raised concerns that some events concentrated too much on 'how to pass the exam'.⁶

We have already taken action to reduce the risk that qualification specifications will result in a narrowing of the curriculum. We are strengthening GCSEs and have already required exam boards to revise a number of specifications. In line with government policy, we have taken action on spelling, punctuation and grammar, and

⁵ Letter from Professor J.J. Thompson CBE, Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Bath.

⁶ Qualification support material and services: call for evidence. <u>www.ofqual.gov.uk/news-and-announcements/83/855</u>

modular assessment in GCSEs. We have identified some GCSEs where the specifications allowed teaching to be narrowed – geography, history and English literature – and we have required exam boards to make changes to strengthen the content in order to enhance teaching and learning. We will be continuing our work to ensure that qualifications are sufficiently robust.

Teachers who attend events may get, or may be seen to get, access to information that supplements the published information and that is not widely available. The Chair of the Examinations Appeal Board has told us that:

There is evidence from many cases, that Awarding Bodies have used INSET, along with Chief Examiners reports, to amplify the published criteria. This is particularly noticeable for the 'banded' mark-schemes where the specification-published criteria could be open to variation in interpretation. Further we have evidence from some cases that there seems to be additional and unpublished amplification of the set of criteria which is shared at training events. In coming to its judgments, the EAB have always taken the view that the only criteria that can be used are those published within the specification, together with any associated 'teacher guides' that are an addendum to the specification. However, we have remaining concerns that there may indeed be specific interpretations known internally to markers and some others, but not known to those preparing candidates who have solely used the published specifications.

We have concluded that the risk of narrowing teaching and learning will remain while face to face training seminars continue.

Alternative options

Are there alternative ways of giving information to schools about qualifications that reduce risks to a minimum?

We have talked to exam boards about options, for providing information in ways that reduce risks to a minimum. We have sought views on the implications of stopping these events. We have concluded that there are fairer and safer ways in which information can be shared with teachers.

It is important that schools have access to high quality information about qualifications that allows them to prepare their students for assessments. In their responses to our call for evidence, teachers told us what information they wanted about qualifications:

- 1. How the assessment is structured. For example, the different units that comprise the qualification, the assessment objectives and how the unit will be assessed (e.g. a one-hour written exam with a total of 50 marks).
- 2. How the assessment of student ability is made by the awarding organisation; access to past papers, mark schemes, and reports about previous exams.

3. How to mark controlled assessments in line with the standards expected by the exam boards.

These are legitimate expectations. But this information could be, and often is, disseminated in ways other than seminars. Examiners' reports, specifications and associated guidance, past papers and mark schemes can be, and are, made available to schools via websites and paper copies. Exam boards should, and do, provide contact details for staff who can answer questions that teachers might have about a particular qualification.

Exam boards should take full advantage of technology to provide information to schools in ways that are less risky and that can be monitored. For example:

- Presentations can be recorded and made available to download along with any slides.
- Question and answer functions can be provided (and monitored) via websites.
- Online training modules can be provided to take teachers through everything that they need to know about qualifications, at a time and pace suited to individuals.
- Live 'webinars' can provide additional controls to ensure that risks are minimal.

These methods can be made available to all schools.

Should we stop these events now?

We recognise that schools need access to some of the information currently provided by exam board seminars and that it would cause problems if exam boards were suddenly to stop providing this information. But we also believe that if this information about exams is truly needed by schools then it can and should be given in other ways. We are asking exam boards to make sure that they minimise the risks raised by seminars until they have other arrangements in place. We will put in place additional regulatory safeguards to protect the confidentiality of exam material.

Should we make an exception for controlled assessment?

We may need to make an exception for controlled assessment. Where teachers are acting on behalf of an awarding organisation to administer and mark controlled assessment, there may be a legitimate need for exam boards to provide them with face-to-face training. These events are lower risk as the content is limited to controlled assessment. There should be no expectation that exams or specifications will be considered. We would expect that any seminars on controlled assessment would be limited to this topic, would be run by exam board staff responsible for

moderation of controlled assessment rather than examiners writing secure exam content, and would be effectively controlled and monitored by exam boards.

Could the risks be minimised by excluding examiners from these events?

Examiners, and those with access to information about the future content of exams, are currently involved in delivering training for teachers. We have considered whether an alternative approach to qualifications training seminars could be taken; namely, whether examiners, or those with access to the content of future exams, could be excluded from these events.

We have decided that this is not a sufficient measure. The very purpose of these events is to help teachers to prepare students for a particular exam. There will always be a risk that specifications will be explored and information will be provided over and above that available generally. We cannot envisage what arrangements would stop this happening. And if only generally available information is to be considered at the events teachers may not attend them anyway.

Launch events

Exam boards may still want to run launch or marketing events to promote new qualification specifications. If these continue then we need to be sure that they do not put future exams or qualifications at risk.

General training events

Teachers need to understand assessment as part of their professional development. A curiosity of the current system is that one of the ways teachers develop understanding of assessment techniques is through the general training events, run by exam boards. These events are not about qualifications, teachers do not attend to find out about a particular qualification, and examiners are not generally involved in their delivery. We do not have evidence to indicate that these events compromise the qualifications system.

General training events broadly fit into one of three categories:

- 1. Events focusing on improving exam results, such as Edexcel's 'ResultsPlus' training, which aims to 'show you how to interpret your exam results data to monitor performance and plan improvement', or AQA's 'Mental Toughness', which focuses on how to prepare students for exams.
- 2. Events that are subject- but not qualification specific, such as AQA training in how to teach stage make-up to drama students, approaches to poetry in English Literature, or 'Inspirational Head of Maths' training.
- 3. Conferences for example, an OCR English conference this July offers highprofile academics and guest speakers.

Each exam board has its own approach. AQA is the largest provider of these events, offering a wide range of teacher training, followed by Edexcel, OCR and WJEC. CCEA does not offer 'general events'. Exam boards generally charge for attendance.

We will seek assurances from each exam board that they have analysed the risks introduced into the qualifications system by any events that they offer. When we have a fuller understanding of exam boards' role in teacher training, we will decide whether we should take further action. We will also consider these events when we look into the impact of other connected activities alongside the core function of the exam boards.⁷

In conclusion

We would like to thank all those who responded to the call for evidence and all those who have taken the time to talk to us about their views. We are now acting on our decisions and will continue to review training events of a more general nature and consider the issues and risks that they may present.

⁷ Healthy markets correspondence. <u>www.ofqual.gov.uk/news-and-announcements/128/807</u>

Appendix A: Call for evidence summary

On 27th February 2012 we called for evidence on materials and activities, including training events, that are provided to support the teaching of qualifications and to support learners to prepare for those qualifications. Feedback was varied, but overall indicated the following:

- Training events are generally valued by schools and teachers.
- In the main, teachers attend training provided by exam boards to understand better how learners will be assessed; they do not attend to develop their teaching skills.
- There are concerns that the costs of attending events can be prohibitive, with the result that teachers from less well-resourced schools cannot attend seminars as readily as those from better resourced schools.
- Some schools and teachers would favour restrictions on the role that can be taken in training by those who have written or checked a future exam paper.
- Some schools and teachers are concerned that if exam boards do not provide training, other organisations will provide events in their place, with the risk that participants will be incorrectly advised.
- Current practice, whereby some examiners contribute to training events provided by bodies other than exam boards, gives rise to concerns about costs and integrity.

We received 82 responses to our call for evidence. The largest group of respondents were schools, colleges and teachers. 13 responses were given by exam boards and examiners and 16 from members of the public. We also received responses from higher education, trades unions, subject organisations, government agencies, employers, training providers, publishers and consultants.

Appendix B: Teacher event and examiner data

We required exam boards to investigate the evidence from the media regarding the conduct of training events for teachers. We also required exam boards to provide us with information about their qualifications training events. This Appendix provides a summary of the data that exam boards sent to us about their events and examiners.

Training events for teachers

Approximately 4,000 qualifications training events are held each year by the exam boards delivering GCSE and A level qualifications.

There are large variations in the numbers of events held by each exam board, from those that choose not to run these events, to those that offer over a thousand events annually.

Edexcel ran 1,578 events in 2011. Of these, 913 were UK bookable events, including feedback events, launch events, preparation events and conferences. The remaining events were broken down as 405 customised events and 260 international events.

AQA offered 1,286 events in the year from September 2010 to August 2011. Of these, 446 were AQA Excellence CPD events intended to provide training on teaching in the context of an AQA specification. There were over 200 AQA Excellence Feedback courses providing feedback on previous exams and CPD courses for primary and secondary teachers about generic skills such as leadership. The remaining events were either introductory meetings at the time of specification changes, courses focused on specification/assessment, courses primarily for new teachers, or web conferences offering feedback as an alternative to face-to-face meetings.

OCR planned 659 events in the year 2011/12, which are either 'Get Ready' courses to provide an overview of new specifications, 'Get Started' courses for teachers preparing to deliver or already delivering OCR specifications, 'Get Ahead' courses for teachers wanting to improve delivery and assessment of current OCR specifications, or 'Lead the Way courses' designed to encourage creativity and innovation.

WJEC ran 453 events in the year up to 30th September 2010, used to support teachers in the delivery of programmes of learning, to introduce new specifications, share good practice and exchange feedback on exams.

ICAAE ran a single training event, which focused on preparation for its exam, offering guidance on the application of marking criteria for its controlled assessment.

CCEA told us that it does not run these types of events for its specifications in England. It does run events to support new specifications and controlled assessment.

Examiners

Exam boards contract with examiners to perform a number of functions, including the reviewing and setting of question papers, the marking and moderating of papers, the awarding and setting of grade boundaries, and the delivery of training events. An individual examiner may perform more than one of these roles.

AQA told us that it employs over 19,000 examiners, of which approximately 1,000 are involved in question paper development or the delivery of training; the remainder are in other roles such as marking. OCR employs over 14,500 examiners, with the majority of these (approximately 13,000) involved in marking and moderating, and approximately 1,000 involved in question paper development or delivery of training. Edexcel told us that of approximately 12,500 examiners that it employs, around 600 are involved in the creation of exam papers in various roles, with the majority (approximately 12,000) contracted as part of the marking process.

WJEC has around 5,000 examiner positions, although a single examiner may hold more than one role. This figure includes both those involved in the marking process and those involved in question paper development. CCEA contracts 160 examiners who are involved in the specifications that it delivers in England, and ICAAE contracts a total of nine examiners for the delivery of the one specification that it offers.

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